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Majjistral Action Group Foundation



The Local Development Strategy for the Majjistral Territory (2023-2027)



The European Agricultural Fund
For Rural Development:
Europe Investing in Rural Areas



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List Of Abbreviations

ARPA	Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CLC	Corine Land Cover
CLLD	Community Led Local Development
DC	Decision Committee
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EC	Evaluation Committee
ENRD	European Network for Rural Development
FPD	Funds and Programme Division
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
LAG	Local Action Group
LDS	Local Development Strategy
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LPIS	Land Parcel Identification System
MA	Managing Authority
MAGF	Majjistral Action Group Foundation
MPV	Multi Purpose Vehicle
MQF	Malta Qualifications Framework
MRA	Malta Resources Authority
MTA	Malta Tourism Authority
NSO	National Statistics Office
ODZ	Outside Development Zone
PA	Planning Authority
CAP SP	Rural Development Programme
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
UAA	Utilised Agricultural Area
WFD	Water Framework Directive
WSC	Water Services Corporation

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1. Introduction

The Leader Programme (LEADER) has been part of the EU package of funding programmes since 1991. It was first implemented in Malta under the 2007-2013 Rural Development Programme (RDP). As described by the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD), Leader is a Community Led Local Development (CLLD) initiative aimed at integrating “development processes designed to engage, enable, resource and empower local communities in undertaking their own local development”.¹

A CLLD has three main components which are vital and are the ‘trinity’ of local territory development. These are:

- The local territory
- The partnership
- The Local Development Strategy (LDS)

In respect to the objective of this document, the latter point will be targeted. That is of putting forward a local development strategy for the Majjistral (North-West) territory of Malta.

The main characteristics that distinguish LEADER from other programmes is the unique design. In particular, strategies deriving from LEADER are drafted using a bottom-up-approach that emphasises and promotes local participation and territorial inclusiveness. This approach then integrates with the local strategy embodying skills, local knowledge ideas and expertise that might not have been given importance in central strategies and national programmes. Hence, LEADER is an important initiative targeting specific needs in each locality as described by the citizens themselves.

To continue building on the foundations of past programmes, the main focus of the 2023-2027 programming period will be to help existing Local Action Groups (LAG’s) improve areas which are found to be suboptimal. In this regard, LAG’s will be supporting both the consolidation as well as development of their territory to target the specific needs of the area and devise policies and strategies to address such needs.

The Majjistral Action Group Foundation (MAGF) initiated the 2014-2020 within the North-West territory of Malta in 2015. The operations kickstarted through the clustering of several local councils and other stakeholders situated within this region. In accordance with the process outlined by LEADER, this document is presented by the MAGF in relation to the Majjistral territory.

¹ European Network for Rural Development (2016), *LEADER Local Development Strategies (LDS) Guidance on design and implementation*, p.1

2. Identifying the Territory

This section describes the characteristics of the territory as well as the population in each locality. This enables an understanding of the characteristics of the territory, thus creating the context for a Strategy aimed at targeting the area's particular needs.

The first step towards the Majjstral LDS was to determine which localities are deemed eligible to participate in LEADER within the stipulated territory. The 2023-2027 CAP SP re-establishes the three criteria on which to identify the territory:

- i. Having a population density lower than 5,000 persons per square kilometre,
- ii. Having not less than 10% of the area of the locality defines as "agricultural land", and
- iii. Having not less than 35% of the locality defined as "outside development zone."

To ascertain whether the localities fall within these pre-determined criteria various data sources were used. For the population density (criterion 1), the latest available National Statistics Office (NSO) Census of Housing and Population data was used.² The percentage of area outside development zone (criterion 3) was collected from the latest available Planning Authority's (PA) datasets.³

As regards to the percentage of area allocated to agricultural land per locality, three different data sources were utilized. The respective sources' differences in estimates were taken into consideration.

- NSO Census of Agriculture (2020) – this report provides an overview of the total utilized agricultural land in hectares (ha) as declared by farmers in respect to locality of residence. This implies that if a holder of an agricultural land resides in the South, but the land is in the North, the Census registers such agricultural land in the South.
- Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) – this data provides agricultural land cover per local council and is provided by the Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency (ARPA) within the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Rights (MAFA). It is a supporting tool in the form of a special register in aid of farmers who intend to apply for such schemes in this area of subject. This is to identify any agricultural parcels intended to be listed in the annual declaration for EU aid. As a result, this source captures only land that is registered by farmers/land managers under EU aid measures (referred to as Pillar I) – while this might be a high proportion, it might not necessarily reflect all agricultural areas.

² NSO (2023), *Census of Population and Housing 2021*

³ Within an Outside Development Zone, the PA includes all areas outside the development zone, as per the 2021 PA Geographic Information Systems (GIS) datasets.

- Corine Land Cover (CLC) inventory data (2018) - this is a Pan-European initiative coordinated by the European Environment Agency and producing land cover/land use information in CLC maps using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology to map different classes of agricultural land. It is pertinent to note that CLC uses a Minimum Mapping Unit of 25 hectares (ha) for areal phenomena and a minimum width of 100 metres for linear phenomena. Hence this resolution might not be sensitive enough to provide precise information about land use/cover in Malta, given Malta's land limitations. However, the summation of land use cover of different agricultural land classes for each local council is still viable and one can still derive reliable estimates.

Evidently, the three data sources all carry their own limitations. Following a review of past LDS's and consultation with the Funds and Programme Division, which is the managing authority of CAP SP fund, it was decided that that the 2018 CLC inventory data is the more useful source for the purpose of this project.

Upon using the chosen data source, it was concluded that the Majjistral territory for the 2023-2027 Programming period differed slightly from that highlighted in the previous Local Development Strategy. During the Programme LEADER 2023-2027, San wann will be replaced by Ħal Lija as part of the Majjistral territory as outlined in the LDS for the LEADER Programme 2007-2013.

Therefore, the Majjistral territory for this programming period will once more consist of sixteen (16) localities situated within the North-West of Malta. These cover a substantial part of Malta's rural areas and associated coastlines. The localities within the territory, classified within NSO's local administration unit's districts⁴ are:

Western

- Mtarfa
- Ħ'Attard
- Ħad-Dingli
- Rabat (Malta)
- Siġġiewi
- Iklin
- Ħaż-Żebbuġ
- Mdina
- Ħal Lija

Northern

- Mellieħa
- Naxxar
- Mosta
- St. Paul's Bay
- Għargħur
- Mgarr

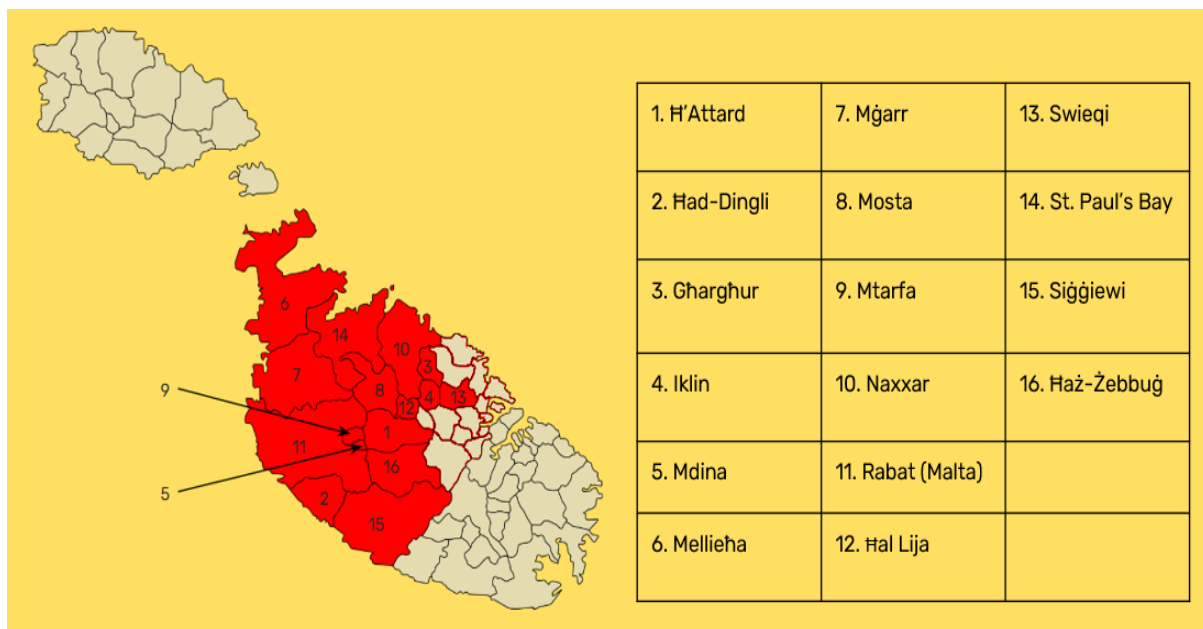
Northern Harbour

- Swieqi

⁴ NSO (2023), *Census of Housing and Population*

These sixteen localities are included in the National Statistics Office (NSO)'s Northern and Northern Harbour and Western district classifications, with the majority of Majjistral region's localities falling under the latter district, as per the above list. All sixteen localities within the Majjistral territory are represented by their own respective local council as constituted under Maltese Law in 1993 (Local Council Act, Chapter 262 of the Laws of Malta) and as amended in 1999 (Act XXI of 1999, that is, the Local Councils (Amendment) Act 1999). As part of their remit, Local Councils are allowed to enter into public-private partnerships with both the private sector or with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's), following approval by the Department for local Government. The latter grants such approvals only if it is satisfied that such partnership would benefit the residents of the locality, and after having obtained the approval of the Minister responsible for Finance and the Minister responsible for local government.

Figure 1: Majjistral territory



As defined previously, the CAP SP establishes three criteria which determine whether a locality is deemed eligible to participate in the LEADER programme through a LAG. Table 1 below provides an overview of the population density (less than 5,000 persons per square kilometre), percentage of agricultural land⁵ (which must fall above the 10% threshold) and percentage of Outside Development Zone⁶ (ODZ) (needs to fall above the 35% threshold) for each locality in the Majjistral territory.

⁵ EEA (2018), *Corine Land Cover*

⁶ Planning Authority's GIS Datasets (2023)

Table 1: Majjistral region qualification criteria

Locality	Population	Area (sq km)	Population Density (pop/sq Km)	% Agricultural land	% ODZ
Threshold			<5000.0	>10.0%	>35.0%
Ħ'Attard	12,268	6.64	1,848	47.29%	72.70%
Ħad-Dingli	3,865	5.67	682	51.16%	94.20%
Għargħur	3,471	2.02	1,718	46.31%	84.70%
Iklin	3,399	1.73	1,965	39.88%	71.10%
Mdina	193	0.89	217	61.60%	93.30%
Mellieha	12,738	22.64	563	28.07%	91.20%
Mġarr	4,840	16.12	300	65.24%	97.00%
Mosta	23,482	6.78	3,463	41.26%	65.80%
Mtarfa	2,566	0.72	3,564	35.52%	52.80%
Naxxar	16,912	11.57	1,462	41.20%	79.60%
Ir-Rabat	11,936	26.6	449	54.67%	95.60%
Swieqi	13,044	3.1	4,208	24.77%	35.90%
Sigġiewi	9,318	14.53	2,205	77.06%	83.40%
St. Paul's Bay	32,042	19.88	469	34.50%	95.10%
Hal Ħal Lija	3,162	1.1	2,875	36.22%	42.00%
Ħaż-Żebbuġ	13,785	8.7	1,584	61.44%	82.10%

3. Analysis of Socio-Economic Context

3.1. Social, Economic and Environmental Analysis

3.1.1. Demographic Analysis

A good starting point to analyse the socio-economic context of a particular territory is its population. The extent of the population figure affects the needs of the area and the scope of demand for services, resource utilisation and therefore strategic needs. In 2021, Malta's population figure stood at 519,562, whilst the total population of the Majjistral region stood at 167,0217. This means that around 32% of Malta's population resides in the Majjistral region.

Over the past decade, Malta's total population increased significantly by 25%. The Majjistral regions population was in line with a 23% increase from the previous 2011 Census figures. This implies a higher-than-average annual growth rate of 2.3% per annum, as opposed to the EU average of 0.16% growth rate. This high growth will have implications on the territory and acts as a background to the LDS. It is also pertinent to note that due to note that in the past two years, further significant demographic changes have been observed in Malta which might not be captured in the latest population figures. A continued influx of foreign workers, driven by the economic and political challenges being faced in neighbouring countries, as well as Malta's positive economic performance (2023: Malta 3.9%; Euro area: 1.1%, EU: 1.0%)⁸, have all led to increased demand for resources such as housing and other amenities, and such factors need to be kept in view within a strategy setting given it is likely not to be a temporary phenomenon.

Table 2 provides a break-down of the population figures per locality. For purposes of consistency in data comparability, we will be comparing the new 2021 Census figures with the same data of 2011. In the past decade, St. Paul's Bay has seen the highest growth in population whereby the figure almost doubled the one in 2011 (c. 94% increase). Swieqi and Mellieha also continued with the high growth trend since 2011 being the second and third highest localities experiencing population growth in the Majjistral territory, with an increase of c. 49% and 48%, respectively. On the contrary, Mdina was the only locality facing negative population growth with a decrease of c. 19% over the past ten years, while Mtarfa practically experienced no growth in population figures.

These changes in demographics reflect the way local populations move in Malta. Swieqi and Mellieha have seen several developments in the past decade while St. Paul's Bay and Mellieha can no longer be considered as summer residence localities considering a considerable number of foreigners have chosen to settle in these localities permanently. Considering the increase in property prices in other parts of Malta which have made such localities less affordable, Maltese residents especially first-time buyers have also chosen to settle in St. Paul's Bay and Mellieha. Nonetheless, these localities have seen a shift in types of dwellings whereby terraced houses have been replaced by blocks of apartments.

⁷ NSO (2023), *Census of Housing and Population*

⁸ European Commission (2023), *Spring 2023 Economic Forecast*

Table 2: Population by Locality

Locality	2011	2021	% Change	Annual Growth
Source	Census 2011	Census 2021		
Ħ'Attard	10,520	12,268	16.62%	1.66%
Ħad-Dingli	3,495	3,865	10.59%	1.06%
Għargħur	2,613	3,471	32.84%	3.28%
Iklin	3,134	3,399	8.46%	0.85%
Mdina	237	193	-18.57%	-1.86%
Mellieha	8,605	12,738	48.03%	4.80%
Mġarr	3,449	4,840	40.33%	4.03%
Mosta	19,650	23,482	19.50%	1.95%
Mtarfa	2,564	2,566	0.08%	0.01%
Naxxar	12,802	16,912	32.10%	3.21%
Rabat (Malta)	11,193	11,936	6.64%	0.66%
Swieqi	8,755	13,044	48.99%	4.90%
Siġġiewi	8,140	9,318	14.47%	1.45%
St. Paul's Bay	16,478	32,042	94.45%	9.45%
Hal Ħal Lija	2,872	3,162	10.10%	1.01%
Ħaż-Żebbuġ (Malta)	11,542	13,785	19.43%	1.94%
MALTA	416,055	519,562	24.88%	2.49%
Total - Majjistral	135,325	167,021	23.42%	2.34%

Source: NSO (2023), Census of Housing and Population 2021: Final Report: Population, migration and other social characteristics (Volume 1)

St. Paul's Bay has emerged as the locality with the highest number of residents in the Majjistral territory, hosting 32,042 residents. This is followed by Mosta (23,482) and Ħaż-Żebbuġ (13,785). Contrarily, Mdina has the lowest population count with just 183 residents. The proportion of residents located in the Majjistral region from the National population remained constant over the years at around 32%.

3.1.2. Population Density

Within the scope of demographic analyses in a specified area, population figures alone often do not give sufficient light to grasp the socio-economic implications. Therefore, such figures must be either broken down further or paired with other metrics to give more perspective. For instance, population density i.e., population per km² helps in assessing the degree of concentration of residents in a locality. As shown below in Table 3, such a metric will inevitably have an impact on the environmental, social and more specifically the quality of life of each individual residing in the area.

Table 3: Population Density per Locality

Locality	Area (km ²)	2011		2021		Percentage change
		Population	Population Density	Population	Population Density	
Ħ'Attard	6.64	10,520	1,584.30	12,268	1,847.60	16.62%
Ħad-Dingli	5.67	3,495	616.4	3,865	681.7	10.59%
Għargħur	2.02	2,613	1,293.60	3,471	1,718.30	32.84%
Iklin	1.73	3,134	1,811.60	3,399	1,964.70	8.46%
Mdina	0.89	237	266.3	193	216.9	-18.57%
Mellieha	22.64	8,605	380.1	12,738	562.6	48.03%
Mġarr	16.12	3,449	214	4,840	300.2	40.33%
Mosta	6.78	19,650	2,898.20	23,482	3,463.40	19.50%
Mtarfa	0.72	2,564	3,561.10	2,566	3,563.90	0.08%
Naxxar	11.57	12,802	1,106.50	16,912	1,461.70	32.10%
Rabat (Malta)	26.6	11,193	420.8	11,936	448.7	6.64%
Swieqi	3.1	8,755	2,824.20	13,044	4,207.70	48.99%
St. Paul's Bay	14.53	16,478	1,134.10	32,042	2,205.20	94.45%
Siġġiewi	19.88	8,140	409.5	9,318	468.7	14.47%
Hal Ħal Lija	1.1	2,872	2,610.90	3,162	2,874.50	10.10%
Ħaż-Żebbuġ (Malta)	8.7	11,542	1,326.70	13,785	1,584.50	19.43%
MALTA	315.2	416,055	1,320.00	519,562	1,648.40	24.88%
Total - Majjistral	148.69	126,049	847.7	167,021	1,123.30	32.50%

Source: NSO (2023), Census of Housing and Population 2021: Final Report: Population, migration and other social characteristics (Volume 1)

The locality with the highest population density in 2021 was Swieqi (with around 4,208 residents per km²), followed by Mtarfa (c. 3,564) and Mosta (c. 3,463). Contrarily, the least densely populated localities were Mdina (c. 217), Mġarr (c. 300) and Rabat (c. 448). Notably, a high growth in population density was registered in St. Paul's Bay (increase of c. 94%) whereby the locality registered almost double the density in the past decade. This reflects the demographic dynamics previously discussed. The locality with the lowest register of population density since 2011 is Mdina (c. -19%), Mtarfa (no growth in population density) and Rabat (c. 7%). So, while Mtarfa's population density has remained constant, Mdina's population density decreased while all other localities registered different extents of density growths.

If we look at population density from an aggregate national level, there was a growth of around 25% in from 2011, with 1,648 persons per km² residing in Malta. In the Majjistral region, the growth was even higher (around 33%) with 1,123 individuals per km² residing in the region's localities. This highlights the contribution to growth of density in localities like St. Paul's Bay and Swieqi on the territory. One should not take such figures lightly as in a socio-economic context, a high growth in population density implies a fall in quality of life.

3.1.3. Population Characteristics

The below Table 4 provides a break-down by age group of each locality within the territory. Notably, Għargħur holds the highest percentage of the young cohorts (individuals who fall under the 0-9 and 10-19 cohorts) at 24%, followed by Mġarr at 22%. Due to modest figures, one must however keep in mind the limiting comparison. Contrarily, the localities who hold the highest proportion of 60+ residents are Mdina and Iklin, equivalent to 47% and 29%, respectively. If we look at more aggregate figures, the distribution of age cohorts in the Majjistral territory closely reflects that of Malta's total. Clearly, the highest concentration lies within the age cohort between 30-39 at 18% followed by the next cohort of ages between 40-49. It is worth noting that the higher concentration of population in mid-to-high age groups than the lower ones is indicative of a society heading towards ageing population. Although this is less evident in the Majjistral than on average in Malta, it is a phenomenon that should be taken into consideration when devising the strategy.

Table 4: Population disaggregated by Age - 2021

Locality	0-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+
Ħ'Attard	1,132	1,110	1,546	2,003	1,777	1,524	1,519	1,512
Ħad-Dingli	380	340	546	643	520	502	521	399
Għargħur	499	408	413	727	625	436	339	289
Iklin	243	263	534	544	376	462	579	396
Mdina	7	7	12	31	20	23	44	44
Mellieha	1,137	1,150	1,551	2,216	2,030	1,651	1,491	1,440
Mġarr	590	452	607	970	741	539	509	416
Mosta	2,373	2,084	3,167	4,159	3,367	2,880	2,610	2,666
Mtarfa	179	312	418	265	409	462	269	216
Naxxar	1,805	1,582	2,087	2,835	2,553	2,179	1,850	1,871
Rabat (Malta)	938	1,020	1,261	1,657	1,697	1,313	1,570	2,319
Swieqi	1,178	1,309	2,017	2,469	2,138	1,639	1,225	1,032
St. Paul's Bay	2,766	2,349	5,081	7,234	5,305	3,781	2,804	2,610
Siġġiewi	984	907	1,143	1,577	1,398	1,070	1,135	1,077
Hal Ħal Lija	280	302	362	480	491	392	367	467
Ħaż-Żebbuġ (Malta)	1,407	1,341	1,833	2,446	2,064	1,484	1,603	1,573
MALTA (absolute)	45,268	44,711	72,441	93,356	75,871	58,985	59,726	69,143
MALTA (percentage)	9%	9%	14%	18%	15%	11%	11%	13%
Majjistral (Total)	15,898	14,936	22,578	30,256	25,511	20,337	18,435	18,327
Majjistral (percentage)	10%	9%	14%	18%	15%	12%	11%	11%

Source: NSO (2023), Census of Housing and Population 2021: Final Report: Population, migration and other social characteristics (Volume 1)

Table 5 below outline the gender distribution by locality. Generally, population within each locality are equally divided between males and females except for St. Paul's Bay where males exceed females by 10 percentage points. If one looks at aggregate levels, the distribution of the Majjistral's territory is similar to the national distribution whereby Males exceed females by 2 and 4 percentage points, respectively. Although one can conclude that gender distribution within the population is quite equal, the males' figures are slightly higher than those of the females.

Table 5: Population by Gender

Locality	Males	Females	Total	Males (%)	Females (%)
Ħ'Attard	6,193	6,075	12,268	50%	50%
Ħad-Dingli	1,978	1,887	3,865	51%	49%
Għargħur	1,880	1,861	3,741	50%	50%
Iklin	1,728	1,671	3,399	51%	49%
Mdina	99	94	193	51%	49%
Mellieha	6,561	6,177	12,738	52%	48%
Mġarr	2,484	2,356	4,840	51%	49%
Mosta	11,748	11,734	23,482	50%	50%
Mtarfa	1,248	1,318	2,566	49%	51%
Naxxar	8,459	8,453	16,912	50%	50%
Rabat (Malta)	5,945	5,991	11,936	50%	50%
Swieqi	6,751	6,293	13,044	52%	48%
St. Paul's Bay	17,482	14,560	32,042	55%	45%
Siggiewi	4,713	4,605	9,318	51%	49%
Hal Ħal Lija	1,581	1,581	3,162	50%	50%
Ħaż-Żebbuġ (Malta)	7,171	6,614	13,785	52%	48%
MALTA	270,021	249,541	519,562	52%	48%
Total Majjistral	86,021	81,270	167,291	51%	49%

Source: NSO (2023), Census of Housing and Population 2021: Final Report: Population, migration and other social characteristics (Volume 1)

3.1.4. Social Profile

Following an analysis of the fundamental demographic elements including population figures, population density age and gender distribution, it is also important to grasp the social profile. This would include social elements including health, education, and employment. This would give more light to the social context of the region whereby one would keep in mind the findings when designing measures and implementing the strategy.

3.1.4.1. Health

A vital characteristic of the social context of residents is health. This will be looked at by highlighting health conditions/illnesses broken down by age groups, and types of disabilities. The latest available data on health conditions are from the NSO Census of Housing and Population of 2011.⁹ Therefore, these figures will be considered with caution given that it is possible the situation of this snapshot has changed since ample time has passed.

Statistics on long-term illnesses or health conditions and disabilities are categorised by district rather than by locality, as presented in the Census of Housing and Population. The 16 different localities falling under the Majjistral region make up the whole Northern and Western districts. However, one must keep in mind that Hal Bazan is included in the Western district while Swieqi is included in the Northern Harbour one. For the purpose of the strategy, the only the Northern and Western district will be taken into account, keeping this simplifying assumption within consideration.

Figures in Table 6 below show that 18% of the North-Western district suffer from long-term illness or health conditions. This stands slightly lower than that of the Maltese average. As expected, the higher concentration of illnesses falls under the higher age cohorts, while low concentrations of illnesses lie under cohorts of ages between 10 and 40.

Table 6: Long-term illness and/or Health condition

District and age group	With illness/ health condition	Without illness/ health condition	Total	With Illness	Without
MALTA	83,102	334,330	417,432	20%	80%
North West	22,183	99,711	121,894	18%	82%
0-9	635	11,348	11,983	5%	95%
10-19	990	14,088	15,078	7%	93%
20-29	902	16,199	17,101	5%	95%
30-39	1,343	16,470	17,813	8%	92%
40-49	2,357	14,444	16,801	14%	86%
50-59	4,302	13,082	17,384	25%	75%
60-69	5,689	8,726	14,415	39%	61%
70-79	3,761	3,704	7,465	50%	50%
80-89	1,861	1,426	3,287	57%	43%
Over 89	343	224	567	60%	40%

Source: NSO (2012), *Census of Population and Housing 2011*

Note: The above districts include San Gwann and Hal Balzan which do not make part of the Majjistral territory, whilst they do not take into account of Swieqi.

⁹ Data obtained from the 'The Local Development Strategy for the Majjistral Action Group Foundation Territory January 2021'.

Table 7 below represents the disability among all districts in Malta. It is evident that the Majjistral territory (Northern and Western district) hold a relatively low share in persons with disability when compared to other districts.

Table 7: Persons with disabilities by district of residence: 2022

District	Count	Share
Southern Harbour	4,883	21%
Northern Harbour	6,455	28%
South Eastern	3,138	13%
Western	3,010	13%
Northern	3,408	15%
Gozo and Comino	2,488	11%
Total	23,382	100%

Source: Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) 2022

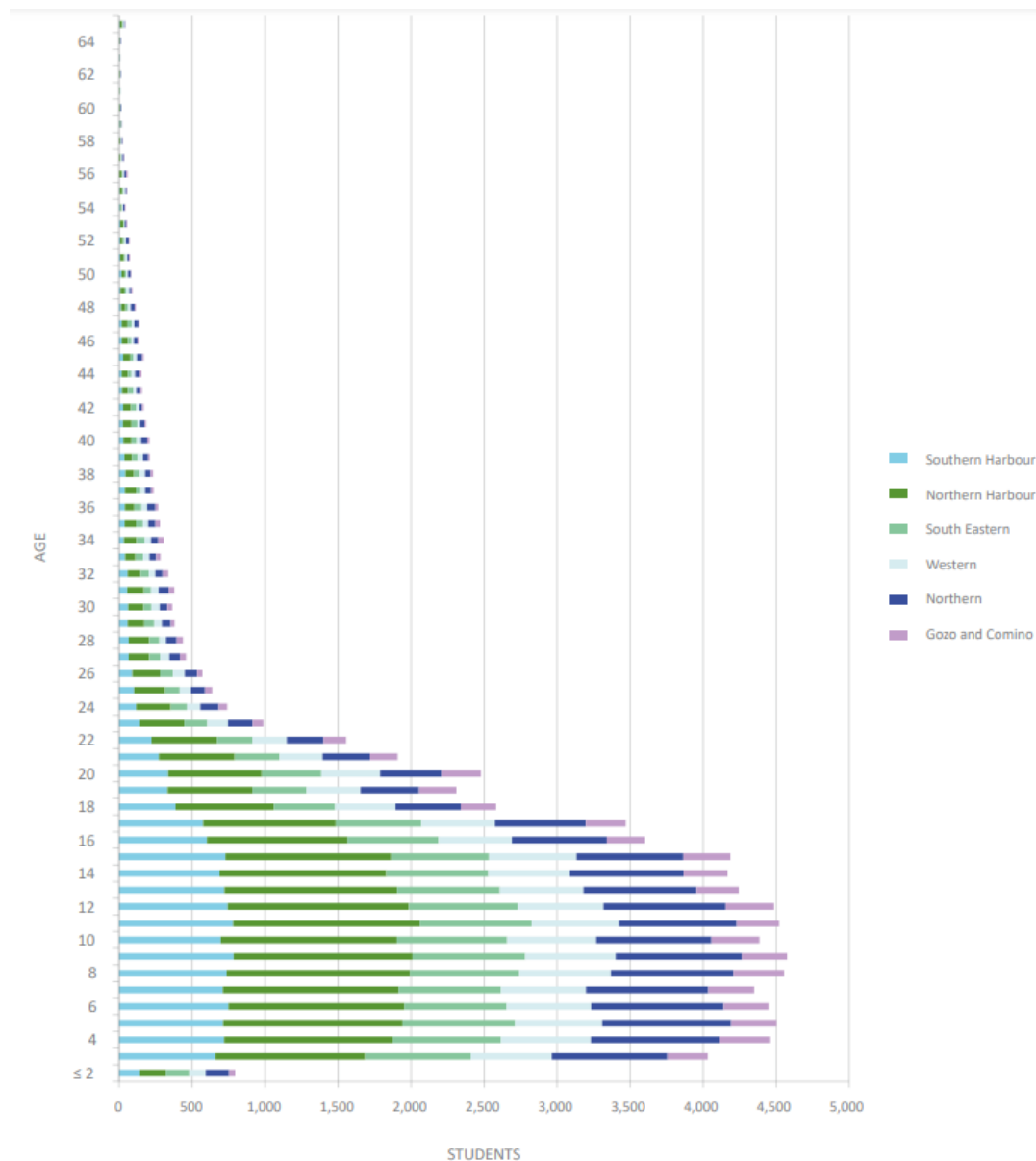
3.1.4.2. Education

Another key socio-economic element within a demographic profile is education attainment. We will be looking at this indicator from different perspectives, namely the Maltese student body, graduates from post-secondary and tertiary institutions and areas of specialisation.

Figure 2 below illustrates a demographic summary of the overall student body both in terms of student age and in terms of the student's district of residence. Most students were aged between 3 and 17 years, comprising 74.4% of the total student body. The Northern Harbour district represented the highest share of students almost across all ages. It is followed by the Northern district, also with a considerable share of students across age groups.¹⁰ The Western district on the other hand ranks among the lower districts with few students when compared to others.

¹⁰ In Chapter 3 one must note that in terms of NSO's district classification, the Majjistral territory is referred to as the Northern and Western districts. However, one must also keep in mind that these districts exclude Swieqi and include Balzan as part of the region.

Figure 2: Student body in Malta by age and district of residence: 2020/21

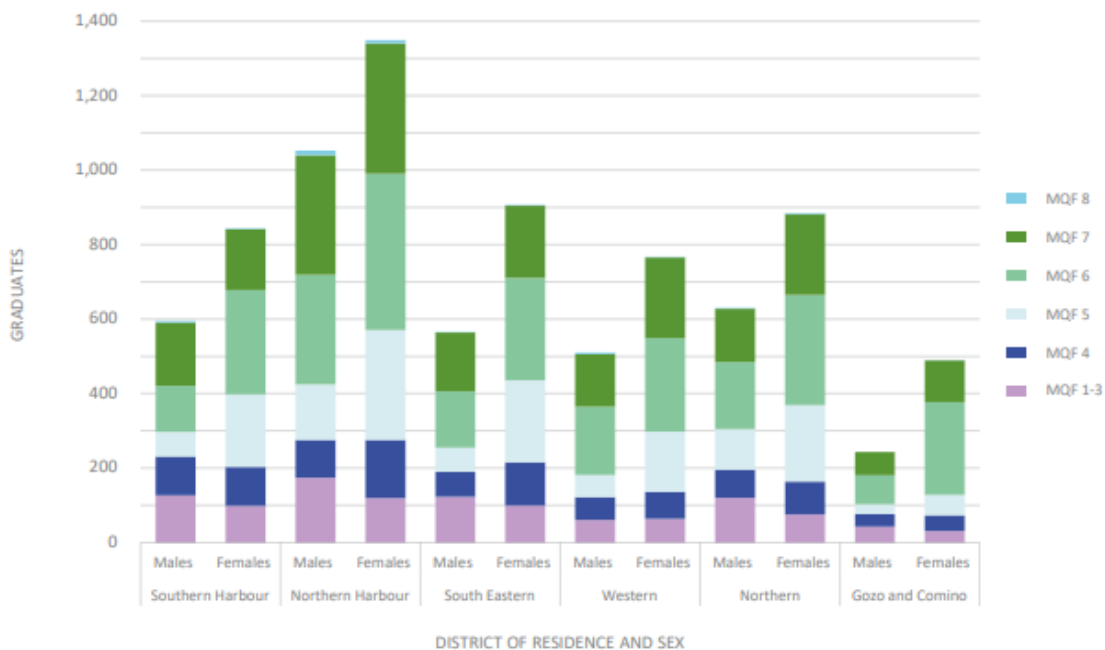


Source: NSO (2023), *Regional Statistics Malta 2023 Edition*

Note: Student body in the above chart refers to persons in non-compulsory education. Data excludes students not residing in Malta or whose residence is unspecified.

