LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR THE XLOKK TERRITORY

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Table of contents

List of Tables and Figures

List of abbreviations

AGM	Annual General Meeting
AIR	Annual Implementation Report
ARPA	Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency
CLC	Corine Land Cover
CLLD	Community-Led Local Development
DC	Decision Committee
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
ERA	Environment and Resource Authority (ERA)
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
EU	European Union
EC	Evaluation Committee
GAL	Grupp Azzjoni Lokali
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
GXF	GAL XLOKK Foundation
LAG	Local Action Group
LDS	Local Development Strategy
LEADER	'Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale
LPIS	Land Parcel Identification System
MA	Managing Authority
MEPA	Malta Environment & Planning Authority
MSDEC	Ministry for Sustainable Development, the Environment and Climate Change
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
NSO	National Statistics Office
ODZ	Outside Development Zone
OP1	Operational Programme 1
PA	Planning Authority
PCM	Public Consultation Meetings
RDP	Rural Development Programme

1. Introduction

Though it has been part of the EU package of funding programmes since 1991, the Leader Programme (LEADER) was first implemented in Malta during the 2007-2013 Rural Development Programme (RDP) [1]. The main characteristics distinguishing LEADER from other programmes is its unique design. In fact, LEADER strategies are drafted using a bottom-up-approach that promotes and emphasises local participation and territorial inclusiveness. Such approach translates into an integrated local strategy that embodies local knowledge, skills, expertise and ideas that might not have been given importance in central strategies and national programmes. LEADER is therefore key for the local community because it provides them with the opportunity to develop and implement strategies that reflect the real needs of their respective local area.

The main aim of the 2014-2020 RDP is to continue aiding the existing LAGs and build on the foundations and recognition that have been created during the previous programming period. In this regard, in the South-East ("Xlokk" in Maltese) of Malta a Local Action Group (LAG), known as Grupp Azzjoni Lokali Xlokk ("Fondazzjoni GAL XLOKK" or "GXF") was officially set up in October 2008 to benefit from the previous LEADER programme under the 2007-2013 RDP.

In line with the LEADER process, this document is presented by the GXF in relation to the Xlokk territory. However, it is pertinent to note that the Foundation is still classified as a potential GXF, and hence any reference to "Foundation", "Fondazzjoni" or "LAG" within this document is being made with this premise in mind.

In this programming period, GXF will continue to support both the consolidation and development of the region in order to better identify specific needs attributed to the local area, support initiatives leading to improved well-being of the territory's communities, and work with local authorities to devise policies that address such needs and requirements. This is the rationale behind the development of this Strategy document.

Additionally, this report is being presented on the basis of information held to date, and indications/ feedback provided by the MA to date.

NOTE NO. 1:

The Expression of Interest (EOI) for Additional Funding under Measure 19.2 – "Support for implantation of operations under the community-led local development strategy" and Measure 19.4 – "Support for running cost and animation" Version No: 1.0 issued on the 21st of December 2021, by the Managing Authority (EAFRD) – Funds and Programmes Division, invited the Local Actions Groups to request and receive funding support through the allocation under Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 and 2020/2220 of 23 December 2020.

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[1] EC, (2015), *Malta – Rural Development Programme*

This additional funding was introduced in the RDP 14-20 by commission decision notification dated 9th December 2021.

Under this scheme, already contracted Local Action Groups (i.e. Local Action Groups that are already implementing a Local Development) had the possibility to request additional funding under Measure 19.2 and Measure 19.4 as part of the implementation of the current LAG strategies.

The GXF engaged Ernst & Young Malta, as the previously contracted consultants to re-validate the existing strategy with the scope of sustaining the current Local Development Strategy (LDS) as per EOI.

The Local Development Strategy for the Xlokk territory, reflects the additional funding granted as per Award Letter dated the 4th of February 2022, and approved by the GXF Decision Committee on the 17th of February, 2022.

NOTE NO. 2:

On the 28th April 2023, the Funds and Programmes Division has sent an offer for a further additional budget under measures 19.2 and 19.4. This also will result in an extension of the programme until the 30th September 2025, whilst the implementation of projects under M19.2 is being extended until the 31st March 2025.

2. Identifying the Territory

This section describes the characteristics of the territory as well as the population of 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 drafting the Xlokk Local Development Strategy (LDS) was to determine which localities are deemed eligible to participate in LEADER within this territory. The 2014-2020 RDP establishes three criteria on which to identify the territory:

- having a population density lower than 5,000 persons per square kilometre, and
- having not less than 10% of the area of the locality agricultural land, and
- having not less than 35% of the locality outside development zone

In order 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) 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].

In terms of the percentage of agricultural area within a locality, three different data sources that provide different estimates for this percentage had to be considered. These included:

- NSO Census (2011)[4] – the document provides an overview of the total utilised agricultural land in hectares (ha) declared by farmers according to the locality of residence. This means that if a farmer had agricultural land in, say, the South of Malta, but resided in the North, the agricultural land would appear under the farmer's address and hence be included in the North (when in actual fact it is geographically located elsewhere). Utilised agricultural land makes up a total of 88% of the total declared agricultural area;

- Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) data – the LIPS provides agricultural land cover per Local Council and is provided by the Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency (ARPA) within the Ministry for Sustainable Development, the Environment and Climate Change (MSDEC). The LPIS is a supporting tool in the form of a spatial register that helps farmers, who intend to apply for aid under any of the area-related aid schemes, 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

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[2] NSO (2014), *Demographic Review*

[3] Within an Outside Development Zone, the PA includes all areas outside the development zone, as per the 2016 PA Geographic Information Systems (GIS) datasets.

[4] NSO (2011),, Census of Population and Housing 2011: Final Report

measures (referred to as Pillar I) – while this might be a high proportion, it might not necessarily reflect all agricultural areas.

- Corine Land Cover (CLC) inventory data (2006) - 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 small size. It is, however, still possible to sum the land use cover of different agricultural land classes for each Local Council and arrive at a reasonable estimate.

It is evident that all three sources have their own limitations. Following consultation with the Funds and Programme Division (i.e. the Managing Authority for the RDP funds) and other concerned bodies, as is evidenced in the accompanying document to this LDS with the stakeholder meeting minutes, a decision was reached to use the 2006 CLC inventory data, which was also used in the RDP 2014-2020. These discussions also indicated that updated source data related to the CLC is available, but that the exercise leading to the mapping of land use/cover in Malta was not available at the time of writing this document. The next section provides further information on the localities that were deemed to form part of the Xlokk territory.

3. Socio-economic assessment

This chapter provides a description of the Xlokk territory in terms of population and its geography. Moreover, this chapter delves into the economic, social and environmental characteristics of the whole Xlokk territory. The main aim of this chapter is to provide a clear description of the territory, its population and other information that helps provide the background to measures that will be proposed in subsequent sections of the Strategy. It is pertinent to point out that the analysis is constrained by the availability and timing of data – where not available, a number of proxies have been used.

3.1 Area and population covered by the strategy

Seventeen (17) localities fall under the Xlokk territory. These are situated along the south coast and extend from west to east and to the centre of the island (as illustrated in the figure overleaf). Although one can say that many planning issues are common to the whole island, the Xlokk territory has a number of specific features/ needs which need to be reflected into different targeted measures. These localities can be divided into:

- Coastal localities:
    - Qrendi,
    - Marsaskala,
    - Marsaxlokk,
    - Birżebbuga,
    - Żurrieq,
    - Kalkara
    - Xgħajra

- Inland localities:
    - Ħal Ghaxaq,
    - Ħal Qormi,
    - Gudja,
    - Ħal Kirkop,
    - Ħal Luqa,
    - Mqabba,
    - Żejtun,
    - Ħal Safi,
    - Santa Lucija,
    - Ħaż Żabbar

Figure 1*: Localities making up the Xlokk territory

These seventeen localities are included in the National Statistics Office (NSO)'s Southern & Northern Harbour and South Eastern district classifications (majority of localities fall under this latter district). The localities making up these three districts are:

• Southern Harbour District – Ħaż Żabbar, Kalkara, Luqa, Santa Luċija, Xgħajra
• Northern Harbour District – Qormi
• South Eastern District – Żejtun, Birżebbuġa, Gudja, Ħal Għaxaq, Kirkop, Marsascala, Marsaxlokk, Mqabba, Qrendi, Ħal Safi, Żurrieq

The Xlokk localities represent a total population of 111,196 people (26% of total Malta population) and an area of c. 71km² (total Malta: 246km²). The territory supports important national infrastructures, such as the Malta International Airport, the Malta Freeport and many industrial estates such as the Bulebel, Ħal Far and Ħal Luqa Industrial estates.

3.2   Local Councils and electoral divisions

All the seventeen localities making up the Xlokk territory are represented by their own

respective local council as constituted under Maltese Law in 1993 (Local Council Act, Chapter 363 of the Laws of Malta) and as amended in 1999 (Act XXI of 1999, that is, the Local Councils (Amendment) Act 1999). As part their remit, Local Councils are allowed to enter into public-private partnerships with both the private sector or with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), following approval by the Department for Local Government. The Department 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 of the Minister responsible for Local Government.[5]

With regards to electoral districts, the 17 localities making part of the Xlokk territory were part of the following districts in the 2013 general election:

- District 2: Ħaż Żabbar, Kalkara, Xgħajra
- District 3: Żejtun, Marsascala
- District 4: Gudja, Ħal Għaxaq, Santa Luċija
- District 5: Żurrieq, Kirkop, Ħal Safi, Qrendi, Birżebbuġia, Marsaxlokk, Mqabba
- District 6: Luqa, Qormi

3.3 Determining the Territory

As already explained previously, the RDP establishes three criteria which determine whether a locality is deemed eligible to participate in the LEADER programme through a Local Action Group (LAG). **Table 1** below provides us with an overview of the population density (less than 5,000 persons/ square kilometre), percentage of agricultural land[6] (needs to be 10% or more) and percentage of Outside the Development Zone (ODZ) area[7] (needs to be 35% or more) for each locality in the Xlokk territory. Marsascala has the highest population density from the coastal localities, while St. Luċija has the highest from the inland localities. Ħal Luqa accounts for the lowest percentage of agricultural land, while St. Luċija has the lowest ODZ in the Xlokk territory.

Table 1: Determining the Xlokk Territory

Locality	Population (2014)	Area	Population density (persons/ km^2)	% of Agricultural land	% of ODZ land
Kalkara	2,954	1.8	1678.4	34.7%	58.5%
Xghajra	1,634	1.0	1684.5	53.1%	73.2%
Birzebbuga	11,963	9.2	1298.9	46.5%	74.8%
Marsascala	11,669	5.4	2169.0	64.4%	74.5%
Marsaxlokk	3,422	4.7	726.5	64.9%	88.7%
Qrendi	2,690	4.9	549.0	57.0%	91.0%
Zurrieq	10,418	8.5	1231.4	68.0%	83.2%

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[5] Local Councils Act, Chapter 363

[6] EEA, (2006), Corine Land Cover

[7] Planning Authority's GIS datasets (2016)

Luqa	5,714	6.7	850.3	22.9%	89.4%
Zabbar	14,820	5.4	2770.1	65.4%	69.7%
Santa Lucija	2,969	0.7	4123.6	45.2%	56.9%
Qormi	16,315	5.0	3243.5	47.7%	57.5%
Gudja	3,049	2.3	1355.1	72.0%	83.1%
Ghaxaq	4,646	3.9	1206.8	58.1%	84.4%
Kirkop	2,318	1.1	2033.3	26.2%	70.2%
Safi	2,122	2.3	930.7	78.6%	84.6%
Mqabba	3,267	2.6	1256.5	29.5%	84.6%
Zejtun	11,226	5.4	2090.5	60.1%	64.1%

Sources: NSO, CLC, PA

3.4   Demographic profile

The number of people living in the Xlokk territory will have an impact on the needs identified for the Xlokk territory. In 2014, the total population of Malta stood at 429,344, while the Xlokk territory accounted for 26% of the total population in Malta, with an overall population of 111,196. In 2005, this percentage also stood at 26% of the total population, showing that on average, they both increased at an equal rate. To be precise, the total population in Malta increase by an annual growth rate of 0.67% and that of Xlokk by an annual increase of 0.77%.

3.4.1   Population dynamics

This sub-section analyses the population dynamics in the Xlokk region, including changes in demographics and population density. **Table 2** below provides a breakdown of population changes throughout the years in the Xlokk coastal localities.

Table 2: Total population – Coastal Localities

Locality	1995	2005	2011	2014	% Change (2005-2014)	Annual growth rate
Kalkara	2,833	2,882	2,940	2,954	2%	0.3%
Xghajra	685	1,243	1,572	1,634	31%	3.5%
Birzebbuga	7,307	8,564	10,525	11,963	40%	4.4%
Marsascala	4,770	9,346	11,056	11,669	25%	2.8%
Marsaxlokk	2,857	3,222	3,339	3,422	6%	0.7%
Qrendi	2,344	2,535	2,642	2,690	6%	0.7%
Zurrieq	8,684	9,781	10,234	10,418	7%	0.7%
Total		37,573		44,750	19%	

Source: NSO 2014

Table 2 provides an indication of the percentage change in population from year 2005 till year 2014. As can be seen in the table above, the seven coastal localities in the Xlokk region registered a positive increase in their population over the years. Overall, the total population in the Xlokk coastal localities increased by 19% (7,177 persons) with an annual growth rate of

2.1%. Birżebbuga, registered the highest percentage increase in population, followed by Xgħajra and Marsascala.

Table 3 analyses the population trends from 2005 till 2014 of the inland localities. The overall total population of the Xlokk inland localities only increased by 0.05% (35 persons) over a period of nine years from 2005 to 2014. Population changes in these localities present a mixed picture, with four out of the ten localities registering a decline in their population while the remaining six localities present a moderate increase in the population size. These localities presenting a population decline were Ħal Luqa, Santa Luċija, Qormi and Zejtun. Qormi remains the locality with the highest population, followed by Zabbar and Zejtun. On the other hand, Mqabba was the locality to register the highest population increase with a percentage change of 8%.

Table 3: Total population – Inland Localities

Locality	1995	2005	2011	2014	% Change (2005-2014)	Annual growth rate
Luqa	6,150	6,072	5,882	5714	-6%	-0.7%
Zabbar	14,138	14,671	14,823	14820	1%	0.1%
Santa Lucija	3,605	3,186	2,939	2969	-7%	-0.8%
Qormi	17,694	16,559	16,312	16315	-1%	-0.2%
Gudja	2,882	2,923	2,973	3049	4%	0.5%
Ghaxaq	4,126	4,405	4,525	4646	5%	0.6%
Kirkop	1,957	2,185	2,271	2318	6%	0.7%
Safi	1,731	1,979	2,066	2122	7%	0.8%
Mqabba	2,613	3,021	3,213	3267	8%	0.9%
Zejtun	11,379	11,410	11,277	11226	-2%	-0.2%
Total		66,411		66,446	0.05%	0.01%

Sources: NSO (2014), 2011 & 2005 Census

Table 4 and *Table 5* below provide a general overview of the population distributed by sex for both sets of locality groups. The percentage change in males and female population within the coastal localities increased by 22.9% and 15.3% respectively, while that of the inland localities reduced by -0.2% for males and increased by 0.3% for females. This is a further reflection of the different demographic trends in the two locality groups – population increase in the coastal localities, but a decline in the inland areas.

Table 4: Population distributed by sex – Coastal Localities

Locality	Males		Females		Change	
	2005	2014	2005	2014	males	females
Kalkara	1,459	1,492	1,423	1,462	2.26%	2.74%

Xghajra	617	807	626	827	30.79%	32.11%
Birzebbuga	4,309	6,684	4,255	5,279	55.12%	24.07%
Marsascala	4,697	5,856	4,649	5,813	24.68%	25.04%
Marsaxlokk	1,606	1,719	1,616	1,703	7.04%	5.38%
Qrendi	1,267	1,339	1,268	1,351	5.68%	6.55%
Zurrieq	4,832	5,192	4,949	5,226	7.45%	5.60%
Total	18,787	23,089	18,786	21,661	22.90%	15.30%

Sources: NSO (2014), 2011 & 2005 Census

Table 5: Population distributed by sex – Inland Localities

Locality	Males		Females		Change	
	2005	**2014**	**2005**	**2014**	males	females
Luqa	2,918	2,711	3,154	3,003	-7.09%	-4.79%
Zabbar	7,458	7,464	7,213	7,356	0.08%	1.98%
Santa Lucija	1,609	1,447	1,577	1,522	-10.07%	-3.49%
Qormi	8,288	8,099	8,271	8,216	-2.28%	-0.66%
Gudja	1,438	1,507	1,485	1,542	4.80%	3.84%
Ghaxaq	2,199	2,361	2,206	2,285	7.37%	3.58%
Kirkop	1,115	1,169	1,070	1,149	4.84%	7.38%
Safi	982	1,075	997	1,047	9.47%	5.02%
Mqabba	1,496	1,655	1,525	1,612	10.63%	5.70%
Zejtun	5,677	5,627	5,733	5,599	-0.88%	-2.34%
Total	33,180	33,115	33,231	33,331	-0.20%	0.30%

Sources: NSO (2014), 2011 & 2005 Census

Despite the decline in population, the population density of inland localities remains higher than the national average of 1,346 persons per km^2. *Table 6* and *Sources:* NSO (2014), 2011 & 2005 Census

Table 7 depict the change in population density for each respective locality and also the total coastal and inland localities. As can be seen below, the 3 coastal localities registered an increase in population density of 197.6 persons per km^2 from year 2005. On the other hand, although above national average, the inland localities registered a marginal decrease in population density of 1.7 persons per km^2. Marsascala, followed by Xghajra and Birzebbuga, registered the highest increase in population density within the coastal localities, while for the inland localities, Kirkop, followed by Mqabba registered the highest increases. One can also note that from the inland localities, Santa Lucija registered a decrease in population density of circa 270 persons per km^2. Moreover, all coastal localities registered an increase in population density, while as for the inland localities, apart from Santa Lucija, Luqa, Qormi and Zejtun registered a decline.

Table 6: Population density – Coastal Localities

	2005			2014		Change
	Population	Persons per km²	Area (km²)	Population	Persons per km²	Persons per km²
Kalkara	2,871	1,632	1.8	2954	1678.4	46
Xghajra	1,234	1,278	1.0	1634	1684.5	407
Birzebbuga	8,668	941	9.2	11963	1298.9	358
Marsascala	9,298	1,730	5.4	11669	2169.0	439
Marsaxlokk	3,205	680	4.7	3422	726.5	47
Qrendi	2,525	515	4.9	2690	549.0	34
Zurrieq	9,816	1,161	8.5	10418	1231.4	70
Total	**37,617**	**1062.9**	**35.5**	**44750**	**1260.6**	**197.6**

Sources: NSO (2014), 2011 & 2005 Census

Table 7: Population density – Inland Localities

	2005			2014		Change
	Population	Persons per km²	Area (km²)	Population	Persons per km²	Persons per km²
Luqa	6,028	896	6.7	5714	850.3	-46
Zabbar	14,694	2,747	5.4	14820	2770.1	23
Santa Lucija	3,174	4,394	0.7	2969	4123.6	-270
Qormi	16,576	3,296	5.0	16315	3243.5	-53
Gudja	2,901	1,289	2.3	3049	1355.1	66
Ghaxaq	4,388	1,139	3.9	4646	1206.8	68
Kirkop	2,183	1,914	1.1	2318	2033.3	119
Safi	1,948	853	2.3	2122	930.7	78
Mqabba	3,021	1,161	2.6	3267	1256.5	96
Zejtun	11,425	2,129	5.4	11226	2090.5	-39
Total	**66,338**	**1878.7**	**35.4**	**66,446**	**1877**	**-1.7**

Sources: NSO (2014), 2011 & 2005 Census

3.4.2 Other demographic indicators

Table 8 and *Table 9* below split the relevant population for each locality by age group on the basis of latest available data (NSO Census 2011), while *Table 10* and *Table 11* depict the age groups as a percentage of the total population in each respective locality.

Table 8: Population by age group – Coastal Localities

	0-14	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Total
Kalkara	416	438	411	383	463	399	430	2,940
Xghajra	350	183	302	276	172	159	130	1,572

Birzebbuga	1,695	1,733	1,931	1,445	1,319	1,260	1,142	10,525
Marsascala	2,207	1,363	1,836	1,987	1,438	1,162	1,063	11,056
Marsaxlokk	543	500	495	414	504	468	415	3,339
Qrendi	407	358	408	354	344	398	373	2,642
Zurrieq	1,606	1,286	1,720	1,371	1,335	1,487	1,429	10,234

Source: NSO (2014), 2011 Census

Table 9: Population by age Group – Inland Localities

	0-14	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Total
Luqa	592	720	682	568	771	794	1,755	5,882
Zabbar	2,344	2,046	2,340	1,887	1,932	2,252	2,022	14,823
Santa Lucija	344	406	372	268	417	532	600	2,939
Qormi	2,278	2,308	2,517	1,814	2,319	2,488	2,588	16,312
Gudja	348	505	422	323	482	521	372	2,973
Ghaxaq	753	623	764	589	563	691	542	4,525
Kirkop	385	366	324	313	359	287	237	2,271
Safi	354	305	327	289	279	283	229	2,066
Mqabba	596	444	481	494	398	381	419	3,213
Zejtun	1,551	1,442	1,700	1,323	1,472	1,744	2,045	11,277

Source: NSO (2014), 2011 Census

Table 10 and *Table 11,* which present the percentage distribution of each age groups for each locality, clearly indicate that certain localities within the Xlokk territory are characterized by an ageing population. One may add that the Coastal and Inland localities have 11.8% and 16.3% of their total population aged 65 and over, respectively.

Table 10: Age group percentage of the total locality population – Coastal Localities

	0-14	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Total
Kalkara	14%	15%	14%	13%	16%	14%	15%	100%
Xghajra	22%	12%	19%	18%	11%	10%	8%	100%
Birzebbuga	16%	16%	18%	14%	13%	12%	11%	100%
Marsascala	20%	12%	17%	18%	13%	11%	10%	100%
Marsaxlokk	16%	15%	15%	12%	15%	14%	12%	100%
Qrendi	15%	14%	15%	13%	13%	15%	14%	100%
Zurrieq	16%	13%	17%	13%	13%	15%	14%	100%

Source: NSO (2014), 2011 Census

Table 11: Age group percentage of the total locality population – Inland Localities

	0-14	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Total
Luqa	10%	12%	12%	10%	13%	13%	30%	100%
Zabbar	16%	14%	16%	13%	13%	15%	14%	100%
Santa Lucija	12%	14%	13%	9%	14%	18%	20%	100%
Qormi	14%	14%	15%	11%	14%	15%	16%	100%

Gudja	12%	17%	14%	11%	16%	18%	13%	100%
Ghaxaq	17%	14%	17%	13%	12%	15%	12%	100%
Kirkop	17%	16%	14%	14%	16%	13%	10%	100%
Safi	17%	15%	16%	14%	14%	14%	11%	100%
Mqabba	19%	14%	15%	15%	12%	12%	13%	100%
Zejtun	14%	13%	15%	12%	13%	15%	18%	100%

Source: NSO (2014), 2011 Census

As can be evidenced in the tables above, within the coastal localities Kalkara has the highest percentage of persons aged 65 and over, while for the inland localities Luqa has the highest percentage, with 30% of its total population aged 65 and over. On the other hand, Xghajra and Mqabba have the highest percentage of persons aged 0-14 in the Coastal and Inland localities respectively.

Table 12 below provides information on the level and type of disability by district which is relevant to the territory being analysed in this strategy. Due to limited data available, data on type of disability and type of disability is based on districts. As already mentioned before, the localities in the Xlokk territory form part of three districts: Northern Harbour, Southern Harbour and South Eastern district, although it is important to add that the focus will mainly be on the South Eastern district as this includes eleven out of the seventeen Xlokk Localities.   The Southern Harbour region includes five Xlokk localities while the Northern Harbour has only one locality. On average, about 92% of the Maltese population suffered from no disability, while circa 8% had some form of impairment. There were no marked differences across districts.

