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Eleanor Scerri
Skrivan tal-Kamra

Sustainable Development

Annual Report 2024

GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
MINISTRY FOR THE
ENVIRONMENT, ENERGY
AND PUBLIC CLEANLINESS

Sustainable Development
Environment • Society • Economy

FOREWORD

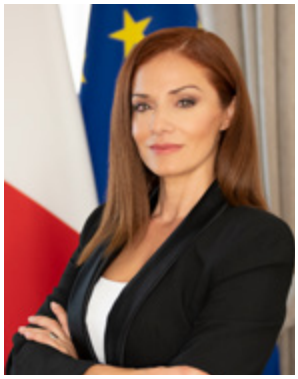
As we near the culmination of the 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Maltese Government maintains its commitment to embedding this fundamental framework within its policies, measures and initiatives, thus accelerating action towards the achievement of these global goals. As a testament to this steadfast commitment, in 2024 Malta also engaged in collaborative efforts towards the preparation of its second Voluntary National Review (VNR) on the implementation of Agenda 2030 and progress towards achieving the SDGs. The preparation of this review, based on the principles of 'Leaving No One Behind', engaged all strata of society, ensuring a holistic qualitative and quantitative assessment.

In tandem, Malta is embracing its own Strategic Goals set out within Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050, published in 2024.

This Strategy highlights the Maltese Government's commitment to transitioning towards a climate-neutral green and blue economy, promoting sustainable urban development and cultural heritage, ensuring healthy lives and well-being, accelerating digital transformation, smart mobility, and connectivity, and achieving social fairness and prosperity for all.

Further demonstrating inclusive education and awareness towards a sustainable future for everyone, this Strategy was published alongside a children's version, instilling sustainable development principles from an early age.

Sustainable development is about promoting the environment, the economy, and society. While achieving this equilibrium is complex, it is possible through the



collective commitment and ongoing efforts of various stakeholders, including the government, private sector, and civil society. These efforts are reflected in the progress made during 2024, as outlined in this report, which provides insights into the transformative processes and actions taking place across the entire government. The report recognises those who drive positive change, foster stakeholder collaboration, and take steps to protect our environment, economy, and the well-being of citizens.

Building a sustainable future that works for everyone and ensuring development that leaves no one behind may seem ambitious given the dynamic nature of the world we live in today. However, achieving this is not impossible if we all work together. Challenges can be mitigated by focusing on introducing and implementing new and innovative strategies, policies, and initiatives. The Maltese Government is committed to making the shift towards a more sustainable, just, inclusive, and resilient economy to build a better future. We can all be agents of change in achieving both global and national goals, benefiting not only our own well-being but also that of future generations.

Miriam Dalli

Minister for the Environment,
Energy and Public Cleanliness

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ACRONYMS

ACTS	Agency for Community and Therapeutic Services	A
AS	Aġenzija Sapport	
AŻ	Aġenzija Żgħażagħ	
AM	Ambjent Malta	
ABP	Animal By-Products	
AI	Artificial Intelligence	
AROPE	At risk of poverty rate or social exclusion rate	
BESS	Battery Energy Storage Systems	B
BCRS	Beverage Container Refund Scheme	
BTR	Biennial Transparency Report	
BYOC	Bring Your Own Container	
BCA	Building and Construction Authority	
CMO	Chief Medical Officer	C
CEMalta	Circular Economy Malta	
CPD	Civil Protection Department	
CETP	Clean Energy Transition Partnership	
CAA	Climate Action Authority	
CGBVDV	Commission on Gender-Based Violence & Domestic Violence	
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy	
CEDMS	Corporate Electronic Document Management System	
CFMS	Corporate Financial Management Solution	
CSA	Correctional Service Agency	
COLA	Cost of Living Adjustment	
COE	Council of Europe	
DFA	Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture	D
DAHS	Directorate for Allied Health Services	
DPA	Directorate for Pharmaceutical Affairs	
DV	Domestic Violence	
EVs	Electric Vehicles	E
ePPS	Electronic Public Procurement System	
EWA	Energy and Water Agency	
EPC	Energy Performance Certificate	

ERP	Enterprise Resource Planning
ERA	Environment and Resources Authority
EHD	Environmental Health Directorate
ESG	Environmental, Social and Governance
EBTC	Establishment of Blood, Tissue and Cell Centre
EC	European Commission
ERDF	European Regional and Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESDW	European Sustainable Development Week
EU	European Union
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
FTTH	Fibre to the Home
FES	Foundation for Educational Services
FSWS	Foundation for Social Welfare Services
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GIS	Geographic Information System
GES	Good Environmental Status
GFL	Government Formulary List
GGH	Gozo General Hospital
GPP	Green Public Procurement
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
HR	Human Resources
HRD	Human Rights Directorate
ITS	Institute of Tourism Studies
ICM	Interconnect Malta
IAS	Invasive Alien Species
JPI	Joint Programming Initiative
JA	Junior Achievement
KNŻ	Kunsill Nazzjonali taż-Żgħażagħ
LULUCF	Land use, land use change, and forestry
LEED	Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer or questioning, asexual and other sexually or gender diverse
LIFE IP RBMP	LIFE Integrated Project for the River Basin Plan
LPG	Liquefied Petroleum gas

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M

MCA	Malta Communications Authority
MDB	Malta Development Bank
MDIA	Malta Digital Innovation Authority
MFC	Malta Film Commission
MFSA	Malta Financial Services Authority
MFA	Malta Food Agency
MITA	Malta Information Technology Agency
MPF	Malta Police Force
MSE	Malta Stock Exchange
MTA	Malta Tourism Authority
MIS	Management Information System
MPAs	Marine Protected Areas
MSFD	Marine Strategy Framework Directive
MDH	Mater Dei Hospital
MED-WET	Mediterranean irrigation and Water Supply or smallholder farmers by providing Efficient, low-cost and nature-based Technologies and practices
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
PMD	People Management Division
MAFA	Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Rights
MEYR	Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation
MFIN	Ministry for Finance
MGP	Ministry for Gozo and Planning
MHA	Ministry for Health and Active Ageing
MHSE	Ministry for Home Affairs, Security and Employment
MJR	Ministry for Justice and Reform of the Construction Sector
MSPC	Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights
MEEC	Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Public Cleanliness

N

NIS	National Immunisation Service
NSC	National Skills Council
NSAPP	National Strategy and Action Plan for Pollinators
NAP	Noise Action Plan
NCDs	Non-communicable diseases
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations

O

OHSA	Occupational Health & Safety Authority
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister

OSA	Office of the State Advocate
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAB	Paris-aligned Benchmark
PRIMA	Partnership for R&I in the Mediterranean Area
PV	Photovoltaic
PA	Planning Authority
PDO	Protected Designations of Origin
PHL	Public Health Laboratory
RRP	Recovery and Resilience Plan
REMPEC	Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre
REWS	Regulator for Energy and Water Services
RES	Renewable Energy Sources
REP	Research Excellence Programme
RO	Reverse Osmosis
S4GES	Science for Good Environmental Status
STEM	Science, Engineering, Technology and Mathematics
SHD	Secondary Healthcare Department
SAMOC	Sir Anthony Mamo Oncology Centre
SMEs	Small and medium-sized enterprises
SCSA	Social Care Standards Authority
SVP	St Vincent de Paul
SDIU	Strategy Development and Implementation Unit
SL	Subsidiary Legislation
SCH	Superintendence for Cultural Heritage
SPH	Superintendence of Public Health
SBEP	Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership
SDD	Sustainable Development Directorate
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TSI	Technical Support Instrument
TDP	Technology Development Programme
MCAST	The Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology
TCNs	Third-county nationals
TCM	Town Centre Management

P

R

S

T

TM	Transport Malta
UWCH	Underwater Cultural Heritage
UfM	Union for the Mediterranean
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UN	United Nations
UM	University of Malta
UAT	User Acceptance Testing
VSA	Victim Support Agency
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WSC	Water Services Corporation
WHO	World Health Organisation
NEETs	Youths not in employment, education or training

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INTRODUCTION

About the Report

This Annual Report has been prepared by the Sustainable Development Directorate (SDD) within the Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Public Cleanliness (MEEC). This fulfils the purpose of compliance with Part VI, Article 14 of the Sustainable Development Act (Chapter 521), which requires the Competent Authority to produce an annual report. It is then submitted to the Minister responsible for sustainable development, whereby 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.

Tasked with formulating and implementing Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy, raising awareness, as well as building and enhancing capacity across Ministries to ensure effective mainstreaming of sustainable development principles, the SDD reports on the achievement and progress of each of the SDGs at a national level. In doing so, it also seeks to identify areas and gaps that require further attention and action. 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 government ministries, bodies, departments and entities during 2024, whilst highlighting those areas that require further effort, commitment and improvements.

The report will follow the same structure outlined in *Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050,* which provides an overarching strategic framework and direction through which Malta can contribute to positive transformative change both within and beyond its borders and, as a result, ensure the protection of the environment and the socio-economic development of the Maltese Islands for 2050. The Strategy focuses on five strategic goals, divided into several strategic objectives, which are considered the most significant for and pertinent to Malta. Therefore, this Annual Report presents all the work carried out during the previous year in accordance with these specific goals and objectives.

Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050

In 2024, the SDD finalised work on a national strategy for Malta that encompasses the 5 goals, 18 objectives and 54 targets that the Maltese government aims to achieve by 2050 to develop a climate where the core principles of sustainability are integrated within the values and priorities of the country, thereby allowing its economy to grow, and its society and environment to flourish and prosper. The Strategy will enable the government to strengthen and develop mechanisms for cross-sectoral policy integration while introducing measures and initiatives that reflect the current and future needs. It also aims to ensure that all members of society play an active role in shaping a sustainable future for the Maltese Islands by empowering and enabling them to contribute to the country's overall well-being.

Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050 builds upon the Vision 2050 document, which was adopted in 2018, as well as the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and seeks to stimulate and mainstream actions across all workings of the government and ensure that the objectives laid out by the UN and the Vision are reached most consistently and efficiently as possible.

Integrating these social, economic, and environmental objectives, as well as their implications for different socio-economic groups and future generations, is no easy task. Therefore, it was crucial for such complex challenges to be addressed as a whole, rather than in isolation.

Thus, the participation and expertise of all actors in society, representing not only the public but also the private and voluntary sectors, were required to create a document that accurately encompasses all facets of society and the challenges being faced. This was also necessary when it came to examining available policy options and translating the broad strategic direction into specific short- and long-term objectives at the national and local levels. Therefore, 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 published in May 2024. 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.

Integration of the SDGs in the Budget Process

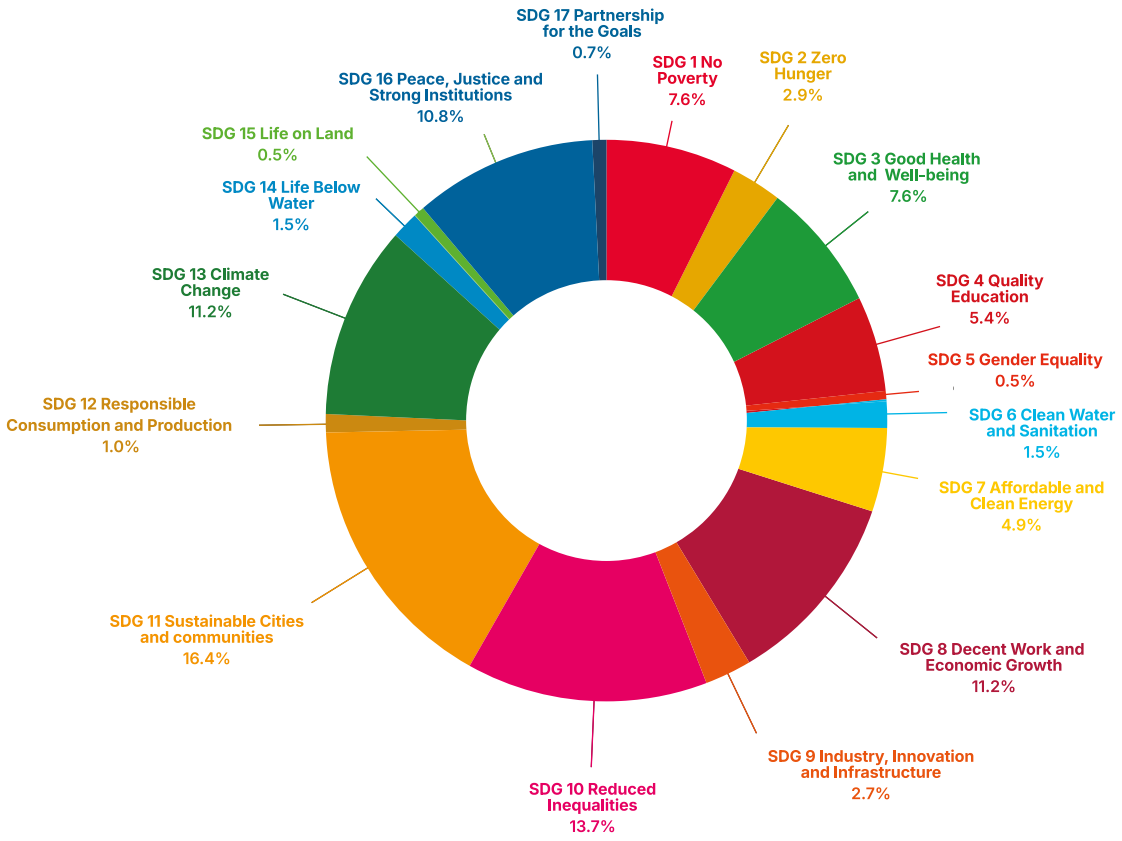
The integration of the SDGs in the budget process is an exercise that the Maltese government has been carrying out annually since 2019, the aim of which is to improve the overall policy coherence when it comes to the implementation of the SDGs and enabling decision-makers to be better equipped to effectively address and realise the ambitions and targets set out by the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In this regard, the Maltese government undertook a long and intensive process involving all the ministries, which required them to analyse and assess the contributions of the measures and initiatives towards the implementation of the SDGs. While this demonstrates the government's commitment to working towards sustainable development, it is also necessary, as it leads to better transparency and accountability in the government's decision-making processes, while ensuring that all pillars of sustainable development are consistently considered.

Keeping in line with its vision of achieving a carbon-neutral economy by 2050, the Maltese Government, through Budget 2025, introduced new measures targeted at combating environmental degradation and climate change and improving the quality of the Maltese Islands' natural environment. These initiatives include, among others, the continued creation of social and green outdoor spaces, schemes promoting a shift towards cleaner energy and encouraging energy-efficient practices such as the installation of solar panels and heat pump water heaters, renewable energy storage, scrapping of old vehicles and encouraging the use of EVs, as well as exploring the potential of offshore and wind renewable energy, and promoting the renovation and restoration of buildings. Furthermore, the 2025 Budget continued to build on previous years' initiatives that were aimed at combating violence, discrimination and inequalities, safeguarding community safety, enhancing the justice system, and aiding the most vulnerable in society.

The 2025 Budget was directed towards maintaining a robust economic future; extending fiscal benefits and tax reductions; offering incentives to businesses - particularly start-ups and small and medium enterprises to be sustainable, grow and remain competitive; enhancing social protection and care and increasing certain social benefits and grants; improving services; investing in good quality health, education and tourism; and also incentivising Research and Innovation.

Three hundred fifteen measures of Budget 2025, spreading across various sectors, were aligned with the SDGs.

2025 Budget Measures and 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, such as the Sustainable Development Report, which is prepared by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, and the monitoring report of the European Union (EU), which is presented by Eurostat. The data provided by the 2024 Sustainable Development Report placed Malta 36th out of 167 countries, an improvement from the previous year, with an SDG Index overall score of 76.95 and a spillover score of 63.36 out of a maximum of 100.

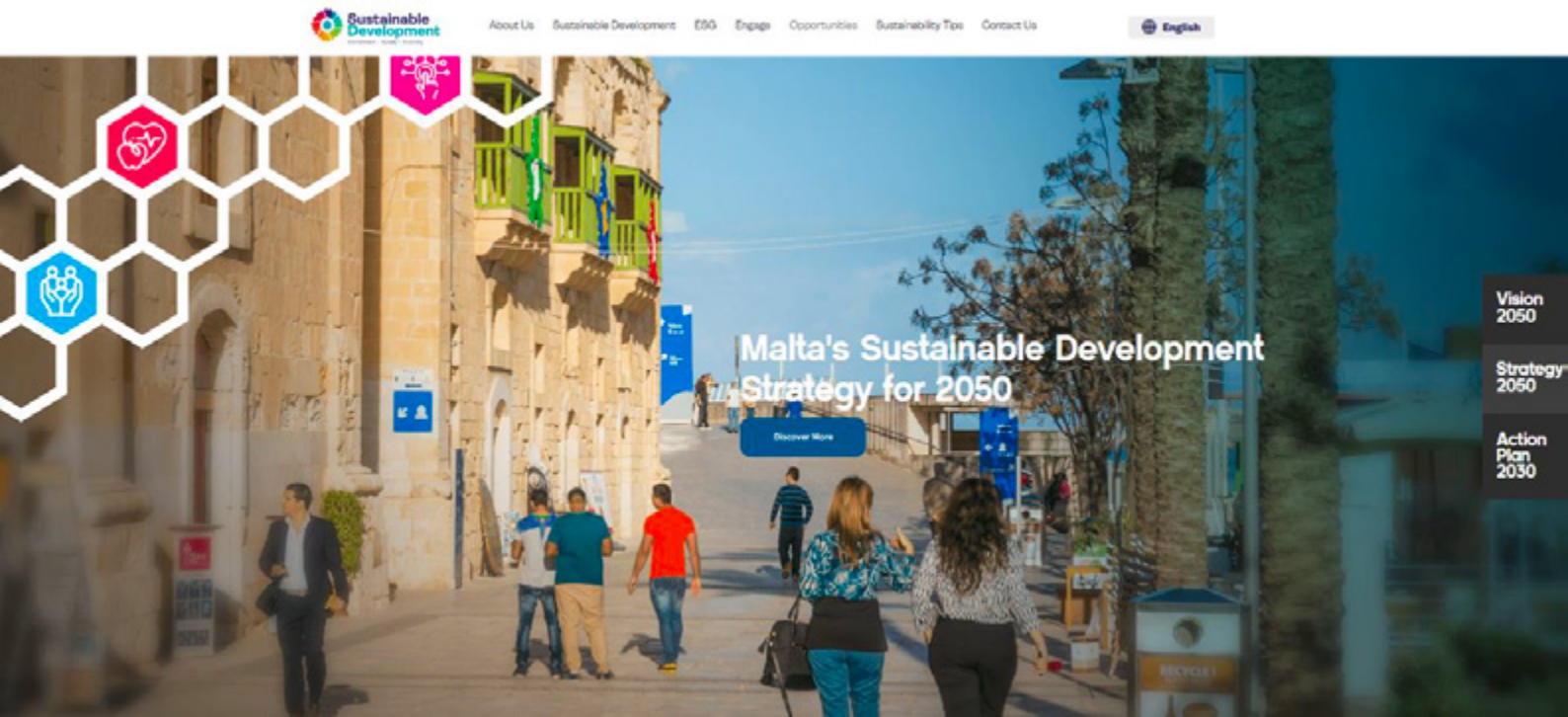
According to the Sustainable Development Report, Malta has achieved SDG 1 No Poverty and is on track to achieve SDG 15 Life on Land but highlights that major challenges remain in SDG 2 Zero Hunger, SDG 6 Clean Water and Sanitation, SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production, SDG 14 Life Below Water, and SDG 17 Partnerships for the Goals. The Report does mention, however, that Malta is moderately improving in most of the SDGs, with the only exception showing a decreasing trend being SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities.

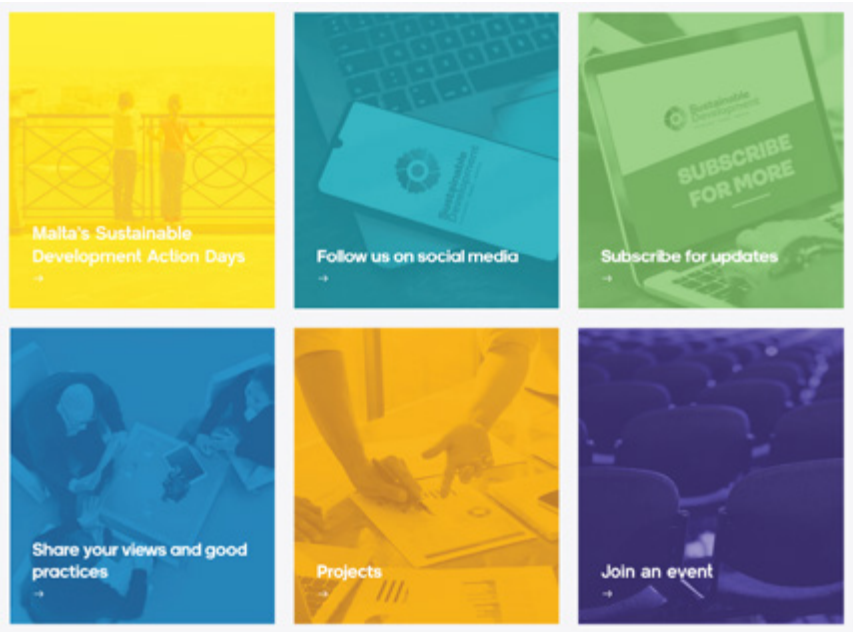
Communicating Sustainable Development and the SDGs

During 2024, the SDD continued to ensure that, through its work, activities, events, and initiatives, sustainable development is promoted and embedded by all actors throughout all aspects of the government's operations, as well as across all sectors in the Maltese Islands.

Raising Awareness Through Online Platforms

Throughout 2024, the SDD continued to raise awareness of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its targets and objectives through its website, which presents information and data in an 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, as part of its efforts to encourage engagement, action and participation, the SDD has a Facebook page (com/sustainabledevelopment.mt , an Instagram page (instagram.com/sustainabledevelopmentmalta/), and a LinkedIn page (https://mt.linkedin.com/company/sustainable-development-malta) through which it aims to increase awareness on ongoing initiatives and activities happening both locally and abroad, while also instilling a higher level of education on sustainable development in the Maltese Islands. These pages also serve as a platform for people to share their ideas and expertise on how one can lead a more sustainable lifestyle.

European Sustainable Development Week (ESDW) 2024

The ESDW was first set up in 2015 and coordinated by the European Sustainable Development Network, and aims to give visibility to sustainable initiatives, projects, activities and events taking place all over Europe on one common platform. Malta has been participating in the ESDW since 2018. In 2024, the ESDW took place between 18 September 2024 and 8 October 2024, with the core of the week happening between 20 September 2024 and 26 September 2024.

As part of ESDW 2024, the SDD, through the

Malta Sustainable Development Action Days 2024: Shaping Together The Future We Want,

organised a number of activities related to sustainable development and promoted a total of 36 sustainable initiatives organised by government entities, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and local councils and businesses which were all showcased on both the local and European platforms.

Lejla Fil-Park

During Malta's Sustainable Development Action Days 2024, the SDD organised the third edition of Lejla fil-Park, which was held at San Klement Park, Żabbar. The purpose of the event was to create a safe environment for all, where, through sports, activities, and educational initiatives, everyone could learn how to live a healthier and more sustainable life.

The programme was varied and those present had the opportunity to meet a variety of sports organisations, including the Malta Football Association, University of Malta Wolves, Badminton Malta, and the Malta Taekwondo Association. There were also representatives from the Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate, Armed Forces, Civil Protection Department (CPD) and Malta Police Force (MPF), as well as representation from several environmental and social government entities.

In addition to exhibitions of sporting skills, there were also fitness sessions, games for children, crafts, sports activities, and a performance by the Żabbar Scout Group.

The Sustainable Baby Box Project

The Sustainable Baby Box project is an ongoing initiative that commenced in November 2021. With this project, the MEEC, through the SDD, provides every newborn with a starter kit that will help guardians shift towards a more sustainable upbringing of their child. By making use of eco-friendly and safe baby products, the Ministry is aiming to instill the concept of sustainability from a very young age as well as increase awareness of reusable baby products as alternatives to single-use and disposable items. Each box contains a baby blanket, a muslin cloth, a wet bag, a cloth wipe, and socks and mittens, all of which are made from eco-friendly material, together with an eco-friendly reusable nappy and nappy liners; there is also a feeding bib, a dummy, a teether, and a cutlery set, all made from Bisphenol A-free material. In addition, a culture of reading is fostered through books in both the Maltese and English languages, which are distributed together with the baby box.

Since the start of the project, by the end of 2024, more than 13,000 sustainable baby boxes were distributed to parents and guardians all over Malta and Gozo.

The Sustainable Localities Scheme

Launched in the third quarter of 2022, the Sustainable Localities Scheme aims to support local councils in Malta and Gozo in implementing infrastructural projects that promote environmental sustainability, social well-being, and economic growth. Through this scheme, financial assistance was provided to recognise and support local community efforts while encouraging active participation in sustainable initiatives.

Three projects were selected under this scheme, focusing on enhancing both the natural and urban environment while fostering socio-economic development. These include the installation of photovoltaic (PV) panels, as well as the regeneration and embellishment of two main squares, along with improvements to surrounding facilities for the benefit of the community. Notably, the latter were successfully completed in 2024, marking a significant milestone in the initiative's objectives.

The Sustainable Development Fund

Recognising the vital role of voluntary organisations, the Sustainable Development Fund strategically supports non-governmental, not-for-profit organisations in their capacity to advance sustainable development objectives. This financial assistance enables the implementation of targeted activities and initiatives that produce measurable outcomes in the economic, social, and environmental spheres. Three of the five projects selected for funding in the current cycle were successfully completed by the end of 2024.

Write Deal Association created thirty-four, 5-minute educational children's TV programmes entitled Pitirross. These programmes focused on educating 8-12-year-olds about all the SDGs through a combination of educational content and playful entertainment, delivered in a manner easily understood by children. Another project was implemented by the Depiro Sports Club, focusing on upgrading their sports facilities to solar-powered lighting systems to create a safer, more sustainable environment for their patrons and the surrounding community. Victim Support Agency Malta (VSA) also finalised their project, which included two actions: a Traffic Accident Trauma Service (TATS) project, which involved a multimodal road safety campaign; and a TATS for individuals and families traumatised by traffic accidents and injury.

Sustainable Development Fund
Support Scheme for Voluntary Organisations

The remaining two funded projects, led by *Għaqda Mużikali San Gejtanu* and the St Jeanne Antide Foundation, are currently ongoing with completion expected by the end of 2025.

The Football for the Goals Initiative

October 2024 saw the launch of the 'Football for the Goals' initiative in Malta, a UN initiative that engages the football communities to advocate for the SDGs. This collaboration between the SDD, the Inħobb il-Futbol Foundation, and the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research, and Innovation (MEYR) equipped 17 classes from the 15 schools that participated in the inaugural edition. Each team was assigned one of the 17 UN SDGs and received the corresponding SDG-branded T-shirts.

This initiative spanned from October 2024 to February 2025. Following the two fun-filled tournament days, which opened the initiative at the Centenary Stadium on November 25 and 26, 2024, the Directorate worked closely with each school through resources and guidance sessions to help schools explore their SDGs and create practical, impactful initiatives involving students and school staff. On 3 February 2025, the students delivered compelling presentations about their SDG-focused school projects, while the final football tournament day drew vibrant and spirited support from classmates in the stands on 4 February.

Recognising football's powerful voice within the local community, the Football for the Goals initiative puts schools and students front and centre as ambassadors of sustainability who embrace the principles of sustainable development and championing sustainable initiatives that drive meaningful change.

Malta's Second Voluntary National Review (VNR) on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

During 2024, Malta committed to delivering its second VNR on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs, to be presented during the 2025 UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. The second VNR builds upon Malta's first, showcasing the evolution of and continued efforts towards the national implementation of the Agenda since 2018, highlighting new initiatives and success stories, areas of progress, challenges, and ways forward. The compilation of this report is the result of a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, which commenced in July 2024, involving the collaboration of Government Ministries and Entities, Regional and Local Councils, civil society organisations, research and academic institutions, and businesses. Stakeholders were engaged through 3 tailored questionnaires disseminated in October 2024, gathering input from Ministries and Local and Regional Councils, the general public, and stakeholder groups such as NGOs, industry, academia and religious institutions. The questionnaires explored awareness of the SDGs, success stories, challenges, and ways forward. Participation in these questionnaires was further encouraged through informative sessions ensuring clarity throughout the process. A central element of engagement was the Sustainable Development Multi-Stakeholder Forum held on 26 November 2024 at the Mediterranean Conference Centre, with approximately 140 registrants comprised of all of the stakeholder groups engaged for the questionnaires. The Forum encompassed 12 thematic workshops addressing all 17 SDGs. The workshops commenced with an introduction from key stakeholders and their most impactful projects and initiatives since 2018 within the relevant thematic area, and then shifted to interactive round-table discussions whereby participants discussed success stories, challenges and ways forward. To engage younger audiences, an art initiative was launched on 6 of November titled "Young Artists, Big Impact" open to children in Years 4-6. Meanwhile a Youth Meet-Up was held on 7 December. This Meet-Up was organised with assistance from Aġenzija Żgħażagħ (AŻ) and Kunsill Nazzjonali taż-Żgħażagħ (KNŻ) and was open to youths aged 18-30. The meet-up comprised 5 round-table discussions among 30 young persons centred on Malta's 5 Strategic Goals and centred on success stories, ways forward and challenges.

Malta's Second Voluntary National Review

SDG Youth Champions

In 2024, MEEC, AŻ and the KNŻ signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in relation to the SDG Youth 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 Youth Champions, who have sustainability at heart and who wish to inspire positive change, by representing and advocating for one of the five Strategic Goals of Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy 2050.

SDG Youth Champions

The Coproduction of Healthy, Secure and Playful Spaces Project

In 2024, the Guardian of Future Generations launched the "The Coproduction of Healthy, Secure, and Playful Spaces – A Collaborative Approach" project, a collaboration with the MEEC and the Gabriel Caruana Foundation. This project aligns with the mission of the Guardian, which is committed to ensuring healthy outcomes for all citizens in Malta and Gozo by advancing and implementing effective policies, more robust systems, and innovative practices that result in a more resilient society. This initiative contributes to UN SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, aiming to co-create vibrant, healthy, playful, and secure urban spaces that benefit all residents, thereby enhancing the quality of life in the towns of Żurrieq, Safi, and Kirkop.

The project involves local communities in co-designing sustainable neighbourhoods that improve quality of life and reduce health disparities, through direct research with residents on their perceptions about their own urban and natural surroundings. During the last quarter of 2024, the project saw the participation of the Żurrieq, Safi, and Kirkop Local Councils, as well as key stakeholders, in a series of meetings to plan the expected implementation throughout 2025.

The findings of this project will offer valuable insights for planners, developers, and policymakers aiming to support residents' well-being. Such an approach elevates the social value of infrastructure, promotes health equity, and encourages community building, integrating nature to shape healthier, more connected spaces.

Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050 School Sessions

To improve children's participation in decision-making, the SDD worked closely with the Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights (MSPC) to publish the children's version of Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050. Between September and November 2024, over 4,500 books were distributed to Year 3 students of all state, church and independent schools in Malta and Gozo through the collaboration with the MEYR. By December 2024, the Directorate also started hosting interactive school-based sessions for Year 3 students about Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050 Children's Version, aiming to reach 27 schools during the 2024–2025 academic year.

These 60-minute sessions, directly in line with set learning outcomes in a variety of subjects such as social studies, science, and PSD, were designed to help students understand their role as responsible and engaged citizens who contribute to the ongoing environmental, social, and economic transformation outlined by Malta's 5 Sustainable Development Strategic Goals in the National Strategy. Activities during the session cover endemic Maltese flora and fauna, internet safety, social justice, and mental well-being. The children were also asked to create posters during these sessions, illustrating their dream sustainable cities, taking into consideration the principles of the Strategy. The school visits also incorporated a collaboration with Saving Our Blue to enhance the children's experience, raising awareness on SDG 14 Life Below Water.

TRANSITIONING TOWARDS A CLIMATE-NEUTRAL GREEN & BLUE ECONOMY

CHAPTER 01

2030 AGENDA RELATED GOALS

01 No Poverty

02 Zero Hunger

03 Good Health & Well-being

06 Clean water & Sanitation

07 Affordable & Clean Energy

08 Economic Work & Economic Growth

09 Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure

11 Sustainable Cities & Communities

12 Responsible Consumption & Production

13 Climate Action

14 Life Below Water

15 Life On Land

17 Partnerships For The Goal

As the world confronts the escalating challenges of climate change, environmental degradation, and resource depletion, the transition towards a climate-neutral economy has become an urgent necessity. For island states like Malta, where economic development is closely tied to natural resources, the shift towards a sustainable green and blue economy is particularly crucial. This transition is not merely an environmental need but a strategic move towards long-term economic resilience, social well-being, and ecological balance.

Malta has demonstrated a strong commitment to sustainability, aligning its policies and strategies with international frameworks such as the UN SDGs, the European Green Deal, and the Paris Agreement. The Maltese Government places carbon neutrality at its core, driving efforts to enhance energy efficiency, promote renewable energy, decarbonize transportation, and implement sustainable waste management practices.

While considerable strides in the transition towards a climate-neutral economy have been made, several challenges remain. The country's small geographic size and high population density present limitations in terms of renewable energy space, waste management, and urban planning. Additionally, economic dependencies on tourism and import-driven industries require innovative approaches to balance sustainability with economic growth. Achieving this transition requires a collaborative effort among government institutions, businesses, civil society, and individuals.

As the government continues to implement Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050 and aligns with global sustainability goals, the progress made today will lay the foundation for a resilient, thriving, and climate-neutral future. Within the framework of the government's efforts in line with the 2030 Agenda, this chapter will highlight measures, projects and initiatives related to SDGs 1, 2, 3, 6-9, and 11-15, 17.

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 minimising the 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 2030 AGENDA RELATED GOALS
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 Green Public Procurement

Malta's National Action Plan for Green Public Procurement (GPP) was first introduced in 2012, and there have been significant updates, with the latest version adopted in 2021. The current plan, GPP National Action Plan 2022-2027, sets targets for 17 product and service groups, including new areas such as street lighting and traffic signals, healthcare electrical and electronic equipment, transport, paints, varnishes, road markings, computers and monitors, office building design and management, road design and maintenance, sanitary tapware, toilets and urinals, and hospitality and catering services.

In line with the GPP National Action Plan 2022-2027, Malta's target is to progressively increase the share of the government's procurement in greener products and services to 90% of tenders which fall under the scope of GPP, by 2027. In 2024, Malta achieved an 87.5% compliance rate in relation to calls for procurement that fall under the scope of GPP, an improvement from the 2023 compliance rate of 87%. This is calculated through weekly compliance checks held by the GPP Office within the MEEC and through a cross-reference with GPP quarterly reports, which every respective ministerial GPP coordinator must submit by the end of every quarter.

Several initiatives are being undertaken to enhance GPP implementation. These include the enhancement of GPP training courses offered by the Institute of the Public Service and the development of a new GPP platform to assist with queries and provide easy access to information.

1.1.2 Climate Action

In 2023, the Maltese Government announced plans to establish the need for the formation of the Climate Action Authority (CAA). The Authority was officially established in October 2024 with the enactment of the Climate Action Act, Chapter 643 of the Laws of Malta. The CAA replaced the Malta Resources Authority, established under Chapter 423, assuming its responsibilities while expanding its scope. As the first authority of its kind in Europe, the CAA is tasked with coordinating and overseeing Malta's climate-related measures and regulations. Its primary role is to monitor the effects of climate change and ensure that Malta's policies and strategies address these challenges effectively and sustainably. The CAA is also empowered to issue regulations that support the implementation of the Climate Action Act. These regulations align with Malta's commitments under the European Green Deal and the Paris Agreement, reinforcing the nation's goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2050.

With the coming into force of legislative instruments such as the EU's Fit-for-55 climate and energy policy package and the Regulation on land use, land use change, and forestry (LULUCF), the efforts of EU Member States and the relevant actors turned towards implementation, which started in earnest in 2024. This also applies to Malta, where several entities are responsible for such implementation, including, among others, the CAA, the Energy and Water Agency (EWA), the Regulator for Energy and Water Services (REWS) and Transport Malta (TM).

Malta actively participated in the UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties, held in November 2024 in Baku, Azerbaijan. The CAA was an integral part of the Maltese delegation, supporting the MEEC in the negotiations. Additionally, the CAA organised two side events, highlighting Malta's commitment to global climate action. In collaboration with the International Renewable Energy Agency, Malta participated in the side event titled 'Efficient Water Management and Offshore Renewables – A Green Opportunity for Island Blue Economies'. This event showcased Malta's involvement in the Small Island Developing States Lighthouse Initiative, emphasising its role as a key platform for advancing sustainable water management and offshore renewable energy. Malta's contributions underscored how its expertise can assist other island economies in addressing jurisdictional, environmental, and maritime challenges. The discussions fostered cooperation on critical issues such as water scarcity and clean energy. Malta's collaboration with the Lighthouse Initiative reinforces its commitment to supporting SIDS by promoting solutions that enhance resilience and drive economic growth through green innovation.

In another side event, 'Leading a New Era of Unified National Climate Action Governance', Malta joined Australia and the United Arab Emirates to discuss the establishment of climate action authorities. This initiative focused on creating a unified framework for climate governance, ensuring effective implementation, monitoring, and compliance with national climate goals. The discussion highlighted the importance of engaging both public and private sectors to achieve coordinated and holistic climate action as a fundamental aspect of good governance.

A key aspect of effective climate governance is the ability to track and assess national emissions, ensuring accountability and informed decision-making. As part of its commitments to transparency and accountability, Malta fulfils its reporting obligations under the Paris Agreement.

The CAA is designated as the competent Inventory Agency of Malta tasked with the annual preparation of a national Greenhouse Gas (GHG) inventory report. Pursuant to Article 13, paragraph 7(a) of the Paris Agreement, Malta submits a national inventory report of anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of GHG emissions to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Malta also submits a national inventory report to the European Commission (EC). The national inventory report consists of a national inventory document and the common reporting tables. This inventory provides a comprehensive overview of the country's emissions from all the sectors in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change guidelines, namely, energy, transport, industrial processes and product use, agriculture, and waste, as well as the removals from the LULUCF sector. GHG inventories provide historic emissions and removals, starting from 1990.

In December 2024, in line with the Enhanced Transparency Framework established by the Paris Agreement, Malta submitted its first Biennial Transparency Report (BTR) to the UNFCCC Secretariat. This report was prepared by the CAA on behalf of the MEEC. Under the Enhanced Transparency Framework, Parties to the Agreement are required to submit BTRs every two years. The first BTR was due by 31 December 2024. BTRs provide country-specific information on the implementation of the Paris Agreement and are compiled according to the modalities, procedures and guidelines for the Enhanced Transparency Framework. The first BTR of Malta includes the following core elements of reporting: information on the national inventory report, information necessary to track progress, information on climate change impacts and adaptation, and information on support provided and mobilised.

At the EU level, the Economic Policy Department participated in the EC working group on Energy and Climate Change. It contributed to discussions on the macroeconomic implications of the EU's energy and climate policies, particularly within the context of the European Green Deal and REPowerEU.

The Department also participated actively in dialogues surrounding the distributional impacts of energy and climate policies, investment needs for the green transition, and the implications of circular economy strategies. It also provided analysis, assistance and technical support to Ministries with expertise in the environment, energy and climate change sectors on EC documents and proposals of a cross-cutting and horizontal nature. These included contributions to the Malta positions on setting the EU 2040 climate targets, on developing a binding global agreement on plastic pollution in the context of the UN Environment Programme, on international finance issues in the context of the UN Convention on Climate Change and on the possibility of incorporating a global pricing mechanism in the context of the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships. The Department continued to participate and follow the developments in the Working Group on Indirect Tax Issues, specifically contributing to discussions at the Council Working Party level on the Revision of the Energy Taxation Directive. Additional contributions included technical discussions relating to the green transition as part of the European Semester process, including through participation in the ECOFIN preparatory committees: Economic Policy Committee and the Economic and Financial Committee-Alternates, thematic discussions within the committee, and discussions related the attainment of milestones and targets in the context of payment requests in relation to the Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP).

Furthermore, the Continental Shelf Department is participating in an EU project – Geological Service for Europe – together with other Member States. Through this project, an online atlas showing potential sites within Europe for the geological storage of carbon dioxide will be developed. In 2024, the Department worked on the identification of potential sites for the storage of carbon dioxide which is key to the implementation of the Net-Zero Industry Act. The project will establish pan-European data and knowledge for the accelerated and safe deployment of CO2 underground storage potential in both core development areas and emerging R&I areas.

At a local level, in 2024, following a preliminary market consultation, the Gozo Regional Development Authority published the tender for the development of a climate-neutral plan for Gozo (SPD3/2024/089). The plan shall be established following a detailed baseline GHG inventory, a comprehensive gap analysis, and extensive consultations with both state and non-state actors. The final plan should identify measures and actions, ultimately serving as a road map for Gozo to achieve climate neutrality.

Within the film industry, in 2024, the Malta Film Commission (MFC) launched a monitoring exercise to identify best practices for implementing sustainable measures during film productions in Malta, referred to as the Green Champions Initiative. The Green Champions Initiative aims to align the film sector with Malta's commitment to the EU's targets of achieving zero emissions by 2050 and a 55% reduction by 2030. It integrates sustainability requirements into the fiscal cash rebate framework for film productions. Eligible productions are required to provide the followingdocumentation before commencement and upon completion:

- Name of Environmental and/or Sustainability Manager (and Team) or person respon sible.
- Carbon Footprint calculator results (preproduction assessment and final on completion).
- Carbon Action Plan and Environmental Sustainability Measures and Actions (preproduction assessment and Final Report).
- Transport Optimisation Plan (preproduction assessment and Final Report), if available.
- Copy of any Green Certificate label (provisional and final), if available.

This initiative aims to promote sustainable production practices, monitors environmental impact, and raises awareness within the audiovisual sector. Additionally, the process helps identify challenges faced by productions and determines the actions needed for long-term improvement. The ultimate goal is to develop a comprehensive policy document, along with templates and checklists tailored specifically to Malta, to guide future productions.

1.1.3 Air Quality

In 2024, the Maltese Government continued its work towards improving air quality and reducing emissions. In this regard, work on the draft Air Quality Plan continued, incorporating feedback obtained from the public consultation held throughout September and October of 2023 and additional stakeholder consultations held in 2024. Work involving the active participation and provision of technical feedback during the negotiation process of the Ambient Air Quality Directive, which sets thresholds for pollutants in ambient air, was finalised in 2024. The recast Ambient Air Quality Directive was published in November 2024, initiating the process of transposing the new requirements over the next two years.