Figure 3 below summarises a break-down of post-secondary and tertiary graduates by MQF level sex and district of residence. It is noticeable that the Northern Harbour and Southern Harbour districts domine in the highest number of graduates in almost all MQF levels for both genders. The Western and Northern districts which make the Majjistral territory, hold a relatively high share of graduates in MQF levels 6 and 7. The chart also highlights that in both districts, Male graduates are higher than Female ones in all MQF levels except for MQF levels 1-3; a common phenomenon in almost all districts.

Figure 3: Graduates from other post-secondary and tertiary institutions by MQF level, sex and district of residence: 2020/21

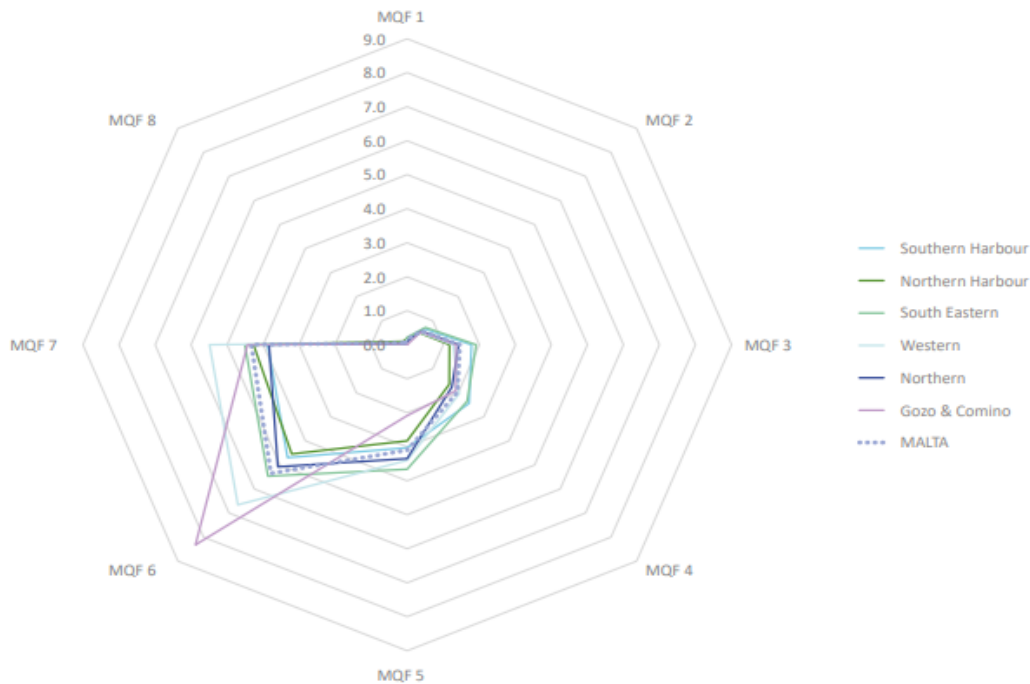


Source: NSO (2023), *Regional Statistics Malta 2023 Edition*

Figure 4 illustrates graduates from other post-secondary and tertiary education and gives a different perspective to the same phenomenon analysed in Figure 3. Disparities in educational attainment across districts prevailed mostly in MQF levels 6 and 7, with disparities narrowing down at lower MQF levels and uppermost levels.

Evidently, the share of graduates at MQF levels 6 and 7 per 1,000 inhabitants is highest in the Western district at 12.8 and 9.1, respectively, followed by Gozo and Comino district at MQF level 6 with a share of 12.7 and at MQF level 7 with a share of 8.0. The lowest share with regards to MQF levels 6 and 7 were both in the Southern Harbour district, with a share of 7.4 and 5.4, respectively, uppermost share in respect to MQF level 8 was registered in the Western district at 0.3 per 1,000 inhabitants.

Figure 4: Graduates per 1000 population by MQF level and district of residence: 2018/19



Source: NSO (2023), *Regional Statistics Malta 2023 Edition*

Note: Comparisons were conducted per 1,000- inhabitants to facilitate regional analysis and feature situations in smaller districts, and to standardise relationship between graduates and population across different regions and districts.

3.1.4.3. Employment

Another pertinent socio-economic phenomenon is employment. This section will be giving light to labour market indicators within the Majjistral region as compared to other districts in Malta and Malta on average. These indicators include employment rate and status, average basic salary and registered unemployment.

Requested data from NSO's Labour Force Survey (LFS) in 2022 shows that around 66% of the workforce, that is, persons between the age of 15 and 64, are employed. Malta's national average employment rate is slightly lower at 63%.

Table 8 below summarises the employment status. Registered unemployed in 2022 was at 2% in both the Majjistral region and nationally, while the inactivity rate stood at 33% in the Majjistral and slightly higher at 36%, nationally. The inactive persons can be regarded as an opportunity for the territory, as it holds several potential workers who have still not joined the labour force. With the right training, there is leeway to match skills with vacancies in the economy for better resource allocation.

Table 8: Employment Status by region and Total for Malta (15+ years)

Employment Status	Majjistral	%Majjistral	Malta Total	%Malta
Employed	93,758	66%	283,341	63%
Unemployed	2,646	2%	8,529	2%
Inactive	46,603	33%	160,768	36%
Total	143,007	32%	452,638	100%

Source: Data given by NSO, August 2023

Table 9 below presents figures on persons registering for work, broken down by gender and district, for years 2019, 2020 and 2021. Evidently in all districts, including the Western and Northern ones, there was a high growth in registered unemployed persons in 2020, mainly due to the economic effects of the pandemic. Nonetheless, figures returned to 2019 levels in the following year. The highest share of registered unemployed in both the Western and Northern district fall under the 50+ age cohort.

Table 9: Persons registering for work under Part I and Part II by year, sex, district and age group

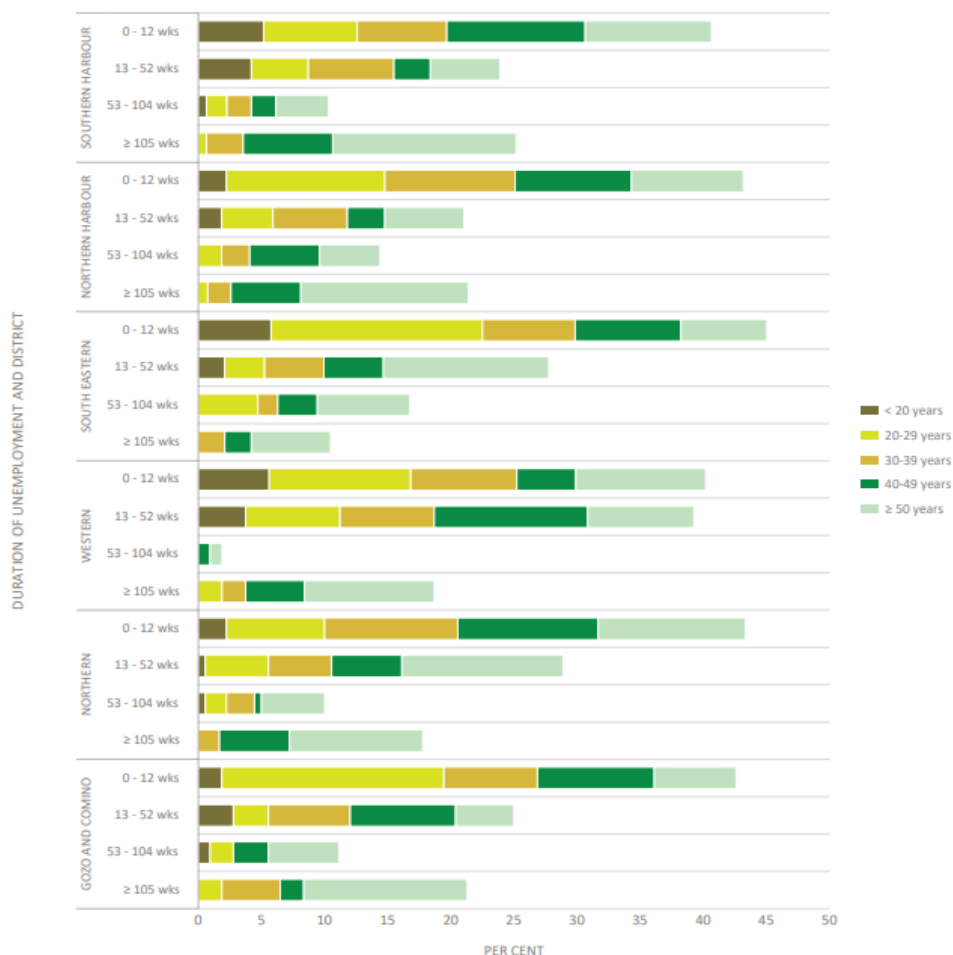
		2019			2020			2021		
		Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Southern Harbour	Under 20	21	7	28	37	17	54	24	7	31
	20-29	35	18	53	72	37	109	29	15	44
	30-39	58	21	79	95	41	136	43	15	58
	40-49	87	24	111	121	45	166	53	18	71
	50 & over	111	45	156	138	54	192	87	19	106
	Total	312	115	427	463	194	657	236	74	310
Northern Harbour	Under 20	14	8	22	21	10	31	8	3	11
	20-29	45	22	67	100	45	145	33	19	52
	30-39	61	15	76	107	64	171	39	16	55
	40-49	80	29	109	137	58	195	51	12	63
	50 & over	131	40	171	156	76	232	71	19	90
	Total	331	114	445	521	253	774	202	69	271
South Eastern	Under 20	7	6	13	20	14	34	10	5	15
	20-29	24	11	35	45	38	83	31	16	47
	30-39	26	14	40	50	30	80	21	9	30
	40-49	41	12	53	58	32	90	25	10	35
	50 & over	55	36	91	62	40	102	44	20	64
	Total	153	79	232	235	154	389	131	60	191
Western	Under 20	6	4	10	8	2	10	8	2	10
	20-29	17	7	24	35	24	59	19	3	22
	30-39	18	7	25	27	14	41	13	6	19
	40-49	20	7	27	27	21	48	14	10	24
	50 & over	28	15	43	47	30	77	25	7	32
	Total	89	40	129	144	91	235	79	28	107
Northern	Under 20	5	2	7	10	3	13	5	1	6
	20-29	22	6	28	55	35	90	16	10	26
	30-39	28	18	46	63	49	112	19	16	35
	40-49	38	22	60	71	46	117	24	17	41
	50 & over	68	34	102	116	80	196	48	24	72
	Total	161	82	243	315	213	528	112	68	180
Gozo and Comino	Under 20	4	3	7	9	3	12	4	2	6
	20-29	28	4	32	31	14	45	18	8	26
	30-39	21	13	34	25	11	36	14	6	20
	40-49	23	9	32	21	15	36	16	8	24
	50 & over	37	24	61	30	23	53	17	15	32
	Total	113	53	166	116	66	182	69	39	108
MALTA	Total	1,159	483	1,642	1,794	971	2,765	829	338	1,167

Source: NSO (2023), *Regional Statistics Malta, 2023*

In 2021, the largest share (26.6%) of unemployed persons resided in the Southern Harbour district, amounting to 310 persons, followed by the Northern Harbour district (23.3%). Both the Western and Northern districts (Majjistral region) bid well in this unemployment indicator. The Western district shows a noticeable proportion of unemployed persons within the age brackets of 20-29 in the 0 to 12 weeks duration cohort and 40-49 in the 13 to 52 weeks duration cohort, while in the Northern district, a noticeable proportion of unemployed persons is shown in 40-49 in the 0 to 12 weeks duration cohort and 50+ age cohorts in almost all durations, as summarised in Figure 5.

The largest proportion of unemployed persons featured in the 50 years and over age bracket, accounting to 33.9% of the total. In terms of unemployment duration, all districts had the highest proportions in the 0 to 12 weeks cohort.

Figure 5: Percentage distribution of registered unemployed by district, age and duration of unemployment as at end December 2021



Source: NSO (2023), *Regional Statistics Malta, 2023*

Table 10 depicts the number of persons within each type of occupation within the territory, together with the share of employees in each respective occupation from the National aggregate. The most common type of occupation within the region is “Professionals” with a share of 21%, followed closely by “Service and sales workers” at 19% and “Technicians and associate professionals” at 13%. The share of occupation in the Majjistral territory also falls in line with the share of occupations in Malta in total, whereby similar percentages are observed for the same occupations. Despite the region being categorised as a rural area only 1% of persons employed work in agriculture, forestry and fishing. This is the least common type of occupation alongside the Armed Force, also with a share of 1%. Despite certain differences among localities, the Majjistral region still seems to be very much in line with national averages in terms of the shares in types of occupations. However, when comparing the share of Majjistral employees within the agricultural sector from Malta’s total, the rate of 44% is quite high.

Table 10: Employed persons by occupation group, locality in the Majjistral region and Total for Malta (15+ years)

Occupation	Majjistral	Occupation share in Majjistral	Majjistral share in Malta	Malta Total
Armed Forces	573	1%	25%	2,274
Managers	11,633	12%	36%	32,722
Professionals	19,615	21%	33%	59,328
Technicians and associate professionals	12,041	13%	33%	36,989
Clerical support workers	10,395	11%	35%	29,390
Service and sales workers	17,800	19%	33%	53,373
Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers	941	1%	44%	2,129
Craft and related trades workers	9,262	10%	34%	27,449
Plant and machine operators, and assemblers	3,068	3%	20%	15,592
Elementary occupations	8,430	9%	35%	24,095
Total	93,758	100%	33%	283,341

Source: Data given by NSO, August, 2023

Table 11 below looks at the Majjistral area’s workforce and disaggregates workers by economic activity. This allows for a better understanding of which occupations are more popular in the territory and therefore also an indicator of which industries thrive the most. Data in the below table shows that the wholesale and retail industry hosts the highest number of workers with an occupation rate of 25%. This is closely followed by public administration and defence (24%) and a further 10% of the work force occupy jobs in professional, scientific, technical, administration and support services. Sharres

Table 11: Employed persons by economic activity, locality and total for Malta (15+years)

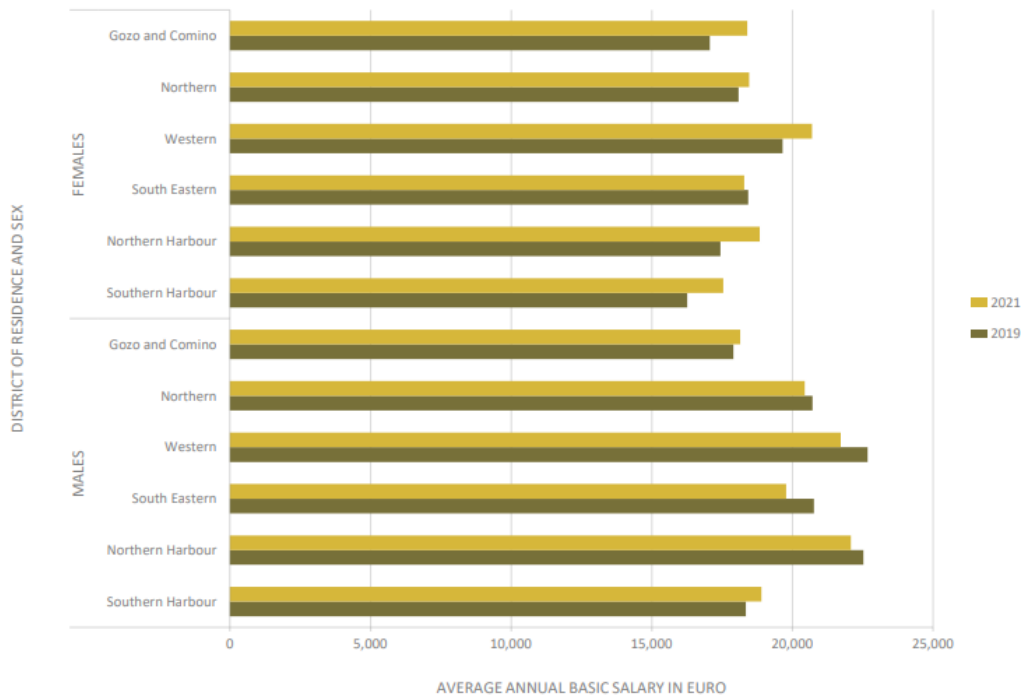
Economic Activity	Majjistral	Occupation Share in Majjistral	Majjistral share in Malta	Total Malta
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	911	1%	40%	2,289
Manufacturing, mining and quarrying and other industry	8,549	9%	27%	31,526
Construction	6,745	7%	38%	17,526
Wholesale and retail trade, transportation and storage, accommodation and food service activities	23,305	25%	34%	69,457
Information and communication	4,097	4%	33%	12,446
Financial and insurance activities	5,878	6%	33%	17,576
Real estate activities	1,684	2%	45%	3,742
Professional, scientific, technical, administration and support service activities	10,589	11%	34%	31,337
Public administration, defence, education, human health and social work activities	22,318	24%	31%	71,930
Other services	9,682	10%	38%	25,512
Total	93,758	100%	33%	283,341

Source: Data given by NSO, August, 2023

The average gross annual basic salary in Malta was estimated at €18,913 in 2020. Figure 3.5 presents how the average gross annual basic salaries vary both by sex and by district of residence. For males the average annual basic salary was of €20,610 whilst for females this was recorded at €18,684 (NSO, 2023).

The highest average annual basic salary for males was registered in the Northern Harbour district whereas for females this was recorded in the Western district. It is evident from Figure 6 that the Northern and Western districts are among the highest when it comes to the average annual basic salary of both genders. In fact, the Western district has the highest salary for both genders, while the Northern one is the third highest district for males after salaries faced a major drop due to the pandemic, and fourth when it comes to females.

Figure 6: Average annual basic salary by sex, district of residence and selected years



Source: NSO (2023), *Regional Statistics Malta, 2023*

3.1.4.4. *Level of Dependency*

As we have seen in Section 3.1.3, there is an upward trend when it comes to ageing population in Malta. The age structure of the population will affect the needs and requirements of the area. This is because the number of minors as well as elderly affect the level of dependency within an area, and hence the quality of life of residents. Table 12 below illustrates by year and district the number of elderly persons as well as the old-age dependency ratio.

The old-age dependency ratio is the ratio of the number of elderly people at an age when they are generally economically inactive (aged 65 years or more) compared to the number of working-age people (aged 15 to 64 years). As of 2020, the highest old-age dependency ratio was registered in the Southern Harbour district with 35.8%, followed by the Gozo and Comino district (34.3%). This means that in these districts there were approximately three working-age adults for every person aged 65 years or more. On the other hand, the least old-age dependency ratio was at 21.2% and was registered in the Northern district, implying that there were slightly fewer than five adults of working age for every person aged 65 years or more. The Western district registered an old-age dependency of 30% in 2020, meaning that there are at least three working age adults for every person aged 65+ years.

Table 12: Old-age dependency ratio by year, region and districtSource: NSO (2023), *Regional Statistics Malta, 2023*

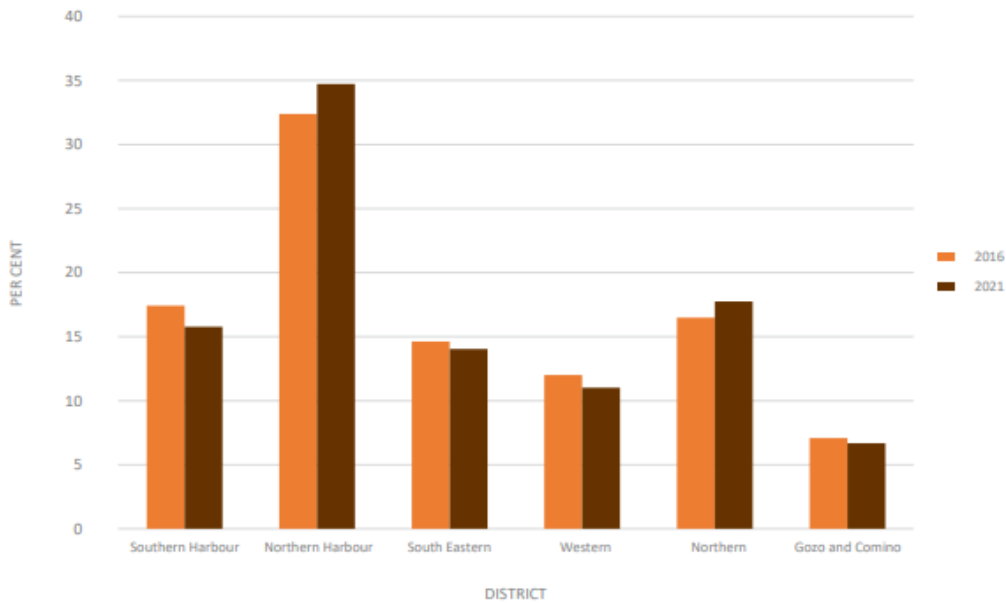
	Number of elderly persons						
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
MALTA	79,805	83,315	86,579	89,517	92,180	95,050	97,418
Malta	73,210	76,549	79,638	82,358	84,883	87,575	89,762
Southern Harbour	16,866	17,432	17,896	18,386	18,736	19,216	19,439
Northern Harbour	25,583	26,806	28,047	29,062	30,013	31,022	31,854
South Eastern	10,078	10,628	11,074	11,513	11,973	12,436	12,883
Western	10,346	10,787	11,176	11,550	11,934	12,221	12,547
Northern	10,337	10,896	11,445	11,847	12,227	12,680	13,039
Gozo and Comino	6,595	6,766	6,941	7,159	7,297	7,475	7,656
Gozo and Comino	6,595	6,766	6,941	7,159	7,297	7,475	7,656
	Old-age dependency ratio (%)						
MALTA	26.9	27.5	28.1	28.0	27.6	27.1	27.9
Malta	26.5	27.1	27.7	27.6	27.2	26.7	27.4
Southern Harbour	32.4	33.6	34.5	35.2	35.3	35.2	35.8
Northern Harbour	28.6	28.8	29.2	28.3	27.4	26.3	26.8
South Eastern	21.5	22.5	23.3	23.9	24.2	24.4	25.4
Western	25.6	26.6	27.6	28.4	28.9	29.1	30.0
Northern	21.7	21.9	22.2	21.5	20.8	20.4	21.2
Gozo and Comino	31.6	32.3	33.1	33.7	33.5	33.2	34.3
Gozo and Comino	31.6	32.3	33.1	33.7	33.5	33.2	34.3

3.1.4.5. Households

In order to understand better the requirements of the region's residents, it is important to analyse the number and structures of private households. This will be done within a socio-economic context, where we will look at household distribution, household size and household disposable income.

In 2021, most households in Malta, specifically 93.3% resided in the Malta region, while 6.7% resided in the Gozo and Comino region (NSO,2023). Within the Malta region, the most populated districts were the Northern Harbour and Northern districts, as shown in Figure 7 below. On the contrary, the two districts with the least share of household distribution are Gozo and Comino and the Western districts. In five years (2016-2021), there was a growth in the share of household distribution in the Northern Harbour and the Northern districts, while rates decreased for the Southern Harbour, South Eastern, Western and Gozo and Comino.

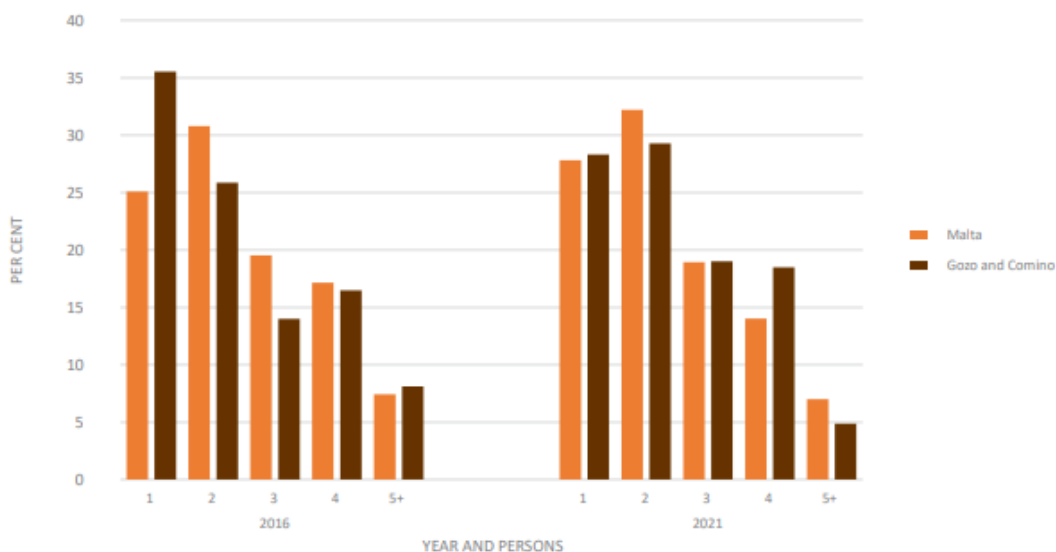
Figure 7: Percentage distribution of households by district and selected years



Source: NSO (2023), *Regional Statistics Malta, 2023*

In 2021, the most common household size for people living in the Malta region was the two-person, the same applies for the Gozo and Comino region, as highlighted in Figure 8 below. In both 2016 and 2021, the Northern Harbour district had the highest percentage share of households for all five household sizes in Malta. This indicates that the Northern Harbour district remained the most populous district in terms of households across different household sizes during 2021. On the other hand, Gozo and Comino had the lowest percentage share of households for all five household sizes in 2021. This suggests that Gozo and Comino continued to be the least populous district in terms of households across different household sizes.

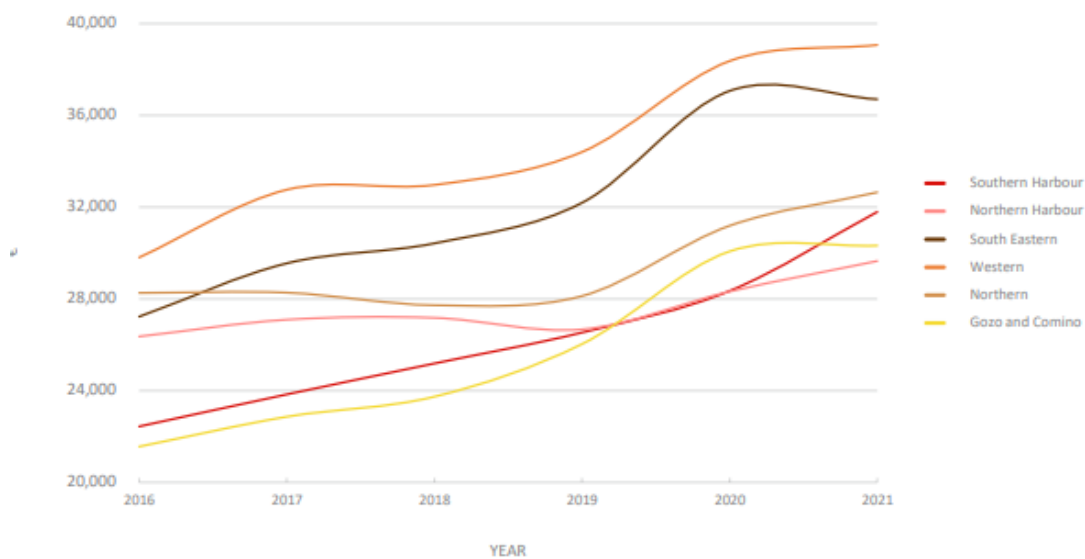
Figure 8: Distribution of households by household size, region and selected years



Source: NSO (2023), *Regional Statistics Malta, 2023*

Since 2016, the Malta region has consistently exhibited a higher percentage of females living in households compared to males. Conversely, the Gozo and Comino region has shown a higher percentage share of males to females living in households (refer to Figure 9 below). Additionally, when examining the districts within the Malta region, the Northern Harbour District, which is the most populous district, also aligns with the trend of having a higher percentage share of females over males living in households. During 2021, the Southern Harbour, South Eastern and Northern districts have experienced a higher percentage of male-headed households over female-headed households.

Figure 9: Average household disposable income by district and year



Source: NSO (2023), *Regional Statistics Malta, 2023*

In 2021, the average household disposable income stood at €32,752 in the region of Malta, an increase of 4.5 per cent over the previous year, while in the region of Gozo and Comino the average household disposable income stood at €30,321, an increase of 0.8 per cent over 2020. The average household disposable income was highest in the Western district at €39,063 and lowest in the Northern Harbour district at €29,648 (NSO,2023).

According to the Statistics on Income and Living Conditions survey, in 2021, 95.1 percent of persons living in private households in Malta who were at risk of poverty, resided in the Malta region, while 4.9 percent resided in the Gozo and Comino region. From a district perspective, the Northern Harbour district, has consistently maintained the highest percentage share of individuals at risk of poverty since 2016. From 2016 to 2020, the Southern Harbour district had the second-highest share of individuals at risk of poverty. However, in 2021, the Northern district surpassed it to become the district with the second-highest percentage share of individuals at risk of poverty (19.2 percent).

In 2021, the at-risk-of-poverty rates for the Malta region and the Gozo and Comino region were 17.2 and 12.4 per cent respectively, as shown in Table 13. Among the districts within

the Malta region, the Northern Harbour district recorded the highest at-risk-of-poverty rate at 19.8 percent, followed by the Northern district at 19.1 percent and the Southern Harbour district at 17.6 percent. This represents a change from previous year, where the Southern Harbour district had the highest rate.

Table 13: Persons at risk of poverty as a percentage of total persons living in households by year, region and district

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
MALTA	16.5	16.7	16.8	17.1	16.9	16.9
Malta	16.4	16.7	17.0	17.3	17.2	17.2
Southern Harbour	20.7	23.7	18.5	16.6	22.5	17.6
Northern Harbour	16.9	16.1	18.9	20.8	18.4	19.8
South Eastern	16.2	14.0	15.8	16.5	11.5	11.8
Western	13.3	13.4	12.0	13.7	15.0	14.1
Northern	13.6	16.1	16.9	14.8	16.3	19.1
Gozo and Comino	18.3	16.4	14.1	13.9	12.9	12.4
Gozo and Comino	18.3	16.4	14.1	13.9	12.9	12.4

Source: NSO (2023), *Regional Statistics Malta, 2023*

Dependency can sometimes lead to the need for institutional care and homes catering for such needs. As we have seen previously, ageing population in Malta as well as in the Majjistral region, ageing population is on the upward trend, and therefore so will be the population residing in an institutional home. In this regard, the Majjistral territory includes several old people's homes and day centres, including¹¹:

- Dar Sagra Familja in Naxxar – Run by Church
- Dr San Pietru in Hal Ʀal Lija – Run by Church
- Dar Saura in Rabat – Run by Church
- Pax et Bonum in Mosta – Run by Church
- Porziuncola House in Mġarr – Run by Church
- St Catherine's Home in Ʀ'Attard – Run by Church
- Age Concern in Mosta – Public-private partnership
- Casa Arkati in Mosta – Public-private partnership
- Golden Care in Naxxar – Public-private partnership
- Simblija Care Home in Naxxar – Public-private partnership
- St Elizabeth Home in Rabat – Public-private partnership
- Roseville in Ʀ'Attard – Public-private partnership
- Villa Messina in Rabat – Public-private partnership
- Ʀad-Dingli Day Centre - run by government
- Mtarfa Day Centre - run by government
- St. Paul's Bay Day Centre - run by government
- Mosta, Day Centre - run by government
- Naxxar, Day Centre - run by government
- Mellieħa, Day Centre - run by government
- Siġġiewi, Day Centre - run by government
- Mġarr, Day Centre - run by government
- Siġġiewi, Day Centre – run by government

¹¹ List obtained from the Office of the Commissioner of Revenue, available at: https://cfr.gov.mt/en/individuals/Pages/TR_YA2022/List-of-Homes-for-the-Elderly.aspx

It is pertinent to note that the impact of such homes on the region depends on the mobility of the homes' residents – in case where residents stay within the confines of such homes, one could refer to the existence of a community within a community, having little, if any, impact on the region.