Table 12: Type of disability by district

Type of disability/difficulty	Southern Harbour	Northern Harbour	South Eastern	Western	Northern	Gozo and Comino	Total
Mental health condition	1,563	1,959	951	1,027	898	647	7,045
Deafness or partial hearing loss	1,109	1,817	776	737	760	474	5,673
Blindness or partial sight loss	1,519	2,301	1,039	853	950	447	7,109
Intellectual disability	334	378	248	297	181	107	1,545
Specific learning difficulty	628	1,003	484	639	534	213	3,501
Development disorder	212	271	131	224	144	58	1,040
Physical disability	1,897	2,914	1,203	1,487	1,428	723	9,652
Other disability	19	45	14	19	26	12	135
Do not have any disability or difficulty	73,195	111,337	60,220	53,840	59,516	29,141	387,249

Source: NSO (2014), 2011 Census

Moreover, while about 20% of the Maltese population suffered from a long-term illness/ health condition, this proportion was more pronounced in the Southern Harbour district (24%). Percentages in the other two relevant districts were in line with the national average, as shown in *Table 13* below. As already mentioned previously, since data on long-term illness was not available per locality, the three main districts that include all localities in the Xlokk territory were used.

Table 13: Long-term illness/ health condition

District	With illness/ health condition	Without illness/ health condition	Total
Southern Harbour	18,670	60,768	79,438
Northern Harbour	25,156	95,293	120,449
South Eastern	11,920	52,356	64,276
Malta - Total	83,102	334,330	417,432

Source: NSO (2014), 2011 Census

3.5   Socio-economic profile

3.5.1   Education and Economic Activity

Data presented in the 2011 Census indicates the literacy and illiteracy rates per locality. As evidenced in *Table 14* and *Table 15* below, one can note that the percentage of literate persons in the coastal localities falls within the national average of 93.6%, while that of the inland localities is below the national average by 3.3%. Additionally, if one had to look at the illiteracy

rate of each locality, one would note that as the highest illiteracy rates were recorded in Luqa, Qormi and Zejtun.

Table 14: Literacy/ Illiteracy rates - Coastal Localities

	Literate		Illiterate		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Kalkara	2,507	93.2	182	6.8	2,689
Xghajra	1,219	91	120	9	1,339
Birzebbuga	8,741	93.8	575	6.2	9,316
Marsascala	9,240	96.4	343	3.6	9,583
Marsaxlokk	2,769	92.1	239	7.9	3,008
Qrendi	2,195	91.3	210	8.7	2,405
Zurrieq	8,536	92.5	691	7.5	9,227
Total	**35,207**	**93.7**	**2360**	**6.3**	**37,567**

Source: NSO (2014), 2011 Census

Table 15: Literacy/ Illiteracy rates – Inland Localities

	Literate		Illiterate		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Luqa	4,864	87.7	680	12.3	5,544
Zabbar	12,041	90.2	1,309	9.8	13,350
Santa Lucija	2,626	95	138	5	2,764
Qormi	13,261	88.9	1,652	11.1	14,913
Gudja	2,624	93.9	171	6.1	2,795
Ghaxaq	3,793	93.1	283	6.9	4,076
Kirkop	1,884	92	164	8	2,048
Safi	1,748	93.9	114	6.1	1,862
Mqabba	2,591	91.7	236	8.3	2,827
Zejtun	9,214	89.4	1,093	10.6	10,307
Total	**54,646**	**90.3%**	**5840**	**9.7%**	**60,486**

Source: NSO (2014), 2011 Census

Table 16 below analyses the highest educational attainment achieved in the Southern Harbour, South Eastern and Northern Harbour districts by gender, and also compares them to the nation average estimates. In the Southern Harbour and South Eastern district, the percentage of no schooling is higher than the national average. With regards to post-secondary education, the Southern Harbour's average is one percent below the national average showing the extent of early school leavers is higher in this district. When compared to the national average, both the Southern Harbour and the South Eastern District (which include 16 out of the 17 Xlokk localities) have a lower level of tertiary education attainment when compared to the national average.

Table 16: Highest educational attainment achieved

	No schooling	Primary	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary	Post-Secondary Non Tertiary	Tertiary	Total
Southern Harbour	**2.2%**	**24.6%**	**45.5%**	**14.8%**	**4.3%**	**8.6%**	68,129
Males	1.4%	20.2%	47.8%	15.9%	6.0%	8.7%	33,705
Females	3.0%	28.9%	43.2%	13.8%	2.7%	8.4%	34,424
Northern Harbour	1.4%	18.5%	40.7%	18.1%	5.2%	16.1%	**103,957**
Males	1.0%	15.2%	41.3%	18.6%	6.4%	17.4%	50,886
Females	1.8%	21.7%	40.1%	17.5%	4.0%	14.8%	53,071
South Eastern	1.8%	20.2%	42.6%	18.2%	5.7%	11.5%	**53,804**
Males	1.3%	17.2%	44.7%	18.2%	7.5%	11.1%	27,177
Females	2.3%	23.3%	40.4%	18.2%	3.9%	11.9%	26,627
MALTA	1.7%	20.0%	40.9%	18.0%	5.3%	14.1%	**355,704**

Source: NSO (2014), 2011 Census

In order to further understand the socio-economic background of the territory, it is pertinent to look into employment and unemployment levels.

Table 17 and *Table 18* below provide the registered unemployment level for both the Coastal and Inland localities distributed by age. While absolute numbers are luckily small, one could argue that one unemployed person is already too many and that certain analysis of these figures can still be undertaken. Both Kalkara and Qrendi experience a high registered unemployment level for persons under the age of 25, while 43% of Marsaxlokk's total unemployment level relates to persons aged 55 and over. In terms of inland localities, *Table 18* shows that the majority of the registered unemployment fall in the middle age bracket (25-39 and 40-55), with the most evident being Safi with 83.3% of its unemployed having an age between 25 and 55.

Table 17: Registered unemployment rate - Coastal Localities

	Under 25	25 - 39	40 - 54	55+	Totals
Kalkara	19.5%	17.1%	46.3%	17.1%	41
Xghajra	10.5%	31.6%	31.6%	26.3%	19
Birzebbuga	5.9%	29.7%	46.5%	17.8%	101
Marsascala	7.6%	32.6%	30.4%	29.3%	92
Marsaxlokk	9.5%	23.8%	23.8%	42.9%	21
Qrendi	17.6%	35.3%	23.5%	23.5%	17
Zurrieq	8.5%	33.8%	28.2%	29.6%	71

Source: ETC 2016

Table 18: Registered unemployment rate: Inland Localities

	Under 25	25 - 39	40 - 54	55+	Totals
Luqa	11.4%	43.2%	20.5%	25.0%	44
Zabbar	8.4%	24.4%	42.0%	25.2%	131
Santa Lucija	6.5%	16.1%	41.9%	35.5%	31
Qormi	11.4%	22.0%	39.4%	27.3%	132
Gudja	7.7%	15.4%	30.8%	46.2%	13
Ghaxaq	6.1%	39.4%	33.3%	21.2%	33
Kirkop	4.8%	23.8%	28.6%	42.9%	21
Safi	8.3%	33.3%	50.0%	8.3%	12
Mqabba	10.0%	15.0%	25.0%	50.0%	20
Zejtun	10.4%	33.8%	36.4%	19.5%	77

Source: ETC 2016

Additionally, data presented by the ETC (2016) provides further information on the split between employed and registered unemployed persons in each locality, as can be seen in *Table 19* below.

Table 19: Employed and registered unemployed persons in the Xlokk Territory

	Employed	Unemployed
Kalkara	1,399	41
Xghajra	664	19
Birzebbuga	4,573	101
Marsascala	5,773	92
Marsaxlokk	1,669	21
Qrendi	1,271	17
Zurrieq	4,958	71
Luqa	2,614	44
Zabbar	7,004	131
Santa Lucija	1,321	31
Qormi	7,794	132
Gudja	1,512	13
Ghaxaq	2,156	33
Kirkop	1,104	21
Safi	1,018	12
Mqabba	1,514	20
Zejtun	4,976	77

Source: ETC 2016

Table 20 overleaf presents the major occupational group for each locality making part of the Xlokk territory. This table provides a clear indication on the professions that are most common in each locality making up the Xlokk territory. Marsaxlokk includes a higher percentage than the other localities when it comes to skilled agricultural and fishery workers, highlighting the locality's buoyant extraction industries. The most common occupations in both the Coastal and Inland Localities include: services and sales workers, elementary occupations and professionals. Moreover, it is quite evident that the lowest percentage of occupations in this table for each localities is the skilled agricultural, fishery and forestry workers, with the exception of Marsaxlokk. There is an evident shift of young people away from these sectors, which has important implications for food security, the management of rural areas, and the loss of cultural heritage, in the form of knowledge and skills developed through interactions with the environment over generations.

Table 20: Major occupation groups

	Armed forces	Managers	Professionals	Technicians and Associate Professionals	Clerks and support workers	Services and sales workers	Skilled Agricultural, fishery and forestry workers	Craft and related trades workers	Plant and machine operator and assemblers	Elementary Occupations	Total
Kalkara	1.1%	5.1%	13.6%	11.2%	14.2%	18.7%	0.4%	9.6%	7.8%	18.4%	**1,399**
Xghajra	1.2%	5.3%	14.2%	9.0%	11.6%	20.5%	0.3%	11.3%	8.1%	18.5%	**664**
Birzebbuga	0.7%	5.1%	14.2%	12.3%	12.3%	16.2%	0.6%	11.2%	10.3%	17.2%	**4,573**
Marsascala	0.8%	8.6%	18.3%	15.0%	14.2%	17.3%	0.5%	8.3%	5.1%	11.8%	**5,773**
Marsaxlokk	0.7%	6.0%	15.5%	12.9%	11.7%	16.2%	8.9%	7.4%	8.0%	12.8%	**1,669**
Qrendi	1.3%	5.8%	16.8%	12.0%	11.4%	18.4%	1.3%	7.8%	8.8%	16.4%	**1,271**
Zurrieq	1.4%	4.9%	18.2%	12.2%	14.6%	15.7%	1.0%	9.6%	7.7%	14.8%	**4,958**
Luqa	1.1%	4.9%	16.9%	11.9%	13.8%	17.1%	0.5%	9.7%	7.9%	16.1%	**2,614**
Zabbar	1.0%	4.7%	14.7%	11.0%	12.9%	17.5%	0.5%	10.6%	8.3%	18.6%	**7,004**
Santa Lucija	0.8%	5.5%	18.4%	12.3%	17.0%	18.2%	0.3%	7.0%	6.1%	14.5%	**1,321**
Qormi	0.8%	5.1%	12.8%	9.8%	12.2%	17.6%	0.6%	10.5%	8.8%	21.7%	**7,794**
Gudja	1.1%	5.1%	18.5%	13.9%	12.8%	14.7%	0.6%	9.8%	6.0%	17.6%	**1,512**
Ghaxaq	1.4%	4.6%	14.0%	11.1%	13.0%	17.4%	1.0%	11.9%	7.8%	17.6%	**2,156**
Kirkop	1.1%	5.1%	15.0%	13.7%	13.4%	14.6%	1.0%	8.8%	9.5%	17.8%	**1,104**
Safi	1.5%	4.5%	17.4%	13.9%	11.9%	16.1%	0.6%	8.5%	9.0%	16.5%	**1,018**
Mqabba	1.0%	5.2%	15.9%	11.8%	12.9%	15.7%	0.8%	7.7%	9.4%	19.7%	**1,514**
Zejtun	0.9%	5.2%	13.9%	11.3%	11.8%	15.7%	1.0%	11.0%	10.0%	19.1%	**4,976**

Source: ETC 2016

3.5.2 Level of dependency

The age composition of the Xlokk territory population will have an effect on both the current and future needs being identified for the area. **Table 21** below presents both the dependency ratios and the old-age dependency ratios of all the seventeen localities making up the Xlokk territory. The dependency ratio is defined as the number of people aged 0 to 14 and 65 and over, divided by the number of people aged 15 to 64. This ratio gives an indication of the proportion of young people and elderly people living in the area.

According to the 2011 NSO Census, the national average dependency ratio stands at 45.2% while the old-age dependency ratio is 23.7%. Xgħajra registered the highest dependency ratio from the coastal localities, while Luqa surpasses all the other sixteen Xlokk localities when it comes to both the dependency ratio and the old-age dependency ratio, showing that two third of the locality's population is considered "dependent". However, in general, both the average dependency ratio (43.1%) and the average old-age dependency ratio (20.9%) for the seventeen Xlokk localities was below the national average of 45.2% and 23.7% respectively.

Table 21: Dependency ratio - Xlokk Territory

	Dependency ratio	Old-age dependency ratio
Kalkara	40.3%	20.7%
Xgħajra	44.3%	12.0%
Birzebbuga	37.1%	15.0%
Marsascala	41.9%	13.5%
Marsaxlokk	40.5%	17.5%
Qrendi	41.5%	20.1%
Zurrieq	42.4%	20.0%
Luqa	66.0%	49.3%
Zabbar	41.8%	19.3%
Santa Lucija	47.3%	30.1%
Qormi	42.4%	22.5%
Gudja	32.2%	16.8%
Għaxaq	40.1%	16.7%
Kirkop	37.4%	14.4%
Safi	39.1%	15.4%
Mqabba	46.0%	18.8%
Zejtun	46.8%	26.6%
Malta	**45.2%**	**23.7%**
Xlokk	**43.1%**	**20.9%**

Source: NSO (2014), 2011 Census

3.5.3   Dwellings

Figure 2 below depicts the percentage distribution of dwellings in the Xlokk territory broken down by three categories - occupied, seasonal use and completely vacant. Additionally, **Table 22** below provides an indication of such distribution per locality, which can also be compared to the Xlokk territory average. It is pertinent to note that this data is based on the NSO 2011 Census, and that more recent data is not available. Hence, data should be cautiously analysed given that recent developments in the property market have brought changes in both demand and supply of property.

As can be seen below, coastal localities have a high percentage of secondary/ summer homes, which is somewhat of a foregone conclusion. As a result, in some of these localities one would find a lower level of dwellings occupied all throughout the year, like for example Xgħajra. As one would expect, secondary houses in the inland localities are not as common as those in the coastal area. The locality with the highest percentage of occupied houses is Santa Lucija with 95.4% occupied houses. In general, when compared to the national average, the Xlokk territory holds more occupied houses (74.4% in the Xlokk territory vs. 68.2% as the national average), less seasonal homes (7.6% in the Xlokk territory vs. 13.3% as the national average) and the same amount of vacant properties.

Figure 2: Percentage distribution of dwellings in the Xlokk territory
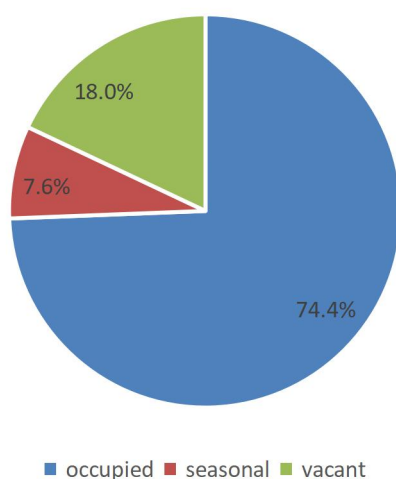
Table 22: Percentage distribution of dwellings in the Xlokk territory

	Occupied	Secondary home	Vacant
Kalkara	78.3%	4.7%	17%
Xghajra	51.7%	23.8%	24.4%
Birzebbuga	64.7%	19.6%	15.6%
Marsascala	58.4%	25.8%	15.9%
Marsaxlokk	75.3%	5.9%	18.7%
Qrendi	73.7%	6.2%	20.1%
Zurrieq	80.4%	1.1%	18.5%

Luqa	76.5%	1.5%	22.1%
Zabbar	78.8%	1.3%	20%
Santa Lucija	95.4%	0.5%	4.1%
Qormi	81.8%	1.4%	16.8%
Gudja	78.1%	1.5%	20.5%
Ghaxaq	79.8%	1.4%	18.8%
Kirkop	82.9%	1.4%	15.7%
Safi	76.5%	2.4%	21%
Mqabba	77.2%	0.5%	22.3%
Zejtun	78.5%	2.4%	19.1%
Xlokk territory	74.4%	7.6%	18.0%
Malta	68.2%	13.3%	18.4%

Source: NSO (2014), 2011 Census

Additionally, the table below presents both the average and median property prices of all the localities making part of the Xlokk Territory. This data covers the period June 2015 to April 2016, and is based on online listings of the major real estate agents' property websites in Malta.

Table 23: Property prices

Locality Name	Properties for sale	Average price for sale	Median price for sale
Birzebbuga	530	€245,141	€148,148
Ghaxaq	358	€257,351	€134,871
Gudja	175	€286,579	€197,158
Kalkara	255	€283,079	€160,247
Kirkop	112	€173,451	€143,100
Luqa	488	€310,245	€142,092
Marsaskala	1850	€243,895	€149,000
Marsaxlokk	228	€449,465	€220,000
Mqabba	169	€210,881	€127,200
Qormi	1478	€332,822	€149,000
Qrendi	245	€251,121	€133,019
Safi	101	€237,748	€160,500
Santa Lucia	7	€340,039	€265,000
Xghajra	288	€150,018	€129,280
Zabbar	1461	€182,050	€118,519
Zejtun	1193	€206,929	€123,454
Zurrieq	817	€292,233	€150,000

Source: LionMalta; EY analysis

This table indicates the highest average property prices in Marsaxlokk, and lowest in Xgħajra. Clearly, the analysis also depends on the sample size and type of property for sale.

3.5.4 Institutional households

As previously mentioned, 11.8% and 16.3% of the Coastal and Inland localities include persons aged 65 and over. The table below presents the number of person in institutional

households in the Xlokk territory. It is important to add that the majority of institutions in Malta are homes for the elderly, but in the Xlokk area there are only two such homes:

- Zejtun Home (Managed by Caremalta)
- St. Vincent de Paul Residence

Additionally, since residents in such institutions change their address (to refer to the institutional home), this tends to contribute to a higher percentage of old people in that locality and hence this is why certain localities have a high percentage of people in institutional homes (e.g. Luqa and St. Vincent de Paul Residence) while others have none.

Table 24: Number of person in institutional household in the Xlokk territory

	Males		Females		Total	
	number	% per locality	number	% per locality	number	% per locality
Kalkara	18	0.5	10	0.2	28	0.3
Xghajra	-	-	-	-	-	-
Birzebbuga	1,259	32.5	468	9.7	1,727	19.8
Marsascala	23	0.6	41	0.8	64	0.7
Marsaxlokk	2	0.1	5	0.1	7	0.1
Qrendi	-	-	-	-	-	-
Zurrieq	5	0.1	11	0.2	16	0.2
Luqa						
Zabbar	315	8.1	748	15.5	1,063	12.2
Santa Lucija	8	0.2	30	0.6	38	0.4
Qormi	-	-	5	0.1	5	0.1
Gudja	-	-	38	0.8	38	0.8
Ghaxaq	-	-	5	0.1	5	0.1
Kirkop	-	-	-	-	-	-
Safi	4	0.1	4	0.1	8	0.1
Mqabba	-	-	4	0.1	4	0
Zejtun	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: NSO (20140), 2011 Census Preliminary Report

In the Xlokk territory, there are day centres in the following localities:

- Zejtun
- Qormi
- Zurrieq
- Luqa
- Birzebbuga
- Safi
- Kirkop

3.6 Economic Activity

This sub-section provides an overview of the economic activity of each locality making part of the Xlokk territory. The following table provides information on the size of the businesses

in each locality in the Xlokk territory.

Table 25: Size of Businesses

	0-9	10+	TOTAL
Kalkara	132	7	139
Xgħajra	n/a	n/a	75
Birzebbuga	1038	88	1126
Marsascala	657	13	670
Marsaxlokk	306	7	313
Qrendi	178	5	183
Zurrieq	629	5	634
Luqa	480	59	539
Zabbar	913	15	928
Santa Lucija	n/a	n/a	123
Qormi	1651	136	1787
Gudja	213	10	223
Għaxaq	302	13	315
Kirkop	134	10	144
Safi	128	3	131
Mqabba	208	8	216
Zejtun	712	52	764
Xlokk territory	7681	431	8310

Source: NSO 2016

As can be seen above, the majority (92.4%) of all businesses in the Xlokk territory employ less than 10 people. This is also a reflection of the situation within the whole of Malta. NSO also provides information on each locality's business birth and death rate (i.e. businesses that cease to exist), as shown in Table 26 below.

Table 26: Business Births and Deaths

	Business Births	Business Deaths
Kalkara	10	3
Xgħajra	7	n/a
Birzebbuga	78	30
Marsascala	74	18
Marsaxlokk	7	5
Qrendi	14	5
Zurrieq	36	15
Luqa	23	13
Zabbar	56	27
Santa Lucija	4	7
Qormi	82	41

Gudja	12	7
Għaxaq	13	8
Kirkop	10	5
Safi	6	n/a
Mqabba	10	11
Zejtun	45	20
Xlokk territory	487	215

Source: NSO 2016

The table above thus shows that overall, business births in the Xlokk territory are more than twice the business deaths. This is also in line with the national overall trend.

3.7   Agricultural sector

The Xlokk region is highly renowned for its rich agricultural sector. Such region is home to a number of fields used for both producing crops and fruits as well as other agricultural produce. The NSO Census of Agriculture provides the distribution of the space (in hectares) declared by the farmers by type of area[8]. The majority is utilised agricultural area (UAA).

Table 27: Distribution of space declared by farmers

Hectares	Total	Utilized agricultural area	Unutilized agricultural area	Other area
Kalkara	29.8	23.5	0.1	6.2
Xgħajra	8.1	6.1	1.0	0.9
Birzebbuga	221.7	188.8	2.9	30.0
Marsascala	98.9	81.1	0.7	17.1
Marsaxlokk	88.3	78.0	2.0	8.2
Qrendi	191.9	174.0	0.8	17.1
Zurrieq	387.4	338.7	2.7	45.9
Luqa	157.5	132.4	4.3	20.8
Zabbar	385.4	344.8	6.0	34.7
Santa Lucija	11.9	10.5	-	1.4
Qormi	239.6	208.7	4.3	26.6
Gudja	163.8	147.9	2.7	13.2
Għaxaq	176.8	145.1	0.9	30.8
Kirkop	94.3	78.7	0.2	15.4
Safi	144.0	135.1	0.0	8.9
Mqabba	141.1	127.5	2.1	11.5
Zejtun	434.4	397.9	3.6	32.8
Xlokk Territory	2974.9	2618.8	34.3	321.5

Source: NSO (2010), Census of Agriculture

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[8] NSO (2010), Census of Agriculture

Figure 3: Distribution of space declared by farmers: Xlokk Territory

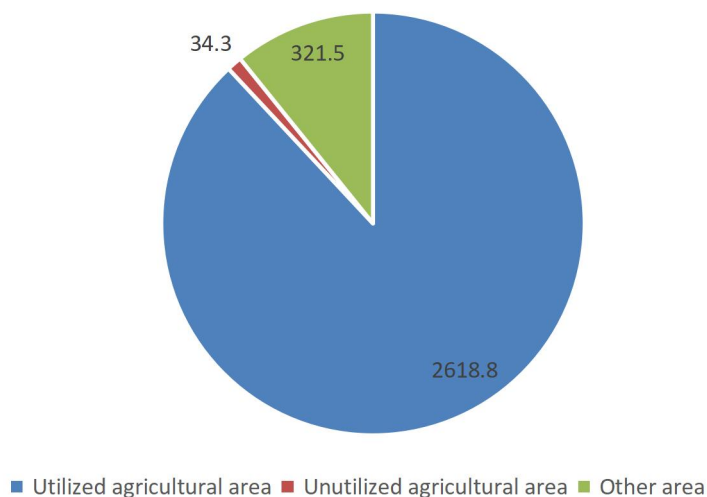Legend: ■ Utilized agricultural area ■ Unutilized agricultural area ■ Other area

Table 28 below shows the distribution of arable land, which makes a large part of the total UAA. Forage and potato cultivation contribute to the majority of arable land in the Xlokk territory.

