

# Malta Sustainable Development Strategy

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## Public Consultation Document December 2022



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

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**THE GOZO BUSINESS CHAMBER**

## 1. Introduction

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The Chamber notes with satisfaction the publication of the consultation document, and agrees with the overarching considerations of this strategy which is that of leading the transitioning towards a “climate-neutral green and blue economy; preserving sustainable urban development and cultural heritage; ensuring healthy lives and well-being for all; accelerating digital transformation, smart mobility and connectivity; and achieving social fairness and prosperity for all” (p.9).

The Chamber believes in this vision. However it is important that within this context Gozo’s particular situation is taken into account, both when it comes to those deficiencies that need to be addressed, but also to those positive element that would position Gozo to contribute in an effective manner to the targets being set by this strategy being achieved at a national level.

## 2. The Importance of Adopting a Regional Approach to the Sustainable Development Strategy

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This feedback emanates principally from the fact that when a regional analysis to national strategies was not adopted in the past, the objectives being put at a national level were not always reached in Gozo. In the area of Sustainable Development, the Gozo Business Chamber believes that the island of Gozo has a significant contribution to make so that the national objectives can be reached. Within this context it is important that the Gozo Regional Development Strategy that is going to be published by the Gozo Regional Development Authority is considered, together with the initiatives of the same Authority in the area of sustainable development.

### **Strategic Goal 1: Transitioning Towards a Climate-Neutral Green and Blue Economy**

With respect to one of the key actions under strategic objective 1 whereby it is highlighted that this strategic objective will be achieved through:

Driving transformative change through more investment in research and innovation in the area of climate action in order to come up with effective solutions in promoting climate neutrality and combatting climate change in all sectors (p.19)

The Gozo Business Chamber would like to highlight that whereby it supports this measure it would also like to point that in this regard the island of Gozo can provide the ideal testing ground for such solutions prior to these being implemented on the main island of Malta. This would create further added value if research initiatives linked to the area of climate neutrality would be based in Gozo.

With respect to the key actions under **strategic objective 3** the Gozo Business Chamber would like to comment that the protection of our natural resources should also lead to the creation of natural parks on the island of Gozo. If these are properly maintained with specific walking trails these could prove an added attraction for tourists and also an active and fruitful recreational space for families in Gozo.

### **Strategic Goal 2: Towards the Preservation of Sustainable Urban Development and Cultural Heritage**

With reference to **strategic objective 1** under this goal, reference should be made to the importance of the voluntary sector. Gozo’s thriving cultural calendar is not possible without the input of the voluntary sector. The Government throughout the years has recognized the importance of its contribution and assisted and collaborated with voluntary organisations to put cultural events. It has also assisted in their marketing abroad. This governance framework should be retained and corroborated further to assist the voluntary sector to set up more professional events and to face and adapt themselves to new challenges.

With respect to **strategic objective 2** the GBC would like to comment that apart from the measures and initiatives it is important for Malta to adopt a holistic planning approach and a regional perspective when needed. As regards Gozo the application of the same policies across the board has led to the

intensification of construction activities in our towns and villages with a complete disregard for how much dwellings a town or village can take, and in some cases without notice to the ancillary services that such an increase in population would require. The Gozo Business Chamber is advocating a regional planning approach for Gozo, a planning approach which would ensure a holistic approach at all levels.

### **Strategic Goal 3: Ensuring Healthy Lives and Well-Being for all**

With respect to **strategic objective 1** the Chamber would like to reiterate again the need for a new hospital for Gozo. This has now become a necessity which can no longer be delayed. It is important that the public health care system in Gozo is aligned to the new developments being introduced in the public health care system in Malta, including the digitalization of patient records.

### **Strategic Goal 4: Accelerating Digital Transformation, Smart Mobility and Connectivity**

With respect to **strategic objective 1** the Chamber is in agreement that digital technologies are conducive to sustainable economic development. The Chamber strongly believes that digital technologies can help bridge the gap faced by many islands such as Gozo. In the past years the Government has invested significantly through: (a) the laying out of a second fibre optic link between Gozo and Malta to ensure that there is redundancy when it comes to data connectivity; and (b) the development of a Digital Innovation Hub. Nonetheless a targeted approach is needed to ensure that Gozo moves in line with the rest of the country. Unfortunately, the sectors which are highly dependent on digital technologies in Malta are not present in Gozo despite the establishment of a supporting infrastructure. Further initiatives to enable these industries to establish themselves in Gozo are required.

With respect to **strategic objective 2** the Chamber would like to point out that when the new public transport system was introduced in Gozo this was very beneficial. In order to increase uptake, one should consider the introduction of more frequent but smaller and more sustainable buses operating in Gozo's towns and villages.

As regards **strategic objective 3** the Chamber would like to link its feedback to that provided under Strategic Goal 1. It is important for Gozo to also contribute to the country's R&I efforts. There exists considerable potential for research in renewable energies and technologies to be conducted from Gozo. This could be done also through international research institutes which could establish themselves on the island.

### **Strategic Goal 5: Achieving Social Fairness and Prosperity for all**

The Chamber overall agrees with the objective of nurturing diversity. Gozo's economy has experienced a significant influx of foreigners. It is extremely important within this context that these foreigners are assisted to integrate within our communities. This means that educational opportunities should also be available to migrants who settle in our communities.

## **3. Conclusion**

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This Sustainable Development Strategy is an important milestone which should lead to Malta obtaining the objectives being set at a European Union level under the Green Deal and the Fit for 55 package. Gozo has an important role to play under this strategy. Consequently it is important that a regional analysis is done to ensure that Gozo can contribute effectively to the nation reaching its targets.

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