Childcare is also another important aspect of the day-to-day lives of the citizens in each locality. Over the past years, we have seen a significant increase in child day-care centres, reflecting the different labour market dynamics, whereby nowadays mothers are more inclined to continue working as opposed to mothers in the past, as well as various government incentives (EU funding for childcare centre investment, free childcare for end-user and tax credits for returning mothers).

In 2022, there was a total of 69 childcare centres within the Majjistral territory alone. These are all Public-private partnerships operated by the 'Foundation for Educational Services' within the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth and Research and Innovation. The below lists these childcare centres by locality¹². The locality hosting the most childcare centres is Mosta with a total of 13, followed by Naxxar and Ғ'Attard with 9 and 8 childcares, respectively. Localities with the least amount of childcare centres are Ғal Lija, Mġarr and Mtarfa, each hosting one.

Mosta	Ғ'Attard
Academy of Dance Arts	Klabb 3-16 Ғ'Attard
Active Learning Childcare Centre	Little Einsteins Montessori System
Kid Zone Childcare Centre	St Cecilia
Kids Zone Summer School	St Cecilia's Childcare Centre
Klabb 3-16 Mosta	The Fun Factroy Summer School
Lil' Ville Childcare Centre	Thi Lakin Childcare Centre
Lil' Ville in the woods Childcare Centre	Wiggles 'N' Wiggles Childcare Centre
Little Einsteins Montessori System	Wiggles n Wiggles Summer Camp
Little Thinkers Childcare Centre	Gharghur
Sam Sam Childcare Centre	Fairytales and Fables Childcare Centre
Smiles Childcare Centre	Nannakola Childcare Centre
The Nursery Childcare Centre	Orange Tree Childcare Centre
Wiggles 'N' Wiggles Childcare Centre	The Play House Childcare Centre
Naxxar	Ғaž-Žebbuġ
Dawra Durella Childcare Centre	Kids World 2 Childcare Centre
Fun Size Heros	Kids World Childcare Centre
Home Grown Fun & Learning Centre	Klabb 3-16 Ғaž-Žebbuġ
Klabb 3-16 Naxxar	L'Ecole Childcare Centre
Pizzi Pizzi Kanna Childcare Centre	St Paula's Childcare Centre
San Luigi Childcare Centre	Team Tickles Childcare and Nursery

¹² List obtained from the Office of the Commissioner of Revenue, available at: https://cfr.gov.mt/en/individuals/Pages/TR_YA2019/List-of-Childcare-Centres.aspx

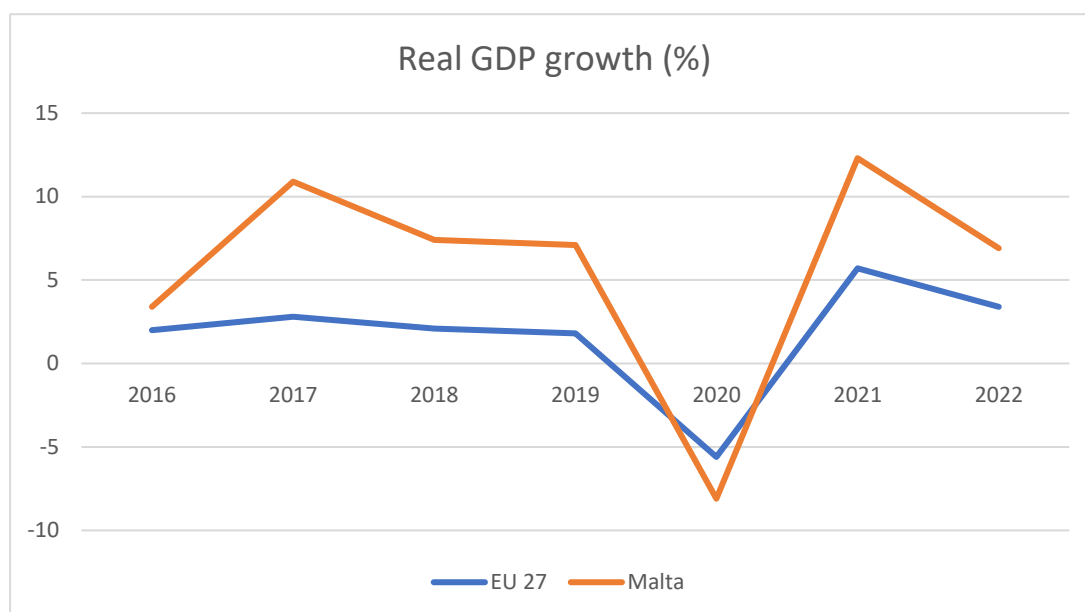
Smiles Childcare Centre	Žmeraldi Childcare Centre
Sportskidz	Sigġiewi
TCTC	Id-Denfil Childcare Centre
Iklin	Klabb 3-16 Sigġiewi
Little Owls Childcare Centre	L'Ecole Childcare Centre
Swieqi	St. Paul's Bay
Energize	Klabb 3-16 St. Paul's Bay
Happy Faces Childcare Centre	Margerita Childcare Centre
Jolly Jumpers Childcare Centre	Hal Lija
Little Elephants Childcare Centre	San Luigi Childcare Centre
Little Hands Childcare Centre	
Mġarr	
Klabb 3-16 Mġarr	

3.1.5. Economic Profile

3.1.5.1. *Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth as an Economic Indicator*

GDP growth is a key indicator of how productive a country or an area of study is. Given that figures at locality and district level are not available, we will first look at this data from a national level as published by Eurostat. Figure 10 below shows the real GDP annual growth rates in volume terms for Malta and Gozo, and compared to other European counterparts. As indicated below, on average, Malta has experienced higher GDP growth than its European counterparts over the years. It is worth noting however that the impact in terms of economic repercussions (mainly in 2020) of the COVID-19 pandemic were heavier for Malta than for other EU countries on average.

Figure 10: Real GDP growth in for Malta and EU 27 average



Source: Eurostat (2023), *Real GDP Annual growth rates in volume terms*

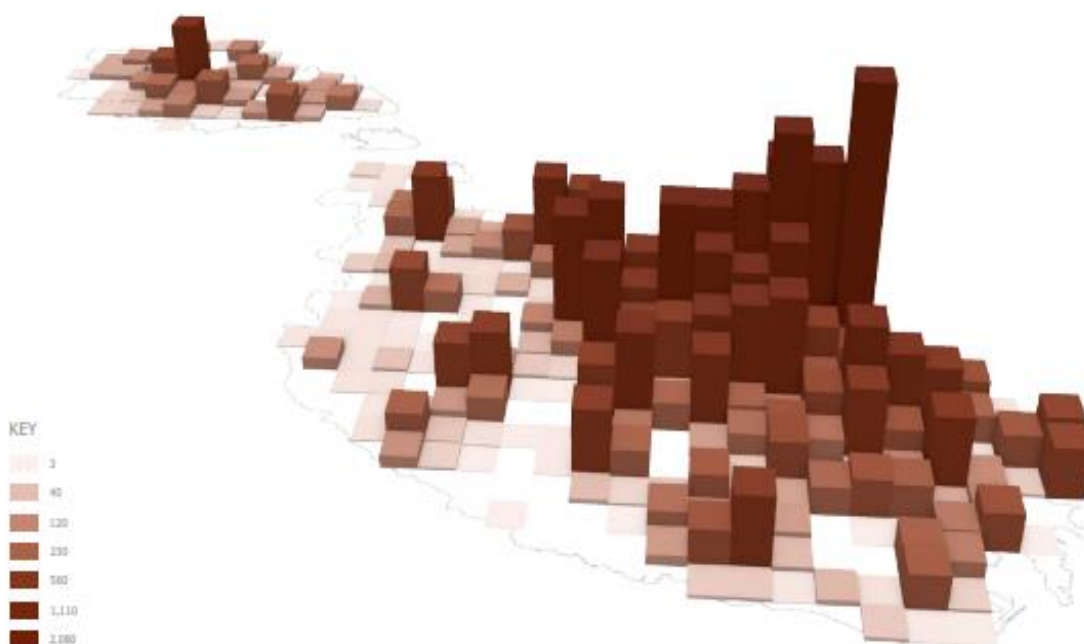
3.1.5.2. Active Business Units

Although GDP and productivity is only published at national level, it is still worth looking at business activity at district level to get a grasp of the economic climate at firm level in our area of interest. In the latest NSO report of regional statistics for 2023, Figure 11 below presents a map for Malta and Gozo showing the number of active businesses at local unit level per 1km² for the year 2021. During this year, total active business population at the local unit level within the statistical business register in Malta amounted to 56,921, which is an increase of 7.7%, or 4,069 active units over the year 2020.

On a regional level, in 2021, the largest increase in the number of active businesses at local unit level in the Malta region was attributed to the population of small (10 – 49) enterprises, registering an increase of 9.5 per cent. This was followed by active businesses that employed 0 to 9 persons, which increased by 7.4 per cent from the previous year. In the Gozo and Comino region, the largest increase in the number of active businesses at local unit level was registered in the micro (0 – 9) enterprises, which rose by 409 units, or 10.6 per cent. These constituted the largest share (96.6 per cent) of the total active businesses at local unit level within the Gozo and Comino region.

From the map it is also worth noting that in the confines of the Majjistral region, the density of active business units per km² varies across the area. If one looks at the Northern part of Malta which includes Mellieha, Mosta, Naxxar and St. Paul's Bay the, the density of business units is quite satisfactory. However, when one starts moving more towards the Western district which includes localities like Mtarfa, Siggiewi and Ħad-Dingli, the lighter density of business units is noticeable. Nonetheless, one also must keep in mind that the Western part of Malta is a less developed region hosting a number of green and ODZ areas.

Figure 11: 1km² grid showing active businesses at local unit level in 2021



Source: NSO (2023), *Regional Statistics Malta, 2023*

3.1.5.3. Tourism Sector

The Majjistral territory is known for containing a fair level of concentration of holiday settlements and is a very important contributor to the Malta tourism product. Table 14 below summarises the Malta Tourism Authority’s (MTA) licenses for hotels, presenting Malta’s total and Majjistral’s share of concentration broken down by hotel classification. The Majjistral territory holds 31% of the total hotel concentration in Malta while also holding a major share in the 4 Star hotels at 42%. St. Paul’s Bay is the locality hosting the highest number of hotels in Malta with a total of 29 hotels. Mellieha also ranks highly with a total of 11 hotels, being the fourth highest locality in Malta in terms of hotel concentration.

Amongst other accommodation options, Majjistral also offers two major 5-star hotels, one in Mdina and one in Mellieha. As previously stated, the 4 Star Hotels are the most popular in the Majjistral region with 22 hotels. Also, the territory hosts 13 3-Star and 6 2-Star Hotels.

Table 14: Concentration of Hotels

Region	Five Star	Four Star	Three Star	Two Star	Grand Total
Majjistral	2	22	19	6	49
Malta	17	52	66	21	156
Majjistral’s share	12%	42%	29%	29%	31%

Source: Extracted from Malta Tourism Authority’s Database, August 2023

According to MTA's statistics on concentration of localities visited by tourists, in 2022 the Majjistral hosted some place of interest for visitors. As expected Mdina and Rabat are the most popular destination within the territory and second most popular nationally after Valletta. These were visited by around 70% of the tourists, as shown in Table 15 below. The highlighted localities refer those areas which fall within the territory under study. Another popular locality among tourists is St. Paul's Bay, with almost half of the tourists paying a visit (this rate also includes tourists that visited Buġibba and/or Qawra which do not make part of Majjistral's territory). Other noticeable places include Mellieħa, Golden Bay, Mosta and Ħad-Dingli who all maintained tourists' visits concentration of 20% or more.

Table 15. Localities visited in Malta by Tourists in year 2022

Location	%
Valletta	92.9%
Mdina/Rabat	70.3%
The Three Cities	39.8%
Sliema	53.8%
St Julians	39.8%
Paceville	13.6%
St Paul's Bay/Buġibba/Qawra	48.0%
Mellieħa	32.6%
Golden Bay	25.1%
Żurrieq/Blue Grotto	19.5%
Marsaxlokk	44.2%
Marsascula	9.2%
Mosta	28.4%
Ta' Qali	8.1%
The Three Villages (Ħ'Attard/Balzan/Ħal Lija)	4.2%
Ħad-Dingli	21.1%
Naxxar	6.2%
Mġarr	19.3%
Siġġiewi	3.7%
Birżebbuġa/Għar Dalam	7.5%
Tarxien	7.6%
Paola/Hypogeum	6.6%
Qrendi/ĦaġarQim/Mnajdra	16.3%
Other locality visited in Malta	1.9%

Source: Extracted from Malta Tourism Authority's Database, August 2023 (localities highlighted in yellow are in the Majjistral territory)

3.1.5.4. Agricultural Sector

The Majjistral territory is known for its vast agriculture produce and the rural areas within the region are one of its most important characteristics. A large part of the territory hosts fields used for crop production, livestock rearing as well as vineyards. Table 16 below indicates the percentage of agricultural land per locality and the classification of the land in terms of development zones. Overall, 46% of the territory is defines as "agricultural land" and 79% of the same territory as ODZ area. Mġarr seems to hod the highest percentage of both Agricultural land (68%) and ODZ land (97%).

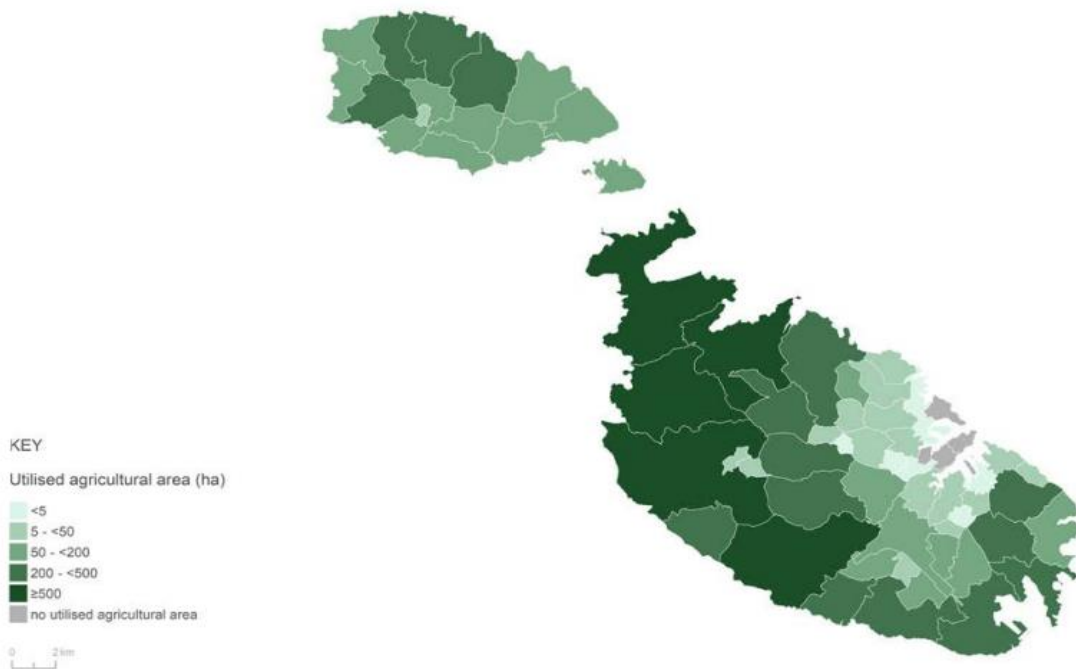
Table 16: Land Area by locality and type

Local Council	Local Council Area (sq km)	Agriculture (sqkm)	%Agriculture	Development Zone (sqkm)	Outside Development Zone (sqkm)	%ODZ
Mtarfa	0.72	0.26	36%	0.34	0.39	53%
Ħ'Attard	6.64	3.27	49%	0.64	5.01	75%
Ħad-Dingli	5.67	2.90	51%	0.33	5.33	94%
Rabat (Malta)	26.6	14.54	55%	0.14	25.40	95%
Sigġiewi	19.88	11.20	56%	0.98	18.90	95%
Iklin	1.73	0.69	40%	0.64	1.47	85%
Ħaż-Żebbuġ (Malta)	8.66	5.34	62%	1.55	7.11	82%
Mdina	0.89	0.55	62%	0.06	0.82	93%
Mellieha	22.64	6.36	28%	0.10	20.59	91%
Naxxar	11.57	4.77	41%	0.14	9.45	82%
Mosta	6.78	2.80	41%	0.35	4.53	67%
St.Pauls Bay	14.53	6.86	47%	0.14	11.94	82%
Għargħur	2.02	0.94	46%	0.31	1.70	84%
Mġarr (Malta)	16.12	10.89	68%	0.47	15.64	97%
Ħal Lija	1.1	0.40	36%	0.01	0.57	52%
Swieqi	3.1	0.77	25%	0.60	1.28	41%
Total Majjistral	148.65	72.52	46%	6.79	130.10	79%

Source: NSO (2023), *Census of Agriculture, 2020 Report*

The 2020 Census of Agriculture showed that the total utilised agricultural area (UAA) in Malta amounted to 10,731 hectares. A total of 8,282 hectares, or 77.2 per cent of the entire UAA, were located in Malta. The largest amount of UAA, 3,252 hectares or 30.3 per cent, was found to be situated in the Western district. This was followed by the Northern and the Gozo and Comino districts with 2,542 hectares (23.7 per cent) and 2,449 hectares (22.8 per cent) respectively, as shown in Figure 12.

Figure 12: Utilised agricultural area by locality

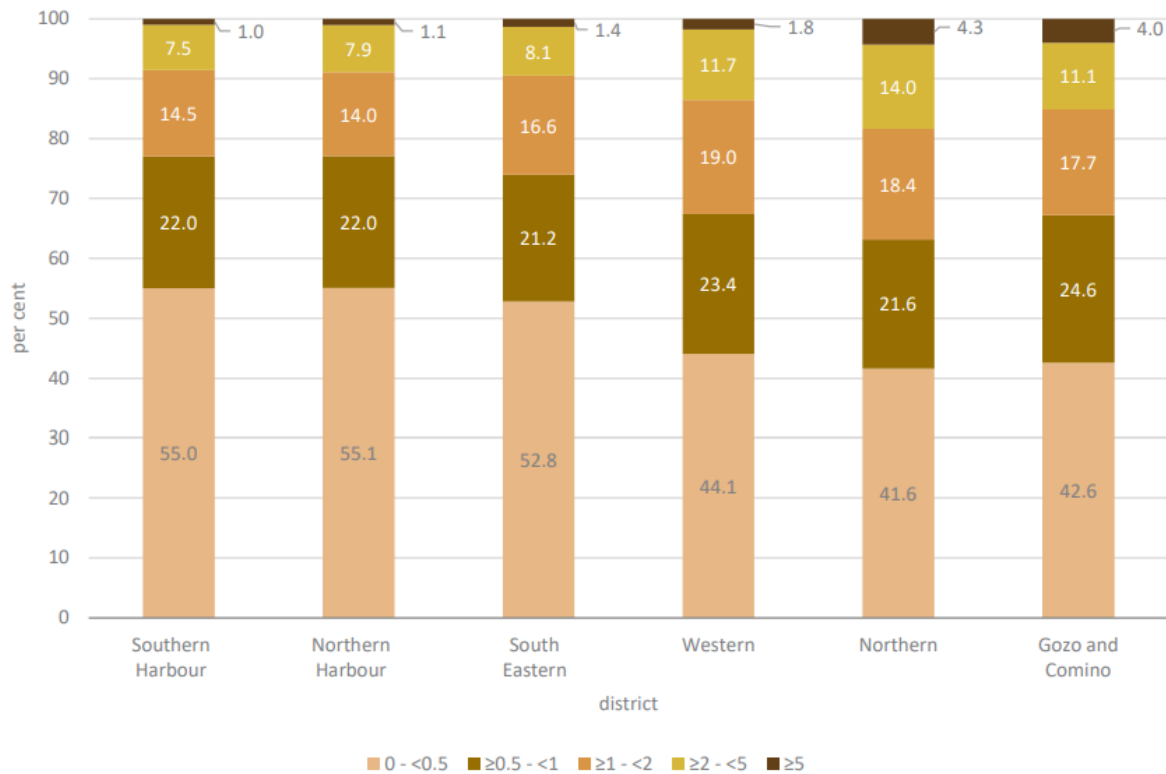


Source: NSO (2023), *Census of Agriculture, 2020 Report*

The 2020 Census revealed that most of the agricultural holdings in Malta and Gozo were relatively small, as 7,118 holdings or 69.2 per cent managed a UAA of less than one hectare. Medium-sized agricultural holdings that managed between one and five hectares of land amounted to 2,898 (28.2 per cent), while 265 agricultural holdings (2.6 per cent) were considered large, managing over five hectares of UAA.

It is evident that the Majjistral region holds quite a strong position when it comes to such holdings, whereby the Northern district has the highest number of holdings between 1 and 5 hectares of land, as highlighted in Figure 13. Figures for the Western district also bode well for holdings between 0.5 to 2 hectares of land.

Figure 13: Percentage distribution of agricultural holdings by district and size class of utilised agricultural area (ha)

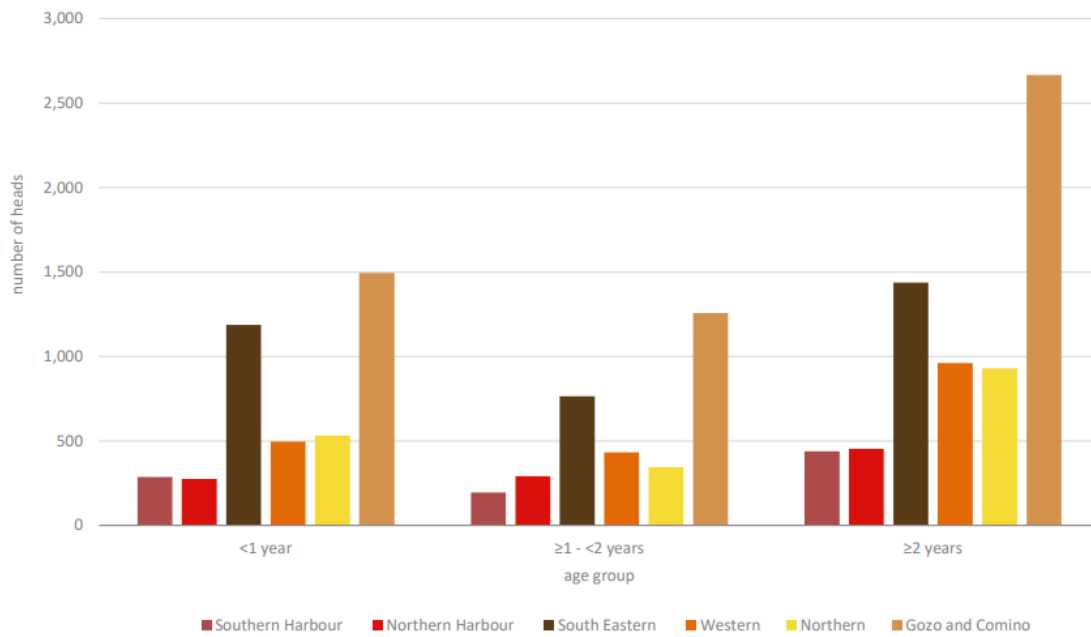


Source: NSO (2023), *Census of Agriculture, 2020 Report*

Through the 2020 Census of Agriculture it emerged that in Malta there were a total of 241 cattle farms with a cattle population of 14,447 heads. Out of this total, 5,996 heads were found to be dairy cows. The largest share of the cattle population, 5,419 or 37.5% were being reared in the Gozo and Comino district. On the other hand, the majority of cattle farms, amounting to 94 or 39.0%, were situated in the South Eastern district. The data also shows that on average, farms in Malta had a total of 46 heads while farms in Gozo had 120 heads each.

A total of 5,042 heads or 34.9% were raised on agricultural holdings having less than 0.5 hectares of UAA, while 2,883 heads or 20.0 per cent were reared on holdings having 5 hectares or more. The Gozo and Comino district accounted for the highest number of dairy cows, where 2,334 heads or 38.9 per cent were being reared, followed by the South Eastern district with 1,275 heads or 21.3 per cent. When it comes to the Western and northern districts, they place third and fourth respectively in terms of concentration of cattle population, as presented in Figure 14.

Figure 14: Cattle population by age group and district



Source: NSO (2023), *Census of Agriculture, 2020 Report*

The labour force within the agricultural sector is another pertinent indicator showing the level of human resources allocated to this economic activity. Table 17 below shows that the Western district has the highest number of workers (3,110) followed by the South Eastern and Northern districts (2,900 and 2,881 respectively). It is noticeable that most of the labour force of a mele gender and the majority of the owners are of a sole-holder legal personality.

Table 17. Agricultural labour force by region, district, sex and legal personality

NATIONAL	MALTA							
NUTS 3	Malta							Gozo and Comino
LAU 1			Southern Harbour	Northern Harbour	South Eastern	Western	Northern	Gozo and Comino
Total number of persons	13,341	10,784	983	910	2,900	3,110	2,881	2,557
Sole-holder holdings	12,956	10,483	928	871	2,842	3,056	2,786	2,473
Group or partnership	197	150	21	12	50	19	48	47
Company	188	151	34	27	8	35	47	37
Males	11,544	9,277	886	813	2,551	2,585	2,442	2,267
Sole-holder holdings	11,209	9,013	834	780	2,506	2,538	2,355	2,196
Group or partnership	171	129	19	11	38	18	43	42
Company	164	135	33	22	7	29	44	29
Females	1,797	1,507	97	97	349	525	439	290
Sole-holder holdings	1,747	1,470	94	91	336	518	431	277
Group or partnership	26	21	2	1	12	1	5	5
Company	24	16	1	5	1	6	3	8

Source: NSO (2023), *Census of Agriculture, 2020 Report*

3.1.5.5. Fisheries

Fishing is another vibrant business aspect within the Majjistral territory. Localities of St. Paul's Bay, Mellieħa as well as the limits of Siġġiewi and Mġarr are found on the coastline. According to NSO's Transport Statistics, in 2021 the total registered number of fishing vessels in Malta stood at 2,741. As indicated in Figure 15, the amount of registered fishing vessels in the Majjistral region was at around 800 (500 in the Northern district and 300 in the Western district). This means that around 30% of the vessels in Malta are registered within the Majjistral territory. The most popular type of shipping vessels in the Majjistral and other part of Malta is the multi-purpose vehicle (MPV).

Moreover, one should also note that a number of fish farms are also present in the areas mentioned, such as at St. Paul's Bay and Mellieħa. Similar to the discussion on the quarrying industry, the presence of such an industry brings about both positive economic spill-over effects, but also potential negative repercussions on the environment.

Figure 15: Stock of fishing vessels by type of vessel and district: 2021



Source: NSO (2022), *Transport Statistics Reference Year 2021*

3.1.5.6. Construction and Quarrying

Given Malta's limited resources and the availability of different stone types, construction has always been a key industry for the economic performance of the island, especially when considering the interconnectedness of other industries with construction. Records from the Malta Resources Authority (MRA) show that there are 20 active quarry licenses within localities under study. The highest number of active quarries are found in the localities of Naxxar and Ħad-Dingli, both of which basically host half of the quarries in the territory. Also worth mentioning, the Majjistral hosts 69% of active quarries in Malta, as shown in Table 18 below.

Table 18: Quarry Licences in the Majjistral territory

Locality	Quarry licences	Share in Majjistral
Ħ'Attard	1	5%
Ħad-Dingli	5	25%
Rabat, Malta	1	5%
Mellieħa	1	5%
Mġarr	2	10%
Naxxar	5	25%
Swieqi	2	10%
Siġġiewi	2	10%
Ħaż-Żebbuġ	1	5%
Majjistral Total	20	69%
Malta Total	29	-

Source: Data given by Planning Authority, August 2023

Note: Number of quarry licences include both hard-stone and soft-stone quarries

3.1.5.7. Settlements

Another important quality of life indicator is dwelling occupancy. Table 19 below provides details with regards to the number of dwellings and occupancy status in the localities under study. This is based on the latest Census of Housing and Population of reference year 2021. As expected, there have been considerable developments in the property market, fuelled by changing demographics (smaller-sized households and increase in foreign workers), macro-economic factors (low interest rate environment), making lending cheaper but also forcing people to look at property as an attractive store of wealth. Government measures, such as the relaxation in certain planning regulations, reduced stamp duty for first-time buyers and schemes to attract foreign direct investment, also encouraged the property sector to grow further.

The upward trend in the Maltese property sector is highlighted by the increase of 31% in total dwelling stock within the Majjistral territory between the decade of 2011 and 2021. This is composed of an increase in both occupied and vacant properties which increase by 40% and 11%, respectively. All localities seem to have witnessed an increase in dwelling stock, with the exception of Mdina (which can be considered as an outlier in our case due to its specific characteristics). Localities with the highest growth in dwelling stock are Swieqi, Mġarr and Ġhargħur with an increase of 65%, 53% and 43%, respectively. Rabat and Ħal Lija are the two localities experiencing the least growth in dwelling stock with an increase of 20% and 24% respectively.

Table 19: Dwellings Stock by Occupancy Status and Locality (2011-2021)

Locality	2011			2021			Change		
	Total	Occupied	Vacant	Total	Occupied	Vacant	Total	Occupied	Vacant
Ħ'Attard	4,069	3,282	787	5,604	4,517	1,087	38%	38%	38%
Ħad-Dingli	1,424	1,128	296	1,786	1,410	376	25%	25%	27%
Għargħur	1,339	957	382	1,953	1,463	490	46%	53%	28%
Iklin	1,124	979	145	1,591	1,272	319	42%	30%	120%
Ħal Lija	1,306	1,075	231	1,613	1,271	342	24%	18%	48%
Mdina	144	90	54	122	89	33	-15%	-1%	-39%
Mellieħa	6,251	3,208	3,043	8,289	5,307	2,982	33%	65%	-2%
Mġarr	1,748	1,181	567	2,671	1,884	787	53%	60%	39%
Mosta	8,359	6,738	1,621	11,592	9,040	2,552	39%	34%	57%
Mtarfa	840	757	83	1,081	884	197	29%	17%	137%
Naxxar	5,973	4,508	1,465	8,712	6,557	2,155	46%	45%	47%
Rabat (Malta)	5,346	4,127	1,219	6,409	4,859	1,550	20%	18%	27%
Sigġiewi	3,341	2,772	569	4,524	3,595	929	35%	30%	63%
St. Paul's Bay	17,593	7,397	10,196	23,738	14,890	8,848	35%	101%	-13%
Swieqi	4,478	3,151	1,327	7,379	5,522	1,857	65%	75%	40%
Ħaż-Żebbuġ (Malta)	5,128	3,958	1,170	7,140	5,329	1,811	39%	35%	55%
Majjistral	72,078	48,394	23,684	94,204	67,889	26,315	31%	40%	11%

Source: NSO (2023), *Census of Population and Housing 2021: Final Report: Dwellings Characteristics (Volume 2)*

As regards to property prices, the lowest average price per sqm rates are found in Gozo at around c. €1,800/sqm, as shown in Table 18 below. The Northern Harbour district holds the most expensive properties with an average price of c. €3,100/sqm. The Western and Northern regions which make part of the Majjistral territory, are the second and third most expensive districts, respectively. On average, one must pay c. €2,800/sqm in the Western district and c. €2,900/sqm in the Northern district. Table 20 below shows the average price per square meter broken down by property type as published in a study by 'Djar' and 'EY' in 2021.

Table 20. Average price per sqm by region and property type

Region	Apartment	House of Character	Maisonette	Penthouse	Terraced House	Townhouse
Gozo	€1,449	€2,186	€1,477	€1,810	€2,334	€1,736
Northern	€2,319	€3,278	€2,256	€2,825	€3,927	€3,039
Northern Harbour	€3,126	€3,083	€2,517	€3,042	€3,543	€3,385
South Eastern	€1,986	€2,282	€2,061	€2,231	€2,831	€2,366
Southern Harbour	€2,322	€3,051	€2,357	€2,166	€2,849	€3,023
Western	€2,174	€2,930	€2,312	€2,583	€3,754	€3,019

Source: Djar&EY (2021), *Property Report February 21*

3.1.5.8. Industrial Estates

In Malta there is a total of sixteen Industrial Estates. Four of these areas are located in the region under study, which are equally divided between Ħ'Attard and Mosta, as shown in Table 21 below. These all fall under the management of INDIS Malta, which is responsible for the administration of government-owned industrial related facilities, as well as supporting and promoting their further development.