Table 28: Distribution of Arable land

	Total	Potatoes	Flowers and seeds	Forage	Fallow land	Vegetables
Kalkara	17.3	3.7	0.0	5.2	4.8	3.5
Xgħajra	5.3	2.5	-	2.0	0.1	0.7
Birzebbuga	151.3	10.8	0.2	121.6	10.8	7.9
Marsascala	71.5	8.4	0.0	44.1	14.1	4.9
Marsaxlokk	68.0	5.0	0.1	46.4	7.2	9.3
Qrendi	142.2	34.4	1.5	73.7	11.0	21.5
Zurrieq	257.6	45.5	0.6	173.8	24.9	12.8
Luqa	97.8	9.1	0.1	71.2	9.8	7.5
Zabbar	302.6	98.0	5.3	118.7	40.9	39.7
Santa Lucija	6.9	0.6	-	4.0	1.4	0.9
Qormi	172.4	13.9	8.6	99.3	19.4	31.3
Gudja	125.7	23.5	-	88.1	8.6	5.4
Għaxaq	117.0	7.9	1.1	85.1	12.8	10.1
Kirkop	61.6	11.8	0.0	43.3	2.6	3.9
Safi	105.3	26.6	0.8	61.2	12.3	4.3
Mqabba	108.8	10.7	0.1	74.8	11.8	11.4
Zejtun	351.7	32.3	3.9	268.8	26.3	20.4
Xlokk Territory	**2163**	**344.7**	**22.3**	**1381.3**	**218.8**	**195.5**

Source: NSO (2010), Census of Agriculture

Agriculture is significantly linked to the use of water on such land. Data on the volume of water used within the Xlokk territory for irrigation purposes is also available through the NSO Census of Agriculture (2010), as shown in *Table 29* below. The majority of water use is

in Zabbar, which takes up about a quarter of water use in the territory.

Table 29: Volume of water used for irrigation

	Volume
Kalkara	116,812
Xgħajra	47,955
Birzebbuga	302,453
Marsascala	228,461
Marsaxlokk	198,846
Qrendi	716,687
Zurrieq	987,878
Luqa	297,717
Zabbar	2,066,362
Santa Lucija	26,826
Qormi	864,016
Gudja	377,031
Għaxaq	231,836
Kirkop	264,517
Safi	514,126
Mqabba	307,073
Zejtun	845,005
Xlokk Territory	**8,393,601**

Source: NSO (2010), Census of Agriculture

The area also houses various livestock farms. *Table 30* below presents information on both the livestock holdings as well as the relative livestock population in the South-East district. The South East district has almost half of Malta's goat population and cattle farms. Additionally, the area also accounts for nearly one third of the island's pig farms and sheep population. One weakness of such farms is that they pose a threat and place more pressure on the attractiveness of the area, mainly because of the waste that is produced.

Table 30: Livestock holdings and population – South East district

	0-9	10+	Total
Pig farms	132	7	139
Pig Population	n/a	n/a	75
Cattle farms	1038	88	1126
Cattle population	657	13	670
Sheep population	306	7	313
Goat population	178	5	183

Source: NSO (2014), Agriculture and Fisheries

3.8   Tourism sector

Although the Xlokk territory offers a number of beaches and historical and cultural sites that are highly renowned among tourists, it lacks tourist accommodation facilities such as hotels.

In fact, there are only four small hotels in the Xlokk territory (quite a low number when considering that the Majjistral Territory includes 48 hotels) - three in Marsascala and another one in Birzebbuga. These include:

- Sensi Hotel
- Porto Scala Hotel
- Cerviola Hotel
- Sea Breeze Hotel

3.9   Construction and quarrying

According to MEPA's Minerals Subject Plan (2006), there are a total of 23 hardstone quarries and 51 softstone quarries in Malta. The majority of sofstone quarries are found in the South of Malta, while on the other hand most hardstone quarries are found in the North Western region of the island. As can be seen in
Table **31** below, Mqabba accounts for more than half of the softstone quarries in Malta, with a total of 27 softstone quarries. The following tables provide information (including location and size) on both the softstone and hardstone quarries in the Xlokk territory:

Table 31: Hardstone quarries

	Area name	Area in sqm
Zejtun	Wied Iz-Ziju	82,690.96
Zurrieq	Tal-Macina, Nigret	47,605.41
Zurrieq	Wied Moqbol	54,762.31
Zurrieq	Tal-Mizieb	15,832.83

Source: MEPA

Table 32: Softstone quarries

	Area name	Area in sqm
Kirkop	Bonu Iz-Zghir	17,164.03
Kirkop	Tal-Mejda	9,997.51
Kirkop	Tas-Sienja	17,165.96
Kirkop	Cuttalf Gandolf	27,492.01
Kirkop	Tal-Bolla	2,433.02
Qrendi	Tal-Mithna	21,499.62
Qrendi	Tal-Modorbu	10,755.77
Qrendi	Ix-Xaghri l-Imqalleb	10,379.51
Mqabba	Tas-Sejba	5,896.41
Mqabba	Ta' Misrah Sinjura	26,377.55
Mqabba	Ta' Ghadajma	58,728.87
Mqabba	Tal-Mentna	27,330.03
Mqabba	Xaghri Mqalleb	4,022.38
Mqabba	Tal-Isqof	30,190.59
Mqabba	Ta' Wied Costa	28,576.91
Mqabba	Tal-Mentna	19,163.79
Mqabba	Ta' L-Isqof	22,423.44
Mqabba	Ta' l-Isqof	19,038.68
Mqabba	Tat-Torri	19,614.07

Mqabba	Tas-Sejba	2,855.37
Mqabba	Tax-Xantin	4,940.20
Mqabba	Tax-Xantin	13,997.98
Mqabba	Tal-Hagra	22,920.06
Mqabba	L-Andar ta' Fuq	7,364.21
Mqabba	Tax-Xantin	11,459.11
Mqabba	Tas-Sejba	38,606.09
Mqabba	Tal-Isqof	17,960.52
Mqabba	Tas-Sejba	16,645.27
Mqabba	Tas-Sejba	7,293.29
Mqabba	Tal-Mentna	24,964.51
Mqabba	Tax-Xantin	13,840.30
Mqabba	Ix-Xaghri l-Imqalleb	3,442.02
Mqabba	Ta' Misrah Sinjura	5,381.22
Mqabba	Tas-Sejba	5,197.07
Mqabba	Wied Ta' Kandja	1,709.81

Source: MEPA

3.10 Environmental profile

As indicated in the data enlisted in the previous sub-sections, the Xlokk territory is characterized by:

- Significant rural and agricultural areas

- A number of historical and cultural sites

- A number of sites of natural heritage associated with agricultural and coastal areas

- Growing population with above average number of old people.

Such characteristics and activities result in added pressure on the territory. The next sub-sections continue to identify principal pressures and key challenges of the territory.

3.10.1 Biodiversity

According to The Environment Report Indicators 2010-2011, total protected areas in Malta reached 67.6km^2 or 21.5% of the Islands' land area. Moreover, 13.1% of Malta's land area formed part of the EU's Natura 2000 protected areas network as at the same date of this report. The table below summarises the designated natural areas. As can be shown from this table, the majority of protected areas in Malta is found in the North-West and Gozo district, especially when it comes to protected beaches and Nature Reserves. In addition to the areas designated as natural areas within the Xlokk region, the territory also supports a number of coastal, agricultural and other terrestrial ecosystems which provide key benefits to the communities and visitors. Further investment through protection and, in some, cases, restoration, remains important for the conservation of biodiversity within the territory, improved rural and eco-tourism, and the general well-being of the territory's community.

Table 33 - Designated Natural Areas

	Total (Malta & Gozo)		Total (Xlokk territory)	
	Number	Area in sq.km	Number	Area in sq.km
Special Areas of Conservation	35	50.44	4	0.33
Special Areas of Conservation - Marine	4	182.29	1	24.51
Special Protection area	13	16.53	-	-
Area of ecological importance	73		10	
Bird sanctuaries	26	16.55	4	6.81
Historical Trees	6	1.16	-	-
Nature Reserves	3	0.19	-	-
Protected beaches	11	0.31	-	-
Tree protection areas	30	5.35	5	0.5

Source: MEPA

3.10.2 Air Quality

According to the same MEPA report, the national annual average sulphur dioxide concentrations were on the decrease in 2010, with a percentage reduction of 5.8%. Such figure remains well below the EU critical level. Average annual benzene concentrations declined by 32.8% between the years 2008 and 2010 with no locality's average exceeding the limits imposed by the EU. On the other hand, Malta experienced higher levels of particulate matter in 2010, and in this regard, the situation might have got worse in recent years with the increased traffic flow. Annual average nitrogen dioxide concentrations decreased from $28.1\mu g/m^3$ to $26.3\mu g/m^3$ in the same period, remaining well below the EU and WHO limit value in 2010 – however, 18 out of 131 individual sites measured registered levels higher than the limit value. As for the annual average ozone concentrations, it increased marginally from $102.8\mu g/m^3$ to $102.9\mu g/m^3$ in 2010. The 8-hour limit value was exceeded in Għarb and Żejtun. Ozone in Malta comes mainly from transboundary sources.

3.10.3 Climate change

Malta's estimated GHG emissions have been relatively stable over the past years, despite an overall increase of 49% between 1990 and 2010. Almost 90% of the 2010 emissions come from the energy sector (including transport) as can be seen in the table below – this shows the energy emissions from different sectors in 2010.

Table 34 - Energy emissions from different sectors

	2010
Energy (incl. transport)	2,657.16
Industrial processes	99.52
Solvent and other product use	1.29
Agriculture	77.66
Land use, land use change and forestry	-61.58
Waste	199.45
Total	2,973.50

Source: MEPA

3.10.4 Waste

Waste generated in 2010 experienced an overall increase of 48% (to 1.4 million tonnes) from the previous year. As can be seen from the table below, 62.8% of waste generated was landfilled, down from 74.7% in 2009. On the other hand, one can note that municipal waste also decreased in 2010, by 7% from previous year.

Table 35 – Types of waste

Type of waste	Municipal Waste	Hazardous Waste	Construction and Demolition	Commercial and Industrial	TOTAL
Recycled	19,121.1	7,226.6	114,148.9	7,875.8	148,372.3
Recovered	14,954.5	-	-	-	14,954.5
Landfilled	201,555.1	-	688,061.2	18,201.9	907,818.2
Others	13,041.70	28,758.71	290,120.00	43,161.37	375,081.8
TOTAL	**248,672.3**	**35,985.3**	**1,092,330.1**	**69,239.1**	**1,446,226.8**

Source: MEPA (2010)

3.11 Summary of salient territory characteristics

The following diagram presents an overview of the key characteristics describing the territory.
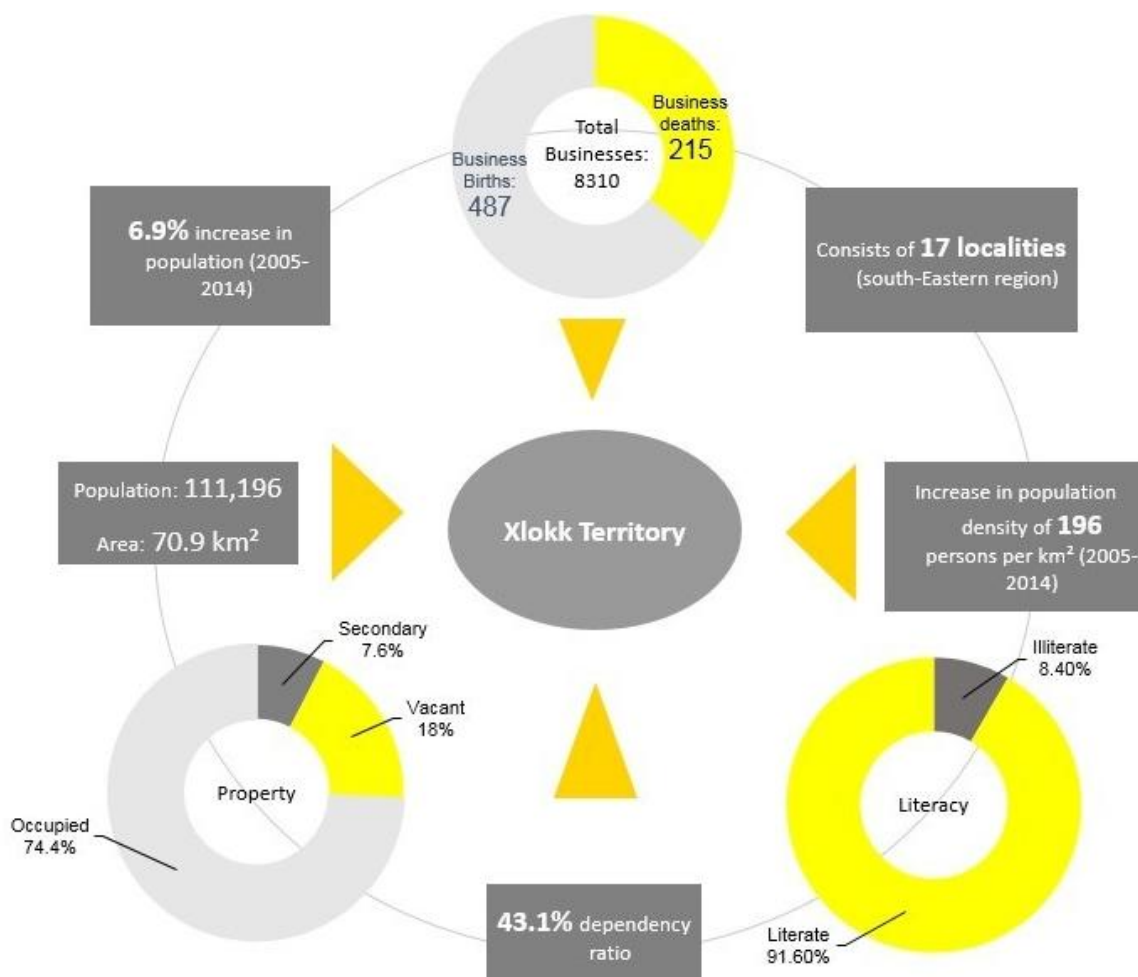
SWOT analysis

In order to further analyse the needs of the territory, the following section highlights its strengths and weaknesses and identifies relevant opportunities and threats. The Strategy is aimed at coming up with measures that:

(a) attempt to minimise both weaknesses and threats;
(b) attempt to minimise the weaknesses and to maximize tile opportunities;
(c) are based on the strengths of the territory that can deal with threats in the environment
(d) maximise 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 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 table below also presents any linkages between these factors and (a) the RDP themes identified in *Section 4.1.1* of this LDS; (b) the three main strategic needs identified in *Section 4.2.3* of this LDS; and (c) the measures presented in *Section 5.1* of this LDS.

Table 36 – SWOT

Strengths	RDP themes/ Strategic needs/ LDS measures Actions
• Strong cultural associations with the rural landscapes of the territory	• LDS Measure 2: Strengthening a healthy cultural identity
• 92% of all businesses employ less than 10 people, which is in line with national trends. Business birth rates are more than twice the business deaths	• Strategic Need 3: Creation of business sand trading opportunities, particularly in niche areas of the rural economy.
• Presence of several SMEs that have maintained cultural practices associated with specific trades and crafts	• RDP Theme 5: Wider rural economy and quality of life • Strategic Need 3: creation of business sand trading opportunities, particularly in niche areas of the rural economy • Previous LDS measure (subsequently removed from LDS following discussions with Managing Authority): Development of regional arts and crafts trading centres
• Agriculture is dominated by forage and potato cultivation	• RDP Theme 4: Landscape and environment
• Coastal areas provide important recreational and tourism sites	• RDP Theme 4: Landscape and environment • LDS Measure 3: Promotion of the cultural heritage
• Presence of several local attractions and cultural and natural heritage sites	• RDP Theme 4: Landscape and environment • LDS Measure 3: Promotion of the cultural heritage
Weaknesses	RDP themes/ Strategic needs/ LDS measures
• Ageing population	• Strategic Need 1: Cultural and social development
• Hefty increase in population density of coastal localities	• Strategic Need 1: Cultural and social development
• Relatively high percentage of illiterate people especially in the Inland localities (surpasses the national average by 3.3% points)	
• Percentage of no schooling higher than national average	
• Tertiary level attainment is below national average	
• Very small percentage of full-time skilled agricultural, fishery and forestry workers	• Strategic Need 3: Creation of business and trading opportunities, particularly in niche areas of the rural economy.
• High dependency ratios	• Strategic Need 1: Cultural and social development
• Coastal localities include a lot of secondary homes	• Strategic Need 1: Cultural and social development
• High emissions especially from the energy sector	• RDP Theme 4: Landscape and environment

• Majority of waste comes from the construction and demolition sector	• RDP Theme 1: Water, wastes and energy
• Limited access to roads, alleys, fields and a number of touristic attractions	• RDP Theme 4: Landscape and environment
• Lack of a designated crafts hub	• Strategic Need 3: creation of business and trading opportunities, particularly in niche areas of the rural economy • Previous LDS measure (subsequently removed from LDS following discussions with Managing Authority): Development of regional arts and crafts trading centres
• Small amount of designated natural areas	• RDP Theme 4: Landscape and environment • LDS Measure 4: Development of green infrastructure
• Considerable amount of tourist attraction sites, yet limited number of hotels in the territory	
• Only few initiatives that market the Xlokk's tourism product and cultural assets exist	• LDS Measure 3: Promotion of the cultural heritage
• Limited cooperation between local actors and tourism operators within the territory	• Previous LDS measure (subsequently removed from LDS following discussions with Managing Authority): Innovation, co-operation and strengthening of the knowledge base • LDS Measure 6: Trans-national and inter-territorial co-operation
• Lack of data at a regional level	LDS Measure 3: Promotion of the cultural heritage
Opportunities	**RDP themes/ Strategic needs/ LDS measures**
• Improving infrastructure in tourist attraction areas such as beaches and heritage trails	• RDP Theme 4: Landscape and environment • Strategic Need 2: beautification of rural areas, with a special focus on landscape amelioration and environmental embellishment • LDS Measure 1: Restoration of assets of artistic and cultural value
• Improved marketing of sites of touristic value	• LDS Measure 3: Promotion of the cultural heritage
• The restoration of cultural heritage sites	• LDS Measure 1: Restoration of assets of artistic and cultural value
• Improving accessibility to address the needs of the most vulnerable, especially when it comes to accessibility to areas of cultural importance	• LDS Measure 2: Strengthening a healthy cultural identity
• More investment in formal and informal educational in particular for youth and children	• Previous LDS measure (subsequently removed from LDS following discussions with Managing Authority): Innovation, co-operation and strengthening of the knowledge base
• Increase the number of sign postings to better guide and inform tourists on the available cultural/ historical sites	• LDS Measure 3: Promotion of the cultural heritage
• Knowledge dissemination and interpretation facilities development for the conservation	• LDS Measure 3: Promotion of the cultural heritage

and sustainable use of the territory's biodiversity	
• More investments to improve the cultural element of those localities that are not that renowned among tourists	• LDS Measure 2: Strengthening a healthy cultural identity • LDS Measure 3: Promotion of the cultural heritage
• Increasing investment in open spaces, public gardens and restoration of degraded sites	• RDP Theme 4: Landscape and environment • LDS Measure 4: Development of green infrastructure
• Investment in particular crafts/ skills to ensure they are passed on to future generations, in particular through information recording and digitisation	• Previous LDS measure (subsequently removed from LDS following discussions with Managing Authority): Innovation, co-operation and strengthening of the knowledge base
• Improved promotion alternative forms of tourism, namely eco-tourism and socio-cultural tourism	• LDS Measure 3: Promotion of the cultural heritage
• Improve the marketing opportunities for area's agricultural products	• LDS Measure 3: Promotion of the cultural heritage
Threats	**RDP themes/ Strategic needs/ LDS measures**
• The loss of sites/ statues/ and other areas of cultural importance, which are today in a dilapidated state	• RDP Theme 4: Landscape and environment • Strategic Need 2: beautification of rural areas, with a special focus on landscape amelioration and environmental embellishment • LDS Measure 1: Restoration of assets of artistic and cultural value
• Agricultural abandonment	• Strategic Need 2: beautification of rural areas, with a special focus on landscape amelioration and environmental embellishment
• Loss of traditional landscape features e.g. rubble walls	• RDP Theme 4: Landscape and environment • Strategic Need 2: beautification of rural areas, with a special focus on landscape amelioration and environmental embellishment • LDS Measure 1: Restoration of assets of artistic and cultural value
• Ageing population impacts expected to persist	• Strategic Need 1: Cultural and social development
• Loss of the territory's biodiversity, green infrastructure and ecosystem services as a consequence of development	• LDS Measure 4: Development of green infrastructure
• Loss of traditional knowledge associated with agriculture and fisheries	• Previous LDS measure (subsequently removed from LDS following discussions with Managing Authority): Innovation, co-operation and strengthening of the knowledge base
• Limited funding for research and development within the territory	

The factors identified in the previous table are next dealt with in more detail in the next sub-sections.

Strengths

- The Xlokk territory is characterised by a large number of rural areas and beaches. As already explained in the socio-economic analysis, there are a number of picturesque coastal areas that attract a large number of tourists every summer, including St. Peter's Pool and Wied iz-Zurrieq. Rural areas have a high cultural and natural value and act as important recreation sites for locals and tourists.

- Business birth rates in the territory are more than twice the business death rates, thus showing a level of sustainability in the future. 92% of all businesses employ less than 10 people, showing that the majority of current businesses are micro businesses formed around individual or family. Such data also reflects the entrepreneurial drive of the Xlokk territory.

- Forage and potato crops are two main products of agriculture within the Xlokk territory.

- With regards to construction, the Xlokk territory is characterised by a large number of softstone quarries, especially in Mqabba (which includes more than half the softstone quarries on the island).

- When it comes to the social aspect, investment is through the involvement (often on a voluntary basis) of entities such as band clubs and NGOs while rural localities tend to be characterised by a high social cohesion.

- It is important to add that local councils in the Xlokk territory are very active towards the improvement of their respective local community and in providing formal and informal education opportunities, in particular relating to the culture of the territory. Although they have limited access to funds, local band clubs attract several volunteers from localities and strive towards setting up activities to showcase the cultural values and talent of their members and locality.

Weaknesses

- One of the most evident weakness of the Xlokk territory is the ageing population. As evidenced in the socio-economic analysis, the Coastal and Inland localities in the Xlokk territory have 11.8% and 16.3% of their total population aged 65 and over respectively.

- On the other hand, when it comes to population increase, one must add that the Coastal localities experienced an increase in their respective population, thus further increasing the pressure on resources and infrastructure.

- Long-term illnesses in the territory are marginally higher than the national average.

- When it comes to education, there is a high percentage of illiterate people in the Xlokk territory, mostly in the Inland localities. Such percentage of illiterate people surpasses the national average by 3.3% points. Additionally, one must add that the Xlokk territory also experiences a lower-than- average tertiary level attainment.

- Although as already highlighted under the Strengths category the Xlokk territory is characterized by a large number of rural and agricultural areas, one can only find a very small number of skilled agricultural, fishery and forestry workers in the region (with the only exception being Marsaxlokk). This percentage shows that people are opting for different occupations and that traditional trades related to the agricultural sector are not as popular as they were before, potentially being lost.