Furthermore, in 2024, a Technical Committee of Experts was established at the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre (REMPEC) level to conduct a study on the potential introduction of a Mediterranean NOx Emissions Control Area, along with its socio-economic and health impacts. Several members of the national working group for the study on the socioeconomic and health impacts on the Maltese Islands were nominated for the Technical Committee of Experts. These members provided feedback and assisted in developing the terms of reference for the REMPEC study.

Efforts towards the monitoring of various ambient air quality parameters were maintained throughout 2024. This included continuous monitoring from the five fixed air quality monitoring stations, which allow for the collection of regulated pollutants' data and other various air parameters. In addition, periodic monitoring of nitrogen dioxide (NO^2) and benzene, and other hydrocarbons, using the passive diffusion tube network also continued. Periodic monitoring of sulphur dioxide (SO^2) was carried out at a number of sites, while several public schools, old peoples' homes and hospitals were periodically monitored for nitrogen dioxide (NO^2). Monitoring of dust from a quarry continued, as well as monitoring for the study on source apportionment of PM2.5 (particulate matter) from shipping within the Grand Harbour. Following the full recovery of cruise liner activity from the effects of the COVID pandemic, air quality monitoring samples for 2023 and 2024 were sent to the laboratory for chemical analysis. In addition to this, periodic monitoring of heavy metals and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons at St. Paul's Bay and Msida stations, as well as ions and elemental and organic carbon at Għarb station, were carried out.

From January to May, the Environment and Resources Authority (ERA) undertook a joint educational campaign in collaboration with TM on air quality, environmental noise and sustainable mobility. The campaign targeted primary and secondary school children. As part of the initiative, an activity book was developed for primary school children, featuring various activities and an artwork competition related to these themes. The competition, which concluded with an award ceremony, invited children to illustrate everyday actions with a positive environmental impact, raising awareness about air and noise pollution. Furthermore, an educational citizen science project was launched in October 2024 in collaboration with Globe Malta and the Science, Engineering, Technology and Mathematics (STEM) & Vocational Education and Training (VET) Curriculum Hub. The project included a one-month observation period during which primary and secondary students from nine schools across Malta and Gozo collected data by installing passive diffusion tubes to measure NO^2, analysing the influence of traffic-related patterns outside their schools. Additionally, real-time data on particulate matter and meteorological parameters were gathered using environmental sensor kits to assess the contribution of both anthropogenic and natural sources, such as road transport and Saharan dust events.

In 2024, the Maltese Government continued its work towards expanding the national carcharging infrastructure and incentivising the use of EVs, with the aim of reducing harmful emissions and pollutants thus improving air quality. The Secondary Healthcare Department (SHD) is encouraging the use of electric cars by installing electric vehicle charging stations in its facility, facilitating access for employees. The SHD is also providing secure parking spaces specifically designed for bicycles to make cycling a more viable and attractive commuting option.

In 2020, Infrastructure Malta launched a €33.2 million short-side electricity project covering the North Grand Harbour and Boiler Wharf Shore Supply. The project is helping in reducing air pollution and improving the quality of life of people living in the South of Malta and around the Grand Harbour.

Works on this first project covering the Northern Part of the Grand Harbour and Boiler Wharf were completed in July 2024. Since its completion, docked cruise liners in the Northern part of the Grand Harbour have been able to plug into Malta's electricity grid through shore-to-ship technology, with a current capacity of up to five cruise liners powered simultaneously.

In addition to the above, in line with its commitment to clean energy and resilient environments, the Malta Freeport Corporation continued infrastructural works on the High Voltage Shore Connection at Malta Freeport. This project involved trenching, pipe laying and cable installation. Preparations for the second phase are underway, which will see the installation of additional electrical distribution points on the remaining quays. A tender was issued in December 2024 (CT3029/2024) for the provision of the system.

1.1.4 Renewable energy, energy efficiency and energy security

In 2021, Malta embarked on the construction of a second cable link to advance its decarbonisation goals and combat climate change. In 2024, Interconnect Malta (ICM) issued and awarded a number of engineering, procurement and commissioning tender calls for the project's implementation. These include the manufacture and installation of the onshore 245kV and 145kV cables, the supply and installation of a 245kV 250MVA auto-transformer, 120MVAr and 240MVAr variable shunt reactors, the supply and installation of the 220kV switchgear, a fire suppression system, an upgraded control system and the manufacturing, laying and protection for the 245kV subsea cable. The first three engineering, procurement and commissioning tenders have been recommended for award in 2024. Meanwhile, work on the onshore routes in Magħtab commenced. In terms of permitting, the Planning Authority (PA) issued the Maltese development permit in January 2024, covering the works required to lay and protect the land and subsea cable link within the Maltese territory. Regarding the Italian permitting procedure, the Italian Government initiated the formal statutory authorisation process in January 2024, conducting the necessary public consultations, followed by a Single Authorisation Decree in December 2024. In June 2024, the project was successfully approved for funding under the 2021-2027 European Regional and Development Fund (ERDF) Programme, specifically under Priority 2 'Promoting clean and fair energy transition, sustainable wastewater management, and green investment'. The ERDF funding allocated to this project amounts to circa €165 million.

Malta is also exploring the possibility of implementing a utility-scale Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) to complement the second cable interconnector, strengthen the electricity distribution network, enhance the resilience of the grid, alleviate bottlenecks, and provide flexibility to accommodate additional renewable energy.

In 2024, the Maltese Distribution System Operator launched a call for tenders for flexibility services through utility-scale battery storage. The tender, however, resulted in market failure. In response, in November 2024 ICM launched an open tender call for awarding an engineering, procurement and commissioning contract for the procurement and installation of two utility-scale BESS facilities, one in Delimara Power Station and another at the 'A' Station. The permitting procedures for both projects were finalised and both permits were issued by the end of summer 2024. An ERDF application for funding of the Delimara BESS Project was submitted in November 2024. The second project, located within the 'A' Station in Marsa, will be funded under the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

Further contributing to EU energy and climate targets for 2030 and 2050, works continued on the Offshore Renewable Energy Sources (RES) project.

On 6 December 2024, ICM officially launched a Preliminary Qualification Questionnaire as part of the first stage of a procurement process for awarding a concession contract for the supply of renewable energy through the design, build, maintenance, operation and decommissioning of an offshore floating wind farm. The proposed wind farm, to be located beyond 12 nautical miles in Malta's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), aims to generate up to 300MW of renewable energy. The Preliminary Qualification Questionnaire shall evaluate the technical and financial capabilities of the interested candidates. The shortlisted candidates will proceed to further stages, eventually leading to the selection of a developer who will construct, operate, and manage the wind farm under a 35-year concession agreement and a 25-year Contract for Difference. The project will substantially increase the indigenous renewable energy production, strengthen the island's energy resilience, reduce reliance on non-renewable sources, and enhance sustainability.

Furthering its commitment to renewable energy, during 2024, EWA published Malta's first National Policy for the Deployment of Offshore Renewable Energy. The policy provides a framework for the development of offshore renewables, with a focus on offshore wind energy within Malta's EEZ, beyond 12 nautical miles from the shoreline. The policy underwent an extensive consultation process with both major stakeholders as well as the general public, and was also subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment, which identifies specific maritime zones that should be considered when designating offshore renewable energy projects.

In terms of onshore installations, the Ministry for Gozo and Planning (MGP), through the EcoGozo Directorate, started and successfully concluded the contract to award a process that will see the installation of 15 smart PV flowers at the Ta' Xħajma Multi-Modal Hub. These solar systems track the sun's movement, maximising energy output by 40% compared to traditional rooftop systems. The installation is expected to produce approximately 60,000 kWh annually. This directly reduces reliance on fossil fuels and lowers carbon emissions, aligning with Malta's renewable energy targets.

Following the publication of a call to set up PV panels on existing Water Services Corporation (WSC) assets in 2023, covering a roof area of 19,000m^3, the installation on the Luqa Reservoir and Pembroke Reverse Osmosis (RO) plant commenced in the fourth quarter of 2024.

These solar farms, with a 2.7 MW peak capacity, will deliver a renewable energy output of approximately 4.3 GWh per annum by the fourth quarter of 2025. During the same year, another call for supplying and installing energy-efficient turbo blowers to replace the current wastewater treatment plant aeration system at Ta' Barkat was awarded. This project is expected to save approximately 3 GWh annually and enhance treatment performance. The supply of equipment and ancillaries was completed in 2024, with installation planned by the third quarter of 2025.

Throughout 2024, the Public Abattoir also continued its investments in energy and water efficiency. One of the key developments was the inauguration of a hybrid system, including a mix of liquified petroleum gas and diesel boilers, which was calculated to reduce emissions for the boiling of water for use within the different abattoir processes by approximately 50%. This was complemented by ongoing energy monitoring, which was instrumental in identifying inefficiencies and optimising energy consumption. By leveraging this system, the facility was able to minimise energy consumption and improve overall operational efficiency. Additionally, these improvements also led to water savings with average daily consumption reduced from circa 150m^3/day to circa 120m^3/day.

The Ministry for Justice and Reform of the Construction Sector (MJR), through the Building and Construction Authority (BCA), is carrying out a holistic reform in the construction sector. This reform also includes initiatives focused on energy performance and energy efficiency in buildings. In May 2024, the new Energy Performance of Buildings Directive brought changes to the required energy performance calculations. As a result, the calculation software was updated to align with the new methodology outlined in the Directive. The methodology for these calculations was finalised in July 2024 and will serve as the foundation for a new software to be introduced by the BCA by the second quarter of 2025. Additionally, the minimum energy performance requirements for new and renovated buildings have been updated in accordance with the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (10/31/EU and 844/18/EU).

These new standards replace those established under Legal Notice 434/2015, which have been in effect since 2016. With the introduction of the updated document, effective from 1 July 2024, compliance with these Minimum Energy Performance Requirements is now mandatory. This initiative not only aligns Malta with European carbon emission reduction targets but also guides landlords and building owners towards achieving higher energy efficiency standards.

Steps were also taken to enforce the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) requirements for advertisements on the sale of property, as stipulated in Article 12/4 of EU Directive 2010/31/EU. In this regard, following discussions with Estate Agents, an agreement was reached that, starting from 1 January 2025, all adverts published will include the EPC rating. Additionally, in October 2024 the BCA launched an informative campaign across multiple channels, including social media platforms, online newspapers, television and radio stations, which concluded in December 2024, to emphasise the importance of including the EPC rating in advertisements for properties listed for sale or rent. This comprehensive approach aimed to raise awareness about the legal obligation and benefits of disclosing the EPC rating and ultimately promoted transparency and informed decision-making in the property market.

1.1.4.1 Energy efficiency and renewable energy schemes

REWS continued to administer the 2021 Solar Water Heater Grant Scheme. This scheme provided a grant of 75% of the total eligible cost, up to the maximum of €1,400. This scheme will also provide an additional grant of €500 to cover maintenance costs after 5 years. During 2024, the Scheme attracted 499 applicants. Additionally, REWS continued to administer the 2023 Roof Insulation and Double-Glazing Scheme, attracting 783 applicants during 2024. Meanwhile, the Heat Pump Water Heater Grant Scheme of 2021, providing a grant of 50% of the total eligible cost, up to the maximum of €1,000, attracted 195 applicants during 2024.

The RES Grant Scheme, launched in 2024, saw significant interest, attracting a total of 1,857 applicants. This scheme provided a grant based on the following options:

- **Option A** – PV system with standard solar inverter: 50% of eligible costs up to a maximum of €2,500 per system and €625 /kWp.
- **Option B** – PV system with hybrid inverter: 50% of eligible costs up to a maximum of €3,000 per system and €750 /kWp.
- **Option C** – Hybrid/Battery inverter and battery: 80% of eligible costs of the Battery Storage up to a maximum of euro €7,200 per system and €720/kWh plus 80% of eligible costs of the Hybrid/battery inverter up to a maximum of €1,800 per system and €450/kWp.
- **Option D** – Battery Storage only: 80% of eligible costs of the Battery Storage up to a maximum of €7,200 per system and €720/kWh.
- When applying for Option B, one may also apply for Option D.

The 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 that benefitted from this scheme in 2024.

Project Ref	Proposal	Applicants	Amount
GS/50037/2023	Joint Application to carry out resurfacing of Triq Ghaxqet l-Ghajn (pedestrian walkway) in natural stone paving (non-slip) and installation of benches and lighting.	Gharghur Local Council & Regjun Lvant	€326,860.00
GS/50020/2024	Joint Application between Naxxar Local Council and Regjun Tramuntana for an Urban Greening Project. Application includes civil works and the formation of an accessible playing field around an existing landscaped area. To include new play equipment, shading canopy, safety flooring, benches, recycling waste bins, fences, gates, lighting, and CCTV.	Naxxar Local Council & Regjun Tramuntana	€241,401.01

1.1.5 Transitioning to infrastructure with reduced environmental impacts

The healthcare sector is advancing climate-neutral and green building initiatives to enhance energy efficiency and sustainability. Projects include eco-friendly infrastructure, renewable energy solutions, and emission reductions at key medical facilities, aligning with EU environmental standards and climate resilience goals.

The National Blood Transfusion Services has invested in the construction of an Establishment of Blood, Tissue and Cell Centre (EBTC), for the Maltese Islands. The EBTC project is co-financed by the EU together with the Government of Malta, in accordance with the rules of the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility. Construction on this project began in 2023, with substantial advancements achieved by 2024. This project aims to reduce energy consumption through various energy efficiency measures, including:

- Enhanced insulation to improve thermal efficiency;
- Heat recovery ventilation systems to optimise indoor air quality;
- High-efficiency heat pump chillers for summer cooling and winter heating;
- Power factor correction units connected to all main low-voltage switchgear;
- Energy-saving LED lighting for reduced electricity consumption;
- Efficient blowers to minimize specific fan power usage;
- Solar domestic hot water heaters for renewable energy use; and
- Rainwater collection systems for firefighting and irrigation purposes.

An exposure analysis was conducted, assessing current and future climate changes, particularly heatwaves, which could impact the building's performance. To counteract these risks, the facility features thermal insulation and ventilation systems for stable indoor temperatures and defined permissible temperatures and environmental conditions for each area within the facility.

Measures have also been taken to mitigate the risk of flooding, including barriers to stop low-level water from flooding the building. Car ports, also equipped with electric vehicle charging points, will provide shade and protection for vehicles from the extreme summer temperatures, reducing the need for air-conditioning in vehicles and promoting energy efficiency.

The EBTC building will receive a green building certification from the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program. LEED provides a set of rating systems for the design, construction, operation, and maintenance of green buildings, homes, and neighbourhoods, helping owners and operators be environmentally responsible and use resources efficiently.

The project also addressed potential environmental impacts arising from both the construction and operation of the facility. During construction, hoarding was erected in accordance with Schedule 2 of LN 295 of 2007. This addressed construction-related issues such as operating hours, dust and noise pollution, site hoarding and vibration. Noise insulation measures are also being installed to reduce the noise impact from the plant, which will be enclosed under a roofed structure. The environmental permit for this project addresses issues of air, land and water pollution from the operation of the facility. The contractor carrying out the construction is required to ensure that building components and materials used in the building do not contain asbestos or substances of very high concern, as identified in the list of substances subject to authorisation set out in Annex XIV to Regulation (EC) No 1907/2006.

The building contractor is also required to ensure that building components and materials used in the building of these premises emit little or no formaldehyde and other carcinogenic volatile organic compounds in accordance with established standards.

All rainwater (white water) collected from the roof and other outdoor areas will be directed to a dedicated reservoir via a separate piping network. This harvested water will then be used for irrigation (and firefighting) purposes. An irrigation system will feed several standalone solenoid valves, which are controlled by a dedicated irrigation control panel. This setup will provide flexibility and promote water conservation, as all landscaped areas can be watered according to the type of vegetation planted and the watering demand throughout different times of the year.

The Gozo General Hospital (GGH) has also invested in multiple initiatives to implement energy-efficient, green measures and improve air quality. The hospital's backup hot water generation boiler currently uses ultra-low sulphur Light Heating Gas Oil but is transitioning to diesel-grade EN590 fuel to reduce emissions and improve efficiency. Additionally, GGH is prioritising low-global-warming-potential refrigerants such as R32 and natural alternatives, for HVAC upgrades and new installations, in alignment with the Montreal Protocol. A phased decommissioning of air-conditioning units beyond economic repair is planned with replacements achieving "A++" energy efficiency ratings. Two outdated rooftop units have already been replaced with advanced, Eurovent-A rated, air-to-air DX packaged units featuring recirculation and heat recovery technology, enhancing energy efficiency, and minimising refrigerant leaks.

In 2024, GGH commenced leasing a new ambulance fleet for emergency response services. These vehicles are all classified as EURO 6 under EU Emission Standards, significantly reducing the carbon footprint associated with ambulance operations. Each vessel is equipped with an exhaust management system to minimise emissions and reduce air pollution. Additionally, in 2024, the hospital's discharge liaison services transitioned to leasing an electric car in place of a petrol-fuelled type vehicle.

As part of its ongoing commitment to sustain and achieve a climate-neutral economy, GGH successfully replaced most of its compact fluorescent light fittings with energy-efficient LED technology throughout 2024. This transition has significantly reduced the hospital's energy consumption, lowered GHG emissions, and improved its environmental sustainability. By adopting LED lighting, GGH has not only reduced operational costs but also reinforced its goal of creating a resilient, resource-efficient healthcare facility.

To further enhance energy efficiency and ensure an uninterrupted power supply during outages, GGH initiated the procurement process for a new set of stand-by generators. These generators will provide reliable backup power and comply with the EC Noise Directive 2000/14/EC and particulate matter emission standards outlined in S/L 549/122.

The Mater Dei Hospital (MDH) has also invested in multiple initiatives to implement further climate-neutral measures. Following the successful installation of four water-cooled chillers (operating as heat pumps) installed at MDH, a similar project was undertaken in 2024 at Sir Anthony Mamo Oncology Centre (SAMOC). These water-cooled chillers will be used for space heating and to heat domestic water. The project involves the installation of two water-to-water heat pumps capable of generating hot water (80°C). These heat pumps are connected in parallel to the existing chiller configuration at the Oncology Hospital. The source side of the heat pumps is connected to the chilled water side whereas the user side is connected to the existing heating circuit. This new chiller management system, integrating heat pumps and SAMOC chillers, provides better control, optimal performance and higher efficiency. Boilers are now only required during very cold periods in the winter months.

The currently installed Air Handling Units are equipped with either a fixed or variable speed-drive-controlled motors that drive blowers using pullies and V-belts. This set-up is being replaced with electronically commutated fans. Electronically commutated motors are significantly more efficient than standard motors by design and require much less maintenance. The EU sets minimum energy efficiency standards for energy-using products through the Energy-related Products Directive 2009/125/EC. The electronically commutated fans being installed fully meet these EU requirements.

In addition to the above, the Multi-Modal Transportation Hub at Ta' Xħajma, developed with over €7 million in EU funding, stands as a flagship project addressing both climate change mitigation and adaptation. In addition to 300 parking spaces for cars in order to alleviate traffic congestion, the hub contains dedicated EV charging stations which encourage the transition to cleaner transportation, reducing emissions from private vehicles. Furthermore, a Park-and-Ride system significantly reduces reliance on private cars, cutting down on vehicular emissions and easing congestion in urban and touristic zones. The introduction of electric shuttle buses ensures that public transport remains a viable, eco-friendly alternative. The green roof will enhance carbon sequestration, improve air quality, and serve as a recreational area for public use. Landscaped with native plants, the green roof promotes biodiversity and requires minimal irrigation, supporting sustainable urban planning. A 10,000 m^3 underground reservoir collects and manages rainwater, ensuring that the hub's green areas are irrigated sustainably. This system will support other water reservoirs across Gozo when additional resources are required, promoting efficient natural resource use. The terminal building incorporates passive energy-saving measures, including double-glazed windows, roof insulation, variable refrigerant flow air-conditioning systems, and energy-efficient LED lighting.

1.2

Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns which Safeguard 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 minimise 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	Rationalise inefficient fossil-fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption by removing market distortions, in accordance with national circumstances, also 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 minimising 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

Managing and effectively reducing the generation of solid waste are critical issues particularly for small island states, thus requiring effective policy adoption and capacity building measures to preserve natural resources and save energy. Malta's Long-Term Waste Management Plan 2021-2030 plays a pivotal role in meeting such objectives. In 2024, several measures from said plan were successfully implemented, including:

A study to quantify the reuse of certain products;

- The implementation of a see-through black bag for mixed waste;
- Audits of end-of-life vehicles facilities;
- The establishment of an online reporting platform for waste operators;
- A feasibility study on extending the Extended Producer Responsibility principle on end-of-life tyres, textiles and non-packaging paper; and
- A study to identify alternatives to single-use plastic cups and food containers.

Addressing the principles of responsible consumption involves promoting sustainable practices that extend the lifecycle of products and reduce waste. In this regard, Circular Economy Malta (CEMalta) is conducting, through a third-party contractor, a feasibility study to determine the economic viability of establishing a repair centre designed to promote the repair, reuse, and upgrading of items, initially focusing on clothing and electronics. By extending the lifecycle of products, this initiative aligns with Malta's Waste Management Plan. As part of the study, a comprehensive survey was conducted to better understand the current situation and the behavioural aspects of the Maltese population regarding the repair of various product categories. This data aids CEMalta in assessing demand, identifying challenges, and tailoring the repair centre's approach to address the specific needs of the community effectively.

Furthermore, CEMalta is implementing smart waste depots in Gozo, with a pilot project currently focused on the catering sector. These depots are designed to be equipped with the Internet of Things technologies, enabling businesses to deposit waste efficiently at any time and allowing for improved monitoring and management of waste flows. This system aims to enhance waste collection efficiency, reduce waste overflow, and minimise environmental impact by optimising waste disposal practices. Preparatory works for the pilot project have been completed, and the first smart waste depot, located in Xlendi, will be launched in January 2025. The smart depots will provide CEMalta with real-time data on waste disposal, allowing for monitoring of waste streams and identification of patterns. This data will create opportunities to better understand waste generation trends in catering establishments, enabling more informed decisions to improve overall waste management strategies.

Promoting education on sustainable practices is crucial for embedding the principles of responsible consumption within society, empowering individuals to prevent and properly manage waste. Building on this principle, WasteServ opened a new interactive and educational centre situated within the Sant'Antnin Family Park in Marsascala, welcoming all those interested in learning more about Malta's waste management systems and good practices. This centre, called the ECOHIVE Academy, is designed to educate the public about waste management and promote sustainable practices through a variety of interactive exhibits and digital experiences. It offers an immersive experience for visitors of all ages, using augmented reality, interactive displays, and engaging digital games to explain the importance of sustainability and waste management.

ECOHIVE
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1.2.1.1 Construction and Demolition Waste

In 2024, various measures aimed at improving the management of construction and demolition waste were implemented. The Construction and Demolition Waste Framework Regulations (S.L. 549.161) were enacted to outline the responsibilities of key stakeholders in the sector, including developers/ clients, contractors, waste carriers and site managers. Additionally, several initiatives from the Construction and Demolition Waste Strategy for Malta 2021 – 2030 were introduced through these regulations. Among these, developers of high-density residential developments serving 16 units or more, as well as major developments, are now required to submit a pre-demolition audit as part of the planning process before an executable permit can be issued. This requirement will take effect from 1 January 2026.

Moreover, these developers must meet specific targets related to re-use or recycling of waste generated during excavation and demolition. They are also required to used recycled aggregates and construction material. These obligations will come into force in January 2028. To support compliance, guidelines are currently being drafted to assist industry stakeholders in meeting their waste management responsibilities.

A good practice aligned with the above waste prevention and management efforts is that related to the construction of the EBTC. Contaminated excavated waste from the construction of the EBTC is being recycled into a lean concrete mix, which can be used for backfilling in this and other projects. ERA has granted a specific permit for the Ta' Żuta quarry to receive the contaminated waste from this site and process it into a lean concrete mix. Additionally, topsoil was removed and reused for landscaping. Throughout the construction process, all unused excavated or removed material, including other potential waste, was transported to the nearest civic amenity site for construction material recycling.

1.2.1.2 Food and Organic Waste

The Malta Food Agency (MFA) plays a pivotal role in managing local produce markets and reducing food waste. Unsold but still consumable produce is redirected to food banks and NGOs, while inedible food waste is sent to WasteServ for recycling into compost, which is then distributed to farmers free of charge, supporting sustainable agriculture.

To further streamline food distribution and minimise waste, the MFA has been working on a digital platform that allows importers, wholesalers, supermarkets, restaurants, and food distributors to register excess food, while NGOs and food banks can use it to submit requests. Once live, it will be automated to enhance efficiency and transparency. Through this initiative, donors will also benefit by being able to apply their donated goods as expenses.

In its ongoing efforts to manage food waste, the MFA, in collaboration with Koperattivi Malta, will manage a sales outlet at Ta' Qali. The main objective of this outlet is to sell unsold fruit and vegetables while promoting local food products.

1.2.1.3 Single-Use Plastic Waste

In 2022, CEMalta introduced the Beverage Container Refund Scheme (BCRS) under the Beverage Containers Recycling Regulations (S.L. 549.134) to promote the return of single-use beverage containers. The initiative enhances collection and recycling efforts, reduces litter, and fosters circular economy practices. The Scheme applies a refundable deposit to beverage containers, encouraging consumers to return empty containers. Once collected, these containers are sorted and exported for recycling. By improving collection and recycling rates, the Scheme strengthens national collection and recycling goals, supporting Malta's broader circular economy objectives.

The Fifth Schedule Collection Targets, as outlined in S.L.549.134, set progressive goals for the collection of single-use beverage containers under the Scheme. The targets aim to steadily increase collection rates over time:

- 2024: From January 2024 to December 2024, the target increases to 80%, signalling a more substantial commitment to container collection.
- 2025: From January 2025 to December 2025, the target increases to 85%, further emphasising container recovery.
- 2026 and onwards: Beginning in January 2026, the target peaks at 90%, reflecting a sustained commitment to maintaining high collection rates.

Following the first full operational year of the BCRS, an analysis of data from January 2023 to December 2023 shows significant progress in both collection and recycling. Over this period, more than 250 million beverage containers were placed on the market, with the distribution as follows:

- 63% PET single-use containers
- 27% aluminium cans
- 10% glass bottles

The collection data for 2023 highlights following achievements:

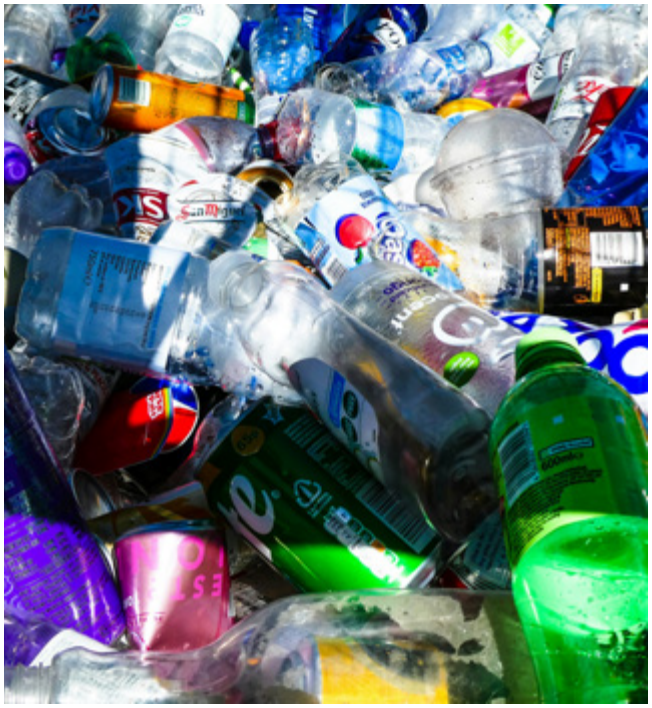
- PET containers reached a collection rate of 83%, surpassing the target.
- Aluminium cans achieved a collection rate of 82%, meeting the goal.
- Glass bottles had a collection rate of 74%, meeting the target.

The collection data for 2024 highlights following achievements:

- PET containers reached a collection rate of 85.7%, surpassing the target.
- Aluminium cans achieved a collection rate of 85.6%, surpassing the target.
- Glass bottles had a collection rate of 80.0% meeting the target.

Launched in April 2024, the Bring Your Own Container (BYOC) initiative encourages consumers to bring reusable containers to participating businesses, offering them discounts or rewards in exchange. This initiative directly addresses the growing concern of single-use plastic waste by promoting the use of sustainable alternatives. By the end of 2024, CEMalta successfully co-opted 300 establishments from the hotels restaurants and catering sector, retail, and other domains. These businesses are actively implementing good practices to avoid single-use plastics and encouraging their clients to make use of their own containers. Notably, reusable containers were used 61,099 times during 2024, showcasing the initiative's tangible impact.

With the increasing number of participating businesses, CEMalta is working to expand the initiative in 2025 by launching public awareness campaigns and ensuring adherence through routine site visits. The BYOC initiative delivers significant environmental benefits by reducing waste generation and promoting adoption of concepts like re-usability.



Additionally, it provides economic benefits by offering financial incentives to consumers.

During 2024, REWS launched a new RO Scheme aimed at reducing the use of plastic containers for bottling water, attracting 2494 applicants. This scheme offered grants for the following options:

- Option A: Water Guard: Water filtration system. Grant percentage and maximum: 40% on the purchase price and installation of water filtration system equipment subject to a maximum grant of €100;

- Option B: RO Wave: RO system. Grant percentage and maximum: 15.25% on the purchase price and installation of RO equipment subject to a maximum grant of €100; and

  Option C: RO Recycle: RO system with reject water return. Grant percentage and maximum: 40% on the purchase price and installation of RO with reject water return subject to a maximum grant of €300.

1.2.1.4 Glass

WasteServ has successfully launched a new automated glass sorting line which is capable of processing 52,000 glass bottles an hour, increasing WasteServ's annual operational capacity from 8,000 tonnes to 21,000 tonnes. The automated glass plant processes larger quantities and produces a higher grade of glass with greater efficiency, which can then be used to create new glass packaging. With its state-of-the-art technology, the glass sorter can remove certain contaminants that are incorrectly disposed of with glass.

This €2.5 million advance facility is also equipped to process flat glass, including windowpanes, thereby broadening the range of glass types that can be diverted from landfills. Utilising the latest automated sorting technology, the system segregates glass by colour, separating clear from green and amber variants, thus yielding a higher grade of material. Such an investment ensures that a material which can be recycled is repurposed and prevented from becoming waste, reducing its negative environmental impact and conserving raw materials.

1.3

Protecting, Conserving and Enhancing Natural Capital and Resources 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 strengthening their resilience, and taking action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans
14.3	Minimise and address the impacts of ocean acidification, also 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, recognising 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 enhance the contribution of marine biodiversity for 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 the UN 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 (IAS) 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	Mobilise and significantly increase financial resources from all sources to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and ecosystems

1.3.1 Terrestrial Ecosystems and Biodiversity

In 2024, Malta revised and launched its National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan to 2030, with the vision "Malta's biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored and sustainably used for the benefit of nature, people and climate". This strategy is driven by 22 Targets and 79 Actions that address various direct and indirect drivers of biodiversity loss. Implementation has already begun in collaboration with governmental entities, the private sector, the public and other stakeholders.

Malta is committed to increasing its terrestrial protected areas up to 30% by 2030, as guided by international frameworks such as the Convention on Biological Diversity's Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan to 2030. In this regard, in 2024 ERA designated four new Special Areas of Conservation of National Importance, namely Il-Ġebla tal-Fessej, Ħondoq ir-Rummien u Il-Ħnejja, Il-Qortin ta' Isopu and Xrobb l-Għaġin. This will ensure the protection and conservation of species and habitats for which the sites were protected, protecting biodiversity and enhancing environmental conservation.

Additionally, the process of updating the Conservation Objectives and Measures for Malta's Terrestrial Natura 2000 Sites was initiated. The first set of updated conservation objectives and measures covers 13 of Malta's terrestrial Natura 2000 sites. The revisions build upon Malta's first "Management Plans and Conservation Orders for Terrestrial Natura 2000 Sites in Malta & Gozo" which were adopted in 2016, continuing the government's long-term efforts in Natura 2000 site management and biodiversity conservation. Furthermore, a 5-year management plan for Il-Park Nazzjonali tal-Inwadar was finalised and launched. The management of these protected sites ensures that the conservation objectives for the species and habitats within these areas are effectively met.

Furthermore, in 2024, the designation of the endemic Maltese Honeybee as a national species represented a key achievement in biodiversity conservation, strengthening its protection. To address the significant decline in pollinator populations, Malta continued the Malta Pollinator Monitoring Scheme for its second year. This collaborative initiative engages citizen scientists, academics, and policymakers in the monitoring of bees, butterflies, and hoverflies. The data collected is essential to informing the development of the National Strategy and Action Plan for Pollinators (NSAPP) up to 2035. The NSAPP aims to serve as the overarching national framework that guides and promotes the safeguarding of pollinator species and their essential services through a series of short- and long-term actions. The drafting process for the NSAPP was initiated in 2024.

ERA is also developing a National Biodiversity Surveillance and Monitoring Framework to address surveillance and monitoring requirements under various Multilateral Environment Agreements and the EU Nature Acquis. Additionally, ERA initiated the drafting of a strategy to promote biodiversity citizen science.

In terms of data collection, monitoring, and management, ERA undertook several efforts, namely, the commissioning of studies on a floral species (liverwort), nine bat species; two terrestrial endemic snail species, pollinators; alongside the monitoring of two mammal species, eight reptile species, and one amphibian across the Maltese Islands. These efforts were utilised to establish baselines for evidence-based policy development and data collection on mammals, reptiles, and amphibians using social media platforms. Additional efforts include a preliminary soil assessment at ten sites covering industrial, urban, and agricultural areas; collaboration with NGOs to improve data collection on orchids; enhancements to the National Biodiversity Database ensuring expert-reviewed, high-quality data; monitoring of inland surface waters, marine environments, and chemicals in water ecosystems; and seabed surveys beyond the 25-nautical-mile boundary at six locations likely to host reefs.

Furthermore, in addressing environmental threats and species conservation, research was advanced on Gozo's fungi, whereby extensive studies were conducted by the MGP to identify species at risk due to climate change. The findings informed targeted conservation strategies, reinforcing efforts to safeguard vulnerable fungi populations and enhance ecosystem resilience. Meanwhile, collaborative initiatives, such as the Joint Network for wild Fungi, played a pivotal role in habitat protection, actively integrating biodiversity considerations into urban planning. These efforts not only preserved vital ecosystems but also bolstered climate adaptation measures, ensuring a more sustainable and resilient environment for future generations.

The MGP also implemented a number of projects in 2024, funded through the Conservation of Wild Birds Fund, contributing towards biodiversity protection. Such projects include the continuation of Phase V of the 'Barn Owl re-introduction project' launched in 2017, Phase III of the 'Turtle Doves Captive-breeding for Release into the Wild', the 'Experiencing birds and their behaviour' project that looks at an innovative way of combining technology and avifauna, and the initiation of 'Research on the short-eared owl population on Comino'.

Efforts also progressed in terms of controlling the spread of IAS through management and eradication. The intent and objectives were issued by ERA for the development of an Action Plan for the Management of IAS that Union Concern. Plotting and mapping efforts of established IAS were also carried out. Various IAS removal projects were conducted by public authorities in collaboration with environmental NGOs and other government entities. Meanwhile, educational campaigns and citizen science efforts aimed to further increase knowledge on potential IAS the public may encounter or potentially own.

In 2024, ERA launched a new user-friendly identification guide on protected and alien trees in Malta. This book is one of a series of guidance documents aimed at supporting Malta's legislative framework to provide well-deserved protection to native trees and woodlands for the enjoyment of our and future generations. Throughout the year, Ambjent Malta (AM) also removed various Invasive Species across Malta and Comino. The removal included areas in Buskett, Salini, Ħal Saptan, Siġġiewi, Ħal Għaxaq, St. Paul's Bay, and Dingli. The species removed include *Arundo donax, Agave spp, Opuntia ficus indica, Ailanthus altissima and Acacia saligna* (216 m²).

In terms of habitat restoration efforts, 2024 saw an extensive project on rubble walls. The project entailed restoration works across Malta and Gozo with the aim of safeguarding both environmental and cultural heritage while supporting sustainable agricultural practices. With 39,197.37 m3 of rubble walls set to be restored across 40 localities, this project will impact approximately 125 farmers and land managers. Restoring these walls not only enhances the environmental value of agricultural land but also mitigates the effects of climate change, improves soil quality, preserves biodiversity, enhances the livelihood of farmers and conserves Malta's rich cultural heritage.

The conservation of biodiversity is also reflected in one of AM's key functions, which involves restoration and maintenance interventions in sites that are part of the protected Natura 2000 network. During 2024, 3,209 trees and shrubs were planted in these sites, including in Armier, Fomm ir-Riħ, Comino, Wied iż-Żurrieq, and Buskett. Other environmental restoration interventions were conducted in coastal areas, which have been reported in the Integrated Coastal Zone Management section. The main areas of intervention include Buskett, Għajn Tuffieħa, and Comino, as outlined below:

- **Għajn Tuffieħa:** Various interventions were carried out to remove and control invasive and alien tree species. Notably, more than 16,091 m^2 of acacia trees were removed, effectively managing their spread in the area;

- **Comino:** Approximately 26,185 m^2 of Acacia, Sumac, and Prickly Pear trees were removed. Additional restoration and maintenance efforts were undertaken, including adjustments to cordoning in the Bejn il-Kmiemen (Blue Lagoon) area and Santa Marija's sandy dunes, the restoration of 350 m^3 of dry-stone walls, and the preservation of other vernacular infrastructure; and

- **Other Locations:** AM also conducts conservation efforts at various other sites. For instance, the restoration of the amphitheatre at Magħluq, a designated Natura 2000 site, has been completed.

In September 2024, the "Silva Green Pathways" project was launched and co-financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, with a total budget of €2,407,170. As part of this project, restoration work will be carried out on two woodlands in Aħrax tal-Mellieħa and Miżieb, which have been susceptible to fires over the past five years, resulting in the destruction of thousands of mature pine trees and the invasion of alien trees, such as Acacia. Work will include the control and removal of alien and invasive trees from areas covering around 12,000 m^2, the planting of 1,887 indigenous trees and shrubs, the restoration of a girna (traditional stone hut), and the installation of irrigation systems connected to the nearby "new water" infrastructure. Information boards and fire markers will be installed to inform visitors about reducing fire risks, and a fire hydrant compatible with the CPD's fire-fighting vehicles will be installed. The works are expected to begin in February 2025 and be completed by September 2025.

As part of its afforestation efforts, AM planted 400 trees in collaboration with the Mellieħa Local Council and the Federation for Hunting & Conservation Malta. Additionally, restoration works are ongoing at the Olive Grove in Bidnija, a designated tree protection zone. These efforts include the demolition of partially collapsed existing rubble walls, construction of new ones, and the removal of invasive species. Over the next two years, the project will focus on restoring approximately 10,000 m^3 of rubble walls, rehabilitating old water channels, constructing a pump room, restoring a reservoir, and installing an irrigation system.

During 2024, AM planted 7,380 trees and 13,970 shrubs. The Ta' Qali nursery, which serves as the main plant propagation centre for AM, grows and maintains a variety of indigenous, endemic, and ornamental plant species for habitat restoration, afforestation, and landscaping projects. Over 70 species have been propagated since 2016, including 65 indigenous/endemic tree and shrub species.

In 2024, studies for the compilation of the masterplan covering the preservation of the Lunzjata Valley were undertaken. Following the preliminary geological investigations held in previous years, the commissioning of full geological investigations is expected to assess the geological and geomorphic conditions of the area, concentrating on the cliff faces bordering this valley. Works are underway for the commissioning of rock mitigation measures to consolidate the cliff overlooking the chapel. The Lunzjata valley is one of the few locations in the country that benefits from a constant supply of freshwater throughout the year. To ensure that this situation ensues, preparatory works are underway to clean the natural course-ways, restore rainwater catching facilities and canals.

Through this intervention, the aquifer shall continue to be recharged, ensuring the preservation of the rare habitats and species found in the area such as the endangered Maltese freshwater crab..

Further to the above on the maintenance of valleys, Project Green carried out extensive interventions across nine valleys during 2024, namely, Wied Baħrija, Wied Għajn Riħana, Wied il-Fiddien, Wied il-Għajn, Wied il-Luq ta' Brija, Wied Morfu, Wied Qannotta, Wied Qirda, and Wied Xkora. These interventions addressed critical issues such as illegal dumping, construction debris, and the spread of IAS. Comprehensive efforts included cleaning and waste removal to restore the valleys' natural ecosystems, the removal of IAS to prevent ecological imbalances, and planting riparian trees and shrubs to promote water conservation and improve habitat quality. Collectively, these initiatives supported water conservation, strengthened valley management practices, and protected local biodiversity by restoring natural habitats and creating healthier ecosystems.

Another notable achievement in 2024 was the regeneration of Wied Għajn Riħana in Burmarrad. This project combined ecological restoration with structural improvements, including the restoration of rubble retention walls to bolster the valley's resilience. Additionally, a public access trail was established, providing an opportunity for informal education and community engagement while fostering greater appreciation for Malta's natural heritage.

Similarly, Heritage Malta continued with the renaturing of Wied Dalam, clearing out most invasive species and planning for indigenous trees and shrubs to assist the establishment of an indigenous habitat. Visitors were also given the opportunity to attend a walk-through with the project leader of this project. Two tours were held; the first was held in Maltese on 20 September 2024, and the second held in English on 21 September 2024. Heritage Malta has also restored a total of 390 m of rubble walls within its rural sites, helping to prevent soil erosion while simultaneously planting over 1,400 indigenous trees and shrubs to conserve local biodiversity.

On an international level, in 2024, ERA was actively finalising the National Action Plan under the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, reinforcing global efforts to address desertification, land degradation, and drought.

The conservation and restoration of terrestrial and inland ecosystems, along with their services, can be accelerated through educational initiatives and community engagement efforts. Spearheaded by the Malta Chamber of Scientists, the Dwejra Lines project was selected for funding in 2024 through the National STEM Community Fund. This project aims to empower neurodivergent youth by offering educational opportunities in ecology and conservation, as well as the opportunity to conduct scientific research in the Dwejra Lines area. The data gathered will be crucial in informing a sustainable recreational plan for the area. Furthermore, the Botanical Bridges Project by Sacred Heart College links education and environment. This project will renovate and equip an area of the school grounds to become a living classroom for learning about sustainable gardening, biodiversity and environmental conservation, both for students and for the wider community.