Table 21. Industrial Estate in the Majjistral territory

Industrial Area	Locality
Ħ'Attard Industrial Estate	Ħ'Attard
Mosta Industrial Estate	Mosta
Mosta Technopark	Mosta
Ta' Qali Artisan Village	Ħ'Attard

Source: INDIS Malta, August 2023

3.1.6. Environmental Profile

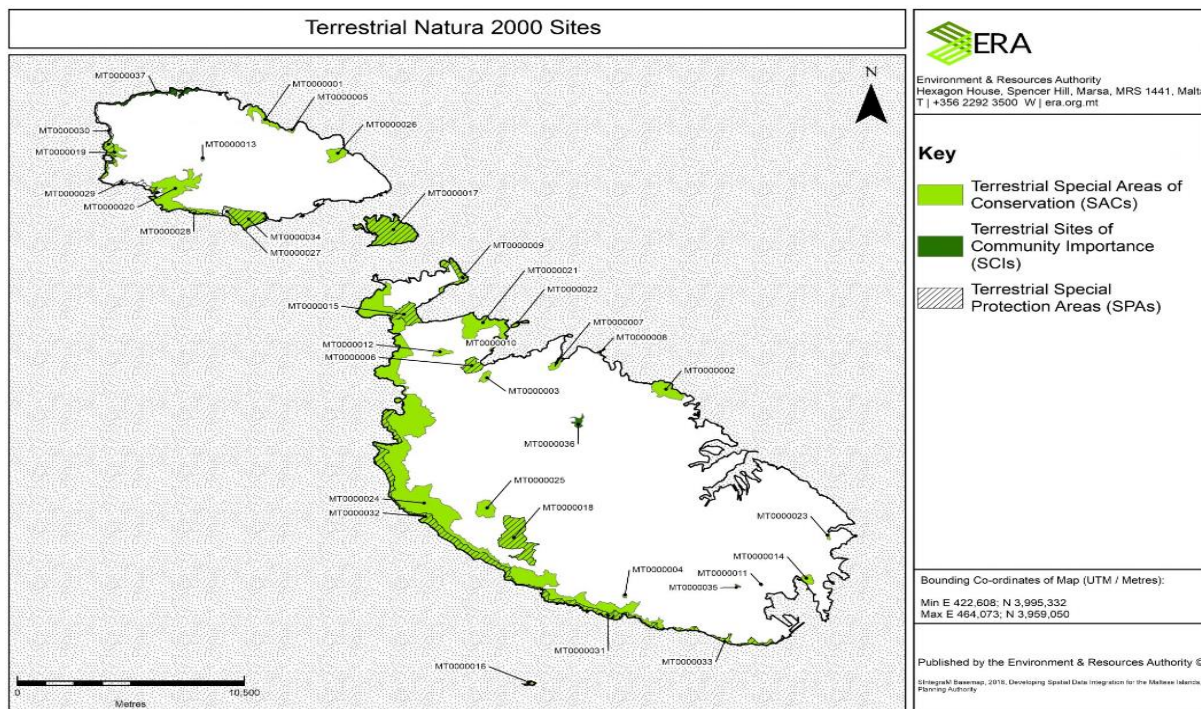
3.1.6.1. *Natura 2000 Sites*

In an attempt to protect the biodiversity in its different member states, the EU has created the Natura 2000 network of protected sites designated under the Habitats and Birds Directives, which require special protection due to their intrinsic value of the habitat or species. The below is a list of Natura 200 sites that fall within the Majjistral territory. Figure 16 then presents the terrestrial special areas in the context of a map of the Maltese islands.¹³

- L-Għadira s-Safra
- Ix-Xagħra tal-Kortin
- Il-Gzejjer ta' San Pawl (Selmunett)
- Il-Ballut tal-Wardija
- Il-Qortin tal-Magun u l-Qortin il-Kbir
- Is-Salini
- Is-Simar (limiti ta' San Pawl il-Baħar)
- L-Għar tal-Iburdan u l-Inħawi tal-Madwar
- L-Inħawi tal-Buskett u tal-Girgenti
- L-Inħawi tal-Għadira
- L-Inħawi tal-Imġiebaħ u tal-Miġnuna
- L-Inħawi tar-Ramla tat-Torri u tal-Irdum tal-Madonna
- Rđumijiet ta' Malta: Għajn Tuffieħa
- Rđumijiet ta' Malta: Ir-Ramla ta' Għajn Tuffieħa sax-Xaqqa
- Rđumijiet ta' Malta: Mir-Ramla taċ-Ċirkewwa sar-Ramla tal-Mixquqa
- Wied il-Miżieb

¹³ List obtained from the Environment and Resource Authority (ERA)

Figure 16: Terrestrial Natura 2000 Sites around Malta



Source: Environment and Resource Authority (ERA), 2023

Link: <https://era.org.mt/topic/natura-2000-management-planning-for-terrestrial-sites-in-malta-gozo/>

3.1.6.2. Water

A very important resource both at country and district levels is water. It is a well-known fact that one of Malta major limitations is the lack of natural resources, in this case mountains and lakes which for other countries are the source of water. In Malta, local water originates from the groundwater extracted from aquifers and through desalination processes via three reverse osmoses found and operated by the Water Services Corporation (WSC), as stated by the previous MAGF LDS strategy.¹⁴

Groundwater bodies

Groundwater in Malta is contained in a number of aquifers and these are distinguished as follows:

- Mean Sea-Level Aquifers (MSLA): Bodies of fresh water of this type tend to have the form of a lens that floats on denser seawater in the rock. These groundwater bodies are ubiquitous and occur extensively at sea level in Malta, Gozo and Comino.
- Perched aquifers: These are found above sea level on the blue clay layer. These bodies are found in the western part of Malta and in Gozo.
- Coastal Aquifers: Here groundwater is retained because of the higher density of seawater at the aquifer's outlet. These small bodies are found at Pwales, Mellieħa and Marfa.

¹⁴ 'The Local Development Strategy for the Majjistral Action Group Foundation Territory January 2021'

The groundwater bodies have been delineated in accordance with the WFD guidelines and are based on geological characteristics. This delineation has identified 15 groundwater bodies as detailed in Table 22 below. As the table shows, more than half of Malta's ground water bodies (aquifers) are situated within the Majjistral territory, meaning more pressure on the ground water is found in these areas, especially so given farming activities are more pronounced in these areas.

Table 22: Groundwater bodies as designated under the Water Framework Directive

Groundwater Body Code	Groundwater Body Name
MT001	Malta Mean Sea Level
MT002	Rabat-Ħad-Dingli Perched
MT003	Mġarr-Wardija Perched
MT005	Pwales Coastal
MT006	Miżieb Mean Sea Level
MT008	Mellieħa Perched
MT009	Mellieħa Coastal
MT010	Marfa Coastal
MT012	Comino Mean Sea Level
MT013	Gozo Mean Sea Level
MT014	Għajnsielem Perched
MT015	Nadur Perched
MT016	Xagħra Perched
MT017	Ħaż-Żebbuġ Perched
MT018	Victoria-Kerċem Perched

Source: ERA (2018), *State of Environment Report 2018; Chapter 5*

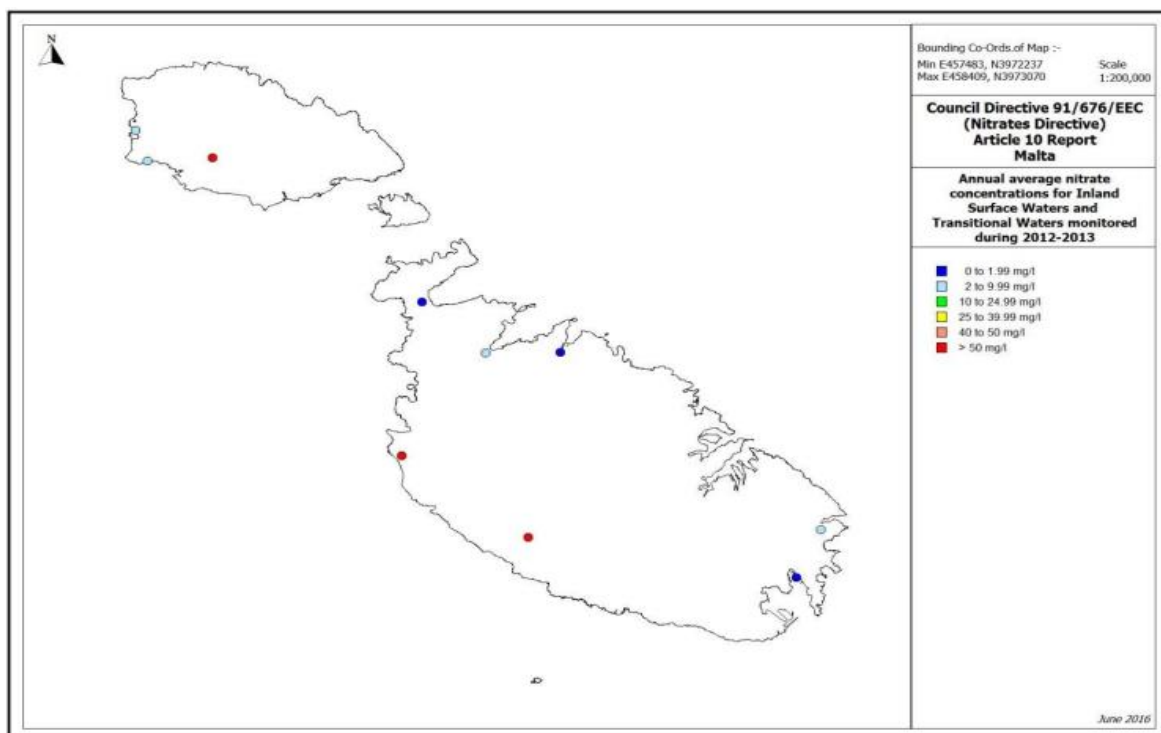
3.1.6.3. Nutrient Enrichment in Waters

Inland surface water bodies delineated for the purpose of the WFD are located within catchment areas with pronounced agricultural activity. Monitoring of nutrient levels in these water bodies is thus relevant to both Water Framework Directive (WFD) and Nitrates Directive. Such monitoring was undertaken between February 2012 and January 2013 where levels of nitrates, nitrites, total Nitrogen, orthophosphates, total Phosphorus and ammonium were measured.

The three watercourses delineated for the purpose of the WFD (Wied il-Luq, Wied il-Lunzjata and Wied tal-Baħrija) are all characterised by very high levels of nutrients with average monthly nitrate concentrations and winter averages exceeding 100 mg/L in all three valley systems. This confirmed the hypertrophic status of all three watercourses as reported on the basis of 2007-2008 data. Such high nitrate levels are attributed to the fact that the valley systems are surrounded by intense agricultural activity.

High nutrient levels coupled to hydro morphological alterations are considered to be the main pressures which are affecting the ecological status of such water bodies. However, it must also be acknowledged that the establishment of nutrient standards that would define good ecological status requires a considerable amount of data to be able to determine natural variations according to differences in hydrological regimes and pressures. Since these waters are important for biodiversity, the water-related requirements of the protected habitats and species need to be established to enable determination of benchmark conditions for nutrients that should be reflected in the definition of good status of these waters. Figure 17 below illustrates areas in Malta and indicates the levels of nitrates on average per annum.

Figure 17: Annual average nitrate concentrations for inland surface waters and transitional waters monitored during 2012-2013



Source: ERA (2018), *State of Environment Report 2018; Chapter 5*

Large fluctuations were recorded for physico-chemical parameters and nutrient levels in transitional waters. The currently available data is too limited to enable assessment of nutrient or ecological status. Nevertheless, these waters are characterised by relatively low nitrate values. The trophic status in these waters ranged from oligotrophic in Is-Simar to ultra-oligotrophic in the other 4 transitional water bodies.

Nitrate concentrations measured in standing waters, L-Ghadira ta' Sarraflu and Il-Qattara, were relatively low and an oligotrophic status was assigned to these water bodies. When comparing 2012-2013 with 2007-2008 datasets, a decrease in average nitrate concentrations in the standing waters is noted. This could be due to the relatively low rainfall records registered during the 2012-2013 sampling period. This observation however needs to be confirmed with additional monitoring carried out in future monitoring programmes.

Figure 18: Malta Nitrogen Dioxide Concentrations in 2022

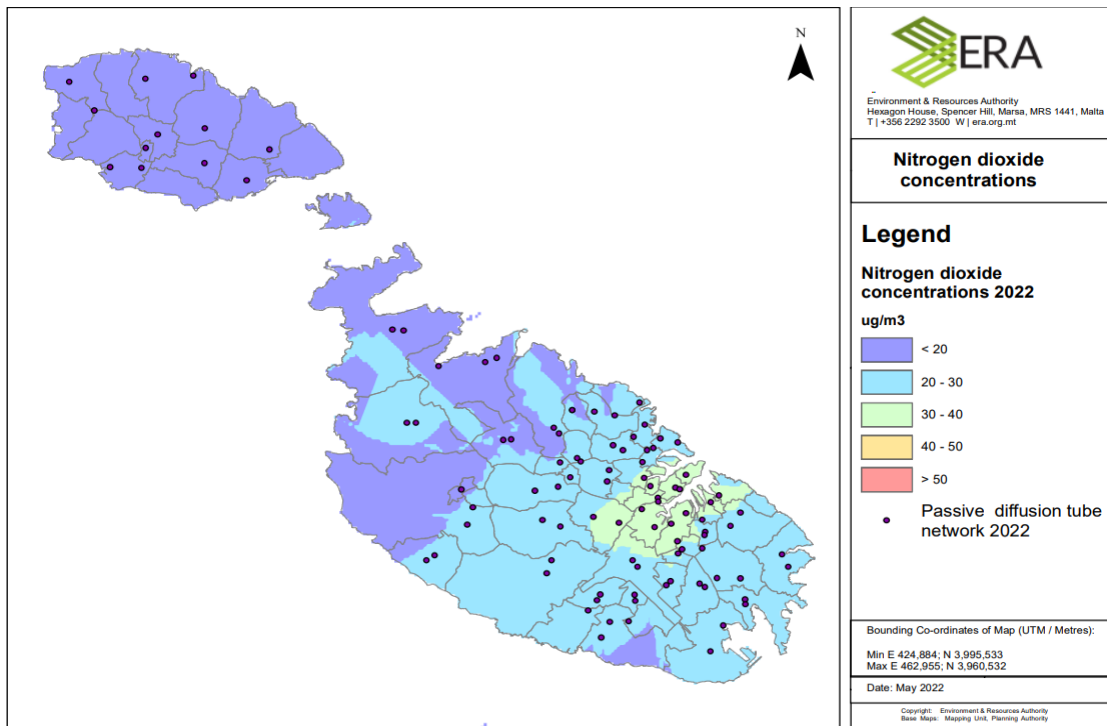
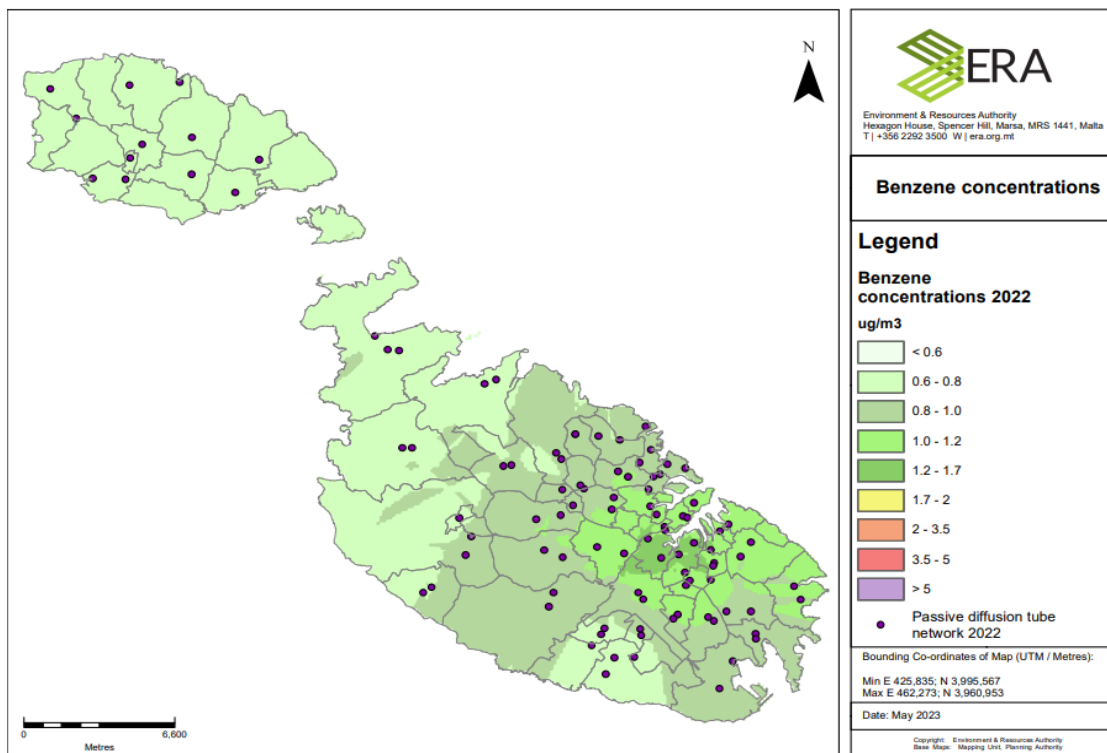


Figure 19: Malta Benzene Concentrations in 2022



Air quality is another important indicator in assessing the environmental profile of the territory. The Environmental and Resources Authority (ERA) possesses a Passive Diffusion Tube Network consisting of 100 sites for volatile organic compounds, nitrogen dioxide and benzene concentrations. Figures 18 and 19 above provides the locations and levels of concentrations of nitrogen dioxide and benzene, respectively. The ERA uses data obtained from the Passive Diffusion Tube Network to produce pollution maps to depict the concentration of NO₂ and benzene throughout the Maltese Islands.

The network is split into traffic and urban background sites in order to obtain a good spatial representation of pollution levels across the Maltese Islands. As expected, traffic sites tend to have higher concentrations than other sites of an urban background nature. In the confines of the Majjistral territory in 2022, higher concentration levels are particularly found in Naxxar, Mosta, Mgarr and Mellieha. While Mgarr and Mellieha's subsidence in air quality might be due to more densely populated areas and traffic congestion, Naxxar's air quality issues probably arise due to the 'Maghtab Environmental Complex.'

3.2. SWOT Analysis

To further analyse the needs of the area, the following section highlights the internal strengths and weaknesses of the territory, as well as the external opportunities and threats. The Strategy is aimed at coming up with measures that:

- i. attempt to minimize both weaknesses and threats;
- ii. attempts to minimize the weaknesses and to maximize tile opportunities;
- iii. are based on the strengths of the territory that can deal with threats in the environment; and
- iv. maximize both strengths and opportunities.

The following factors which will be outlined have been derived from the analysis of the data referred to in this section, as well as evidence-based observations through community participation and 35 Majjistral Local Development Strategy stakeholder involvement (these processes are discussed in more detail in latter sections). The factors are not presented in any order of importance or merit.

The process of data analysis highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the Majjistral territory. The derivations are factual in the sense that they are based on statistics published or provided by local authorities.

Opportunities and Threats are primarily derived through consultation meetings with local stakeholders of the territory. Throughout the three meetings several constituents voiced their concerns regarding threats and potential ones which traditionally did not relate to the area and that now make part of the risk factors of the territory. Constituents also voiced several opportunities given the territory's geographical, natural and traditional characteristics. As a LAG, we have also complemented these threats and opportunities with deductions for local data.

In the below tables, elements of the SWOT are also attributed to available publications such as the CAP SP objectives and themes, established strategic needs and the measures put forward by this LDS. One should also note that the LEADER programme is primarily linked to specific CAP SP objective 8, that of aiming towards more vibrant rural areas. It is evident in the below table that this objective features highly in the attributions made to elements of the

SWOT.

The tables below also present any linkages between these factors and (a) the CAP Objectives identified in Section 4.1, (b) the three main strategic needs identified in Section 4.4.3 of this LDS; and (c) the Measures presented in Section 5 of this LDS.

Strengths	Strategic needs/CAP SP themes/LDS measures/CAP objectives
Level of health conditions and share of disability in the area bodes well when compared to national average	CAP Objective 8
Satisfactory level of post-graduate students when compared to other regions in Malta	CAP Objective 8
Higher employment rates than national average	CAP Objective 8
Relatively higher salaries than other districts in Malta	CAP Objective 8
A high share in skilled agricultural workers form Malta's total	CAP Objective 8
Positive number of active businesses in the Northern district	CAP Objective 8
Presence of large areas of land dedicated for agricultural purposes	CAP Objective 8
Area of agricultural and rural importance, supporting Agri-biodiversity and positively contributing to the territory's economy	CAP Objective 8;
High percentage of ODZ areas	CAP Objective 8
Coastal and marine areas have a significant recreational and touristic value	CAP Objective 8
Relatively high number of natural designated areas	CAP Objective 8
Presence of localities and sites having important cultural assets	CAP Objective 8
Satisfactory tourist and hotel concentration	CAP Objective 8
Presence of a Tourism hub, including accommodation as well as numerous attractions	CAP Objective 8
Touristic areas acting as entertainment hubs	CAP Objective 8
Active civil organisations e.g. farming and agricultural organizations	CAP Objective 8

Weaknesses	Strategic needs/CAP SP themes/LDS measures/CAP objectives
Increased environmental pressure due to high population density and increased economic activity	CAP Objective 8
Low number of active businesses in the	CAP Objective 8

Western district	
High growth in new dwellings and increase in vacant properties	CAP Objective 8
Limited funding for social and cultural activities, and for organisations implementing such programmes	CAP Objective 8

Opportunities	Strategic needs/CAP SP themes/LDS measures/CAP objectives
Economic activity can be boosted given higher population density in the territory	CAP Objective 8
Innovation can be given higher priority given the increase in younger age cohorts	CAP Objective 8
High levels of post graduate students can lead to higher disposable income and quality of life	CAP Objective 8
Untapped labour forces resources through inactive population	CAP Objective 8
Increasing child care centres	CAP objective 8
Possibility of restoring cultural buildings and artefacts for improved tourism	
Exploiting local crafts and investing in them	CAP Objective 8
Coordinate between places of interest to create Tourism Information Centre's and utilise technology to digitalise information	CAP Objective 8
Opportunities to showcase traditional farming techniques in rural settings	CAP Objective 8
Potential of creating synergies amongst different localities	CAP Objective 8
Trend towards informal educational systems and accreditations	CAP Objective 8
Use of existing sporting institutions to promote inclusivity	CAP Objective 8
Promotion of regional produce and typical agricultural practices	CAP Objective 8
Innovation in farming is another potential, leading to further development in more sustainable production techniques within the area	CAP Objective 8
Greening of public areas and open spaces identified as key for the improved well-being of the territory's communities and social inclusion	CAP Objective 8

Threats	Strategic needs/CAP SP themes/LDS measures/CAP objectives
Lower quality of life brought about by staggering population density figures in	CAP Objective 8

some localities	
Pressures on resources, land, water and air given the growth in population density	CAP Objective 8
Repercussions on rural areas brought about by quarrying and other commercial activities.	CAP Objective 5 8
Urban sprawl	CAP Objective 8
Intensive fishing can put pressure on rural coastal areas	CAP Objective 8
Possibility of losing traditional skills in terms of agriculture, fishing and other crafts and trades	CAP Objective 8
Limited land available in other areas of Malta, leading to increased land use pressure in the region	CAP Objective 8
High concentration of tourist visits in both cultural and green areas can lead to degrading of patrimonial assets, loss of biodiversity and challenges to a circular bio-economy.	CAP Objective 8
Agricultural abandonment	CAP Objective 8
Limited availability of funding for collaboration, innovation and gender-balanced participation in farming	CAP Objective 8;
Subsidence in air quality of Naxxar arising from the Maghtab Environmental Complex	CAP Objective 8

The following sub-sections will provide a description of the SWOT Analysis and what are the implications brought about by these factors:

Strengths

- In the data analysis, we are shown that the Majjistral region suffers less from health conditions and long-term illnesses than the average of the rest of the population.¹⁵ Although the difference is marginal, this could be due to lower traffic congestion and pollution than the rest of the localities or could be simply because on average the population under study tends to abide to healthy lifestyle habits and hence fewer resources are to be allocated to health and curation needs.
- In the Majjistral region the data also shows that the share of graduates at MQF levels 6 and 7 per 1,000 habitants is highest in the Western district, while uppermost share in respect to MAF level 8 was also registered in the Western district at 0.3 per 1,000 inhabitants. On average, the Majjistral territory (including the Northern district) bodes well when it comes to post-graduate students.
- The employment rate as at 2022 in the Majjistral region was higher than the national average rate, while the inactivity stood lower. Unemployment was in line with the national average.

¹⁵ Keeping in mind that these figures are back dated and implications from these figures must be treated with caution.

- The salaries within the Majjistral region are also satisfactory. The Western region holds the highest level of annual basic salary for both genders. While the Northern district is the third highest district for males.
- The area is known for its rural and agricultural importance, with a good number of wine presses, olive yards, and farmers' markets, amongst others. Agriculture is very much part of the economic activity especially in areas such as Ta' Qali (mainly because of Pitkalija) and Imġarr.
- Indeed, a good percentage of land is dedicated to agricultural purposes, more specifically 46% of the land, again highlighting the importance of the rural aspect of the region.
- The various number of protected environmental zones are another stronghold of the Majjistral territory. These include the Natura 2000 areas that ensure certain habitats and ecological sites are protected and not disrupted.
- Air quality in the region under study also tends to be of good quality, meaning there is less pollution in the localities concerned on average which in turn reduces the negative impact on the health of residents.
- The Majjistral region is also known for its coastal and marine characteristics. Moreover, it hosts several good bathing water beaches. These beaches are highly sought after by both locals and tourists for their recreational potential.
- The region is also enriched by great cultural heritage, hosting various artefacts, buildings, trades and customs of historical value. This adds further value to the area and highly contributes to the high concentration of tourists visits in such areas, especially Mdina.
- The Majjistral territory is indeed considered as a touristic hub. It hosts 31% of all the hotels in Malta and 42% of all the 4-Star Hotels. Moreover, various touristic sites are found in the region, including St. Paul's Bay, Mdina and Rabat.
- The region is also considered to be an area of entertainment. As already stated the area has a number of beaches, such as Golden Bay, Ġnejna, St. Paul's Bay, and Ġhadira. Other recreational places include the national park of Ta' Qali, the equestrian school at Ġhajj Tuffieħa, various restaurants and bars, a shooting range at Baħar ic-Cagħaq and many others. This means that the region is a dynamic hub, celebrating life and culture.
- There is also a very vibrant and active resident base with several different organisations allowing for the interaction of the citizens. These include farming and agricultural organisations, church groups, scouts, band clubs, environmental NGOs, and many others. This allows for the area to continuously seek innovation.

Weaknesses

Despite the positive aspects mentioned above, the territory suffers from a number of weaknesses which this Strategy aims to address:

- A staggering increase in population density (especially in localities like St. Paul's Bay) greatly hinders the quality of life of residents. Moreover, this causes increased pressure on the environment as whole.
- Although the Western district is highly rural and includes several green areas, data shows a low level of active businesses.
- The number of properties in the area has been rising (by 31% between 2011 and 2021), with occupied dwellings increasing by 40% (fuelled by the increase in foreign

workers) and an increase of 11% in vacant dwellings. This is decreasing the open spaces and increasing the 'crowding effect'.

- Over the years, the territory has had limited funding on social and cultural activities posing a risk of losing part of our identity.

Opportunities

The Strategy also takes into account opportunities which might arise, and which can be tapped to improve and develop the region further:

- One of the main weaknesses in the territory was the increase in population and population density. Nonetheless, this could be an opportunity to utilize this human resource and allocate it where the territory needs it most. In turn this would turn in higher economic activity including production and consumption which in turn sets off the reduction in quality of life.
- A slightly higher population in younger cohorts than that of the national average poses the opportunities for authorities to invest in education and innovation in ways that would eliminate any labour market gaps that have arisen due to misallocation of resources or higher ageing population. This would also help the dependency ratio of the area.
- The previous point can also be further reinforced by the relatively high levels of post-graduates, which could in turn create a society with higher disposable income and quality of life.
- Despite a lower inactivity rate than the Maltese average, there is still a good pool of inactive people who can be seen as untapped labour force. Through targeting of such individuals, the region could potentially increase its labour force, productivity and economic activity.
- The above point can also be brought about given the increase in childcare centres. Now in the region there are 69 centres. These can assist parents, especially mothers, to return to the labour market.
- The Majjistral region is very rich in culture and historical buildings and artefacts, yet some of them require upkeep and investment in their refurbishment. This can be seen as an opportunity to restore such assets and use them as an attraction for tourists as well to increase the value of the locality. Such investment also generates activity in the region.
- Given the presence of several crafts in the area, more investment could help the localities to capitalise on these activities, which are often left un-marketed.
- The importance of the agricultural sector in this area could help in developing and using new farming techniques. This would not only assist the farmers themselves but also increase the productivity of the entire area.
- There is also an opportunity to create informal educational systems to pass on the knowledge and the trades as well as create an accreditation system to ensure that Maltese produce is recognised and promoted.
- The area has a few sporting institutions and areas. These can be used to promote inclusivity in the society, by creating specific activities for vulnerable groups.
- Given the importance of rural areas as well as agriculture, one can see the opportunity to use such already existing systems to further promote the local produce and agricultural systems.

Threats

Apart from opportunities, external forces could also act as a threat to the stability and growth of the area. It is for this reason that the Strategy is being written with these threats in mind:

- As previously highlighted, the issue of population increases and concentration on population density poses a threat to quality of life and issues of environmental degradation. Although this has also been highlighted as an opportunity, higher pressures on resources such as water, air, land, road infrastructure, and sewage, there can be repercussions if not monitored.
- Urban sprawl is another possible threat due to growth in population figures. Given the higher intensity of people residing in a particular area, dwellings have been extended to areas which were previously classified as green areas or free spaces and hence causing a depletion in the rural identity of certain area.
- The Majjistrat region is also known for the importance quarrying in various sections of the territory. Despite this being a lucrative economic activity, the quarries do have serious environmental implications on the area, including noise and particulate pollution. Once the quarries close down and excavations are terminated, the quarry leaves the issue of being an eye sore and many times needing some sort of re-engineering.
- Another economic activity important for the area is that of fisheries, with a good number of licences fisherman in the coastal localities, as well as fish farms. This activity puts great pressure on the coastal zones and might also lead to the threat of over-fishing, as well as other effects related to pollution.
- The high activity in agriculture, especially in areas like Imgarr, might be a threat to the land as well as the water table. The rearing of livestock also brings about problems in terms of waste production, which might contaminate the water table and bring about a problem of disposal.
- Limited availability of funding for collaboration between entities and/or groups is another threat in losing out on ideas and possibly brain-drain. Same goes for funding of innovation.
- Another possible threat is the limited knowledge transfer of particular trades or crafts that were more popular in the past and are not being passed on to present and future generations. These trades may be specific to an area or a certain undertaking and there is a risk of being lost when older generations pass. The loss of knowledge would not only lead to the know-how of the trade itself but will also improve the culture of the region, given that many trades will be lost in time.

4. Description and objectives of the Strategy

The Local Development Strategy (LDS) is a crucial component of the LEADER program, and it must align with various overarching policies and objectives. Here's an overview of the strategy's description and objectives:

4.1. Setting the Scene

1. Alignment with Europe 2030: The LDS must be in harmony with the Europe 2030 strategy, which is the European Union's growth strategy for the current decade. This alignment ensures that the local development efforts are in line with broader European goals.

2. Common Agricultural Policy (CAP): The LDS should also be consistent with the objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). CAP is a European Union policy that aims to support agriculture, promote sustainable farming, and ensure the availability of safe food. The LDS must be in accordance with CAP's long-term objectives. For the period 2023-27, the CAP is built around ten key objectives. Focused on social, environmental and economic goals, these objectives are the basis upon which EU countries designed their CAP Strategic Plans. The 10 objectives are:

- to ensure a fair income for farmers;
- to increase competitiveness;
- to improve the position of farmers in the food chain;
- climate change action;
- environmental care;
- to preserve landscapes and biodiversity;
- to support generational renewal;
- vibrant rural areas;
- to protect food and health quality;
- fostering knowledge and innovation.

3. Territorial Development: The primary focus of the LDS is to contribute to achieving balanced territorial development in rural areas. This aligns with one of the three overall CAP long-term objectives for EU rural development policy in the 2014-2022 period.¹⁶ The LDS plays a pivotal role in promoting balanced development across rural regions.