- The Xlokk territory is also characterized by high dependency ratios showing the increased pressure on the territory.
- High emissions in the territory emanate mostly from the energy sector, situated within the territory.
- The majority of waste comes from the construction and demolition sector.
- One of the major weaknesses which was highly accentuated during the public consultation meetings was the current state of access roads to beaches, lighthouses, and fields. Such sites are frequented by a large number of tourists every year.
- There is also a lack of a crafts hub in the Xlokk territory which can be vital for the locals to showcase their work.
- There is small amount of designated natural areas in the Xlokk territory.
- While many tourists frequent the Xlokk territory for its picturesque landscape and beaches, accommodation in the region remains significantly limited.
- In general, there is lack of data at a regional level.

Opportunities

- In order to guarantee the maximum benefit/ utility from the territory's landscape and beaches, access leading to such areas must be improved.
- Many cultural sites are of extreme importance and provide the territory with a sense of identity. Some of these sites are in a dilapidated state and hence there is a need to restore such buildings, artefacts, and statues - to preserve them for future generations. The restoration of these buildings can hence offer an opportunity for unemployed people especially younger ones to learn specific skills.
- Another opportunity worth mentioning is the fact that various local band clubs and similar local entities organise and set up regular cultural events in their premises. Further investments should be directed at ensuring a greater reach for such events.
- Social inclusion is of utmost important for the LEADER programme and hence more investment in educational courses is always needed. Emphasis should be aimed at ensuring that such courses are aimed to the whole society, especially children.
- The dissemination of information and increasing the number of sign postings should also be emphasised. Such tools act as means to market the territory's landscape and also providing the tourists/ locals with a better understanding of the territory's must-see attractions.
- Those localities that are not that popular among tourists should be provided with the means possible to improve and invest in cultural activities, including marketing tools.
- Other opportunities lie in the need for investment in open spaces and the restoration of degraded areas, the setting up of a crafts hub which will serve as an incubator for local talent and skills, the promotion of alternative forms of tourism, and marketing opportunities related to the area's local products.

Threats

- Buildings/ statues/ artefacts and other areas of cultural and historic importance to the territory that, if not restored or taken care of, risk being lost.

- The loss of the territory's biodiversity, open spaces and agricultural areas is a significant threat associated with a strong economy, dependent on tourism and construction activities. Biodiversity plays an important role in providing benefits to local communities, e.g. through improved air quality, carbon sequestration, crop pollination and surface water run-off reduction.

- Agricultural abandonment is a significant threat arising from the limited uptake of agricultural activities by young people, which may lead to the degradation of the traditional features within the landscapes. These include rubble walls, an important functional feature of the Maltese and territory's landscapes which reduce soil erosion and provide important habitat for agrobiodiversity. There is currently a limited amount of people with the right skills to restore such rubble walls. As with several other traditional skills and knowledge associated with agriculture, skills transfer is key in this area.

- An ageing population poses a general threat to the overall Xlokk territory.

- The territory is characterised by a weak innovation element, as a consequence of the generally limiting funding for research and development. This is important to attract new business and develop new products. In particular, innovation can be useful to develop the tourism product of the territory.

4. Description and objectives of the strategy

4.1 Setting the scene

As the means by which the strategic objectives of the LEADER programme are to be implemented, the Local Development Strategy (LDS) must be in line with the Europe 2020 strategy and the overall objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). In order to be strategically aligned, the LDS needs to be oriented towards the objective of achieving balanced territorial development of rural areas, which is one of the three overall CAP long-term objectives that have been identified for EU rural development policy in the 2014-2020 period.

Furthermore, the LDS should also contribute towards the priorities of the European rural development policy, with particular focus on priority 6 which is that of promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas.

4.1.1 Malta's partnership agreement and the rural development programme

The overall strategy and objectives of the LDS need to be guided by the framework approach and prioritisation that Malta has adopted in its definition of the Community Led Local Development (CLLD) and LEADER in its Partnership Agreement (PA) for the current programming period. Malta's intention in this respect is to use the LEADER approach for the delivery of actions that serve to promote social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas. The LEADER approach is intended as a key delivery method for interventions aimed to strengthen the wider rural economy and quality of life, besides also contributing towards the achievement of thematic objectives for SMEs and social inclusion.

The PA goes on to identify the priority actions for LEADER as those that shall aim to stimulate new business activity and help support rural incomes and standard of living, including interventions such as farm diversification, investment in cultural and natural heritage, social inclusion, co-operation and knowledge transfer. The PA also places emphasis on the need for the LDS to reflect the specific needs of the designated territory which it covers.

In setting the vision and the high-level strategic objectives of the LDS, one needs to be constantly reminded of the distinguishing characteristics of the LEADER programme - the bottom-up-approach and the inclusive, local participation it promotes. These elements must serve as the foundations of the LDS and also as the backdrop against which local knowledge and ideas that are otherwise not given priority in central strategies and national programmes are translated into an integrated and inclusive LDS.

In defining this LDS, one also needs to be guided by the fact that this is the second cycle of implementation of the LEADER programme in Malta (since it was launched in the programming period 2007-2013), and therefore, while this presents an opportunity to address deficiencies and to improve the delivery of the value of the LEADER actions, it is acknowledged that the aim of the 2014-2020 rural development policy is to build on the

foundations and recognition that have been created in the previous cycle.

The contribution of the LDS to the focus areas and the cross-cutting objectives of Malta's rural development policy are well-defined. It is recognised that Local Action Groups (LAGs) play a key role in developing networks or clusters of small-scale producers and other stakeholders that can work together to develop rural tourism. This networking aspect is also given importance as a means by which LAGs can share experiences and engage in knowledge transfer operations both within their own territory and outside or trans-nationally, via co-operation actions. The power of the LDS to bring together different actors from diverse backgrounds and motives to collaborate for a common result is a defining feature of the LDS, and the Malta Rural Development Programme (RDP) places deserved importance on this aspect.

In terms of type of actions that are given priority for support by the LEADER programme, the RDP identifies cultural, touristic and artisanal interventions, interventions that encourage economic growth and jobs, innovation, capitalisation of rural assets, family farming, farm diversification, co-operation and knowledge transfer, as well as the use of ICT.

It is a requirement for the LDS to serve as a mechanism for the contribution of the cross-cutting objectives of the Malta RDP – the environment, innovation, and climate action. These elements are seen to result mainly as a consequence of the selection of projects, however it is recognised that LEADER offers scope to programme actions that are directly intended to serve environmental sustainability and innovation.

Finally, it is important to programme LDS measures by grouping types of activity together in a logical manner, by themes to form coherent packages rather than as individual actions. In accordance to the requirement for the LDS to be structured around one or several of the themes defined by the Malta RDP, these themes may be viewed as horizontal topics that help to integrate Union priorities for rural development at a programme level. The five main themes in the Malta RDP are:

- Theme 1. Water, wastes and energy: improving sustainable use and generating renewable energy
- Theme 2. Maltese quality produce: improving quality, traceability, strategic marketing, adding value, branding and promotion
- Theme 3. Sustainable livestock: improving resource efficiency, competitiveness and productivity, and welfare
- Theme 4. Landscape and environment: managing habitats and features
- Theme 5. Wider rural economy and quality of life: developing rural tourism, rural skills and promoting social inclusion

4.1.2 The previous local development strategy

In recognition of the need to build upon the previous experience and reputation of the LEADER programme attained during the period 2007-2013, it is important to consider the vision and strategic objectives that were established in the first LDS for the Xlokk region for

that period. This exercise serves to provide a context for highlighting areas of convergence of strategy as well as divergence of approach of the current LDS with respect to the previous one.

The overall objective of 'achieving a rural and sustainable development in the southern part of Malta' called for a broad and encompassing vision, which translated as a scenario in which the region is actively promoted and the quality of life of the people in the territory is improved. This vision was considered to be a balance between aligning to national objectives, and providing a focus on the attention that the region and its people need and deserve.

In terms of approach, the core strategic objectives were defined on the basis of the analysis of the territory while giving priority to the issues that emerged as a result of the consultation. On the basis of this approach, the main core strategic objectives that have been established in the LDS for the Xlokk region for the period 2007-2013 were:

- Strengthening the identity of the region;
- Enhancing community cohesiveness;
- Making the region more attractive;
- Assisting agriculture and niche products; and
- Animation of the territory.

4.2   Setting the strategy

4.2.1 Intervention logic

First and foremost, the LDS is a tool for funding of operations within the territory and for this purpose it must abide to the principles of the LEADER approach and fulfill the criteria that define a strategy that is adequate and fit-for-purpose in that it provides a means by which actions that add value to the region are implemented. This is a balance that can only be attained by building a strategy that allows for actions that are bound to the opportunity that is to be created rather than to the issues that need to be overcome. In this regard, the SWOT analysis provides the necessary foundation for the intervention logic behind each measure.

What this LDS sets out to do is the result of an analysis of the geographical and socio-economic profile of the region, particularly how it changed in recent years, against the background of the culture and historic traditions which define it. This analysis is complimented by the results of a wide and sufficiently long-lasting consultation which served to give form and substance to specific proposals and types of operations that would otherwise have remained more generic or unknown.

In view of the importance attached to balanced territorial development, this strategy aims to be widely inclusive, to accommodate the diversity and the richness of the territory and its people, and to ensure that no person is left outside, and no idea, however embryonic or risky, is left behind. This is the means by which the strategy builds on the strengths of the

region, providing focus through the objectives that have been identified on the basis of the most pressing needs emerging from the said analysis and prioritisation.

The need for focus is also a strong requirement in view of the fact that the strategy cannot accommodate all proposals and wishes. In this respect, focus is provided by choosing to build in areas that have a strong foundation (e.g. culture and traditions and the arts), and by targeting sectors and activities that have potential. In this respect the SWOT analysis provides excellent evidence.

The question of how well these actions serve the good of the community and how much of a mark they do leave, long after the project is done, is also a constant that helps define priorities. This approach is used to delineate the scope of the strategy to something that given the limitation of budget, addresses with more rapidity the issues that although not urgent, are most important. These are the long-term goals that require careful planning in order to be achieved.

Added focus is also provided through measure design and the in-built targeting, thresholds, selection criteria and prioritisation of operations and/or target groups. Again, this approach needs to be conducted in a manner that strikes the right balance between stimulating and supporting value-added operations and ensuring that the strategy remains truthful to the principles of inclusion and solidarity.

The LDS must serve the very strong sense of identity of the people in the territory, and the manner in which this identity is established through land and stone and the way things have always been done. The challenge here is to strike a balance between the need to steer growth and development in traditional territory as well as serving more innovative objectives and ideas.

The LDS acknowledges that the need for ownership and direct action often conflicts with the adoption of a collaborative approach and that this is a reality that is not easily changed. The need to encourage co-operation, and to stimulate a collaborative approach among different entities with separate agendas, e.g. by joining up different localities, each with its own culture and identity, would also need to respect the wishes of the people in terms of what they want to do, and how far they are willing to go.

4.2.2 Setting the vision

In essence, the LDS is a strategy fabricated by the people and for the people, with the unique aim to create opportunities for a better quality of life. These are opportunities for valorising the assets of the territory; for transforming the local know-how into a prospect for business and pleasure; to give space to the smaller projects that normally lag behind in the list of priorities; to enable people who, for one reason or another are not performing as well as the rest of the local community of which they form part; to provide some form of resilience in the face of happenings that challenge the traditional status; and to empower the people to move forwards and be part of the same inevitable change that transforms their territory and their way of life.

This is the vision that guides the strategy and the logic that underpins the measures and actions that have been programmed in order to achieve the objectives that have been chosen by and agreed with the people living and using their territory and working to make it better.

4.2.3 Defining the needs

The base of needs that this strategy is intended to address builds on the needs identified in the territorial analysis, the consultation process, and the experience of the GXF, within the overarching need to ensure that all actions that are supported by the LEADER fund have a broad social impact on the community. In this respect, the socio-economic profile of the territory, its geographical and landscape typologies, and the findings of the consultation, bear most relevance to the overall strategic visioning of the LDS and the definition of priority objectives and how these needs and objectives are to be translated into tangible actions and projects.

Firstly, as evidenced by the turn-out to public consultation meetings, and the number of responses/proposals received in one form or another, the LEADER programme enjoys the confidence of the people to deliver value to the community. As a result of the experience gained from the previous programme there is a positive and sustained response to the call for participation in the definition of needs and priorities for action. This response is matched with an expectation that the current LDS should be able to support a larger quantity of better-quality projects. On account that the overall budget allocation for LDS actions for the Xlokk region cannot support a large number of projects, the LDS needs to be focused towards achieving high-priority objectives while at the same time ensuring equitable distribution and inclusion. These considerations determine the structure of the LDS measures, including criteria such as the relative weighting of actions, the budget capping and upper thresholds of expenditure for certain cost items, where applicable.

This also means that the good reputation that the LEADER programme enjoys needs to be safeguarded, so that it can continue to deliver value to the rural community. For this reason, the LDS dedicates due emphasis on the implementation and management capacity of the GXF, including the organisation and capacity of the group, and the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that need to be set in place.

Experience from the previous programme pointed to the need for a more focused strategy, and better streamlining of operations that is proportionate to the administrative and implementation capacity of the management structures, as well as an increased drive towards collaborative actions and integrated operations, in view of the need for concerted projects that make use of common resources and assets while serving to embellish and promote the region, or parts of, as a whole.

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

1. cultural and social development;

2. beautification of the rural areas, with a special focus on landscape amelioration and environmental embellishment; and
3. creation of business and trading opportunities, particularly in niche areas of the rural economy.

The two other needs which emerged strongly from the territorial evidence were the need to invest in the knowledge base and skills of the rural community, encouraging the inter-sectoral and inter-generational transfer of traditional knowledge that is in danger of being lost; and the need to promote the territory in view of its unique cultural and traditional heritage and to develop rural tourism opportunities in combination with other initiatives.

This analysis of the territory, particularly in terms of the strengths that the region offers, such as the large number of rural areas and several areas with high landscape value/ assets, active local councils, and a high number of cultural organisations that are run on a voluntary basis with a mission to teach children and other persons in the local communities; and the opportunities that are available in this scenario, such as the possibility to invest in elements of cultural value in localities that are not well-reached by tourists, and the potential to create areas of high landscape value that is compatible with ecological areas and to use these areas for environmental sustainability, educational and leisure purposes, leads to the definition of the strategic objectives that shape this strategy.

On this basis, the strategic objectives that define this LDS and thus delimit the scope of supported interventions, in order of priority, are the following:

1. To invest in the development of the cultural landscape and social heritage of the territory;
2. To invest in the development of the environmental landscape of the rural areas;
3. To invest in the development of rural enterprise and trading activities;
4. To invest in the transfer of skills and development of the knowledge base of the rural communities;
5. To invest in the development of the tourism product of the rural areas.

Together, these strategic objectives are geared towards the improvement of the quality of life of the people and the improvement of the quality of the environment of the areas, by creating new or improved opportunities for business and/or recreation, and by making the areas more attractive for residents and visitors.

This vision for the Xlokk territory and the setting of priority objectives on the basis of needs and opportunities, allows for a number of parallels to be drawn, in approach and substance, in common with the previous strategy for the territory (for 2007-2013), particularly with respect to aspects concerning the strengthening of the identity of the region and making the areas more attractive.

In conjunction with the horizontal objectives described in the following sections, these strategic objectives define the shaping of this LDS and determine the rationale for each of the programmed measures.

4.3   Consistency, complementarity and synergy

4.3.1 Correspondence to the themes of the rural development programme

The analysis of the findings and the prioritisation of needs showed a strong correspondence to two themes of the RDP – the theme dealing with the wider economy and quality of life, and the theme on landscape and the environment. This preference comes as no surprise. Firstly, it is to be recalled that theme 5 of the Malta RDP for a wider rural economy and quality of life embodies the elements of rural development on a local level that go beyond the agricultural sector. In fact, this theme has ranked highest in the list of desired outcomes when these were grouped by theme during the consultation process for the preparation of the Malta RDP.

Secondly, it is known that non-LEADER measures of the RDP provide all types of support for investment and improvement in farm production, farm business, infrastructure for agriculture, agriculture-related services (including insurance), non-productive investments, support for quality schemes of agricultural products, etc., and that the LEADER programme would, ideally, need to complement rather than duplicate any of the RDP measures in principle and in scope and thus provide support for activities that take place around the same agricultural land supporting the production of food, and latch onto the rural fabric woven by the agriculture-based communities.

As envisaged in the RDP, the theme for a wider rural economy and quality of life is the repository of activities that can flourish in rural areas, almost exclusively. These are rural tourism, farm diversification, rural business start-ups and entrepreneurship, rural services, inclusive employment (for women, young, vulnerable), and life-long learning in areas that do not form part of the core topics of national curricula. These activities are made possible by the mix of resources that are found in rural areas as opposed to urban, more densely populated areas with little or no agricultural activity – traditions that are passed on from one generation to another, life around the village core, artisanal arts and crafts, local varieties and breeds and related recipes, land, soil, valleys, water, rural structures, rural architecture, religious feasts and cultural traditions that are enshrined in the calendar of the community, sacred art, architecture, chapels, the list goes on.

The Malta RDP identifies landscape and the environment as one of the major strengths of the programming area. The budgetary allocation to this horizontal theme reflects the importance given to this theme, also as a result of the prominence it received during consultation with stakeholders, ranking second in the overall list. The Malta RDP goes on to define the environment as an important economic and cultural asset and recognises that the cultural landscape is perhaps even more distinctive and unique than the natural environment, showing evidence of centuries of habitation and layers of rich archaeological, historical, and cultural heritage.

In this strategy, the measures that are aligned to the achievement of the goals of the thematic area of landscape and the environment of the Malta RDP, particularly the development of green infrastructure, and the restoration of assets of cultural value to a

lesser extent, are designed in recognition of the strong attachment that the people have to their environment whether natural or cultural, and in appreciation of the wealth, perhaps still to be exploited, that their environment holds. The overarching aim of these and other measures that result in an improvement in the quality of the environment, is to empower people to act as guardians of this heritage, and to be able to make use of the resources available in a sustainable manner, one which guarantees benefit and durability in time.

4.3.2 Complementarity with other funds and the EAFRD

As LEADER is a method used for rural development on the local level, its scope covers in principle all the instruments supported by the EAFRD. Therefore, in order to ensure complementarity with other funds, including the EAFRD that is normally structured around standard ("top-down") operations, this strategy realises the added value that LEADER operations are meant to achieve through specific eligibility conditions as for example: small scale projects, integrated projects (with more than one objective), innovative/experimental projects including pilot projects and studies, area-based projects, and cooperation projects. This emphasis on small-scale operations is in fact one of the determining criteria for the delineation and demarcation with other funds including the EAFRD.

In addition, bearing in mind that the non-LEADER measures of the RDP are targeted towards the improvement of agricultural productivity, also in terms of quality, the scope of actions for the measures programmed within this LDS excludes agricultural primary production activities. This provides for complementarity with the non-LEADER EAFRD measures, and also fosters development in other sectors of the rural economy that are not equally served by other funds.

The fact that the RDP already provides support for actions that are normally also supported by LEADER, such as farm diversification activities (subject to MA approval), including social, educational and health services that can be provided by rural enterprises building on the farm assets, effectively means that the LDS cannot include similar measures, even if these are considered as classical LEADER-type interventions. The issue is that adequate demarcation between such measures in the LDS and measures in the RDP could not be established.

In consideration of the need to provide access to LEADER funds to all sectors of the business and social community in the Xlokk region, including the agricultural community, who is also represented by a number of organised agrarian societies and producers' associations, the measures in this LDS have been programmed to encourage and foster initiatives by these agrarian groups that capitalise on the rural heritage provided by agriculture and are aimed towards continued cultural and social development, in line with the major strategic objective of this strategy. Examples of such initiatives include the setting up of new activities and experiences in the region that build on the agricultural traditions, practices, products and implements, as well as the relationship that the sector has with natural resources, the weather, and the history and the culture of the rural communities and that provide opportunities for the creation of new cultural and/or commercial activities that build around culinary/gastronomic experiences, and educational initiatives such as promotion of health and nutrition aspects in schools.

This feature of the LDS is considered an important element that serves the principles of inclusion and integration since it provides an opportunity for an important group within the rural society of the Xlokk region to participate in the advancement of the territory's economic and social development.

The issue remains, however, that since there is no line of demarcation between farm diversification actions that can be supported by the RDP and those that can potentially receive support under this LDS, it is impossible to provide access to members of the agricultural community who wish to invest in their farm holdings in order to improve their economic performance, mainly through the provision of farm diversification services. In considering this issue, one needs to bear in mind that measures for the diversification of business and the creation of new economic opportunities, also by providing support to farms, are considered to be an example of a classical intervention in the LEADER domain. Moreover, these measures would be structured in such a way as to provide increased accessibility to funding (as well as a higher aid intensity) to smaller-scale interventions that are conducted by farmers who do not necessarily have the financial capacity to invest in large-scale investments, and tend to receive less priority when assessed against the same set of criteria as other farmers with better financial standing.

The fact that the RDP 2014-2020 is wider in scope than the previous programme, as well as that it precedes the programming of the LDS means that it was not possible to identify the means by which the two programmes could complement each other in terms of supporting farm diversification activities. It is to be recalled that the previous LDS supported a number of projects intended to improve agricultural operations, also through the management of measures supporting interventions such as improving the infrastructure for agriculture, and development of rural tourism as a form of farm diversification service. This means that members of the agricultural community look towards the LEADER programme as a possible source of funding for agriculture-related investments, particularly in cases where conditions could be stipulated to favour very small enterprises that would benefit from the type of assistance that the GXF can provide, by way of being more knowledgeable about the local and specific situations.

On the basis of this type of knowledge about the territory, and the very strong drive for measures that support farm diversification activities in the Xlokk region, demonstrated by the consultees and the wider stakeholders group, a separate measure for farm diversification and fostering rural enterprise has been programmed in this LDS. In view of the recognition that at the time of programming this strategy, a clear line of demarcation with the relevant measure of the RDP could not be established, this measure is not being included in the action programme, but positioned as a 'dormant' measure that would potentially be activated on condition that the required demarcation is established. In accordance to discussions on the subject, this demarcation could possibly be set through a minimum threshold for investment in the RDP measure – e.g. minimum investment of 50,000 EUR, permitting the corresponding LDS measure to support investments below that threshold.

This proposition to include a separate measure for farm diversification in the LDS that can only be activated once the necessary safeguard mechanisms are put in place to guarantee that there is no risk of double funding for the same or similar type of operations, is a very significant element of the strategy for the Xlokk region, in recognition of the community which it serves. In this respect, the GXF commits to maintain the dialogue with the Managing Authority for the RDP so that this measure can be activated and launched as early as possible in the implementation cycle of the LDS.

4.3.3 Consistency and coherence

It is important to guarantee that all operations supported by the LEADER programme on a local level are in synergy with national policies and developments. This aspect is particularly relevant for policy areas such as culture, life-long learning, enterprise, tourism, waste, agriculture, employment, water, energy, climate action and the environment. For this reason, the consultation with the public was preceded by an expansive consultation with policy makers in each of the areas of relevance to the design of this strategy. The aims of this exercise were to make sure that LEADER actions are in line with national policies and plans, thereby using this process of consultation as a cross-check mechanism for the 'bottom-up' prioritisation of proposals, and to identify potential areas for local action within the national plans that can feed into the programmed measures as examples for possible projects.

Having national policy as a reference framework for possible LEADER-type action ensures internal coherence of the LDS, and a consistency of approach, by providing a foundation on which the rationale for each measure can be based.

4.4 Horizontal objectives

4.4.1 Equal opportunities

This LDS makes use of the same principles with regards to the setting of selection criteria that are adopted in the RDP, by including social criteria to enable preference to be given to proposed interventions that contribute towards the promotion of equal opportunities, equality, non-discrimination and improved accessibility.

4.4.2 Environmental sustainability

The quality of life of people living in rural areas is dependent on the natural environment and the rural resources it supports. In turn, the impact of operations in the rural areas, and especially of interventions in the non-built environment, could include undesirable effects, such as irreversible modification to natural habitats and landscapes. It is therefore extremely important that projects and actions that are implemented through the LDS respect the environment and environmental sustainability principles.