1.3.2 Marine Ecosystems

In terms of marine area management, the project "Marine Conservation: An inclusive approach to managing marine resources" was selected for co-financing in July 2024. This project will seek the implementation of management processes in Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and the wider marine environment. By maintaining or improving the status of the habitats and species within MPAs and the overall status of the marine environment, this project will contribute to improvement in quality of life. In addition, in February 2024, Malta's updated Programme of Measures for the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) was reported to the EC. These measures are geared towards the achievement of Good Environmental Status (GES) in Malta's marine waters by including measures that contribute to the achievement of GES for each of the different MSFD GES Descriptors.

Various actions under the LIFE Integrated Project for the River Basin Management Plan (LIFE IP RBMP) project progressed in 2024. This project seeks to ensure the optimised management of all water resources on the Maltese Islands. These actions would lead to improved management processes for achievement of good water and marine environmental status, thus contributing to improved quality of life. The works and progress carried out throughout 2024 are outlined below:

- The restoration of an important coastal wetland of "Il-Ballut ta' Marsaxlokk" through LIFE IP RBMP Action C13;
- The identification of management options for anchoring and mooring activities to reduce pressures on seabed habitats through physical damage through LIFE IP RBMP Action C14;
- The improved management of pressures arising from anchoring and mooring helps Malta enhance its marine protection measures, including in MPAs; Progress was made on LIFE IP RBMP Action C16 which included the setting up of the modelling and observation systems required to develop the baseline hydrographic knowledge for Malta's nearshore and offshore waters, and to use this baseline data to characterise pressures and impacts on the marine environment; and
- LIFE IP RBMP Action C18, which includes the monitoring framework for contaminants of emerging concern in a number of water categories (surface waters, ground water, rainwater runoff and new water)

On Integrated Coastal Zone Management, AM have undertaken initiatives at Ramla tat-Torri to mitigate sand sediment loss and protect dune ecosystems. Key efforts include:

- Utilising Posidonia placement in front of dunes as a buffer against storms. This initiative contributed towards conserving the dune's integrity and was carried out in conjunction with ERA and the Cleansing and Maintenance Division,
- Regular maintenance, such as removing invasive species (Arundo and Malva) and cordoning off this sensitive area in line with the management plan; and
- Two major cleanups in 2024: one with Reġjun Tramuntana and ERA (16 February) and another on World Cleanup Day (20 September).

Additionally, vulnerable and degraded dunes at Marfa Ridge were cordoned off, specifically in Ġnejna and Armier. The dune at Little Armier had suffered severe degradation due to the presence of *Carpobrotus edulis*. In response, AM removed and cleared this invasive species, although Arundo remains present. Meanwhile, at Żurrieq, a project was carried out to create a coastal garden featuring coastal dunes and wetland plants within a degraded site, with a total of 350 shrubs and trees planted. Additionally, *oleander and vitex* were planted at both Ramla tat-Torri and the Little Armier dune.

2024 also marked a record year for sea turtle conservation in Malta. A total of eight nests were confirmed, yielding 594 eggs and 406 hatchlings. To safeguard these nests, ERA implemented an Emergency Conservation Order for each one. In collaboration with Nature Trust Malta, ERA actively protected the nests while engaging the public in conservation efforts.

Launched in 2023 and implemented throughout 2024, the Sea Urchin Restocking Project is a three-year initiative aimed at replenishing the sea urchin population in Maltese waters.

By cultivating juvenile sea urchins and releasing them into the wild, the project supports marine biodiversity and the sustainability of the local aquaculture industry.

On invasive marine species, the coral species *Oculina patagonica* was first reported in Malta in 2017. A study conducted in 2020 mapped its distribution and abundance, identifying 43 colonies in 10 sites along the Maltese coast. Colonies were mainly found on artificial substrates within a depth range of 0.1–6 m. In 2024, a pilot project was launched in Birżebbuġa to control the spread of the *Oculina patagonica*. Actions included initial surveys to map and measure colonies, physical removal of six colonies using hammer and chisel, and the smothering of six colonies with biodegradable jute matting. Quarterly surveys are ongoing to evaluate the effectiveness of these methods.

The final post-intervention survey is scheduled for March 2025, after which results will be published, with preliminary observations indicating that manual removal seems to be the best option for their removal.

1.3.2.1 Cleanups and Educational Campaigns

The removal of marine litter from the seafloor has been a key focus to improve the habitat conditions in MPAs. In 2024, eight seabed cleanups were conducted by AM, resulting in the collection of 1,177 kg of litter (2,360 items). These efforts were carried out in collaboration with the Professional Diving Schools Association of Malta, Gozo, and Comino, and a local supplier. The litter composition included plastics and polystyrene (50%), metals (20%), glass (15%), and other materials such as rubber, clothing, and fishing gear. Cleanup sites included Sirens, Żonqor Point, Fekruna, Għar Lapsi, Marsascala, Żurrieq, Armier, and Exiles. Effort metrics for litter accumulation across locations were calculated, providing early insights into spatial distribution trends, indicating Sirens as a hotspot (high).

To target floating marine litter, 12 cleanups were carried out by AM in 2024, whereby 79 kg (173 items) of litter was collected. Nets were used for collection, and further analysis was conducted by AM Environmental Stewards. The boat was procured by an AM-led project,

"Mapping and Monitoring of Posidonia oceanica using Remote and Sentinel technology".

Meanwhile, 15 coastal cleanups held in 2024 resulted in the collection of 2,058 kg of litter. These cleanups employed systematic sampling approaches and targeted litter of marine and anthropogenic origin. Additionally, Saving Our Blue, through the Islands Clean Up Initiative with Project Green, and in collaboration with various stakeholders and NGOs, collected a total of 1707.53 kg tons of waste since the beginning of 2024.

Although cleanup initiatives are key hands-on efforts for preserving and restoring ecosystems, education is just as crucial for sustaining their health. To this end, in 2024 the Ministry for the Environment, Energy, and Public Cleanliness (MEEC) introduced the VR Mobile Unit, allowing visitors to experience seven MPAs around Malta, Gozo, and Comino from a diver's perspective through virtual reality. Saving Our Blue also collaborated with AM to organise educational boat trips, walks, and sessions at the Buskett Hub.

At the Buskett Hub, visiting students learned about marine litter and the importance of preserving nature. Furthermore, Saving Our Blue participated in Skola Sajf and other summer school programmes, engaging with almost 450 children. Additionally, 52 ballot bins were installed on sandy and rocky beaches around the Maltese Islands to combat the damage caused by cigarette butts, which contain microplastics.

Meanwhile, AM established two snorkel trails at Għajn Tuffieħa and Golden Bay in collaboration with ERA and Nature Trust. These trails aim to educate the public about marine habitats through signage and guided tours. Engaging participants aged 15 and over, 11 snorkel tours were held in June and July 2024. Meanwhile, five boat trips were organised in MPAs, including Filfla, Ta' Ċenċ Gozo, Comino, Għajn Tuffieħa, and St. Paul's Island. Over 200 participants joined, raising awareness about coastal habitats. Additional trips to Filfla were conducted with Reġjun Tramuntana. Further to this, five educational walks were held at Natura 2000 sites, engaging over 200 participants to foster awareness of environmental conservation and marine biodiversity. In collaboration with the Learning About Forests Programme, educational visits were organised with primary school students at the il-Mall, Argotti and San Filippu Gardens that form part of the Malta Botanic Gardens Project. Additionally, educational centres such as the Xrobb l-Għaġin Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre and the Ċentru Edukattiv at Buskett welcome numerous visitors and students year-round.

1.3.3 Water Resources Management

Malta's limited natural water resources are vital for providing several services. In 2024, Malta continued its efforts to ensure the diligent and efficient use of these resources and ecosystems, aiming to achieve both good quantitative and qualitative status. To this end, ERA and EWA published the 3rd RBMP for Malta. This plan provides a status assessment of inland and coastal waters in the Maltese Islands and outlines a programme of measures necessary to work towards the achievement or maintenance of good status in these water bodies. The programme of measures also addresses the country's water management, with specific focus on the significant water management issues identified during the second implementation cycle of the EU Water Framework Directive.

The MED-WET Project (Improving Mediterranean irrigation and Water supply for smallholder farmers by providing Efficient, low-cost and nature-based Technologies and practices), launched in 2021, aimed to tackle water scarcity challenges in the Mediterranean, particularly in the context of climate change. As part of the MED-WET Project, several advanced water management solutions were introduced and tested, significantly improving irrigation efficiency and reducing environmental impact. The key initiatives included:

01. Self-Regulating, Low-Energy, Clay-Based Irrigation

- This subsurface irrigation system utilised clay tubes to regulate water release based on soil suction, ensuring efficient water use,
- The technique proved to be highly cost-effective and adaptable to rural environments, reducing both water consumption and energy demands; and
- By optimising irrigation efficiency, SLECI contributed to lowering the environmental footprint of agriculture while supporting sustainable farming practices.

02. Solar Desalination Greenhouse

- The SDGH integrated solar energy technology to desalinate brackish water for irrigation, providing an alternative water source in areas facing freshwater scarcity,
- In addition to water desalination, the structure supported vertical farming of halophytes, a salt-tolerant crop, promoting sustainable agricultural diversification; and
- The system demonstrated the potential of renewable energy in mitigating water scarcity, offering a scalable solution for regions with limited freshwater resources.

03. Capacity Building: Workshops and Training Sessions

- A series of workshops and training sessions were conducted for farmers and key stakeholders, ensuring the successful adoption of these innovative technologies,
- These sessions provided hands-on training and knowledge transfer, empowering local agricultural communities to implement water-efficient farming practices; and
- The training component played a crucial role in strengthening long-term agricultural resilience to climate change.

The conclusion of the MED-WET Project in 2024 marked a significant milestone in advancing sustainable water management in Mediterranean agriculture. The project enhanced water efficiency through innovative irrigation technologies, reduced dependency on traditional freshwater sources by utilising desalinated brackish water, provided farmers with practical training to integrate climate-resilient agricultural methods, and strengthened regional collaboration on climate adaptation strategies.

In line with Malta's objective to further invest in alternative water supply sources, MGP, through the EcoGozo Directorate, continued its participation in the LIFE 16 IPE MT 008 Project, advancing work on Concrete Action C.6 – "Demonstration Site for the Application of New Water Resources – Gozo." Following the completion of the reservoir in 2023, work on the fertigation system continued in 2024, bringing it closer to full operational status. Additionally, discussions with ERA regarding the rehabilitation of Wied ta' Għirxi progressed, with specific plans and strategies further developed to facilitate the restoration of this area.

Further to the above, in 2023, WSC secured €20 million from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development Funds to expand the Malta South reclaimed water (New Water) production capacity and extend the distribution network to cover the Southwest of Malta. This project will extend the provision of the New Water supply to an additional 223 hectares of agricultural land. Work on the project began in October 2024, with an expected completion date of the first quarter of 2026.

Additional efforts to ensure the responsible use of water include blue infrastructure projects and initiatives encouraging rainwater harvesting. During 2024, REWS continued to administer the 2018 Domestic Cisterns Restoration Scheme. This scheme provided a Grant Percentage and maximum of 50% of the total eligible costs of restoration works, including VAT, plus 100% of certification costs, including VAT, up to a maximum of €1,000. Eligible certification costs will be capped at €100. This Scheme attracted 89 applicants during 2024.

Another notable harvesting initiative is the St Vincent de Paul (SVP) project, which focuses on the development of Malta's largest dementia-friendly garden. Works unveiled a century-old-cistern, which was reconnected to rainwater catchments. The cistern can hold 8,400,000 litres of water, which is used for irrigation of gardens.

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, and provide 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, help maintain ecosystems, strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and 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 utilisation 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, recognising 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 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 the UN 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 IAS 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 Sustainable Agriculture

In 2024, the Food Systems Directorate launched Malta's first-ever Strategy for Resilient Food Systems. The Strategy seeks to align the mindsets and behaviours of various stakeholders across the food ecosystem towards sustainability and resilience. It aims to unite all stakeholders in the food ecosystem, guiding them towards shared objectives in line with national priorities outlined in various sectoral and thematic strategies, including Malta's National Post-Pandemic Strategy and the EU's Green Deal, Farm to Fork Strategy and Malta's Action Plan for Organic Food. Through this Strategy, Malta envisions fostering a culture of conscious consumption, where informed choices and the Maltese product are celebrated, ultimately contributing to a healthier society and a thriving food economy.

Following the publication of the Agricultural Act (CAP 639) in 2023, through the powers conferred under regulation 7, new regulations were published in 2024 for the categorisation of farmers. These regulations provide for farmers to be categorised according to their economic activity. Such categorisation will act as a tool for better visibility of the efficiency, viability and needs of the agriculture sector for both policy makers as well as for other entities to target schemes and policies according to the needs of the sector. Through the implementation of these regulations, the sustainability of farmers can be better assessed and supported through targeted schemes.

In 2024, drawing on experience gained from the checks and controls within the centralised market, as well as the pressure from sectoral stakeholders, the MFA initiated the process of amending the current legislation (S.L. 117.43) to strengthen traceability and accountability throughout the supply chain. For the very first time, the legislation mandates the use of the identified crates exclusively for locally produced agricultural products, primarily of plant origin.

To support Maltese agricultural producers through investments in the processing and development of agricultural products, the managing authority for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) – Strategic Plan 2023-2027 organised an information session on the call for applications under Intervention 73.4: Off-farm Productive Investments (Processing). The budgeted eligible cost of the operation is €9,313,474.00 exclusive of VAT. Through this funding scheme, the managing authority shall contribute €4,656,737.00 out of the CAP Strategic Plan, equivalent to 50% of the total, for the refurbishment of existing facilities, purchase of chillers, investments in processing lines, cold rooms and investments related to energy generation. Applications for this funding scheme were open to eligible beneficiaries until the end of March 2024. Eligible applicants included farmers (whether natural or legal persons), groups of farmers (including partnerships and cooperatives), and other businesses, public entities and land managers active in the sectors of agricultural or rural business processing, marketing and development.

1.4.1.1 Organic Farming

In 2024, the Ambassador for Organic and Sustainable Food coordinated several promotional measures to raise awareness and encourage the adoption of organic farming practices. These measures included several promotional events, such as a roundtable discussion on viticulture and organic production, a promotional event focused on organic olive oil, and a workshop on the implementation of the National Action Plan for Organic Food. All of these events provided opportunities for stakeholders to network, share knowledge, and promote the organic sector. Moreover, the Ambassador supports local producers by promoting the EU Organic Award, through AgriFair, while engaging future consumers with initiatives like the Tiny Teen Science Café and discussions on food and sustainable choices.

1.4.1.2 Agricultural Projects and Schemes

The 2024 Pest Survey Programme, co-financed by the EC, aimed to monitor 48 pests posing risks to agricultural, ornamental, and landscaping plants, prioritising those of significance at the EU level. The survey employed visual inspections, trapping, sample collection, and laboratory analysis to assess pest status and mitigate emerging threats. A final report published in 2024 highlighted the following achievements:

- Assessment of the official pest status of surveyed species in the Maltese Islands;
- Comprehensive surveillance of priority pests, including Union quarantine and emerging threats not previously monitored in Malta;
- Ongoing risk evaluation for pests impacting plant health in trade;
- Enhanced knowledge of emerging pest risks affecting Malta;
- Prevention of pest introduction through proactive monitoring and rapid eradication;
- Application of survey findings to improve contingency and action plans;
- Stakeholder engagement in surveillance activities and awareness-building; and
- Swift detection and response mechanisms for new pest incursions.

In 2024, the Plant Protection Directorate conducted additional surveys beyond the Pest Survey Programme to monitor key plant health threats. These included monitoring through 30 inspections and 15 traps for *Halyomorpha*. A total of 3,071 samples were collected during pest surveillance surveys with an extra 28 inspections conducted on tomatoes for processing.

A total of 185 traps were set up as part of the Pest Surveillance Programme. 11 notifications of interceptions were reported to the EU regarding deficiencies identified during import and trade inspections.

Meanwhile, the Agriculture Directorate within the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Rights (MAFA) is developing a national collection of autochthonous agricultural crop varieties to study, characterise, and promote these resilient local strains. These varieties, adapted to Malta's pedo-climatic conditions, require fewer inputs such as water and pesticides, making them more sustainable. Since 2021, the Directorate has been cultivating local vine varieties, with research outcomes expected to support increased adoption, particularly in the wine sector. In 2024, for the first time, the Directorate formally included the autochthonous grape varieties *Ġellewża* and *Girgentina* and the autochthonous olive variety *Bidni* in the national catalogue. Furthermore, MAFA launched the third edition of the 'Let's Talk Farming Programme' under the theme "Empowering Future Generations for a Sustainable Food System." The programme focuses on empowering young people to nurture a generation that prioritises sustainability in food systems.

In addition, MAFA hosted the second edition of The Malta AgriFair which served as a platform for stakeholders, from large organisations to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), to explore opportunities, address challenges, and celebrate the rich heritage of Maltese agriculture. The AgriFair served as a landmark event that celebrated the resilience, diversity, and innovation of Malta's agriculture, fisheries, and aquaculture sectors. From showcasing traditional farming practices to exploring cutting-edge technologies, the event offered something for everyone interested in the future of food production and sustainability.

By fostering collaboration, driving innovation, and promoting dialogue, the Malta AgriFair 2024 aimed to chart a path towards a more prosperous and resilient future for Malta's agricultural and fisheries industries. Over 60,000 people attended the 2024 AgriFair.

To further align agricultural activities with Malta's strategic goals, the Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency has introduced targeted state-aid measures. These include the Agroforestry Scheme which supports farmers in diversifying land use to integrate tree planting with agricultural activities, contributing to carbon sequestration and biodiversity conservation. The Dairy Cessation Scheme addresses economic and environmental challenges in the dairy sector by optimising production efficiency and reducing market imbalances, and the National Fertiliser Scheme, mitigating the impact of rising fertiliser costs due to global supply chain disruptions, ensuring local food security remains stable.

1.4.2 Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture

The fisheries and aquaculture regulations in Malta are crucial for supporting the island's fishing sector and ensuring its sustainable development. The Fishing Conservation and Management Act (Cap. 425), initially introduced in 2001, provides a framework for regulating the sector and its operations. The 2024 implementation of this amended Act marks the second full calendar year of its operation, designed to streamline enforcement procedures while reducing the administrative burden on the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture (DFA). This is particularly important in light of the EC's concerns regarding Malta's slow sanctioning process in the Bluefin Tuna sector. By strengthening enforcement and aligning its legal framework with the current EU regulations in force, Malta is better positioned to comply with EU regulations and contribute to the conservation of marine resources.

In 2024, Malta remained committed to fisheries data collection, regulated through the EU Fisheries Data Collection Multi-Annual Programme, a key ongoing initiative within the EU aimed at harmonising the collection and management of fisheries data across member states. This data is essential for the sustainable management of fish stocks, advising on conservation efforts, and supporting the Common Fisheries Policy. The programme collects biological, environmental, and socio-economic data, contributing to the protection of marine ecosystems and sustainable fishing practices.

In 2024, geological investigations were commissioned for Daħlet Qorrot and Ħondoq ir-Rummien, and these are expected to be concluded in 2025. Following the results of these investigations, the architect in charge will finalise the outline plan for the refurbishment of the fishing infrastructure of the two respective sites and submit it to the PA for their review and approval. An agreement was also reached with the University of Malta (UM) to undertake other complementary studies, including but not limited to wave analysis and bathometry investigations.

Consultations were also held with Infrastructure Malta and the proposed interventions include the upgrading of the quays and slipways, as well as, the replacement of the existing winches with more modern models. The ultimate purpose of this project is to continue supporting the artisanal fisheries sector of Gozo through the provision of a safer working environment that would translate into additional competitive gains to the island's fishers.

Launched for the sixth consecutive year, the Traditional Boat Maintenance Scheme provides financial support for the maintenance of traditional Maltese wooden vessels, such as *Firilla, Frejgatina, and Luzzu*. The initiative encourages sustainability in the fishing sector by preserving cultural heritage and supporting local economies.

The Imrejkba fishing practice, a traditional method introduced by local recreational fishers, was revitalised through a pilot project by the DFA. The project seeks to promote sustainable fishing practices while respecting the ecological balance of local marine environments. In the year 2024, the licensing and logbook system was digitalised, allowing recreational fishers to apply for a license online, increasing accessibility.

The second edition of the Fishing for Recipes Competition, open to children under the age of 16, was launched to inspire creativity and raise awareness about sustainable seafood choices. Participants were invited to submit their original recipes through the SAJD website, with a focus on incorporating underutilised fish species. The most innovative and well-crafted recipes were selected for an exciting live cooking competition held at the Malta Agrifair 2024. This initiative served as a platform to educate young individuals about the importance of making environmentally conscious choices in the kitchen while highlighting the potential of underutilised fish species as a nutritious and sustainable resource.

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 formalisation 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 integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle
13.a	Implement the commitment undertaken by developed-country parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change to a goal of mobilising jointly $100 billion annually by 2020 from all sources to address the needs of developing countries in the context of meaningful mitigation actions and transparency on implementation and fully operationalise the Green Climate Fund through its capitalisation as soon as possible
17.14	Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development

1.5.1 Strengthening financial assistance towards sustainable investments

On 21 August 2023, the Malta Stock Exchange (MSE) listed Malta's first Green Bond, launched by WSC through its subsidiary, ClearFlowPlus plc. Valued at €25 million, the proceeds from this bond are being utilised to fund a series of eco-conscious measures. These include the RO plant at Ħondoq ir-Rummien, the establishment of solar farms, improvements in wastewater treatment aeration, reduction of non-revenue water, enhancements in billing efficiencies and upgrades to water network infrastructure. Billing efficiency increased from 72% of production in 2023 to 74.4% in 2024. The operation of the Ħondoq RO plant resulted in energy savings of approximately 2 GWh in 2024 compared to the baseline year of 2021. Additionally, 3 km of water network was replaced, financed through the Green Bonds, benefitting 662 accounts with improved water quality. The benchmark Infrastructure Leakage Index was lowered from 1.84 in 2023 to 1.75 in 2024. Furthermore, an online monitoring tool was launched, allowing the public to track the progress of these initiatives and the associated bond disbursement.

The Smart and Sustainable Investment Grant, introduced by Malta Enterprise in April 2024, provides funding to support businesses investing in sustainable processes, enhancing their competitiveness. Eligible investments include waste minimisation, sustainable materials, energy efficiency, waste efficiency, and sustainable digitisation.

In addition to the above, the "Accelerate 2024" measure, published in April 2024, is intended to support Undertakings within their initial seven years in financing participation in an Accelerator Programme. Such a measure is intended to support businesses with a viable business concept and that are within the process of developing the technology into a market. The submissions shall be evaluated on the basis of four criteria, including (1) feasibility, (2) employment, (3) impact, and (4) environmental, including the alignment of the business to Malta's environmental and sustainable development targets.

Meanwhile, the Business Development Scheme is intended to facilitate value-added projects including new business initiatives, start-ups, expansions and transformation activities that shall contribute to the regional development of Malta. Support is awarded to enterprises contributing to the economic development, environment and sustainability targets of the Maltese Government.

Published in January 2024, the Invest-Support for Initial Investment Projects Scheme is intended to sustain the regional industrial and economic development of Malta by facilitating initial investments. Evaluation is based on criteria that includes sustainability, that is, what environmental impact will the project have and if it will address the SDGs at a corporate and national level.

1.5.2 Encouraging banks and other financial entities to finance sustainable investments

In June 2024, the Malta Development Bank (MDB) benefitted from a counter-guarantee agreement with the European Investment Fund under the InvestEU Sustainability window. This support includes a €15 million guarantee to empower SMEs and small mid-caps in Malta to undertake green projects, thereby contributing to a low-carbon economy and mitigating the adverse effects of climate change. A complementary agreement has enabled the MDB to benefit from the European Investment Bank's advisory services under the Green Gateway Programme. These services assisted the MDB in identifying eligible green projects and providing access to finance at favourable conditions to empower businesses to embrace green practices.

The Central Bank of Malta (CBM) has sustainability as its fourth investment pillar, alongside capital preservation, liquidity, and return. Moreover, the Bank has a long-term climate target of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 for its non-monetary policy portfolios. In line with this objective, during 2024, the Bank increased its holdings in funds tracking Paris-aligned Benchmark (PAB) indices; maintained investment in equity funds supporting the transition to low-carbon economies; implemented PAB exclusions

from the Bank's externally managed corporate bond portfolio and increased its holdings in green, social and sustainable bonds.

By investing in companies that actively reduce their carbon emissions and adopt sustainable practices, PAB indices directly contribute to climate action and mitigation efforts, whilst generating returns for investors. These funds typically exclude companies involved in tobacco, controversial weapons, fossil fuels, certain high-emission industries, and those that do not meet specific Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) criteria. The investments in active equity funds channel capital towards companies and sectors that are actively working to achieve environmental sustainability and contribute to the transition to low-carbon economies. Additionally, the Bank completed the implementation of PAB exclusions for its externally managed corporate bond mandate. These exclusions complement the existing norm-based exclusion list (based on the Norges Bank Investment Management Exclusion List), which is based on companies' adherence to international norms and standards related to ethical behaviour, environmental sustainability, and social responsibility.

Furthermore, holdings in green, social, and sustainable bonds with these thematic investments continue to expand and now comprise nearly 12% of the Bank's assets under management. These bonds are aligned with the International Capital Markets Association principles.

Central banks play an important role in supporting international climate commitments through climate reporting and actively engaging in transition efforts. In this regard, the Bank published its second climate-related financial disclosures report in June 2024, in accordance with the Eurosystem disclosure framework, outlining its climate-related governance structure, strategy, risk management as well as, metrics and targets for its non-monetary policy portfolios.

1.5.3 Increasing awareness on sustainable finance for the benefit of all stakeholders

As part of the Malta Financial Services Authority (MFSA)'s engagement with the industry, the Authority has held a number of workshops on sustainability matters, published various Circulars, 'Dear CEO' Letters and supervisory interactions, and has communicated its expectations for the industry to ensure effective compliance with the relevant sustainable finance legislative framework. Moreover, as part of its strategic objectives, the Authority integrated sustainable finance within its financial education programmes. In this regard, during the first quarter of 2024, the Authority launched a wide and cross-sectoral consumer awareness campaign and, as part of the campaign, also created a portal on the MFSA's website entitled 'Go Sustainable – Dodge Greenwashing!' .

Raising awareness and guiding market participants ensures a stable regulatory environment, underlining the need for consistency of outcomes across all market segments and, most importantly, raising standards. In order to enable this shift within finance, the Authority ensures the correct implementation of EU sustainable finance legislation and convergence measures. Due attention was given to the transposition of the Corporate Sustainable Reporting Directive and the EU Green Bonds Regulation. The MFSA held a number of stakeholder meetings and engaged with the relevant authorities, including the Ministry for Finance, the Malta Business Registry, the Malta Gaming Authority, the Accountancy Board, the Malta Institute of Accountants, the Malta ESG Alliance and the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development.

Ensuring uniformity of rules at the European and international level allows financial markets to facilitate cross-border investment and contribute meaningfully towards the achievement of the SDGs. To this end, the MFSA has participated in the work of the Sustainable Standing Committee within the European Securities and Markets Authority, as well as, the Sustainable Finance Project Group within the European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority and the European Banking Authority.

The MFSA has also participated in the Network for Greening the Financial System, specifically, in relation to a macro-financial workstream. Its membership is spread across the five continents and is composed of global members from central banks and supervisory authorities, cooperating and sharing knowledge to address climate change and scale up sustainable finance.

TOWARDS THE PRESERVATION OF SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

CHAPTER 02

2030 AGENDA RELATED GOALS

01 No Poverty

04 Quality Education

06 Clean Water & Sanitation

08 Economic Work & Economic Growth

09 Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure

11 Sustainable Cities & Communities

12 Responsible Consumption & Production

13 Climate Action

14 Life Below Water

15 Life On Land

In consideration of its changing population dynamics and the high concentration of human activity in urban areas, in 2024 Malta maintained its efforts to ensure sustainable urban development, enhance green infrastructure and spaces, and encourage green mobility. Such efforts have been made in tandem with preserving our cultural heritage and safeguarding our natural environment and the well-being of residents.

Tourism remains a cornerstone of Malta's economy, contributing significantly to its economic growth and development. To this end, addressing the off-peak period and shifting from seasonal mass-tourism to more sustainable patterns has remained a priority for Malta. Efforts include increased marketing and campaigns targeting travellers seeking unique experiences in history, culture, gastronomy, and conferences, and branding Gozo as a distinct, year-round destination. Furthermore, initiatives have been undertaken to recognise corporate tourism excellence, promoting quality service in the industry.

Cultural heritage instils a sense of identity, inclusion, and unity among citizens, and is widely recognised as a fundamental element of social cohesion and stability. Consequently, Malta's cultural legacy and traditions are crucial in promoting the social, environmental, and economic development of the Maltese Islands. In 2024, Malta continued promoting cultural events and supporting Maltese and Gozitan artists through various schemes and opportunities for professional growth in the cultural and creative sectors. Other initiatives have centred on the preservation of traditional and sustainable practices, benefitting livelihoods and preserving the Maltese cultural identity. Restoration efforts of historical features around Malta and Gozo have also continued, protecting our architectural heritage.

The Maltese Government has continued to promote spaces and infrastructure that encourage active lifestyles and accessibility. Urban greening and embellishment projects have been implemented to improve areas of communal interest, including the restoration of several gardens and the implementation of nature-based infrastructure in various localities.

Within the framework of the government's efforts in line with the 2030 Agenda, this chapter will focus on actions related to SDGs 1, 4, 6, 8, 9, and 11-15.

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 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 taking 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 Hospitality, Tourism and the Film Industry

During 2024, several initiatives were undertaken by ministries and entities in Malta and Gozo to promote the hospitality, tourism, and film industry in the country. During the year, the Marketing Directorate within the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) carried out a wide range of marketing and public relations activities in different markets, using a 360-degree marketing approach where possible. MTA worked on both traditional and digital platforms to make sure they reached potential visitors effectively. MTA focused on key markets, including long-haul destinations like North America, South America, Australia, China, and Japan. Strategies were adjusted to fit each region to connect with audiences and meet their travel needs.

In this regard, in 2024, MTA organised several activities abroad to grow its international presence. These included attending well-known international fairs and exhibitions, allowing for networking opportunities with industry leaders and promoting Malta as a destination. The Authority also invited journalists and influencers to experience what Malta can offer and share it with their followers.Furthermore, MTA carried out various joint marketing activities with trade partners, including tour operators and airlines, as well as brand partners like Manchester United and Polti Kometa.

MTA's marketing campaigns have been generally segment-focused to attract travellers willing to spend more on unique experiences. These focused on history and culture, gastronomy, faith tourism, active tourism, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer or questioning, asexual and other sexually or gender diverse (LGBTIQ+), military tourism, screen tourism, conferences and incentives, English language teaching, and weddings and honeymoons, among others. By focusing on these interests, Malta is positioning itself as a top choice for travellers looking for meaningful experiences. MTA's main goal for 2024 was to attract better-quality tourists and spread visitor numbers more evenly throughout the year. This helped support a strong tourism industry and made tourism more sustainable. It also ensured that there is enough demand for airlines to maintain viable operations, which is crucial for keeping our islands well-connected.

Concerning tourism in Gozo and Comino, during 2024, tourists visiting the islands, including both day-trippers and overnight visitors, accounted for 58.9% of all tourists to the Maltese Islands. Notably, there was significant growth in international overnight stays during the shoulder season when compared to 2023. This trend was further highlighted by the growth rate of day trips versus overnight stays, as the growth rate of overnight stays outpaced that of day trips, particularly in the months of January, February, March, June, October, and November. These results certify efforts to brand Gozo as a distinct destination rather than a mere day-trip island. This is ingrained in the objective to have a sustainable tourism product, away from mass tourism and the constant evolution of becoming an all-year-round destination, which remains an anchoring challenge for small island destinations like Gozo.

To further stimulate economic growth and sustain establishments and businesses in their operations, in 2024, the MGP offered a number of schemes of support. The Restoring and Upgrading Venues with the Capacity to Host Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) Events in Gozo 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 2024, a total of €9,384.22 was disbursed from funds under this scheme.

The Supporting Marketing Initiatives for Specific Niche Markets in Gozo 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, stimulating investment in the quality of the local product, while promoting Gozo as a sustainable, quality destination. 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 €4,500 if falling under either one or both categories respectively. In 2024, a total of €14,985.08 was disbursed from funds allocated under this scheme.

Similarly, the Supporting Marketing Initiatives for the Accommodation Sector in Gozo 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. The MGP covers up to 65% of the eligible expenditure for undertaking a digital marketing campaign, up to a maximum of €8,000. In 2024, a total of €45,890.66 was disbursed from funds allocated under this scheme.

Additionally, the Extended-Stay Incentive Scheme for the Accommodation Sector in Gozo Scheme offers an incentive to tourists to visit Gozo during the low season and spend a minimum of ten nights in one of the participating accommodation properties. This sustains the efforts in promoting Gozo as an experiential destination as opposed to the day-trip visit.

Moreover, the scheme has the intention to sustain tourism industry operators who encounter decreased business activities in certain periods of the year. In 2024, a total of €2,973.72 was disbursed from funds allocated under this scheme.

Moreover, the Supporting the Adventurous Tourism Industry in Gozo through Hiring Equipment Refund 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 by clients, ultimately giving further credibility to the Gozo brand as an all-year-round sustainable holiday destination. The MGP covers up to 50% of the eligible equipment pertaining to the eligible activities, up to a maximum of €5,000 for each approved application per calendar year. In 2024, a total of €10,062.69 was disbursed from funds allocated under this scheme.

In conclusion, in order to recognise all that is being done to improve and develop the sector further, the Malta Tourism Awards, which in 2024 replaced the Special Thanks and Recognition Awards Initiative that had been running since 2005, were held. The aim is for these Awards to become a flagship of corporate tourism excellence, acting as a recognition platform for key leaders in the industry to entice rewarding career paths by honouring the best local tourism service providers, as well as promote, encourage and reward tourism quality service. This will also serve as a showcase for responsible investments in digitalisation, sustainability and human resources (HR) upskilling. The Awards shall enhance the visibility of Malta as a quality tourism destination through the promotion of professional careers and dedicated hospitality, in line with the Malta Tourism Strategy 2021-2030 recover. rethink. revitalise. Selection committees have been established for the Tourism Worker of the Year Awards and the Responsible Tourism Development Awards. Online nominations for awards are accepted until 31 January 2025 and the first edition of the Malta Tourism Awards will be taking place in April 2025. Such nominations need to be submitted by entities operating within the Tourism industry, including the accommodation sector, catering establishments, visitor attractions, travel and tourism service providers, English language schools and diving centres.

2.1.2 Culture, Traditions and Arts

Throughout 2024, the organisation of cultural, traditional and entertainment events in Gozo continued. In this regard, VisitGozo promoted several events on local and international platforms. Such activities serve as a cultural display to the islands' visitors, while supporting the hundreds of participatory players throughout the year encouraging talent development. These events also serve as an additional tourist product that sustains tourism during the off-peak period.

During 2024, the Gozo Cultural Support Programme was relaunched with various activities, including the Gozo Arts Weekend, Valentines' in Gozo, the Regional Carnival, Easter in Gozo, the *Memorji* concert, the Spring Fair, the Honey & Bee Festival, Gozo Pops & Rocks, *Lejl Imkebbes* – A festival of lights, Summer in Gozo, the Xwejni Music Fest, the Film Festival, the Ceramics Festival, Rock Legends, the Gozo Music Festival – Levant, Opera is Gozo, the Kite Festival, the Sweet Tooth Festival, the *Mixegħla tal-Qaddisin*, Christmas in Gozo and the New Year's Eve celebrations.

A significant international event, "Pop in the City," was also held in Gozo in September 2024, attracting considerable attention. The event hosted 440 women, with 87% hailing from France, 5% from Belgium, and another 5% from Switzerland. Participants engaged in a series of activities organised across the island, ranging from cultural to arts and sports. This not only showcased Gozo's unique offerings but also generated extensive international exposure through social media, press coverage, and other media platforms.

MGP also continued various collaborations, including with the National Orchestra and Spazju Kreattiv. Furthermore, promotion and exchanges between Maltese and Gozitan artists, production of creative initiatives, and the organisation of an Artists' Residency programme continued in collaboration with the Centre for Creativity Foundation allowing for Gozitan, Maltese and foreign artists to benefit.

Furthermore, the Gozo Cultural Events Fund, a measure for creative and artistic activities led by the community in Gozo, was re-launched in 2024. The fund co-finances projects that encourage active cultural participation, promote local talent, and boost the creative expression of the community or the appreciation of its identity. Additionally, with the aim of continuing to strengthen the Carnival in Gozo as a cultural activity that attracts an audience from Gozo, Malta and abroad, a scheme was re-launched through which financial assistance was provided to individuals and organisations to rent a facility to be utilised to build floats and, in 2024, also grotesque masks.

In addition to the events and activities held in Gozo, other entities have undertaken endeavours with the aim of promoting local artists and cultural initiatives. In this regard, SVP, for instance, organises several events as part of its comprehensive care programme for residents. Many artists, bands and production houses are invited to contribute to this social and cultural programme.

Moreover, professional growth across the culture and creative sectors is being supported through the Apprenticeship Scheme, which is an action aligned with the vision outlined in Arts Council Malta's Strategy 2025. The primary objectives of the Scheme were to support the professional development of creative practitioners; to foster excellence in the fields of art and culture, and the advancement of knowledge and capabilities in such related fields; to encourage professional intellectual growth; to encourage creative professionals to continue building their skill sets; and to support enterprises operating within the priority sectors of this scheme and which actively strive towards social, economic and environmental sustainable practices.

Additionally, the Regional Cultural Cooperation Programme enables Regions and those involved in their councils to support and maintain Malta's creative and cultural ecology, whilst practicing cultural diplomacy. This is being done by enabling cultural activities and collaborations with creative practitioners and cultural operators to introduce programmes that will actively involve participants of various demographics (age, gender, ethnicity, nationality) within the various cultural regional areas; nurture cross-sectoral synergies at local and national levels to recognise arts and culture as essential for the wellbeing of all; maintain, build, and foster new and existing strategic partnerships, collaborations, and networks nationally to enable further opportunities for artists and practitioners; as well as advocate for the involvement of diverse communities in decision-making processes, whilst providing opportunities for community involvement and responsibility to widen the scope of engagement within the arts and culture.

Further to the above schemes, the Jumpstart and Jumpstart Boot Camp are programmes in collaboration with the Media Studies Department of the MEYR, aiming to encourage secondary school students to develop their creative and technical skills in filmmaking.

2.1.3 Restoring and Preserving Malta's Heritage

Throughout 2024, the Public Abattoir continued its research into traditional methods of meat production and innovation thereon as part of a two-pronged approach which seeks to safeguard culinary heritage while adapting old methods to new approaches and an expanded modern market, reintroducing certain food items which make use of previously discarded by-products. These initiatives included trials relating to the harvesting of the *Tameż*, a previously discontinued practise which would allow for the utilisation of a currently discarded by-product, whilst adhering to traditional methods of *ġbejna* production, as well as, trials concerning parchment production to divert lambs/kids' hides away from the waste stream. A further initiative included the production of *qriemeċ* (traditional pork crackling) and *xaħam tal-majjal* (pork lard) which may be utilised for frying. Work is still ongoing to move towards full-blown market production of such products.

In parallel, new products using such traditional foods as ingredients were launched, including a *mazzit* pate, *mazzit* croquettes, and *qassatat tal-kirxa* (tripe small pies). A key focus has been on the consolidation of tripe and blood processing and the collection for further processing of bovine bones, all of which were previously discarded. Furthermore, during 2024, a *Mazzit* Production Plant was inaugurated to facilitate greater market access for mazzit, the traditional blood sausage whose economies of scale proved challenging for the small-scale producers. The plant enabled wider uptake of production, and hence increased demand for blood and, therefore, its subsequent diversion from the waste stream. In 2024, approximately 95.6 tonnes of animal by-products (ABP) were diverted from waste streams, including 15 tonnes of animal blood, 60 tonnes of tripe, and 14.6 tonnes of bones.

To further promote sustainable consumption and encourage the rediscovery of traditional local meat dishes, the Public Abattoir has also participated in various events across the Maltese Islands.
These events aim to engage younger generations and tourists, allowing them to experience and appreciate Maltese culinary heritage while ensuring its sustainability in a modern context. Through awareness campaigns, culinary competitions, and tasting events, the Public Abattoir is encouraging greater use of these products in local gastronomy. This included participation in 12 different promotional events, which attracted tens of thousands of visitors including the AgriFair, the Public Service Expo, the *Mnarja* Festival, and the Malta International Food Festival.

The collaboration with the Malta Chef Society further supports the valorisation of Maltese meat-based products. This includes the facilitation of competitions such as Malta *Kulinarja*, and Porkilicious, an event which seeks to valorise, through haute-cuisine, nose-to-tail pigmeat utilisation.

Both competitions assist in bringing attention to local culinary traditions. In addition, the recognition of traditional Maltese mazzit in an article on the Michelin Guide website highlights the cultural and gastronomic significance of these products on an international stage. During 2024, in collaboration with the UM, a course on traditional Maltese foods was also launched.

Moreover, other initiatives, such as the Malta International Fish Fest, celebrate Malta's fishing heritage, highlighting the importance of sustainable seafood consumption. This specific festival was held at Fisherman's Wharf, Marsaxlokk, and in Mellieħa, and sought to promote local fish species like sea bass, tuna, and lampuki, providing an opportunity for the community to learn about their nutritional value. Through educational stands and cooking demonstrations, the festival helped in encouraging healthy, responsible seafood consumption while supporting local fishermen and their practices.

In addition to the above, in 2024, work began on the Protected Designations of Origin (PDO) for Maltese cheeselets (*ġbejniet*), a status that ensures that the production of cheeselets follows traditional methods that often rely on small-scale, sustainable farming practices. By preserving local cheese-making traditions, PDO cheeselets also maintain regional food diversity and contribute to resilient food systems. Moreover, PDO certification adds value to cheeselets, creating more income opportunities for farmers, cheese-makers, and small-scale businesses. Maltese cheeselets are also part of the culinary heritage, attracting food tourism, which supports jobs in rural

areas. Further to this, PDO certification promotes eco-friendly production methods, such as pasture-fed livestock and minimised use of chemical additives. By prioritising local resources and traditional techniques, the carbon footprint of production is reduced, aligning with sustainable consumption goals. Additionally, traditional grazing and livestock practices linked to cheeselet production often involve climate-adaptive methods that protect biodiversity and reduce carbon emissions, while PDO cheeselets encourage the use of native livestock breeds and support the maintenance of traditional pastures and ecosystems. The use of sustainable farming techniques also protects the natural environment and promotes soil and water conservation, whereas PDO status protects the cultural identity of Maltese cheeselets, ensuring the continuation of centuries-old artisanal practices that contribute to the local heritage. The certification process also fosters innovation in packaging, branding, and marketing while ensuring quality standards.