In essence, the LDS serves as the strategic roadmap for implementing the LEADER program at the local level. It ensures that local development efforts are not only consistent with European policies and objectives but also contribute to the well-being and prosperity of rural communities by addressing issues like social inclusion, poverty reduction, and economic development.

4.2. The previous local development strategy

Reflecting upon the previous Local Development Strategy (LDS) for the Majjistral region, which was in effect during the 2014-2022 period, provides valuable context for evaluating the current LDS. This retrospective analysis enables us to identify areas of alignment and divergence between the two strategies.

The vision underpinning the Majjistral LDS for the 2014-2020 period (+ 2 years) was characterized by a commitment to a "people-driven" approach that prioritized the creation of a distinct regional identity. Central to this vision was the objective of fostering community cohesion and empowerment to instigate positive changes that would, in turn, facilitate sustainable economic, social, and environmental development. This vision was translated into a set of strategic objectives, which encompassed:

Priority Objective 1: To invest in the development of the cultural landscape and social heritage of the territory

- Measure 1: Restoration of assets and sites of artistic and cultural value
- Measure 2: Strengthening a healthy cultural identity
- Measure 3: Promoting the cultural heritage

Priority Objective 2: To invest in the development of the environmental landscape of the rural areas

- Measure 4: Development of green infrastructure

Priority Objective 3: To invest in the training and transfer of skills of the rural communities

- Measure 5: Training and education

¹⁶ Referring to the latest LDS publication 'Factsheet on 2014-2022 Rural Development Programme for Malta'

This overview highlights the thematic priorities and corresponding measures that shaped the previous LDS for the Majjistrat region. It forms a foundational reference point for assessing the strategic alignment and divergence inherent in the current LDS.

These strategic objectives laid the foundation for the 2014-2020 Majjistrat LDS, embodying a commitment to holistic and sustainable development while emphasizing the pivotal role of community involvement and regional identity formation. The current LDS can benefit from a nuanced understanding of these past objectives, identifying opportunities to build upon and refine the region's developing environmental trajectory while adapting to evolving challenges and priorities.

4.3. Setting the strategy

4.3.1. Strategic Framework Development

The Local Development Strategy (LDS) serves as a pivotal instrument for allocating resources to initiatives within the territory, and in this capacity, it must adhere to the fundamental principles of the LEADER approach. To be effective and fit-for-purpose, the strategy must meet the criteria necessary for facilitating the implementation of value-added actions. Achieving this equilibrium requires the formulation of a strategy that aligns actions with opportunities, rather than focusing solely on addressing existing challenges. In this context, the SWOT analysis plays a pivotal role in shaping the logic underpinning each intervention.

The objectives set forth in this LDS are a product of a comprehensive analysis of the region's geographical and socio-economic landscape. This analysis encompasses recent transformations, underpinned by the region's cultural and historical heritage. It is further informed by extensive and sustained consultations, which have translated generic or unknown proposals into specific and tangible operations.

Given the paramount importance of fostering balanced territorial development, this strategy aspires to be all-encompassing, celebrating the diversity and richness of the region and its inhabitants. It is committed to ensuring that no individual or nascent idea is marginalized. This inclusivity enables the strategy to build upon the region's strengths, aligning objectives with pressing needs identified through the aforementioned analysis and prioritization.

Maintaining a sense of focus is crucial, considering the strategy's limitations in accommodating all proposals and desires. Focus is achieved by investing in areas with a robust foundation, such as culture, traditions, and the arts, and by targeting sectors and activities with significant potential—a determination supported by the SWOT analysis.

Additionally, the strategy weighs the lasting impact of actions on the community and how deeply they resonate long after project completion. This perspective shapes the scope of the

strategy, expeditiously addressing issues that, while not urgent, hold paramount importance. These are the long-term objectives necessitating meticulous planning for their attainment.

Further refinement of focus occurs through the design of measures, which incorporate targeting mechanisms, thresholds, and the prioritization of operations or target groups. This approach seeks to strike a harmonious balance between incentivizing and supporting value-added initiatives while upholding the principles of inclusivity and solidarity.

The LDS must honour the strong sense of identity ingrained in the territory's residents, which derives from the land, heritage, and enduring traditions. Striking equilibrium in directing growth and development within traditional territory while advancing innovative goals poses a significant challenge.

The strategy recognizes the inherent tension between the need for ownership and direct action and the imperative of adopting a collaborative approach. Encouraging cooperation and fostering collaboration among disparate entities with distinct agendas, even across different localities each with its own cultural identity, requires careful consideration of the community's desires and willingness to participate in such endeavours.

4.3.2. Establishing the Vision

At its core, the Local Development Strategy (LDS) is a collective endeavour, crafted by the community and intended to benefit the community. Its overarching goal is to create opportunities that enhance the quality of life. These opportunities are designed to unlock the potential of the region's assets, convert local expertise into avenues for economic and social growth, prioritize smaller projects that are often relegated to the periphery of development agendas, provide support for individuals facing challenges within the community, create resilience in the face of disruptions that challenge established norms, and empower individuals to embrace and shape the inevitable changes that reshape their territory and way of life.

This vision serves as the compass guiding the strategy and underpinning the rationale for the measures and actions meticulously planned to achieve the objectives. These objectives are not arbitrary but rather the result of a collaborative process, aligned with the aspirations of the people who inhabit, utilize, and strive to improve their territory.

4.3.3. Defining the Needs

The foundation of needs addressed by this strategy is drawn from various sources, including the territorial analysis, extensive consultation processes, and the Majjistrat Foundation's practical experience. The overarching objective is to ensure that all initiatives supported by the LEADER fund generate a broad and positive societal impact. To achieve this, a comprehensive understanding of the territory's socio-economic profile, geographical characteristics, and landscape typologies, as well as insights garnered from the consultation process, is crucial for shaping the strategic vision of the Local Development Strategy (LDS). It aids in defining priority objectives and mapping out how these needs and objectives can be translated into concrete projects and actions.

Firstly, the active participation and engagement observed in public consultation meetings, along with the number of responses and proposals received, underscore the community's trust in the LEADER program's ability to deliver value. Building on the experience gained from the previous program, there's a robust and sustained enthusiasm for contributing to the identification of needs and action priorities for the current LDS. However, it's essential to acknowledge that the LDS operates within budget constraints, and while the demand for projects is high, the available resources are finite. Consequently, the LDS must be targeted towards achieving high-priority objectives while ensuring fairness and inclusivity. This necessity shapes the structure of LDS measures, including considerations such as the relative importance of actions, budget limitations, and upper spending thresholds for specific cost items, where applicable.

Furthermore, safeguarding the strong reputation of the LEADER program is paramount to its continued ability to serve the rural community effectively. Thus, the LDS places significant emphasis on the implementation and management capabilities of the Majjstral Foundation. This encompasses the organization and capacity of the group, as well as the establishment of robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Experience from the previous program highlights the need for a more focused and streamlined strategy, proportionate to the administrative and implementation capabilities of the management structures. Additionally, there's a growing emphasis on collaborative and integrated efforts, recognizing the value of joint projects that utilize shared resources and enhance the region as a whole. It is therefore the aim of the LAG to motivate collaborative projects whereby two or more entities join forces to reach an objective in line with the stipulated LDS and benefit from funding in doing so. The LAG also encourages such projects especially in Measures 2, 3 and 4 and is envisaging additional points for joint projects.

The outcomes achieved through the previous implementation of LEADER projects also indicate that certain stakeholders within the territory are prepared to advance to projects that build upon prior work. This suggests potential for second-phase initiatives that may include ones that are more ambitious and innovative.

The consideration of proposals and the prioritisation of these ideas in combination with the analysis of the area and the population of the Majjstral region showed a predominance for measures serving three main strategic needs:

1. Further investment in cultural heritage promotion with specific demand for restoration of traditional machinery and artistic patrimony.
2. Investment in the agricultural sector and promotion of the territory's products.
3. Fostering development of skills, knowledge and capacity-building.

The importance to continue investing in the cultural and social development of the Majjstral region is underpinned by the findings of the SWOT analysis. The analysis revealed that the territory boasts significant strengths, including a rich cultural heritage and its status as an

established tourism hub, replete with accommodations and numerous tourist attractions. Consequently, investments directed towards enhancing the cultural and social fabric of the rural areas within the Majjistrat region hold the promise of capitalizing on identified opportunities. These investments can manifest as initiatives to restore cultural sites and harness local craftsmanship and artistic traditions. Addressing the need for investing in cultural heritage also addresses certain weaknesses identified, notably the limited attention and resources allocated to rural crafts and arts, along with the lack of readily available information for visitors about the region and its attractions.

Elevating the environmental and landscape quality of the region is another priority, primarily through projects focused on establishing new urban green infrastructure within the built-up areas of villages and on the urban fringe. This emphasis arises from the fact that, despite the region's relatively extensive areas classified as Outside Development Zone (ODZ) and the presence of protected or designated natural sites, it grapples with issues related to conflicting land use in natural environments. Urban green infrastructure projects are envisioned not only as a means of enhancing the visual appeal of localities but also as an avenue for creating additional green spaces for recreational activities, leisure, social interaction, and education, thereby contributing to the well-being of the community.

The imperative to invest in knowledge transfer, particularly within the domains of arts and crafts closely tied to the Majjistrat region, addresses a recognized threat, namely the risk of losing valuable knowledge and skills in certain trades over the long term. The opportunity to invest in the arts and crafts trades of the region and harness these rural assets for business prospects is expected to resonate with local stakeholders, given the region's higher levels of education compared to national averages. These factors also provide a compelling rationale for fostering innovation and knowledge transfer initiatives with the potential to stimulate economic activity.

Based on these considerations, the strategic objectives that delineate this LDS and outline the parameters for supported interventions, ranked in order of priority, are as follows:

- To restore and maintain cultural, historical and artistic patrimony
- To invest in and protect rural areas
- To foster development of skills and knowledge through training and education

Collectively, these strategic objectives are oriented toward enhancing both the quality of life for the residents and the overall environmental quality within the region. They aim to achieve this by establishing new opportunities for business and recreation or by enhancing existing ones. Simultaneously, these objectives seek to augment the region's appeal to both its inhabitants and visitors.

This strategic approach entails addressing priorities that were previously recognized in the 2014-2020 strategy but doing so with a more refined and focused perspective. It acknowledges the expertise acquired by the Majjistral Foundation and local stakeholders in the region, fostering an environment that encourages greater creativity and innovation. Furthermore, it takes into account developments within the region that have led to changes in the economic and social landscape of the population.

In conjunction with the cross-cutting objectives outlined in subsequent sections, these three strategic objectives collectively define and mould this LDS. They provide the foundation for the rationale and intervention logic underpinning each of the planned measures.

4.3.4. Alignment with CAP Strategic Plan

The analysis of findings and the prioritization of needs demonstrated a strong alignment with two key themes of the CAP SP: the theme related to the broader economy and quality of life, and the theme focused on landscape and the environment. This alignment is unsurprising for several reasons. Firstly, it's important to recall that the fifth theme of the Malta CAP SP, concerning the wider rural economy and quality of life, encapsulates elements of rural development that extend beyond the agricultural sector. During the consultation process for the preparation of the Malta CAP SP, this theme garnered the highest level of interest when outcomes were categorized by theme.

Secondly, it's widely understood that non-LEADER measures within the CAP SP offer various forms of support for agricultural investment and improvement, farm-related businesses, agricultural infrastructure, ancillary agricultural services (including insurance), non-productive investments, quality schemes for agricultural products, and more. As such, the LDS should not replicate or duplicate any of the CAP SP measures, but rather complement them in principle and scope. The aim is to provide support for activities that coexist within the same agricultural landscape, supporting food production, and integrating with the rural communities intertwined with agriculture.

As envisioned in the CAP SP, the theme of a broader rural economy and quality of life encompasses activities that can predominantly thrive in rural areas. These activities encompass rural tourism, diversification of farming activities, the initiation of rural businesses and entrepreneurship, provision of rural services, inclusive employment opportunities (especially for women, youth, and vulnerable populations), and lifelong learning in areas not included in the national curriculum's core subjects. These activities are made possible by the unique blend of resources found in rural regions, distinct from urban areas characterized by higher population density and limited agricultural activity. Rural areas possess traditions passed down through generations, community life centred around the village core, artisanal arts and crafts, local varieties of produce and animal breeds, traditional recipes, fertile land, pristine landscapes, rural structures, traditional architecture, religious festivities, and cultural

traditions enshrined in the community calendar, sacred art, chapels, and more. The list is extensive.

The Malta CAP SP underscores landscape and the environment as one of the primary strengths within the program area. The budget allocated to this cross-cutting theme reflects its significance, particularly due to its prominence in stakeholder consultations, ranking second overall. The CAP SP further defines the environment as a valuable economic and cultural asset and recognizes that the cultural landscape, in particular, may be even more distinctive and unique than the natural environment. It bears witness to centuries of human habitation, layers of rich archaeological, historical, and cultural heritage.

Within this strategy, the measures aligned with the thematic goals of landscape and the environment in the Malta CAP SP, notably the development of green infrastructure, and to a lesser extent, the restoration of sites and assets of cultural and artistic value, are designed with a deep understanding of the profound attachment that people have to their environment, whether natural or cultural. This appreciation also extends to the untapped wealth within their environment. The overarching objective of these measures and others that enhance environmental quality is to empower individuals to become stewards of this heritage. They should be able to utilize available resources in a sustainable manner, one that guarantees benefits and long-term durability.

4.3.5. Complementarity with Other Funds and the EAFRD

As LEADER operates as a method for local-level rural development, it essentially encompasses all the instruments supported by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). To ensure complementarity with other funds, particularly the EAFRD, which typically follows a standard ("top-down") approach, this strategy seeks to add value to LEADER operations through specific eligibility conditions. These conditions include small-scale projects, integrated projects with multiple objectives, innovative/experimental projects (including pilot projects and studies), area-based projects, and cooperation projects. Emphasizing small-scale operations is a pivotal criterion for distinguishing LEADER from other funds, including the EAFRD.

Furthermore, this strategy does not support agricultural primary production activities to maintain complementarity with the non-LEADER measures of the EAFRD. This approach fosters development in sectors of the rural economy that may not receive the same level of support from other funds.

It's important to acknowledge that the CAP SP already provides support for activities that LEADER also supports, such as farm diversification activities, including social, educational, and health services provided by rural enterprises that leverage farm assets. Consequently, the LDS excludes measures similar to those in the CAP SP, even if they are considered classical

LEADER-type interventions. The challenge lies in establishing a clear demarcation between such measures in the LDS and those in the CAP SP.

To address this issue and provide access to LEADER funds for all sectors of the business and social community in the Majjistrat region, including the agricultural community, measures within this LDS have been designed to encourage initiatives by agrarian groups. These initiatives capitalize on rural heritage provided by agriculture and are aimed at continued cultural and social development, aligning with the main strategic objective of this strategy. Examples include establishing new activities and experiences based on agricultural traditions, practices, products, and implements, as well as the relationship between the sector and natural resources, weather, and the region's history and culture. These initiatives offer opportunities for creating new cultural and commercial activities, such as agricultural interpretation or heritage centres, culinary experiences, and educational initiatives in schools related to health and nutrition.

This aspect of the LDS is considered essential for promoting inclusion and integration by allowing an important segment of the rural society in the Majjistrat region, namely the agricultural community, to participate in the region's economic and social development. However, since a clear distinction between farm diversification activities supported by the CAP SP and those that might receive LEADER support could not be established, members of the agricultural community may view the LEADER program as a potential source of funding for agricultural investments, particularly for very small enterprises that could benefit from MAGF's local knowledge.

Given the strong demand for measures supporting farm diversification activities in the Majjistrat region, a separate measure for farm diversification and rural enterprise promotion has been included in this LDS. However, due to the absence of clear demarcation with the relevant CAP SP measure at the time of programming this strategy, this measure has not been included in the action program but positioned as a 'dormant' measure. It would only be activated once the necessary safeguards are in place to prevent double funding for similar operations. Potential demarcation could be established through a minimum investment threshold in the CAP SP measure, allowing the corresponding LDS measure to support investments below that threshold.

In the absence of such demarcation, the LDS measure for diversification remains on the reserve list as "optional" (e.g., in case of budget savings from other measures). This proposal to include a separate measure for farm diversification in the LDS, which can be activated once mechanisms are in place to prevent double funding, is a significant element of the strategy for the Majjistrat region. The MAGF commits to maintaining a dialogue with the Managing Authority for the CAP SP to ensure the timely activation of this measure during the implementation of the LDS.

4.3.6. Consistency and Coherence

Ensuring that all operations supported by the LEADER programme at the local level align with national policies and developments is of paramount importance. This is particularly crucial for policy areas encompassing culture, lifelong learning, enterprise, tourism, waste management, agriculture, employment, water management, energy, climate action, and the environment. To achieve this, extensive consultations were conducted with policy makers in each relevant area before engaging the public in the consultation process. The objectives of these consultations were twofold: first, to confirm that LEADER actions are in harmony with national policies and plans, thereby using the consultation process as a validation mechanism for locally prioritized proposals; and second, to identify potential areas for local action within the national plans that can serve as examples for potential projects under the programmed measures.

By referencing national policy as a framework for potential LEADER-type actions, the LDS ensures internal coherence and a consistent approach. It provides a solid foundation upon which the rationale for each measure can be built.

4.4. Horizontal Objectives

4.4.1. Equal Opportunities

This Local Development Strategy (LDS) adopts the same principles as the Malta's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) strategic plan when setting eligibility criteria. It includes social criteria to allow preference for proposed interventions that contribute to the promotion of equal opportunities, equality, non-discrimination, and improved accessibility.

4.4.2. Environmental Sustainability

The quality of life in rural areas depends on the natural environment and the rural resources it supports. Interventions in rural areas can have environmental impacts, including irreversible modifications to natural habitats and landscapes. Therefore, it's crucial that projects and actions under this LDS respect environmental sustainability principles.

Environmental sustainability is ensured through a two-level approach. Adequate budget allocation is directed towards a measure for the development of green infrastructure, which addresses the priority objective of investing in the environmental landscape of rural areas. Potential operations under this measure may include rehabilitating gardens and small green areas, creating new open green spaces on degraded sites, establishing green belts and corridors within localities and between rural areas, using green infrastructure for environmental services within urban spaces, interpretation and training, and promoting awareness and education.

Another level of environmental sustainability is established through environmentally relevant eligibility criteria. Eligibility criteria include conditions that ensure interventions do not harm the environment and are fully compatible with the surrounding environment. For example,

when considering development outside built-up areas, one way to assess its justification is by asking if it could have occurred in an urban zone.

Other considerations include site suitability for the proposed development, the absence of irregularities or illegalities on the land, compliance with domestic permitting regimes and guidelines on development in Outside Development Zones (ODZ), and whether the project would lead to increased demand for engineered infrastructure and vehicular access. The guiding principle is that the project must fully respect the environment. Additionally, interventions in countryside/ODZ areas should not formalize these areas and should use eco-materials and green building techniques to maintain the unique aesthetic quality and natural arrangement of these rural areas.

Regarding climate action, although a similar approach is taken as with the environment, the impact of LEADER actions on climate is considered less significant than on the environment and landscape.

4.4.3. Innovation

Stimulating innovation is achieved by providing support for operations targeted towards innovation within the relevant measure and by integrating innovation elements into selection criteria and measure design. The measure for innovation, collaboration, and knowledge base development supports relatively riskier, innovative projects that rely on collaboration among different local actors, making it a major driver of innovation and a contributor to the cross-cutting objective of embedding innovation in rural development policy.

4.4.4. Co-operation

The need for cooperation, both to enhance the value of operations and as a tool for joint ownership and knowledge transfer, is addressed through the same dedicated measure intended to support innovative projects. This measure makes group or cluster formation a precondition for eligibility. The same principle is adopted in other measures, where collaboration is favoured through relevant selection criteria.

4.5. Transforming identified needs and objectives into tangible projects

The analysis of the socio-economic and geographical characteristics of the Majjstral territory, coupled with insights gleaned from the bottom-up participatory approach involving rural communities residing in the region, has formed the foundational basis for structuring a comprehensive set of five measures within the programming framework.

Primarily, these measures are strategically aligned with the identified needs that have emerged from this inclusive process. They are, therefore, designed to address the core priority objectives encompassing cultural and social development, environmental investments, and the cultivation of a more robust knowledge base. This strategic prioritization of objectives and the corresponding actions is transparently reflected in the allocation of budgetary resources to these measures.

Secondarily, it is imperative to emphasize that all measures articulated in this strategy are carefully formulated to adhere to the LEADER-specific and horizontal objectives, as expounded upon in earlier sections. These encompass principles of balanced territorial development, bottom-up participatory local action, the promotion of small-scale, cost-effective projects, and a steadfast commitment to social inclusion, innovation, collaboration, and environmental considerations.

In light of the strategic objectives established for the Majjstral region, the ensuing section delineates the specific measures programmed for this Local Development Strategy (LDS).

Priority objective 1: To restore and maintain cultural, historical and artistic patrimony

- Measure 1: Enriching Rural Heritage by Safeguarding Tangible and Intangible Elements

Priority objective 2: To invest in and protect rural areas

- Measure 2: Strengthening Short Supply Chains for Local Gastronomy
- Measure 3: Investing in Nature Connectedness, Protection and Enhancement of Biodiversity Resources

Priority objective 3: To foster development of skills and knowledge through training and education

- Measure 4: Knowledge Sharing and Capacity-building for Sustainable Development.

4.5.1. Priority objective 1: To restore and maintain cultural, historical and artistic patrimony

The primary objective of this measure is to invest in the promotion and preservation of the unique cultural and natural heritage found in rural areas. This investment aims to enrich the tourism offerings within the territory and create incentives for both current and future generations to uphold traditional and cultural practices that may have been more prevalent in the past. It's important to note that this measure goes beyond the mere restoration of physical

artifacts; it also allocates funds for the preservation of intangible assets related to cultural practices.

The total budget for this objective will be of €250,000.00 which is 19% of the total budget. The specific objective of this measure is to improve the condition of the artistic and traditional heritage within the LAG territory by implementing approximately 15 projects by the end of the programming period. These projects may involve the restoration of artifacts, traditional agricultural machinery, research or publications with artistic or traditional themes, or the organization of activities and events with similar cultural preservation objectives.

Through an analysis of the LAG territory and insights from the consultation process, it has become evident that numerous stakeholders possess or have access to items and artifacts with significant historical and cultural ties to the region. These items stand to benefit from conservation and restoration efforts. There have been numerous requests in consultation meetings to renew the restoration funding measure from the previous program, underscoring the cultural and historical importance of these artifacts. The conservation, restoration, and subsequent integration of these items into educational programs, heritage trails, and tourism activities are expected to provide opportunities for promoting local culture and identity, generating employment, and diversifying the rural economy within the LAG territory.

However, this measure extends beyond the restoration of artifacts or agricultural machinery; it also encourages research, the creation of documentaries, and the organization of events that showcase the artistic and traditional heritage within the territory. Therefore, this measure serves to promote the cultural and historical identity of the LAG territory by fostering educational and tourism activities related to the artistic, traditional, and historical value of both restored tangible and intangible assets.

The LAG territory is replete with sites of artistic, cultural, and historical significance, including military structures, architectural and archaeological gems, rural buildings, and stand-alone features worthy of conservation. Additionally, unique features such as stone structures and antique fountains can be found in rural gardens. Equally important are the intangible cultural assets, including trade practices, culinary recipes, and traditional fabric production methods, which are at risk of fading with time. This measure places a priority on the restoration and preservation of these practices.

This action supports the restoration of both tangible assets such as small-scale sites and objects, and intangible assets such as the promotion of traditional practices, all of which hold significant cultural and historical value for the territory. This will be coupled with the development of educational, capacity-building, and tourism activities related to the subject of restoration and promotional endeavours. Therefore, projects focused on the restoration of artworks, vintage machinery, research, documentaries, and cultural events will allocate funds for information dissemination to enhance their value when on display or as part of their respective educational and promotional activities. Consequently, projects that incorporate

associated educational and/or promotional information activities will be given more importance in the selection process.

4.5.2. Priority objective 2: To invest in and protect rural areas

Two measures fall under this objective with a total amount of €860,000.00 which is around 64% of the total budget. The aim is that they were programmed in fulfilment to invest in and protect rural areas of the Majjistral region are intended to complement each other

The overarching objective of Strengthening Short Supply Chains for Local Gastronomy is to bolster short supply chains and enhance food self-sufficiency within the territory. This can be achieved through the promotion of local cuisine, traditional food preparation methods, animal husbandry, and local crop cultivation, as well as activities such as tastings and retailing of these locally produced goods. The measure aims to connect various aspects of local cuisine, including wines, apiculture, olive and oil production, and other traditional local products. It can potentially lead to the establishment of new product brands or delicacies originating from the territory and the development of services aimed at promoting and facilitating the marketing of local products. Such initiatives are expected to have a positive multiplier effect on the local economy, while also reinforcing the production efforts of farmers, breeders, and fishermen.

The specific objective of this measure is to witness an improvement in the local gastronomic tourism product within the LAG territory by the end of the programming period. This improvement would ideally attract more tourists interested in experiencing the elevated culinary offerings resulting from this measure. Approximately 20 to 30 projects (depending on project dynamics) are envisaged to benefit from this measure.

The Majjistral rural area is renowned for its fertility and abundant agricultural production. It boasts a significant agricultural presence, with numerous wine presses, olive groves, and farmers' markets, among other agricultural activities. Agriculture plays a vital role in the economic landscape of the Majjistral region, notably hosting the Pitkali, a key hub where Maltese farmers gather to sell their produce in the Farmers' Market in Ta' Qali, H'Attard. Additionally, the region houses various agricultural production entities specializing in honey, olive oil, sun-dried tomatoes, and citrus fruits, produced in locations such as Mgarr, Wardija, and the Pitkali area, among others.

Data analysis reveals that nearly half of the Majjistral territory (46%) is dedicated to agriculture, indicating a robust presence of agricultural holdings. The Western district leads in terms of the agricultural labour force, closely followed by the South Eastern and Northern districts. Consequently, the Majjistral territory possesses a considerable agricultural human resource base. Therefore, it is imperative that existing resources operate at their full potential, and one approach to achieving this is by promoting and strengthening existing short supply chains.

Feedback gathered from consultation meetings underscores the need for further investment in the agricultural sector, particularly in the Majjistral territory, where many individuals have invested their livelihoods in this economic activity. Thus, this measure aims to promote the region's agricultural produce, establish brands, and devise strategies for expanding market reach. During discussions with public authorities, the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) expressed its willingness to provide guidance to beneficiaries in branding and marketing processes.

The rationale behind Measure 2 is to encourage one or more producers within the same locality to invest in, brand, and showcase their products through various events or processes. For instance, a strawberry producer in Mgarr might undertake a study of the local product, highlighting its unique qualities compared to similar products from other regions. This could involve product branding, and promotion through marketing strategies, potentially including events. While this program's scope does not encompass this aspect, the MTA has offered to provide consultancy on how to enhance product branding for wider market outreach.

This action supports research into local produce, including branding, marketing strategies, and the dissemination of research findings and promotional materials. Beneficiaries can seek funding for research or studies, brand development, and the formulation of marketing schemes.

The primary objective of Measure 3: "Investing in Nature Connectedness, Protection and Enhancement of Biodiversity Resources", is to raise awareness among stakeholders and the general populace regarding the significance of ecosystems and the adoption of improved practices for the preservation of biodiversity. Furthermore, this measure also seeks to encourage public engagement with green spaces as a means to alleviate nature-deficit disorders and potentially address associated mental health issues. The reconnection of individuals with the natural world holds considerable importance, necessitating the provision of suitable outdoor spaces and opportunities for such reconnection. Central to this endeavor is the imperative to safeguard and conserve biodiversity in agricultural and rural domains.

The specific aim of this measure, within the applicable programming period, is to enhance the environmental quality of life and well-being of Local Action Group (LAG) communities through the initiation or enhancement of approximately four green infrastructure projects. These projects are intended to enhance and "green" accessible public open spaces within the territorial boundaries of LAG. Additionally, the measure targets the implementation of around ten projects related to environmental education, clean-up initiatives, and the development of virtual reality trails.

The rise in nature-deficit disorder, which has been associated with increasing rates of obesity, attention disorders, anxiety, and depression is a well-known issue. Reconnecting individuals with the natural world is deemed highly consequential, necessitating the provision of suitable outdoor spaces and opportunities to foster such reconnection. In this context, the preservation and protection of biodiversity through educational programs, such as the creation of

documentaries, organization of clean-up events, and nature excursions, assumes paramount significance. Additional measures encompass enhancements in irrigation systems, informative signposting, and investments in green infrastructure.

Green infrastructure is characterized by its multifunctionality, as it serves a myriad of purposes within a given spatial area, conferring several benefits upon local communities. These encompass the safeguarding of cultural heritage, the conservation and sustainable utilization of biodiversity, the provision of open and recreational amenities for local residents, heightened carbon sequestration, enhanced management of floodwaters, and regulation of air quality. An analysis of the territory, supplemented by consultation findings, has revealed the presence of pre-existing green infrastructure within the LAG territory, featuring significant natural and cultural heritage sites warranting preservation. Simultaneously, opportunities exist for the expansion of green infrastructure to enhance the quality of life for LAG communities.

Consequently, Measure 3 has been conceived to support projects that disseminate environmental knowledge concerning the Majjistral territory. In collaboration with pertinent stakeholders, the measure facilitates the formulation and execution of green infrastructure initiatives within the LAG territory. This includes the management and safeguarding of biodiversity in rural areas and the enhancement of open spaces within village cores, as well as in their peripheral zones, with the aim of establishing an interconnected network of green spaces linking various localities.

This measure extends its support to projects that either safeguard existing green infrastructure resources or foster the development of new elements of green infrastructure, in conjunction with related activities aimed at educating, raising awareness, disseminating information, and facilitating communication regarding the environmental and climate benefits of green infrastructure within the community. Importantly, the scope of this initiative encompasses not only terrestrial but also coastal and marine projects. The overarching mission is to enhance public environmental awareness within the territory through educational programs and the provision of necessary infrastructure for habitat management, including rural landscape features, soil conservation, water management, the replacement of non-native species, and the cultivation and maintenance of indigenous species.

Given that the primary focus of Measure 3 is to heighten public environmental awareness, project proposals will be incentivized to incorporate educational, promotional, or informational components, and these will carry significant importance in the selection process.

4.5.3. Priority objective 3: To foster development of skills and knowledge through training and education

The total budget allocated to this priority objective of transfer of skills is €235,000. which translates into approximately 17% of the total budget for operations implemented under the LDS.

The overarching goal of Measure 4 is to facilitate training and education endeavours that are aligned with the specific needs and cultural heritage of the territory while concurrently benefiting the local community. This measure serves as a vital means of preserving traditional arts, crafts, and elements of popular culture that are intrinsically linked to the rural heritage of the region and are at risk of disappearing from the local landscape. Importantly, these courses will be accessible to the local community at no cost. In addition to preserving cultural heritage, this measure is instrumental in fostering respect for and the preservation of cultural diversity across its various expressive forms. It is regarded as a pivotal instrument for promoting socio-economic development within the territory.

The specific objective of this measure, to be achieved by the conclusion of the applicable programming period, is to enhance the economic and social performance of the Local Action Group (LAG) territory through the implementation of approximately 21 training and education initiatives. These initiatives are designed to engage individuals from within the rural community and create avenues for teaching and training by individuals possessing proven competence, skills, and experience within the relevant sector.

The provision of training in agricultural trades, practices, crafts, and other traditional activities seeks to offer opportunities, primarily to young individuals (though not exclusively), for acquiring skills in these areas while simultaneously revitalizing fading practices that could serve as supplementary income sources for practitioners. This training is intended to lend support to the narratives of communities and individuals striving to preserve traditions and cultural practices that hold significant importance to them. While traditions naturally evolve over time, new generations often reinterpret cultural practices to fortify identities and communities. These evolving perspectives shall be duly considered in the curriculum design.

It is noteworthy that this measure was previously included in the GAL Majjstral LEADER program but was unfortunately not implemented due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and the ensuing restrictions that rendered training and education sessions unfeasible. During the consultation meetings for the current program, numerous stakeholders expressed their disappointment regarding the abandonment of this measure in the previous program and advocated for its reinstatement. Several potential applicants emphasized the importance of continuous training for various types of organizations and underscored its positive impact on daily operations.

Support under this measure is intended to facilitate the delivery of new training and education activities in trades, arts, crafts, and themes of popular culture that can be demonstrated to have a strong connection to the traditions and history of the territory and its residents. Funding

will be allocated to cover the costs associated with organizing and conducting these training and education activities, provided they occur within the project's designated timeframe.