The approach taken to guarantee the environmental sustainability of operations undertaken

in the ambit of the implementation of the LDS is on two levels. Sufficient budgetary allocation is directed towards the measure for the development of green infrastructure that addresses the priority objective of investing in the environmental landscape of rural areas. The list of possible operations that are likely to emerge under this measure include rehabilitation of gardens and small, green areas, creation of new open green spaces on derelict/degraded sites, installation of green belts and corridors within the localities and connecting different localities in rural areas, use of green infrastructure for the provision of environmental services within the urban spaces, interpretation and training, awareness and education.

At another level, the LDS sets out the principles of environmental sustainability through the establishment of environmentally-relevant eligibility and selection criteria. Where relevant and possible, eligibility criteria include conditions that are intended to ensure that the interventions do not result in any type of damage to the environment, and that they respect the environment in which they are set, in other words, the development must be fully compatible with the surrounding environment. When considering development of any type outside of the built-up areas, for example, one way to test whether the proposed development is justified is to ask whether it would have been possible for that development to take place in the urban zone.

Other considerations that need to be considered, either as eligibility criteria, or in the set of more detailed requirements in the relevant call for applications and accompanying guidelines for action, would be related to the site suitability for the type of proposed development, the absence of irregularities and illegalities on the land in question, the compliance to domestic permitting regime and guidelines on the development in Outside Development Zones (ODS), whether the project shall result in a demand for engineered infrastructure and/or increased vehicular access and emissions, etc. As stated earlier, the general guiding principle that is reflected in the eligibility criteria is that the proposed project fully respects the environment. In addition, in line with national policy, interventions in the countryside/ODZ should not result in the formalisation of these areas and should make use of eco-materials and green building techniques. In this way, the distinctive aesthetic quality of these rural areas is maintained, and the form of the land and the arrangement of species, habitats and non-living elements is not disturbed.

With respect to climate action, although the same approach is being taken in this LDS as that for the environment, it is acknowledged that the impact of LEADER actions on climate is less relevant than that on the environment and the landscape.

4.4.3 Innovation

Again, the need to stimulate innovation is achieved by providing support for operations that are targeted towards innovation, within the scope of actions that are provided for in the relevant measure, and by integrating, as much as possible, elements of innovation in selection criteria and in measure design. By way of providing support for relatively more risky, innovative operations that are reliant on joint collaboration among different local actors, the measure for innovation, collaboration and development of the knowledge base is a central driver of innovation and as such a major contributor to the cross-cutting

objective of instilling innovation as a central pillar of rural development policy.

4.4.4 Co-operation

The need for co-operation to mitigate against the limited value of stand-alone operations, but more importantly as a tool for joint ownership and transfer of experience, is addressed through the same dedicated measure that is intended to support innovative projects, by way of demanding that the formation of the group or cluster is a pre-condition for eligibility. The same principle is also adopted across other measures where preference is given to collaboration through the setting of relevant selection criteria.

5. Definition and development of the Action Plan

This section explains the Strategy's Action Plan by providing a detailed description of each measure falling under the objectives described in the previous section.

5.1 Measures by objective

The measures designed for the Action Plan for the Xlokk territory are presented below and classified as per the previously discussed territory-specific strategic objectives. A total of five measures have originally been designed targeting the three identified objectives. These were reduced to four measures targeting two identified objectives. Detailed descriptions for each measure are presented in the subsequent subsections.

Objective 1: Development of the cultural landscape, social heritage and tourism product of the rural territory
1.1   Restoration of assets of artistic and cultural value
1.2   Strengthening a healthy cultural identity
1.3   Promotion of the cultural heritage

Objective 2: Development of the environment landscape of the rural territory
2.1   Development of green infrastructure

Operations by the Foundation
1.1   Trans-national and inter-territorial co-operation
1.2   Running costs and animation

Another measure was also designed following feedback received from various stakeholders through the different communication channels adopted. This relates to a farm diversification initiative, but following discussions with the MA, we understand that such an initiative is also being contemplated through the RDP. As a result, this measure is being removed from the suggested LDS financial budget, and shown in ***Appendix 1*** as "optional" (e.g. in case there are budget savings from other measures), for illustration purposes.

Originally, the LDS included another measure titled: ''Training and Education''; however, the Covid-19 pandemic lead to the removal of the mentioned measure. The removal of the measure was accepted by the Change Request Review Board on the 3rd November 2020 with decision, REF: CR 667.

In the case of all measures, the GXF 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[9], and eligibility and selection criteria.

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[9] Local Councils should note the content of Circular Number 19/2016, which tackles local councils' participation in LAG measures and LAG membership.

5.2 Measure 1: Restoration of assets of artistic and cultural value

Measure title: Restoration of assets of artistic and cultural value
Measure Code: LDS 19.2.01

a) Aim, Rationale and Scope of Action

Specific Objectives

The general aim of this measure is to invest in the cultural and historical heritage of the territory as a means to strengthen and promote the area's identity. The purpose is to support the one-time restoration of objects of artistic and cultural importance.

The specific objective of this measure is to improve the social and economic performance of the GXF territory, by the end of the applicable programming period, through 57 projects resulting in the restoration of objects that have a historical and cultural link to the territory.

Rationale

The analysis of the GXF 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. 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 identity, fostering job creation and facilitating the diversification of the economy of the rural areas making up the GXF territory. This measure supports the one-time restoration of these small-scale items, while also promoting the cultural and historical identity of the GXF territory by opening up opportunities for educational and tourism activities related to the artistic, cultural, historical and inspirational value of the restored items.

Scope of action

This action supports the restoration of small-scale objects of significant cultural and historical value to the territory with reasonable free access by the general public. Specifically, objects and artefacts that are not accessible for public viewing, such as items in private collections/ gardens, are excluded from the scope of this measure and do not qualify for support.

b) General description of the Action

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 conservation of paintings of significant artistic and historical value;
- the restoration of *objets d'art*, located within the territory and which have a religious or cultural significance to the community;
- the restoration of local statues or street niches;
- the restoration of historical archives found on the territory;
- the restoration of chapel facades and shrines, and the exhibition of sacred art and historical objects to the public;
- the conservation of features of historical importance within sites that are accessible to the general public e.g. public gardens;
- the restoration of artefacts found in the interior of registered VOs and NGOs premises that are accessible to the general public free of charge

Type of support

The form of support provided by this measure is a grant support in the form of reimbursement of eligible costs that have been actually incurred and paid, together with, where applicable, other contributions as may be specified in the call for applications. It is pertinent to note that, as in the case with all measures, all eligible costs related to the project will be treated as such from the signing of the contract with GXF if the project is selected for funding.

Action intervention logic

Malta's Partnership Agreement (PA) recognises cultural heritage 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 cultural heritage as a key objective, and recognises the need for efforts to protect and promote cultural heritage with a view to contributing towards Malta's tourism product.

The restoration of 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 I (OP1). Under this priority, the government 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 identity and tourism product at a more local level.

The Malta RDP identifies 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 features and artefacts within the territory are seen as an asset with significant cultural value, and which provide an opportunity to promote local development. This measure will support one-off small scale restoration projects to promote the cultural identity and subsequently, to continue to develop the tourism product of the GXF territory, whilst encouraging job creation, cooperation, diversification and capitalisation of rural assets.

Contribution to cross-cutting objectives of the rural development programme

The restoration of objects of cultural value will promote confidence in the territory's rural and cultural identity and provide opportunities for capacity building, both of which are aspects associated with an improved rural economy and quality of life, as identified within the innovation cross-cutting objective of the RDP.

c) Eligible Beneficiaries

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

- Local councils
- Registered Voluntary Organisations & NGOs (regularly registered with the Office of the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations, in line with the Voluntary Organisations Act 2007, and regularly operating within the Xlokk territory)
- Natural Persons

d) Eligible and non-eligible costs

Only costs incurred from the date of signing of the contract/grant agreement with the Foundation shall be eligible. The Foundation 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 may relate to two types of investments:

- Type 1: Structural investments that are directly related to the restoration of the object.
- Type 2: Other investments, such as external expertise and public relations as well as professional research, associated with the development of educational, tourism and information dissemination initiatives.

The following is an indicative list of eligible and non-eligible costs; more restrictive eligibility of expenditure conditions may be stipulated in the call for applications for this measure.

Eligible costs

Where applicable, the investment in the restoration must be in line with all relevant planning, environmental and development permits, including permits from the competent authorities responsible for the restoration and heritage.

The following is an indicative list of eligible costs:

a. Costs that are directly related to the restoration of the items or object or artefact or feature;
b. General professional fees linked to expenditure in point (a) up to a maximum of 10% of the total eligible costs of the project;
c. Costs linked to public relations.

Costs shall be eligible if incurred within the project duration (between the project start date and termination date).

Non-eligible costs

The following is an indicative list of costs which shall not be eligible:
a. interest on debt; and
b. value added tax except where it is non-recoverable under national VAT legislation.
c. work in kind

e) Eligibility and selection criteria

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 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 Xlokk 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 proposed project contributes to at least one indicator target;

- The item/artefact/site must be accessible to the general public and must be free of charge.

Selection criteria

An evaluation of the proposed actions that meet all the eligibility criteria shall be carried out in accordance with the selection criteria set out in the grid below. This permits the proposed actions that are eligible for funding to be ranked with priority being given to proposals that are deemed to be more value-for-money.

To be considered for funding or to be placed on the reserve list, a project must pass all the Eligibility Criteria and must also obtain a minimum of 50 marks out of the total marks allocated to the Selection Criteria. Please note that in relation to the above, for every criteria there are sub-criteria which the Project Selection Committee will be using to mark the projects. The following table presents suggested selection criteria for this measure – marks are being shown for illustrative purposes only and are subject to further change following confirmation of such measures.

	Selection criteria and sub-criteria	Maximum points
1	Relevance to the objective of the measure	20
1a	Evidence of cultural value of the asset in question	10
1b	Evidence of the tourism potential of the asset that is to be restored	10
2	Link to the territory	20
2a	Evidence that the asset to be restored has a historical link to the area	10
2b	Evidence that the asset to be restored is linked to other sites/assets of cultural value in the same area	5
2c	Evidence that the asset to be restored is linked to other sites/assets of touristic value in the same area	5
3	Type of project	20
3a	The project is an integrated project in that incorporates the achievement of more than one objective	5
3b	The project is area-based and targets more than one site/asset within the same area	10
3c	The project is a co-operative project; in that it involves more than one local actor	5
4	Social impact on the community	15
4a	The project has an element of information and education that is targeted to children	5
4b	The project has an element of information and education that is targeted to youths	5
4c	The project has an element of information and education that is targeted to persons with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	5
5	Preparedness	15

5a	Evidence that the necessary consultation with stakeholders has taken place	10
5b	Evidence that the necessary consultation with regulatory entities (e.g. Superintendent of Heritage) has taken place	5
6	Sustainability	10
6a	Evidence that the project has a neutral or positive impact on the environment and the climate	5
6b	Evidence that the project has a neutral or positive impact on gender and other forms of non-discrimination policies	5

f) 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.

g) Budget allocation towards Action

The total budget allocation under this measure is 640,508.96 EUR. Grant support is capped at 20,000 EUR per project.

h) Targets and clear, adequate indicators to measure the success of the action

At least 57 projects leading to the one-time restoration of artefacts.

	Indicator	Target	Indicator Type
1	Number of beneficiaries receiving support for investment in non-agricultural activities in rural areas	33	RDP PI
2	Number of restoration projects of artefacts of important cultural value	57	LDS-specific PI

i) Risks in implementation and mitigation factors

A main risk associated with this measure is the lack of dissemination of information on the object of cultural value, resulting in a lower socio-economic impact of the project. This risk is being mitigated through the inclusion of selection criteria that favour projects with tourism potential and an increased awareness of target groups.

Another risk associated with this measure is that of providing support to activities that could be easily transferable to other territories, that is, the proposed activities have a weak dependence on the territory and its people. This risk is being mitigated through the requirements for strong territorial attachment in the selection criteria.

j) Overall assessment and relevance of the Action

This measure promotes the cultural identity of the territory by supporting projects restoring artefacts and other small-scale cultural assets. As such, it 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 this objective and may serve as a precursor to the implementation of actions under the measure for promotion of the cultural heritage.

This measure complements the other measure intended to strengthen the cultural identity of the region, and improving the social performance, by supporting activities that are aimed at strengthening the cultural identity. 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.

5.3 Measure 2: Strengthening a healthy cultural identity

Measure title: Strengthening a healthy cultural identity
Measure Code: LDS 19.2.02

a) Aim, Rationale and Scope of Action

Specific Objectives

The overall objective of this measure is to strengthen a healthy cultural identity in the rural community and to improve the quality of life of people living in rural areas by providing improved and easier access to high-quality cultural and social investments as a means for personal development, expression, and entertainment.

The specific objective is, by the end of the applicable programming period, to improve the social performance of the GXF area through actions leading to 77 projects resulting in new or improved cultural investments and in 6,000 participants.

Rationale

The analysis of the territory and the results of the consultations have both demonstrated a uniquely strong element of the community's need to establish its identity, on a regional as well as on a local scale, through cultural and social investments, and a strong emphasis on the need to invest in projects that develop this cultural heritage of the rural community. In this sense, culture is seen as a driver and a destination.

As the analysis of the territory and its population shows, and as rightly echoed by the public on more than one occasion during consultation sessions, culture is the cradle that best accommodates the diverse investments and interests of a rural community that is continuously in evolution. Culture is a dynamic concept and a multi-functional vehicle, one that reflects the aspirations of the community, while providing a means for expression and development as well as for the improvement in the quality of life of the individual and society.

Against this evidence, the need to support the development and strengthening of cultural and social investments in their many and very diverse forms, is both logical and justified, as these investments represent the people's way of life within the rural communities. The rationale to encourage a very wide scope of actions with a cultural dimension stems from the evidence of the existence of a wide spectrum of cultural investments, and a desire to continue to build on the already established cultural heritage, as well as expand on it. With this reasoning, the aim is two-fold: to ensure that no group or sector is excluded, however small or under-represented it is, as long as it has a genuine intent to engage in the creation and development of cultural investments with true links to the rural territory in which it operates, and to stimulate the further development and growth of this rich cultural and social fabric of the community.

This measure is built on the premise that without the necessary investment in the infrastructure, these cultural and social investments would not be possible. This need is

more evident when one considers that most of the investments in question are run by local voluntary groups, with little or no access to alternative sources of funding. The intention is therefore to use the LEADER fund to provide support for the necessary initial infrastructure to be put in place, such that the activity can be sustained in the longer term.

Scope of action

This measure is intended to provide support for the setting up and/or quality improvement of activities, events, experiences and sessions of cultural and social value, that have a strong link to the historical, social and cultural development of the locality or the region, build on the rural heritage of the areas, and that are aimed to provide a means of entertainment and recreation, social space and expression for members of the community. Support under this measure shall be provided for the investments undertaken in any one or a combination of the following areas[10]: arts and crafts (including performing arts, dance, film, literature and theatre productions; trades and artisanal crafts and products), music, sports, adventure (including outdoor adventure and scouting), life skills (including survival and leadership skills), gastronomy and culinary experiences, agrarian traditions and heritage, and trades and traditional practices (including fisheries and farming).

This measure supports interventions that are aimed to invest in the infrastructure for new or improved[11] cultural and social investments to take place within the Xlokk territory. Such investment includes improvements to immoveable property/premises from which the group operates, and other related ancillary investments in equipment and facilities that are necessary for the activity or event.

b) General description of the Action

Description of the type of operation

Based on the analysis of the territory and the findings of the consultation exercise, the following indicative list presents best estimates of the type of operations that are likely to be supported through this measure, in relation to investments undertaken, or the development of existing ones:

- theatrical productions related to traditions.
- cultural/social clubs' investments.
- investments in the form of exhibitions and events by agrarian societies.
- cooking and tasting experiences for products of traditional origin.
- investments related to artisanal, arts and crafts products.
- sports, outdoor adventure, leisure and fitness related investments.

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[10] The support provided through this measure should be aimed at creating a LEADER legacy – through sustainable projects. For instance, a theatre production should look into investment in props rather than investments in a one-time event.

[11] During the application process, in the case of proposed improvements to existing activities, prospective applicants will be asked to provide details of the (a) current Situation of the event in question; (b) weaknesses that are being faced; and (c) a plan of action to improve such activities to address such weaknesses.

- permanent exhibitions of objects of unique cultural/artistic/historical value.
- experiences involving various forms of arts focusing on the engagement of the participants.
- In all cases, these operations shall involve investment-type operations, including development of infrastructure

Type of support

The form of support provided by this measure is a grant support in the form of reimbursement of eligible costs that have been actually incurred and paid, together with, where applicable, other contributions as may be specified in the call for applications. Additionally, all eligible costs related to the project will be treated as such from the signing of the contract with GXF if the project is selected for funding.

Action intervention logic

As shown in the analysis of the territory, the region boasts of a very rich cultural heritage and a strong desire to build on that heritage for the well-being of the community, also as a means to develop the tourism product.

The consultation findings, including evidence from the previous programme, steer the need to design this type of measure for the strengthening of the cultural base with maximum flexibility, in order to permit the various forms of actions being contemplated by the community. In practice this means that while certain limitations shall still need to be applied, the type of investments that are to be implemented through this measure, as well as the manner in which they shall be executed, might be different from each other, and that this needs to be reflected in a broad scope.

Although having a wide scope and permitting a diverse range of investments, this measure shall serve to accommodate actions with a unifying objective – that of serving to strengthen the cultural identity of the rural community as means to foster social coherence. This aim is the common element that needs to be demonstrated, with evidence, in the supported actions. In order to achieve this objective, the supported investment in the infrastructure needed for the cultural activities must demonstrate strong links to the territory in terms of the connection to the land and its geography, and to the traditions of the area, on the basis of historical evidence. Another common element for these actions is the need to demonstrate that the cultural and social investments shall not only be created and developed, but also sustained in time.

This type of programming – wide-scope, flexible approach, evidence of territorial attachment, and sustainability of actions which involve durable investment as per Article 71 1305– provides the platform for achieving the core objectives of community-led local development in that it contributes towards balanced territorial development by supporting actions that serve to improve the quality of life of individuals and groups within the community, particularly those who might have limited access to other activities either because of price or difficulty to travel to more central/densely populated areas with a

higher density of leisure activities or with more advanced/high-tech entertainment centres.

The scope of action for this measure falls within the Government's stated scope of interventions for the implementation of the LEADER actions as established in the Partnership Agreement for Malta (GoM, 2014), as a type of intervention aimed at fostering local development with the aim of promoting social inclusion, also through the capitalisation of rural assets (in this case the cultural base and social performance).

In line with the Malta Rural Development Programme (GoM, 2015), the scope of actions for this measure shall aim to support actions that strengthen the local identity and the local profile of the community, and that improve the quality of life and the attractiveness of the local area.

This measure is linked to theme 5 of the Malta RDP for a wider rural economy and quality of life.

Contribution to cross-cutting objectives of the RDP

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 investments that demonstrate how the environmental/climate impact is being reduced (e.g. the activity has sound waste-management and/or green transport arrangements) and investments 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.

c) Eligible Beneficiaries

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

- Registered Voluntary Organisations & NGOs (regularly registered with the Office of the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations, in line with the Voluntary Organisations Act 2007, and regularly operating within the Xlokk territory)

d) Eligible and non-eligible costs

The following is an indicative list of eligible and non-eligible costs for the purpose of this measure. More restrictive guidelines may apply, as provided for in the call for applications.

Only costs incurred from the date of signing of the contract/grant agreement with the GXF shall be eligible. As in the case of all measures, the GXF will issue guidelines at the time of the launch of the calls for applications.

Eligible costs

The eligible costs to be reimbursed through this grant support consist of the following:

- Direct project costs associated with the development and/ or creation of the cultural or social activity, including professional fees, leasing of space and equipment, purchase of small instruments and activity equipment;
- Improvements to immoveable property, that are necessary for the development/ creation of the activity and without which the activity could not take place

The following is an indicative list of the direct project costs that may be supported under this measure when these relate to the development/creation of the activity:

- Expenses related to knowledge capacity building 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. Additionally, such costs will be capped at a maximum of 10% of the total cost;
- Purchase of new 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, amongst others, which are needed for the organisation of the proposed events will be capped at 20%;

Where applicable, the improvements to immoveable property must be in line with all relevant planning, environmental and development permits.

The following are an indicative eligible costs relating to the investments in infrastructure:

a. the improvement of immovable property;
b. the purchase of new equipment up to the market value of the asset;
c. general costs linked to expenditure referred to in points (a) and (b), such as architect, engineer and consultation fees.

General costs referred to in point (c) are eligible up to 10% of the total eligible costs of the project.

All costs shall be eligible if incurred within the project duration (between the project start date and termination date).

Non-eligible costs

The following is an indicative list of costs which shall not be eligible:
a. interest on debt;
b. value added tax except where it is non-recoverable under national VAT legislation;
c. non-durable accessories and small equipment such as sportswear/kits and training aids such as footballs, cones etc;
d. the organisation of one-time events;
e. Second hand equipment;
f. work in kind

e) Eligibility and selection criteria

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;
- At application stage, the applicant is to include a declaration (signed by the VO Commissioner), stating they are line with their respective reporting requirements;
- The proposed project will be implemented within the Xlokk 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 project proposal contains evidence of the cultural and/ or social activity that is to be created and/ or developed as a result of the investment;
- The project proposal contains evidence of the social/ cultural/ historical link of the activity to the Xlokk territory, or to any of its localities.
- The project involves the setting up of on-going events and not a one-time event

Selection criteria

An evaluation of the proposed actions that meet all the eligibility criteria shall be carried out in accordance with the selection criteria set out in the selection criteria grid below. This permits the proposed actions that are eligible for funding to be ranked with priority being given to proposals that are deemed to be more value-for-money.

Although some of the selection criteria may be seen to overlap with eligibility criteria, their inclusion in the selection permits the evaluators to assess the quality of the evidence that is presented in the project proposal in relation to a specific criterion, and thus to be able to give preference to higher-quality project proposals.

To be considered for funding or to be placed on the reserve list, a project must pass all the Eligibility Criteria and must also obtain a minimum of 50 marks out of the total marks allocated to the Selection Criteria. Please note that in relation to the above, for every criteria there are sub-criteria which the Project Selection Committee will be using to mark the projects.

The following table presents suggested selection criteria for this measure – marks are being shown for illustrative purposes only and are subject to further change following confirmation of such measures.

	Selection criteria and sub-criteria	Maximum points
1	Relevance to the objective of the measure	25
1a	Evidence of cultural value of the activity (evidence of significance of activity in terms of the cultural and social heritage of the locality/area)	10
1b	Evidence of the tourism potential of the cultural activity (to attract non-residents)	5
1c	Evidence that the activity is to be conducted on a regular basis in the annual calendar of events	10
2	Link to the territory	15
2a	Evidence that the cultural activity has a historical and social link to the cultural heritage and traditions of the area	5
2b	Evidence that the cultural activity is geographically linked to the territory (link to the land/area)	5
2c	Evidence that the cultural activity is linked to other investments of cultural and/or touristic value in the same area	5
3	Type of project	20
3a	The investment is targeted towards the achievement of more than one objective (cultural exchange, leisure & entertainment, skills building, etc.)	10
3b	The investment involves local actors from different sectors of arts and crafts and popular culture	10
4	Social impact on the community	15
4a	The investment is targeted to children and youths	5
4b	The investment is targeted toward the elderly	5

4c	The investment is targeted to persons with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	5
5	Preparedness	10
5a	Evidence that the necessary arrangements have been made with local actors that are to be involved in the development and delivery of the activity	5
5b	Evidence that the necessary permits (in the case of improvements to immoveable property) have been obtained, or are in the process of being obtained from the relevant authorities	5
6	Sustainability	15
6a	Sustainability of the project following 5 years from its completion	5
6b	Evidence that the project has a neutral or positive impact on the environment and the climate	5
6c	Evidence that the project has a neutral or positive impact on gender and other forms of non-discrimination policies	5

f) 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.

g) Budget allocation towards Action

The total budget allocation under this measure is 1,176,973.40 EUR. The grant support for each project varies based on the nature of the project. The following capping levels for this measure will apply:
- €30,000 for major investments or
- €15,000 for smaller-scale investments or
- €5,000 for organization of events.

h) Targets and clear, adequate indicators to measure the success of the Action
i)
Circa 77 projects leading to the creation of new cultural and social investments and/or the significant improvement of existing ones.