Finally, local farmers and producers can collaborate to meet PDO requirements, strengthening community-led initiatives and produce traditional cheeselets, which often use natural ingredients and methods, offering a healthier, less processed alternative for consumers.

Apart from the promotion and conservation of traditional food products, the PA 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 traditional towns and villages. The following projects commenced in various towns and villages:

Project Ref	Proposal	Applicants	Amount
GS/50020/2023	Joint application between Socjetà Dun Filippu Borgia and Birkirkara Local Council to carry out restoration works on façade of St Paul Church.	Socjetà Dun Filippo Borgia and Birkirkara Local Council	€70,449.54
GS/50020/2021	Joint application submitted between Socjetà Filarmonika Pinto and Qormi Local Council for the upgrading of the Infrastructure at Socjetà Filarmonika Pinto - Banda San Sebastjan to provide a professional Music Academy space and a cultural artistic hub.	Socjetà filarmonika Pinto. Banda San Sebastjan, Qormi and Qormi Local Council	€229,916.11
GS/50038/2023	Restoration of statues at Triq San Pawl, Triq Santu Wistin, and Triq San Frangisk.	Rabat (Malta) Local Council and Reġjun Punent	€44,788.08
GS/50043/2023	Restoration of Rabat Local Council's Administrative Offices.	Rabat (Malta) Local Council and Reġjun Punent	€268,909.53
GS/50013/2024	To convert Ta' Saura Home into an Empowerment Hub.	Malta Trust Foundation	€900,00.00
GS/50018/2023	Joint application between Banda San Mikiel and Żabbar Local Council for the restoration of the facade and upgrading it as per permit PA/8812/21.	Għaqda Muzikali Madonna tal-Grazzja Banda San Mikiel & Żabbar Local Council	€66,870.00
GS/50032/2023	Joint application between Għajnsielem Local Council and EcoGozo to reconstruct a historical arched footbridge that previously existed. This is not intended to be used as a footbridge but to reconstruct a historic monumen	Għajnsielem Local Council - EcoGozo	€24,342.22

Further to preserving Malta's cultural, historical and architectural heritage, a number of properties were scheduled in 2024:

Project	Item	Adress	Locality	Grade
Miscellaneous	Palazzo Marnisi	Triq it-Torri u Triq iż-Żejtun Sqaq Nru. 1	Marsaxlokk	1
Miscellaneous	Villa San Injazju	Triq Scicluna	San Ġiljan	2
British Batteries	Il-Batterija ta' Misraħ Strejnu	Sqaq Nru. 4 fi Triq Xrobb l-Għaġin	Iż-Żejtun	1
British Batteries	Il-Batterija ta' San Pietru	Triq San Leonardu	Il-Kalkara	1
British Batteries	Il-Batterija ta' Wolsley	Triq Delimara	Marsaxlokk	1
British Batteries	Il-Batterija ta' San Pawl	l-Irziezet ta' Xrobb l-Għaġin	Marsaxlokk	1
British Batteries	Il-Batterija tal-Għargħur	Tal-Ferħa	Ħal Għargħur	1
British Batteries	l-Batterija taż-Żonqor	I/t Triq il-Batteija taż-Żonqor	Marsaskala	1
British Batteries	Il-Batterija tal-Wardija	Triq il-Fortizza	San Pawl il-Baħar	1
British Batteries	Il-Batterija ta' Delle Grazzja	Triq Dwardu Ellul	Ix-Xgħajra	1
British Batteries	Il-Batterija ta' San Giovanni	Triq l-Inġinier	Is-Swieqi	1
British Batteries	Il-Batterija ta' Cambridge	Triq il-Ponta ta' Dragut	Tas-Sliema	2
British Batteries	Il-Batterija ta' Garden	Ix-Xatt ta' Qui-si-Sana	Tas-Sliema	2

A tender was also evaluated for the structural consolidation and conservation of the aqueducts on the road from Victoria to Ta' Pinu. The preferred bidder has been selected and the agreement with the selected bidder signed to begin the restoration work, which is expected to last until the end of 2028.

In addition to the above, immediate interventions are required at *Għar Gerduf,* which is in a poor state of preservation and at risk of imminent structural collapse. A detailed and in-depth geological study was carried out, and the necessary permits were obtained from the Superintendence for Cultural Heritage (SCH) and the PA to carry out emergency interventions. A tender has been issued and evaluated to carry out the necessary interventions, and the work is expected to begin in 2025.

Ta' *Sdieri* Bridge, within the limits of Għarb, is also due to be restored. A reassessment of the drainage and water services was carried out by the WSC to verify if there are any leaks. In addition, collaborations were carried out with other service providers regarding alternative services that pass through the bridge to investigate the feasibility of including a culvert. An application has been submitted to the PA for the necessary work to be carried out with the outcome still in process. A tender is to be issued for the restoration of the bridge, which will cover a holistic restoration of both sides and the entire length of the bridge, while work is expected to start by the end of 2025.

Moreover, the geological study process on the Citadel ramparts is still ongoing. A tender was issued to select the appropriate contractor for the required work which is expected to last until the end of 2026. Maintenance and restoration work has also been carried out on the outer walls surrounding the Ċittadella Cultural Centre, from *Triq il-Fosos* to the Bastion of St John. Furthermore, various maintenance and restoration works have been carried out on many monuments and niches around Gozo.

To complement the extensive restoration of the fortifications and buildings in the Citadel, better use will be made of the space that previously served as the Old Clock. Through this project, the existing face of the Old Clock facing Victoria will be removed and replaced with a calendar face, while the other face facing Cathedral Square will be restored and used again as a clock. The necessary permits from the SCH and the PA have been obtained and work is currently underway on the specifications in order to issue a tender. The work is expected to be carried out during 2025.

Additionally, in 2024, the permit application was approved to start works on the consolidation of Calypso Cave situated within the outskirts of Xagħra overlooking Ramla Bay. Works would involve the consolidation of the cave's structure, together with footpath works to improve accessibility to the site and hence reduce the occurrence of trampling. Moreover, as the area is associated with the Legend of Homer, an Interpretation Centre is being planned. Part of the unutilised public convenience situated within the vicinity shall be converted for this purpose.

Furthermore, the Partnership Agreements between the MGP and the voluntary organisation Wirt Għawdex were renewed in 2024, whereby Wirt Għawdex will safeguard and protect five important historical sites found in Gozo for the enjoyment of future generations and will provide physical and intellectual access to them. These Partnership Agreements cover a period of ten years and will contribute to the enhancement, rehabilitation, and restoration of tangible cultural heritage, as well as improve the management of the same sites, thereby increasing appreciation and understanding of our architectural heritage. Complementing this, funding continued for a study by the UM on the site containing the Phoenician Shipwreck off Xlendi Bay. The amount of funding, €140,000.00, spread over four years (2022 – 2025), will facilitate a holistic approach to the study of the site which will certainly result in more substantive and tangible results.

Additionally, the Restoration Works Scheme for Gozitan Local Councils, launched in 2024 by the EcoGozo Directorate, aims to restore historical structures and rejuvenate urban spaces.

The Scheme provides financial assistance to Local Councils for the restoration and preservation of structures, monuments, and niches of historical or artistic value. It ensures that restoration is conducted using eco-friendly and energy-efficient materials, thereby minimising the ecological footprint while maintaining cultural integrity. This initiative directly supports the preservation of Malta's rich architectural heritage and prevents the deterioration of historically significant sites. By restoring historical buildings and monuments, the scheme safeguards cultural landmarks that are deeply embedded in Malta's national identity. The eligibility criteria of the Scheme emphasises the importance of restoring publicly accessible historical sites, ensuring that the community can engage with and appreciate Malta's heritage. The Scheme also considers structures of ecclesiastical or third-party ownership, provided they meet public accessibility requirements. This ensures a broad and inclusive approach to heritage conservation. The inclusion of efficient lighting, greening initiatives, and eco-friendly materials enhances the visitor experience while maintaining environmental responsibility. Additionally, the focus on revitalising urban alleyways supports the creation of picturesque and culturally immersive spaces, attracting both tourists and locals. The Scheme incorporates artistic elements by encouraging the use of local art in public spaces, particularly in urban alleyway rejuvenation projects. This provides opportunities for local artists and creative practitioners to contribute to their communities, fostering a thriving cultural and creative sector. By integrating artistic embellishments, the Scheme enhances public appreciation for the arts while strengthening Malta's cultural landscape.

Work also continued on the restoration of the Manoel Theatre Facade, a measure that shall impact the restoration of cultural heritage and enhance the touristic and historical value of the building in question. Furthermore, phase one was completed in both the restoration project of the Grand Master's Palace and the Malta Maritime Museum. This goes hand in hand with the restoration of the 130-year-old facades of the last block pending refurbishment, St Francis Wards 1 and 2, at SVP.

The CBM also contributed to heritage preservation efforts by supporting the restoration and conversion of a dilapidated British military building at the Majjistral Nature and History Park into a multi-purpose exhibition hall. Situated along the North-Western part of the coast of Malta in Għajn Tuffieħa, the building was originally constructed in June 1949 as a one-storey building to be used as a modest cinema within the military barracks. It was later converted into a chapel. This project is in the vicinity of where the administration of the park is located and is aimed at providing a space for activities and exhibitions, while also serving as an ideal location for community-related initiatives. The area has an overall built footprint of around 85 m2 and an adjacent open space, which will also serve as a space for students to take supervised sessions in photography, ceramics and art, amongst other activities; whilst its multifunctional sports area would cater for outdoor sports such as basketball, football and volleyball. The restoration of this building forms part of a larger project that the Heritage Parks Federation is currently pursuing and is expected to achieve lasting visibility since it will be promoted for the use and enjoyment of society at large. Moreover, this building has the potential of becoming one of the main attractions in the area, focused and dedicated to arts and culture.

Falling in line with these projects, the Estate Management Directorate within the Lands Authority has re-established the Commercialisation Section in an effort to optimise the use of government properties and promote their sustainable restoration. This initiative not only helps reduce restoration costs but also aids in preserving local heritage and national assets. By revitalising these long-vacant properties, the Lands Authority aims to restore community spirit in local villages, while at the same time rendering them safer for habitation. The process has also begun to create an online photo album of Gozo in collaboration with the office of the Chief Information Officer within the MGP, with the aim of preserving the history of the island. The rollout of the system through which the photos will be available to the public is currently underway. In the second phase, the public will have the possibility to comment on photos and even add others.

In addition to the above online platform, several in-person exhibitions were held at the Banca Giuratale, at the Ċittadella Cultural Centre and at the Xewkija Windmill, including the Malta Biennale 2024 hosted at the Ċittadella Cultural Centre. Moreover, the Directorate of Cultural Heritage within the MGP helped financially to publish several books related to our land's heritage, archaeology, culture and even poetry books. The Maltese language plays an important role in the preservation of Malta's culture and heritage. Therefore, during 2024, projects aimed at promoting it were carried out with schools and children. These included Peppa Pig and Perlina TV, which are both public-private partnerships, through which Maltese is being disseminated to wider audiences through fun audiovisual programmes, and Mal-Melodija, which is a project concentrating on middle-school-based activities that bring together the Maltese language, an appreciation of Maltese literature, as well as, music and traditional Maltese instruments.

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

Recognising Malta's growing population and urbanisation trends, the government continued to strengthen its efforts in developing sustainable and resilient urban spaces in 2024. Various initiatives and projects have been undertaken, focusing primarily on spatial planning, greening of buildings and infrastructure, creation of accessible green spaces, and upkeep of clean urban environments.

The PA is currently carrying out a review of its Strategic Plan for Environment and Development, which focuses on the use of the land and sea and serves as an enabling plan to increase the competitiveness of the Maltese Islands in a manner where socio-economic development assists the achievement of national environmental objectives.

Additionally, with the mechanism of environmental permits, ERA is managing to mitigate or prevent a number of impacts and environmental risks of activities, interventions and operations that fall within its regulatory scope, making sustainable decisions and integrating a number of environmental considerations in permits through conditions and approved technical specifications. To further ensure this, the Authority is launching systems so that environmental permit processes are more effective, transparent, inclusive, simple and efficient. In 2024, ERA received 20,388 permit applications and processed 15,083 of them.

Work also progressed on the Environmental Permitting (Procedure for Applications and their Determination) Regulations, which seek to introduce a consolidated environmental permitting framework, with the aim of establishing a procedure and consolidating current fragmentary permitting regimes, providing more clarity to applicants and prescribing which environmental permit applications shall be decided in public The draft regulations are being made to streamline, and for some sectors, replace existing permitting regimes covering a multitude of operations, interventions and/or activities. In addition, the regulatory scope will be extended to other areas that are currently unregulated. It is also seeking to introduce a common procedural structure both in terms of application processing and fees. The draft Regulations were released for public consultation from 21 February 2024 to 17 April 2024. Targeted stakeholder meetings were also organised by ERA during the same period to ensure effective engagement. In addition, the Authority is operating a digital system for the submission of applications. With the changes in the Environment Protection Act (Cap. 549), the Authority will be improving transparency and encouraging public participation and scrutiny during the processing of applications. In 2024, ERA vetted 8,235 planning applications, of which 3,319 were further reviewed due to their environmental implications. ERA also vetted 2,295 TM road works applications, reviewed 29 Project Description Statements, and requested two Environmental Impact Assessment studies.

Further to the above, the Government continued to administer a number of schemes aimed at assisting more citizens to become owners of their own home and upgrade their property according to their needs. Through the Malta Tax and Customs Administration, citizens could benefit from the First Time Buyers Scheme, the Second Time Buyers Scheme, as well as the Gozo Property Scheme for which the deadline for the final deed in relation to such transfer had to be made by 31 January 2024 and notice of the deed had to be given to the Commissioner for Tax and Customs by 31 March 2024.

2.2.1 Noise Pollution

After the adoption of the Noise Action Plan (NAP) (2019-2024) in 2023, following a public consultation period and submission to the EC, the measures outlined within the Plan started undergoing a Cost-Benefit Analysis and a technical feasibility study. These assessments aimed to evaluate the applicability of specific measures within the local context. Additionally, in 2024, works commenced on the fourth round of the NAP (2025-2029). The public consultation for this new round of the plan was held between 27 November 2024 and 18 December 2024. Several stakeholder meetings with all relevant key entities were carried out to update the plan, taking into account the latest policies and strategies relating to noise.

Continuous exposure to excessive noise levels is harmful to both human health and the environment and is considered pollution. The implementation of the measures contained in the NAP is expected to lead to a better environmental noise quality in areas where this is poor and to be preserved and maintained where ambient noise is already in a good state. This will be achieved by taking a strategic approach to managing environmental noise and following a balanced approach within the context of sustainable development. Moreover, as part of the implementation of the NAP, ERA is conducting a technical feasibility study on noise abatement measures for road traffic and a cost-benefit analysis to assess the socio-economic aspect of the proposed measures in the NAP.

The fourth round of the noise mapping exercise for major roads across Malta and for aviation and industrial noise sources within the agglomeration, for assessment year 2021 was finalised, adopted and reported to the EC in April 2024. A Noise Model Validation exercise was also carried out to confirm the accuracy of the noise calculation model used for the strategic noise mapping exercise. This involved data manipulation including cleaning and analysis relating to the extensive monitoring of ambient noise levels in six sites around Malta. Noise modelling calculations and relevant assessment and uncertainty calculations were conducted and presented in a final report.

2.2.2 Urban Green and Embellishment Projects

Several local councils and other organisations have been given the capacity, thanks to funding opportunities and financial assistance, 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 through the Development Planning Fund:

Project Ref	Proposal	Applicants	Amount
GS/50023/2023	Project with San Anton School located on three fields, including wooden walking paths, flower beds, and trees. The site is located within St Paul's Bay Local Council.	San Anton School, St Paul's Bay	€67,000.00
GS/50014/2024	Joint application between Xgħajra Local Council and Xgħajra Tornados to remove existing benches, and install recycled benches, planters and indigenous shrubs along the promenade.	Xgħajra Local Council & Xgħajra Tornados Football Club	€43,757.54
GS/50001/2023	Proposed roof garden including a new roof over existing roof structure, the construction of a lift, roof and stairs, and a reservoir at ground floor level.	Ħamrun Local Council	€346,939.44

Additionally, Infrastructure Malta is currently undertaking the Msida Creek Project, which commenced in November 2024. The project involves the construction of a new flyover intended to replace the existing traffic light junctions and incorporate facilities for alternative modes of travel, namely cycling and walking. The proposed road design is set to reduce travel times and accident risks along this arterial route.

Additionally, around 60% of the Msida Creek Project will be dedicated to open public spaces for the community. By replacing the traffic lights with a grade-separated intersection, this project will increase the efficiency and capacity of this node, whilst reducing the existing high levels of air and noise pollution caused by long waiting times. In so doing, this investment will improve the air quality in this part of Msida and other nearby residential and recreational areas.

Works are also ongoing by the Tourism Zones Regeneration Agency, with a focus on the regular upkeep, repair, and maintenance of tourism areas. The goal is to enhance and preserve the overall environment in these regions. This may include activities such as plastering, tiling, painting, repairing benches and light poles, light landscaping, watering plants and trees, and cleaning, among others. To manage these tasks, there are three teams, each responsible for the Northern, Central, and Southern tourism zones, respectively. In collaboration with local councils and other stakeholders, area managers oversee the coordination and execution of these efforts, ensuring they are carried out continuously.

Additionally, as part of this initiative, new galvanised steel railings, decorative street lighting, and benches will be installed along promenades. This will not only enhance the aesthetic appeal of these areas but also provide a more enjoyable experience for tourists and visitors alike. The primary goal of these measures is to improve open spaces, create a cleaner environment, provide better lighting, and enhance accessibility along pavements and promenades in tourism areas. Thus, this initiative will contribute to the upgrading of the current state of tourism zones while enhancing the overall tourist experience. It will also create a better environment for both tourists and locals, revitalise the tourism product, boost the competitiveness of Malta's tourism industry, and improve safety along the promenades.

With regard to the regeneration plan for St Paul's Bay, the tender was re-evaluated and awarded, with the contract being signed in October 2024. The consultants are currently working on the Regeneration Plan and will submit the final Plan by the end of 2025. Furthermore, regarding Paceville, the Town Centre Management (TCM) Committee was reconstituted in 2024.

The application for Purple Flag accreditation to the UK-Association of TCM was submitted in early 2024 and awarded, with conditions for improvement, in June 2024. The work of the TCM is ongoing with regard to embellishment in the area, and issues raised by stakeholders including commercial establishments, and the coordination for public entities works in the area.

In addition, in 2024 the MGP commenced preparatory works to refurbish several public gardens, including *Ġnien il-Ħaddiem* in Xewkija, *Ġnien Maġistrat Salvu* Attard in Qala, and *Ġnien Ċensu Xiberras* in Kerċem. The related calls for tenders for the refurbishment of these gardens are being drafted. Once these gardens are refurbished, they will complement past efforts undertaken by the Ministry and other stakeholders in establishing green spaces around the island. Furthermore, *Ġnien Ċensu Xiberras* has been designed to be a dementia-friendly open space, which will make it the first public garden on the island that shall take into account the specific needs of those individuals who suffer from this illness.

Throughout 2024, Heritage Malta also completed work on the embellishment and pedestrianisation of the square next to the visitors' centre at the Tarxien Prehistoric site, and finalised the restoration of part of the Villa Portelli gardens, which have since been opened to the public. The project transformed the villa's expansive gardens, spanning over 5,000 m^2, into an accessible and welcoming green space for public use. Key restoration efforts included extensive cleaning and removal of invasive species, pruning and landscaping to revive the garden's historical charm, and indigenous planting and sustainable greening practices to respect the site's natural and cultural context. This initiative not only preserved the historical and cultural significance of Villa Portelli but also promoted community wellbeing by providing a tranquil environment for relaxation, cultural appreciation, and informal education.

In parallel, located on the outskirts of Kalkara, Birgu, and Cospicua, *Ġnien Fuq il-Glażiż* in Birgu has undergone a remarkable transformation. What was once a neglected 9,000 m2 forested area has been transformed into a green recreational space for the community. This project has revitalised the site and seamlessly integrated heritage preservation with modern recreational amenities, reshaping this Grade 1 scheduled area. Central to this project is a deep respect for both history and environmental conservation. Work included the careful restoration of the garden's internal traverses and masonry walls. Guided by a commitment to environmental stewardship, the existing natural habitat was carefully preserved, weaving pathways among the mature trees, making the grounds more accessible. Removal of invasive and alien species was undertaken, while mature and established trees and indigenous flora were safeguarded, ensuring that the woodland's character and historical significance remained intact. Furthermore, a solar-powered lighting system was installed. Street furniture was also installed, crafted from sustainably harvested timber, durable materials, and, where possible, natural and recycled resources. Accessible to all, *Ġnien Fuq il-Glażiż* encourages visitors to explore its four informal areas. These include a dedicated dog park equipped with an obstacle course; amenities such as waste bins and a drinking fountain; a play area equipped with specific equipment encouraging outdoor adventure, including a zip-line, multipurpose recreational zones in various corners of the garden, including timber deck platforms; and picnic zones complete with benches and tables. This garden has also been equipped with CCTV for security purposes, free Wi-Fi which is accessible throughout the garden, and a rustic safety fence surrounding the entire garden and dog park.

Ġnien Fuq il-Glażiż

Furthermore, the Spencer Garden Regeneration Project was concluded in 2024. The gardens have undergone a revitalisation project, including the installation of new water systems, solar lighting, and the planting of hundreds of bushes, plants and trees, restoring this historic area to its former beauty. The main intent of the refurbishment was to create an oasis in this heavily urbanised and industrial area that is easily accessible for Marsa residents and workers alike, acting also as a project with social benefits. The garden offers a peaceful escape from the surrounding urban landscape, providing visitors with a tranquil, safe, and accessible space. The surrounding landscape features thematic gardens, a nursery, elevated structures, and sound barriers, creating a soothing environment that helps visitors disconnect from the hustle and bustle of city life.

A number of greening projects funded under the Better Environment in our LocaL Urban Spaces (BELLUS) initiative of the Environment Fund progressed during 2024. The funded projects aim to bring nature back to our cities, towns and villages through green initiatives and the application of nature-based solutions in urban, peri-urban and rural areas, with activities aimed to implement more green spaces within public areas. Projects are meant to benefit the common good, contribute towards enhancing public environmental stewardship and sustainability, and improve biodiversity, as well as contribute towards the mitigation of the urban heat island effect. The amount of €500,000 was committed to six environmental projects under this call. Among the projects are the Regeneration of Fort Madliena (Reservoir), the Green Living Hub Malta project, and the Green Access project. Other projects include the uplifting of the Gardjola Gardens, the restoration and roofing of an existing reservoir to create a belvedere in Ġnien l-Għarusa tal-Mosta, and two reservoirs and the beautification of two gardens in Mellieħa, as well as another project addressing the problem of invasive alien plant species in Wied Babu, Żurrieq, by replacing such species with indigenous/endemic plant species.

On a similar note, in December 2024, Wied Inċita was inaugurated and opened to the public after AM carried out several restoration interventions, including the removal of dead trees, invasive trees and plants, cleaning, and the installation of green infrastructure. This included the planting of 750 trees, 1,400 indigenous shrubs, and 500 aromatic and ornamental plants.

In addition to the above, by 2024, Project Green was managing 118 open green space projects, representing an ambitious investment of approximately €350 million and encompassing around 1.7 million square metres, which is equivalent to 240 football fields. The agency focused on restoring and upgrading existing spaces while also creating new ones aligned with the latest guidelines for climate change adaptation, nature-based infrastructure, and sustainable urban ecosystems. Throughout these initiatives, stakeholder engagement played a pivotal role, with placemaking sessions involving various community sectors to ensure that projects reflected the needs and aspirations of local residents.

In this regard, during 2024, significant milestones included the restoration of gardens such as the Independence Garden in Birżebbuġa, Hospice Garden in Santa Venera, Pollinator Garden in San Ġwann, San Blas Caritas Garden, Helen Keller School Garden in Ħaż-Żebbuġ, Peace Lab Garden in Ħal Far, and a garden in Qrendi, which were revitalised using nature-based infrastructure, enhancing their ecological and social value. These projects prioritised the preservation of native species, the planting of indigenous trees and shrubs, and the creation of welcoming spaces that encourage relaxation, community interaction, and ecological resilience. Furthermore, Project Green carried out the regeneration of Gebel San Martin in Zejtun, which received a special commendation in the Urban Planning Concept Award, recognising its innovative design and sustainable urban development principles. The project emphasised biodiversity conservation, sustainable land use, and community-Centred planning.

In 2024, works also commenced on the regeneration of Erba' Mwieżeb in St. Paul's Bay, the Rainwater Harvesting Park in Għajnsielem, the Serenity Garden in Santa Luċija, Kottonera Gardens, and William Harding Garden in Pembroke. Additionally, the Community Greening Grant, launched in 2023, advanced in 2024, whereby the development of 16 new greening projects across Malta and Gozo was funded. These projects aim to transform derelict sites into vibrant green spaces equipped with educational and recreational facilities tailored to local needs. The beneficiaries included Santa Venera, Birkirkara, Għajnsielem, and Marsaxlokk, among other localities.

2.3 Sustainable Demographic Development for the Creation of Resilient Communities

In order to continue supporting efforts that promote active ageing for senior citizens, through its night shelters and day centres, namely Għajnsielem Day Centre, Casa Amalia (Victoria) and *Ġesu' Nazzarenu* Night Shelter (Xagħra), the Services Gozo Directorate within the MGP offered spaces that provide various daily activities, companionship and a safe environment with the required caring support.

By making use of such services, elderly citizens may still live independently in their own homes but utilise the services provided in these centres. The Services Gozo Directorate also offers a vast array of services to the elderly to further encourage independent living for the elderly. This includes, inter alia, physiotherapy services at their place of residence, home helpers, maintenance services and gardening services. In addition, active ageing is further encouraged through the various Active Aging Centres across Gozo, which currently amount to six centres. Various sessions are held which promote active aging and a healthy lifestyle for senior citizens, namely BeActive sessions, line dancing, knitting sessions, and gilding, among others.

During 2024, the Services Gozo Directorate also continued sustaining lifelong learning through the provision of university courses for elderly individuals, which were held weekly at the Xewkija University Campus Hub. Furthermore, in October 2024, the Directorate also organised a series of events to celebrate senior citizens in Gozo with inter-generational events such as a Mass at Ta' Pinu with the participation of students from Sannat Primary School, student visits at Casa Amalia and San Gużepp Residential Home in Għajnsielem, and an event at Villa Rundle which focused on connecting generations. Other events focused on healthy eating, physical activity and recreational activities, which were also held in October.

In addition to lifelong learning, the elderly are also being supported through the reconstruction of both Cospicua Home and Msida Home for Older Persons, for which tenders for their demolition, design, construction, maintenance, repair, management and operations were published in 2024, with an estimated procurement value of €102 million excluding VAT and €124 million excluding VAT, respectively. The aim is to provide a modern, safe, and accessible facilities that meet current standards and the needs of the residents. This includes the efficient demolition of the existing structures, sustainable and energy-efficient construction practices, and the creation of high-quality living and care environments with appropriate medical and caring facilities. Additionally, the tenders aim to ensure ongoing maintenance and operational excellence, providing a high standard of living and comprehensive care for the residents.

ENSURING HEALTHY LIVES AND WELL-BEING FOR ALL

CHAPTER 03

2030 AGENDA RELATED GOALS

03. Good Health & Well-being

04. Quality Education

05. Gender Equality

07. Affordable & Clean Energy

09. Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure

Ensuring the health and well-being of the population while promoting sustainable development remains at the forefront of Malta's agenda. The foundation of a thriving society is built upon the accessibility and quality of healthcare services available to all citizens. When health systems evolve and become more efficient, further societal and economic growth is naturally supported. Therefore, a key priority for the government is to cultivate an environment that guarantees access to a high-functioning healthcare system while simultaneously fostering initiatives that encourage physical activity and the adoption of healthy eating habits, leading to a more active and healthier population.

Alongside this, the government is committed to implementing stronger preventive measures to address non-communicable diseases (NCDs), reduce health inequalities, and improve the overall quality of life for all Maltese residents. Education programmes are vital in promoting the importance of healthy living and making individuals aware of how lifestyle choices, environmental factors, and dietary habits directly impact long-term health outcomes. The government's initiatives are also aimed at tackling mental health challenges, preventing injuries, addressing substance abuse, and promoting sexual health. In line with these goals, the healthcare workforce is continuously expanding and being trained to meet the changing needs of both current and future generations.

Several programmes have been introduced to recruit, retain, and incentivise healthcare professionals, ensuring that citizens receive high-quality care when needed. Significant investments are also being made in primary healthcare, specialised clinics, and innovative services to improve access to timely medical treatments, promoting long-term health and sustainability.

This chapter outlines the various initiatives and projects that contribute to these overarching goals, with a focus on their alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly SDGs 3, 4, 5, 7, and 9.

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 healthcare services, including 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 healthcare 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, the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences

In June 2024, the Strategy Development and Implementation Unit (SDIU) within the Office of the Superintendence of Public Health (SPH) launched the Policy Framework for the Prevention of NCDs and the Promotion of Well-being 2025-2035. This framework aims to improve population health and well-being by preventing NCDs, thus reducing morbidity and mortality associated with these diseases. Building on this framework, the SDIU started the process of developing the first Patient Safety Strategy for Malta to cover the period 2025-2035. The strategy concept was launched among stakeholders from the Ministry of Health and Active Ageing (MHA) during a conference held on 17 September 2024 where representatives from all departments within the Ministry were invited to discuss priorities and concerns to be included in the strategy. This stakeholder meeting was facilitated by representatives from the World Health Organisation (WHO) Patient Safety Flagship Initiatives from Geneva and the WHO European Region through the Athens Office on Quality of Care and Patient Safety. Following the launch, a series of stakeholder consultation meetings were organised with individual entities to gather more feedback. The strategy's main objective is to improve the safety and quality of healthcare services and prevent hospital-related harm to persons making use of healthcare service within both the public and private health sectors in Malta.

Additionally, the SDIU continued to engage with stakeholders to finalise the draft for a Tobacco Control Strategy 2025-2030 for consideration by Cabinet. The strategy's goal is to improve public health by reducing the prevalence of conventional tobacco products, as well as new and emerging products used in Malta.

In 2024, the SDIU also extensively revised the standards for licensing acute care hospitals, collaborating closely with the relevant stakeholders. These standards were initially drafted in 2022 as part the project 'Investing in human capital to create more opportunities and promote the well-being of society', which was part-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF). Currently, a gap analysis is being conducted with the active participation of all licensed acute hospitals, both private and public. The anticipated outcome of this initiative is the promulgation of the proposed Licensing Standards for Acute Care Hospitals.

Alongside the development of these licensing standards, a comprehensive legislation package has been drafted. The package aims to consolidate regulations regarding the application process, issue and renewal of licenses, enforcement, and the suspension or withdrawal of licences in cases of premises not meeting the required standards. It also introduces an appeal mechanism for such decisions. These regulations replace four different pieces of legislation currently in force, and significantly reform the licensing methodology. Furthermore, they establish uniform healthcare standards to be followed by all public and private healthcare premises, ensuring a level playing field for all acute care providers.

Meanwhile, the Office of the Chief Medical Officer (CMO), which provides strategic direction and advice for the national health system, worked towards the publication o Legal Notice 105 of 2024 on 1 May, updating Subsidiary Legislation (SL) 35.28 of 2004. This important legislation transparently outlines the fees applicable to third-country nationals (TCNs) and Maltese citizens undertaking healthcare in centres within other EU countries.

The CMO's office also organised an International Workshop on Patients' Rights and Rare Diseases in conjunction with the EC and the Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (SANTE) on 29 February 2024. This hybrid event, featuring both local and international speakers, aimed to raise awareness on the application of patients' rights in cross-border healthcare (Directive 2011/24/EU).

The workshop also addressed the role of the European Reference Networks, rare diseases, and the integration of cross-border healthcare and e-health initiatives.

In the area of palliative care, the MHA finalised an agreement with Hospice Malta regarding the management of St Michael Hospice in-patient unit which will largely be funded by MHA. The CMO's office has also applied for ESF funding for training in palliative care across the health sector.

In line with these advancements, the Environmental Health Directorate (EHD), which is responsible for promoting and safeguarding public health from adverse environmental effects, continued to update its working practices. These updates, stemming from the Official Control Regulations, are aimed at improving and ensuring consistency of services. The internal audit conducted within the EHD focuses on reviewing processes with the intention of ingraining a continuous improvement policy in all its services. As part of this initiative, EHD renewed its quality system: the SM EN ISO 9001:2015 certification on complaints handling in both the environment and food sectors.

The Public Health Laboratory (PHL), also within the EHD, continued to enhance its capabilities by participating in the EU Reference Laboratories' proficiency schemes, ensuring competence in its testing activities for several microbiological and chemical parameters. Good performance in such testing activities enhances the testing performed at PHL.

The Directorate for Pharmaceutical Affairs (DPA) continued to improve access to safe, effective, and high-quality essential medicines. One key milestone was the inclusion of new medicines on the Government Formulary List (GFL), which includes medicinal products, vitamins, and food supplements available to patients with chronic conditions following hospital or outpatient referral. The DPA completed an assessment of 42 items, recommended by the GFL Advisory Committee for inclusion on the GFL. Notably, this assessment included ten oral feeds and four parenteral nutrition items.

Additionally, the Advisory Committee for Health Care Benefits approved eight new medicines for inclusion into the formulary, and a total of 20 new medicines were added to the GFL for 2024.There were 165 changes to the hospital formulary, outpatients formulary and/or entitlement protocols, 405 amendments to technical specifications, and 39 new specifications.

In terms of access to medicines, DPA also processes exceptional requests arising from clinicians for medicinal treatment that is not covered by an existing policy on the GFL. Such requests are compiled and then presented to the Exceptional Medicinal Treatment Committee in line with the L.N. 58 of 2018: Health Act (Cap. 528), which committee then decides on the outcome. In 2024, a total of 1,028 new cases were approved, with 976 approvals renewed. Out of the 859 non-formulary drugs approved, many were new treatments procured for the first time through this process. Notably, 31% of new, non-formulary requests were approved for a rare disease, whereas a number of new drugs were also made available on a named-patient basis in treating rare conditions. Significant progress has also been made in the addition of three new conditions under Schedule V entitlement.

In cancer care, the Cancer Care Pathways Directorate extended its nurse navigator services to include Neuro-Oncology, Sarcoma, Skin, and Melanoma cases. This expansion is aimed at providing a personalised and integrated approach to cancer care, both during and after treatment. A new nurse navigator was recruited and specifically trained to manage cases in these areas. From January to November, the nurse navigator followed 92 new cases of sarcoma, 66 cases of neuro-oncology, and 154 newly diagnosed skin and melanoma cases.

In addition to participating in multidisciplinary team meetings, the navigator offers one-to-one reviews when requested and provides a dedicated telephone line to address patient queries. Moreover, the Oncology Outreach Service played a crucial role in improving access to care, enhancing patient comfort, and supporting continuity of care while reducing hospital admissions. In summer 2024, a pilot project was launched, where an oncology nurse started to carry out a selected number of oncology related interventions within the community.

The GGH also saw key advancements in its clinical services in 2024. The hospital introduced several clinical tests and services aimed at improving the quality of health services provided. Notable additions included electrophysiological studies for follow-up care, a wound device checks clinic post-pacemaker implant, a heart failure clinic, and a cardiac rehabilitation service. Furthermore, the hospital expanded its diagnostic capabilities with the introduction of a new 3T MRI scanner and a CT scanner. Other advancements included musculoskeletal ultrasound studies, the vascular clinic, and an epilepsy clinic and pain clinic. GGH also introduced new laboratory tests, added extra operating theatre sessions with Sunday initiatives, and provided a spirometry service through the cardiology department, and transitioned to a digital hearing aid service. These developments not only enhanced the hospital's clinical offerings but also ensured that all services remained accessible to all, irrespective of age, gender, socio-economic status, and ethnicity. Additionally, GGH continued its commitment to outreach services in areas such as maternal, urological, orthopaedic, and mental health. These services increased the accessibility of services provided and promoted optimal mental health and general well-being. Furthermore, investments in HR and ongoing staff training are placed high on the hospital's agenda.

In terms of gender and sexual health, the Gender Well-being Clinic launched the National Sexual Health Strategy 2025-2030 for public consultation. This comprehensive strategy outlines the Government's plans in terms of sexual health and well-being, with several proposals, including education across the life course, sexual health services, family planning services, and measures aimed at key populations.

Modernisation in Primary HealthCare also progressed in 2024, with the opening of newly modernised community clinics across the country. In March, the newly modernised Qormi Health Centre was opened, ensconcing new services and improved facilities for the population of the surrounding areas.

Since then, Qormi Health Centre has successfully provided services for over 75,000 clients. The new community clinics in St Julian's, Qala, Birżebbuġa, Siġġiewi, and Għargħur brought the total number of community clinics to 30, ensuring wider access to healthcare across the islands.

In collaboration with MDH, Primary HealthCare re-engineered patient flow for individuals living with diabetes through the setting up of a new Diabetes Centre at Qormi Health Centre. This centre provides a holistic, one-stop-shop offering patients diabetes specialists, nurses, physiotherapists, podiatrists, dieticians and ophthalmic nurses.

In October 2024, the National Immunisation Service (NIS) within Primary HealthCare launched the PCV20 Vaccination Programme, targeting individuals aged 65 and above. The vaccine provides immunity against common respiratory pathogens, aiming to reduce hospitalisations among the most affected demographic. By the end of 2024, 23,867 PCV vaccines were successfully administered. In addition, the NIS expanded the administration of the Human Papilloma Virus vaccine to older age groups through newly organised outreach campaigns within post-secondary schools throughout the year, resulting in 740 new vaccines being administered during the 2024 campaigns.

Furthermore, Primary HealthCare, through its Allied Health Professionals, started a podo-paediatric screening programme for Year 2 students attending state schools. The aim of this programme is to detect early problems and initiate intervention in a timely manner, resulting in the prevention of long-term complications and enhancing overall foot health for children. Meanwhile, the Speech and Language Pathology Centre launched the SpeakTX Software, an online speech therapy platform that provides interactive exercises created by speech therapists to enhance service provision to its clients.

AED

Primary
HealthCare
Health Centre

Additionally, the Directorate for Allied Health Services (DAHS) provided speech and language services to children in all the entities of the Maltese healthcare system in both Malta and Gozo through a decentralised model. In 2024, a total of 3,609 children were referred to these services in the community, including schools. The DAHS also worked on an inter-ministerial collaboration with MEYR to address the provision of psychology services in schools. Stakeholder meetings are being organised to identify service needs and establish referral pathways for various conditions. Furthermore, the DAHS is developing a system for the public to communicate directly with the Directorate, aiming to better understand customer needs, strengthen service delivery, and address any gaps.
Meanwhile, the DAHS, in collaboration with Aġenzija Sapport (AS), has provided physiotherapy, social work and occupational therapy services to persons with disability. A key component of these services is the sensory integration therapy programmes which help children improve their processing and integration of sensory inputs to gain an appropriate adaptive response to everyday stimuli. Moreover, MGP, through the Santa Marta Day Care Centre in Gozo, continued to offer its service to persons with disability from the age of 18 upwards.

In addition, several financial support measures have been increased to assist families and individuals. In 2024, the Carers Grant increased by €487 per year, bringing it to nearly €5,000 per year, paid every three months. This grant, introduced in 2021, is awarded to a parent who is not in employment to take care of a child or children with a disability over 16 years of age and in receipt of an Increased Severe Disability Assistance. In 2024, this measure benefitted 500 beneficiaries. Furthermore, the In-work Benefit was enhanced by €50 for each child in the family under 23 years of age. This benefit assists couples and single parents who are in a gainful occupation and have children under the age of 23 years, who are still dependent and living with them. In 2024, this measure assisted 23,000 families.

On the other hand, the Ministry for Inclusion and Voluntary Organisations initiated a process to offer closure to the victims of Thalidomide, addressing an incident dating back to the 1960s. At that time, pregnant women were prescribed Thalidomide to alleviate morning sickness. Despite its international ban in 1961, the pill remained available in Malta until 1968, leading to numerous pregnancy complications and children born with deformities. The Government began a rigorous evaluation process to assess compensation claims from affected individuals. An independent medical board subsequently reviewed 40 applications, finding 25 cases directly linked to Thalidomide use. The first financial compensation payments were distributed in May 2024, with payouts scheduled to continue over a three-year period.

3.2

Promoting Good Nutrition & 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 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

In 2024, the MHA led several initiatives aimed at promoting good nutrition and active lifestyles for a healthier society. In August, the SPH office launched a Strategy for Health-Enhancing Physical Activity for public consultation. This strategy aims to ensure that every Maltese resident has the knowledge, awareness, opportunities, and an enabling social, cultural, and physical environment for health-enhancing physical activity across their life course and in all life settings.

In line with this, the SDIU within the SPH office started the process of developing two vertical strategies emanating from the Policy Framework for the Prevention of NCDs and Prevention and the Promotion of Well-being. First, the Weight Management and Obesity Care Strategy for Malta 2025-2030 aims to improve public health outcomes, enhance the quality of life, and reduce healthcare costs by addressing overweight and obesity through a comprehensive approach that includes prevention, treatment, and long-term management. Throughout 2024, a series of stakeholder consultation meetings were organised with a variety of stakeholders to gather more feedback for the development of the strategy.

In addition, the SDIU embarked on developing a Healthy Eating and Nutrition Strategy for Malta to cover the period 2025-2030. This strategy, by a public health review carried out in 2023, aims to improve dietary habits to maximise health and wellbeing and reduce diet-related disease in the Maltese population. 2024 also saw a series of stakeholder consultation meetings organised with individual Ministries and entities to gather more feedback for the development of the strategy.

The MHA also continued to focus on initiatives related to staff training, awareness campaigns, and public educational lectures. These efforts targeted a diverse range of groups within the community, from infants to the elderly, ensuring that everyone had access to valuable information and resources.

In 2024, the Public Abattoir offered a variety of free courses for individuals involved within the Agrifood industry. One of the courses was a Creative Thinking Course, which aimed to provide participants with the necessary tools to adopt new approaches to food production to meet the demands of an increasingly diverse market. Additionally, 2024 also saw the start of a collaborative effort with the UM on a course relating to Traditional Maltese Food. The course takes a multi-faceted approach, covering aspects of history, culture and marketing as well as technical aspects of food production such as hygiene and cooking methods. The goal of this collaboration is to once again give the participants involved a toolkit with which to respond to an increasingly changing market through the utilisation of traditional methods of production, which often includes the utilisation of ABP.