The range of training and education activities encompasses diverse forms of knowledge transfer and education, spanning organized courses, workshops, and informal learning methods. During the application process, and where applicable, prospective applicants will be required to furnish evidence of their "competence," which may include CVs, references to past experiences and years in the sector, qualifications/certificates, third-party references, completion certificates of attended training sessions, or prototypes/works performed, among other relevant documentation.

5. Definition and Development of Action Plan

This section lists the LDS objectives and puts forward four measures that will allow the LAG to meet those objectives. The devised measures take into account the strategic needs of the community, the CAP SP and its objectives as highlighted in the previous section.

As indicated below, each objective has a number of different measures under which various projects will be categorized and which will allow the LAG to meet the needs of the territory. The objectives and their related measures are the following:

Priority objective 1: To restore and maintain cultural, historical and artistic patrimony

- Measure 1: Enriching Rural Heritage by Safeguarding Tangible and Intangible Elements

Priority objective 2: To invest in and protect rural areas

- Measure 2: Strengthening Short Supply Chains for Local Gastronomy
- Measure 3: Investing in Nature Connectedness, Protection and Enhancement of Biodiversity Resources

Priority objective 3: To foster development of skills and knowledge through training and education

- Measure 4: Knowledge Sharing and Capacity-building for Sustainable Development

These measures are further explained in the action plan below. For each measure there is a clear explanation of the aim, rationale and scope behind each action, a general description of the measure as well as the indicative list of eligible beneficiaries for such action. Eligible and non-eligible costs will also be mentioned to ensure that applications are not aimed at covering non-eligible costs, nevertheless one should be made aware that such costs are only indicative, and the LAG will provide a more detailed list in the guidelines published for each call. The Action Plan also puts forward suggested eligibility criteria which will help the LAG choose and rank applications. The level of support, as well as the budget allocated per action are also outlined. In order to ensure the good monitoring and evaluation processes a list of targets and indicators for each measure are also set out. This section will also outline the risks in implementing the strategy and any mitigation factors already established. Finally, the overall assessment and relevance of each action will be investigated.

In the case of all measures, the MAGF will issue guidelines at the time of the launch of the calls for applications, to finalise and confirm the various aspects of each measure, including for instance, the beneficiaries and eligibility criteria.

5.1. Enriching Rural Heritage by Safeguarding Tangible and Intangible Elements

1. Aim, Rationale and Scope of Action

a) Specific Objectives

The general aim of this measure is to invest in the promotion of the unique cultural and natural heritage of the rural areas as a means to enrich the touristic product within the territory as well as to create incentives for present and future generations to maintain any forms of traditional and/or cultural practices that were more popular in the past. This measure will not only stop at restoration of artefacts but funds will also be allocated to the restoration and safeguarding of intangible assets related to cultural and traditional practices.

The specific objective of this measure is that by the end of the applicable programming period the LAG territory's condition of the artistic and traditional patrimony would have improved via around 15 projects resulting in restoration of artefacts or traditional agricultural assets, research or publication with an artistic or traditional theme or through an activity/event forming part of a whole project (or series of projects).

b) Rationale

The analysis of the LAG territory and findings from the consultation exercise have shown that several stakeholders own, or have access to, items and artefacts with a clear historical and cultural link to the territory which would benefit from conservation and restoration practice. There has been several requests in these meetings that the restoration funding measure is renewed from the previous programme. During this programme, however, the aim is to limit such projects by excluding natural persons who are looking to restore structural buildings. However, such restoration would then be eligible by other entities such as Local Councils and VOs. Given the cultural and historical value of these artefacts, their conservation and restoration and subsequent inclusion in educational programmes, heritage trails and other tourism activities is expected to provide opportunities for the promotion of local culture and can indirectly create or retain jobs and facilitate the diversification of the economy of the rural areas making up the LAG territory.

However, this measure will not only stop at restoration of artefacts or traditional rural assets but also incentivises research and publication of documentaries and events that showcase this artistic and traditional patrimony within the territory. Hence, such measure would be promoting the cultural and historical identity of the LAG territory by developing opportunities for educational and tourism activities related to artistic, traditional and historical inspirational value of the restored tangible or intangible assets.

The territory is also rich in sites of artistic, cultural and historical importance. These include military structures and other small buildings of architectural and/or archaeological importance, including rural structures and free-standing features worthy of conservation. Unique features, such as stone features and antique fountains, are also found in public gardens in the rural areas. Nonetheless, other intangible assets of cultural value include trade practices, food

recipes and traditional fabrics the production of which is being lost with time. The restoration of such practices is also a priority to this measure.

c) Scope of action

This action supports the restoration of tangible assets such as small-scale sites and objects and also intangible assets such as showcasing traditional practices which are all of significant cultural and historical value to the territory, in conjunction with the development of educational, capacity building and tourism activities relating to the subject of restoration and promotional activities.

Hence, in the case of restoration of works of art and rural tangible or intangible, funds will be earmarked for information dissemination on the work that can be used as info label when on display. This also applies to projects related to research, documentaries, and cultural events.

2. General description of the Action

a) Description of the type of operation

Based on the analysis of the territory and the findings of the consultation exercise, the following list presents best estimates of the type of operations that are likely to be supported through this measure:

- The restoration of *objets d'art* located within the territory and which have a religious, cultural or historical significance to the community, together with the possibility of inclusion in a heritage trail;
- the conservation of paintings of significant artistic and historical value in conjunction with the development of educational information dissemination about the artefact and its cultural and historical significance;
- the restoration of sites and rural structures of architectural and/or archaeological importance, by Local Councils and VOs, such as military structures/features, parts of fortifications, and rooms of historical and/or traditional importance;
- the restoration of artefacts found in the interior of registered VOs' and Local Councils' premises that are accessible to the general public free of charge;
- the restoration of traditional vintage machinery and equipment which is directly linked to agriculture, but not to agricultural production, and which carries a traditional scope and cultural heritage, including projects by Natural Persons;
- Research and publication of traditional and cultural practices that are being phased out.

b) Type of support

The form of support provided by this measure is a non-repayable grant support in line with any of the forms of financing outlined in Article 83 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115, and as may be announced in the Call for Project Proposals issued, and/or at the latest in the document setting out the conditions for support. Operations shall not be eligible for support where they have been physically completed or fully implemented before the application for the support is submitted to the Local Action Group, irrespective of whether all related payments have been made.

c) Action intervention logic

Malta's tourism policy focuses on sustainable tourism growth, in particular through increasing tourist numbers during off-peak months and attracting quality tourists. Rural areas are seen as potential areas where employment can be increased through the diversification of agricultural activities. Similarly, in Malta's Partnership Agreement (PA) 2021-2027, cultural heritage is recognised as a key asset for the Maltese Islands as it contributes to Malta's identity and makes a direct contribution towards Malta's tourism sector and thus towards economic growth. The PA identifies the conservation, protection, promotion and development of the cultural and historical heritage as a key objective, and recognises the need for efforts to protect and promote the cultural and historical heritage with a view to contributing towards Malta's tourism product.

The restoration of small-scale sites and assets as provided for under this measure will complement initiatives under Investment Priority 6c 'Conserving, protecting, promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage' of Malta's Operational Programme launch (2021-2027). Under this priority, the Majjistral Local Development Strategy will support the protection, conservation and development of cultural and historical sites. Actions supported through this measure will contribute towards boosting Malta's economic competitiveness, the generation of sustainable employment in supporting ancillary areas including the creative sector, the preservation and sustainable reuse of the built historical environment and the enhancement of the quality of life of citizens. Small-scale interventions under this measure will also provide opportunities to improve the tourism product at the locality or territorial scale, which will add to the value of larger scale initiatives under OP1 whilst strengthening the cultural and historical identity and tourism product at a more local level.

The latest Malta CAP SP together with the CAP objectives identify the need to enable local actors to develop market products and rural tourism experiences, in order to enhance the quality of life within rural areas. The implementation of this measure is projected to support interventions aimed at fostering local development by adding value to the socio-economic and environmental aspects of the territory. Historical sites and artefacts within the territory are seen as an asset with significant cultural and historical value, and which provide an opportunity to promote local development. This measure will support one-off small scale restoration projects, including research and documentation, to promote the cultural and historical identity and develop the tourism product of the LAG territory, with job creation possibilities, cooperation, diversification, and capitalisation of rural assets.

d) Contribution to the CAP cross-cutting objectives

The contribution of this measure to the cross-cutting objectives of climate and the environment is promoted through the requirements for environmental sustainability embedded in the selection criteria, whereby preference is given to activities that demonstrate how the environmental/climate impact is being reduced (e.g. the activity has sound waste-management and/or green transport arrangements) and activities that incorporate an element of education and communication on the local environment.

These elements in turn contribute towards the innovative aspect of the measure, moving away from the more 'traditional' way of doing things on a single discipline, but rather striving to combine different aspects of the local culture.

3. Eligible Beneficiaries

The following are considered eligible beneficiaries for the purpose of this measure.

- Local councils
- Registered voluntary organisations (regularly registered with the Office of the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations, in line with the Voluntary Organisations Act 2007, and regularly operating within the Majjistrat territory)
- Natural Persons
- SME's

4. Eligible and non-eligible costs

The eligible costs to be reimbursed through this grant support relate to two types of investments:

Type 1: Structural investments that are directly related to the restoration of a structure/feature or traditional vintage machinery and equipment which is directly linked to agriculture, but not to agricultural production.

Type 2: Non-structural investments associated with research, documentation and publication, the development of educational, tourism information and dissemination initiatives.

Both eligible and non-eligible costs outlined in this section make part of indicative lists which can be further augmented once guidelines for each call/measure are published. The LAG reserves the right to make such lists more complete.

Only costs incurred from the date of signing of the contract/grant agreement with the MAGF shall be eligible. The MAGF shall issue more detailed guidelines at the time of the launch of the calls for applications for this measure.

a) Eligible costs

In the case of the restoration of sites, costs incurred are only eligible if investment operations are in line with all relevant planning, environmental and development permits, including, permits from the authorities competent for the restoration and heritage, where applicable. Nonetheless, all eligible and ineligible costs will follow the eligibility specified in the CAP SP and subsequent National Eligibility Rules.

The following is an indicative list of the eligible costs relating to the structural investments (Type 1 structural):

- i. the improvement of immovable property, structures and features;
- ii. general costs linked to expenditure referred to in point (a), such as architect, engineer and consultation fees, feasibility studies and also research costs related to the restoration project;
- iii. the following intangible investments: acquisition or development of computer software and acquisitions of patents, licenses, copyrights, trademarks.
- iv. Overhead expenditures directly related to the implementation of the project may be included as a flat rate based on simplified cost option mechanisms.

In terms of type 2 operation the running costs are related to:

Expenses related to knowledge sharing of historical, geographical, traditional/folkloristic documentary evidence;

- Costs of procurement of specialist services, including experts' fees (such as historians, artists, designers, chefs, etc.) and area-specialists (literature, art, music, theatre, sports, nutrition, outdoor adventure, etc.). The costs of these specialists shall only be supported for the duration of the projects and upon demonstration of evidence of their direct contribution to the implementation of the action;
- Renting of equipment and instruments that are to be used for the realisation of the cultural activity, such as equipment for the high-quality delivery of the cultural activity/event/experience, including audio-visual equipment, and instruments that are either necessary for the delivery of the activity/event/experience, or that are to be transmitted to the participants to enable them to engage in the activity including musical instruments, sports equipment, etc.;
- Procurement of durable activity aids and accessories including traditional costumes, props, designs, printed material, graphical aids, training resources (such as compasses, torches, maps, guidebooks, etc.), artefacts, antiques, collectable items, apparatus, etc.;
- Leasing of temporary facilities and infrastructure, such as leasing of premises, mobile toilets, tents, exhibition stands, information panels, etc. which are needed for the organisation of the proposed events will be capped at an indicative rate of 20%;

- Sub-contracting of research entities and publication of traditional practices of intangible assets;
- Activities aimed at showcasing one or a series of projects of restoration.

b) Non-eligible costs

The following is an indicative list of the costs that shall not be eligible:

- i. Interest on debt;
- ii. Value added tax (may be eligible as guided through the National Eligibility Rules);
- iii. Works in kind.
- iv. Projects of restoration of structural buildings by natural persons.

5. Eligibility criteria

The following general eligibility criteria shall apply for the evaluation of proposals for actions to be supported under this measure:

- Submitted application (including a tentative Contracting Schedule and Disbursement Schedule) is fully completed and duly filled-in with details required by the DC to be able to evaluate the application for eligibility and selection;
- The applicant is able to demonstrate that he/she forms part of (or is the legal representative) the beneficiary/applicant organisation;
- The proposed project will be implemented within the eligible territory of the Majjstral region;
- The applicant is able to demonstrate evidence of sufficient financial capacity required to finance the project and to fund the private financial component;
- The proposed project contributes to the general and specific objectives of this measure;
- The item/artefact/site must be accessible to the general public and must be free of charge.

6. Level of Support – aid intensity

The beneficiary will be granted financial assistance amounting to up to 80% of the total eligible expenditure. The co-financing element must be borne by the applicant.

7. Budget allocation towards Action

The total budget allocation under this measure is 250,000 EUR. Actions for restorations shall be capped at a total eligible cost of 20,000 EUR. Research, documentation and publications shall be capped at 10,000 EUR.

8. Targets and Indicators for the monitoring process of the action

This measure is targeting around 15 projects that would include around 8 small-scale restorations, 6 research or publication projects and 3 events showcasing one or more projects of the underlying type.

Indicator	Target	Value
Number of small-scale restoration projects	11	190,000 EUR
Number of Research or Publication projects	6	60,000 EUR
Total	17	250,000 EUR

9. Risks in implementation and mitigation factors

A main risk associated with this measure is that of providing support to activities that could be easily transferable to other territories. In such a case the proposed activities would have a weak dependence on the territory and its people. This will be mitigated through the requirements for strong territorial attachment.

Another possible risk is the lack of knowledge transfer and social spillover effects including dissemination of activities which would then lead to lower socio-economic impact of the project. This risk is being mitigated by supporting activities associated with information dissemination and including an eligibility criteria in favour of projects that support awareness of target groups and a tourism potential.

10. Overall assessment and relevance of the Action

This measure promotes the cultural identity of the territory by supporting projects which restore artefacts, other small-scale cultural assets as well as sites of unique historical and architectural value and traditional agricultural machinery. In addition, the measure ensures a positive socio-economic impact on the territory's community by fostering the development of opportunities for research and publication, events that promote traditional practices and

educational and tourism activities relating to the restored item, being tangible or intangible. This is in line with Malta's Tourism Policy focus on sustainable tourism growth, and Malta's PA which recognises cultural heritage as a key asset contributing to Malta's identity, tourism industry and economic growth.

This measure is particularly relevant to the objective of this LDS of investing in the cultural landscape of the rural areas and sustaining activities that leave a positive socio-economic impact on the territory's community. This measure complements other measures falling under the objective to invest in the capital assets of the territory and to develop the tourism product and may serve as a precursor to the implementation of actions under the measure for marketing and promotion.

This measure also complements other measures intended to strengthen the cultural identity of the region, and improving the social performance, including the measure for strengthening the cultural identity, and the measure for training and education. These synergistic measures are expected to sustain activities that protect and restore the territory's cultural heritage, including small-scale historical assets and traditional practices, whilst developing opportunities for collaboration between local actors and improving accessibility and the availability of information about the territory.

5.2. Strengthening Short Supply Chains for Local Gastronomy

1. Aim, Rationale and Scope of Action

a) Specific objectives

The general aim of this measure is to strengthen short supply chains and food self-sufficiency within the territory. This can be done by promoting, cuisine, traditional food preparation, animal rearing and local crop production, together with tasting and retailing such produce.¹⁷

Whilst linking together local cuisine, wines, the tradition of apiculture, olive and oil produce and other traditional local products amongst others, it can establish new brands of products / delicacies produced in the territory and / or services to promote and foster the marketing of local products – having multiplier effects on economy and dove-tailing the production element from farmers, breeders and fishermen.

The specific objective of this measure is that by the end of the programming period, there would be an improvement in the local touristic gastronomical product within the LAG territory. If that would be the case, this measure would pay dividends in the future in terms of more tourist visits specifically experience this culinary produce that has been elevated to the next level by this measure. Around 20 to 30 projects (depending on project dynamics) are being projected to benefit from this measure.

¹⁷Refer to the following link for information on traditional agri-food products:
<https://agriculture.services.gov.mt/en/ikeltakwalita/Pages/registerTraditionalProducts.aspx>

b) Rationale

The Majjistral rural area is recognised to be very fertile and rich in agricultural production. It is known for its rural agricultural importance, with a good number of wine presses, olive mills and farmers' market amongst others. Agriculture is very much part of the area's economic activity, as the Majjistral region is home to the Pitkali and the Farmers' Market in Ta' Qali; the place where Maltese farmers meet to sell their produce in Ta' Qali, limits of F'Attard. Moreover, one also finds a good number of agricultural production entities focusing on honey, olive oil and sundried tomatoes, as well as citrus being produced in Mgarr, Wardija and the Rabat area, amongst others.

In the data analysis we have seen that almost half of the Majjistral territory (46%) is dedicated to agriculture and also holds quite a strong position in agricultural holdings. When it comes to agricultural labour force, the Western district also holds the highest number of workers, closely followed by the South Eastern and Northern districts. This means that the Majjistral territory also holds a strong position when it comes to agricultural human resources. Hence, it is important that the current resources operate to their full potential and one way to do that is to promote and market the sector and strengthening any existing short supply chains.

Evidence obtained from consultation meetings also show the need to invest further in the agricultural sector, especially in the Majjistral territory where many people have invested their life in this type of economic activity. Hence, this measure aims to promote the territory's produce, branding it and devise strategies to increase market outreach. In one of the meetings with public authorities, the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) has also offered to help and provide guidelines beneficiaries in their branding and marketing processes.

The rationale after this measure is to have one or more producers within the same locality who come forward to invest, brand and/or showcase their product through events or processes. This would involve a study of the product within the locality and why it outstands the same product in other areas, branding of the product and promotion through marketing strategies (including events). This measure will seek to be complemented from other initiatives such as the provision of consultancy support offered by MTA.

c) Scope of action

This action supports the research on the produce, together with branding, marketing strategies and public dissemination of information when it comes to findings of research together with promotion material. Beneficiaries can apply for funding to conduct a research or study, for brand development and / or to devise a marketing scheme.

2. General description of the Action

a) Description of the type of operation

Based on the analysis of the territory and the findings of the consultation exercise, the following list presents ideas of the type of operations that are likely to be supported through this measure:

- One or a group of producers from the same locality who decide to join forces would conduct research to identify why the product stands out from other localities, benefits of the produce and obtain certification of good quality. It is required that findings of such research should be published and a marketing strategy for such produce should be undertaken based on such findings.
- The next process would be the development of a brand whereby the applicant needs to subcontract a marketing company. From this stage, the MTA would be willing to consult and guide the beneficiary in decision making requirements during the course of the project.
- A further step would be the devising of a marketing scheme, again through a marketing agency.
- Beneficiaries can apply for one or more of the above processes. However, research only projects must be complemented by dissemination/publication.

b) Type of support

The form of support provided by this measure is a non-repayable grant support in line with any of the forms of financing outlined in Article 83 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115, and as may be announced in the Call for Project Proposals issued, and/or at the latest in the document setting out the conditions for support. Operations shall not be eligible for support where they have been physically completed or fully implemented before the application for support is submitted to the Local Action Group, irrespective of whether all related payments have been made.

c) Action intervention logic

In line with the goals of Malta's tourism strategy, which identifies the need to develop opportunities for rural tourism, this LDS measure provides an opportunity to develop collaboration between local rural actors and improve the marketing, branding and dissemination of agricultural information regarding the particular produce locally and internationally. The eco-tourism and rural tourism potential and increasing recognition of Malta's gastronomical qualities is an opportunity to further improve the quality of touristic product and income of farmers within the territory.

This measure also satisfies one of the strategic needs set out previously in Chapter 4. This is to invest further in the agricultural sector and promoting the territory's products. The need

for investments in the agricultural sector was highlighted in the consultation meetings. One of the attendants highlighted that local production is on a downward trend and that the remaining agricultural workforce should be aided further. One of Malta's CAP SP themes also highlights food chain organisation including the processing of marketing of agricultural products, animal welfare and risk management in agriculture. Furthermore, this measure would also be in line with at least two CAP objectives; that of ensuring a fair income for farmers and to improve the position of farmers in the food chain.

The set-up of a collaboration between producers of the same product within the same locality improves the economic welfare of the society, especially that of farmers, and results in a better tourism product of the territory. Through these interventions, this measure aims to develop cooperation, increase the quality of tourism with higher expenditure per capita and develop new rural experiences in gastronomy within the territory.

d) Contribution to CAP cross-cutting objectives

Activities carried out under this measure are expected to promote value-added innovation in rural development through the development of rural and agricultural tourism which in turn fosters business innovation. This will also ensure a better income for farmers and improves their position within the food chain. Maintaining local produce is also an argument in favour of preserving biodiversity, considering the downward spiral of local supply in recent years. All these are in line with the latest CAP objectives set out by the EU.

3. Eligible Beneficiaries

The following are eligible beneficiaries for the purpose of this measure:

- Local Councils
- Registered voluntary organisations (regularly registered with the Office of the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations, in line with the Voluntary Organisations Act 2007, and regularly operating within the Majjistral territory).
- SMEs

4. Eligible and non-eligible costs

Both eligible and non-eligible costs outlined in this section make part of indicative lists which can be further augmented once guidelines for each call/measure are published. There is no capping on the expenditure in favour of professional and ancillary services as long as these are directly related to the implementation of the marketing and promotion of the project, and not the administration of the project per se.

Only costs incurred from the date of signing of the contract/grant agreement with the MAGF shall be eligible. The MAGF shall issue more detailed guidelines at the time of the launch of the calls for applications for this measure.

The eligible costs to be reimbursed include investments associated with the development of marketing, branding, promotion and information dissemination activities, including experts' and professional fees (market research, designers, etc.) and the procurement of related services (promotional material, etc.) as well as any marketing or sales strategies that may be undertaken.

a) Eligible costs

Indicatively direct project costs that are necessary for the implementation of such operations shall be eligible for support. There is no capping on the expenditure in favour of professional and ancillary services as long as these are directly related to the implementation of the marketing and promotion project. Overhead expenditures directly related to the implementation of the project may be included as a flat rate based on simplified cost option mechanisms.

b) Non-eligible costs

The following is an indicative list of costs that shall not be eligible:

- i. interest on debt, except in relation to grants given in the form of an interest rate subsidy or guarantee fee subsidy;
- ii. value added tax (may be eligible as guided through the National Eligibility Rules);
- iii. works in kind.

5. Eligibility criteria

a) Eligibility criteria

The following general eligibility criteria shall apply for the evaluation of proposals for actions to be supported under this measure:

- Submitted application (including a Contracting Schedule and Disbursement Schedule) is fully completed and duly filled-in with details required by the Decision Committee to evaluate the application for eligibility and selection;
- The applicant is able to demonstrate that he/she forms part of (or is the legal representative) the beneficiary/applicant organisation;
- The proposed project will be implemented within the eligible territory;
- The applicant is able to demonstrate evidence of sufficient financial capacity required to finance the project and to fund the private financial component, and
- The proposed project contributes to the general and specific objectives of this measure.

6. Level of Support

The beneficiary will be granted financial assistance amounting to up to 80% of the total eligible expenditure. The co-financing element must be borne by the applicant.

7. Budget allocation towards Action

The total budget allocated towards this measure is 400,000 EUR. For phase 2 (branding process), the individual action will be capped at 10,000 EUR. If the applicant will undertake a research (phase 1) and a marketing strategy (phase 3), the project will be capped at 20,000 EUR. Should an applicant decide to undertake all the processes, the project would be capped at 30,000 EUR.

8. Targets and Indicators for the monitoring process of the action

This measure will be targeting around 21 projects in total. These would include 5 projects which would benefit from the research phase and marketing phase only, 4 from the branding process only and another 5 from the marketing process only. Around 7 entities are expected to engage and benefit from all the three phases of the measure. The LAG encourages entities to engage in partnerships.

Indicator	Target	Value
Number of entities conducting research on their produce and marketing strategy	5	100,000 EUR
Number of beneficiaries receiving support in the branding process of their products	4	40,000 EUR
Number of entities receiving support in devising a marketing strategy only	5	50,000 EUR
Number of entities engaging in all three processes of the action	7	210,000 EUR
Total	21	400,000 EUR

9. Risks in implementation and mitigation factors

Several small operators are expected to contribute to the touristic gastronomical product of the territory. A real risk associated with this is the limited ability of relatively small-scale operators to be able to brand and market a local product to make their operations sustainable.

This risk is being mitigated through a criterion that incentivise cooperation between operators and other local organisations.

Another probable risk is that potential beneficiaries (farmers) are not familiar with processes of branding and marketing strategies. This risk is being mitigated by offering the consultation of experts from the MTA free of charge. This will help beneficiaries understand better and concretise their project. The purpose of having the MTA as a reference point is to create a successful product that the beneficiaries can benefit from ongoing streams of income in the foreseeable future.

10. Overall assessment and relevance of the Action

This measure aims to improve the local gastronomic product and make it more reachable to potential clients overseas. Hence, the promotion of local gastronomy aims to improve the touristic product leading to a positive socio-economic impact. This is in line with Malta's priority of increasing rural and sustainable tourism. It is important to mention that this measure satisfies strategic needs of investment in the agricultural sector brought forward in stakeholders' meetings and also in line with the objective of improving food chain organisation through the promotion of the agricultural sector and ensuring a fair income for farmers within the Malta CAP SP and the context of the CAP objectives.

5.3. Investing in Nature Connectedness, Protection and Enhancement of Biodiversity Resources

1. Aim, Rationale and Scope of Action

a) Specific Objectives

The purpose of this measure is to educate stakeholders and the general public on the importance of ecosystems and better practices to protect biodiversity. Moreover, this measure, up to a certain extent also aims to stimulate the public to make more use of green areas to mitigate/tackle nature-deficit disorders and possibly other mental health issues. Reconnecting people to nature is highly important, and providing adequate outdoor space and the right opportunities to do so is crucial. To do so, it is important to conserve and protect biodiversity on farms and rural areas.

The specific objective of this measure, by the end of the applicable programming period, is to improve the environment performance and quality of life of LAG communities through the development/ improvement of green infrastructure in around 4 projects leading to the enhancement and greening of open spaces within the territory which are freely accessible to the public and also around 10 projects that may include environmental educational programmes, GPS projects, clean-ups and production of virtual reality trails. The measure does not only visualise inland projects only but also aims take on coastal and marine sites.

b) Rationale

Scholars put forward the idea that there is an increased nature-deficit disorder, that is linked to rises in obesity, attention disorders, anxiety, and depression. Reconnecting people to nature is highly important and providing adequate outdoor space and the right opportunities to do so is crucial. To do so, it is important to conserve and protect biodiversity and this can be done through educational programmes such as creation of documentaries, organisation of clean-ups and nature walks, educational signposting and investments in green infrastructure.

Green infrastructure is multi-functional, performing many functions within the same spatial area and providing several benefits to local communities. These include the protection of cultural heritage, conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, provision of open and recreational space amenities for local communities, increased carbon sequestration, improved flood water management and air quality regulation. The analysis of the territory and consultation findings has shown that the LAG territory has access to existing green infrastructure, with important natural and cultural heritage and requiring protection, whilst presenting several opportunities for further development of green infrastructure to improve the quality of life of the LAG communities.

This measure has therefore been designed to support projects that educate the public on the environment of the Majjstral territory and in consultation with relevant stakeholders, facilitate the development and implementation of green infrastructure within the LAG territory through the management and protection of biodiversity in rural areas and enhancement of open spaces in village core areas, in the outskirts of the same villages, as well as to provide an interconnected network of green spaces between localities. In this case, virtual reality trails can be integrated to complement and enhance the experience of nature connectedness and would especially be of benefit to people with mobility issues.

c) Scope of action

This measure supports projects that facilitate the development of new elements of green infrastructure in conjunction with related activities for the education, awareness, information and communication on the environmental and climate benefits of green infrastructure within the community. However, this project does not aim to stop only at projects on land but also should include coastal and marine projects.

The scope of action is to elevate environmental public awareness of the territory through educational programmes and also to establish infrastructure needed for the management of habitats including rural landscape features, soil conservation and water management, the replacement of alien species, planting of new vegetation and maintenance of existing species.

As the cope of this measure is primarily the public environmental awareness, projects will be incentivised to include educational, promotional or information activity.

2. General description of the Action

a) Description of the type of operation

Based on the analysis of the territory and the findings of the consultation exercise, the following list presents best estimates of the type of operations that are likely to be supported through this measure:

- Environmental educational programmes involving land, coastal and marine such as campaigns, educational land or marine activities, documentaries, nature walks and virtual reality trails.
- Geolocation Activities and geotagging vis-à-vis GPS projects.
- Initiatives to improve the environmental conditions of the territory, such as clean-ups.
- the use of native vegetation and trees in the landscaping of open spaces for the creation of recreational spaces, whilst promoting informal education about LAG territory's biodiversity through interpretation;
- the regeneration and/or embellishment of open spaces in village core areas and rural outskirts through the development of green infrastructure, accompanied by information on the benefits of green infrastructure within the built environment;
- the upgrading and embellishment, through the use of natural and eco-friendly materials, of open green spaces such as gardens, together with programmes for the promotion of benefits of biodiversity and the ecosystem services which it supports, e.g. pollination;
- the creation of green belts and green corridors within the territory, linking different localities, and providing a means of educating and interpreting the importance of green infrastructure for biodiversity, climate and air quality and
- Improving and investing in new irrigation systems in green areas and public gardens. Any support for irrigation, where applicable, should be in line with Article 74 of Regulation (EU) 2115/2021.

b) Type of support

The form of support provided by this measure is a non-repayable grant support in line with any of the forms of financing outlined in Article 83 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115, and as may be announced in the Call for Project Proposals issued, and/or at the latest in the document setting out the conditions for support. Operations shall not be eligible for support where they have been physically completed or fully implemented before the application for support is submitted to the Local Action Group, irrespective of whether all related payments have been made.

c) Action intervention logic

The actions supported through this measure are intended to result in an improvement in the level of environmental awareness within the territory, together with improvements of the natural and semi-natural landscape of the rural areas, and the development and improvement of new, green infrastructure with the general aim to enhance open spaces within the territory, improve the quality of life of the LAG community, amongst others, through improved opportunities for recreation.

Projects supported by this measure complement measures and objectives within the CAP SP and CAP aiming to enhance the rural landscape of Malta by supporting forestry-related actions, non-productive investments for the purpose of agri-environmental/climate objectives, and the restoration of habitats and landscape features. This measure complements larger-scale, non-productive investments under the Malta CAP SP by providing support for smaller-scale, similar initiatives that can be implemented in the localities. As such, this measure is complimentary to Malta's CAP SP theme number 4, that of restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystem related to agriculture and forestry. Moreover, it is also in line with CAP objectives 5 (environmental care), 6 (to preserve landscapes and biodiversity) and 10 (fostering knowledge and innovation).

The measure is expected to contribute to the target of the Malta's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) to 2030 of increasing in coordination and strategic application of nature-based solutions, including blue green infrastructure, so as to contribute to climate change mitigation while ensuring ecosystem resilience and supporting biodiversity (Target 7). The NBSAP also identifies the importance to reduce land and sea degradation by strengthening the relevant tools (Target 5).

d) Contribution to CAP cross-cutting objectives

The loss of biodiversity, soil erosion, ground water pollution and increased greenhouse gas emission are identified as key environmental problems in Malta. The management of habitats and features to increase local biodiversity whilst mitigating environmental pressures is a cross-cutting environmental and climate change objective identified in the CAP. The promotion of biodiversity and improved forest management and rubble wall restoration are considered as being important in raising awareness of the impacts of climate change and how to enable adaptation.

The development of green infrastructure within the territory will also promote confidence in the territory's rural tourism product whilst improving the quality of life of the territory's communities. The improvement of the wider rural economy and quality of life is a key cross-cutting innovation objective of the CAP SP.

The environmental significance of actions implemented under this measure is further augmented in view of the requirement for inclusion of a project component that is dedicated towards education, awareness, information and communication on environmental issues in the context of the rural setting.