	Indicator	Target	Indicator Type
1	Number of beneficiaries receiving support for investment in non-agricultural activities in rural areas	38	RDP PI
2	Number of new/improved quality cultural and/ or social investments in the GXF area	77	LDS-specific PI
3	Number of participants, following the undertaking of the investments needed, per	6,000	LDS-specific PI

	year, up to the end of the programming period		

j) Risks in implementation and mitigation factors

The main risk associated with this measure is that of providing support to investments that could be easily transferable to other localities; in other words, investments that have a weak dependence on the territory and its people. This risk is being mitigated through the requirements for strong territorial attachment in the selection criteria.

k) Overall assessment and relevance of the Action

This measure is very relevant in the overall scheme of type of measures programmed under this LDS and the relative weighting dedicated in monetary terms. The weighting attached to this measure reflects the importance given to this type of investments, revolving around popular culture in the rural villages, by the people, and as such it is a recognition of the need to continue to invest in the cultural and rural heritage of the region.

The measure also reflects the overall strategic framework of the LDS, providing focus for actions that build on areas with a strong foundation (popular culture and traditions).

5.4 Measure 3: Promotion of the cultural heritage

Measure title: Promotion of the cultural heritage
Measure Code: LDS 19.2.03

a) Aim, Rationale and Scope of Action

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 continue to develop the tourism product.

The specific objective of this measure is, by the end of the applicable programming period, to improve the economic performance of the LAG territory through the implementation of 21 projects in cultural tourism and promotion.

Rationale

It is recognised that rural areas are rich in assets of cultural importance that are not exploited for tourism purposes to the same extent as major attractions in capital and larger cities. At the same time, these rural areas have the potential to serve as part of the overall touristic package that is to be experienced by the visitor to Malta, also helping to alleviate the pressure on main places of interest with limited carrying capacity. In order for these rural areas to feature on the visitors' list of sites to visit/things to do, the touristic attractions need to offer the same quality of experience, improved connectivity and facilities, excellent content and sufficient visitor time. In other words, the tourist needs to be offered a number of high-quality attractions/sites that are equipped with the necessary facilities, building on points of unique interest (such as traditional knowledge and experiences), preferably animated by local residents, and that are situated within short distances even if in different localities, thus allowing for the possibility of joint tours and/or trails that centre on a particular theme or product or type of experience.

The need to record, document and translate knowledge that is in danger of being lost is undeniable. In many localities in rural areas, the only surviving tradesman with the know-how and the history of the traditions and the trades is of old age, and unless this information is captured, there is a risk that the heritage will be lost upon his death. The need to address this issue, and to develop the cultural and traditional knowledge base, is in line with the national drive to build a digital platform for Malta's touristic product. In this context, the use of modern technology that is not only more accessible, but also permits user interactivity, is greatly encouraged. As mentioned earlier, while one locality might not have the necessary density of attractions/sites of interest to afford the tourist an entire day experience, the possibility of combining a number of attractions/sites of interest across neighbouring villages/localities adds value to the touristic experience and improves the cost-effectiveness of the individual operations.

Evidence obtained from the analysis of the territory and the consultation findings indicates that the LAG territory has a significant tourism product, which may not be fully exploited

due to the lack of information dissemination and promotion activities. This measure aims to promote the territory's cultural heritage and improve accessibility to rural assets of touristic importance through visitor-oriented actions such as the installation of sign-posting, the recording of local knowledge, and the use of various information dissemination methods, including interactive applications in social media, dedicated websites, and other ICT applications.

It is also recognised that rural tourism projects that build on co-operation among different actors, whether from different sectors, or different localities, are cost-effective and hence such projects are encouraged. In such cases applicants must clearly demonstrate that there is a leading partner and that he/she holds a sense of ownership of the project.

Scope of action

This action supports the documentation and/or digitilisation of information, branding, advertising, and dissemination of information related to the cultural heritage; the setting up of heritage tours and trails joining up different attractions/sites of touristic importance, and the limited installation of physical structures for improved access and mobility by visitors (such as ramps) and small-scale refurbishment of ancillary facilities for sanitary purposes (such as upgrading of on-site toilet facilities).

b) General description of the Action

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:

- area-wide sign-posting to render the localities more accessible for non-residents and tourists;
- cooperation between tourism operators, local councils and organisations based within the territory to develop and promote trails and tours that build around sites of cultural importance;
- the recording, documentation, promotion and dissemination of information, in printed and digital formats, about artefacts, museums and sites of cultural heritage value within the territory, and
- the branding of a unique product or experience within the territory, including the one-time design and development of marketing plan.

Type of support

The form of support provided by this measure is a grant support in the form of reimbursement of eligible costs that have been actually incurred and paid, together with, where applicable, other contributions as may be specified in the call for applications.

Additionally, all eligible costs related to the project will be treated as such from the signing

of the contract with GXF if the project is selected for funding.

Action intervention logic

In line with the goals of Malta's tourism strategy, which identifies the need to develop opportunities for rural tourism, this measure of this LDS provides an opportunity to develop collaboration between local actors and to improve the marketing and dissemination of information regarding the cultural heritage of the territory. The rural tourism potential, and the increasing recognition of the value of the cultural landscapes, is recognised as an opportunity for balanced, territorial development.

The need to improve communication and develop networks in order to enable local actors to create and market products and rural tourism experiences is also recognised in the Malta RDP, where opportunities for farm diversification activities and collaboration for the development of rural tourism services are provided.

As shown by the analysis of the territory and the consultation findings, this measure serves as an important tool for the provision of opportunities for the development of tourism services, and for bringing together local actors and economic operators with a similar agenda. The set-up of cultural heritage trails and tours, building around local products, techniques, food, sites and objects of interest, serves to foster collaboration between local actors, improve their economic performance and result in a better tourism product of the territory. Through these interventions, this measure aims to develop cooperation, increase tourism visits and develop new rural tourism experiences within the territory.

Contribution to cross-cutting objectives of the RDP (innovation, climate and environment)

Activities carried out under this measure are expected to promote value-added innovation in rural development through the development of rural tourism, which in turn fosters business innovation. Innovation in the cultural dimension is also spurred through the selection criteria favouring the mix of technology as a platform for tradition, in what is considered a positive clash of generational differences and an excellent mode of transmitting knowledge from one generation to the next and sustaining the traditional heritage in time.

c) Eligible Beneficiaries

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

- Local councils
- Non-governmental organisations (need to be registered with the VO Commissioner)
- Private entities (legal persons)

d) Eligible and non-eligible costs

Only costs incurred from the date of signing of the contract/grant agreement with the

Foundation shall be eligible. The Foundation 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: Investments associated with the development of marketing, advertising, branding, promotion and information dissemination activities, including experts' and professional fees (market research, designers, etc.) and the procurement of related services (website development, promotional material, etc.) as well as installation of physical infrastructure for promotion and information (sign-posts, boards, information panels, etc.).
- Type 2: Very small, one-off, structural investments that are directly related to the improvement of access and mobility of visitors (e.g. ramps and similar structures) and the upgrading of facilities for hygiene (e.g. toilets for visitors).

In view of the fact that the main objective of this measure is to support marketing of the rural areas and their assets and sites of importance, and that ancillary investments are of secondary importance, the maximum permitted expenditure in relation to type 2 interventions shall be capped at 20% of the total eligible cost of the project.

The following is a list of indicative eligible and non-eligible costs. More restrictive guidelines may apply.

Eligible costs

Direct project costs that are necessary for the implementation of type 1 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.

The Foundation reserves the right to issue more restrictive guidelines on the eligibility of expenditure, including standard rates for operating costs.

Non-eligible costs

The following costs shall not be eligible:
a. accessibility projects in isolation will not be considered;
b. interest on debt;
c. value added tax except where it is non-recoverable under national VAT legislation;
d. work in kind.

e) Eligibility and selection criteria

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 proposed project will be implemented within the Xlokk 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.

Selection criteria

An evaluation of the proposed actions that meet all the eligibility criteria shall be carried out in accordance with the selection criteria set out in the grid below. This permits the proposed actions that are eligible for funding to be ranked with priority being given to proposals that are deemed to be more value-for-money.

To be considered for funding or to be placed on the reserve list, a project must pass all the Eligibility Criteria and must also obtain a minimum of 50 marks out of the total marks allocated to the Selection Criteria. Please note that in relation to the above, for every criteria there are sub-criteria which the Project Selection Committee will be using to mark the projects.

The following table presents suggested selection criteria for this measure – marks are being shown for illustrative purposes only and are subject to further change following confirmation of such measures.

		Selection criteria and sub-criteria	Maximum points
1		Relevance to the objective of the measure	30
	1a	Evidence of touristic value of the project to be promoted	10
	1b	Evidence of cultural value of the project to be promoted	10
	1c	Evidence that the activity capitalises on local knowledge	10
2		Link to the territory	20
	2a	Evidence that the object/s to be promoted has a historical link to the area	10
	2b	Evidence that the object/s to be promoted is/are linked to other	5

	objects of cultural value in the same area	
2c	Evidence that the object/s to be promoted is/are linked to other objects of touristic value in the same area	5
3	Type of project	20
3a	The project is an integrated project in that incorporates the achievement of more than one objective	5
3b	The project is area-based and targets more than object/site of interest within the same area	5
3c	The project involves more than one local actor	10
4	Preparedness	20
4a	Evidence that the necessary consultation with stakeholders and business operators (e.g. in tourism sector) has taken place	10
4b	Evidence that the proposed project is fully compatible with the policies and objectives of Malta's tourism policy, including rural tourism policies, on the basis of consultations and communications with the relevant competent authorities	10
5	Sustainability	10
5a	Evidence that the project has a neutral or positive impact on the environment and the climate	5
5b	Evidence that the project has a neutral or positive impact on gender and other forms of non-discrimination policies	5

f) 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.

g) Budget allocation towards Action

The total budget allocated towards this measure is 159,800.62 EUR. Grant support shall not exceed 10,000 EUR per project.

h) Targets and clear, adequate indicators to measure the success of the Action

	Indicator	Target	Indicator Type
1	Number of marketing and promotion projects by end of programming period	21	LDS-specific PI
2	Number of visitors per project[12]	150	LDS-specific PI

i) Risks in implementation and mitigation factors

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[12] The main beneficiaries that will eventually benefit from this measure must be responsible to check and record the number of people/residents/tourists visiting such project location (where the nature of the project allows it). Additionally, statistics have to be submitted to GXF when requested.

Several small operators are expected to contribute to the tourism and cultural product of the territory. A real risk associated with this is the limited ability of relatively small-scale operators to attract enough tourists to make their operations sustainable. This risk is being mitigated through selection criteria that incentivise cooperation between operators and other local organisations. A higher limit on expenditure applies in the case of joint operations.

Increased visitation by tourists to rural areas may lead to negative environmental impacts on biodiversity and ecosystems, particularly as a consequence of vehicular access and human trampling.

This risk is being mitigated through the inclusion of selection criteria that favour projects including measures to mitigate environmental impacts and which provide evidence of consultation, and support, of the proposal by the relevant environmental and planning authorities.

j) Overall assessment and relevance of the Action

This measure aims to improve access and information dissemination about the territory to promote its cultural and natural heritage, leading to positive socio-economic impacts. This is in line with Malta's priority of increasing rural and sustainable tourism. This measure complements the LDS measure for the restoration of sites and assets of artistic and cultural significance and offers the possibility of investing in the tourism product of the area after the completion of the restoration project. The implementation of these measures is expected to be associated with synergistic impacts on the territory's operators leading to improved access of the territory by tourists and non-residents, whilst developing opportunities for collaboration between local actors and improving accessibility and the availability of traditional knowledge about the territory and its people.

5.5 Measure 4: Development of green infrastructure

Measure title: Development of green infrastructure
Measure Code: LDS 19.2.04

a) Aim, Rationale and Scope of Action

Specific Objectives

The general aim of this measure is to improve the environmental landscape of the area. The purpose is to support the development of urban green infrastructure within the GXF territory through the development/ creation of new green open spaces[13] in rural areas and the installation of elements of green infrastructure (green belts and corridors, green roofs, vertical gardens, etc.) within both built and rural areas.

The specific objective of this measure is, by the end of the programming period, to improve the environment performance and quality of life of GXF communities through the development of green infrastructure in at least 10 projects leading to the greening of spaces within the territory. It is imperative to add that these projects have to be freely accessible to the general public.

Rationale

Green infrastructure delivers essential ecosystem services which underpin human well-being and quality of life. The European Commission defines green infrastructure as a strategically planned network of high quality natural and semi-natural areas with other environmental features, which are designed and managed to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services and protect biodiversity in both rural and urban settings[14].

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 have shown that the GXF territory has access to existing spaces, that present several opportunities for further development of green infrastructure to improve the quality of life of the GXF communities.

This measure has therefore been designed to support projects that, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, facilitate the development and implementation of green infrastructure within the GXF territory through the creation of green areas that can support biodiversity in rural areas, particularly within the built zone (such as on derelict sites, within public buildings and gardens/parks) and enhancement of open spaces in village core areas,

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[13] "Green open spaces" need to be freely accessible to the general public

[14] Building a green infrastructure for Europe, European Commission (2013)

in the outskirts of the same villages, as well as to provide an interconnected network of green spaces between localities.

Scope of action

This measure supports projects that protect existing green infrastructure resources and/or 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 urban landscape.

The scope of action includes the installation of green infrastructure components and related ancillary works and educational/information actions as a type of non-productive investment with a clear benefit for biodiversity and climate change adaptation.

The scope of action includes the restoration and establishment of infrastructure needed for the management of habitats, such as urban landscape features, soil conservation and water management, the introduction of alien species and the planting of new vegetation.

b) General description of the Action

Description of the type of operation

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

- the use of native vegetation and trees in the landscaping of open spaces for the creation of recreational spaces, whilst promoting informal education about GXF 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;
- the creation of elements of green infrastructure including green roofs and green walls within public buildings, such as schools;
- the careful restoration and embellishment of sites of cultural, historical and ecological importance, such as public gardens.

Type of support

The form of support provided by this measure is a grant support in the form of reimbursement of eligible costs that have been actually incurred and paid, together with, where applicable, other contributions as may be specified in the call for applications. Additionally, all eligible costs related to the project will be treated as such from the signing of the contract with GXF if the project is selected for funding.

Action intervention logic

The actions supported through this measure are intended to result in an improvement 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 other through improved opportunities for recreation, and sports and leisure activities.

Projects supported by this measure complement measures within the RDP 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 RDP by providing support for smaller-scale, similar initiatives that can be implemented in the localities. As such, this measure is complementary to the RDP Measure 04 which targets the restoration of rubble wall and appropriate landscape features, sub-measure 4.4 which provides support for capital works within the framework of an agri-environment climate schemes, which may include the restoration and establishment of infrastructure needed for the management of habitats, including rubble wall restoration, and RDP Measure 10 which supports the restoration, soil conservation and water management where there is no significant economic return to a farm or other rural business.

This measure is also in line with Action 37 of the "Greening our Economy – Achieving a Sustainable Future" policy document, which targets the identification of areas of public land to serve as components of green infrastructure. The measure is expected to contribute to the target of the Malta's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) of maintaining ecosystems and their services by establishing green infrastructure and restoring key ecosystems (Target 2). The NBSAP also identifies to importance of strengthening the components for building a green infrastructure (EN4), and improved spatial planning safeguarding the local countryside from urban sprawl and supporting urban biodiversity (S16).

Contribution to cross-cutting objectives of the rural development programme

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 of the RDP. The

promotion 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 RDP.

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.

c) Eligible Beneficiaries

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

- Local Councils
- Environmental NGOs (regularly registered with the Office of the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations, in line with the Voluntary Organisations Act 2007, and regularly operating within the Xlokk territory).
- Schools found in the Xlokk territory (these may include private schools, church schools, independent schools, state schools and other schools).

d) Eligible and non-eligible costs

Only costs incurred from the date of signing of the contract/grant agreement with the Foundation shall be eligible. The Foundation 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: Other costs associated with the development of educational, awareness, information and communication initiatives, up to 5% of the total eligible project costs.

The following is a list of indicative eligible and non-eligible costs; more restrictive conditions may be applied in the call for applications.

Eligible costs

In the case of the development of 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. The investment in green infrastructure must be in line with all relevant planning and development permits, including, where applicable, consultation on permits and/or guidelines issued by the authorities competent for the environment and resources.

The following are eligible costs relating to the structural investments in green infrastructure (type 1):

a. The construction or improvement of immovable property;
b. General costs such as landscape architects, irrigation/water engineers, project management costs and consultation fees, feasibility studies, the acquisition of patent rights and licences up to a maximum 10% of the total eligible project cost;
c. The costs of establishing green infrastructure/landscape/soil management plans;
d. Fencing and other works needed to facilitate conservation management, including protection of water and soil;
e. Restoration costs of ecological habitats and landscapes and features;
f. 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)
g. The costs of materials and/or services, labour used for the above mentioned investments for improving the environmental or public amenity value of green open areas;
h. The cost of amenities and facilities such as garden/street lighting, light furniture, other fittings and fixtures that are needed for the project, and that respect the environment and landscape quality of the project;
i. The cost of purchasing and planting of native flora species. A capping of cost per plant/tree/shrub shall be specified in the guidelines of the measure.

All costs shall be eligible if incurred within the project duration (between the project start date and termination date).

Non-eligible costs

The following is an indicative list of costs which shall not be eligible:
a. the purchase of machinery and real estate
b. planting and purchasing of non-native species of trees/plants/shrubs
c. interest on debt
d. value added tax except where it is non-recoverable under national VAT legislation
e. "simple replacements", as determined by the Foundation Decision Committee following guidance received by the Managing Authority;
f. building and/ or restoration of rubble walls;
g. works in kind

In addition, calls for applications and respective guidelines may contain additional provisions relating to methods of procurement of the works, rates of items and services, types of

vegetation and/or trees, and other requirements, as may be applicable. The subsidiary Legislation 549.64 of the Environment and Resources Authority on "Trees and Woodlands Protection Regulations – Legal Notice 200 of 2011" is one such example.

e) Eligibility and selection criteria

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 Xlokk 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 project includes investment in environmental educational, awareness, information and communication initiatives, of up to 5% of the total eligible budget;
- The project is not on designated ecological areas such as Natura 2000 sites or any other site of national importance;
- The project area does not exceed 5000sq/m;
- The proposed project is compatible with the surrounding environment, and respects the wider environment.

Additional eligibility criteria may be established at the time of call for applications.

Selection criteria

An evaluation of the proposed actions that meet all the eligibility criteria shall be carried out in accordance with the selection criteria set out in the grid below. This permits the proposed actions that are eligible for funding to be ranked with priority being given to proposals that are deemed to be more value-for-money.

To be considered for funding or to be placed on the reserve list, a project must pass all the Eligibility Criteria and must also obtain a minimum of 50 marks out of the total marks allocated to the Selection Criteria. Please note that in relation to the above, for every criteria there are sub-criteria which the Project Selection Committee will be using to mark the projects.

The following table presents suggested selection criteria for this measure – marks are being shown for illustrative purposes only and are subject to further change following

confirmation of such measures.

	Selection criteria and sub-criteria	Maximum points
1	Relevance to the objective of the measure	20
1a	Evidence that the project contributes to the conservation of biodiversity	5
1b	Evidence that the project contributes to the creation of green carbon sinks and makes use of species of conservation value that are either native or indigenous	5
1c	Evidence that the project contributes to the creation of recreational spaces for visitors	10
2	Link to the territory	20
2a	Evidence that the area proposed for the intervention has a documented link to the natural history of the area	10
2b	Evidence that the area proposed for the intervention has a documented link to the socio-demographic development of the area	5
2c	Evidence that the area proposed for the intervention is linked to other sites of ecological value in the same area	5
3	Type of project	15
3a	The project is an integrated project in that incorporates the achievement of more than one objective	5
3b	The project is area-based and targets more than one element of green infrastructure within the same area	5
3c	The project is a co-operative project; in that it involves more than one local actor	5
4	Social impact on the community	15
4a	The project's information and education components are targeted to children	5
4b	The project's information and education components are targeted to youths	5
4c	The project's targets persons from an economically-disadvantaged background/status (low income earners; unemployed; single parents)	5
5	Preparedness	15
5a	Evidence that the necessary consultation with stakeholders and regulatory entities has taken place	5
5b	The development permitting process has already been initiated (where applicable)	10
6	Sustainability	15
6a	Evidence of the project's sustainability following 5 years from its completion	5
6b	Evidence that the project has a positive impact on the environment and the climate	5
6c	Evidence that the project has a neutral or positive impact on	5

	gender and other forms of non-discrimination policies	

f) 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.

g) Budget allocation towards Action

The total budget allocation towards actions under this measure is 448,910.14 EUR. The grant support for individual projects shall be capped at 100,000 EUR.

h) Targets and clear, adequate indicators to measure the success of the action

At least 11 projects leading to the development of green infrastructure to improve the quality of life of the communities of the LAG territory.

	Indicator	Target	Indicator Type
1	Number of beneficiaries receiving support for investment in non-agricultural activities in rural areas	9	RDP PI
2	Number of projects for the development of green infrastructure	10	LDS-specific PI

i) Risks in implementation and mitigation factors

A main risk associated with this measure is the transformation of existing open spaces with significant rural and semi-natural heritage 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 and the inclusion of relevant selection criteria.

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 natural heritage of the territory.

j) 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.

5.6 Measure 5: Inter-territorial and trans-national co-operation

Measure title: Inter-territorial and trans-national co-operation
Measure Code: LDS 19.3

a) Aim, Rationale and Scope of Action
Specific Objectives

To support the design and implementation of joint project/s with other LEADER LAGs.

By the end of the applicable programming period, to implement at least 1 cooperation project that will foster transnational and inter-territorial cooperation.

Rationale

The action allows the LAG, together with farmers, producers and other regional actors, to interact with other groups. The implementation of joint projects with other LAGs will add a wider national and international perspective to the actions supported by the LAG. Transnational and inter-territorial cooperation is expected to strengthen the regional identity by providing opportunities for networking, developing regional tourism and marketing of the LAG's territorial products outside of the territory.

The analyses of the territory and the consultation findings have shown that the promotion of the cultural identity of the region and the protection of its natural heritage will benefit from opportunities for sustainable and rural tourism, and from activities that will encourage the development of markets and direct sales of the territory's products at an inter-territorial and transnational scale.

Scope of action

This action will support initiatives that promote the regional cultural identity and natural heritage, and which encourage rural tourism, which may lead to the development of markets and direct sales of the territory's products in Malta and abroad.

Transnational and inter-territorial projects implemented under this action will target the following elements:
   i. the promotion of the identity of the territory in Malta and in partner countries through a better strategic marketing of regional products and cultural and natural assets;
   ii. the development of linkages and sharing experiences in order to promote entrepreneurship and business innovation;
   iii. ensuring sustainability through the adoption of innovative practices leading to improved sustainable water and energy use, agro-biodiversity conservation and through an improved added value, branding and promotion
   iv. the promotion of social inclusion and development of opportunities for local collaboration

b) **General description of the Action**

Description of the type of operation

The LAG will prepare for participation in a transnational and an inter-territorial cooperation project. In the case of inter-territorial cooperation, the LAGs in Malta can propose a joint project of a national dimension, while trans-national projects will involve LAGS from Malta and other EU member states or EU non-member states.