Moreover, the EHD continued its food control work to ensure proper hygiene in food establishments and for operators to follow food safety protocols. EHD is also currently updating the bathing water website to facilitate its use to ensure swimmers bathe in non-polluted water.

Additionally, the Services Gozo Directorate within the MGP launched the Sports Initiative and Facilities Scheme, to provide financial assistance to various NGOs whose main aim was to improve their sports facilities or organise sports-related activities.

With regards to youths' wellbeing, AŻ, responsible for managing, implementing and coordinating the National Youth Policy and promoting the interests of young people, provided four programmes focusing on the health and wellbeing of young people:

- 'Mindful Mosaic' is a programme where students embark on a dynamic journey that helps them cultivate their mental resilience through interactive activities and empowering discussions led by youth workers.

- Another programme, which was held between October and December 2024, is the 'Resilience Toolbox: Coping Skills for Teens workshop'. This programme is specifically designed for young individuals enrolled in youth organisations, aimed at strengthening resilience through valuable coping strategies.

- AŻ also offered 'Zen Zone', a programme focused on causes of stress in the lives of youths, be it school, relationships or personal challenges. Interactive activities with youth workers introduce young people to practices that foster their focus to harness their inner resilience during stressful times.

- AŻ also continued with its 'Youth Worker Online' initiative to offer a valuable support system for young people, providing guidance and resources through a digital platform.

3.2.1 Active Ageing

The Government is committed to fostering active aging through various initiatives that promote health, independence, and social inclusion for senior citizens. Key programmes include financial support for caregivers, the expansion of specialised care facilities, and community-based activities designed to improve physical and mental well-being. These efforts focus on accessibility and holistic care, ensuring that older adults can lead fulfilling, active lives while remaining integrated in society.

One example of this commitment is the financial support provided to senior citizens who employ a caregiver of their choice to assist them in their daily needs. The Carer at Home Scheme was increased from €7,000 to €8,000 as from 1 January 2024. By December 2024, there were 1,131 beneficiaries on this scheme. As from January 2025, this scheme is expected to increase further to €8,500 annually.

SVP Long-Term Care Facility has prioritised holistic care through several key initiatives. By 2030, SVP aims to provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, particularly for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities. St Francis Wards 1 and 2 are being restored and made more accessible to nearby spaces, which includes Malta's first dementia-friendly garden which was inaugurated back in 2023.

In addition, SVP completed the development of a therapeutic farm to offer patrons, their visitors, and the public with the opportunity to interact with friendly animals usually found in traditional Maltese farms. This initiative aligns with SVP's commitment to holistic care and other ongoing projects, such as pet and animal therapies. All the gardens at SVP are wheelchair accessible, and two extensive yards have been pedestrianised to ensure safe walking for older persons and visitors, while also reducing emissions in these strategic areas.

Moreover, SVP actively promotes physical activity among both residents and staff. To support this, a budget of €10,000 has been allocated to sponsor staff athletes, with a Standard Operating Procedure that has been drafted to establish the eligibility and application process for sponsorship. This is complemented by special leave to represent government entities in sport activities abroad as per Public Service Management Code regulations. Furthermore, SVP has identified a number of employees to undergo training in health promotion, while another group is organising a 1 km walk around SVP's campus to encourage physical activity.

In 2024, SVP strengthened its outpatient services for geriatric treatment and extended to provide the necessary specialised medical services for the growing elderly population. Also, SVP adapted Narċis, a specialised unit for adults (18 to 59 years old) with high dependency and a complex medical history, to hospital-based intermediate person-centred care for older adults (60+ years of age) living in the community requiring care for acute and subacute health challenges that cannot be dealt with by means of services in the community.

Moreover, a new multidisciplinary clinic equipped with specialised medical equipment was completed within Floriana Residential Home to ensure that all residents receive holistic and personalised care in a private and dignified environment. This clinic is equipped with a range of medical devices and serves a variety of healthcare needs. The clinic is staffed by professionals such as physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech language pathologists, podiatrists, psychotherapists, nurses, doctors, and geriatricians. This includes specialised services such as a continence clinic and support for diabetic clients. The introduction of this clinic provides holistic assessments and care whilst addressing the lack of privacy in the residents' rooms by providing a private and accessible space for treatment and consultations, thus reducing the need to travel to other clinics.

In October 2024, the Services Gozo Directorate organised a series of events to celebrate senior citizens in Gozo. Apart from organising inter-generational events various other events focused on healthy eating and physical activities, talks and physical exercise sessions were held. In 2024, physical activity was also encouraged through the various sessions held at the Active Ageing Centres in Gozo. These included BeActive sessions and line dancing sessions.

ACCELERATING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION, SMART MOBILITY AND CONNECTIVITY

CHAPTER 04

2030 AGENDA RELATED GOALS

03 Good Health & Well-being

04 Quality Education

05 Gender Equality

08 Economic Work & Economic Growth

09. Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure

10. Reduce Inequalities

11. Sustainable Cities & Communities

The Government remains committed to developing robust government policies and infrastructure aimed at enabling the digital transformation, which is central to the success of Malta's economy and to the livelihoods and well-being of modern society. The Government will continue to increase accessibility to its services through digitalisation and utilise technology to increase efficiency within its workings and across various sectors including health, education, and agriculture.

With the emerging importance of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Government is taking steps to integrate such tools so as to aid with its digital transformation and improve its services, whilst balancing its responsible use through resilience and preparedness. Its use has been promoted through informative events on the availability of free tools for generative application, and its applicability within the tourism sector, to process data and allow for informed decisions.

Malta continues to strive towards smart mobility and increased connectivity, namely through improved transport systems and infrastructure, in tandem with increased resource efficiency and shifting towards climate-neutrality. To this end, efforts have centred on the provision of schemes encouraging green mobility and increasing the uptake of EVs. Such efforts yield benefits, including mitigating congestion, encouraging active lifestyles, and safeguarding community health and well-being.

This chapter will highlight measures, projects and initiatives undertaken by the government linked to the 2030 Agenda: SDGs 3-5 and 8-11.

4.1

Towards a Digitally Empowered Economy & 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 Digital Transformation of the Public Administration and the Public Service

During 2024, the Government continued to prioritise the digital transition, particularly within the public administration and the public service. In this regard, the Address Management Unit within the Electoral Office is in the process of finalising the legal basis for the proposed Address Register and subsidiary registers. All the elements of this initiative are targeted towards the launch of a new national Address Register. The setting up of this register is mentioned as part of the "Once Only Principle" initiative in the Strategy for the Public Service – "Achieving a Service of Excellence". Moreover, the creation of the legal basis for the said Address Register is highlighted in the Public Administration Data Strategy 2023–2027. During 2024, the Electoral Office published and awarded a service tender for the first phase of this project, which is the creation of an address-based geolocated image capture of Maltese building units, using zero-emission vehicles, as part of an address management solution within the Electoral Office. This data-capturing exercise is provisioned to commence in January 2025.

Further to this, the Corporate Electronic Document Management System (CEDMS) has reached significant milestones in 2024 that put the project on track to go live in two pilot ministries in mid-2025, these being the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and the Ministry for Transport, Infrastructure and Public Works. In view of this, during 2024, following the publishing and awarding of a public call for a tender for the provision of a CEDMS, work commenced on the finalisation of the project plan and system architecture. Discussions were then held on the configuration of the system, its screens, and the repository, followed by a review of the six workflows as defined in the tender documents. Introductory sessions were held with users to introduce them to the benefits of the new system and get their input on the new way of working. The tests to be carried out for the provisional User Acceptance Testing (UAT) on the system supplied were also defined to ensure that the business and technical requirements as specified in the tender would be met.

The provisional UAT was successfully carried out and the UAT certificate was issued. A service-wide intranet website was developed and launched to be a repository for information on the CEDMS, with trials on the transfer of data from the legacy document register into the CEDMS being successfully carried out. The Document Management Unit has been tasked with managing the project and implementing the CEDMS and is increasing its capacity accordingly.

During 2024, digitisation efforts were also promoted through the Treasury Department's Corporate Financial Management Solution (CFMS), which is an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) System with accrual accounting. This system was introduced to modernise Government's financial processes and improve efficiency through the automation of financial operations. In 2024, the Treasury Department continued working on the CFMS to guide the departments and improve the processes as much as possible. During the year, more training programmes were also conducted with the aim of enhancing users' e-skills. This also increased efficiency and innovation within the Public Service's financial sphere.

4.1.1.1 Servizz.gov

As in previous years, work continued towards increasing the efficiency of and accessibility to government services. In 2024, Servizz.gov undertook various initiatives to leverage advanced technologies and innovative solutions, aiming to enhance citizen services, optimise operations, and promote sustainability. During this year, Servizz.gov implemented a Queue Management System across its 25 hubs, with the aim of enhancing operational efficiency and improving the citizen experience, marking a significant step forward in modernising service delivery. This Queue Management System provides reporting capabilities and valuable analytics in real-time, allowing Servizz.gov to monitor peak times, average waiting periods and service delivery efficiency. These insights will support continuous improvement efforts, ensuring that the service maintains its commitment towards putting citizens at its heart. A core feature of the Queue Management System is its scalability and future integration capabilities.

Plans are underway to link this system with an online appointment booking platform, enabling citizens to reserve their time slots at any Servizz.gov hub in advance. This integration will allow for even greater flexibility and convenience, as citizens can plan their visits around their schedules, further minimising waiting times. Additionally, this functionality will help the agency better anticipate demand, adjust staffing levels, and allocate resources more effectively.

Further to this, a Single Point of Entry proof-of-concept project was launched during the third quarter of 2024 to ensure consistent data integrity across government websites. This collaborative initiative between Servizz.gov and the MSPC leverages the capabilities of the Microsoft Dynamics CRM Service Catalogue, a centralised repository hosting information for all government services. The system plays a pivotal role in maintaining uniformity and accuracy across multiple platforms. The project introduces a streamlined process for backend users to update government services directly within the Microsoft Dynamics CRM. These updates are then reflected in real-time, whereby citizens accessing government services are able to receive consistent, accurate, and up-to-date information, regardless of the portal they use. By eliminating discrepancies and redundancies across platforms, this initiative enhances transparency, efficiency, and user trust.

An Invitation to Tender was also issued during the fourth quarter of 2024 to redevelop Servizz.gov's portal. The EU-funded project is an effort to develop a user-friendly digital platform that will establish itself as the primary link between Maltese citizens and government services. This initiative aims to redefine how citizens engage with public services by providing an accessible and personalised digital experience. The redesigned Servizz.gov portal will go beyond being a simple online interface. It will act as a dynamic platform that transforms citizen interactions with government services. By incorporating AI-driven personalisation and smart service recommendations, the portal will offer tailored experiences that cater to the unique needs of individual users. Unlike traditional portals, this innovative approach will provide citizens with relevant services based on their life events, preferences, and past interactions.

4.1.1.2 Accounting and Banking

Following the adoption by the European Parliament and the European Council on 13 March 2024, of amending Regulations (EU) No 260/2012 and (EU) 2021/1230 with regard to instant credit transfers in Euro, the CBM, acting as a payment system provider, implemented the system for receiving instant credit transfers in Euro during 2024. Substantial efforts were carried out by the CBM to integrate its core accounting system and its payment applications with a new solution dedicated to instant payments. Furthermore, the Bank will offer outgoing instant credit transfers in Euro by September 2025. Upgrades were also performed on the Payments Acquisition Platform, an internally developed solution used by government entities to manage payment services with the CBM. These changes allow such entities to self-upload payment instructions to the CBM platform, thereby eliminating manual interventions both for SEPA and instant payment transactions.

During 2024, the CBM undertook several significant cybersecurity projects and initiatives aimed at enhancing the Bank's overall security posture. These efforts were part of a broader cybersecurity strategy focused on improving risk management, threat detection, and incident response capabilities. One of the key projects completed was the monitoring of the Bank's related internet domains, social media, and other digital risks. This initiative provided comprehensive protection for the Bank's digital presence, including brand, location, and domain protection, as well as universal takedowns and corporate social account protection. Another project involved the implementation of a web toolkit developed by the European Central Bank to enhance the information risk management methodology. This toolkit enabled the CBM to conduct local risk assessments more systematically, thereby improving the identification and management of information security risks. Significant benefits were achieved through this project, including enhanced risk assessment quality, improved information security, increased efficiency, better decision-making processes, and compliance

with established standards. To further strengthen the Bank's cybersecurity posture, a Security Information and Event Management, together with a Security Orchestration, Automation, and Response solution, was implemented to empower the cybersecurity operations team with improved capabilities for monitoring and responding to security events and incidents. This project aimed to enhance the efficiency of security analysts in detecting and responding to security events, to expand the detection of attack vectors by mapping coverage with established frameworks, and to increase visibility into security events, providing a comprehensive view of the security landscape. The integration of an advanced cybersecurity solution with existing systems was completed to create a comprehensive cybersecurity framework. This project involved setting up and configuring the new system, testing its functionality, and training staff on its use. Protocols for responding to insights provided by the system were also developed and incorporated into existing incident response plans. The benefits included enhanced cybersecurity resilience, improved incident response with AI-generated playbooks and automated actions, and increased operational efficiency by automating aspects of incident response. Additionally, a project was initiated to enhance security management and governance across all server operating systems. This involved extending management capabilities to on-premises servers and providing advanced threat protection and unified security management.

These projects are collectively enabling the fostering of a digitally-empowered economy and society by enhancing the cybersecurity infrastructure, improving risk management and incident response capabilities, whilst also ensuring compliance with established standards.

4.1.1.3 Digitalisation in the Agriculture and Food Sectors

The MFA, with funding from the Interreg VI-A Italy-Malta Programme, plans to introduce an integrated digital platform, entitled the SMART FOOD Project, at both the Fish and Farmers' Markets. These new technologies will support traceability, transparency, and information dissemination, aligning with the Agency's policies and enhancing market operations.

Furthermore, in order to minimise food waste and improve market access, the MFA is developing a virtual marketplace where consumers can view available produce and make online purchases. This platform will also allow NGOs and food banks to reserve unsold produce, further promoting sustainability. The virtual marketplace will be created in collaboration with the AI Department of the UM. AI is becoming a cornerstone of the MFA's digital transformation, enhancing service delivery and control mechanisms across the markets. By leveraging AI, the MFA aims to optimise processes and improve operational efficiency.

4.1.1.4 Digitalisation in the Health Sector

Digitalisation harnesses the potential of transforming the health sector by streamlining operations and enhancing patient care. During 2024, the MHA embarked on initiatives to accelerate digital transformation within multiple healthcare settings.

The EHD commenced the process of updating its current IT infrastructure to a more modern system of digitisation, while the PHL set out to have a Laboratory Information Management System in place at the new premises, which will be beneficial for both the customer and PHL personnel. This system will ensure better traceability and sharing of laboratory results. As part of this process, PHL personnel will be equipped with substituting stand-alone computers.

Furthermore, during 2024, Secondary Healthcare continued its efforts in introducing digital systems intended to facilitate management processes and make it easier for both staff members and patients to make use of services. In this regard, the Vincent Moran Regional Healthcare Hub is also working on the creation of a digital twin of the healthcare hub and the provision of three digital solutions, including indoor positioning to assist all visitors, including the visually impaired, tracking of assets, and building management.

In addition to this, in support of the development of e-services undertaken holistically at Ministry level, across all entities forming part of the MHA and as part of the development of a more resilient digital infrastructure at the GGH, during 2024, the hospital's core network equipment, including firewalls and switches at distribution level, was upgraded using equipment procured in line with the Maltese Government's green procurement initiatives.The Wi-Fi infrastructure across the hospital was completely upgraded in 2024, including the procurement of two enterprise-grade wireless controllers and 85 new access points, which provided robust Wi-Fi services to patients, visitors, and staff across the campus

During 2024, the GGH adopted a new ERP system within its Pharmacy, Stores, and Finance Departments. The system will lead to less overhead, better stock management, and less waste as stock is more accurately monitored. The hospital's engineering department also upgraded and improved the hospital's Building Management System, ensuring that any faults are reported automatically to ensure optimal operations of lighting, heating, cooling, water, and ventilation systems..

Administratively, as part of the comprehensive project to reduce paper-based processes, electronic forms were implemented, reducing file movements and needless paper trails. Additionally, an Absence Management System was implemented to eliminate absence-related paper forms, enhancing efficiency and reducing the use of paper.

4.1.1.5 Digitalisation in the Education Sector

At the Foundation for Educational Services (FES), efforts are being made to reduce costs and shift towards environmentally conscious behaviour. The HR Department is working on developing and introducing an HR module to better align operations with the Finance Department. The reduction in the use of paper was also replicated within the Programmes Department, with employees uploading their plans and records of work on an online drive. This also facilitated access and monitoring by the Centre Coordinators and by the support staff at the FES Head Office.

This digitisation practice was expanded to replace the physical support visits sheets filled in by the FES Head Office Programme Coordinators when they visit the centres. The Programme Coordinators fill in the report directly onto a tablet and then upload it to a shared online drive. This also provides the advantage of having immediate access to information. Further to this, the FES is currently also drafting technical requirements to enhance its online portal system, facilitating the application process for parents who wish to use the Klabb 3-16 or Skolasajf service.

4.1.1.6 Other digitisation initiatives by various Ministries and Entities

In 2024, GamingMalta aligned its UNITY training programme with Malta's broader ESG goals. The initiative, which has trained 400 students since 2022 across the UM and The Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology (MCAST) to gain qualifications in the UNITY platform, directly contributes to the social and economic pillars of ESG, fostering a skilled workforce and promoting equitable opportunities within the gaming industry. The programme is funded under a government line item administered by GamingMalta known as 'Educational Initiatives'. Through the programme, GamingMalta directly addresses the growing global demand for professionals proficient in game development technologies. By cultivating local talent, the initiative enhances Malta's reputation as a hub for gaming and technology, attracting investment and creating high-quality job opportunities. The economic benefits extend beyond gaming, as UNITY skills are transferable across sectors such as architecture, education, and healthcare, contributing to Malta's diversified and resilient economy. While the primary focus of the UNITY programme is skills development, the curriculum also emphasises sustainable engineering design principles as a whole, design optimisation, and visualisation over physical prototyping. Students learn about energy-efficient programming practices and how to design games with minimal environmental impact, reflecting the industry's growing commitment to sustainability. GamingMalta remains committed to empowering individuals through education while advancing Malta's standing as a leader in the global gaming ecosystem. By integrating ESG principles into initiatives like the UNITY training programme, it ensures that Malta's growth is not only innovative but also inclusive and sustainable.

In the field of cultural heritage, further sites, discoveries, and scheduled monuments were included on the Geographic Information System (GIS) platform, an ongoing project within SCH. The SCH is one of many government entities that forms part of an enterprise agreement with Malta Information Technology Agency (MITA), Environmental Systems Research Institute and the local ArcGIS software provider.

Besides the ArcGIS software and products, this agreement allows access to training courses and programmes, as well as seminars and workshops where GIS users can discuss the application and effectiveness of GIS within their own entities and share their results. Furthermore, presently, the registry files ranging from 1951 to 2022 are being digitised to simplify staff and public access. Archival material is also being digitised to ensure plans, maps, reports, and notebooks are organised and accessible for those performing research on historical and archaeological sites. This process will streamline the retrievability of files and will eliminate the handling of files that are often in a fragile state, ensuring their conservation and preservation for future use, making national as well as global access achievable.

In addition to the above, during 2024, the MGP launched the Supporting Knowledge Based Sectors in Gozo Scheme. The main objective of this aid scheme is to attract new high-growth industries in Gozo that are more conducive to digital and technological innovation, as well as, contributing to broader environmental and societal goals. The Scheme also aims to promote continuous professional development, further valorising Gozo's human capital. This Scheme provides for a partial salary reimbursement of up to €8,000 per annum for a period of three years, for a total grant of up to a maximum of €24,000, and for a partial reimbursement of training costs of up to €1,500 per annum for a period of three years for each employee working within specific knowledge-intensive economic sectors based in Gozo. In 2024, a total of €2,032.79 was disbursed from funds allocated under this Scheme. In parallel, during the year, the Information Management Unit within the MGP, together with the business owners, worked on the issuance of a tender for the development and implementation of three business-specific applications. This was done following a business process and requirements collection exercise.

In line with this, digitisation practices will be introduced in the Care for the Elderly Section within the MGP, which provides community care services to over 1,400 elderly and disabled persons by means of 140 employees.

The Social Work Unit within the same Ministry provides professional help and assistance to various client groups with different backgrounds, who form part of our community. Currently, the Care for the Elderly Section is using several methods to keep data of where employees rendered their services and the number of hours they spent assisting the elderly, with the data eventually required to pay the employees accordingly. The data for both the Care for the Elderly Section and the Social Work Unit is still held in Excel sheets, files and other documents and everything is processed manually. The aim of this project is to digitise the information held in the manual systems and to introduce automated computations of what is due to the helpers in the Care for Elderly Section, as well as, a database to keep track and records of social work cases in the Social Care Unit. This will be done through the introduction of a web-based system. A further web-based system with a database to keep track and records of cases is also being developed for the Animal Welfare Section in MGP since this section is also currently processing and storing the data about the different cases manually.

Digitisation processes are also being implemented in the tourism sector in Malta. Tourism in Malta is almost exclusively dependent on air connectivity, which transports over 98% of tourists visiting the Maltese Islands. Overseas digital advertising generates tourism demand, which, in turn, is channelled into floated aircraft capacity, thus ensuring that airline routes remain feasible due to high utilisation. Tourism influxes into the Maltese Islands are recognised for their positive economic impact arising from a high level of expenditure, which was estimated to reach €3.3 billion in 2024, and high multipliers arising from tourism expenditure's multiple re-use in the Maltese economic cycle. Tourism provides employment opportunities, full-time and part-time, to all of society, in a direct and indirect manner and through its expansion contributes strongly to economic growth and development.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Tourism, through the MTA, is currently developing an AI Tourism Platform.
The overall objective of the project, which is being funded by the Malta Digital Innovation Authority (MDIA), is to make use of AI techniques to process and combine different data sources and provide a better understanding of the tourist situation to make better-informed decisions based on the data. In this regard, 2024 marked the successful roll-out of the AI Platform and its deployment as a live service. The Contractor successfully deployed the Natural Language Processing Module, Recommendation Engine Module, Intelligent Insights Module (Dashboards), and the AI Tourism Platform on live service. These modules were first tested in a controlled testing environment and then transitioned to the production environment to ensure stability, performance, and readiness for use. The AI Tourism Platform provides access to a range of tools and resources in a centralised manner. This diverse portfolio encompasses data from traditional sources, such as surveys conducted by the National Statistics Office and the MTA, along with the integration of big data sources like short-term rental information, credit card transactions, mobile data, and air passenger movement data. The Platform is designed to serve the unique needs of various tourism stakeholders.

In line with this, a state-of-the-art AI data platform named MaltaSage was also developed. This platform aims to enhance tourism-related data analysis and decision-making processes. The platform is designed with various user access layers to ensure secure, efficient, and role-appropriate interaction with the system.

4.1.1.7 Enhancement of digital public procurement processes and tools

In order to continue digitising procurement processes and systems, in 2024, the Department of Contracts published an informative e-Forms Circular (Contracts Circular 4/2024) titled 'e-Forms: Structure, Function and Operation'. In view of the significant benefits of eForms, their continuous updating and implementation in Malta ensure that public procurement remains pivotal in the digital transformation. In view of this fact, Malta has just started utilising Software Development Kit V 1.9.
In addition to simplification, eForms provide for

consistency and standardisation, thus reducing administrative burdens, as well as attaining improved public procurement data accuracy and reliability. This will ultimately increase transparency, integrity, effectiveness and efficient data accuracy. Accordingly, Malta shall be equipped with evidence-based data resulting in improved governance and justified data-driven policy decisions about public spending. Such a proactive approach in relation to eForms' development shall ascertain that any new requirements within the context of public procurement processes, which at times achieve overarching objectives, are regularly reflected in eForms.

Furthermore, throughout 2024, a variety of minor quality of life enhancements and changes took place, thereby ensuring an enriched user experience on the Government's Electronic Public Procurement System (ePPS). In addition, during 2024, the necessary preparatory work vis-à-vis new ePPS modules in relation to the appeals procedure, as well as to the compliance and monitoring modus operandi, also took place.

4.1.1.8 The use of digital technologies for compliance and monitoring purposes

During 2024, the MPF launched a new user-centric website for enhanced public access and customised information, a significant step forward in its commitment to ensuring safety and security through accessible and immediate information. Developed with the user experience in mind, the new website provides the community with an innovative, efficient, and mobile-friendly platform. Through its Remote Reporting Unit, as of July 2024, the MPF introduced the option to file a police report remotely, for both crime victims and crime witnesses, allowing reporting to be done without the need for the person to go to a police station.

Furthermore, the MPF hosted officials from the Montenegro Police for a study visit focused on integrating body-worn cameras into their policing practices.

4.1.2 Enhancing electronic communications services

2024 continued to see progress when it comes to the improvement of services, particularly regarding systems of electronic communication. On this, GO Plc continued with the rollout of its Fibre to the Home (FTTH) network, providing various locations with gigabit speeds. At the end of the third quarter of 2024, GO Plc's FTTH coverage reached approximately 92% of all homes and 100% of businesses in Malta. It intends to complete its FTTH rollout in 2025. GO Plc is expected to gradually decommission its copper-based network once it has deployed its nationwide FTTH network. Additionally, Epic Communications Limited offers fixed broadband internet access services over its own FTTH network in selected locations, as well as over GO Plc's FTTH network in order to achieve nationwide fixed broadband service. The rollout of fibre, which is replacing less energy-efficient legacy copper networks, is just one example of a development that will help ensure the sector's environmental sustainability.

In line with the above, Malta is also served by two 2G (Global System for Mobile Communication) mobile networks, three 3G (Universal Mobile Telecommunication System) mobile networks, three 4G (Long Term Evolution) mobile networks, and three 5G (Non-standalone) mobile networks. Moreover, the Malta Communications Authority (MCA) conducted two broadband reach mapping surveys in 2024. These surveys, undertaken in accordance with the obligation set out in Article 22 of the European Electronic Communications Code, aim to provide comprehensive information on the location and extent of coverage of the nation's broadband infrastructure and services.

While the MCA remains dedicated to facilitating Very High-Capacity Networks deployment, it is also vigilant about the resilience and security of electronic communications networks throughout the value chain. Recognising that network resiliency involves factors such as redundancy, flexibility, and scalability, largely within the operator's responsibility, the MCA acknowledges its role in overseeing the interdependency of resiliency and security. In fact, during 2024, the MCA collaborated closely with the Critical Infrastructure Protection Directorate, the entity responsible for overseeing the implementation of the NIS 2 Directive in Malta. Following the completion of the transposition of the NIS 2 Directive into the Maltese legal framework, existing security frameworks will require alignment with the eventual framework established to implement the EU Directive on measures for achieving a high common level of cybersecurity across the EU (NIS 2 Directive).

4.1.3 Enhancing Digital Skills

Throughout 2024, several initiatives were carried out to enhance digital skills, particularly those relating to cybersecurity. During this year, MITA supported the UM through a collaboration that resulted in the UM offering a Master of Science in Cybersecurity course starting from October 2024, in line with the industry requirements. MITA sponsored a specialised cybersecurity lab, thus facilitating practical cyber modules. This is essential to secure a supply of cybersecurity knowledge and skills.

Furthermore, in 2023, MITA had launched the Cyber Skilling Programme whereby the first course was launched addressing Security Operations Centre (SOC) Analyst. The course was compiled in such a way that it is accessible to anyone having an interest in cybersecurity or wanting to make a career change. Up until 2024, six rounds of the SOC training programme were committed with almost 100 participants undergoing this training.

In 2024, Tech.mt successfully concluded an Erasmus+ funded project called 'CybARverse', which aimed to create a platform for training in cybersecurity in the VET sector, including through the adoption of immersive technologies like augmented reality. The project, which will continue to be sustained through collaboration with the Directorate for Digital Literacy & Transversal Skills, has been instrumental in increasing awareness of cybersecurity, as the issue becomes ever more important. Tech.mt has been able to organise workshops with officials from the Directorate so that the resulting platform and learning products created through the project can be used in schools around Malta.
Additionally, in 2024, Tech.mt was involved in the creation of the 'inMalta' brand initiative, together with Malta Enterprise, FinanceMalta, GamingMalta and the MDIA, to help the local tech industry and attract foreign direct investment. As a result of the business missions carried out under the 'inMalta' brand, Tech.mt has been able to assist digital innovation through fintech, medtech, edtech and other tech-based startups in Malta.

When it comes to the adoption of digital technologies, the mainstreaming of e-skills in education, and supporting digital skills development, in 2024, Tech.mt organised and participated in various events aimed at students, the industry, and tech startups, through such events, Tech.mt collaborated with local companies and organisations, including Junior Achievement (JA) Malta Foundation, MCAST, EU Startups, Public Service, Ernst & Young, Supercharger, and many others.

These projects, events, and initiatives were complemented with media campaigns to further Malta's goal towards achieving a digitally empowered economy and society, also by highlighting women in tech and junior innovators in Malta. In this regard, an important collaboration of considerable impact with MDIA provided a Summer School and Summer Bootcamp to youths in Malta between July and September. These were carried out in collaboration with the MCAST Gateway to Industry and UM. Over 150 students participated in this initiative. Additionally, the development of the EU co-funded Maltese Digital Skills and Jobs Portal, codenamed LISP, has now been finalised. The platform is a single-point regarding digital and education skills and supports national stakeholders in sharing their digital skills and job-related activities with other relevant national coalition networks of actors in the Member States of the EU.

Malta has also placed first in EU Code Week 2024 with the highest number of coding sessions organised per capita. Over 400 coding sessions were held nationwide, engaging participants of all ages in learning essential digital skills and coding knowledge between 14 and 27 October 2024. In 2024, the Hour of Code event focused on generative AI, where various tools were provided for free. The eSkills Malta foundation promoted this with all the schools in Malta through the Government, Church, and independent schools' digital literacy departments.

Furthermore, the eSkills Malta Foundation collaborated with FES to provide engaging robotics sessions to young students about the basics of robotics and programming in a fun and interactive environment. The children participated in hands-on activities, building, and programming their own robots. A further collaboration took place in 2024 with All-Digital, a Brussels-based Digital Skills organisation, which provided the Foundation with many resources and tools pertaining to education, industry, government and society. The Foundation collaborated with the Local Councils' Association to drive the All-Digital Weeks in Malta.

As part of its yearly commitments, the eSkills Malta Foundation also supported the I CHOOSE Fair 2024, organised by the MEYR. Additionally, a number of Information and Communication Technology industry visits for secondary level students coming from public and church schools were organised. The eSkills Malta Foundation also collaborated with JA Malta in an initiative to support and sponsor the 'Best Use of Technology Award'. This award celebrates the mini-company that demonstrates exceptional innovation and best practices in the integration of technology within its business model. It encourages young entrepreneurs and future leaders to embrace digital solutions, even when their core product or service is not technology-based, through the use of tools and methodologies such as e-commerce, digital automation, digital marketing, or similar technology. The award highlights the value of embedding digital tools in entrepreneurial projects and fosters practical, hands-on learning. The winning team is the one that most effectively leverages technology to strengthen a key aspect of their business, whether operational or customer-facing.

From a national skills perspective, the National Skills Council (NSC) is currently conducting a training gap analysis on green and digital skills, with a view to enhance workforce readiness for the twin transition. Following a broad definition of training opportunities in the area of green skills, an analysis of existing training opportunities is being conducted, focusing on accredited qualifications at European Qualifications Framework levels 4, 5, 6 and 7. This assessment aims to identify gaps where existing courses could be enhanced, or new ones developed, to meet evolving current and future demands. Findings from this desktop evaluation will then be openly discussed with industry stakeholders through a sectoral approach, and final recommendations will be presented and discussed with academia and VET institutions. A similar procedure is being applied for training opportunities in digital skills.

4.2

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

The Green Mobility Scheme, published on 27 March 2024, promotes clean, sustainable and modern energy in the transport sector. The transport sector is a major contributor to GHG emissions. EVs are required in accordance with the EU's objective of becoming the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. The aim of the scheme is to support the sustainable transition through the accelerated uptake of EVs for the transportation of both people and goods, and to support investment in recharging infrastructure. The objectives of this scheme are being reflected in a number of initiatives carried out by various Government Entities and Departments.

The GGH is also offering a park and ride service from GGH's main campus to the Child and Adolescent Youth Services premises, facilitating parking access for patients and strengthening transport links and connectivity, as well as improving the management of freight and urban logistics. This also aligns with Secondary Healthcare procedures being explored to ensure a smooth transport system for patients and clients visiting the Vincent Moran Regional Hub, including transport services in collaboration with various stakeholders, such as the Paola Local Council.

Similarly, from an educational services perspective, the FES, which operates Klabb 3-16 across 38 centres in Malta and Gozo, is collaborating with the MEYR Transport Unit to facilitate transportation for children from areas without a Klabb 3-16 service to those that offer this after-school programme.

4.3

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

During 2024, the Government of Malta continued to strengthen its efforts in further promoting R&I as a driver of sustainable growth across all sectors. This is highlighted in a number of initiatives and policies, such as in the National R&I Strategic Plan 2023 – 2027, which was formally launched in March, where sustainability remains a key focus. This Plan acts as the flagship strategy for strengthening Malta's R&I and enhancing its directionality with regard to addressing social and economic issues through R&I. Efforts towards its implementation have been actively progressing in collaboration with key stakeholders throughout 2024. There has been notable progress in implementing several recommendations, including the strengthening of the Malta Council for Science and Technology's legal status through its transition to an agency, Xjenza Malta; the establishment of a Community of Practice for Research Funding Organisations; and the strengthening of connections with Maltese diaspora researchers and other government ministries and entities.

In addition, Recommendation 3.2 of the Strategic Plan, "Green and Digital directionality", seeks to strengthen synergies with the broader EU focus on digitalisation and sustainability. This would include an enhanced drive towards R&I thematically focused on sustainability that is empowered by broader EU roadmaps while remaining based in the domestic strengths and capabilities of Malta's own research ecosystem and geography. Furthermore, with respect to monitoring, the 'No. of publications in the areas of Green, Digital, Health, and Energy Innovation as a percentage of total Maltese publications' and the 'Eco-Innovation Index' constitute two of the identified metrics that will be monitored throughout the span of the Strategic Plan.

In line with this, through the support of the Smart Specialisation Strategy Community of Practice, Xjenza Malta is currently participating in the Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships, which are intended to bring together regions with complementary Smart Specialisation Strategies to explore new value chains in specific priority areas. On the topic of Thematic Programmes, these were also established in a collaboration between the MDIA and Xjenza Malta with the aim of improving Malta's R&I landscape by creating a cohesive system for researchers and entrepreneurs to develop their innovative ideas within a comprehensive, well-adapted environment suited to their sector. Complementary to this, following recommendations put forth by the Sustainable Use of Resources for Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Committee, in 2024 Xjenza Malta identified and joined the Sustainable Buildings partnership, which will be tackling energy efficiency in buildings, eco-construction and renewable integration in buildings, with the aim of increasing interregional collaboration, building capacity and facilitating knowledge sharing.

In addition to the above, Xjenza Malta offers different support schemes to assist Maltese entities to participate more actively in programmes such as Horizon Europe, which is the EU's flagship R&I programme that recognises the interconnectedness of scientific and technological advancements with global challenges and seeks to address these challenges in areas such as health, climate action, clean energy and sustainable agriculture. Since the beginning of the programme in 2021, Maltese entities have received more than €42 million in net contribution from Horizon Europe. Schemes offered by Xjenza Malta include proposal writing assistance to project coordinators, coaching and pitch training for European Innovation Council projects, and a networking scheme.

During 2024, the Government also continued to support projects relating to STEM subjects and research, such as through Xjenza Malta and the Ministry of Science and Technology in China's call for funding to support bilateral R&I projects between Maltese and Chinese researchers. In 2024, the sixth call for proposals was launched, focusing on digital technologies, health, and green transitions. Ongoing evaluations are intended to conclude with the selection of six projects. Furthermore, the National STEM Community Fund provides grants of up to €8,000 per project, with a total of €24,000 distributed in 2024 across four projects. The primary aim of the fund is to enable the implementation of participatory STEM projects that are based on the theoretical and practical aspects of STEM, and which involve citizens and STEM professionals working together.

The 'Development of Resources and Improving Visibility for Engineering in STEM', known as DRIVE STEM, by the Chamber of Engineers, was a project supported by the above fund. This project will promote engineering careers to students through the creation of digital resources, an in-person event, and training for educators and career guidance professionals.

In line with the above, the Education Unit within Esplora Interactive Science Centre is also deeply committed to advancing the SDGs through different educational programmes and initiatives throughout the year. By fostering scientific curiosity and environmental stewardship, these aim to empower individuals and communities to take informed actions for a sustainable future. Esplora strives to be accessible and inclusive in all efforts, embracing gender differences, diversity, and equality in general. The educational programmes prioritise accessible, inclusive, and equitable quality education for all ages, fostering lifelong learning and inspiring the next generation of scientists and innovators. They actively promote gender equity through targeted workshops that challenge stereotypes and highlight opportunities in STEM for all genders. The programmes incorporated in 2024 include:

- 'Little Sprouts', which is a storytelling workshop that introduces young learners to the seed and butterfly lifecycle, promoting an understanding of biodiversity and life cycles. This programme encourages an appreciation for the diversity of life and ecosystems by focusing on the life cycle of plants and butterflies.

- 'Catch Them Young', which is designed to break down stereotypes in STEM fields and careers. This hands-on workshop encourages diverse participation and equitable opportunities in science and technology, specifically addressing gender stereotypes in STEM to foster a culture of inclusion and equality.

- 'Akkwatiku', which is a workshop that addresses biodiversity and sustainable practices in aquatic ecosystems, such as responsible fishing and aquaculture.

- 'Karta Festa', which is a Carnival-themed event demonstrating sustainable practices, such as creating floats using recycled materials and sustainable techniques.

- 'Weatherology', which is an interactive science show that explores different climates and weather patterns across the globe, highlighting their connections to climate change.

- 'Climate Conundrum', which is a hands-on workshop that delves into the history of the climate crisis and practical, sustainable solutions to address this global challenge; and

- 'Soil Investigators', which highlights the importance of soil as a fundamental resource for life, teaching participants about its physical properties and its role in sustainable agriculture.

Through such programmes, designed to engage diverse audiences in meaningful scientific exploration, the Government is ensuring that it continues to champion the integration of sustainability into education, inspiring curiosity, innovation, and informed action towards the achievement of the SDGs. This is also reflected in other efforts the Government is carrying out, particularly through the Research Excellence Programme (REP), which has the primary aim to spur the growth of new knowledge through experimental evidence following scientific hypotheses. The programme is intended to fund projects that 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 €80,000 in 2024. 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 2024 call, two projects were awarded with respect to sustainable development. Furthermore, the Technology Development Programme (TDP) Lite 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 programme is designed to provide an expedited route for Maltese innovators to develop and demonstrate their novel technologies.

This route to commercialisation will allow for new entrepreneurial ventures based on innovations in competitive industries. The TDP Lite provides a grant of up to €150,000 to Maltese registered entities. Six projects have been provided with funding under the 2024 call with regard to sustainable development.

R&I also plays a crucial role in healthcare. As outlined in the National Health Systems Strategy for Malta 2023-2030, coupling research activities with the provision of healthcare services improves standards of care and enhances the overall performance of the health system. It also draws the interest of high-level expertise within a health system and encourages the engagement and retention of top professionals. Better health outcomes and improved quality of care would result from these endeavours, and health professionals would be spurred on to achieve better results for patients and the general population.

During 2024, the DAHS collaborated in a Technical Support Instrument (TSI) project, titled 'Support for Strengthening the Maltese Allied Health Workforce', which assisted it in drafting policies and carrying out research. The latter was done through surveys conducted for staff members and service users. The results shown in the final report provided an in-depth analysis of the current Allied Health System.

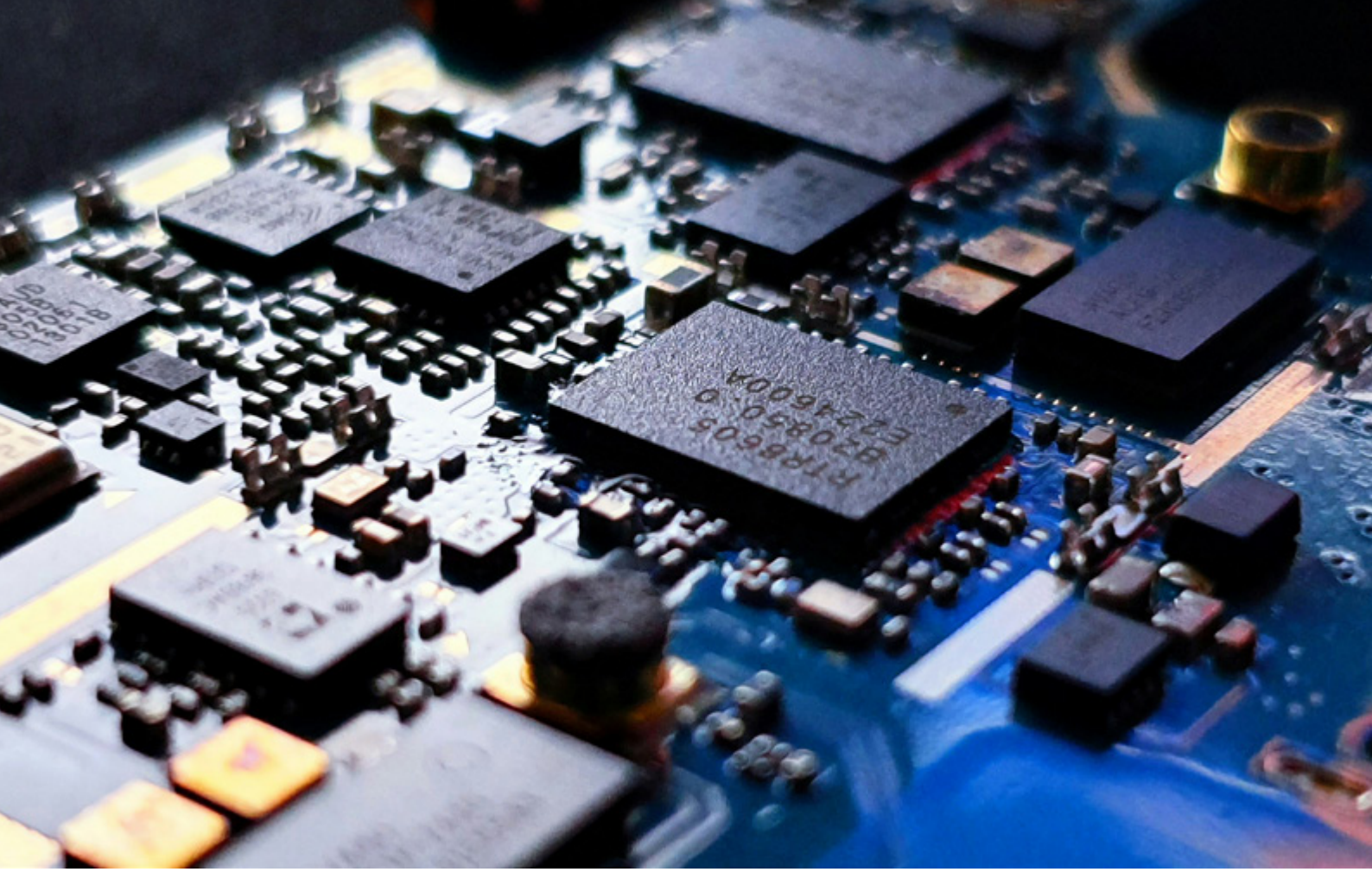
In the second half of 2024, numerous meetings were held with various stakeholders to establish a Clinical Research Institute. The latter would serve as a focal point, as well as facilitate the studies that will be carried out mainly at MDH, both investigator-led and industry-led. It would also assist in the application for EU-funded health-related projects. Malta Enterprise, Xjenza Malta, as well as academics from the UM were amongst the major stakeholders in the initiation of this project. Meetings with all interested parties were held to establish the current lacunae in research and innovation in healthcare, as well as outline the way forward to enable the set-up of a research institute that is self-sustainable and results in benefits both to the healthcare professionals and patients.