3. Eligible Beneficiaries

The following are considered eligible beneficiaries for the purpose of this measure:

- Local Councils
- Registered voluntary organisations (regularly registered with the Office of the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations, in line with the Voluntary Organisations Act 2007, and regularly operating within the Majjistral territory)

4. Eligible and non-eligible costs

Both eligible and non-eligible costs outlined in this section make part of indicative lists which can be further augmented once guidelines for each call/measure are published. The LAG reserves the right to make such lists more complete.

Only costs incurred from the date of signing of the contract/grant agreement with the MAGF shall be eligible. The MAGF shall issue more detailed guidelines at the time of the launch of the calls for applications for this measure.

The eligible costs to be reimbursed through this grant support relate to two types of investments:

- Type 1: Structural investments that are directly related to the development of existing/ new green infrastructure.
- Type 2: Non-structural investments associated with the development of educational, awareness, information, clean-ups and communication initiatives.

a) Eligible costs

In the case of the development of new and/ or existing green infrastructure projects, costs incurred are only eligible if investment operations have been preceded, where applicable, by an assessment of the expected environmental impact in accordance with relevant legislation. This applies only where the investment is likely to have negative effects on the environment. The investment in new and/ or existing green infrastructure must be in line with all relevant planning and development permits, including consultation on permits and/or guidelines issued by the authorities competent for the environment and resources, where applicable.

The following indicative list presents the eligible costs relating to the structural investments in both new and/ or existing green infrastructure (type 1):

- i. The construction or improvement of immovable property;
- ii. General costs such as landscape architects, irrigation/water engineers, project management costs and consultation fees as long as such costs are not associated with the management of the overall project, feasibility studies, the acquisition of patent rights and licences up to a maximum 10% of the total eligible project cost;
- iii. The costs of establishing green infrastructure/landscape/soil management plans;
- iv. Fencing and other works needed to facilitate conservation management, including protection of water and soil;
- v. Restoration costs of ecological habitats and landscapes and features;
- vi. The costs of propagation material (seeds, seedlings, saplings, etc.) used for structural changes, planting, under-planting, edges and borders, belts, etc., and the related plant prevention, (e.g. poles, irrigation equipment, and any individual plant protection requirements as appropriate);
- vii. The costs of materials and/or services, labour used for the above-mentioned investments for improving the environmental or public amenity value of both new and/or existing green open spaces;

- viii. The cost and installation of street furniture, lights, bins amongst other amenities;
- ix. The cost of purchasing and planting of native species of trees and plants/shrubs. A capping of cost per plant shall be specified in the guidelines of the measure.
- x. Overhead expenditures directly related to the implementation of the project may be included as a flat rate based on simplified cost option mechanisms.

Type 2 costs that are related to the development of educational, public awareness, tourism, information and dissemination initiatives that would involve costs related to subcontracting and provision of services.

b) Non-eligible costs

The following indicative list presents costs that shall not be eligible:

- i. The purchase of machinery and real estate;
- ii. Purchase and planting of non-native species of trees and plants/ shrubs;
- iii. Maintenance costs;
- iv. Interest on debt, except in relation to grants given in the form of an interest rate subsidy or guarantee fee subsidy;
- v. Value added tax (may be eligible as guided through the National Eligibility Rules);
- vi. "simple replacements", as determined by the Foundation Decision Committee following guidance received by the Managing Authority;
- vii. Works in kind.

5. Eligibility criteria

a) Eligibility criteria

The following general eligibility criteria shall apply for the evaluation of proposals for actions to be supported under this measure:

- Submitted application (including a Contracting Schedule and Disbursement Schedule) is fully completed and duly filled-in with details required by the Decision Committee to evaluate the application for eligibility and selection;
- The applicant is able to demonstrate that he/she forms part of (or is the legal representative) the beneficiary/applicant organisation;
- The proposed project will be implemented within the eligible territory;

- The applicant is able to demonstrate evidence of sufficient financial capacity required to finance the project and to fund the private financial component;
- The proposed project contributes to the general and specific objectives of this measure;
- The proposed project contributes to at least one indicator target;
- The proposed project is compatible with the surrounding environment, and does not lead to any form of negative impact to the surrounding environment, in accordance to planning and environmental policies;
- The proposed project must be accessible to all the general public, and the LAG retains the right to restrict projects to land that is open to the general public, as prescribed by the pertinent authorities.

6. Level of Support

The beneficiary will be granted financial assistance amounting to up to 80% of the total eligible expenditure. The co-financing element must be borne by the applicant.

7. Budget allocation towards Action

The total budget allocation towards actions under this measure is 400,000 EUR. Individual projects of Type 1 (green infrastructural investment) shall be capped at 60,000 EUR. Individual projects of Type 2 (educational and promotional) shall be capped at 15,000 EUR.

8. Targets and Indicators for the monitoring process of the action

This measure is targeting around 12 projects, 5 of which would be of Type 1 and around 7 projects of Type 2.

Indicator	Target	Value
Number of projects of Type 1 (green infrastructural investments)	6	360,000 EUR
Number of projects of Type 2 (environmental promotion and awareness)	7	100,000 EUR
Total	12	460,000 EUR

9. Risks in implementation and mitigation factors

A main risk associated with this measure is the transformation of existing open spaces with significant agricultural and green infrastructural value into more formalised environments. This risk is being mitigated through the inclusion of the eligibility requirement that the project is compatible with the existing land uses and habitats.

Another risk is the introduction of alien species during landscaping. This is mitigated through the inclusion of relevant criteria favouring indigenous species of conservation value and through a requirement for documented evidence of consultation with the relevant authorities.

Another main risk is associated with the design of environmental spaces that are not conducive to improved use of these spaces by the territory's communities. This is being mitigated through a requirement for the development of green infrastructure that leads to improved recreational uses and educational opportunities relating to the environment and the green infrastructure of the territory.

10. Overall assessment and relevance of the Action

This measure is relevant to national policies relating to the protection of biodiversity and its sustainable use. The Action ensures positive environment impacts through the protection of biodiversity in the territory's rural areas whilst promoting projects for the landscaping and greening of open spaces. In addition, the Action ensures a positive socio-economic impact on the territory's community by promoting the use of these sites for education, and tourism and recreation.

5.4. Knowledge Sharing and Capacity-building for Sustainable Development

1. Aim, Rationale and Scope of Action

a) Specific Objectives

The general aim of this measure is to promote training and education in areas of relevance to the territory and which benefit the community. In this way this measure is intended to sustain traditional arts and crafts and themes of popular culture that are associated with the rural heritage of the region and that are at risk of disappearing from the territory. Such courses will be offered to the local community free of charge. This measure shall also help to achieve the respect and preservation of cultural diversity in its various forms of expression. It is considered as an important instrument for the socio-economic development of the territory.

The specific objective of this measure is, by the end of the applicable programming period, to improve the economic and social performance of the LAG territory through around 26 training and education actions aimed at engaging people from within the rural community and create opportunities for teaching and training for persons with proven competence, skills and experience in the relevant sector.

b) Rationale

Training in trades and practices, crafts and other traditional activities shall provide opportunities for young persons (though not exclusively) to learn trades while revitalizing the fading activities from which individuals could supplement their incomes. Training seeks to support the narrative of communities and individuals working to preserve traditions and cultural practices that have great importance to them. Though traditions change over time, new generations often reinterpret cultural practices in order to strengthen identities and communities. These perspectives will need to be considered in the curriculum.

It is worth mentioning that this measure was also present in the previous LDS programme but unfortunately the measure was not launched due to the Covid-19 pandemic situation and the relevant restrictions made it impossible for training or education sessions to occur. During the upcoming programme's consultation meetings, several stakeholders expressed their disappointment in the previous programme's abandonment of this measure and requested this measure to be once more included in the next programme. Several potential applicants highlighted the importance of constant training for any type of organisations and the positive impact it has on the daily operations.

c) Scope of action

Support under this measure shall be provided to the delivery of new training and education activities in trades, arts, crafts and themes of popular culture that can be demonstrated to have a strong link to the traditions and history of the territory and its people. Support shall be provided to cover the costs of the organization and delivery of the training and education activities, as long as these take place within the duration of the project

Training and education activities shall include various forms of knowledge transfer and education, including organised courses, workshops and informal learning methods. It is important that during the application process, and where applicable, prospective applicants will be asked to provide evidence of their "competence" (e.g. CVs; reference to past experiences and years in sector; any qualifications/ certificates, and third party references; completion certificates of training attended or prototypes/ works performed, etc.).

2. General description of the Action

a) Description of the type of operation

The operation is focused on training of individuals or groups of individuals (including train the trainer) in a specific art, craft, trade or traditional practice associated with the cultural and rural heritage of the territory.

Particularly, this measure focuses on exchange of knowledge both locally and internationally. Local experts can organise sessions or workshops to transfer knowledge/skills to local rural actors. This can also occur via the exchange of a group of rural actors with a common undertaking who travel overseas to experience and acquire new skills. The LAG reserves the right to make it obligatory on the beneficiary to disseminate this knowledge. Knowledge can also be imported by bringing over an international expert to Malta. There is also the possibility of locals travelling abroad to acquire the skills, and then an expert is brought over to Malta to deliver workshops. The travelling local rural actors would then serve as a point of reference to attendees of the workshop/seminar.

The range of training initiatives may be various, but they must be intended to support crafts and traditional activities associated with the territory. The training would be expected to cover both practical and theoretical perspectives and help to preserve a traditional activity, combining both technology and tradition.

The workshops as in the case of training in a specific art, craft or traditional activity would need to be taught by people with the necessary competence/ experience in the sector. This is deemed as a requirement and trainers would need to provide evidence of their ability to train others.

The applicant must provide an endorsement letter on an ad hoc template to be provided by MAGF; whereby two knowledgeable and experienced persons in the sector endorse both the

course material and the trainer, confirming the trainer's competency within the sector. The applicant must also ensure that a responsible person is supervising the group to maintain a safe learning environment, as applicable. Moreover, the applicant is responsible for obtaining the necessary consents from guardians where minors are involved.

The focus of this measure is to primarily undertake a train the trainer approach. Long-term effects of this capacity building are envisaged through dissemination and knowledge sharing of these trainers. It is the aim of the LAG that this project revolves around agricultural capacity building which can include training on techniques such as grafting, pruning, crop rotation and other farming techniques that are being threatened.

b) Type of support

The form of support provided by this measure is a non-repayable grant support in line with any of the forms of financing outlined in Article 83 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115, and as may be announced in the Call for Project Proposals issued, and/or at the latest in the document setting out the conditions for support. Operations shall not be eligible for support where they have been physically completed or fully implemented before the application for support is submitted to the Local Action Group, irrespective of whether all related payments have been made.

c) Intervention logic

This measure addresses the need to preserve the cultural heritage and traditions of the rural areas by facilitating the necessary mechanisms for inter-generational transfer of knowledge. The logic behind this intervention is to train residents from the territory in areas of traditional arts or crafts or activities associated with popular culture that are considered worthy of financial support.

In this way it is intended to safeguard traditions whilst developing new ideas to generate more interest in the activity, as well as a means for providing supplementary income to the trainers in addition to that from sale of their products so that they can, in turn, continue to invest in their own professional development.

d) Contributions to CAP cross-cutting objectives

This measure complements the overall aims of the Leader Programme in that it supports the territory's social and economic development. Terms such as "creative economy," "creative class," and "cultural economy" are becoming key objectives for community leaders within the territory and this measure helps to achieve these emerging and innovative objectives. In essence, this measure could help to improve a community's economic potential; it could create a foundation for defining a sense of place; attract new and visiting populations; integrate the visions of community and business leaders who could 'exploit' the benefits derived from the development of skilled crafts persons; and of course, contribute to the development of a skilled

group of persons within the territory. The recognition of a community's arts and culture assets is an important element of economic development and economic development is enhanced by concentrating creativity through both physical density and human capital.

3. Eligible Beneficiaries

The following are considered eligible beneficiaries for the purpose of this measure:

- Local Councils
- Registered voluntary organisations (regularly registered with the Office of the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations, in line with the Voluntary Organisations Act 2007, and regularly operating within the Majjistral territory)
- SMEs
- Natural persons

4. Eligible and non-eligible costs

Both eligible and non-eligible costs outlined in this section make part of indicative lists which can be further augmented once guidelines for each call/measure are published. The LAG reserves the right to make such lists more complete.

Only costs incurred from the date of signing of the contract/grant agreement with the MAGF shall be eligible. The MAGF shall issue more detailed guidelines at the time of the launch of the calls for applications for this measure.

a) Eligible costs

The following is an indicative list of eligible expenditure that shall relate to the cost of organising and delivering the training and education activities within the project period:

- Personnel costs of trainers and specialists for the delivery of training
- Flight costs for local rural actors
- Flight costs and accommodation for international experts
- Venue costs
- Hire of facilities to deliver training events
- Non-mandatory marketing and promotion of training events/courses
- Publication of training materials – CDs, memory cards/sticks, booklets, folders, handouts
- Purchase of materials and supplies for practical demonstration sessions (e.g. fabric, wood, paint, glue, glass, chemicals, ceramic, clay, etc.
- Overhead expenditures directly related to the implementation of the project may be included as a flat rate based on simplified cost option mechanisms.

b) Non-eligible costs

The following is an indicative list of costs that shall not be eligible:

- i. interest on debt, except in relation to grants given in the form of an interest rate subsidy or guarantee fee subsidy;
- ii. value added tax (may be eligible as guided through the National Eligibility Rules);
- iii. works in kind.

5. Eligibility criteria

a) Eligibility criteria

The following general eligibility criteria shall apply for the evaluation of proposals for actions to be supported under this measure:

- Submitted application is fully completed and duly filled-in;
- The applicant is able to demonstrate that he/she forms part of (or is the legal representative) the beneficiary/applicant organisation;
- The LAG reserves the right to request the applicant to provide an endorsement letter (for which a template will be provided by MAGF) whereby 2 qualified persons in the sector endorse the course material and the trainer, and declare that both are in line and competent in the sector.
- The LAG reserves the right to request the applicant to provide a warranted / qualified person supervising the class if course attendees include minors.
- With regards to procurement of skill provider / expert, the LAG will define a capped hourly rate relating to service provided by the expert only. For other expenses, the LAG will reimburse on a per diem rate allocated to Malta. In cases where the expert is local, applicants will get 3 quotes for all remaining expenses, except for a capped hourly fee.
- The proposed project will be implemented within the eligible territory;
- The applicant is able to demonstrate evidence of sufficient financial capacity required to finance the project and to fund the private financial component;
- The proposed project contributes to the general and specific objectives of this measure;
- The applicant is able to demonstrate that trainers are competent on their task;
- The training programme to be offered free of charge, and

- The proposed course is not being provided by any other institution (e.g. MEDE, Lifelong learning, Jobsplus etc.) locally (in Malta) at the time of the call.

6. Level of support – aid intensity

The beneficiary will be granted financial assistance amounting to up to 80% of the total eligible expenditure. The co-financing element must be borne by the applicant.

7. Budget allocation towards Action

The total budget allocation under this measure is 235,000 EUR. If the project entails local experts organising skills sessions, or group of local rural actors acquiring knowledge overseas or international expert comes from abroad, the project is capped at 10,000 EUR. If the project entails both the rural actors to go overseas and then expert also comes from abroad, project would be capped at 15,000 EUR.

8. Target Indicators for the monitoring process of the action

This measure will target around 21 projects in both local and international capacity building / training programmes. The LAG envisages around 8 projects that would undertake training on local soil, another 8 projects on foreign soil and 5 projects that would engage in both local and international capacity-building programmes. The LAG does not exclude, albeit encourages entities to partner for the purpose of this measure.

Indicator	Target	Value
Number of capacity building projects on local soil	8	80,000 EUR
Number of capacity building projects on foreign soil	8	80,000 EUR
Number of projects with both local and foreign (international expert) exchanges	5	75,000 EUR
Total	21	235,000 EUR

9. Risks in implementation and mitigation factors.

The main risk associated with this action is continuity of the training activity over the medium term. It is for this reason that the training activity must meet the minimum requirement of

the national competent authority as this would require engaging qualified trainers as well as the setting of minimum standards for training inputs and outcomes.

10. Overall assessment and relevance of the Action

By way of overall assessment, the project would be deemed successful if it can be sustained over the medium term both financially and in terms of the effectiveness of training which as part of the training outcomes would be expected to generate enhanced interest in a particular traditional activity. In this context, the action is deemed relevant to the overall objectives of balanced territorial development and improvement in the quality of life of people in rural areas. This measure complements the training, dissemination of information and demonstration actions of the Malta CAP SP, which are primarily (though not exclusively) intended to support training in the agricultural sector, with a focus on the five needs of the Malta rural landscape. It is also in line with CAP objective 10 of fostering knowledge and innovation, and in line with strategic need 3; that of fostering development of skills, knowledge and capacity building.

The value and significance of this measure also needs to be seen in the context of the synergistic aspect it creates with the LDS measure to support a healthy cultural identity through the development of cultural activities in the same sectors that are being targeted through this measure.

5.5. Transnational and Inter-Territorial Collaboration Initiatives

A budget allocation of approximately €52,451.55 is earmarked for transnational and inter-territorial cooperation initiatives. These initiatives involve collaborative efforts between distinct rural regions, with transnational cooperation encompassing participation from at least one Member State. The Local Action Group (LAG) has expressed a preference for engaging in transnational projects, recognizing their potential to offer alternative and innovative opportunities aligned with the LEADER program's objectives, thus injecting fresh perspectives into local projects.

For transnational cooperation projects, funding can extend up to 80%, with the remaining 20% sourced from private contributions.

Through careful analysis, the LAG has identified a primary thematic focus for transnational cooperation: the promotion of LEADER as an effective tool for fostering sustainable coastal economies and addressing marine environmental challenges. Other key areas of interest encompass the involvement of the youth in rural activities, such as farming, fishing and other coastal activities, food preparation valorisation and appreciation, the promotion of a balanced

healthy diet deriving from local produce, exchange of experiences between Malta and Estonia rural coastal communities, the creation of awareness of the importance of a healthy marine biodiversity and the provision of practical sources of information.

The envisioned scope and objectives of transnational cooperation initiatives include:

1. Establishing a networking and marketing platform to facilitate collaboration among LAGs.
2. Sharing experiences and best practices in regional development through the LEADER program.
3. Cultivating a robust network among participating LAGs to foster ongoing learning and knowledge generation.

This project is anticipated to lay the crucial groundwork for enhancing the current strategy's implementation and ensuring the sustainability of future LEADER activities. Collaborative efforts of this nature are instrumental in promoting and enhancing the success of innovative elements within the strategy, with a strong emphasis on partnership-building and the mobilization of financial resources from diverse channels. Innovators involved in the project are expected to disseminate their findings through the LAG webpage.

Furthermore, this project aligns with the objectives outlined in the CAP SP 2023-2027, particularly in advancing socially sustainable CAP interventions through LEADER. It also lends support to the focus areas of the CAP SP 2023-2027, notably those aimed at a greener CAP. Importantly, it has the potential to indirectly address the specific needs of the Majjistral region, as outlined in this strategy's proposed actions.

6. Implementation Plan

This section delineates the comprehensive process for implementing the current strategy. It presents a specific timeline that outlines the management, monitoring, evaluation, and control of the LDS. This plan complements other sections of the LDS, particularly those addressing its design and the structure and role of the MAGF.

6.1. Overview

This section provides an overview of the essential steps required for the successful implementation of the LDS. The process commences with the issuance of the LDS tender and proceeds through adjudication, involving intermediary steps leading to the final disbursement of funds to beneficiaries. Below, we outline the various steps involved, some of which may already be completed, in ensuring the effective execution of the LDS.

The implementation process can be divided into three sequential phases, with specific tasks at each stage:

- a. Development of the Strategy
- b. Project Selection
- c. Monitoring and Reimbursement

The Managing Authority (MA), the Agricultural and Rural Payments Agency (ARPA), and the MAGF share responsibilities as outlined in this implementation plan. The roles and duties of each entity are detailed below, following the guidelines provided to Local Action Groups (LAGs) for the design and development of the LDS by the MA for the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.¹⁸

Managing Authority

The MA is responsible for the following:

- a) Contracting the LAG (MAGF).
- b) Providing guidance on the content and structure of the LDS.
- c) Approving the LAG's proposal for preparatory actions before drafting the LDS.
- d) Reviewing and evaluating the LDS.
- e) Approving the final LDS.
- f) Allocating the budget.
- g) Approving any cooperation projects proposed.
- h) Approving operational budgets.

¹⁸ Managing Authority for the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (2015), Guidelines to Local Action Groups: How to design and develop the Local Development Strategy, pg. 40

- i) Monitoring and evaluating the MAGF and LEADER.

MAGF Responsibilities

The Local Action Group (MAGF) assumes the following responsibilities:

- a) Establishing preparatory actions preceding the development of the LDS, which have already been completed. These actions encompassed the issuance and adjudication of requests for quotations from third-party entities to be subcontracted for consultancy services in the drafting of the LDS.
- b) Implementing the LDS.
- c) Executing cooperative projects, including the necessary preparatory actions.
- d) Monitoring and evaluating the LDS.
- e) Fulfilling any additional roles defined in the operating rules established by the MA.

Paying Agency (ARPA) Responsibilities

ARPA is tasked with the following responsibilities:

- a) Receiving payment claims.
- b) Processing and verifying these claims.
- c) Disbursing payments in accordance with verified claims.
- d) Conducting audits on beneficiaries who have received payments.

A meeting involving all three entities should be convened following the issuance of operating rules by the MA and the release of additional guidance by ARPA. The agenda for this meeting will focus on discussing and clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each entity in the administration and execution of the LDS, as well as outlining the various controls that LAGs should conduct during the evaluation and selection of projects. Furthermore, it is recommended that regular monthly meetings be held among the three authorities to stay informed about developments related to each call and address any issues that may arise during the programming period.

6.2. Implementation Flow

Procedures included in the implementation flow will be aligned with the respective operating rules. Below is a concise overview of the phases and associated activities/tasks involved in implementing this Strategy:

Phase 1: Strategy Formulation

While this phase has already been completed, we briefly summarize the process undertaken during the formulation of this Strategy as it serves as the foundation for understanding the subsequent implementation phases.

Figure 20: Implementation Flow

1. Formulation of Strategy	2. Project Selection	3. Monitoring / Reimbursement
LDS request for quotations	Public call for potential beneficiaries	Monitoring of Project
Public consultation meetings	Administrative checks on applications received	Reimbursement of Project
Drafting of strategy	Project selection	
Final meetings and documentation	Contracting of selected beneficiaries	

1A: LDS Tender

- In July 2023, the MAGF initiated a request for quotations to secure consultancy services for developing the LDS for the Majjistral territory.
- By August 2023, this tendering process resulted in the award of the contract.

1B: Public Consultation Meetings

- As community engagement in a bottom-up approach is a fundamental principle of the LDS, the initial step in preparing the Strategy involved extensive consultations within the MAGF territory.
- These consultations included engagements with key stakeholders, including various government entities, and a series of three consultation meetings held in Mellieha, L-Imġarr, and L-Imtarfa.
- These meetings occurred in late August 2023, where local communities participated in the development of the Strategy.

1C: Drafting of Strategy

- The Strategy was then drafted based on the needs identified during the public consultation meetings and stakeholder consultations.
- The initial draft of this Strategy was submitted to the MAGF on October 2, 2023.

1D: Strategy Finalization

- After discussing the draft with the MAGF Decision Committee, its key features were presented in a public consultation meeting open to the general public.
- The strategy was finalized by the end of November 2023, following a final discussion with the MAGF Decision Committee.
- Subsequently, it was submitted to the Managing Authority (MA) for its final approval.

Upon receiving feedback from the MA, making any necessary amendments to the Strategy, and obtaining final approval (if required) from the MA, the MAGF and the MA will proceed with making the Strategy publicly available and disseminating its key points in accordance with the designated communication and publicity plan of this Strategy).

This step is crucial to ensure community awareness of the strategy and is considered a vital element in the strategy's implementation. Workshops, information events, and training sessions held in various locations may assist in informing potential beneficiaries about the opportunities offered by this LDS.

Phase 2: Project Selection

This phase encompasses the entire process leading to the final selection of projects and the contracting of chosen beneficiaries. It commences with the issuance of calls.

2A: Issue of Calls

The process begins with the MAGF issuing calls inviting applications for funding under the measures outlined in this Strategy. This includes information about deadlines, application forms, guidance notes, and any necessary documents. The number of calls will depend on the budget allocated by the MA. Calls may be issued gradually over time to prevent administrative overload, with the order of issuance determined by factors such as project duration, expected application volume, and project urgency. The MAGF will publicize the calls extensively through the communication channels specified in the plan.

A meeting between the LAG, MA, and PA is planned to clarify respective administrative responsibilities and streamline procedures.

2B: Receipt of Applications and Administrative Checks

The call will typically be open for at least 30 days, during which applicants will submit their forms to the MAGF. The EC will conduct administrative and eligibility checks, verifying project eligibility and supporting documentation. MAGF will notify applicants of missing information and provide a period to rectify any issues. Failure to comply will result in disqualification and notification through a rejection letter.

2C: Evaluating and Marking Projects

The EC will review both administrative and technical aspects, preparing reports for each project. The DC, comprising members who will evaluate project eligibility and selection criteria, will evaluate these reports. The DC can request additional information and clarifications. Details on the DC's structure and responsibilities are provided in Section 12 on the LAG structure.

2D: Project Selection

Using a predefined scoring mechanism, the DC will select projects eligible for LEADER funds. A preliminary list will be published on the official website, indicating selected, reserved, and rejected projects along with scoring results. Rejected project applicants will receive notification letters explaining reasons for non-selection and informing them of their right to appeal within a specified timeframe. An independent appeals board/committee will review appeals autonomously, assessing appeal validity and supporting documentation. The board's decision will be final and non-contestable.

Transparency will be maintained throughout the evaluation and selection process through accurate meeting minutes and documentation.

2E: Award Notice and Contracting of Beneficiaries

After the selection process, including appeals resolution, the MAGF will publish the final results and notify eligible project applicants through award notices. These notices will also outline the subsequent steps for funding support, with details to be regulated by a signed contract.

For rejected applications, communication will include a summary of relevant reasons.

2F: Appeals Procedure

Any person with an interest or who has been adversely affected by an alleged infringement or decision in the proposed award process may file an appeal within ten calendar days following the Evaluation Committee's proposed award decision. The appeal must clearly state the reasons for the complaint and be accompanied by a deposit, the amount of which will be specified in the application process.

The DC will appoint an Appeals Review Board, which will evaluate all evidence and consider submissions from all parties, including the EC and the applicant, before making a decision to accept or reject the appeal.

Phase 3: Monitoring and Fund Reimbursement

This phase covers the subsequent process of monitoring selected projects and ensuring a smooth reimbursement process.

3A: Project Monitoring

After contracting beneficiaries and initiating selected projects, the MAGF takes on the role of project monitor. The MAGF's responsibility is to ensure that contract conditions are being met and that projects are progressing in line with established targets and objectives. The Strategy outlines the LAG's monitoring plan, including details of the proposed project monitoring rules, control systems, and monitoring and evaluation reports.

3B: Reimbursement

The Paying Agency is responsible for facilitating reimbursements. While ARPA may provide interim payments in some cases, reimbursements are typically made upon successful project completion. Beneficiaries are required to submit reimbursement requests to ARPA, accompanied by the necessary financial documentation (invoices, receipts, certificates of work, and other relevant documents). The MAGF will guide and assist beneficiaries throughout this process.

The roles of the MAGF and ARPA in this regard will be clarified through meetings held between the two entities at the start of Phase 2. Final payments will be processed once ARPA conducts an on-site check and administrative checks confirm contract compliance.

6.3. Indicative Time Plan

The following Gantt chart (Table 23) provides an indicative time plan for the three-phased implementation described. Phase 1, "Strategy Formulation," has almost been fully completed with the drafting of this strategy. The chart presents the timeline (monthly) for this phase separately.

Phase 2 (Table 24), commencing with the issuance of calls, will start at various times for each call/measure, staggered as deemed administratively appropriate. Therefore, the specific commencement date of Phase 2 for each call/measure is not fixed at this stage. The timing of Phase 2 and subsequently Phase 3 in the Gantt chart is presented in general terms, indicating the duration of quarters for each call, without being linked to fixed calendar dates. It's essential to note that the duration of actions/activities may vary significantly across calls/measures based on their type, the number of applications received, the duration of selected projects, and any unforeseen circumstances. Therefore, this time plan is intended solely as an indicative tool for planning the timely implementation of the Strategy within the Programming Period ending in 2020, recognizing that selected projects may extend beyond this period.

Table 23: Phase 1 implementation time-line

Phase 1: Strategy Formulation	July	August	September	October	November
LDS tender - Request for quotations - Adjudication					
Public consultation meetings - Preparation & publicity - Meetings					
Drafting of Strategy					
Strategy finalisation 1. Consultation Process 2. Submission to MA 3. MA approval 4. Publicity					

Table 24: Indicative implementation time plan – Phases 2 & 3

Phase 2: Project selection	Q1 2024	Q2 2024	Q3 2024	Q4 2024	Q1 2025
Issue of calls <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MAGF, MA, ARPA meeting - Administrative preparation & call drafting - Issue & Publicity 					
Receipt of applications and administrative checks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open call - Administrative and validity checks 					
Evaluation of Projects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluation by EC 					
Project Selection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Selection by DC - Publication of results - Appeals 					
Award notice & contracting of beneficiaries					
Project Monitoring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Monitoring and control checks including on-site visits - Monitoring and evaluation reports 					
Re-imburement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Request for re-imburement and submission of documentation - Checks by PA - Re-imburement 					

7. Financial Plan

This section provides a breakdown of the financial allocations for the delivery of the envisaged measures within the strategy.

7.1. Overall Financial Plan

This financial plan has been drawn up after taking into account the outcome of the stakeholder consultation process, discussions with the Managing Authority and LAG Manager, as well as lessons learnt from the previous programming period. The financial plan has been prepared on the basis of the 2014-2020 CAP SP Programming Period. Actual disbursement of funds (excluding running costs as discussed separately below) is planned to start in the second half of 2023 and are expected to continue until 2030, as some actions and their relative payments will continue to flow for a period of three years following the end of the current programming period.

7.2. Annual Action Allocation

It is to be noted that the LAG will not implement objectives and actions within the same year and that certain measure might also take more than one year to be initiated and implemented fully. The following table provides a breakdown of the prevised actions broken down annually by type.

Table 25: Financial plan annual breakdown						
Actions	Total LEADER Budget	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Priority objective 1: To restore and maintain cultural, historical and artistic patrimony	250,000	10.0%	15.0%	20.0%	25.0%	30.0%
Priority objective 2: To invest in and protect rural areas	800,000	10.0%	15.0%	20.0%	25.0%	30.0%
Priority objective 3: To foster development of skills and knowledge through training and education	296,000	10.0%	15.0%	20.0%	25.0%	30.0%
Total	1,346,000					

As summarized within the above table, the costs are being apportioned over the 5 years as outlined by the programming period. Nonetheless, as previously stated the current programming period envisages around seven years of eventual operation by the LAG. In this regard, given that the running costs according to the LAG's projections and the financial plan being drawn would be exhausted by the fifth year, the LAG does not exclude further discussions with then managing authority to extend funding for the remaining two years of the programme.

Throughout the consultation meetings process it was made evident that demand for such local actions is by no means suppressed and given the limited funding available from LEADER, it is fair to say there could be actions that would not be funded. This strategy took these possible instances by means of a detailed description of what types of projects should be accepted and eligible/non-eligible funding. Hence, it will be less problematic for MAGF since the strategy is in itself selective in a way that projects funded will be expected to yield the most dividends in terms of economic, social and environmental benefits in the future. Nonetheless, the LAG will still be committed to monitor and evaluate processes in making sure that funds are being utilized rationally.

Table 26: Overall budget by action

Objective	Actions	Target no. of actions	Capping level 1	Capping level 2	Budget allocation	% of budget
To restore and maintain cultural, historical and artistic patrimony	Enriching Rural Heritage by Safeguarding Tangible and Intangible Elements	15	10,000	20,000	250,000	18.6
To invest in and protect rural areas	Strengthening Short Supply Chains for Local Gastronomy	25	10,000	30,000	400,000	29.7
	Investing in Nature Connectedness, Protection and Enhancement of Biodiversity Resources	15	15,000	60,000	400,000	29.7
To foster development of skills and knowledge through training and education	Knowledge Sharing and Capacity-building for Sustainable Development	30	15,000	15,000	296,000	22
Total					1,346,000	

8. Communication and publicity plan

To ensure the successful implementation of any strategy, it is imperative to establish a robust communication plan that engages stakeholders and enhances public awareness of the strategy and its associated measures. This section outlines the communication and promotional activities designed to achieve these goals and engaging rural stakeholders and increasing public awareness of the Strategy (LDS).

