



## EU Funds for Malta 2021 - 2027

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### European Social Fund Plus (Public Consultation Document)

The Gozo Business Chamber's Feedback to the Public Consultation Document

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THE GOZO BUSINESS CHAMBER

## **1. Introduction: A More Inclusive Society**

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The Gozo Business Chamber notes with satisfaction the document issued for consultation on the 'European Social Fund Plus' and notes the 5 priorities for this programme:

**Priority 1: Enhancing Employability and Labour Market Resilience**

**Priority 2: Fostering active inclusion for all**

**Priority 3: Quality and Inclusive Education and enhanced lifelong learning for growth**

**Priority 4: Addressing Material Deprivation**

**Priority 5: Technical Assistance**

In Chapter 2 on 'Developmental Challenges and Opportunities' the Chamber agrees with the concern raised relating to the early school leaving rate.

However, the Chamber believes that this is something which needs to be addressed not only through specific programmes but also through a holistic review of the whole scholastic system whereby despite the various and significant investment made by the Government throughout the years, this has not always yielded meaningful results.

The Chamber also agrees with the declared objective to "improve access and quality of Further Higher Education" (p.19). It also agrees with the consideration that:

"Having the right skills is critical to make the transition to a low-carbon economy, with the emphasis placed on improving current skills and training to provide new green skills. A growing low-carbon economy can only flourish if employees have the right skills to meet the demands that the industry will face in the future." (p. 19)

The Chamber also notes that Gozo's development needs are taken into consideration whereby it is highlighted that:

The ESF+ Programme will also aim to address territorial disparities between Malta and Gozo. Building on previous programming periods, Government remains committed to earmarking for Gozo at least 10% of the ESF+ Programme. Initiatives foreseen for this purpose will be horizontal across the programme, although complementary targeted investments are not excluded.

These initiatives will particularly complement the horizontal and specifically targeted investments in Gozo to be supported under European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). (p.23)

To this end within this context, the Chamber would like to put forward these considerations based on the priority areas included in this document.

## **2. Priority 1: Enhancing Employability and Labour Market Resilience**

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As indicated above reference has been made on the need to have the necessary skill set to assist the country to make the transition to a low-carbon economy. The transition to a low carbon economy will imply a greater drive in the uptake of electric vehicles and the deployment of charging infrastructure both private and public.

The transition will mean that a person would have the required peace of mind that wherever he or she is in the Maltese islands he will find the required technical assistance. Gozo in this regard is also being considered by the Government to achieve carbon neutrality prior to Malta. This means that Gozo needs to have the required technical infrastructure to be able to assist people with electric vehicles in Gozo.

This means that the new funding programme must take into consideration specific programmes for the private sector in Gozo in order to have competent people who are adequately trained to assist electric vehicle owners. To this end one should consider holding such training sessions in Gozo. Justifying such courses on the number of people who enroll however is not viable, given the evident economies of scale. If this prove difficult, especially in relation to the training equipment involved, and the lack of qualified personnel, in formulating such programmes one should think about the introduction of hybrid learning methods, offering the required flexibility, where certain modules are taught online, while other modules are taught physically. Courses could be done within working hours in order to entice employees to take up such courses.

The early school leaving rate is still a matter of concern to the Chamber. Employers are sometimes faced with prospective employees who are neither literate nor possess the required skills to work in certain sectors such as construction and manufacturing. An education path which emphasises the obtainment of the basic skills while pursuing training in some basic trades could be considered.

### **3. Priority 2: Fostering Active Inclusion for all**

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Of specific consideration under this priority area is the 'promotion of socio-economic integration of third country nationals including migrants'. The private sector in Gozo is heavily reliant on the input of third country nationals.

To this end it is important that they are integrated in society. Unfortunately, in Gozo, third country nationals and migrants, because of the cost of accommodation, reside in locations such as Xlendi and Marsalforn. Moreover, third country nationals and migrants often integrate within the same circles. This may also be based on several prejudices and socially established conventions prevalent both within the host community and migrants. If we do not promote and foster inclusion, we risk creating segregated locations and communities with all the difficulties this brings with it.

It is also important that third country nationals are given all the information they require in term of their rights and obligations under employment law. One may even think of having a one-stop shop incorporating various entities in the public and also social sphere who offer their services to third country nationals and migrants.

### **4. Priority 3: Quality and inclusive education and enhanced lifelong learning for growth**

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The Chamber agrees with the overall objective under this priority area of 'reducing ESL rates and increasing participation in FHE' (p. 41)

With respect to the provision of scholarships for Further Higher Education, the country is now at a stage where further emphasis on doctorate scholarships should be considered. Interested participants may not only require grants to be able to apply for a doctorate level course, but assistance would be required whereby especially if they are in full-time employment, they may need to take leave without pay to follow their studies. To this end assistance to compensate for their missed earnings, at least partially, should be considered, in order to assist them to follow doctorate level courses.

### **5. Priority 4: Addressing Material Deprivation**

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The Chamber agrees with the measures being indicated under this priority area with efforts to have more people in employment being sustained.

## **6. Priority 5: Partnership**

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The Chamber agrees with the measures being targeted under this area whereby civil society partners are supported through capacity building measures to enable them to contribute towards the formulation of national, social, education and employment policies. However, such funding measures need to go beyond the simple objective of training and consider measures whereby specific persons are employed within the organization for a definite period of time. Civil society organizations many a times do not have the required funds to employ people. Such programmes could consider for example the support for one-year internships with civil society organizations, as an in-between between a bachelor and a masters degree, whereby interns would be given a salary in order to perform work with civil society organisations, while gaining considerable experience, prior to starting their masters degree.

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