In the future, a Clinical Research Institute will also be set up in Gozo. The two entities will be functioning together and not independently, thus ensuring the effectiveness of both entities. Furthermore, there are ongoing discussions with Queen Mary University of London, which is keen to collaborate in this project to ensure positive outcomes for both parties involved.

In addition, from an EU perspective, there is also a major push towards involvement in EU-funded projects. In the last quarter of 2024, Malta joined a consortium in relation to a Horizon Europe call addressing the care of HIV patients. The MHA will also be applying for Horizon Europe's WIDERA fund, Teaming for Excellence. A successful application will allow funds to be allocated for establishing a research hub for SAMOC at MDH.

2024 has also seen a rapid progression of the projects that received funding from the Space Upstream Programme. A vast majority of them are now actively engaged in testing and data collection, a phase that marks a critical step in validating the concepts and technologies developed during this Programme. Regular update meetings with project leads continue to be held every six months. These meetings have proven essential in monitoring progress, addressing challenges, and ensuring alignment with programme objectives. All projects are on track to be completed by the established deadline of 1 June 2025.

Further to the above, as Malta's representative in the 5+5 Dialogue on R&I and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) Regional Platform, Xjenza Malta advanced regional and international cooperation through science diplomacy. It actively contributed to addressing UfM priorities, including health, renewable energy, and climate change, and supported the 5+5 Dialogue's goals through the organisation of dedicated events as well as signing the Lisbon Declaration (6th Ministerial Conference) to continue the work in this important regional dialogue, promoting sustainable development, youth employment, and the UN's 2030 Agenda.



Xjenza Malta also played a key role in the Global Approach to R&I and contributed to the Multilateral Dialogue on Principles and Values in R&I and International cooperation. In February 2024, it supported the adoption of the Brussels Statement, which underscores the role of international cooperation in addressing global challenges, achieving SDGs, and benefitting societies and economies globally.

In 2024, Xjenza Malta signed an agreement with the National Research Council of Italy to strengthen scientific cooperation between Malta and Italy in areas such as maritime technologies, digital innovation, health, resource sustainability, smart manufacturing, aerospace, and cultural heritage.

Complementing the above, the Government of Malta developed the 'Strategy and Vision for AI in Malta 2030', which is the National AI Strategy focusing on investment, resources and attention in ways that maximise the benefits for Malta and its contributions to the global economy. This Strategy aims to map the path for Malta to gain a strategic competitive advantage in the global economy as a leader in the AI field with the use of a holistic approach.

It also aims to give due focus to the needs of various groups of stakeholders as the country looks forward to achieving its vision. Such efforts are also reflected in the MDIA Applied Research Grant, which aims to support capacity-building efforts related to AI; digital trust; knowledge, data representation and analysis; technology for sustainability and ESG; and/or quantum computing and other emerging technologies.

During 2024, the Government also continued to enhance its efforts in promoting R&D within the private sector. In this regard, the R&D Scheme, published on 23 January 2024, is targeted to support industry in undertaking Industrial Research and Experimental Development activities through projects addressing both scientific or technological uncertainties, to lead towards the development of innovative solutions and products.

Furthermore, Innovate - Innovation Aid for SMEs was also launched on 18 January 2024. This aims to support SMEs in carrying out projects leading to product, process and organisational innovation through collaborations with research and knowledge dissemination organisations or through innovation advisory services with the provision of funding for the secondment of Highly Qualified Personnel, and access to innovation advisory and support services. The Scheme facilitates access to expertise and the generation of new knowledge, thus achieving the scope of accelerating innovation, enhancing business performance and driving competitive advantage.

4.3.1 R&I projects in the field of environmental sustainability

In terms of environmental sustainability, Malta is participating in and leading several initiatives aimed at improving the health and resilience of its environment. Malta is co-leading the Joint Programming Initiative (JPI) Oceans Joint Action – Science for Good Environmental Status (S4GES), in collaboration with Italy and Belgium, to adopt an innovative approach to the evaluation of the marine GES. The Action seeks to achieve a better understanding of marine ecosystems, how multiple activities impact the environment, and how the requests of the MSFD can be fulfilled. This Joint Action aims to coordinate R&I to introduce a complementary approach to the MSFD. During 2024, S4GES completed the first phase of its work and published a pivotal paper introducing a novel approach to monitoring and evaluating the health of our seas. In the second phase of S4GES, a joint call will be launched to address critical knowledge gaps and enhance the scientific basis underpinning the MSFD. By consolidating existing knowledge and integrating innovative, process-based monitoring approaches, the upcoming joint call further aims to improve the accuracy and effectiveness of environmental assessments. Central to this effort is the development of augmented observatories and the implementation of collaborative, transnational research activities. Moreover, Maltese-based entities will receive support by Xjenza Malta to participate in successful collaborative projects.

In line with the above, in 2024, Xjenza Malta officially appointed a team of local experts from MCAST and the UM. These experts are actively contributing to the activities of the Knowledge Hub, officially launched in 2024, which is currently operating through three dedicated working groups. The Policy Working Group is currently developing three policy briefs addressing the MSFD, LULUCF, and the Nature Restoration law on linkages and gaps between policy objectives and the blue carbon field. On the other hand, the State of the Art Working Group is carrying out a review of available knowledge on blue carbon habitats, whilst the Data Repository Working Group is working towards preparing a brief that will guide the creation of a data platform. Synergies with existing platforms/databases, like the European Marine Observation and Data Network, are also being sought.

Additionally, the Knowledge Hub on Blue Carbon was also officially endorsed in March 2024 as a project by the Global Ocean Decade Programme for Blue Carbon and as the European Regional Hub (Euro-BC). Euro-BC contributes to JPI Oceans' multidisciplinary network of the Programme and will work towards creating the databases for habitat extent, vulnerability, carbon stock, and sequestration rate data, which the Knowledge Hub will produce. Upon the completion of the Working Groups' efforts, a Joint Call is expected to be established to address key knowledge gaps, generate new knowledge and advance R&I on blue carbon across the countries participating in the Joint Action.

Furthermore, the JPI Oceans Management Board agreed to launch a Scoping Action on Offshore Freshened Groundwater as a means to alleviate water scarcity and advance scientific knowledge of this largely known resource. This Scoping Action is led by Malta and co-led by Italy and the decision on whether it should be approved as a Joint Action will be taken in 2025.

Complementing this, in 2024, Xjenza Malta also joined the Joint Action on Changing Marine Lightscapes that seeks to enhance knowledge and understanding of how marine lightscapes are changing through artificial light and turbidity, respectively, the drivers of change, the impacts on biodiversity and ecosystems, and how to manage these changes. A Joint Call, launched in 2024, led to a successful project involving a Maltese beneficiary from the UM. The Call's aims are aligned with the UN Ocean Decade's goal of fostering transformative and inclusive ocean science for sustainable development. It is accordingly co-branded with the UN Ocean Decade, meaning that funded projects are also endorsing Decade Actions.

The UM, together with MCAST, also benefitted from transnational partnerships through which innovation investments and national programmes could be aligned at pan-European scale, taking into consideration the sea-basin and Atlantic Ocean dimension. Both UM and MCAST were successfully awarded the 2023 Call under the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership (SBEP), beginning their work in 2024. The results of the 2024 Call are expected in early 2025. The SBEP will continue to launch annual calls for proposals until 2027, with such proposals addressing several intervention areas, including the development and validation of Ocean Digital Twins at sub-sea-basin scale; blue generation marine structures; planning and managing sea-uses; and healthy blue food under a one-health-approach.

Partnerships also play a crucial role in initiatives such as the BlueMissionMed project, which is an EU-funded initiative that aims to bring together a diverse consortium of research institutions, NGOs, industrial associations, and SMEs across the Mediterranean to tackle pollution in oceans, seas, and waters. Through a multi-disciplinary approach, it has established the Mediterranean Light House as a hub for transformative solutions, integrating technological, social, business, and governance innovations. The project emphasises collaboration with existing networks and stakeholders, aligning with the EC's mission implementation strategies, and fostering basin-wide cooperation among Mediterranean Light Houses. Key achievements include mapping 239 projects offering innovative solutions, clustering and analysing 86 of them for upscaling, and engaging stakeholders through national and regional hubs. Governance bodies have been involved in guiding implementation, resulting in a Terms of Reference and Operational Implementation Roadmap for the Light House. Efforts to align and coordinate with the Mission Secretariat and other initiatives have been integral, with active participation in working groups and meetings. The project has also laid the groundwork for systemic transformation and sustainability by developing plans for the deployment, upscaling, and transferability of its outcomes, with further activities planned for subsequent phases. Outreach and awareness have been central to BlueMissionMed's strategy. It has implemented a comprehensive communication plan, created educational materials and organised large-scale events, exhibitions, and campaigns. Tools such as the Business Country Desk platform have facilitated access to knowledge and networking opportunities, while initiatives like the Society4Med Award have promoted citizen engagement and co-designed solutions. These efforts collectively aim to ensure widespread impact, foster collaboration, and support the project's long-term sustainability.

Together with the BlueMissionMed project and other efforts promoting the blue economy, joint calls were also launched for initiatives addressing the energy transition. This is reflected in the Clean Energy Transition Partnership (CETP), which is a transnational initiative on joint Research, Technological Development, and Innovation programming seeking to boost and accelerate the energy transition. The overarching aim is to empower the energy transition and contribute to the EU's goal of becoming the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. The CETP launched three Joint Calls with the aim of funding projects that develop practical solutions and deliver results for the clean energy transition within one of the seven thematic configurations of the partnership. These include integrated net-zero energy systems at the regional and industrial levels, as well as within the built environment, along with enhanced zero-emission power technologies, storage technologies, renewable fuels, and efficient heating and cooling solutions. Two projects with Maltese partners from the UM were awarded in 2024, both focusing on integrated net-zero-emission energy systems. The CETP will launch Joint Transnational Calls until 2027.

4.3.2 R&I projects in the field of tourism and cultural heritage

The Government has also been investing in R&I for the promotion of tourism and the preservation of the Maltese Islands' cultural heritage. This is being done through several initiatives and projects, such as Tech Beyond Borders, a project being led by the Port Regional Council and funded through the National STEM Community Fund of 2024, which makes use of technology such as virtual reality to deliver education on appreciating and safeguarding culture and the local environment to citizens, including vulnerable people, residing in the Port region.

Through the SCH, Malta is also forming part of the Horizon 2021-2027 project titled BCThubs: Blue Culture Technology Excellence Hubs in EU Widening Member States. Through this project, the SCH will be investing in technology to assist in the monitoring and surveillance of underrepresented Underwater Cultural Heritage (UWCH) sites that do not currently form part of national sites. These sites vary from pottery scatter to wrecks. This technology will allow for the detection of degradation and illicit looting. Under this project, a number of R&I topics are being explored, including underwater research supporting services/capabilities; services for improving on-site and remote accessibility; UWCH assets' safeguarding services/capabilities; and underwater health and safety services/capabilities.
In addition to this, in order to further promote sustainable practices within the tourism sector, Malta is also participating in the Virtual & Augmented Reality Trainers Toolbox to Foster Low Carbon Tourism & Related Entrepreneurship project, better known as VINCI, which is a Strategic Partnership project in adult education funded by the EU's Erasmus+ programme. The project, which was concluded in January 2024, aimed to promote low-carbon tourism and entrepreneurship across EU Member States by uniting seven partners with expertise in climate change, sustainability, tourism, entrepreneurship, training, curriculum development, and digital technologies. One of these partners is the ITS (Institute of Tourism Studies).

Furthermore, the MTA is also participating in the EU-funded project Cross-Re-Tour, which seeks to promote open innovation and allow SMEs to improve their operational performance by integrating digital, green and circular economy practices. The main areas of focus are water, energy, plastic, food, equipment/furniture, mobility, client nudging and staff development. Eight project partners from eight different EU Member States are collaborating on this project. During 2024, in addition to marketing efforts to promote the project, a green and digital solution mapping exercise was carried out by each partner. Moreover, during the year, an online dialogue and a Call for Challenges, together with a Call for Proposals, were launched. Under the latter, SMEs from the Cross-Re-Tour project countries were invited to present innovative tourism project proposals to enhance their green and digital innovation. Other milestones for 2024 include the organisation of capacity building initiatives and the provision of Business Advisory Services in green and digital transition for SMEs participating in the Call for Challenges.

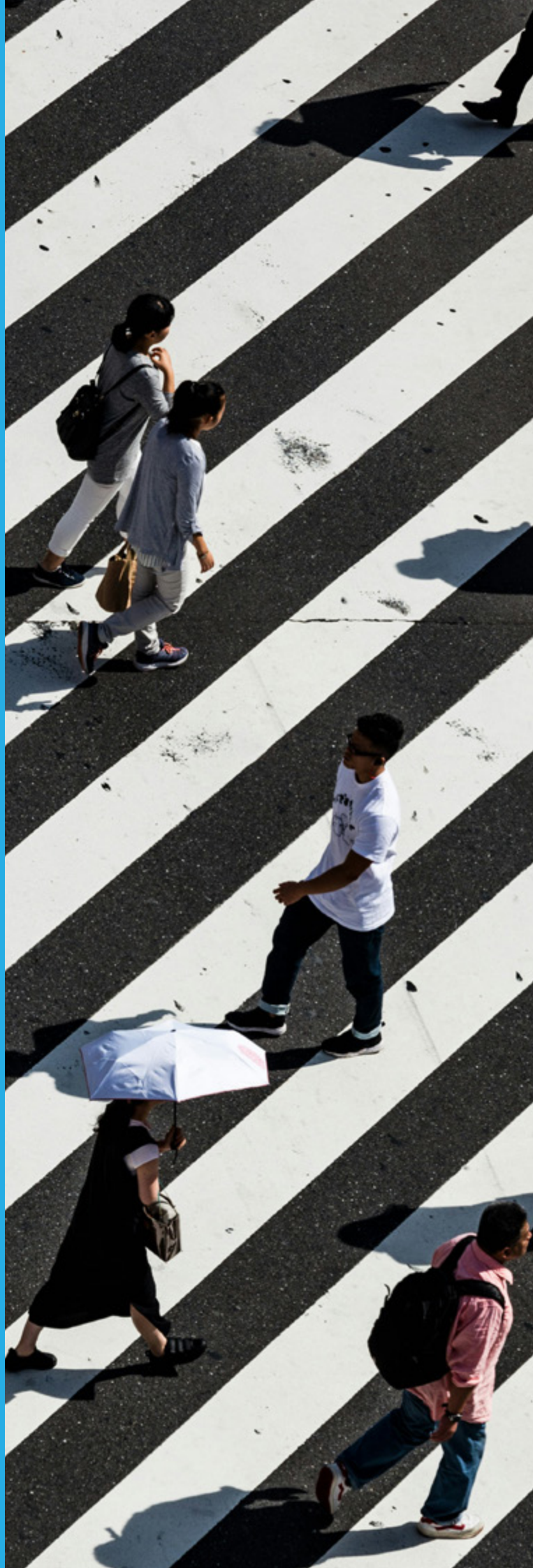
4.3.3 R&I projects in the agricultural and food sectors

Malta is also strengthening its efforts when it comes to the promotion of the agricultural and food sectors through more investment in R&I initiatives. In this regard, the Partnership for R&I in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA) facilitates collaborative R&I in the areas of water management, farming systems and the agro-food value chain. PRIMA operates under two main lines of funding, with Section 1 Calls being funded through EC funds and Section 2 Calls being funded by the countries participating in PRIMA. In February 2024, the Internationalisation Unit within Xjenza Malta organised a hybrid event titled PRIMA COLLABORATE, which was an event uniting MED researchers in Malta for innovation. This event marked a great occasion for prospective applicants to familiarise themselves with the PRIMA programme, encourage collaboration among researchers in Malta and the rest of the Mediterranean, and foster innovation in the region in specific thematic areas.

In line with this, Xjenza Malta is a beneficiary of FUTURE4PRIMA, which is an EU-funded project launched in January 2024 and has the primary goal of fostering collaboration among the R&I funding bodies of the PRIMA Participating States. This helps in broadening PRIMA's thematic scope by advocating for an integrated resource management approach in the ecosystem, energy, and health sectors, thus advancing PRIMA's commitment to sustainable water management and food systems. Additionally, Xjenza Malta is leading efforts in WP5-Widening Actions to Extend the PRIMA Partnership, poised to promote inclusion and coordination in R&I to strengthen systems across Europe and its close neighbourhoods, adhering to Horizon Europe's principles, thus laying the groundwork for a renewed PRIMA partnership under the 10th EU framework programme.
Furthermore, Xjenza Malta and the Scientific Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBITAK) jointly launched four Bilateral Calls for R&I Proposals, whereby the 2024 Call featured the thematic areas of digital technologies, health and sustainable manufacturing, in addition to the PRIMA thematic areas mentioned above. Following the evaluation procedures, six projects were selected for funding.

Through PRIMA Section 3, the Internationalisation Unit also administers the PRIMA Training and Mobility Award, supporting Maltese entities to form collaborative links with at least one foreign counterpart from any of the PRIMA Participating States. Another call for participants was launched in 2024 and one Maltese private entity was awarded.

ACHIEVING SOCIAL FAIRNESS AND PROSPERITY FOR ALL



CHAPTER 05

2030 AGENDA RELATED GOALS

01. No Poverty

02. Zero Hunger

03. Good Health & Well-being

04. Quality Education

05. Gender Equality

08. Decent Work & Economic Growth

09. Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure

10. Reduce Inequalities

11. Sustainable Cities & Communities

12. Responsible Consumption & Production

13. Climate Action

16. Peace. Justice & Strong Institution

17. Partnership For The Goals

Building a truly inclusive society requires a vision that transcends traditional boundaries, where everyone, regardless of their race, gender, disability, or socio-economic status, has equal access to opportunities and resources to thrive. In 2024, the government introduced a series of progressive initiatives designed to address systemic inequalities, create pathways for empowerment, and reduce social exclusion. These initiatives span critical areas such as poverty reduction, gender equality, the rights of marginalised communities, and social inclusion, with a strong emphasis on fostering an environment where individuals can reach their fullest potential.

Central to this vision is a commitment to reshaping key societal sectors, including education, healthcare, and the justice system. In the education sphere, the government is working closely with industry partners to ensure that training and upskilling opportunities align with the demands of a rapidly evolving labour market, ensuring that all citizens are equipped with the tools needed to succeed in the workforce. The introduction of policies aimed at creating safe, supportive, and accessible spaces reflects an ongoing effort to ensure that every person has an equal chance to contribute meaningfully to society. Meanwhile, progressive reforms in the justice system aim to guarantee fairness, transparency, and accessibility for all citizens, regardless of their background.

Moreover, the government's focus on creating equitable opportunities within the labour market aims to eliminate discrimination, enhance working conditions, and provide fair wages, empowering workers across all sectors. This commitment extends to the promotion of work-life balance and the introduction of safety regulations designed to protect individuals, ensuring a secure and healthy working environment.

By empowering individuals, fostering inclusivity, and ensuring equal opportunities, the government is actively contributing to building a fairer, more sustainable future for all. Through these measures, the vision of a just society, where every individual has the support they need to thrive, is slowly becoming a reality, paving the way for future generations to live in a society that values diversity, equality, and opportunity for all.

This chapter explores these initiatives and the impact they have in addressing the key SDGs, including SDGs 1-5, 8-13, 16, and 17.

5.1

Empowering Individuals & Communities Through Policy Instruments & 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 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 five 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 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 seven 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 formalisation 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 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 forty 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	Ensure developed countries fully implement 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	Mobilise 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 UN 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 mobilise 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 Poverty reduction and social inclusion

In 2024, progress was made towards reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion through strategic policies and collaborative initiatives. By focusing on key areas such as education, healthcare, employment, and family support, these efforts aimed to improve the quality of life for all citizens. The MSPC developed comprehensive social policies and strategies with a view to address children and families. One such initiative was the launch of a Social Plan for the Family 2024-2030 for public consultation. This comprehensive strategic document aims to address the evolving needs of families, particularly those facing significant challenges. The plan focuses on four key priorities: promoting social justice, fostering healthy family relationships, empowering families with essential knowledge and skills, and addressing low fertility rates. In doing so, it aims to enhance the families' quality of life through targeted support in education, employment, and social services, while also striving to create a more inclusive society.

In support of these efforts, 2024 also saw the implementation of ongoing and new measures aligned with the strategic policy actions outlined in the National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion 2014-2024. Additionally, a renewed framework, the National Strategy for Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion 2025-2035, was published for public consultation. This new strategy goes beyond income disparities, focusing instead on promoting broader well-being through access to education, healthcare, and employment. By adopting a strategic foresight approach, it seeks to anticipate future shocks and opportunities, proposing actions to reach the targets to reduce the at-risk-of-poverty rate or social-exclusion rate (AROPE) by 3.1% and lower child poverty by 6% by 2030.

In addition, the Social Care Standards Authority (SCSA) initiated a series of collaborative platforms that brought together different services from the same fields. All service providers were invited to meet and discuss new developments, concerns, and the way forward. These platforms targeted various service areas, including disability, substance abuse, alternative care, supported accommodation, shelters, and domestic violence (DV). Stakeholder meetings were held for each of the groups and the SCSA received positive feedback from the service providers themselves as well as the staff who attended on their behalf. These meetings align with SCSA's philosophy in supporting the sustainability of social growth over time.

The Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS) within the MSPC, made further strides in improving the synergy of social services, particularly through a project focused on social auditing in nine localities. This initiative aims to foster integration and inclusion within the community. In 2024, to support this vision, a Self-Assessment Social Audit Tool was created, set to be launched in 2025, to promote cohesive communities through shared efforts and collective impact. This tool addresses six critical key areas to advancing social fairness and prosperity: (1) engaging communities and stakeholders, (2) leadership, (3) governance and management, (4) communication and public relations, (5) sustainable development, and (6) reflective practice. By using this tool, organisations can strengthen inclusivity and accountability by rooting policies and practices in the needs and aspirations of the community. Through enhanced collaboration among stakeholders, the promotion of sustainable practices, and the encouragement of professional growth, the tool transforms organisations into equitable spaces that support cohesive and resilient communities. Its emphasis on reflective practices ensures continuous learning and adaptation, laying the groundwork for long-term social fairness and prosperity for all.

In 2024, several measures and initiatives related to contributory and non-contributory benefits were rolled out to further support poverty reduction and social inclusion. The increase in the Children's Allowance reflect the Government's commitment to sustainable development by promoting social equity and thus ensuring that families have the necessary support to nurture their children.

This initiative aligns with the broader goals of eradicating poverty, enhancing social inclusion, and improving the well-being of children, thereby contributing towards a more inclusive and sustainable society. 2024 marked the largest increase provided for the Children's Allowance to date, with an increase of €250 per child. This social benefit affects more than 41,000 families with 62,000 children. This measure is broadly in line with the commitments undertaken by Malta in the National Action Plan for a Child Guarantee 2022-2030.

In parallel, the Government continued its strategic reforms to ensure the long-term sustainability of public finances. Key reforms in the pension system were designed to balance fiscal sustainability with income adequacy for retirees. The main initiatives included the progressive increases in the retirement age, increases in the contributory period required to be granted full pension and the provision of fiscal incentives to those who choose to defer retirement beyond retirement age. In addition, the Government has also progressed in enabling and encouraging the diversification of retirement income through the introduction and subsequent strengthening of tax incentives with respect to voluntary third pillar pensions and voluntary occupational pensions. In this regard, the Economic Policy Department within Ministry for Finance (MFIN) concluded the Pension Projections, published as part of the Ageing Working Group's Ageing Report (2024). Such projections, together with healthcare and long-term care projections, enable policy analysis and assessments in the area. In addition, the Department continued to support the pension reform process in Malta.

Up to December 2023, the Maximum Pensionable Income for those born prior to 1962 was increased only by the cost-of-living adjustment, whereas the Maximum Pensionable Income for those born during or after 1962 was increased by 30% of the increase in inflation, together with 70% of the cost-of-living adjustment. This created a difference in the pension rates awarded to those born prior to 1962 and those born during and after 1962. As from 2024, the 70-30 mechanism was enacted for those born prior to 1962 so that their Maximum Pensionable Income will eventually become equal to those born during and after 1962. In 2024, there were 21,625 pensioners born prior to 1962 who benefitted from an Updated Maximum Pensionable Income that was equal or greater to €22,000 per annum.

This 70-30 mechanism means that when inflation returns to normal levels in the future, all pensioners will continue to receive annual pension increases that are adjusted to keep up with the cost of living. This ensures that pensioners, regardless of their year of birth, will maintain their purchasing power and enjoy an adequate yet secure and sustainable retirement income. This reform not only promotes fairness across different age groups but also contributes towards sustainable development by ensuring long-term financial security for all pensioners, reducing the (AROPE) among the elderly, and fostering economic stability.

The reform to the Unemployment Benefit in 2024 linked the benefit rate to the individuals' salary prior to unemployment. For the first six weeks of registered unemployment, the applicable benefit rate was set to be equivalent to 60% of the applicant's salary.

The rate is subsequently reduced to 55% of the salary for the following 10 weeks, and to 50% for the final 10 weeks of the benefit period. The total number of beneficiaries who began to benefit from the reformed rates amounted to around 1,165 persons. This reform not only provides more equitable, realistic, and responsive financial support to those facing unemployment, but also contributes towards sustainable development by promoting economic resilience, reducing the AROPE, and supporting a smoother transition back into the labour market.

In 2024, the newly adjusted eligibility mechanism for Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) was enhanced to reach more families, following comprehensive discussions with the trade unions and the relevant stakeholders. The benefit was granted to those with a national median income, based on the number of household members, and ranged between €100 and €1,500 per annum. The payments associated with this benefit were distributed in two instalments, benefiting around 99,000 families, or 149,000 individuals, to mitigate the negative effects arising from high inflation. Moreover, through the cost-of-living increase, which impacted 100,000 individuals, pensioners received €15 more per week, amounting to €780 annually.

Key reforms were also introduced aimed at improving the support structure for individuals in receipt of social and sickness assistance. As part of these reforms, all beneficiaries of Social Assistance, which totalled approximately 5,800 beneficiaries in 2024, began receiving the full COLA. This measure reflects the Maltese Government's commitment to safeguarding the well-being of vulnerable populations by helping them cope with the rising living expenses. Furthermore, a new measure was introduced in 2024, giving concessions for Sickness Assistance beneficiaries to those receiving a pension for at least 5 years. In this regard, the means-test capital limit was increased to €50,000 for couples and to €30,000 for single persons as long as the excess results solely from inheritance. This mechanism also applies to Sickness Assistance beneficiaries, including improvements related to donations made to their children. This reform affected 41 beneficiaries. The concept of partial invalidity was also introduced in 2024, which means that individuals who have been on sickness benefit for more than six months will start benefitting from rates equal to those in receipt of the invalidity pension.

Looking ahead, Jobsplus has applied to launch the VASTE II Programme, which is set to be co-financed through the ESF+ 2021-2027. This project aims to build upon the original VASTE concept, with a focus on supporting vulnerable groups, through different work packages. By offering research, assessments, informal training, resources, professional services and supported employment, the programme seeks to assist persons with disabilities, vulnerable individuals, and the unemployed AROPE towards employment. The overarching strategic objective of the project is to establish and further sustain several new and improved actions focused on enhancing the skills and confidence needed for the targeted groups. This will empower them to navigate the complexities of the labour market, promote their employability, and contribute to the creation of a more inclusive and equitable society. Thus, the programme aims to provide suitable employment opportunities, enabling these citizens to become active contributors to the Maltese economy.

5.1.1.1 Community Outreach and Services

In 2024, a range of community outreach initiatives and services were implemented to support the vulnerable population, focusing on enhancing their well-being, financial literacy, and social inclusion. The periodic distribution of Material Aid schemes, implemented by the MSPC and logistically supported by the FSWS, continued to improve the living standards of vulnerable households and alleviate their AROPE. In 2024, the Food 4 You Support Project (ESF+.04.188) was launched, with the support of the EU's 2021-2027 Multi-Annual Financial Framework. Throughout the year, two distributions were carried out from approximately 18 centres located around Malta and Gozo, benefitting around 2,500 eligible households per distribution. A total of 12,500 food packages were distributed. Similar to the FEAD Programme that preceded the Food 4 You Support Project, the FSWS continues to contribute through the involvement of professional officers in the area of social welfare services.

In the realm of financial literacy and capability, 2024 saw the MSPC lay the groundwork for two accredited courses, one in financial literacy coaching and another in debt advisory, planned to be offered through MCAST for psycho-professionals. The financial literacy coaching course is aimed at professionals working in state entities and NGOs who offer services to vulnerable persons at risk of poverty or below the poverty threshold. The debt advisory course is aimed at selected professionals who will be working with a debt advice national service. Moreover, the MSE, under MFIN, offered introductory courses on financial markets in a bid to help enhance financial literacy in Malta. The MSE also partnered with other entities to organise informative seminars for the public on financial well-being.

Concurrently, MSPC laid the groundwork to create a free, confidential, and impartial debt advice service to be made available to all Maltese citizens. The aim of this service is to help persons and their households to manage their finances and take control of their debt. MSPC's participation in the European Consumer Debt Network's Project for the Provision of a European Platform for the Prevention of Over-indebtedness by the Increase of Accessibility and the Improvement of Effectiveness of Debt Advice, known as *PEPPI*, further enhanced its technical capacity to prepare for the envisaged service.

In 2024, the MSPC, through its financial capability platform, known as *ĠEMMA*, organised training sessions for parents, teachers, and students, within private and church schools, as well as specific sessions for two different age groups in the Klabb 3-16 after-school club, run by the FES. Additionally, in collaboration with the Agency for Community and Therapeutic Services (ACTS), within the FSWS, the MSPC offered different sessions on financial capability to youths and adults aged 60+.

ACTS delivers non-formal education such as group sessions, alongside informal, community-focused projects, events, and collaborative activities. In addition to ongoing projects that combat social exclusion such as *Anzjani Teżor* in Siġġiewi, and the *Qawsalla* support group for women organised by the Cottonera Community Services, new key initiatives in intergenerational solidarity undertaken in 2024 include a collaboration between St. Elizabeth Home and the Western Community Service that builds intergenerational ties through storytelling and traditional games. *Flimkien f'Bormla* by the Cottonera Community Services allowed local organisations to host activities that encouraged different generations to exchange knowledge and stories, celebrating their shared heritage. Another initiative for the reinforcement of residential and community-care services, Grupp *Miftuħ*, organised by the Valletta and Floriana Community Services, offers a safe space for empowerment and mental wellbeing to enhance self-esteem and self-confidence through the development of meaningful friendships, while encouraging participants to explore ways to contribute positively to their community.

5.1.2 Gender Equality

In 2024, the Menstruation Pilot Project was one of the key initiatives undertaken by the Human Rights Directorate (HRD) to combat the stigma associated with menstruation. This was a pilot project launched in three schools across Malta and Gozo, which involved the installation of dispensers to ensure easy access to menstrual products, such as pads and tampons, for students. A comprehensive nationwide awareness campaign, the 'End the Stigma, Period' campaign, was also introduced alongside this pilot project. This campaign utilised social media, as well as television and radio appearances, to educate the public on menstruation-related issues and to challenge the existing taboos surrounding this topic. This initiative will be expanded further in 2025 by the roll-out of dispensers in every school and the removal of tax on menstrual products.

5.1.3 LGBTIQ+ Equality

In September 2024, the Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics (Amendment) Act (Act No. XXV of 2024) came into force, establishing legal recognition for non-binary genders, allowing individuals to officially identify as non-binary with the gender marker 'X' on all official documents. The amendment allows changes to all relevant acts of civil status (e.g., birth, marriage, civil union) to be done through a single notary procedure.

This legislative change complements the broader commitment to the LGBTIQ+ outlined in Malta's LGBTIQ+ Strategy & Action Plan 2023-2027 and a Social Vision for Malta 2035. One key initiative in this regard is the establishment of the LGBTIQ+ Community Centre in Valletta. The aim of this centre is to provide a supportive and inclusive environment for the LGBTIQ+ community. It seeks to address issues in the existing temporary facility in Paola. To this end, a disused government property in Valletta was transferred by the Lands Authority to the Permanent Secretary (OPM - European Funds, Equality, Reforms and Social Dialogue) in July 2024. Following this, architects have already begun preparing designs and plans for its development.
The centre will address issues such as discrimination, mental health challenges, social isolation, lack of access to inclusive healthcare, educational barriers, employment discrimination, and the need for a safe space for self-expression. This centre will provide a range of services, including healthcare, counselling, social activities, educational programmes, and advocacy. It will also serve as a venue for hosting events, conferences, and meetings, promoting social cohesion, awareness, and empowerment within the LGBTIQ+ community.

5.1.4 Anti-Racism and Integration

In September 2024, HRD completed the 'Towards the implementation of an Anti-Racism Strategy for Malta' (END-RACISM-MT) project, aimed at improving Maltese public authorities' responses to multiple and intersectional discrimination, racism and xenophobia. The project also focused on the implementation of a whole-of-society Anti-Racism Strategy (2021-2023). As part of the END-RACISM-MT project, training was provided to over 400 public officers until 2024, by one of the project partners, Kopin, in collaboration with the Government's Institute for Public Service. The training aimed 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. The training also raised awareness on why anti-racism is important, whilst promoting antiracist behaviours and providing an opportunity to exchange strategies on the variety of ways to combat racism and discrimination. Moreover, HRD worked on a campaign entitled '*Tkunx Razzist*' (Don't Be Racist), which included a strong social media presence as well as traditional media such as billboards, buses, radio, TV, and bus shelters.

On the other hand, training was also provided to officers within the MPF on 'Embracing Racial Equality,' which began on a regular basis in February 2023 and has continued since then. In 2024, more than 500 police officers were trained, including in-service training, training for recruits, and training for sergeants.

Malta also made significant strides on the international stage. In June 2024, Malta became an observer country at the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, which aims at addressing contemporary challenges related to the Holocaust and genocide of the Roma. In December 2024, Malta attended a second plenary in London, where the theme was 'In Plain Sight', which explored the importance of Holocaust

remembrance, education, and research, while addressing issues such as antisemitism, antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination, and Holocaust distortion. These international engagements reinforced Malta's commitment to combating racism, xenophobia, and discrimination at both national and global levels.

On the ground, efforts to promote the integration of vulnerable groups saw several key initiatives led by FSWS. Notably, the Mosta Community Services English Lessons, an initiative aimed at helping migrants access services, pursue education, and secure employment opportunities, supporting their integration and social inclusion. In addition, a Diversity Day was organised by the Southern Community Services in Birżebbuġa to maximise stakeholder and community involvement while promoting cultural inclusion and addressing community challenges.

Furthermore, a Human Library event spearheaded by the Qawra Community Services was held to foster dialogue, reduce prejudice, and encourage understanding through personal storytelling. Individuals, referred to as 'Human Books', volunteer to share their personal experiences, often related to topics such as discrimination, stigma, or unique life circumstances. Examples include refugees, people with disabilities, members of marginalised communities, or those with unconventional professions or lifestyles. Then, participants sign up to 'read' a Human Book by having a one-on-one or a small group conversation with them. Sessions are typically timed, lasting around 20 to 30 minutes. The human library's aim is to break stereotypes, fight xenophobia, and help towards building one's social capital, empowering the participants in furthering their knowledge, and foster a sense of mutual understanding.

Further initiatives aimed at promoting social inclusion included the Tinkering Days and Skills-Based Courses spearheaded by the Valletta and Floriana Community Service in collaboration with Dar Ħiliet and the Valletta Design Cluster. These initiatives sought to promote the concept of lifelong learning, encouraging residents to embrace continuous personal and professional development throughout their lives. Foreign residents in Malta may encounter social, economic, and health disparities, which may be exacerbated by cultural and language differences. In fact, language barriers can limit access to healthcare, as individuals may not obtain the necessary health information to achieve optimal outcomes. The use of interpreters is important to address these barriers. In response to these challenges, MDH launched a telephone interpretation service as a pilot project, using live human linguists. The initial pilot programme was initiated towards the end of 2023 and was implemented at the Accident and Emergency Department, the Genitourinary Clinic, and the Obstetrics and Gynaecology Department of MDH. By the end of 2023, this service was extended to all hospital departments. In 2024, an improvement was made to the service, allowing healthcare providers and patients to connect directly to the EU service provider using a specific line extension. This resulted in faster connection times for both healthcare providers and patients.

In parallel, efforts to promote inclusion within the health services workforce were also undertaken. SVP, in collaboration with the UM, organised training programmes for foreign-born carers and nurses. These programmes focused not only on medical Maltese but also on cultural integration. Additionally, efforts within the Occupational Therapy Unit and the SVP Sports Centre aimed to encourage older adults to participate in activities such as walking football and traditional Maltese *boċċi*. To further enhance intergenerational connections, SVP organised structured events with the cooperation of various NGOs and schools. These initiatives helped bridge generational gaps and promoted social cohesion across different age groups.

5.1.5 Empowering Children and Youths

In 2024, the Children's Policy Framework 2024-2030 was launched to enhance the overall childhood experience through targeted support, ensuring that every child reaches their full potential. Rooted in international standards, including the 1989 UN on the Rights of the Child, the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child, and the European Child Guarantee, this six-year roadmap is built on four key national priorities, namely improving children's well-being; creating a better environment for children; strengthening child participation; and supporting families with children.

The MSPC continued to implement a targeted project entitled Empowering Children's Participation in Malta to improve children's participation in decision-making by strengthening an inclusive digital platform known as the 'Empowering Children App' for Android devices. This platform provides a safe space for children to engage in policy discussions and access professional emotional support, particularly for vulnerable children. In 2024, the project continued to offer child-friendly versions of key documents and public consultations, including the child-friendly versions of the National Strategy for Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion 2025-2035, the National Children's Policy Framework 2024-2030, A Social Plan for the Families, Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050, the Digital Education Strategy 2024-2030, alongside the launch of the Minecraft Competition in schools. Additionally, four videos were published in relation to the National Children's Policy Framework 2024-2030. These resources ensure that children have access to relevant information, allowing them to contribute meaningfully towards shaping policies that affect their lives. This fosters trust and openness between young citizens and decision makers. Throughout 2024, the project also achieved other milestones such as the submission of Mid-term Progress Report, the organisation of the second Capacity Building Activity featuring cooperation and the sharing of best practices for the creation of a 'Child Participation Impact Toolkit', and the Empowering Children's Participation in Malta Final Conference during which saw the launch of the VUĊI Toolkit, a child participation impact evaluation toolkit.

The broad awareness campaign of this project, aimed at educating stakeholders on children's rights and the importance of child participation, also continued through sessions in schools delivered by the Office of the Commissioner for Children and through the presence of MSPC representatives in various events. Such outreach promoted the Empowering Children App, informed children, parents and educators about child participation, and encouraged participation from children and the public on the latest social policies.

In addition, the Office of the Commissioner for Children organised Rights 4U, a series of two to three-day live-ins for young people aged 13 to 15. The interactive programme aimed to address various issues like the elimination of stereotypes and promotion of inclusion. A total of 90 children from diverse backgrounds, including those from state, church, and independent schools, participated in these live-ins. Despite not knowing each other beforehand, the workshops empowered the participants to engage with concepts like respect and inclusion. Each live-in included a specific workshop focused on stereotypes and racism with the goal of empowering children to combat online hate speech. The Office also conducted a series of focus groups in five schools to explore the issues of poverty and social exclusion. During these focus groups, children shared their perspectives and put forward several recommendations for addressing poverty and promoting social inclusion. These contributions were formally submitted as part of the national consultation for the National Strategy for Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion 2025-2035. As part of the ESDW, the Office also launched a social media campaign to raise awareness of children's rights, emphasising their integral role in achieving the SDGs. All these efforts not only strengthen democratic processes but also ensure that children are empowered and their voices taken into account when shaping a more inclusive and sustainable future.

From an educational perspective, FES offers a variety of initiatives and policies through its Childcare, Klabb 3-16 and Skolasajf services, designed to promote equality, diversity, and social justice among the children enrolled in FES services. In addition, FES is committed to ensuring that vulnerable groups can access its services. To facilitate this, FES has established an MoU with FSWS, which enables vulnerable families to be referred to FES for access to its services. Once these clients are approved by the FES Social Board, they are offered placements, subject to availability, and are exempt from fees. These inclusive practices, followed and implemented by FES, align its services and procedures with the National Education Strategy 2024-2030 for Malta in relation to its three pillars of Equity, Quality, and Access.

As of 2024, FES also embarked on an added-value initiative by forming public-private partnerships to offer a more varied series of learning opportunities to the children. The financial and in-kind support of private and public entities enabled FES to offer children attending the service the opportunity to experience sessions in drama, dancing, art, financial literacy, road safety, sewing, and French language and culture appreciation. These initiatives help to decrease the deficit in cultural capital experienced by the children who remain at school till late hours, due to family circumstances, and those whose financial situation does not enable them to pursue such extra-curricular interests in the private sector. These ventures are also a way of making the school premises a hub of service to the community after the official school-dismissal hour. Rather than remaining empty, these buildings are exploited to their full potential, enabling the children to not only explore their own talents, but also freeing them for more quality time at home with their parents when the latter arrive from work.