Responsibilities of each partner within a cooperative action will be identified in a Cooperation and Partnership Agreement. The agreement will include an agreed budget, project objectives, the activities for joint implementation in order to accomplish the objectives, the role of each partner, and the final financial contribution of each partner within the project. Cooperation actions between LAGs/partners will be implemented under the responsibility of a coordinating LAG.

Type of support

Contracts with bodies to deliver specific—exchanges, visits, training, information and promotion activities and other initiatives identified as being eligible under this action.

The following indicative operations are identified as being eligible for support under this action:
- training;
- capacity building exercise/s;
- organisation of events and events planning;
- support for innovation in products / services in rural areas;
- adoption of common methodological and working methods;
- communication and networking;
- marketing activities;
- activities to support job creation and sustain existing jobs, and
- other expenses (including flights, accommodation, per diem, insurances and shipping expenses amongst others)

Action intervention logic

Cooperation is a fundamental means for LAGs to improve local knowledge, understanding, and awareness, and a means to access to new information and ideas, learn from experiences of other regions or countries, to stimulate and support innovation, and to acquire skills to improve the quality of delivered services.

Contribution to cross-cutting objectives of the RDP (innovation, climate and environment)

This action contributes to an improved wider rural economy by promoting the cultural identity and developing rural tourism through collaboration with other LAGs. The

development of a trans-national project will provide opportunities for knowledge exchange, training and skills development and for marketing the tourism and Malta's quality produce.

c) **Eligibility and Selection**

The eligibility and selection criteria for this measure fall under the Managing Authority's remit, which will be launching this measure.

d) **Level of Support**
Aid intensity

Projects may be supported up to 80% with the remaining 20% coming from private contributions.State Aid regimes apply.

e) **Budget allocation towards Action**

The indicative budget allocation towards this action amounts to a total of 99,000 EUR, as confirmed by the MA.

f) **Targets and clear, adequate indicators to measure the success of the Action**

At least 1 project, coordinated by the LAG, will be implemented under this action. Through transnational and/or inter-territorial cooperation, and the involvement of stakeholders and operators within the territory, this action will promote the Region, its cultural identity and products, and natural heritage.

Table 51: Indicators for 'Inter-territorial and trans-national co-operation'			
	Indicator	Target	Indicator Type
1	Number of cooperative projects	1	LDS-specific PI
2	Number of participating local operators and stakeholders	15	LDS-specific PI

g) **Risks in implementation and mitigation factors**

The main risk associated with this measure is that of supporting activities that would not lead to an improved long-term tourism potential of the territory. This is being mitigated primarily through the focus on stakeholder participation, enabling the latter to develop own networks and to participate in markets, which may lead to increased opportunities for direct sales of products relating to the territory.

h) **Overall assessment and relevance of the Action**

This action meets the goals set in the RDP by enabling LAGs to engage in trans-national co-operation projects with a view to learn about similar activities in other Member States and to develop national and international networks for collaboration and market development. In particular, efforts will aim to further develop rural tourism through new collaborations between LAGs, producers and other stakeholders.

5.7   Measure 6: Running Costs and Animation

Measure title: Running costs and animation
Measure Code: LDS 19.4

a)   Aim, Rationale and Scope of Action

Specific Objectives

To support running and animation costs linked to the management of the LDS.

Rationale

The efficient administration of the LAG is crucial for the success of the LEADER programme within the territory. This measure supports the running costs of the LAG to implement the LDS. In addition, this action will also support the training of the LAG staff and members of the Decision Body involved in the implementation of the strategy. Costs related to the animation of the LDS are also supported through this measure. These may include information dissemination events on the LAG's initiatives and projects, promotional events, and networking sessions. Given the importance of efficient management systems in the implementation of the LDS, activities associated with monitoring and evaluation, and bookkeeping and legal-related specific issues, of the LAG activities and projects will also be supported.

Scope of action

The efficient implementation of the LDS and the administration of the LAG is crucial for the success of the LEADER programme. This measure supports the running of the LAG to effectively implement the LDS and efficiently manage LAG activities and projects. Animation activities promoting activities and the provision of training and information sessions are important for developing links between local actors and projects and for stimulating the local development budget permitting process.

b)   General description of the Action

Description of the type of operation

The following indicative operation types are supported by this action:
- Running Costs
- Animation
- Training

This measure supports the following running costs[15]:
- running cost of the LAG linked to the management of the implementation of the strategy consisting of operating costs;

- personnel costs,
- training costs,
- costs linked with communication,
- financial costs,
- and costs linked to the monitoring and evaluation of the strategy

The main task, for the LAG is implementation of the strategy, but it must also undertake the following administrative functions:

- Animation of the territory in order to facilitate exchange between stakeholders, to provide information and to promote the strategy and to support potential beneficiaries with a view of developing operations and preparing applications;
- Preparation and publication of public calls in line with the LDS;
- Receipt, analysis, assessment, selection and contracting of projects;
- Management, Monitoring and implementation of the strategy, and
- Bookkeeping and legal-related specific issues

Type of support

i. Reimbursement of eligible costs actually incurred and paid, together with, where applicable, and depreciation;

ii. flat-rate financing, determined by the application of a percentage to one or more defined categories of costs.

The following types of support will be provided under this measure:
- During implementation, at the level of each local development strategy, the running and animation costs for each LDS shall not exceed 25% of the total public costs for this strategy.
- Running and animation costs are directly related to the strategy and will target specific activities aimed to consolidate LAG capacity. The LAG shall create procedures and instructions for the assessment/monitoring of its own LDS, which will become an instrument contributing to the management of local groups and to the collection of useful data at the programme level.
- The support for animation aims to facilitate the exchange between stakeholders, the provision of relevant information, the promotion of relevant financing opportunities included in the strategy, and to support potential beneficiaries to prepare applications within the defined territorial areas.
- Animation activities may be carried-out by the LAG staff members.
- The types of support for running and animation costs linked to the management of the strategy implementation are laid down in Art 35 (1) d, e of CPR 1303/2013.

Action intervention logic

Under the LEADER programme, the LAGs are tasked with the development and implementation of the approved LDS. Measures within the LDS are based on the priorities of the territory's communities and aim to enhance the quality of life of rural communities by involving local actors. LEADER will support initiatives that conserve the local cultural and natural heritage, implement cultural and tourism-oriented interventions, foster economic growth and job creation, promote cooperation, education and knowledge exchange. This measure supports the running of the LAG and the implementation of the strategy, and aims to create the conditions for an efficient administration of the LAG, which is considered as being critical for the implementation of the LDS and the promotion of local partnerships.
The LEADER approach is about a proactive 'animation' of the territory that develops links and partnerships between local actors to promote local development. Animation activities are important for the promotion of opportunities for knowledge exchange and awareness creation, but also to support potential beneficiaries in developing their operations and preparing applications. Raising awareness of the approach adopted by the LEADER programme is important for stimulating the local development process and for creating opportunities for collaboration and project development. Activities carried out by the LAG will include training and information sessions on LEADER, local development, project applications and the LDS. These are important to facilitate the development of bottom-up approaches that better identify the local needs and solutions, engage the local stakeholders and improve the potential for collaboration and innovation.

Contribution to cross-cutting objectives of the RDP (innovation, climate and environment)

The implementation of the LDS is expected to contribute to the three cross-cutting objectives of the RDP, as explained in each measure presented within the LDS Action Plan. In addition, the implementation of 'Measure 12 - Running Costs and Animation' will contribute to the improvement of the wider rural economy and quality of life by involving local actors, promoting local development and encouraging economic growth and job creation within the territory.

c) Eligible Beneficiaries

Running costs: LAGs or the (legal) structures clearly entitled to carry out the LAG management tasks.

Animation: LAGs or the structures clearly charged with animation tasks

d) Eligible and non-eligible costs

This measure will enter into force once the LDS has been approved and preparatory support no longer applicable.

Eligible costs

Running costs:

Costs linked to the management of the implementation of the strategy consisting of operating costs, personnel costs, training costs, costs linked to communication, financial costs as well as the costs linked to monitoring and evaluation of the strategy as referred to in point (g) of Art. 34(3) CPR

Animation:

Costs of animation of the CLLD strategy in order to facilitate exchange between stakeholders, to provide information and to promote the strategy and to support potential beneficiaries to develop operations and prepare applications

Eligible costs under M19.4 Running costs and animation are to be determined by the MA in the Operational Guidelines.

e) Level of Support
Aid intensity

- 100% of the costs

- The EAFRD will provide support for 75% of the respective measure budget with the remaining 25% covered from National contribution

- An advance payment may be provided subject to a relevant bank guarantee or equivalent for investment type actions, subject to MA's consideration.

f) Budget allocation towards Action

586,893.40 Eur (following the two additions to the budget)

g) Targets and clear, adequate indicators to measure the success of the Action

The implementation of the following initiatives leading to an improved quality of life for the communities of the LAG territory:

	Indicator	Target	Indicator Type
1	Number of training sessions for LAG staff and members of the Decision Body (By the concerned Authorities)	3	LDS-specific PI
2	Number of information and networking sessions carried out by the LAG	4	LDS-specific PI
3	Number of potential beneficiaries receiving support whilst developing operations and	74	LDS-specific PI

	preparing applications			
4	Number of projects implemented by the LAG within the framework of the LDS		165	LDS-specific PI

h) Risks in implementation and mitigation factors

The main risk associated with the implementation of this measure is the possible low uptake by the local communities of initiatives carried out by the LAG. To mitigate against this risk, the following mitigating actions will be undertaken:

- This risk is mitigated through the strong local connections developed by the LAG, with local councils, operators and the territory's community during the implementation of the previous LDS (2007-2013), and by the robust public consultation carried out during the development of the new LDS.
- The LAG will make use of digital (e.g. website, social media profiles) and printed (e.g. newspapers, local publications) media to inform the community of initiatives, calls and services provided.

Another risk relates to cost overruns. In this regard, in terms of mitigating actions:

- The financial plan section provides a split of the running costs throughout the period 6th November 2017 until 30th September 2025.

i) Overall assessment and relevance of the Action

This measure supports activities carried out by the LAG to efficiently implement the LDS and to animate the territory by developing links and partnerships between local actors. The measure is particularly relevant to the objective of the LDS of protecting and make sustainable use of the cultural and natural capital of the territory and to leave a positive socio-economic impact on the territory's community. This will be done by providing support to local operators and stakeholders to develop and manage projects implemented under the LDS. Through this projects and other local-scale initiatives, the LAG will promote the local cultural and natural assets, and create synergies and opportunities for developing rural tourism and fostering education and employment within the territory.

6. Transposing needs and Objectives into Projects

The analysis of the socio-economic and geographical profile of the Xlokk territory and the evidence provided by the bottom-up participatory approach of the rural communities living in the region have provided the basis for the programming of a total of five measures. Firstly, the measures are structured around the needs that have been identified as a result of this process, and therefore build on the need to address the three priority objectives of cultural, environmental, business, knowledge base and tourism development. The prioritisation of objectives and corresponding actions is reflected in the relative budgetary allocation directed to these measures.

Secondly, all the measures programmed in this strategy have been framed within the limits of the set of LEADER-specific and horizontal objectives that have been described in the preceding section – balanced territorial development, bottom-up, participatory local action, small scale, value-for-money projects, and a strong attention to social inclusion, innovation, collaboration, and the environment.

Taking the set of strategic objectives that have been established for Xlokk region, the following measures have been programmed for this LDS.

Priority objective 1: Development of the cultural landscape, social heritage and tourism product of the rural territory

> Measure 1: Restoration of assets of artistic and cultural value

> Measure 2: Strengthening a healthy cultural identity

> Measure 3: Promotion of the cultural heritage

Priority objective 2: Development of the environmental landscape of the rural territory

> Measure 4: Development of green infrastructure

6.1   Priority objective 1: Development of the cultural landscape, social heritage and tourism product of the rural territory

The three measures that were programmed in fulfilment of social and cultural development are intended to complement each other[16] – restoration of assets focuses on the numerous objects and features of cultural value that are found in rural areas, including village cores and other sites of interest, whereas the strengthening of a healthy cultural identity is aimed at creating new or improved content for cultural and social activities. On the other hand, the measure for the promotion of the cultural heritage programmes under this priority objective serves to support individual and joint tourism-oriented projects, such as tours, trails,

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[16] In practice this link means that some of the beneficiaries of the restoration and cultural activities measures might also wish to access support for the promotion of the same cultural object or activities, and that the timing of launching of applications and selection of projects should allow for such possibilities, since these synergies maximise the benefit that is to be derived.

branding of unique products and experiences, and digitilisation of information, that are intended to promote the rich cultural heritage of the localities in the Xlokk region, in a manner that is complementary to national tourism policy and initiatives including the digital platform.

In the measure supporting cultural activities, although the objective is the creation of new forms of entertainment, recreation and social interaction within the community, the measure is structure in such a way as to allow for the investment in the infrastructure that is necessary for such activities to take place. This is based on the premise that without the necessary infrastructure, the said activities and events cannot take place. Such support is also provided in recognition of the fact that most potential beneficiaries are voluntary organisations with no access to other sources of funding.

In the case of restoration of assets, the focus is on the item of interest, and no provision is made for ancillary actions, also in view of the relatively low threshold imposed on individual actions (originally, the grant support for projects is not to exceed 10,000 EUR; however; the amount has been updated to 20,000 EUR following an approval from the Project Selection Committee dated 4th February 2022). This allows for a larger number of projects to be supported, based on the demand for such actions

The total budget for these three measures has been updated following an approval from the Project Selection Committee dated 4th February 2022, a change request approved from the Change Request Review Board dated 25th October 2022, a further change request approved from Change Request Review Board dated 5th December 2023 and the provsion of two additional budgets offered by the EAFRD Managing Authority. The updated budget is now €1,977,282.98 amounting to around 81.4% of the total budget for implementation of operations under this LDS. Such a high budget allocation is justified only if one appreciates the importance of culture and arts and traditions in the life of the rural communities – culture as the cradle that accommodates all the different activities and interests of the community, and as a means through which the people identify themselves and their connection with the territory. Objects of cultural value and activities of cultural importance reflect the aspirations of the community, and provide a means of expression and development that is conducive to an improvement in the quality of life.

For these measures, the rationale is to build on the very strong foundations that the region offers – active organisations that are run on a voluntary basis and even so are able to create value in their localities; and a rich cultural heritage, enshrined in stone and in traditions that are not yet written – and to support the conservation, in time of these symbols of the community that carry so much importance in themselves. This link to the territory and to the history of the locality is an important element that defines priority for support, and is reflected in relevant selection criteria in each of the measures.

Although the measures are mainly targeted towards the improvement of the social and cultural performance of the rural communities, in reality, these actions may serve other purposes, including educational and touristic promotion. The potential for the actions and projects that are to be supported to achieve more than one objective is given consideration in the selection criteria. The achievement of these and other horizontal objectives such as

collaboration and social inclusion is a common element in measures under this priority objective, and is propelled through the use of appropriate selection criteria.

6.2 Priority objective 2: Development of the environmental landscape of the rural territory

The single measure for the development of green infrastructure programmed under this objective, as updated following a change request approved from the Change Request Review Board, dated 25th October 2022, carries the remaining circa 18.6% - a total of €448,910.14 for 10 projects (as updated following an approval from the Project Selection Committee dated 4th February 2022, a change request approved from the Change Request Review Board, dated 25th October 2022, a further change request dated 5th December 2023 and two additional budget offered from the EAFRD Managing Authority) - of the total budget for implementation of operations under the strategy, reflecting the importance that the communities of the Xlokk region attach to actions that improve the environment and the landscape of the areas, as a means to create open spaces of ecological, recreational and educational value. This budgetary allocation is justified on the basis of evidence from the SWOT analysis that shows that the region is characterised by areas that could potentially be turned into sites of ecological importance, as well as other sites, such as abandoned or derelict sites that could serve as open green spaces. The analysis of the territory and the consultations findings also show that there is a strong demand for greener spaces, even within the urban fabric, and that these elements of green infrastructure can be created around or within existing sites of cultural and historic value as a means to complement the rural features and so as to integrate features that can support biodiversity and related ecosystem services.

This measure aims to achieve a number of objectives that are also of pivotal importance in other strategies and programmes – including the national biodiversity strategy and the RDP. This measure complements a number of measures under the RDP that are directed towards non-productive investments, investments for the achievement of agri-environment climate objectives, afforestation and other actions that result in the amelioration of the state of agricultural land and its surrounding areas. The line of demarcation between the measure in this LDS and other similar initiatives within the Malta RDP is thus provided by the small-scale type of operations that the LDS supports by way of stipulating that the project area shall be less than or up to 0.5 hectares, in comparison to larger-scale projects that are made possible under the RDP; as well as by targeting a different spatial focus - green infrastructure projects are to take place in urban areas including village cores and outskirts, and in the areas connecting different localities in the same rural area.

Although the main focus of this measure is environmental sustainability, it has been designed to achieve other aims as well, including educational, collaboration, promotion of the territory, and added-value social impact, through the use of relevant selection criteria for this purpose.

7. Financial plan

Following on after the section delineating the Strategy measures, the following section provides information on the envisaged financial allocations of each measure, taking into account the LEADER budget available.

7.1   Overall Financial Plan

This Xlokk financial plan for the 2014-2020 RDP Programming Period – LEADER programme – has been based on the budget available as communicated by the MA, the stakeholder consultation process, discussions with the Decision Committee and LAG Manager, as well as lessons learnt from the previous programing period. Actual funds disbursement (excluding running costs – discussed separately below) are planned to start in the first half of 2018 and are expected to continue until 2023 since some actions and their relative payments will continue to flow for a period of 3 years following the end of the current programming period.

Originally, out of the total RDP funds, an amount of €6.5 million will be devoted to support the LEADER initiative. The contribution rate of the EAFRD will be equal to a 75% of such costs, amounting to €4.875 million.[17] The amount of €6.5 million has been increased to approximately €9.95 million, following an additional budget provided by the EAFRD Managing Authority.

This total will need to be divided amongst the 3 LAGs established in the Maltese islands. On the basis of decisions communicated by the MA, the Xlokk territory has been orignally allocated a total of **€1,474,440 under M19.2 - Support for the implementation. Following an expression of interest issued by the MA and the related award letter dated 4th February 2022 an additional amount of €768,345.14 has been allocated, leading to a total amount of €2,242,785.14 under M19.2. This budget has been further increased to the sum of €2,426,193.12**

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[17] The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (2015), *Rural Development Plan.* p.624

Table 37: Overall budget by action

Objective	Actions	Target no. of actions	Total estimated cost in €	Capping	Budget allocation in €	% of budget
Development of the cultural landscape, social heritage and tourism product of the rural territory	Restoration of assets of artistic and cultural value	50	640,508.96	20,000	640,508.96	26.39
	Strengthening a healthy cultural identity	c.64	1,176,973.40	30,000	1,153,825.42	48.52
	Promotion of the cultural heritage	19	159,800.62	10,000	176,693.46	6.59
Development of the environment landscape of the rural territory	Development of green infrastructure	11	448,910.14	100,000	455,165.28	18.5
Operations by the Foundation	Trans-national and inter-territorial co-operation	1	99,000		99,000	
	Running costs and animation	1	**586,839.40**		**586,839.40**	
Sub-Total (excluding Trans-national, inter-territorial co-operation, running costs and animation) - M19.2					**2,426,193.12**	**100**
Total (M19.2, M19.3 and M19.4)					**3,013,032.52**	

7.2 Allocation by action by year

Clearly, all actions cannot be implemented in one year due to strategic and administrative reasons. In some cases, measures might also take more than one year to be initiated and implemented fully. Therefore the following table provides an annual breakdown of the allocation by type of action. These figures relate to the actual disbursement to the end beneficiaries.

Table 38: Annual allocation breakdown

Actions	Total LEADER Budget	Year 1 (2018)	Year 2 (2019)	Year 3 (2020)	Year 4 (2021)	Year 5 (2022)	Year 6 (2023)	Year 7 (2024	Year 8 (2025)
Development of the cultural landscape, social heritage and tourism product of the rural territory	€1,977,282,98	0%	5%	10%	13%	27%	20%	15%	10%
Development of the environment landscape of the rural territory	€448,910.14	20%	0%	0%	6%	46%	18%	5%	5%
Trans-National and Inter-Territorial Cooperation	€99,000	0%	0%	5%	15%	40%	40%	0%	0%
Running Costs	€586,839.40	12%	12%	12%	12%	12%	12%	12%	16%

8. Communication plan

For any Strategy to be implemented successful, a sound communication plan is required to involve stakeholders and increase the general public's awareness of the Strategy and its related measures. This section describes such communication and animation activities.

Objectives

The Communication Plan is aimed at advertising the LEADER Programme, the Xlokk Strategy as well as the application and selection process of related measures emanating from such a Strategy. This plan is consistent with the one outlined in the 2014-2020 RDP, and is also in line with the EU's legal provision for EU funding – specifically Annex III of implementing Regulation EU 808/2014. The main objectives of this Communication Plan are to:

- Increase the public's awareness with regards to the LEADER Programme
- Divulge the salient points of the LDS amongst the residents and other stakeholders of the Xlokk territory
- Maximise the number of potential beneficiaries by increasing the awareness of the opportunities for stakeholder involvement and participation
- Keep track of benefits and success stories of the funds resulting from the Programme

Contents

GXF shall be responsible for disseminating the Strategy to the general public in order to achieve the objectives stated above. Communication will primarily focus on the following content:

1. Basic information with regards to the LEADER programme
2. The main objectives and actions of the Strategy
3. The way forward in terms of proposing projects and applying for funds (including time-frames)

Target groups

Since the Strategy is aimed at different target groups (as indicated in the section on the Strategy measures), the communication will also reflect this diversity. In this regard, the actions outlined in the Strategy shall be presented in a concise and less technical manner, depending on the target audience. Specifically, the Strategy and the way forward in terms of submission of projects shall be presented to:

1. The Funds and Programme Division (FPD), the Managing Authority for the RDP funds – prior to the EC submission for approval
2. Decision Committee members of the GXF
3. Government entities involved in this Strategy's stakeholder consultation process

4. Individuals and entity representatives attending the public consultation meetings

5. Individuals and entity representatives that provided their feedback/ project proposals via email/ social media

6. Past and potential beneficiaries of the LEADER (who might already be included in groups 4 and 5 above)

7. Other individuals/ entity representatives included in the database compiled for the purposes of this Strategy's public consultation exercise (might already be included in groups 4-7 above)

8. Other stakeholders of the territories such as local councils, clubs, NGOs that are not already included in the database above

9. Other members of the general public not included in points 4-8 above

Modes of communication

In order to reach the different target groups mentioned above a variety of communication channels shall be utilized:

- Technical information meetings shall be held with the MA as well as the GXF DC Board so as to explain the Strategy in detail, the envisaged time-frames as well as the process to be taken in order to evaluate potential applicants for funds.

- An information session of a less technical nature open to any individual wishing to attend shall be held, whereby the salient points of the Strategy, time-frames as well as the process to submit applications shall be outlined. The information session can also take the form of workshops (in a Xlokk locality for each measure to be launched) or training sessions, targeted at diverse audiences (e.g. civil society, Local Councils, or different localities), but always aimed at helping potential beneficiaries understand better the funding possibilities under this Strategy. Additionally, GXF will also be available for one-to-one meetings prior and during the launch of a new call. GXF will also make use of the local councils to disseminate any information relating to any new call.

- The 2007-2013 RDP evaluation talks about the impact of television as one of the most effective media to reach target audiences. Therefore this medium could be used in the following ways:

  o Having specific advertisements in relation to the Strategy, if such a budget is made available to the LAGs
  o Developing specific features describing past projects and promoting the new programme - again depending on the budget that is made available to LAGs
  o GXF representatives being present on discussion or informative programmes

- The Xlokk LAG shall also tap press coverage in relation to the LDS publication – for instance, through a press release or similar media events which would in turn reach a wider audience and increase awareness. In some cases, press releases can be published free of charge, while in other cases a paid advert is required to be able to also have coverage. Articles in relation to the Strategy objectives could be published in newspapers, organisational newsletters and in periodical publications such as magazines of the NGOs etc.