The responsibility for disseminating the Strategy to the general public and promoting awareness of the LDS, along with communicating funding opportunities to potential beneficiaries, falls under the purview of the MAGF. Consequently, this well-structured communication plan is essential to ensure effective promotion and maximum engagement of stakeholders with the LDS.

8.1. Objectives

The Communication Plan has a primary focus on promoting the LEADER Programme and the Majjistrat Strategy, along with disseminating information about the application and selection process for related measures under this Strategy. This plan aligns with the approach outlined in the CAP strategic plan 2023-2027 and adheres to the EU cohesion policy objectives:¹⁹

- Possible job creation outside the agriculture industry (new businesses, tourism related activities, etc.)
- Development of connections between cities and rural areas, especially in the context of the information society
- Support for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the agriculture industry, the agro-alimentary industry and the forestry industry
- Risk control in the agriculture and forestry industries
- Development of basic infrastructure in villages, particularly in new member states
- Urban-Rural linkage

8.2. Target Audiences

Effectively communicating the Strategy necessitates tailoring the message to various audience groups. Recognizing these diverse groups is essential for shaping the communication approach appropriately. The actions outlined in the strategy will be presented in a clear and less technical manner, customized to suit each target audience. The anticipated target audience and beneficiaries for each measure or action are detailed in Chapter 4 of this Strategy: Definition and Development of the Action Plan.

¹⁹ The European regional development fund (ERDF) and the European social fund (ESF) work to complement the European agricultural fund for rural development (EAFRD).

The Strategy and the forthcoming submission of projects will be presented to the following:

1. The Funds and Programme Division (FPD), acting as the Managing Authority for CAP funds, prior to submission for approval to the European Commission.
2. Members of the Decision Committee of the MAGF.
3. Government entities that have been engaged in the stakeholder consultation process for this Strategy.
4. Individuals and representatives of entities participating in public consultation meetings.
5. Individuals and representatives of entities who have submitted feedback or project proposals via email or social media.
6. Past and potential beneficiaries of the LEADER Program
7. Other individuals and entity representatives included in the database compiled for the purpose of the Strategy's public consultation exercise
8. Additional stakeholders within the territories, such as local councils, clubs, and NGOs, not already covered in the database mentioned above.
9. Members of the general public who have not been previously accounted for in the aforementioned groups.

8.3. Information Channels

To effectively reach the diverse target groups mentioned earlier, a range of communication channels will be employed as follows:

- **Technical Information Meetings:** Detailed sessions will be conducted with the Managing Authority (MA) and the MAGF board to provide an in-depth explanation of the Strategy, its timelines, and the evaluation process for potential fund applicants.
- **General Information Sessions:** Less technical, open sessions will be organized, allowing any interested individuals to attend. These sessions will outline the key aspects of the Strategy, including timelines and the application process. These information sessions may take the form of workshops in various locations within the Majjistrat territory, aiming to assist potential beneficiaries in better understanding the opportunities offered by the LDS
- **Individual Meetings:** The MAGF will be available for one-on-one meetings with interested and potential applicants for each measure. Additionally, Local Councils will be leveraged to disseminate information about the Measures, with MAGF officials available to attend meetings in specific localities and explain the details of the measures.
- **Television:** Television, identified as an effective medium for reaching the target audience for the LEADER Programme, will be utilized in several ways:

- Specific advertisements related to the Strategy (subject to budget availability for LAGs).
- Participation of MAGF representatives in discussion or informative programs.
- Development of specific features describing past projects and promoting the new program (budget-dependent on LAGs).
- Press Coverage: The Local Action Group (LAG) will decide on the possibility of press coverage for the publication of the LDS through press releases or similar media events. This approach will reach a broader audience and enhance awareness. Depending on the circumstances, some press releases may be published free of charge, while others may require paid advertising for coverage.
- Brochures: MAGF will explore the option of producing brochures containing fundamental information about LEADER, the new Strategy, and the application process for funds. These brochures will be distributed to the target audience described earlier.
- Articles: Articles related to the objectives of the LDS and the funding application process may be published in newspapers, organizational newsletters, and periodical publications such as NGO magazines.
- Online Presence: A summary of the key points of the Strategy will be included on MAGF's website, Facebook page, and disseminated via email newsletters.

Every form of communication and information dissemination will prominently feature the European Union emblem, the Maltese emblem, the co-financing logos, and the MAGF logo. This comprehensive display serves the purpose of clearly informing audiences that the publicity is directly connected to actions funded by LEADER. In particular, the Communications Unit within MEFL should be contacted on communication related issues during implementation.

8.4. Budget

To execute the communication and publicity plans outlined above, the following preliminary list of actions is proposed. The budget allocated for each action will be contingent on the availability of funds from the budget:

1. Information Sessions
2. Press Advertisements
3. Brochure - Design, Publication, and Distribution
4. Facebook - Boosting Posts

Depending on the budget constraints, MAGF will need to make decisions regarding the allocation of marketing resources based on budget availability and a thorough cost-benefit analysis.

8.5. Information for Applicants and Potential Beneficiaries

The Majjstral LAG is committed to ensuring that applicants and potential beneficiaries of the fund have access to comprehensive information regarding the program and the application process. This information will encompass, but is not limited to:

- i. Details on available funding opportunities.
- ii. Timelines for the application process.
- iii. A step-by-step guide to the administrative procedures required to qualify for financing, including accessing the application form, completing it, and providing necessary documentation.
- iv. An overview of the application examination process.
- v. Eligibility criteria for selected projects.
- vi. Contact information for staff members responsible for explaining the operations of the program.
- vii. Obligations of beneficiaries to inform the public about the support received through the program.
- viii. Procedures for addressing and examining any complaints that may arise during the process.

8.6. Information for the General Public

The MAGF will assume the responsibility of conveying the following information to the general public, utilizing a medium chosen by the LAG itself:

- i. The content of the LDS.
- ii. Any updates or revisions made to the LDS.
- iii. Significant success stories achieved as a result of the strategy's implementation.

8.7. Other Considerations

Every form of communication and information dissemination will prominently feature the European Union emblem, the Leader logo, and the MAGF logo. This ensures that viewers are made aware that the publicity is associated with actions funded by the LDS.

9. Monitoring and Self-Evaluation

This section outlines a comprehensive plan for monitoring and evaluating the Local Development Strategy (LDS), including milestones and targets, along with a data collection plan to facilitate periodic information gathering for indicator calculations. The primary objective of the monitoring and evaluation phase is to identify actions that may be lagging and objectives not being achieved, allowing for corrective measures to be implemented.

Monitoring and evaluation constitute critical steps in the LDS. Once the Strategy is launched, project calls are published, and projects begin implementation, a thorough assessment of results and impacts becomes essential. The self-evaluation exercise to be undertaken by the LAG will take the form of continuous self-assessment whereby it takes stock of its implementation that is then complemented by an external evaluation. At this point, the LAG has to take an active role in supporting such evaluation.

As a result, Local Action Groups (LAGs) are mandated to monitor and evaluate their own LDSs, which will, in turn, contribute to the broader evaluation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Even at the regional level, this requires careful planning, as specified in this subsection.

In summary, the monitoring and evaluation plan for the Local Development Strategy is a crucial element in ensuring the effectiveness of the strategy and the achievement of its objectives. It involves setting clear benchmarks, collecting relevant data, and using that information to make informed decisions and improvements throughout the life of the strategy.

9.1. Objectives

Monitoring and evaluation serve as means to achieve several important objectives:

- Learning Process: Evaluation of the LDS allows the LAG to capitalize on the learning process by leveraging experiences to increase the value added by the Strategy. This includes learning from the previous 2014-2020 LEADER experience as well as gaining valuable insights from the current LEADER program as it unfolds.

- Process Improvement: It aids in improving the existing implementation process by identifying achieved targets and those yet to be attained. This enables the LAG to allocate resources where they are needed most effectively.

- Foundation for Future Programs: Monitoring and evaluation provide a solid foundation for future programs, allowing for the avoidance of past mistakes and the replication of successful approaches.

- **Accountability:** It promotes accountability among program managers and beneficiaries, particularly since the program is funded, either directly or indirectly, by taxpayers' funds. This transparency builds public trust in the LEADER program's value to the entire territory.

- **Update Possibility:** Monitoring and evaluation enable the MAGF to update the LDS based on information derived from the ongoing program, subject to approval by the MA.

9.2. LDS Performance Indicators

The LAG will make use of several different indicators which are measure specific. They will be used to examine the turnout of the measures and whether the objectives set out in this strategy are being met. These indicators will therefore help gauge the success rate of the specific action and measure its value added.

In the Measures section of Chapter 5, every measure outlines its specific performance indicators in part 8. These sub-sections indicate the type of indicators, the number of targeted actions for each indicator and the budgeted value of each specific indicator, adding up to the pre-determined budget of the measure.

9.3. Data Sources and Collection

As previously explained, the evaluation and monitoring process necessitates the collection of data from various sources, with the LAG relying on the most dependable and proficient sources available.

Desktop Research: The initial step in data collection involves desktop research, which provides essential background information on the territory. This phase emphasizes secondary data sources, facilitating the rapid and cost-effective collection of pre-aggregated data that is readily available for use. The LAG will use standard data sources to compare data over time and identify patterns. Section 2 of this Strategy outlines contextual indicators pertaining to the territory.

NSO and Other Data Sources: The LAG plans to utilize data from the National Statistics Office (NSO) for various evaluation processes. The NSO regularly publishes press releases and periodic datasets and can provide data upon request, if available. Additionally, data from the Planning Authority (PA) and the Environment and Resource Authority (ERA) (formerly MEPA) may be used, as these entities maintain specific datasets such as awarded permits. Data collection from these sources may vary, with some data accessible through desktop research, including publicly available information from reports, publications, or websites. Other data not in the public domain may be requested from these sources. Collaborative efforts may also be established with these entities for the collection of primary data that can serve multiple purposes.

Primary Data: Primary data is obtained directly from program applicants and/or beneficiaries, which is the preferred method employed by LAGs due to its regular updatability. Primary data collection can be divided into two stages:

- Stage 1: Data is collected during the application stage and includes information such as the estimated total project funds required, the amount to be obtained through the LDS, and estimates of project results (e.g., estimated jobs created). These estimates align with the indicators specified for each measure.

- Stage 2: Follow-up data collection involves beneficiaries or accepted applicants. Once their projects are underway, these beneficiaries will be contacted regularly, often annually, to gather information on program processes, implementation progress, and project outcomes. For instance, data requests may include the time taken for fund reimbursement and the actual number of jobs created by the project. The data collected depends on the specific program measure.

This data collection method aligns with the bottom-up approach of the LDS, allowing for a participative evaluation approach that directly collects data from citizens in the territory. The LAG will ensure both qualitative and quantitative data are collected to gauge the added value of the LEADER program.

Data Collection Process: Stage 1 primarily involves collecting data from the application forms, which will be drafted by the LAG following MA guidelines and approval. These forms will be designed to collect essential information during the initial stages without unnecessarily complicating the application process.

Stage 2 is more intricate, involving annual follow-up with beneficiaries through ad-hoc requests. Surveys, will be employed. Surveys can be conducted via phone, in-person interviews, or online, depending on the target audience. These surveys provide crucial information to understand the program's impact on the territory and its residents. Additionally, other evaluation techniques like site visits, interviews, and case studies may be used to assess specific indicators.

Apart from external data sources, the LAG already possesses some data necessary for indicator calculations, such as disbursed fund amounts and the number of applicants and awardees. Collaboration with paying authorities and regular system updates ensure this data is readily available for administrative purposes. The LAG will focus on proper data collection, classification, analysis, and presentation in these cases.

9.4. Collation, Evaluation, and Reporting of Data

Data collection serves as the initial step in the evaluation plan, with the subsequent stages involving the compilation, analysis, and reporting of gathered information. The Evaluation Committee, composed of LAG representatives, will play a pivotal role in this process, working to piece together the collected data, identify trends, and compare it to specific benchmarks outlined in the approved LDS, thereby initiating the evaluation process.

Participatory Evaluation: The Majjstral LAG will employ a participatory evaluation approach, encouraging residents of the territory to contribute their own evaluations of LEADER through surveys and consultation meetings. While this approach yields valuable qualitative information, the Evaluation Committee and LAG must ensure that quantitative data is also collected when designing data collection tools.

Self-Evaluation Technique: The self-evaluation technique means that the LAG will utilize its in-house expertise to conduct the analysis, rather than relying on external evaluators. This approach requires training some of the LAG staff who are part of the Evaluation Committee to develop their analytical skills and reflect on specific aspects of the LDS. While the possibility

of appointing an external evaluator is not ruled out, it would necessitate allocating sufficient funds to the LAG.

This self-evaluation approach aligns with the LAG's work and internal monitoring and reporting processes, considering the LAG's familiarity with systems, projects, the territory, and previous LEADER program experience (2007-2013). However, it's crucial to emphasize that this internal monitoring system requires the same level of rigor and adherence to principles as an external evaluation would.

Analysis and Reporting: Trained staff will compare the collected data to the earlier-set targets for each specific measure, as specified in Section 5 of the LDS. Once all the necessary data has been gathered and analyzed internally, a report highlighting key findings will be compiled. This report will present the findings and convey information to the MA, which will use the data to populate its CAP SP Annual Implementation Report (AIR).

Reporting plays a vital role in informing various stakeholders, including the general public, NGOs, businesses, territory residents, and others, about the findings. It also facilitates the effective local promotion of the LEADER program, both at the territorial and national levels.

9.5. Responsibilities and Roles

To ensure the effective monitoring and evaluation of the LEADER program, it's crucial to specify the roles and responsibilities of the individuals and entities involved. This clear delineation of roles helps in taking ownership of each step and contributes to the successful implementation of the evaluation plan.

While the Managing Authority (MA) and the Agricultural and Rural Payments Agency (ARPA) have significant roles at the national level, the LEADER program's evaluation primarily falls within the purview of the Local Action Group (LAG). The LAG is the entity closest to the territory and is intimately familiar with the projects in question.

As previously mentioned, the LAG will establish an Evaluation Committee (EC), which will be responsible for implementing the evaluation plan. The LAG manager, who is part of the EC, will provide assistance in this regard. Their primary responsibilities include:

- Identifying the necessary data required from internal administrative records.
- Collecting data from external sources as needed.
- Designing surveys or interview questions if applicable, once the Strategy is approved and launched.

- Conducting site visits or interviews as necessary.
- Compiling the collected information into an evaluation report.

The EC will then prepare a summary of the report, highlighting the most significant points, emphasizing areas where the program excelled, and identifying areas where objectives and targets were not met or were suboptimal.

This summary will be presented to the LAG Board. While this stage suffices for monitoring and evaluating the LDS, since the LDS and LEADER are part of a larger Rural Development Program (CAP SP), the Board must ensure that the reporting methods and sources used are reliable and appropriate. The Board will approve the report, which will then be forwarded to the MA.

The MA's responsibility is to incorporate the information outlined in the report into its own Annual Implementation Report (AIR), which evaluates the CAP SP as a whole. This report, along with the evaluation of the LDS, must be presented to the European Commission at the EU level.

It's also important to note that the MA may request a preliminary account of the LDS evaluation and monitoring from the LAG before the final report. This preliminary information allows the MA to begin preparing the AIR within the specified timeframes.

10. Community Involvement

This section details the processes undertaken by the Local Action Group (LAG) to ensure the active involvement of local communities in the development of the Strategy.

As previously explained, the LEADER approach emphasizes a bottom-up strategy that involves local communities rather than relying solely on centralized decision-making in line with national priorities.

To adhere to this approach, the strategy drafting process began with meetings with policymakers directly connected to the Majjistral Territory, along with broader consultations involving the general public.

10.1. Policy Makers

Meetings were conducted with various government entities, including ministries, regulators, and other decision-making bodies, to gain a deeper understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of past programs and to determine what steps are needed to implement this Strategy effectively.

The following 7 entities were consulted:

- Ministry for the Economy, European Funds and Lands;
- Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Rights
- Ministry for National Heritage, Justice and Local Government
- Ministry for Tourism
- Ministry for Environment, Energy and Enterprise.
- Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation
- Ministry for Inclusion, Voluntary Organisations and Consumer Rights

These meetings provided valuable insights into national projects' developments, as well as the pipeline of projects that could impact the territory. The aim was to avoid duplication (although unlikely given that national projects typically have larger budgets) and identify areas where LDS projects could complement national efforts.

Policymakers also contributed ideas on where they believed the LEADER program should focus, based on their sectoral perspectives. Some of these policymakers were also provided with a draft of the measures to seek their further input.

10.2. Public Consultation Meetings

To initiate the drafting of this Strategy, public consultation meetings were organized to gather input from the local community regarding the strengths, assets, needs, and opportunities in the area.

11.2.1. Before the Meetings

Prior to the meetings, several preparatory steps were taken:

Venue Selection: Three different venues within the territory were chosen for the meetings to ensure accessibility. These venues were located in Mgarr, Imtarfa, and Mellieha, held in the respective hotel and local council halls.

Announcements: The general public was informed about the LEADER program and the upcoming consultation meetings through various channels. Advertisements were placed in local newspapers, featuring posters with meeting details, dates, venues, and registration information. Six ads were published over two consecutive Sundays in three major local newspapers (two in Maltese and one in English).

Emails: Emails were sent to the database and public entities like SEM to promote the meetings on their websites and e-newsletters.

Contact Methods: A dedicated Majjistral-branded email was established for this purpose. The LAGs provided part of the contact database, while additional research was conducted to fill data gaps and include other relevant entities.

10.2.2. During the Meetings

The public consultation meetings were conducted following a structured approach:

Registration: Attendees were required to sign an attendance sheet with registration details before each meeting.

Group Structure: Initially, a plan was made to divide attendees into five thematic groups, each with a moderator. However, it was observed during the first meeting that keeping all stakeholders together in one room encouraged more ideas and discussions. As a result, this one-room approach was followed in subsequent sessions.

Introduction: Each meeting began with a brief overview of the LEADER program, the desired meeting outcomes, and a call for active participation. Attendees were informed about the reduced LEADER funding allocation for the current programming period compared to previous ones. Large infrastructure projects, typically proposed by local councils, were mentioned as a potential challenge due to limited funding. Attendees were encouraged to propose projects aligned with improving economic prosperity, promoting social inclusion, and safeguarding the natural environment.

Diverse Participation: The meetings attracted participants from various sectors and economic areas, each with different project ideas aimed at enhancing the quality of life in the region. These included private entities, farmers interested in agritourism projects, local councils, band clubs, cultural organizations, NGOs, skilled individuals, and more.

Questionnaires: Attendees were provided with short questionnaires to gather their opinions on the LEADER program, identify issues they encountered in past programs, rate the sessions, and offer suggestions for improvement. Detailed minutes were recorded during each meeting and are submitted as separate documents.

One-on-One Meetings: For stakeholders who couldn't attend the consultation sessions, one-on-one meetings were conducted by the LAG manager. These meetings provided an opportunity for individual discussions and project presentations.

10.2.3. After the Meetings

Following each meeting, attendees received an email with additional information and an invitation to reach out via email, phone, Facebook, or private messaging for further ideas or questions not addressed during the meeting. Some individuals or entities preferred to discuss their projects privately due to project sensitivity.

10.2.4. Draft Submission

Before submitting the draft Strategy, another public consultation meeting was held in Naxxar on the 19th September 2023 to discuss the draft measures and general selection criteria. Feedback from this meeting was considered during the drafting process.

11. LAG Structure, Roles, and Procedures

This section provides insight into the structure, roles, and organizational procedures of the LAG (Local Action Group) involved in the implementation of the local development strategy (LDS).

11.1. Legal Structure of the LAG

As per the Common Provision Regulation, Local Action Groups are responsible for designing and implementing community-led local development strategies. To fulfil this mandate, the MAGF (Majjstral Action Group Foundation) was established as an autonomous non-profit foundation in 2012. The legal representation of the Foundation rests with the Chairperson and the Secretary of the Foundation's Decision Committee (DC), which functions similarly to a board of directors in a commercial entity. The Committee can also delegate members or staff to represent the Foundation as needed in various legal proceedings and transactions.

The MAGF is recognized as a distinct legal entity with the authority to take legal action and enter into contracts. This legal status empowers it to carry out a range of tasks, including:

- Engaging in business activities, projects, or endeavours aligned with partnership objectives.
- Managing finances for operational purposes.
- Conducting financial administration, including borrowing or raising funds in line with available budgets.
- Administering EU and national funds for projects.
- Establishing operational groups to achieve its goals.
- Serving as the administrative entity for implementing the approved LDS, which includes issuing calls for proposals, receiving and evaluating applications, and monitoring the overall process.
- Engaging in activities and transactions that support its functions and objectives.

The Foundation operates as a non-profit organization under the Voluntary Organization Act, Chapter 492, while also having the flexibility to engage in commercial activities as long as the proceeds are dedicated to its social purposes, in accordance with relevant laws.

11.2. Objectives of the LAG

The Foundation's primary objectives include:

- Enhancing and promoting the territory with the goal of improving the quality of life for the rural community.
- Establishing a public-private partnership to become a LAG.
- Developing and implementing an area-based LDS for the North West of Malta.
- Adhering to a bottom-up approach in decision-making for LDS development and implementation.
- Participating in inter-territorial and trans-national initiatives with partner organizations.
- Actively engaging in the National Rural Network, European Network for Rural Development, and other LEADER-related networks.

11.3. Structure of the LAG

The Foundation consists of both public and private partners representing locally based socio-economic sectors. The DC comprises 44% public partners (local councils) and 56% private partners. DC members serve a three-year term.

Within the DC, four key roles are designated, each filled by two individuals, balancing public and private representation:

- Chairperson: The Chairperson, along with the DC Secretary, serves as the legal representative of the Foundation. The Chairperson also coordinates with the LAG Manager, schedules meetings, sets agendas, and issues invitations to third parties for DC meetings when necessary.
- Vice Chairperson: The Vice Chairperson assumes the Chairperson's responsibilities in their absence and handles any temporary or exceptional situations. Additional tasks may be assigned by the Decision Committee.
- Secretary: The Secretary is responsible for documenting meeting minutes and ensuring their timely distribution and approval.
- Treasurer: The Treasurer oversees the proper financial management of the Foundation.

This structured organizational framework ensures a balanced representation of public and private stakeholders and supports effective governance and decision-making within the LAG.

The Decision committee meets regularly every month so as to take any necessary decisions with regards to the Foundation.

11.4. Membership

The foundation operates as an inclusive organization and welcomes applications from both private and public members.

Private Membership Criteria: Private applicants are required to specify their association with the social, economic, and environmental aspects of the Majjstral Region.

The foundation maintains two separate registers, one for Public Partners and the other for Private Partners. These registers are regularly updated to reflect the current membership.

Membership Termination: A member may cease to be a member if a motion for their removal receives a vote of 60% or more of all members present at a General Meeting.

Membership Fee (Public Partners): Public Partners are subject to a membership fee. It's worth noting that during the 2014-2020 LEADER program, Local Councils' membership in the LAG required the payment of a membership fee. Local Councils that failed to pay this fee were not eligible to apply for projects. However, even in such cases, local entities and private individuals within that locality remained eligible to participate in the program. The LAG intends to maintain a similar procedure for the 2021-2027 program, where Public Partners, such as Local Councils, are expected to pay the membership fee.

11.5. Roles and Responsibilities

This section outlines the roles and responsibilities of various entities within the LAG structure.

11.5.1. Managing Authority (MA):

The MA is responsible for planning, implementing, delivering, and evaluating the Rural Development Programme (CAP SP) funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), including the LEADER program, which is part of the CAP SP. The key roles of the MA include:

- **Selection of Applications:** Choosing which applications for funding meet the established criteria (in the case of LEADER, applicants refer to the LAGs, not the end beneficiaries within each territory).

- Monitoring and Evaluation: Overseeing the implementation of the Program, including monitoring and evaluation processes.

- Communication and Publicity: Ensuring the program is well-publicized and reaches potential beneficiaries.

- Reporting: Fulfilling reporting obligations to the European Commission on the progress of program implementation.

- Information Provision: Providing necessary information to the LAGs regarding obligations and requirements.

- Liaison with ARPA: Collaborating with the Agency for the Rural Payments and Agency (ARPA) by supplying the required information on procedures and controls before payments are made.

The MA governs the overarching LEADER program, while the LAG (in this case, the MAGF) is responsible for its territorial implementation.

LAG Structure (MAGF):

The LAG, represented here by the MAGF, consists of various subgroups and follows a specific structure. The Decision Committee (DC) within the LAG plays a pivotal role and is responsible for selecting a LAG Manager. The LAG Manager, employed by the Foundation, is responsible for the day-to-day management of the Foundation.

Additionally, Working Groups may be established by the Decision Committee to facilitate the efficient and effective administration of the strategy. These Working Groups leverage their expertise and knowledge in specific thematic fields to contribute to the LAG's objectives and activities.

11.5.2. Foundation Decision Committee (DC):

The Decision Committee (DC) is the primary decision-making body within the LAG (represented by the MAGF). It holds authority over all LAG activities and is responsible for recruitment and appointments throughout the LAG's operations.

Key responsibilities and attributes of the DC include:

- Decision-Making: The DC makes decisions related to all LAG activities, and these decisions are formally recorded in meeting minutes. This committee is also responsible for evaluating the correct implementation of the Local Development Strategy (LDS).

- Supervision: The DC acts as a supervisor for all initiatives carried out under the LEADER program.

- Meeting Frequency: The DC typically meets regularly, often monthly, but can convene as needed based on the Chairperson's discretion or upon request by the LAG manager or any other committee member. These meetings are essential for directing the Foundation's operations and making strategic decisions.

- Composition: The current DC consists of nine members, with five representing the private sector and four from Local Councils. The DC may also appoint and refer to thematic working groups when making decisions.

- Quorum and Decision-Making: A quorum, with at least five Committee members present, is required to initiate, and continue DC proceedings. Decisions are made by voting, and in case of a tie, the Chairperson has a casting vote. The Committee regulates its procedures and makes decisions related to the Foundation's operation, project/measures launches, and project monitoring.

- Conflict of Interest: DC members cannot vote on decisions in which they have a direct conflict of interest, such as being direct personal financial beneficiaries of a project.

- Compliance: The DC ensures that all decisions align with Commission Guidelines, EU regulations, national legislation, the 2021-2027 CAP SP, the LAG's grant agreement with the MA, and the Operating Rules issued by the MA.

- Assessment and Review: The DC assesses and reviews pre-recommendations from the Evaluation Committee (EC), assigns points to eligible projects, ranks and selects projects, and allocates funding. If the DC's decision contradicts the EC's pre-recommendations, the reasons for the decision must be documented.

- Conflict of Interest in Selection: DC members with conflicts of interest cannot participate in the selection board assessing specific calls for projects.

- Publication of Results: The DC publishes the preliminary results of the project selection process.

- Appeals Board: The DC establishes an autonomous and independent Appeals Board to handle project appeals. DC and EC members cannot serve on this board. The Appeals Board's decisions are final and cannot be altered by the DC.

- MA Oversight: The MA has the authority to conduct checks on the process to verify fairness and transparency. If irregularities are identified, the MA can request the LAG to revise the process accordingly.

11.5.3. Evaluation Committee (EC):

The Evaluation Committee (EC) plays a crucial role in assessing project applications and making pre-recommendations to the Decision Committee (DC). Here are the key aspects of the EC's role:

- Composition: The EC consists of a Manager and a Secretary. These members, who are also the LAG Manager and LAG Secretary, do not have voting rights but perform administrative roles.

- Technical Expert: If needed, the LAG may request a technical expert with specific expertise to assist in evaluating certain applications.

- Responsibilities: The EC is responsible for evaluating project proposals and tenders, focusing on the administrative and technical aspects of each application. They ensure that projects meet eligibility criteria, align with LDS objectives, contribute to economic, social, and environmental goals, and are administratively compliant. They also verify the validity, comparability, and legitimacy of project quotations.

- Reports: The EC prepares two reports following its analysis:

- Administrative Report: This report includes an administrative checklist, initially verified by the Secretary of the EC and later confirmed by the LAG Manager.

- Technical Report: This report assesses the verifiability of costs, project feasibility, reasonableness of costs, and timing. It includes the Project Assessment Sheet.

- Input to the DC: The pre-recommendations made by the EC serve as input to the DC, which will evaluate and perform additional technical checks on projects before ranking and selecting them.

- Funding Verification: The LAG conducts checks to ensure that project proposals have not sought additional funding from other sources by collaborating with the relevant oversight bodies.

11.5.4. LAG Manager

The LAG Manager is appointed by the DC and has several critical responsibilities:

- Overall Management: The Manager oversees the sound operational and financial management of the LAG and ensures the proper implementation of the LDS following the procedures outlined by the MA in the Operating Rules.

- Liaison with MA: The Manager maintains communication with the MA as necessary and is available for meetings with them.

- Reporting to DC: The Manager regularly updates the DC on the implementation of actions identified in the Strategy, as well as on the management and administration of the Foundation.

- Budget Management: Given the limited budget allocated to LEADER, the Manager must efficiently manage the LAG's operations within these constraints. They must be capable of finding flexible solutions and possess deep knowledge of EU project management, local government systems, NGO legislation, and public procurement principles.

- Consultation: The Manager knows when to seek consultation to address ad hoc issues requiring expertise not available within the LAG.

- Manager of EC: The LAG Manager also holds the position of Manager for the EC.

11.5.5. LAG Secretary

The LAG Secretary assists the Manager in the LAG's operations, primarily from an administrative and secretarial perspective. This role ensures better scrutiny of work, particularly during the evaluation of projects submitted to the LAG throughout the programming period.

The following table provides a summary of the roles and responsibilities of each body/ entity/ person.

Table 27: Roles and Responsibilities

Body	Role
	· Manage and implement this Programme in an efficient, effective and correct way
Managing Authority	· Report progress of implementation to the Commission
	· liaise with the Paying Agency
Decision Committee	· Manage and make decisions for the Foundation
	· Appointing the LDS Manager (and Secretary)
	· Evaluate the correct implementation of the LDS
	· Supervise all initiatives undertaken under the LEADER
	· Appoint the EC
	· Assess and review all pre-recommendations made by the EC
	· Set up an autonomous and independent appeals board
Evaluation Committee	· Check all applications
	· Evaluate all project proposals
	· Make pre-recommendations to the DC
	· Prepare an administrative and technical report
LAG Manager	· Liaise with the MA whenever necessary
	· Ensures the sound operational and financial management of the LAG together with the LAG accountant*.
	· Oversees and implements the LDS

	Update the DC on the implementation of actions identified in the Strategy
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Note: Information obtained from previous MAGF LDS 'The Local Development Strategy for the Majjstral Action Group Foundation Territory January 2021

11.6. Tackling Conflict of Interest

To prevent conflicts of interest, the following measures are put in place:

- Declaration of Interest: DC members and EC members are required to declare any direct interest they may have in specific matters from the outset or as soon as the issue arises. This declaration is recorded and accessible to the Members of the foundation. Nonetheless, reference must be made to the European Commission notice 'Guidance on the evidence and management of conflicts of interest under the Financial Regulation (2021/C 121/01).

- Conflict Resolution: In cases of potential conflict of interest, DC members are not allowed to sit on the selection board. Discussions on the matter commence only after the concerned member leaves the meeting. Once the item is concluded, the member can rejoin the group, but further discussions on the item will not take place in their presence. In the resolution process, the Commission's notice also has to be reflected and the LAG may be guided by the Managing Authority.

11.7. Continuous Professional Development

Continuous Professional Development is considered essential for the effective implementation of the LEADER program. Here are some key points related to training:

- External Key Experts: External key experts can provide support and training to the LAG Manager, Secretary, the DC, members of the LAG, and other stakeholders. These experts can help build the necessary knowledge and skills required for the successful management of the program.

- LAG Manager Training: The LAG Manager needs training in operational and financial management, as well as audit matters. Public speaking skills are also valuable, as the manager will be required to actively participate in various meetings throughout the process.

- DC and LAG Member Training: All LAG members should familiarize themselves with the criteria outlined in the LEADER Operating Rules. LAG staff should receive training to acquire

evaluation skills, as project evaluations must be conducted objectively based on predetermined criteria. Additionally, training in identifying and recording conflicts of interest is vital for all LAG members.

Training and development ensure that the personnel involved in the LEADER program have the knowledge and expertise needed to manage and implement it effectively.

12. Sources of Information

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- The Local Development Strategy for the Majjstral Action Group Foundation Territory, January 2021