In parallel, Jobsplus, operating under the Ministry for Home Affairs, Security and Employment (MHSE) continued to address youth employment and youths not in education, employment, or training (NEETs) – through the implementation of the Youth Guarantee 3.0 under the ESF+ programming period 2021-2027. This initiative targets individuals aged 15 to 29, offering specialised re-skilling and upskilling programmes, with a focus on emerging sectors such as green and digital sectors. The scheme includes several components, such as Empower YOUth, which addresses both inactive and unemployed youth below 29 years of age through an activation pathway combining personalised support, formal and informal training and work placements. It also includes five weeks of free SEC revision classes for students who fail their SEC/Ordinary level exams for up to three core subjects (English, Maltese, Maths, Physics or Biology) and remedial classes for MCAST students who do not pass their end-of-year exams for 8 weeks between July and September. The Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve (ALMA) Mobility Scheme, an EU initiative for NEETs, helps the most disadvantaged young people (aged 18-29) integrate into society by gaining access to work or training through supervised work-related placements in another EU Member State, along with appropriate coaching and counselling. The project includes a transnational component, which involves the delivery of specific training and capacity building sessions to Jobsplus staff employed in departments that are directly involved in the delivery of active labour market schemes to disadvantaged groups, such as the Youth Guarantee. The training will encompass different forms of learning including study visits and international training. The project will also deliver a Research Census of the NEET population to identify barriers and gaps in the system, thus allowing for the development of targeted interventions and policies. Finally, Jobsplus will put in place a number of collaborative activities that will materialise in the active participation of the international partners in activities and events to share best practices in data analysis, focusing on employment policies, and create an ongoing knowledge-sharing platform as well as in putting the basis for a more structured cooperation.

5.1.6 Combating trafficking in human beings

In line with its commitment to combatting trafficking in human beings (THB), Malta launched its first National Strategy and Action Plan on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings in Malta (2024-2030) on 1 August 2024. The plan addresses issues related to forced prostitution and exploitation for sexual purposes as a crime. Key measures include research initiatives, efforts to tackle sexual exploitation in high-risk operations, and specialised support for victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation through targeted exit programmes. Three legislative amendments were enacted in 2024: ACT No. X of 2024, which amended Article 251F of the Criminal Code, entitled enforced sterilisation to protect women with disability from undergoing forced sterilisation; ACT No. XI of 2024, which saw the introduction of Virginity Testing as a criminal offense; ACT No. XXII of 2024 which amended the definition of the 'family or domestic unit' to allow for more specialised focus on cases of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and DV and reduce the backlog of such cases in Court.

The National Strategy and Action Plan (2024-2030) also outlines significant measures to strengthen institutions and law enforcement agencies responsible for combatting THB. This includes the identification of a national coordinator and rapporteur, clarifying their roles to enhance the authority, sustainability, and effectiveness of these institutions. Strengthening law enforcement is another critical aspect of the plan. This will be achieved by modernising the MPF, improving its specialisation and operational capabilities to effectively counter THB.

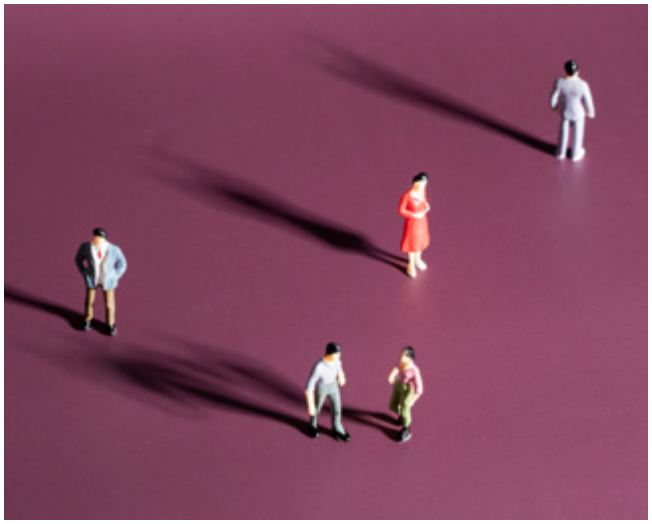
The introduction of advanced intelligence systems, such as modern police records management systems and enhanced data collection methods, will also strengthen intelligence-led investigations with a National Intelligence Model and electronic intelligence techniques.

In line with the victim rehabilitation and reintegration, the National Strategy prioritises the creation of specialised shelters for victims of THB. These shelters will provide more effective care and protection tailored to the specific needs of victims, while also focusing on ensuring the effective and sustainable reintegration of victims of THB in society and instigating more incentives for victims to cooperate with the police. Cooperation with NGOs on the reintegration of THB victims is also included in the Strategy which will increase the number of reintegration services available.

Additionally, the Strategy emphasises strengthening border management in combatting THB. This includes improving the referral, return and assistance of foreign victims of trafficking through the development of a Transnational Referral Mechanism with formalised SOPs for cross-border THB cases. Another important aspect of the plan is the training and support for all relevant entities, such as border officials, Identitá, Jobsplus, DIER, trade unions, and employers, on migration channels to ensure that people are correctly advised about their options.

5.1.7 Gender-Based and Domestic Violence

In 2024, the Commission on Gender-Based Violence & Domestic Violence (CGBVDV) continued to coordinate and monitor the implementation of the third National Strategy on GBV and DV 2023-2028. The strategy, launched in 2023, is based on the four pillars of the Istanbul Convention: integrated polices, prevention, protection and support, and prosecution, incorporating 23 measures and 81 actions with allocated timeframes. As the designated coordinating body established under Article 10 of the Istanbul Convention, CGBVDV chaired several meetings with the Inter-Ministerial Committee responsible for the implementation of the National Action Plan and NGOs active in the sector. In addition to overseeing the implementation of the measures and actions, CGBVDV coordinated discussions on the strengthening of support services; legislative amendments; the consultation on the reform of the Family Court; the drafting of the Sexual Health Policy; and the transposition of the Directive (EU) 2024/1385 of the European Parliament and of the Council on combating violence against women and DV following its entry into force. By the end of 2024, a total of nine actions were fully implemented, and work on 35 others had commenced in line with the established timeframes.



Malta is currently carrying out a mapping exercise of its legislative framework towards the strengthening of the provisions of the Criminal Code to ensure the effective prosecution of all forms of GBV and DV, including their digital manifestations. In addition to its coordinating role, CGBVDV implemented several prevention initiatives throughout 2024 towards the elimination of discrimination and stereotypes as well as the promotion of the principles of equality.

CGBVDV organised five rounds of multi-agency training on GBV and DV for frontline professionals, which included educators, police officers, probation officers, doctors, nurses, lawyers, social workers, risk assessors and representatives from agencies and NGOs working in the sector. Each training round comprised a three-day programme which was delivered by experts from governmental and NGOs. The programme included an overview of the Istanbul Convention and the national legislative framework, working with victims and perpetrators of violence, as well as the psychological impact of violence. Furthermore, an intersectional perspective was incorporated into the training programme through the inclusion of sessions specifically focused on the experiences of persons with disability and the LGBTIQ+ and migrant communities. This multi-agency training programme aimed to foster networking amongst the different professionals representing the various services and provide frontline professionals with the knowledge to effectively respond to GBV and DV through the provision of protection and support services.

CGBVDV also collaborated with the Active Ageing and Community Care on the organisation of information sessions in active ageing centres in Malta. These sessions were delivered by NGO representatives and focused on raising awareness amongst the elderly community about GBV and DV through the provision of information about recognising the signs of violence and available services.

To further expand the reach of its efforts, CGBVDV also designed and delivered an extensive national campaign to raise awareness about GBV and DV during the 16 Days of Activism against GBV, under the theme Together we Stand. Together we Heal. The campaign featured infographics, videos, and radio clips addressing various forms of GBV and DV, such as coercive control, consent and violence against elderly persons. These materials were shared on social media and broadcast on several national television and radio stations to ensure maximum visibility. Additionally, short video clips were developed and displayed at bus terminals across Malta. Throughout this campaign, CGBVDV wrote various articles in English and Maltese, which were published in several local newspapers and online news portals. The articles focused on showcasing the highlights of the campaign, such as events organised by the Commission, as well as the themes of consent, supporting persons experiencing GBV and DV and how to access services. This campaign is also targeting public spaces through the display of a series of promotional adverts on buses and bus shelters across Malta and Gozo.

In parallel, the SCSA within the MSPC has finalised the process of the new Social Regulatory Standards for DV and GBV shelters, community-based services, and outreach services. The Standards Unit initiated this project in early 2024, and the regulatory standards mentioned were launched by the end of 2024, moving on to the public consultation phase. This collaborative effort supports sustainable growth by ensuring long-term and inclusive impacts, empowering communities, holding service providers accountable, and enhancing the adaptability of social care services to respond to emerging challenges.

Meanwhile, in February 2024, the MHSE opened a hub for victims of DV in Santa Lucija, receiving an average of six DV victims a day. Furthermore, VSA initiated a new therapy group service aimed at victims of DV and the national support line for victims of crime, the 116 006 Freephone Service, became available 24 hours a day for victims seeking help or to make requests for information from VSA professionals.

5.1.8 Support for persons with addictions

In 2024, the Correctional Service Agency (CSA), within the MHSE, took further steps to address the complex and pressing issues faced by incarcerated individuals. The agency built upon its 2021 initiative by continuing its seven psychoeducational group sessions of two hours each to raise awareness about the impact of drug and alcohol addiction on one's well-being from a biopsychosocial perspective. These groups are conducted by a professional specialising in addiction, with the aim of breaking the cycle of addiction and motivating and helping incarcerated individuals become more self-sufficient. During 2024, these increasingly popular psychoeducational groups continued to be delivered to both male and female residents. These groups are instrumental in enriching the experience for service users, creating a strong sense of community that effectively supports high retention rates. Furthermore, the same professional supports the person in prison on an individual basis who has a drug and alcohol addiction. During 2024, CSA initiated another project that focuses on seven psychoeducational group sessions of two hours each on the topic of gambling addiction. Sessions were delivered to both the male and female populations. These groups aimed to raise awareness of gambling addiction from a biopsychosocial perspective. Furthermore, individuals with gambling addiction are also benefiting from individual sessions. The objective of these groups is to strengthen prevention efforts and raise awareness about the impacts of drug abuse, the harms of alcohol addiction, and the consequences of gambling dependence.

5.1.9 Empowering persons with disabilities

As of 2024, the disability benefits application process has been fully transitioned to a digital, end-to-end system, providing an accessible and efficient approach for individuals seeking disability-related support. A key change has been the establishment of a newly upheld Inter-Professional Board composed of experts from various fields, which now replaces the previous medical panel. This board uses the International Classification of Functioning developed by the WHO to assess disabilities and determine eligibility or otherwise. The shift to the new system provided improved access to individuals who previously lacked access to disability-related benefits, while also serving to improve the assessment process to better identify cases of disability. The Inter-Professional Board aims to enhance sustainable development by promoting a more inclusive, equitable, and efficient approach to disability benefits, empowering individuals and contributing to broader social and economic goals.
The changes in the disability benefits system have also been accompanied by significant financial adjustments to better support individuals. In 2024, the Increased Disability Assistance saw a rise of €17.39 per week, benefitting 950 recipients. Similarly, the Severe Disability Assistance was raised by €12.81 per week, impacting 3,800 beneficiaries, while the Disability Assistance was raised by €8.54 per week, reaching 400 beneficiaries.

The MHA, in collaboration with AS, provides physiotherapy, social work and occupational therapy services to persons with disability. The DAHS is also supporting the provision of sensory integration therapy programmes to help children improve their processing and integration of sensory inputs to gain appropriate adaptive responses to everyday stimuli. The Directorate is evaluating the outcome of several services, such as the National Neonatal Screening Programme and expansion of Mental Health Services. An extension of occupational therapy services to all adults with disability is also in the pipeline.

Moreover, the PHL within the EHD is committed to support all employees with health problems through providing duties which will make the individual part of the system.

The Regional Hub was also designed following the Universal Access for All Guidelines and other guidelines, guaranteeing that the facility is accessible to everyone, regardless of physical disabilities, vision impairment, hearing impairment, or mental health difficulties.

5.1.10 Voluntary Sector

As part of its manifesto, the Government committed to establishing a one-stop-shop with the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector to provide vital support for voluntary organisations. This included offering reference points for organisations, information on funding programmes, administrative support, and meeting spaces. In two and a half years, five one-stop-shops were opened. In 2023, centres were inaugurated in Valletta, Rabat, and Birkirkara, followed by another in Xewkija, Gozo, in early 2024. These centres operate 24/7 with an online booking system, ensuring easy access for voluntary organisations. Usage statistics show high demand: Valletta was used by 86 organisations, Rabat 34, Birkirkara 21, and Xewkija 30.

To further extend this network, plans for another centre in Paola aim to reach the southern part of Malta. This centre will be named Jake Vella Volunteering Centre, commemorating Jake Vella, who, despite health struggles, initiated charitable efforts for abandoned animals. The new facility will enhance resources, space, and support for voluntary organisations, signifying the government's commitment to civil society and honouring Jake Vella's enduring legacy as a role model for volunteering.

The one-stop-shop initiative has broadened recognition of certifications issued by the Office of the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations. These are increasingly valued by private sector stakeholders, including banks and commercial enterprises, fostering larger philanthropic investments in social, environmental, and animal welfare sectors. To further incentivise such support, the government will continue to reward enterprises that donate to voluntary organisations in these areas with a tax credit of up to €500.

5.1.11 Supporting Developing Countries and Providing Humanitarian Aid

Malta's 2024 Official Development Assistance (ODA) strategy was mainly dedicated to delivering integrated solutions that enhance climate resilience, improve water security, and ensure inclusive growth for vulnerable populations. By empowering communities and forging strategic partnerships, Malta is committed to driving meaningful change and ensuring sustainable development reaches those most in need. In 2024, the ODA budget saw an increase of 4.7% from the previous year, reaching a total allocation of €2,200,000. All the budget was utilised, ensuring that no funds remained unspent compared to previous years. Humanitarian aid accounted for the largest share of expenditure, followed by development projects. Scholarships/ education initiatives were also part of a substantial amount of Malta's ODA. ODA assistance reached a broad geographic scope, spanning Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Eastern Europe, the Caribbean, and the Western Balkans. Key beneficiary countries included Ethiopia, Sudan, Libya, Ukraine, India, and Afghanistan, among others.

A diverse range of organisations also benefited from ODA funding, including UN agencies such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and the WHO, as well as international entities like Save the Children and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Regional bodies such as the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), along with local organisations including the UM, SOS Malta, and HopeXChange, also received support. The strategic and efficient use of funds in 2024 reflected a strong commitment to global humanitarian and development efforts, ensuring impactful support across multiple sectors and regions.

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

The Ministry for Social and Affordable Accommodation put in place the Private Rent Housing Benefit Scheme, designed to make housing more affordable. Originally introduced in 2019, this scheme was amended in January 2024 to benefit more tenants and assist more people. This scheme now calculates housing benefits based not only on the applicants' income but also on their rent expenditure, ensuring that no one pays more than 25% of their income in rent, provided the rent does not exceed certain thresholds. This meant that any person who was currently renting in January 2024 would receive no less than €125 per month. The changes as of January 2024 stated that a person renting alone saw their benefit increase from €3,600 to €4,200; a family with one child saw an increase from €4,800 to €5,400; and a family with two or more children saw an increase from €5,000 to €6,000. This increase in the Rent Benefit not only helped people pay their rent but also enabled them to live a better and higher-quality life after paying their rent.

Alongside the housing benefits, the government has also addressed the needs for first-time homebuyers through the Grant on First Residence. This grant provides financial assistance to all first-time buyers, regardless of their income, as partial compensation for expenses related to construction, completion, or rehabilitation work. Although this scheme was introduced in previous years, significant changes were introduced in 2024. Notably, single applicants can now receive the same grant amount as couples. Additionally, owners of first residences who need to construct additional rooms or make alterations to their homes due to a growing family are also eligible for a grant under this scheme.

On 1 September 2024, legislative amendments to the Private Residential Leases Act, as well as the 2024 Regulations on the Limitation of the Number of Residents in Rented Homes, came into effect. These amendments are inspired by the principles of dignity and stability and are designed to provide peace of mind to both landlords and tenants. Essentially, the changes state that a residence with two bedrooms and at least one bathroom can be permitted to house a maximum of four residents. If the number of bedrooms increases to three, the permissible number of residents will be limited to six. This applies only to single tenants and not families. The amendments in the law also simplified processes related to the lease renewal, tenant substitution, the addition of tenants, and consensual lease terminations between tenants and landlords.

In addition to these housing-focused initiatives, the government has also prioritised accessibility with mobility impairments. The Eco-Gozo Directorate started offering services to individuals with mobility impairments so they can now safely access the sea using their beach hoist located in Menqa, Marsalforn. Bookings for this service can be made through the MyGozo App, with hourly sessions available from 10:00 AM to 4:00/5:00 PM. Each session lasts between 1 to 2 hours, and an ERRC attendant will be present to assist from 15 minutes before to 15 minutes after the scheduled time.

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 organised 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 and Construction Sectors

The MJR continued its reforms aimed at improving both the justice and construction sectors. The primary focus in the justice sector was enhancing the Rule of Law, promoting access to justice, and increasing people-centric services. This includes reforms to family law procedures, particularly through a comprehensive reform to the family court. A public consultation process launched in September 2024 engaged stakeholders and led to recommendations aimed at improving the family court system to provide families with a more efficient and supportive framework for resolving disputes. The reform emphasises the importance of prioritising child welfare in legal proceedings and strengthening the mediation processes to ensure better outcomes for families. Over 70 submissions were received by the closing time of the consultation process in November 2024, with the feedback received used to inform the next steps in these reforms.

In addition, the Government has also worked to address the timeliness of the justice system by advancing reforms such as the Compilation of Evidence reform, which is nearing completion. A Bill has already been tabled for its First Reading in Parliament. Furthermore, in 2024, new laws relating to arrest and detention, as well as the procedure related to the proceeds of crime, were approved for effective, proportionate and efficient justice. A significant development also took place with the transfer of Certificates of Conduct from the Police to the Justice Department, following legal amendments to the Conduct Certificates Ordinance (Cap. 77).

Another milestone for the justice sector came with the conclusion of a reform that saw the Office of the Attorney General assume responsibility for prosecuting cases that were previously handled by the Police. This shift, in line with recommendations from the Venice Commission Opinion of 2018 and the Group of States against Corruption known as GRECO Fifth Evaluation Report, means that the Office has taken on prosecution of serious offences, in accordance with the Prosecution of Offences (Transitory Provisions) Regulations, 2020 (Legal Notice 378 of 2020), which came into effect on 1 October 2020.

Strengthening justice-related institutions has been a key priority of the Administration. In an effort to further strengthen the Law Courts and improve the efficiency of the justice system, progress has been made through the revised procedural rules before the Courts of Appeal, which aim to reduce the length of proceedings. The Administration is also working to bring about further reforms that will establish a fully-fledged Commercial Court and enhance the Inquiring Magistrate section. In addition, to reduce the Court's case load and address space constraints, a new Court Hall was finalised and started to be used for court sittings in 2024. Work on the demolition and construction of the building in Strait Street, which will house, amongst others, three court halls, is expected to commence in 2025.

Further digitisation of legal services was also introduced at the Law Courts, and offers were received for the procurement of the Court Services Management System. The Court Services Agency also launched a Help Desk to assist the public with court services queries, ensuring proper access to justice.

As part of the efforts to expedite judicial proceedings, the Government continued to increase the number of judicial members. By the end of December 2024, the total number of judiciary appointed to the bench stood at 55, including 26 Judges (excluding the Chief Justice and the Judge sitting at the European Court of Human Rights) and 29 Magistrates.

The MJR has been collaborating with the Council of Europe (COE) to implement an action plan aimed at reorganising the business processes of the Office of the Attorney General and the Office of the State Advocate (OSA). This collaboration aims to strengthen these two offices and align them with European standards. In this regard, in 2024, the Office of the Attorney General worked tirelessly on the 2-year reorganisation project, setting the groundwork for the implementation of the Office's Strategic and Operational Plan, which was launched in 2023. In September 2024, this transformative project crossed an important milestone by completing its first year. The project aims to strengthen the core of Malta's justice system, enhancing the operational independence and efficiency of the Attorney General's office. Through this project, the Office is working towards a modernised, more resilient justice system that better serves the people of Malta, ensuring that justice is not only delivered but done so swiftly and effectively. Concurrently, the Office of the Attorney General has seen an increase in its prosecution staff in order to cater for the taking over of prosecutions from the Police. This also led to higher-quality investigations and speedier resolutions when prosecuting highly complex cases, especially in the area of financial crimes.

Furthermore, to enhance the effective management of the Office of the Attorney General and ensure it meets its statutory responsibilities and functions efficiently, a proposal to amend the Attorney General Ordinance (Chapter 90 of the Laws of Malta) has been enacted through the Attorney General Ordinance (Amendment) Act, 2024 (Act No. XXXIV of 2024), published in the Government Gazette of Malta (No. 21,334) on 25 October 2024. This amendment allows for the designation of additional Deputy Attorneys General, expanding from the previous law, which permitted only one Deputy Attorney General.

On the other hand, during 2024, the OSA worked to strengthen its workforce and expand its legal team. Furthermore, the position of Head of Strategy was filled to head a new unit to oversee the implementation of strategies aligned with the Office's current needs and future direction. Moreover, in order to enhance the OSA's functioning in relation to the Courts of Malta, particularly regarding the payment of compensation in cases where the State is condemned to pay third parties (mainly in Constitutional property cases), the Office is working to expedite these processes by engaging further officials. In addition, OSA is actively working on the digitalisation of court acts and files. This project aims to reduce the physical space required for paperwork, encourage greater accountability, and facilitate more efficient data collection.

As a further initiative to facilitate access to justice, the MJR has undertaken further collaboration with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to initiate a multi-country project on people-centred justice. This 3-year project was launched in October 2024 and will seek to review and strengthen the role of mediation as an alternative dispute resolution option within the local justice system, carry out the first legal needs survey, work closely with key stakeholders in order to improve access to justice for persons with different abilities and set up key justice indicators in order to ensure the sustainability of the people-centric policies within the entities and institutions that make up the justice sector. This project is being implemented within the OECD framework for people-centred justice and aligns with the Commission's objectives of improving access to justice and strengthening the rule of law.

Meanwhile, the Asset Recovery Bureau continued its efforts in the identification, tracing, seizure and recovery of assets, which is an effective way to tackle crime and prevent such proceeds are re-invested for further criminal activities. 2024 saw a significant increase in staff, complemented by the engagement of a pool of lawyers to assist the Bureau, including the new and revised amendments in the Proceeds of Crime Act, which has contributed to substantial efforts in the execution of asset recovery practices. As part of the Government's commitment to uphold the Rule of Law, on 31 July 2024, the Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation Order (SL) 460.40 of the Laws of Malta) was enacted. The Order fully transposes Directive (EU) 2024/1069 of the European Parliament and Council of 11 April 2024 on protecting persons who engage in public participation from manifestly unfounded claims or abusive court proceedings 'Strategic lawsuits against public participation' into national legislation. The enactment of this law made Malta the first EU Member State to transpose the EU anti-SLAPP Directive.

The Legal Aid Agency continued its informational campaign aimed at increasing awareness of legal aid services, with a particular focus on access to justice for victims of crime and DV. As of 1 January 2024, specialised panels of legal aid lawyers in civil, criminal, and victims' cases started functioning, receiving positive feedback from stakeholders. This initiative enhances the quality of legal aid services provided to clients. The Agency also strengthened its collaboration with stakeholders, including signing an MoU with the Chamber of Advocates to enhance good practices and address client complaints. In the last quarter of 2024, the Agency also began developing a child-friendly leaflet in collaboration with the Commissioner for Children's Rights, aiming to finalise it by the second quarter of 2025.

By the end of July 2024, the Agency finalised its Legal Aid Management System as part of its RRP commitments and commenced its internal use in August. A new public-facing web portal will launch in the second quarter of 2025, improving service accessibility.

Throughout the year, the Agency continued to provide regular guidance to contracted legal aid lawyers regarding their responsibilities and expectations through internal memos. It sponsored various training sessions, including a DV workshop organised by the CGBVDV, as well as a seminar on recent European Court of Human Rights case law in criminal law, focusing on detention and prison conditions, hosted by the Academy of European Law. The Agency also participated in seminars on human trafficking organised by the International Organisation for Migration, as well as a two-day program on victim/survivor engagement and digital evidence training offered by the TSI Project through the COE and EC, and the EU-funded DISRUPT project led by UM.

The Construction Sector saw continuous reform through several legislative interventions intended to continue raising standards in the construction sector, further clarify responsibilities, and provide peace of mind to all stakeholders. Various legislative amendments dealing with a number of Legal Notices related to the Building and Construction Act were carried out during 2024. In particular, new regulations on the licensing of masons. Through the gradual implementation of amendments in the regulations, the Building Construction Authority continues to assume a greater role in the construction industry.

In order to ensure a safer working environment for everyone involved and continue building a resilient and responsible construction sector, the introduction of the new Health & Safety Act 2024 and the collaboration to perform joint inspections on construction sites marked a step forward to maintain more rigorous health and safety standards on construction sites. In this regard, the restructuring exercise being undertaken by an independent reviewer on the BCA and the Occupational Health & Safety Authority (OHSA) is instrumental to equipping these two entities with the necessary resources.

In addition, the new Property Market Act was enacted to set up an Agency on the property market, and the newly established Construction and Occupational Health Directorate shall ensure the promotion of effective communication and coordination between government and private entities involved in the property sector.

Furthermore, the introduction of various initiatives, such as the launching of the Helpline 138 in the summer of 2024 which provided a centralised 24/7 system for all inquiries related to construction, health and safety, as well as the introduction of a pool of lawyers and architects to aid third parties affected by construction free of charge, continued to provide more access to people-centred justice.

5.3.2 Digitalisation and Technological Advancements in the Justice System

During 2024, MJR continued with the implementation of the Digital Justice Strategy by introducing management information systems (MIS) in several entities, installing digital equipment and providing automated online services. This investment is financed by the EU Recovery and Resilience Programme. The main beneficiary of this investment was the Court Services Agency, which continued its efforts to make the Law Courts more digitally accessible and user-friendly. In this regard, during 2024, all court halls were equipped with overhead projectors and a new audio system to facilitate court proceedings, whereas a new Wi-Fi system was installed at the Court's Main Building. Furthermore, a tender for the procurement of a case MIS to be used by the Courts was published and closed in November 2024. The bids received are under evaluation. Further implementation of other case management systems continued during 2024, and the new Legal Aid and Freedom of Information case management systems are nearing conclusion. Moreover, during 2024, tenders for the procurement of case management systems for the Asset Recovery Bureau and the Mediation Centre were issued, and the Whistleblower information system was introduced. Another important milestone was the awarding of a contract for the mapping process of all justice entities. This mapping process is an important step forward in the implementation of the Digital Justice Strategy. During 2024, the Department of Justice substantially invested in holistic digital solutions and related sub-projects to implement the European Criminal Records Information System – TCNs Directive and Regulation for the due collection of biometric data from convicted TCNs. As the National Central Authority for Malta, established by virtue of Act II of 2024, the Department of Justice must ensure interoperability with other IT Security and Home Affairs systems at the national level, as well as across borders via this platform. During 2024, the Office of the Notary to Government continued its scanning process and aimed to preserve additional Notarial Volumes by enhancing the present scanning systems. The latest scanning machines were identified to process 350 pages in 2 minutes, substantially improving the rate of the ongoing digitisation process. Concurrently, the office continues to work with stakeholders to introduce the concept of digital contracts. OHSA is also using digital tools and solutions to enhance surveillance initiatives. During 2024, OHSA compiled various modules in its MIS, which is in its pilot phase, whilst several databases and reporting features were created, allowing OHSA to adopt automated processes, thus rendering more efficient and comprehensive surveillance and compliance efforts. Furthermore, through the MIS Project, all processes, including technical inspections, were simplified, and all documentation, issuance of notifications, and reminders were facilitated.

5.3.3 Enhancing Community Safety

The CPD invested in new protective wear for its personnel, including fire suits and immersion suits that are used in cases of fire and flooding. The new protective wear provides more safety, is 35% lighter, more comfortable and better adapted to the climate in Malta. Furthermore, works were ongoing on a new station in Floriana and Baħar iċ-Ċagħaq. The WSC and the CPD entered into an MoU aimed at bolstering public safety and improving emergency response capabilities across Malta and Gozo, focusing on the installation and maintenance of fire hydrants and on specialised training for WSC personnel.

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 youths 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 youths 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 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

Malta has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the EU; however, one of the biggest challenges facing the economy is a shortage of workers. In December 2024, the unemployment rate for persons aged between 25 and 74 years stood at 2.2%. Eurostat data shows a consistent decrease in unemployment rates across both the EU-27 and Malta from 2021 to 2023, with Malta maintaining significantly lower rates than the EU-27 averages across all categories, standing at 3.2% compared to the EU 5.8% for people aged 20-64 years. Jobsplus seeks to empower, assist, and train job seekers whilst also promoting workforce development. It also assists employers in their recruitment and training requirements. Various training schemes to equip individuals with the skills needed to find gainful employment are available. Such schemes include:

- The Traineeship Scheme, which is intended to provide jobseekers with initial vocational training (pre-employment training) to find and retain employment; and
- The Work Exposure Scheme, which is intended to facilitate the transition into employment by providing jobseekers with initial hands-on training that will help them obtain the knowledge, skills and competences required to find and retain employment.

In addition, JobsPlus also administers the Access to Employment Scheme, which provides financial assistance to businesses to recruit individuals who are the most disadvantaged among job seekers and inactive people. The scheme aims to reduce labour market barriers and enhance the employability of individuals who face difficulties entering or re-entering employment. This scheme results in benefits for employers, including financial assistance, support in expanding their teams, and contributions to a more diverse and inclusive workforce. Employers are encouraged to hire from various sectors and strata of society, enriching their workforce with a range of perspectives and experiences.

In 2024, the NSC spearheaded the development of the National Skills Strategy with the technical assistance of the OECD Centre for Skills Strategies, as part of the TSI Skills Flagship 2024. The process was launched on 10 September 2024 and is therefore in its early stages. This strategy is being designed through a whole-of-government approach and beyond, engaging multiple government entities, industry, academia, and civil society in consultations to ensure broad commitment. The recently completed priority setting phase identified critical areas of focus, such as aligning educational outcomes with labour market needs, improving access to skills information for lifelong learning, and incentivising employers to promote learning within the organisations. Furthermore, the Strategy will support workers in upskilling and reskilling, ensuring their employability amidst significant challenges such as an aging workforce, the shift to climate neutrality, and rapid technological advancements. In parallel, a bottom-up approach is being undertaken as part of this same project, focused specifically on assessing skills gaps in Malta's maritime sector and developing a skills action plan to address those gaps. This sector will serve as a pilot case study, helping to create a framework that can be applied to other industries.

To enhance skills intelligence, NSC is actively collaborating with key industry stakeholders to assess the local skills landscape and address skill shortages and mismatches. Partnerships have already been established with Jobsplus and LinkedIn, which aim to improve data-driven insights and facilitate a deeper understanding of workforce dynamics.

In May of 2024, NSC organised a dialogical conference entitled 'CareerScape', which served as a platform for bringing together stakeholders from 13 sectors to build bridges between industry, policymakers, and education providers, to foster sector-specific discussions on emerging careers and in-demand skills across various industries. In tandem with 'CareerScape', NSC laid the groundwork for a nationwide campaign on the theme of 'Emerging Careers', which is set to be launched in 2025. This campaign aims to encourage parity of esteem between academic and vocational careers, to raise awareness on emerging careers and the skills needed to thrive in the world of work.

In 2024, NSC also organised its annual 'SkillScape' conference with the primary focus on discussing the future of work and education.

'SkillScape' explored key themes such as Gen Z career aspirations, the impact of AI on innovation, productivity and creativity in the workplace.

Career guidance is essential to addressing skills imbalances and to guiding individuals of all ages, including those at both school age and working age, both employed and unemployed, towards continuous skills improvement, thus addressing labour market needs. In April of 2024, the NSC, together with MEYR, launched the National Career Guidance Network consultation process, with the aim of creating a unified and comprehensive network of career guidance service providers, employers, and HR professionals. In the third quarter of 2024, NSC initiated a consultation process with local stakeholders, adopting a bottom-up approach to gauge the current career guidance landscape. The network, along with its committee, was officially launched in December at an event held at the NSC, during which the OECD presented key findings from its report 'Teenage Career Development in Malta'. This report, commissioned by the NSC, marks one of the first major initiatives undertaken by the National Career Guidance Network. The study involves the analysis of data collected from OECD's 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment, known as PISA findings, and explores the state of career development among 15-year-olds in Malta.

In 2024, the NSC also launched the 'Dream, Learn, and Succeed' campaign, which provides guidance on developing ten transversal skills, ensuring individuals remain competitive in the evolving job market. This campaign was further developed into a Skills Advent Calendar which ran throughout December, highlighting 24 key skills essential for personal and professional growth.

As part of its 360-degree campaign on skills, the NSC has been working on a pilot project with St Ignatius College to foster a growth mindset in students, educators and parents, with a specific focus on critical thinking and emotional intelligence. The collaboration kicked off with the creation of a branded diary centred around the transversal skill of critical thinking, with activities designed to encourage students to practice and reflect on their critical thinking skills. NSC also held a Continuing Professional Development session themed 'Future Skills and Critical Thinking' at the Prof. Edward de Bono Ħandaq Middle School, to provide educators with the knowledge and practical tools and approaches to foster critical thinking in students. Moreover, a college-wide competition was organised on the topic of Saving the Maltese Honeybee, emphasising critical thinking and creativity skills to solve this problem.

The FES actively collaborates with parents to create services that meet their demands and enable them to create a more sustainable work-life balance. However, from an educational perspective, children are central to its service mission, and thus the central focus of the services offered is to ensure that their needs are also met. The services offered by FES take care of children from the cradle till the age of 16 years. In fact, FES operates the State's childcare, the after-school clubs, and the summer school centres.

FES manages thirteen government-funded childcare centres in Malta, with the most recent addition being the Djamant Childcare Centre in Gozo. This was the first state-owned childcare centre on the sister island. The FES Childcare Centres operate different hours. Nine centres operate from 06:00 AM till 6:00 PM, whilst the rest operate from 07:30 AM till 4:00PM. However, FES is currently cooperating with Jobsplus to identify whether there is a need for the service by parents who work atypical hours. More information about initiatives for children and vulnerable families run by FES in 2024 can be found in section 5.1.5.

By the start of 2024, FES had completed the training of all the Childcare Centre Coordinators and Childcare Educators, in the principles and pedagogy of the Emergent Curriculum, or as it is also known as the 'Child Led Approach'.

As part of the construction reform, measures were also taken to ensure that workers in this industry are licenced and have the necessary skills. In this regard, amongst the various legislative amendments that were carried out in the Building and Construction Act in 2024, the new regulations on the licensing of masons were introduced. The new Masons Licence Regulations now require stone masons to receive regular training on safety and new building practices before they are able to renew their licences. Previously, masons had to pass an exam once and were not required to receive continuous training when renewing their licences yearly. The law has now been amended to require masons to renew their licenses every two years and must sit and pass new exams to do so. The law also established the setting up of a new committee under the BCA to be responsible for licencing masons. The committee will test masons' competencies through both theoretical and practical exams before granting a licence. When renewing their licence, masons will be required to undergo training, as the committee deems necessary.

Another important legislative amendment that came into effect in 2024 is that of mandating the licensing of construction contractors, marking significant progress in the sector's oversight. Under these new rules, contractors are required to obtain separate licenses for demolition, excavation, and construction work. They must demonstrate competency in each area, undergo specialised training, and ensure that all projects are covered by insurance policies protecting against third-party damages and worker injuries. The new regulation also stipulates that by January 2025, all contractors must possess licenses to engage in building, demolition, and excavation activities. The new regulations, which came into effect, are also measures to promote re-skilling and up-skilling and to raise standards in the construction industry.

Furthermore, the Grant Payable to Malta Resident Students Following Full-Time Courses in Gozo, the Grant Payable to Gozitan Resident Students Following Full-Time Courses in Malta, and the additional benefit covering rental costs for Gozitan students studying in Malta, all of which had commenced in previous years, but were sustained due to the importance that the country is giving towards establishing an education environment that leaves no-one behind.

Another initiative to bridge the gap between education and industry was the '*Triq il-Qasab Project*', a collaboration between Project Green and the UM architecture students. This project proposes transforming *Triq il-Qasab in Birkirkara*, a currently concreted area, into a natural valley with educational and recreational elements. This transformation will address key environmental challenges while enhancing the urban landscape and benefiting the local community. By redesigning the area as a natural valley, the project aims to improve rainwater catchment, mitigate stormwater runoff, and reduce flooding risks. The project represents an innovative approach to urban regeneration, blending natural elements with urban infrastructure. It offers an immersive public space that encourages community engagement while promoting sustainable urban development practices. *Triq il-Qasab* will serve as a model of how environmentally conscious design can enhance the resilience of urban areas. This initiative provided UM architecture students with an invaluable learning experience. Under the mentorship of faculty and professionals, they participated in the design phase, gaining practical insights into urban regeneration, ecological restoration, and sustainable landscape architecture. This hands-on involvement reflects the successful integration of academic learning with real-world applications, equipping students with skills that are in high demand in the evolving labour market.

Additionally, a mentorship programme was introduced in collaboration with UM during the summer. This programme enabled students to work closely with industry professionals, honing their technical and practical skills. MCAST apprentices also participated in various projects, gaining hands-on experience in landscape planning, construction, and environmental management. These work-based learning opportunities enriched students' academic journeys and provided them with a competitive edge in the labour market.

These initiatives are part of broader national strategies that focus on equal opportunities in education, reducing early school leaving, and promoting work-based learning. They contribute to the development of skilled professionals capable of driving sustainable urban planning and environmental stewardship.

5.4

Achieving High Quality Education Responsive to Labour Market Needs

Relevant UN SDG Targets	
4.4	By 2030, substantially increase the number of youths 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 formalisation 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 industrialisation and, by 2030, significantly raise the industry's share of employment and gross domestic product, in line with national circumstances, and double its share in the 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 one million people and public and private research and development spending
12.6	Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle
16.b	Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development

The Temporary Agency Workers Regulations 2024 were published in June 2024 and came into force on 1 January 2025. By virtue of these regulations, any inequality arising from any difference in the rate of remuneration and in the basic working and employment conditions of temporary agency workers who work in the same class of employment but with different 'user undertakings' are addressed. Provisions were also included so that if the rate of remuneration and, or the basic working and employment conditions of the temporary agency worker are more favourable than those of a comparable employee of the user undertaking, the rate of remuneration and or basic working and employment conditions of the temporary agency worker shall prevail and be applicable to the temporary agency worker. Employees engaged directly by the user undertaking shall have no right to claim a breach of the principle of work of equal value. Another provision was included so that if the rate of remuneration and/or the basic working conditions of the temporary agency worker are less favourable than those of a comparable employee of the user undertaking, the rate of remuneration and, or the basic working and employment conditions of the comparable employee of the user undertaking shall prevail and be applicable to the temporary agency worker. If the temporary agency worker and the employee of the user undertaking are covered by a collective agreement, the collective agreement with the most favourable rates of remuneration and or the basic working and employment conditions shall be applicable to the temporary agency workers.

Additionally, significant efforts have been made to strengthen occupational health and safety, which are essential for creating safe and secure working conditions. In 2024, OHSA embarked on an extensive legislative reform primarily through the enactment of a new Health and Safety at Work Act, which emphasises social dialogue to improve health and safety conditions at the place of work through the involvement of the new Governing Board. The new Act assigns specific roles to the new Governing Board, such as oversight of the Executive, involvement in strategy formulation, advice and social participation and dialogue. The Governing Board is now legally obliged to consult on a regular basis with stakeholders. The Act also introduced new powers to OHSA, such as the publication of Administrative Instruments, in order to address urgent matters that require immediate action, a tool that would further bolster the efficiency and effectiveness of OHSA enforcement actions.

Moreover, it also includes a new structure of penalties, which now cover failures of a purely administrative nature, shortcomings for which a special compromise procedure applies and the retention of action through Courts. Penalties under the new Act have increased as follows: administrative penalties have been set up to a maximum of €20,000, and up to €50,000 for fines under a special compromise procedure. Convictions through a Court may lead to imprisonment for a term of not more than two years, or to a fine of not less than €1,000 but not exceeding €50,000 or to both such fine and imprisonment. On a second or subsequent conviction, such person shall be liable to a fine of not less than €2,000 but not exceeding €50,000, or to imprisonment for a term of not less than one year and not exceeding four years, or to both such fine and imprisonment. Furthermore, OHSA will also publish an offenders register on its website detailing enforcement actions taken.

Throughout 2024, OHSA was also active in consolidating its internal resources, with the engagement of additional recruitment following an increase in financial allocation by the Government. This higher allocation also allowed OHSA to embark on more awareness-raising initiatives and staff training. OHSA also recently launched new software solutions to manage the inspection activities conducted by its Technical Division, leading to a higher output and efficiency by the inspectorate.

Another initiative by OHSA targeted pro-activeness, prevention, and a new holistic view to occupational health and safety, such as the organisation of information sessions and media interventions on the new legislation, a national campaign on the protection of workers from risks associated with heat at work, the organisation of various events on different aspects, including health and safety in the health and elderly care setting, health and safety at work in the digital age, and climate change and its impact on OHS.

Throughout 2024, OHSA also engaged the local health and safety practitioners to involve and empower them in areas that affect them directly. OHSA is also planning additional awareness activities on occupational psychosocial health and the potential risks it may present, a priority area further solidified by the recent call for the recruitment of an occupational psychologist.

The MHA People Management Division (PMD) aligns with central policy, which ensures equal job opportunities, equal pay for equal work or work of equal value, and access to parental and carers' leave within the Public Service. Additionally, any new sectoral agreements signed always include provisions aimed at enhancing working conditions for employees.

PMD is aligning its initiatives with the Health Workforce Strategy launched in 2022. This strategy focuses on employee well-being programmes, work-life balance support, assistance for employers, and the attraction and retention of foreign workers. As part of these efforts, MHA PMD conducted an employee motivational survey to assess workplace motivation, with the results shared with senior management. Given that a significant portion of the workforce consists of foreign employees, PMD, in collaboration with Jobsplus, introduced a short course for new foreign staff called 'Embracing Diversity.' Additionally, in Summer 2024, Maltese-language sessions focusing on colloquial Maltese for foreigners began at one of Malta's main hospitals, making it easier for foreign workers to access this essential course. The staff development strategy is in line with lifelong learning, whilst facilitating gender equality and empowering all women.

Furthermore, the 'Opportunity For All' platform was developed by the MFC to foster equal opportunities for crew members and businesses within the film industry in Malta. This initiative aims to provide a centralised platform for talent acquisition and project management within the film sector, create a sustainable environment for skill development and professional growth in Malta's film industry, facilitate partnerships between local businesses and film crews to boost the industry's ecosystem, ensure fair access to jobs and resources for all individuals, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background. In addition, it aims to provide information about industry opportunities to all members, to which they would be able to apply, act as a comprehensive directory of crew members, businesses, and local service providers, with profiles showcasing skills, experience, and availability.

Alongside this platform, an analytic system was also developed, and surveys were conducted with the aim of tracking how many people are working in the industry and in which roles/departments. This will help the commission identify any gaps within the local sectors, creating a clearer picture for investment regarding educational and training programs to fill these gaps.

Following several consultation sessions with Heads of Industry Departments and on-site visits with local crew, the MFC launched 10 key pledges as part of the Crew Rate Guidelines 2024, aiming to enforce equal rights in the workplace and promote more opportunities within the industry.

The next phase of this initiative is to create a work regulation order to ensure a legal framework is in place to ensure its implementation. Meanwhile, this initiative integrates these requirements into the fiscal cash rebate framework, whereby film productions benefitting from this scheme are expected to abide by these pledges.

In addition, an exercise was carried out amongst HODs and service providers, comparing crew rates to establish an average benchmark to enable the MFC to establish a 'Crew Rate Card' for 2024. This rate card provides industry workers with a benchmark as to what fair wages reflecting their profession and efforts should be.

Finally, the MFC also initiated the process of applying for the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality Mark certification and will also endeavour to obtain The Equal Pay certification. It is expected that this will be concluded and be in place by the end of 2025.

Furthermore, SVP benefits from the Public Service's Employee Support Programme, which assists officers in making contact with ESP. In certain cases, this programme may be imposed following a review by a Medical Board. As of this year, SVP started offering courses in Mental Health First Aid, together with the well-established First Aid course. SVP also provides facilities for staff to utilise, such as the gym, which is free of charge but obviously not within the particular employee's working hours. Akin to all Public Service entities, SVP provides work-life mechanisms such as the flexi week, flexi time, reduced hours, and remote working when the duties of the respective officer allows. Moreover, it is pertinent to note that all employees, that is, irrespective of whether they are employed by the Government or otherwise, are entitled to free education and free childcare.

All working conditions and assistance relating to Maltese employees are provided to foreign employees who are obviously Public Service Officers. These employees are also provided a basic course in the Maltese Language in order to assist them to communicate better with Maltese residents/patients and the general public. Moreover, all Public Service Officers who are either terminally or chronically ill or who may have particular health conditions are also provided with donated leave when their sick leave, full pay and their vacation leave entitlement do not suffice. They are also provided with accumulated sick leave, which is calculated as 50% of their remaining sick leave balance over the last four years prior to the request.
This may be used even when an officer needs to be admitted to a hospital; in fact, some may refer to it as hospitalisation leave. Adoption leave or leave for IVF assistance is also granted to all Public Officers to assist them in their personal lives.

5.5.2 Upskilling the Workforce

Since the launch of the Health Workforce Strategy, the PMD within MHA has continued to focus on various aspects of the Healthcare workforce; this ongoing effort aims to ensure a comprehensive approach to address the needs of both current and future health employees. As part of this effort, ESFs were used to carry out a Training Needs Analysis to identify areas for employee development that will enhance their competencies in response to the evolving needs of the industry.

In collaboration with PMD, the MHA has continued to follow central policies issued by the Public Service, ensuring that better working conditions are incorporated through various sectoral agreements. The promotion of flexible working arrangements and work-life balance, aligned with Public Service policies, remains a priority for the Ministry. Moreover, at GGH, workspaces are being improved to offer better working conditions and also incentivise older workers to remain in employment and provide training opportunities to the employees as part of their continuous professional development.

Beyond healthcare, the tourism and hospitality sector has also seen significant investment in workforce development for maintaining Malta's destination market share, ensuring repeat tourism and safeguarding customer satisfaction. In 2024, the MTA addressed the importance of investment in HR.

Employees in hotels, restaurants, visitor attractions and destination management companies were informed about and encouraged to participate in various courses being offered by Jobsplus. These courses included Food Handling, Mental Health and First Aid training. A seminar was organised for guidance teachers in Malta to raise awareness of the diverse career paths in tourism. This initiative aimed to assist students in selecting subjects to pursue their studies. Additionally, the MTA attended several events aimed at students to promote tourism careers.

Tourism employees play a pivotal role in the success of the industry, and investing in their professional development through Erasmus+ projects can lead to higher job satisfaction, improved customer service, and increased retention rates. By enhancing the skills of employees, the overall service quality improves, which is crucial in maintaining Malta's reputation as a top tourist destination. Furthermore, training focused on leadership and management skills can inspire innovation within the sector, empowering workers to contribute to the strategic direction and future growth of tourism businesses.

Erasmus+ projects often focus on developing soft skills, leadership abilities, and professional training, all of which are crucial for improving service quality in the tourism sector. Through these projects, workers in Malta can access training that helps them build both technical and interpersonal skills. By investing in Erasmus+ projects, MTA boosts the tourism industry by creating a more resilient, skilled, and digitally proficient workforce, ensuring that both employees and the industry itself can thrive in the face of global challenges. Erasmus+ also supports digital transformation by offering opportunities for employees to enhance their skills in digital marketing, cybersecurity, and emerging technologies. This investment strengthens Malta's tourism industry by fostering a skilled, resilient workforce and promoting sustainable practices that contribute to eco-friendly tourism development. Additionally, the programme emphasises inclusivity by offering equal opportunities for professional growth, benefiting diverse groups within the workforce. Ultimately, these efforts aim to maintain Malta's competitive edge in global tourism through continuous education and innovation.

This Group Mobility project includes a VET programme, where employees from various tourism sectors had the opportunity to attend a 5-day tailored training in Rome to improve their knowledge in digitalisation, AI, and Big Data. This opportunity has been open to participants who are professional employees in Managerial or Supervisory roles and working in accommodation, catering, visitor attractions, destination management and other tourism-related businesses that are licensed by MTA and/or hold a Quality Assured or an Eco-Certification issued by the MTA. The VET Group Mobility is composed of 30 persons with ages that vary between 28 and 62 years, mixed European and non-European nationals. The participants have been split into two groups, with the first intake taking place in November 2024 and the second intake in January 2025.

In 2024, ITS started implementing a Skills Pass system, which is expected to be rolled out completely by 2026. This system facilitates access to skilled employees in the hospitality and tourism industry. It is achieved through obligatory training and assessments, which applicants must complete and pass in order to qualify. This qualification has now become a mandatory part of the Identitá Single Permit Application process. The aim of the proposal is to ensure a quality level for EU and non-EU employees in the hospitality and tourism industry and to provide access to quality through rigorous assessments in the basic knowledge, skills and attitudes needed in the hospitality and tourism industry; hence, the introduction of this training and assessments guarantees quality employment in the hospitality and tourism industry in Malta. As a result, this attracts skilled TCNs, EU and Maltese citizens to the industry. It is about attracting quality and not quantity. On 1 January 2026, the Skills Pass within the hospitality and tourism industry will become mandatory for everyone, including Maltese and EU Nationals.

In 2024, the NSC organised a professional development training for senior leadership teams in compulsory schools on 'Embedding Sustainability through School Management'.

This initiative aimed to equip Heads of Schools and Assistant Heads with the tools and insights needed for a holistic approach to sustainability within their schools and communities, in collaboration with the Centre for Environmental Education & Research within the UM.

Moreover, Malta Enterprise has sustained the Skills Development Scheme, which aims to help businesses provide training that develops and updates the skills and knowledge of their workforce. The scheme focuses on enhancing employees' existing skills, addressing skills shortages, facilitating re-skilling, bridging skill gaps, and striving towards developing a knowledge-based workforce.

In parallel, the MGP has sustained the schemes of support that were initiated in previous years, aimed at promoting sustainable development and improving the work-life balance for Gozitan employees. Among the flagship initiatives is the Employment Refund Scheme, which offers a 30% refund (up to €6,000) for every new job created within the private sector based on a three-year contract. Likewise, the Gozo Back Office Employment Refund Scheme provides a partial reimbursement of salaries for full-time work in back-office operations in Gozo on a minimum three-year contract with the aim of attracting highly skilled and educated workers whilst reducing the existing disparities in average basic salaries between Malta and Gozo. In 2024, a total of €947,440.03 was disbursed from funds allocated under both schemes.

Gozo Teleworking Scheme encourages Malta-based companies to grant their Gozitan resident employees, on a minimum three-year contract, the facility to work a number of stipulated hours/days from home. Through this scheme, employees granted telework by their employers have the possibility of reducing their commute frequency between Gozo and Malta, thus potentially reducing their vehicle use, boosting their productivity and overall gaining a better work-life balance. The 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. In addition, it 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 2024, a total of €92,638.79 was disbursed from funds allocated under this scheme.
A new initiative, the Supporting Sustainable Quality Employment in Gozo Scheme, was launched. The main objective of this aid scheme is to direct more efforts towards consolidating full-time employment in Gozo by encouraging enhanced salary packages and improved employment sustainability for employees in Gozo. The scheme also aims to assist employers when it comes to the costly employee turnover rates being experienced. It offers a partial salary reimbursement to Gozo-based employers, spread over 3 years, for full-time indefinite employment. Eligible staff includes newly hired employees or those who have been continuously employed since 1 January 2018, whose employer has benefited from the full 3-year cycle under the previous Gozo Employment Refund Scheme or Gozo Back-Office Employment Refund Scheme. In 2024, a total of €1,842.70 was disbursed under this scheme.

Finally, Gozo resident workers are eligible for a subsidy, including the collective transport subsidy for Gozitan residents working full-time in Malta, both in the Public Sector and in the Private Sector.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The 2024 Sustainable Development Annual Report showcases a continued commitment towards a future built on the pillars of sustainable development, placing both national and global goals at the forefront of government operations. Government's dedication to embedding transparency and an integrated approach towards sustainable development is exemplified in this report, clearly delineating the contribution of the various policies and initiatives undertaken throughout the year towards the realisation of Malta's Sustainable Development Vision for 2050, the Strategic Goals set within Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050, and on a global scale, the Agenda 2030 and its 17 SDGs. It provides a comprehensive overview of the collective efforts and impact of all government ministries and entities. These efforts accelerate progress towards the betterment of our socio-economic and physical environment, promoting a green and blue economy, safeguarding cultural heritage, enhancing physical and mental well-being, utilising digital advancements, creating safe and resilient urban environments, and fostering robust social systems.

The whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach features as a prominent theme in 2024, setting the foundation for the national commitment of preparing Malta's second VNR and ensuring a robust qualitative and quantitative assessment of Malta's progress towards achieving the SDGs. These preparations were reinforced by continued efforts in establishing a set of Sustainable Development Indicators, supporting decision-making that is evidence-based. Additionally, the process of preparing Malta's second VNR fostered an inclusive and open national dialogue on sustainable development among several stakeholders, including government entities, private companies, academic and religious institutions, vulnerable groups, together with youths and children, driving ambitions of reaching shared goals between various sectors and disciplines.

Cultivating an atmosphere of discussion and partnership, alongside promoting sustainability principles, will drive positive change and ensure that sustainable practices are integrated across all areas of development. Through coherent and consistent efforts, Malta can achieve its Strategic Goals and effectively meet the UN's goals in an inclusive, efficient, and impactful manner.

ANNEX 1: 2024 MILESTONES

SDG	Main Initiatives/ Measures commencing in 2024	Description	Reference page in document
ALL SDGs	Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050	The SDD published Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050 in 2024, alongside a children's version. The Strategy is built on 5 Strategic Goals, 18 Strategic Objectives, and 54 targets. accomplish by 2050.	12
ALL SDGs	Malta's Sustainable Development Action Days 2024	As part of ESDW 2024 Malta launched its first edition of Malta's Sustainable Development Action Days with the theme "Shaping Together the Future We Want", held between the 18 September and 8 October.	18
ALL SDGs	The Sustainable Development Fund	By the end of 2024, three of five projects selected were completed. This funding enables projects and activities that have quantifiable effects on the social, economic, and environmental domains.	20
ALL SDGs	Sustainable Localities Scheme	By the end of 2024, two projects were completed.	20
ALL SDGs	The Football for the Goals Initiative	This initiative, which started in October 2024, places students and schools at the forefront as sustainability ambassadors by supporting sustainable projects that bring about significant change.	21
ALL SDGs	Drafting Malta's Second Voluntary National Review	Malta started drafting its second VNR. The second VNR builds upon Malta's first, showcasing progress, challenges and ways forward for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.	22
ALL SDGs	Sustainable Development Multi-Stakeholder Forum	The first edition of this forum was launched in 2024 as a way to bring together different stakeholders to discuss thematic areas related to sustainable development. The first edition was used to gather insights for the VNR.	22
ALL SDGs	Launch of the Young Artists, Big Impact – Children's Art Expo	To engage younger audiences, an art expo was launched on 6 November titled "Young Artists, Big Impact," open to children in Years 4-6, centred on depicting what the SDGs.	22
ALL SDGs	SDG Youth Meet-Up	This event was held in collaboration with AŻ and KNŻ, and brought together youths aged 18-30 to discuss the five Strategic Goals of Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy.	22

ALL SDGs	SDG Youth Champions	Five young people with a passion for sustainability who want to inspire others were given the opportunity to represent and advocate for one of the five Strategic Goals of Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy 2050.	22
11	The Coproduction of Healthy, Secure and Playful Spaces Project	This project aligned with the Guardian of Future Generations' work to ensure healthy outcomes for all Maltese and Gozitan residents by developing and implementing effective policies, improving systems, and adopting creative practices that foster a more resilient society.	23
All SDGs	Sustainable Development Strategy 2050 School Sessions	By December 2024, 4,500 books of the Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050 – Children's Version were distributed to year 3 students and school-based sessions were held based on the five Strategic Goals in the Strategy.	23
13	Establishment of the Climate Action Authority	The CAA was officially established in October 2024 and is tasked with coordinating and overseeing Malta's climate-related measures and regulations.	28
13	Submission of Malta's first Biennial Transparency Report	In December 2024, Malta submitted its first BTR, which provides country-specific information on the implementation of the Paris Agreement.	29
8, 13	Launch of the Green Champions Initiative	Launched in 2024 by the Malta Film Commission, this monitoring initiative aims to promote sustainable production practices in the film industry.	30
11,13	ERA and TM Educational Campaign on Air Quality	The campaign targeted primary and secondary school children to raise awareness of air quality, environmental noise and sustainable mobility. As part of the campaign, an activity book was developed and an art competition was held.	31
7, 11, 13	Completion of works for the Shore-to-Ship Project in the Northern part of the Grand Harbour and Boiler Wharf	Since its completion, docked cruise liners in the Northern part of the Grand Harbour have been able to plug into Malta's electricity grid through shore-to-ship technology, with a current capacity of up to five cruise liners powered simultaneously.	33
7	National Policy for the Deployment of Offshore Renewable Energy	Published by EWA, this policy provides a framework for the development of offshore renewables, with a focus on offshore wind energy within Malta's Exclusive Economic Zone.	35
7	Installation of PV panels on Water Services Corporation assets	By the end of 2024, a roof area of 19,000m^3 was covered by PV panels.	35
6,15	Extending the provision of the New Water supply	New Water supply will be extended to an additional 223 hectares of agricultural land. Work on the project began in October 2024.	57

7, 11	Building and Construction Authority Informative Campaign on Energy Performance Certificate rating for property advertisements	This comprehensive approach aimed to raise awareness about the legal obligation and benefits of disclosing the EPC rating and ultimately promoted transparency and informed decision-making in the property market.	36
7	2024 Renewable Energy Grant Scheme	Grant to further encourage the better use of the renewable energy being generated by the country.	36
4, 12	Opening of the ECOHIVE Academy in Marsascala	This academy was created to use a range of interactive displays and digital experiences to inform the public about waste management and encourage sustainable practices.	42
12	Enactment of the Construction and Demolition Waste Framework Regulations	These regulations outline the responsibilities of key stakeholders in the sector, including developers/clients, contractors, waste carriers, and site managers.	44
12	Launch of the Bring Your Own Container Initiative	Launched in April 2024, this initiative encourages consumers to bring reusable containers to participating businesses, offering them discounts or rewards in exchange.	45
6	Launch of a new RO Scheme by the Regulator for Energy and Water Services	This scheme aims at reducing plastic containers for bottling water.	46
12	Launch of a new automated glass sorting line at WasteServ	This new sorting line is capable of processing 52,000 glass bottles an hour, increasing WasteServ's annual operational capacity from 8,000 tonnes to 21,000 tonnes.	46
15	Launch of a 5-year management plan for Il-Park Nazzjonali tal-Inwadar	The management of such sites ensures that the conservation objectives for the species and habitats within these areas are effectively met.	48
15	Designation of the endemic Maltese Honeybee as a national species	This designation represents a key achievement in biodiversity conservation, strengthening the species' protection.	48
4, 15	Launch of a new user-friendly identification guide on protected and alien trees in Malta	This book is one of a series of guidance documents aimed at supporting Malta's legislative framework to protect native trees and woodlands.	49
6, 14	Launch of the Silva Green Pathways Project	As part of this project, restoration work will be carried out on two woodlands in Aħrax tal-Mellieħa and Miżieb. Work will include the control and removal of alien and invasive trees, the restoration of a girna, and the installation of irrigation systems connected to the nearby New Water. Information boards and fire markers will also be installed.	51
14, 15	Regeneration of Wied Għajn Riħana in Burmarrad	This project combined ecological restoration with structural improvements, including the restoration of rubble retention walls to bolster the valley's resilience. A public access trail was also established.	52

14	Restoration of "Il-Ballut ta' Marsaxlokk" coastal wetland	Carried out through LIFE IP RBMP Action C13.	53
14	Launch of a pilot project to control the spread of the *Oculina patagonica*	Actions included initial surveys to map and measure colonies, physical removal of six colonies using hammer and chisel, and the smothering of six colonies with biodegradable jute matting.	54
14	Introduction of a VR Mobile Unit by the Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Public Cleanliness	The unit allows visitors to experience seven MPAs around Malta, Gozo, and Comino from a diver's perspective through virtual reality.	55
12, 14	Installation of ballot bins on sandy and rocky beaches across the Maltese Islands	52 ballot bins were installed by Saving Our Blue on sandy and rocky beaches around the Maltese Islands to combat the damage caused by cigarette butts.	55
14	Publication of the 3rd River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) for Malta	This plan provides a status assessment of inland and coastal waters in the Maltese Islands and outlines a programme of measures necessary to work towards the achievement or maintenance of good status in these water bodies.	56
2	Launch of Malta's Strategy for Resilient Food Systems	The Strategy seeks to align the mindsets and behaviours of various stakeholders across the food ecosystem towards sustainability and resilience.	60
2	Publication of New Regulations for the categorisation of farmers	These regulations provide for farmers to be categorised according to their economic activity, which will act as a tool for better visibility of the efficiency, viability and needs of the agriculture sector.	60
2	Off-Farm Productive Investments	In 2024, the application process for this investment scheme was launched, and an information session was held.	60
2, 15	Inclusion of the autochthonous grape varieties	Ġellewża and Girgentina, and the autochthonous olive variety Bidni have been included in the national catalogue.	61
2	Introduction of targeted state-aid measures to align agricultural activities	These include multiple schemes including the Agroforestry Scheme, Dairy Cessation Scheme and the National Fertiliser Scheme.	62
2, 8, 14	Commencement of investigations for Daħlet Qorrot and Ħondoq ir-Rummien	Geological and bathometric investigations, as well as wave analysis of the area commenced. The purpose of this project is to continue supporting the artisanal fisheries sector of Gozo through the provision of a safer working environment that would translate into additional competitive gains to the island's fishers.	62
8, 9	Launch of an online monitoring tool for Malta's first Green Bond	The tool allows the public to track the progress of the initiatives under the Green Bond and the associated bond disbursement.	65
7, 8, 9, 12	Introduction of the Smart and Sustainable Investment Grant	This grant provides funding to support businesses investing in sustainable processes, enhancing their competitiveness.	65

8, 9	Launch of Accelerate 2024	Such a measure is intended to support businesses with a viable business concept and are within the process of developing the technology into a market.	65
8,9	Launch of the Business Development Scheme	A scheme intended to facilitate value-added projects including new business initiatives, start-ups, expansions and transformation activities that shall contribute to regional development.	65
8,9	Launch of the Invest-Support for Initial Investment Projects Scheme	A scheme intended to sustain the regional industrial and economic development of Malta by facilitating initial investments.	65
8,9	Counter-Guarantee Agreement between the European Investment Fund and the Malta Development Bank	This support includes a €15 million guarantee to empower SMEs and small mid-caps in Malta to undertake green projects.	65
8,9	Launch of a cross-sectoral consumer awareness campaign and online portal	MFSA launched a consumer awareness campaign and, as part of the campaign, created a portal on the MFSA's website entitled '*Go Sustainable – Dodge Greenwashing*!'	65
11	Introduction of Malta Tourism Awards	These awards replaced the previous Special Thanks and Recognition Awards. These awards act as a recognition platform for stakeholders in the industry.	74
8, 11	Launch of Apprenticeship Scheme	The primary objectives of the Scheme included supporting the professional development of creative practitioners, encouraging creative professionals to continue building their skill sets, and supporting enterprises operating within the priority sectors of this scheme.	75
10, 11	Launch of the Regional Cultural Cooperation Programme	Enables Regions and those involved in their councils to support and maintain Malta's creative and cultural ecology, whilst practicing cultural diplomacy.	75
2, 11	Launch of a course on traditional Maltese foods	This course is a collaboration between the Public Abattoir and UM.	77
11	Renewal of a partnership agreement between Ministry for Gozo and Planning and *Wirt Għawdex*	Covering a period of 10 years, this agreement will safeguard and protect five important historical sites found in Gozo for the enjoyment of future generations and will provide physical and intellectual access to them.	81
11	Launch of the Restoration Works Scheme for Gozitan Local Councils	Aims to restore historical structures and rejuvenate urban spaces. The Scheme provides financial assistance to Local Councils for the restoration and preservation of structures, monuments, and niches of historical or artistic value.	81
11	Re-establishment of the Commercialisation Section	Implemented by Lands Authority in an effort to optimise the use of government properties and promote their sustainable restoration, this initiative not only helps reduce restoration costs, but also aids in preserving local heritage and national assets.	82

4, 11	Peppa Pig and Perlina TV in Maltese	Two projects launched in 2024 that aim to promote the Maltese Language and make it accessible to wider audiences.	83
4, 11	Mal-Melodija	This project brings together the Maltese language, literature and traditional Maltese instruments.	83
11	Commencement of works for the Msida Creek Project	The proposed flyover design is set to reduce travel times and accident risks. This project will also be decreasing noise pollution whilst improving air quality.	86
11,15	Embellishment and pedestrianisation of piazza next to the visitors' centre at the Tarxien Prehistoric site	Carried out by Heritage Malta, such projects preserve historical and cultural significance while promoting community wellbeing.	88
11	Restoration of Villa Portelli	The project transformed the villa's expansive gardens, spanning over 5,000 m2, into an accessible and welcoming green space for public use.	88
11, 15	Transformation of Ġnien Fuq il-Glażiż	The 9,000 m2 forested area has been transformed into a green recreational space for the community. This project has revitalised the site and seamlessly integrated heritage preservation with modern recreational amenities.	88
11, 15	Spencer Garden Regeneration Project	The main intent of the refurbishment was to create an oasis in this heavily urbanised and industrial area that is easily accessible for Marsa residents and workers in the area alike.	90
11, 15	Inauguration of Wied Inċita	Opened to the public after AM carried out several restoration interventions, including the removal of invasive trees and plants, cleaning, and the installation of green infrastructure. Works included the planting of 750 trees, 1,400 indigenous shrubs, and 500 aromatic and ornamental plants.	90
11	Garden restoration projects	These included: • The Independence Garden in Birżebbuġa • Hospice Garden in Santa Venera • Pollinator Garden in San Ġwann • San Blas Caritas Garden • Helen Keller School Garden in Ħaż-Żebbuġ • Peace Lab Garden in Ħal Far • Ġebel San Martin in Żejtun • Erba' Mwieżeb in St. Paul's Bay • The Rainwater Harvesting Park in Għajnsielem • The Serenity Garden in Santa Luċija • Kottonera Gardens • William Harding Garden in Pembroke.	91

3	Launch of a Policy Framework for the Prevention of Non-communicable Diseases, Prevention and the Promotion of Well-being 2025-2035.	This framework aims to improve population health and well-being by preventing NCDs, thus reducing morbidity and mortality associated with these diseases.	96
3, 16	Publication of Legal Notice 105 of 2024 updating SL 35.28 of 2004	This important legislation transparently outlines the fees applicable to third-country nationals (TCNs) and Maltese citizens undertaking healthcare in centres within other EU countries.	96
3, 10	International Workshop on Patients' Rights and Rare Diseases	Organised by the CMO's office in conjunction with the EC and the Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (SANTE). This hybrid event, featuring both local and international speakers, aimed to raise awareness on the application of patients' rights in cross-border healthcare.	96
3	Inclusion of new medicines on the Government Formulary List	A total of 20 new medications were added to the GFL.	97
3	Extension of the Nurse Navigator Services	Extension of the services into Neuro-Oncology, Sarcoma, Skin, and Melanoma cancer care cases and recruitment of a new nurse navigator specifically trained to manage cases in these areas.	97
3	Advancements at the Gozo General Hospital	Some examples include electrophysiological studies for follow-up care, a wound device checks clinic post-pacemaker implant, a heart failure clinic, and a cardiac rehabilitation service, introduction of a new 3T MRI scanner and a CT scanner, and musculoskeletal ultrasound studies.	98
3	Launch of the National Sexual Health Strategy 2025-2030	This comprehensive strategy outlines the Government's plans in terms of sexual health and well-being, with several proposals, including education across the life course, sexual health services, family planning services, and measures aimed at key populations.	98
3	Opening of newly modernised community clinics across the country	In March, the newly modernised Qormi Health Centre was opened, ensconcing new services and improved facilities for the population of the surrounding areas. Since then, Qormi Health Centre has successfully provided services for over 75,000 clients. The new community clinics in St Julian's, Qala, Birżebbuġa, Siġġiewi, and Għargħur brought the total number of community clinics to 30, ensuring wider access to healthcare across the islands.	98
3	Launch of PCV20 Vaccination Programme	Targeting individuals aged 65 and above, the vaccine provides immunity against common respiratory pathogens, aiming to reduce hospitalisations among the most affected demographic.	99

3	Podo-paediatric screening programme	Screenings for Year 2 students attending state schools. The aim of this programme is to detect early problems and initiate intervention in a timely manner, resulting in the prevention of long-term complications and enhancing overall foot health for children.	99
3, 9	Launch of SpeakTX Software	An online speech therapy platform that provides interactive exercises created by speech therapists to enhance service provision to its clients.	99
3, 10, 16	Compensation for Thalidomide Victims	The first financial compensation payments were distributed in May 2024, with payouts scheduled over three years.	101
3	Launch of the Sports Initiative and Facilities Scheme	The main aim of this scheme, which launched in 2024, is to improve sports facilities and/or organise sports-related activities.	103
3	Aġenzija Żgħażagħ Programmes	Programmes include: Mindful Mosaic, Resilience Toolbox: Coping Skills for Teens workshop, Zen Zone, Youth Worker Online.	104
3, 10	New multidisciplinary clinic in Floriana residential Home	The new multidisciplinary clinic, equipped with specialised medical equipment within the Floriana residential home, ensures that all residents receive holistic and personalised care in a private and dignified environment.	105
9, 16	Queue Management System	Servizz.gov applied this system across its 25 hubs, aiming to enhance operational efficiency and improve the citizen experience whilst modernising service delivery.	110
9, 16	Launch of Single Point of Entry proof-of-concept project	Ensures consistent data integrity across government websites. The project introduces a streamlined process for backend users to update government services directly within the Microsoft Dynamics CRM. These updates are reflected in real-time, whereby citizens accessing government services are able to receive consistent, accurate, and up-to-date information, regardless of the portal they use.	111
9, 16	Monitoring of the Bank's related internet domains, social media, and other digital risks	This initiative provided comprehensive protection for the Bank's digital presence, including brand, location, and domain protection, as well as universal takedowns and corporate social account protection.	111
3, 9	New ERP System at the Gozo General Hospital	The hospital adopted a new ERP system within its Pharmacy, Stores, and Finance Departments. The system will lead to less overhead, better stock management, and less waste as stock is more accurately monitored.	113
3, 9	Update of Building Management System at the Gozo General Hospital	The hospital's engineering department also upgraded and improved the hospital's Building Management System, ensuring that any faults are reported automatically to ensure optimal operations of lighting, heating, cooling, water, and ventilation systems.	113

11	Launch of the Supporting Knowledge-Based Sectors in Gozo Scheme	The main objective of this aid scheme is to attract new high-growth industries in Gozo that are more conducive to digital and technological innovation, as well as contributing to broader environmental and societal goals.	114
11	Development of the MaltaSage Platform	This platform aims to enhance tourism-related data analysis and decision-making processes. The platform is designed with various user access layers to ensure secure, efficient, and role-appropriate interaction with the system.	115
16	Launch of a new website for the Malta Police Force	Developed with the user experience in mind, the new website provides the community with an innovative, efficient, and mobile-friendly platform. Through its Remote Reporting Unit, as of July 2024, the MPF introduced the option of filing a police report remotely for both crime victims and crime witnesses.	116
4, 8, 16	Introduction of an MSc in Cybersecurity course at UM	This course is in line with industry requirements. MITA sponsored a specialised cybersecurity lab, thus facilitating practical cyber modules. This is essential to secure a supply of cybersecurity knowledge and skills.	117
4, 8, 9	CybARverse	This Erasmus+ funded project, concluded in 2024, aimed to create a platform for training in cybersecurity within the VET sector, including the adoption of immersive technologies such as augmented reality.	117
9	'inMalta' Brand Initiative	Collaboration between Tech.mt, Malta Enterprise, FinanceMalta, GamingMalta and the MDIA, to help the local tech industry and attract foreign direct investment.	117
8, 9	Finalisation of the LISP Platform	The platform is a single-point regarding digital and education skills and supports national stakeholders in sharing their digital skills and job-related activities with other relevant national coalition networks of actors in the Member States of the EU.	118
4, 9	EU Code Week 2024	Malta placed first in EU Code Week 2024 with the highest number of coding sessions organised per capita. Over 400 coding sessions were held nationwide, engaging participants of all ages in learning essential digital skills and coding knowledge between 14 and 27 October 2024.	118
4, 9	Provision of robotics sessions to young students	eSkills Malta Foundation collaborated with FES to provide engaging robotics sessions to young students about the basics of robotics and programming in a fun and interactive environment. The children participated in hands-on activities, building, and programming their own robots.	118
8, 11, 13	Launch of the Green Mobility Scheme	The aim of the scheme is to support the sustainable transition through the accelerated uptake of EVs for the transportation of both people and goods, and to support investment in recharging infrastructure.	119

9	Launch of the National R&I Strategic Plan 2023 – 2027	This Plan acts as the flagship strategy for strengthening Malta's R&I and enhancing its directionality with regard to addressing social and economic issues through R&I.	121
11	Agreement between Xjenza Malta and the National Research Council of Italy	The agreement aims to strengthen scientific cooperation between Malta and Italy in areas such as maritime technologies, digital innovation, health, resource sustainability, smart manufacturing, aerospace, and cultural heritage.	124
9	Launch of the Malta Enterprise Research and Development Scheme	Launched in January 2024, the scheme supports industry in undertaking Industrial Research and Experimental Development activities.	124
8, 9	Launch of the Malta Enterprise Innovate-Innovation Aid for SMEs	Its aim is to support SMEs in carrying out projects leading to product, process and organisational innovation.	125
13	Conclusion of Vinci – Low Carbon Tourism project	This project aimed to promote low-carbon tourism and entrepreneurship across EU Member States by uniting seven partners with expertise in climate change, sustainability, tourism, entrepreneurship, training, curriculum development, and digital technologies.	127
1, 10	Reforms in the Pension System	Reforms in the pension system were designed to balance fiscal sustainability with income adequacy for retirees. The main initiatives included the progressive increases in the retirement age, increases in the contributory period required to be granted full pension and the provision of fiscal incentives to those who choose to defer retirement beyond retirement age.	136
1, 10	Reforms in the Unemployment Benefit	The reform to the Unemployment Benefit in 2024 linked the benefit rate to the individual's salary prior to unemployment.	136
1, 10	Reforms in Social Assistance	As part of these reforms, all beneficiaries of Social Assistance, which totalled approximately 5,800 beneficiaries in 2024, began receiving the full COLA.	137
1, 10	Reforms in Sickness Assistance	A new measure was introduced giving concessions for Sickness Assistance beneficiaries to those receiving a pension for at least 5 years. In this regard, the means-test capital limit was increased to €50,000 for couples and to €30,000 for single persons as long as the excess results solely from inheritance.	137
1, 10	Launch of the Food 4 You Support Project	Throughout the year, two distributions were carried out from approximately 18 centres located around Malta and Gozo, benefitting around 2,500 eligible households per distribution.	137
11	Flimkien F'Bormla Initiative	This collaboration between ACTS and Cottonera Community Services allowed local organisations to host activities that encouraged different generations to exchange knowledge and stories, celebrating their shared heritage.	138

5	Menstruation Pilot Project and Campaign	This was a pilot project launched in three schools across Malta and Gozo, which involved the installation of dispensers to ensure easy access to menstrual products, such as pads and tampons, for students. A comprehensive nationwide awareness campaign, the 'End the Stigma, Period' campaign, was also introduced alongside this pilot project.	138
10	Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics (Amendment) Act (Act No. XXV of 2024)	This amendment establishing legal recognition for non-binary genders, allowing individuals to identify officially as non-binary with the gender marker 'X' on all official documents. The amendment allows changes to all relevant acts of civil status (e.g., birth, marriage, civil union) to be done through a single notary procedure.	139
4,8,10	Mosta Community Services English Lessons	An initiative to help migrants pursue education and secure employment.	140
10	Diversity Day	An activity organised in Birżebbuġa by the Southern Community Services to promote cultural inclusion.	140
10	Human Library Event by the Qawra Community Services	An activity held to foster dialogue, reduce prejudice and encourage understanding through personal experiences.	140
4,8,10	Tinkering Days and Skills-Based Courses	These initiatives sought to promote the concept of lifelong learning, encouraging residents to embrace continuous personal and professional development.	140
3, 10	Launch of the Children's Policy Framework 2024-2030	This framework was launched to enhance the overall childhood experience through targeted support, ensuring that every child reaches their full potential.	141
4, 10	Introduction of child-friendly versions of key documents through the Empowering Children's Participation in Malta Project	These key documents included the National Strategy for Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion 2025-2035, the National Children's Policy Framework 2024-2030, A Social Plan for the Families, Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050, and the Digital Education Strategy 2024-2030.	141
10	Launch of VUĊI Toolkit	A child participation impact evaluation toolkit.	141
3, 4, 8, 17	Forming of public-private partnerships by FES	These partnerships offer a more varied series of learning opportunities to children, including sessions in art, financial literacy and road safety, among others.	143
8, 9	Youth Guarantee Scheme 3.0	This initiative targets individuals aged 15 to 29, offering specialised re-skilling and upskilling programmes, with a focus on emerging sectors such as green and digital sectors.	143
5, 8, 16	Launch of the National Strategy and Action Plan on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings in Malta	The plan addresses issues related to forced prostitution and exploitation for sexual purposes as a crime. Key measures include research, efforts to tackle exploitation, and specialised support for victims.	144

5, 8	16 Days Activism 2024 – Together we Stand, Together we Heal	A national campaign enacted by the CGBVDV to raise awareness on GBV and DV. Such efforts included social media material highlighting victim stories, articles and bus adverts.	145
5, 8	Opening of Santa Lucija Hub for Victims of Domestic Violence	The hub, opened by MHSE, received an average of 6 victims a day.	146
5, 8	Therapy Group Service by the Victim Support Agency	This new therapy group aims to support victims of DV.	146
8, 9, 10	Disability benefits application fully transitioned to a digital end-to-end system	This provides an accessible and efficient approach for individuals seeking disability – related support.	146
10	Establishment of an Inter-Professional Board for persons with disability	The board aims to enhance sustainable development by promoting a more inclusive, equitable, and efficient approach to disability benefits, empowering individuals and contributing to broader social and economic goals.	146
11	Volunteer Centre Xewkija, Gozo	A new volunteer centre was opened in Xewkija by the Malta Council for Voluntary Sector, ensuring 24/7 easy access for voluntary organisations.	147
1, 10, 11	Amendment of Private Rent Housing Benefit Scheme	The scheme now calculates housing benefits based not only on the applicants' income but also on their rent expenditure.	148
1, 11	Amendment to the Grant on First Residence Scheme	Single applicants can now receive the same grant amount as couples. Additionally, owners of first residences who need to construct additional rooms or make alterations to their homes due to a growing family are also eligible for a grant under this scheme.	148
11	2024 Regulations on the Limitation of the Number of Residents in Rented Homes	As of 2024, a residence with 2 bedrooms and at least one bathroom can only be permitted to house a maximum of 4 people.	148
10	Beach Hoist services at Menqa, Marsalforn	This service offers individuals with mobility impairments easy access to the sea with a beach hoist.	148
16	Reforms in the Office of the Attorney General	The Office of the Attorney General assumes responsibility for prosecuting cases that were previously handled by the Police.	150
16	Finalisation of new Court Hall	In addition, to reduce the Court's case load and address space constraints, a new Court Hall was finalised and started to be used for court sittings in 2024.	150
16	Launch of a Help Desk by the Court Services Agency	The Court Services Agency launched a Help Desk to assist the public with court services queries, ensuring proper access to justice.	151
16	Amendment of the Attorney General Ordinance (Amendment) Act, 2024 (Act No. XXXIV of 2024)	This amendment allows for the designation of additional Deputy Attorneys General, instead of 1.	151

16,17	Launch of a multi-country project on people-centred justice	MJR and OECD have come together to review and strengthen the role of mediation as an alternative dispute resolution option within the local justice system and improve access to justice for persons with different abilities.	151
16	Enactment of the Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation Order (SL) 460.40 of the Laws of Malta)	The Order fully transposes Directive (EU) 2024/1069 of the European Parliament and Council of 11 April 2024 on protecting persons who engage in public participation from manifestly unfounded claims or abusive court proceedings 'Strategic lawsuits against public participation' into national legislation. The enactment of this law made Malta the first EU Member State to transpose the EU anti-SLAPP Directive.	152
16	Introduction of specialised panels of legal aid lawyers in civil, criminal and victims of crime	This initiative enhances the quality of legal aid services provided to clients.	152
16	Amendments to the Building and Construction Act	In particular, new regulations on the licensing of masons. Through the gradual implementation of amendments in the regulations, the Building Construction Authority continues to assume a greater role in the construction industry.	152
8, 16	Introduction of a Health and Safety Act	Aims to move towards a safer working environment for everyone involved and continues building a resilient and responsible construction sector.	152
8	Enactment of Property Market Act	The act establishes an Agency on the property market.	153
8	Establishment of the Construction and Occupational Health Directorate	Ensures the promotion of effective communication and coordination between government and private entities involved in the property sector.	153
8, 16	Introduction of Helpline 138	Provides a centralised 24/7 system for all inquiries related to construction, health and safety.	153
4, 8	Priority setting for the development of a National Skills Strategy	Critical areas of focus have been identified, including aligning educational outcomes with labour market needs, improving access to skills information for lifelong learning, and incentivising employers to promote learning within the organisations.	153
8	'CareerScape' Conference	The conference brought together stakeholders from 13 sectors to build bridges between industry, policymakers, and education providers, to foster sector-specific discussions on emerging careers and in-demand skills.	156
8	Launch of the National Career Guidance Network	The network aims to create a unified and comprehensive network of career guidance service providers, employers, and HR professionals.	157
8	Launch of the 'Dream, Learn, And Succeed' Campaign	This campaign provides guidance on developing ten transversal skills, ensuring individuals remain competitive in the evolving job market.	157

8,11, 16	Introduction of the Masons Licence Regulations	The new regulations now require stone masons to receive regular training on safety and new building practices before they are able to renew their licences.	159
8,9,11, 16	Legislative amendment on mandating the licensing of construction contractors	Under these new amendments, contractors are required to obtain separate licenses for demolition, excavation, and construction work. They must demonstrate competency in each area, undergo specialised training, and ensure that insurance policies cover all projects.	159
4, 8	Introduction of a Mentorship Programme through Project Green and UM	This programme enabled students to work closely with industry professionals, honing their technical and practical skills.	159
8, 10, 16	Temporary Agency Workers Regulations 2024	By virtue of these regulations, any inequality arising from any difference in the rate of remuneration and in the basic working and employment conditions of temporary agency, workers who work in the same class of employment but with different 'user undertakings' are addressed.	162
8, 16	Enactment of a new Health and Safety at Work Act	The Act introduced new powers to OHSA, including the publication of Administrative Instruments, in order to address urgent matters. It also includes a new structure of penalties covering failures purely of an administrative nature.	162
8, 10, 16	Launch of 10 key pledges as part of the Crew Rate Guidelines 2024	These pledges aim to enforce equal rights in the workplace and promote more opportunities within the film industry.	163
8	Establishment of the Crew Rate Card	This rate card provides industry workers with a benchmark as to what fair wages reflecting their profession and efforts should be.	164
8	Start of implementation of the Skills Pass system	This system facilitates access to skilled employees in the hospitality and tourism industry. It is achieved through obligatory training and assessments, which applicants must complete and pass in order to qualify.	165
4, 8	Embedding Sustainability through School Management Training	This initiative aimed to equip Heads of Schools and Assistant Heads with the tools and insights needed for a holistic approach to sustainability within their schools and communities.	166
8	Launch of the Supporting Sustainable Quality Employment in Gozo Scheme	The main objective of this aid scheme is to seek to direct more efforts towards consolidating full-time employment in Gozo by encouraging enhanced salary packages and improved employment sustainability for employees in Gozo.	166

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