- GXF shall also consider the possibility of publishing a brochure with basic information on LEADER, the new Strategy as well as the way forward for funds' application. These leaflets shall then be distributed to the target audiences, as described above.

- A summary of the salient points of the Strategy will be included on the Xlokk LAG website, its Facebook page, as well as sent via e-mailshot.

Every type of communication and information disseminated shall display both the European Union emblem, the Maltese emblem, the co-financing logos, the Leader logo and the GXF logo. This is done so as to ensure that audiences are aware that the publicity is related to LEADER-funded actions.

Information for the applicants and potential beneficiaries

The Xlokk LAG shall make sure that the applicants and any other potential beneficiaries will have access to all the relevant information related to the LEADER Programme and the application process, including, but not limited to:

(a) The funding opportunities and related time-frames
(b) The administrative procedure to be followed in order to qualify for the financing, from accessing the application form, its completion, and documentation to be provided, as well as the related deadlines
(c) The process of application evaluation, and the eligibility condition of selected projects
(d) The staff responsible for explaining the operations of this structure
(e) The duty of the beneficiaries to inform the public about the support received through the programme.
(f) The appeal process, and related time-frames

Information for the general public

The GXF will also be responsible for passing on the following information to the general public through a medium which will be chosen by the LAG:

(a) The content of the approved Strategy, and any updates made to it
(b) The major success stories following the Strategy (past and ongoing)

In order to carry out the above communication and publicity plans, the following indicative list presents the different types of media which are to be used (depending on the available budget):

- Oral delivery (e.g. Information session, training)
- Written media
- Social media

9. Implementation Plan

This section sets out a plan for the implementation of the LDS. Specifically, an indicative time plan is described and presented, with considerations on how the plan could be managed, monitored, evaluated and controlled throughout. This implementation plan must be considered in conjunction with other ensuing sections of this Strategy which describe the process adopted up to date in the design of the LDS (Section 11 – Community Involvement) and the LAG's organisational structure and roles which provide the capacity to implement this plan (Section 12 – LAG Structure, roles and procedures).

9.1   Overview

The whole process for the implementation of this LDS is mapped out in this section, starting from the initial issuance and adjudication of the LDS tender to the reimbursements of funds to the selected beneficiaries at the end. This section describes the sequence of stages and activities that need to be undertaken (with some already having been undertaken) for a successful strategy implementation, together with an indicative time plan phasing out this sequence of activities.

The implementation of the LDS can be divided into three phases with each phase building upon the work done in the preceding phase/s. The three identified implementation phases are:

1. Strategy formulation
2. Project selection
3. Monitoring and reimbursement

Each phase involves a number of activities/ tasks with the duties for their execution being shared between the MA, the Agricultural and Rural Payments ("Paying Agency" or "ARPA") and the GXF. The latter has subcontracted the consultancy services required in the preparation of this strategy to a third party. The implementation duties across these entities are presented below as indicated in the Guidelines to LAGs on the design and development of the LDS prepared by the MA for the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development[18]. Furthermore, following the reception of call applications for this 2014-2020 programming period, a meeting bringing together the 3 entities should be set-up following the issuance of the Operating Rules by the MA and the MOP by ARPA. This will determine the exact roles and responsibilities for each entity.

Table 39: Guiding implementation duties

Managing Authority	GXF	Paying Agency
• Provision of guidelines on LDS structure and content • Approval of proposal by LAG to undertake preparatory	• Preparatory actions for the development of a LDS. This included the issuance and adjudication of a request for	• Receipt of payment claims • Processing, verifying and execution of payments

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[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

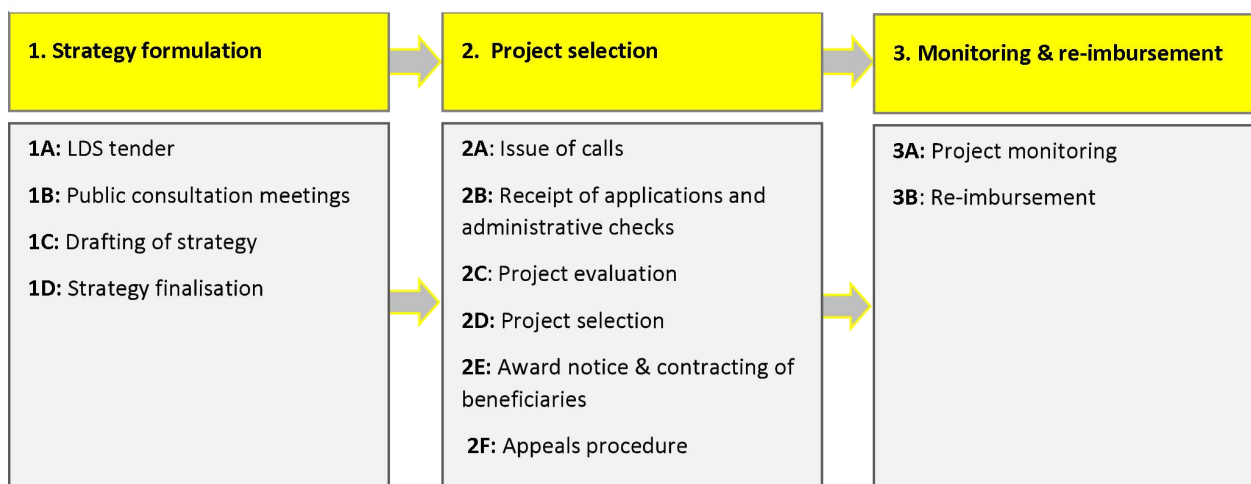| action for the preparation of the LDS	quotations for the provision of consultancy services for the development of the LDS	• Controls on beneficiaries
• Receipt and evaluation of the LDS	• Implementation of the LDS	
• Approval of the LDS	• Implementation of cooperation projects including the undertaking of the necessary preparatory requirements	
• Allocation of budget		
• Contracting GXF		
• Approval of Cooperation projects		
• Approval of operational budgets	• Monitoring & Evaluation	
• Monitoring and Evaluation of GXF/ LEADER	• Other roles as defined in the operating rules issued by the MA	

With the drafting of this Strategy, the first phase (Strategy formulation) has been almost completed. For the purposes of illustrating the implementation flow, the activities and tasks performed up to this point are still described briefly below, but a much more detailed explanation of the tasks performed so far is presented in *Section 12 – Community Involvement*. Other sections of this strategy also explain in more detailed planning activities/ tasks to be performed in different parts of the implementation plan, namely:

- The communication plan described in *Section 9*, outlining the communication aspects related to the implementation of this Strategy;
- *Section 10* considers project monitoring aspects in further detail; and
- *Section 12* explains the organisational structure of the LAG that will be responsible for the management of this strategy and which holds the capacity to implement this strategy.

9.2 Implementation flow

What follows is a brief description of the phases and the associated activities/ tasks to be undertaken in the implementation of this Strategy:

Figure 4: Implementation Flow

1. Strategy formulation	2. Project selection	3. Monitoring & re-imbursement
1A: LDS tender	**2A:** Issue of calls	**3A:** Project monitoring
1B: Public consultation meetings	**2B:** Receipt of applications and administrative checks	**3B:** Re-imbursement
1C: Drafting of strategy	**2C:** Project evaluation	
1D: Strategy finalisation	**2D:** Project selection	
	2E: Award notice & contracting of beneficiaries	
	2F: Appeals procedure	

Phase 1: Strategy formulation
Although this phase has already been carried out, the process undertaken in the formulation of this Strategy is briefly summarised hereunder as it will assist in the understanding of the remaining phases which still need to be implemented. Given that the implementation of the Strategy is also grounded upon the work undertaken in the formulation of the same Strategy, the Strategy formulation process is summarised below.

1A: LDS tender
In preparation for the development of a LDS, the GXF issued, in April 2016, a request for quotations for the provision of consultancy services for the development of the LDS for the Xlokk territory. This tendering process eventually led to the adjudication of this contract by June 2016.

1B: Public consultation meetings
Given that one of the fundamental principles of the LDS is community involvement in a bottom-up approach, the first step in the preparation of the LDS was the undertaking of a wide ranging consultation process within the GXF territory. This involved consultations with key stakeholders, including various government entities and a series of three consultation meetings held in three different localities in the Xlokk territory. The meetings were held towards the end of July and beginning of August 2016 in Zejtun, Luqa and Qrendi. The whole process undertaken in preparation for these meetings to involve the local communities in the development of the strategy is explained in detail in *Section 11* of this report.

1C: Drafting of Strategy
This Strategy was then drafted based upon the assessment of the needs emerging from the public consultation meetings and stakeholder consultations, and a first draft of this Strategy was submitted to the GXF on 12th September 2016.

1D: Strategy finalisation

After discussing the draft with the GXF Decision Committee, its salient features were discussed in a public consultation meeting open to the general public.

The strategy was then finalised at the end of September 2016, following a final discussion with the GXF Decision Committee. This was then submitted to the MA for its final approval.

Following the MA's submission of feedback, amendments to the Strategy (if any), and eventual approval, to be obtained from the MA (if any), the GXF and the MA will proceed with making this Strategy publicly available and publicising the salient points of the finalised Strategy in line with the indicated communication and publicity plan (Section 8 of this Strategy).

This step is of utmost importance to ensure that the community is aware of the strategy and is considered to be an imperative step for the implementation of the strategy. Workshops, information events as well as training set up in different localities might help in informing potential beneficiaries with the possibilities of this LDS.

Phase 2: Projects selection
This phase refers to the whole process leading to the final projects selection and the contracting of the selected beneficiaries, starting from the issuance of calls.

2A: Issue of calls
The process starts with the issuance of calls by the GXF for the submission of applications for funding under the measures set out in this Strategy, including information on deadlines, the link to the application form to be filled in, any guidance notes accompanying such a call and any other documents which may be deemed as necessary. The number of calls that will be issued may depend upon the final budget allocated to the GXF by the MA. The LAG aims to be in a position to start issuing calls by the first half 2017. The GXF should however consider issuing the calls gradually over time so as not to eventually suffer from administrative overburden stemming from the required vetting and checks of applications. Calls could thus be issued over an extended period, with the order of issue being decided by the LAG after considering estimated average project duration under each call, the envisaged number of applications to be received, and the urgency for projects to be under-way in each of the measures. Throughout this phase, the GXF will be responsible for publicising the issue of calls to the interested parties in the territory as widely as possible through information channels discussed in the communication plan.

At this stage of the process, a meeting between the LAG, the MA and the PA is planned to be held to discuss and clarify the respective responsibilities in relation to administrative duties. The aim is to streamline procedures and ensure that the applicants' needs are addressed efficiently.

2B: Receipt of applications and administrative checks
The duration of the call will vary based on the type of measure and call but typically a call is open for a minimum of 30 days, during which application forms will be submitted by applicants to the GXF.

The EC (composed of the LAG Manager, the LAG secretary and any technical expert needed by the LAG) will undertake the administrative and eligibility checks by carrying out a verification of the eligibility of the project itself (in terms of the eligibility criteria set out in the call documents) and the verification of the supporting documentation. GXF will notify those applicants in case of missing documentation or in cases where the EC needs any clarifications. Applicants will be asked to provide the required missing information within a notified period and failure of doing so will result in their disqualification, with the applicant being informed through a rejection letter.

 2C: Evaluating and marking projects

The EC will review the administrative and technical aspects of each application, drawing up an administrative and technical report on each proposed project, providing pre-recommendations to the DC on such basis (In the case of projects deemed ineligible, only the administrative report will be drawn up). These reports will be reviewed by the DC members who will also evaluate the eligibility of such projects (including the projects that had been deemed ineligible by the EC). After evaluating the reports including eligibility of

projects, the DC will evaluate the information provided in each application against the selection criteria set out in the call and award marks for each criterion accordingly. The DC has also the right to request other information and clarifications on the project. Further information on the structure, roles and responsibilities of the DC is provided in Section 12 focusing on the LAG structure.

2D: Project Selection

Based upon the pre-chosen scoring mechanism, the DC will select the projects to be granted LEADER funds. The Committee will devise and publish on its official website a preliminary list indicating the selected, on reserve and rejected projects, together with the scoring results. The applicants of projects which failed to qualify will receive from the LAG a notification letter explaining the reasons why the project was not selected, and informing them of their right of appeal within a stipulated time-frame. For this purpose, the GXF shall set up an independent appeals board/ committee which will review in an autonomous way any appeals lodged. The appointed chairperson of this Board will first review and assess the validity of the reasons of appeal and the supporting documentation provided by the appellant before presenting the appeal before the whole board/ committee for assessment. The decision taken by this Board shall be final and non-contestable.

It is necessary that throughout the whole project evaluation and selection process, the LAG evidences and records the whole process. Transparency should be maintained by adequately taking minutes of meetings and decision making, and documenting the selection process.

2E: Award notice and contracting of beneficiaries
Upon the completion of the above selection process (including appeals settlement), the GXF will publish the final result and proceed to notify the applicants of projects eligible for financial support with award notices. The award notice should also indicate the approach and the subsequent steps to be undertaken for the support and funding conditions to be regulated by a signed contract.

In the case of a rejection, the communication to each concerned applicant shall be accompanied by a summary of the relevant reasons relating to the rejection of such application.

2F: Appeals Procedure
Any person, having or having had an interest or who has been harmed by an alleged infringement or by any decision taken in the proposed award process, may file an appeal by means of an objection before the DC, which shall contain in a very clear manner the reasons for their complaints.

The objection shall be filed within ten calendar days following the date on which the Evaluation Committee has put forward the proposed award decision outcome.

The objection shall only be valid if accompanied by a deposit, which amount shall be

indicated in the application process.

The DC will nominate an Appeals Review Board, who, after evaluating all the evidence and after considering all submissions put forward by the parties (EC and applicant), will decide whether to accede or reject the appeal.

Phase 3: Monitoring and fund reimbursement

This phase refers to the subsequent process of monitoring selected projects, and ensuring the reimbursement process runs smoothly.

3A: Project monitoring

Once the beneficiaries have been contracted, and the selected projects are under-way, the GXF must assume the role of project monitor so as to certify that the contract conditions are being adhered to and that the timely progress of the project fulfils the established targets and objectives. The next section of this Strategy explains the LAG's monitoring plan, including descriptions of how and when the proposed project monitoring rules, control systems, and monitoring and evaluation reports will be effected.

3B: Reimbursement

The agency responsible for the provision of reimbursements facilities is the Paying Agency. The facility of interim payments may be provided by ARPA but in most cases reimbursement payments are effected following the successful completion of the project. The beneficiary will need to submit a request for reimbursement to ARPA together with the necessary financial documentation (invoices, receipts, certificate of works and any other relevant documentation). The GXF will guide and provide assistance to the beneficiaries throughout this process. The roles of the GXF and ARPA in this regard is to be clarified during meetings to be held between the two at the beginning of Phase 2. Final payment will be effected once an on-site check is carried out by ARPA and administrative checks that confirm adherence to the contract are performed.

9.3   Indicative time plan

In this sub-section an indicative time plan for the above described three phased implementation is presented through the use of Gantt charts. With the drafting of this strategy, Phase 1 of the implementation - 'Strategy formulation' – has almost been fully completed. A detailed description of the process leading to the design of this strategy is presented in *Section 11*. Hence, the Gantt chart with the time-line (monthly) of this phase is presented separately.

Given that Phase 2 will commence with the issuance of calls, which will be staggered over time as deemed appropriate for administrative purposes, the exact time when this phase will commence for each call/ measure is not known at this stage. Hence, the timing of Phase 2 and the subsequent Phase 3 in the below Gantt chart is presented in general terms (in terms of duration of quarters for each call) and are not linked to fixed calendar timing. Additionally, we note that duration of different actions/ activities can vary considerably across calls/ measures depending on the type of call/ measure, number of applications received, duration of selected projects and any unforeseeable circumstances. Hence, this time plan must be considered only as indicative, serving as a planning tool for the timely implementation of the Strategy within the Programming Period ending 2020 (completion of

selected projects can extend beyond this period).

Figure 5: Phase 1 implementation time-line

Phase 1: Strategy Formulation	2016								
	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
1A. LDS tender - Issue of tender - Adjudication	▓	▓							
1B. Public consultation meetings - Preparation & publicity - Meetings			▓	▓					
1C. Drafting of Strategy					▓	▓			
1D. Strategy finalisation - Consultation Process - Submission to MA - MA approval - Publicity						▓	▓	▓	▓

Figure 6: Indicative implementation time plan – Phases 2 & 3

Phase 2: Project selection	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8
2A. Issue of calls - GXF, MA, ARPA meeting - Administrative preparation & call drafting - Issue & Publicity	▓							
2B. Receipt of applications and administrative checks - Open call - Administrative and validity checks		▓						
2C: Project Evaluation - Evaluation by EC			▓					
2D: Project Selection - Selection by DC - Publication of results - Appeals				▓				
2E: Award notice & contracting of beneficiaries				▓				
3A: Project Monitoring - Monitoring and control checks including on-site visits - Monitoring and evaluation reports					▓	▓	▓	
3B: Reimbursement - Request for interim reimbursement and submission of documentation - Interim Checks by PA - Interim Reimbursement	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓

10. Monitoring and evaluation

This section sets out a plan for the monitoring and evaluation of the LDS. The scope behind the monitoring and evaluation phase is to identify those actions that might be lagging behind, and objectives which are not being reached, so that corrective action can take place. Specifically, indicators, milestones and targets are set within this plan, as well as a data collection plan to enable the LAG to collect the information required to calculate these indicators on a periodic basis.

Once the strategy is launched, and the calls for projects are published and the projects start being implemented, there will be need for a thorough assessment of the results and impacts of the Strategy/ actions. Hence, the monitoring and evaluation of the strategy and its actions is another important step of the LDS. Such monitoring and evaluation will make sure that the Strategy and the LEADER programme are truly being fruitful and also allow for the administration to assess where improvements can be made.

In this regard the evaluation of the LDS and the LEADER forms part of the hierarchy of evaluating contribution of the RDP, whereby information is moved on from local to regional to national to EU levels.[19] Hence, LAGs are required to monitor and evaluate their own LDSs which would in turn feed into the larger evaluation exercise – that is, the obligatory monitoring and evaluation of the RDP[20]. At a national level the MA must set up an evaluation plan as specified under the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Rural Development 2014-2020 and then file an Annual Implementation Report (AIR) on the RDP implementation, each year from 2016-2025. This process requires correct planning at a lower regional level as well, as will be specified in this sub-section.

10.1 Objectives

The monitoring and evaluation of the LDS is a means to reach a number of objectives, including:

- By understanding which targets are being reached and which still have to be attained, the LAG can focus resources where they are needed the most. This allows the LAG to improve the implementation process.
- The monitoring and evaluation also helps people managing the programme as well as the beneficiaries to be accountable, especially given the programme is funded, directly or indirectly, through taxpayers' monies.
- The sense of transparency transpiring from the monitoring and evaluation process, allows the public to trust that the LEADER is truly adding value to the whole territory;
- The evaluation of the LDS allows the LAG to capitalise on the learning process, that is, making use of experiences to increase the value added of the Strategy. This includes experience and valuable information from the past LEADER Programme (2007-2013), as well as from the current LEADER programme as it is implemented;

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[19] http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader/leader-tool-kit/monitoring_evaluation/evaluation_planning_enx

[20] Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 Art 34.3 (g)

- The monitoring and evaluation of the current Programme also acts as a good foundation for future programmes, whereby past mistakes are avoided and successful steps are repeated.

10.2 Indicators

In order to examine how the projects are being carried out and whether their objectives are being reached, the LAG will make use of a number of different indicators. These will also allow the LAG to gauge the success of the Strategy and measure its value added. They are usually quantifiable measures which look at objectives reached, resources mobilised, outputs accomplished or particular effects being obtained.

Overall the LAG will use three levels of indicators:
   i)   Common indicators for LEADER;
   ii)   Indicators in line with the local RDP; and
   iii)   Specific indicators for the Territory

The first two levels are made mandatory through a) the common rules for the LEADER programme and through b) the local RDP. Other third level indicators which the LAG will use have been devised by the action group itself in order to reflect the specific needs and structures of the Xlokk territory and the LDS.

   i)   Common Indicators for LEADER

The first level of indicators to be used for the monitoring of the LDS are those prescribed by the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Systems, being common indicators for the LEADER programmes across the EU. These indicators set at an EU level allow for a basic set of data to be collected by all Member States and their LAGs – thereby allowing for a degree of comparability.

The Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 808/2014 Annex 4 outlines four major types of indicators: *context, target, result* and *output indicators* as outlined in the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Systems. The Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) NO 834/2014 Annex 1 also states that *impact indicators* must be collected.

- **Context indicators** are those indicators which set the scene and describe the baseline scenario in which the LDS is being drawn up in. Many of such indicators are already outlined in *Section 3* describing the characteristics of the territory.
- **Target indicators** refer to indicators whereby a specific objective is to be reached – for instance the creation of a certain amount of jobs. These are usually found at a result level.
- **Result indicators** are there to measure the direct and immediate effect of the programme. They provide information on changes in behaviour as well as performance or results for the beneficiaries. These can be measured both in monetary terms and physical terms. As shown in the table below, the Commission Implementing Regulation specifies a number of results and target indicators for LEADER, and which must be collected and passed on by the LAG to the MA.

It is to be noted that even some data will be collected annually the LAG will rely greatly on national data and since this is an external source, data may or may not be update annually.

Table 40: Results and Target indicators

	Indicator	Source of data	Frequency
R22/T21	% of rural population covered by the Local Development Strategy	NSO data sets	Available data
R23/T22	% of rural population benefiting from improved services/ infrastructure	NSO data sets & Beneficiaries' applications	Available data
R24/T23	Jobs created in supported projects	Beneficiaries	Upon application (estimate); thereafter annually

Source: EU (2014), Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 808/2014 Annex 4

- **Output indicators** are more specifically related to the results obtained when processing inputs through the RDP. Their purpose is to show the introduction of something new in the system.

Table 41: Output indicators

Indicator	Source of data	Frequency
Total Expenditure	LAG Administration	Annually
Number of projects supported by LDS		
Number of applications received		
Number of applications awarded		
Number of beneficiaries receiving advice and similar support from the LAG		
Number of training days to LEADER staff by the relevant authorities		
Number of trained beneficiaries/ attendees to training		
Number of cooperation projects supported	Beneficiaries applications	Upon Application
Population covered by the LAG	NSO	Annually

Source: EU (2014), Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 808/2014 Annex 4

ii) Indicators in line with the local RDP

The RDP highlights a number of indicators which should be monitored in order to evaluate the effects of the policy on the environment. These indicators are classified under five themes:
- Theme 1: Water, wastes and energy
- Theme 2: Maltese Quality Produce

- Theme 3: Sustainable Livestock
- Theme 4: Landscape and the Environment
- Theme 5: Wider Rural Economy and Quality of Life

By transposing these indicators on a regional level an assessment of the Strategy and its impact on the region through the fulfilment of such aims can be performed. This way one could also identify how territorial development is being achieved.

The table below shows some of the indicators included which emanate from the RDP[21]. However it is again important to note that the LEADER Strategies are designed using a bottom-up approach, making sure there is no overlap with measures and actions emanating from the larger funding programmes, including the RDP itself. Hence some of the below indicators reflect priorities set for the RDP, but not priorities set by the community within the LDS.

Table 42: Indicators emanating from the local RDP

Indicator	Source	Frequency
Number of projects targeted for the conservation and management of natural assets/ protected natural sites	LAG Administration + Beneficiaries' applications	Annually
Number of projects providing public space/ recreation activities		
Number of projects in relation to renewable energy sources		
Number of projects implemented that include soil conservation		
Number of water management projects		
Number of waste management projects		
No. of projects targeting the restoration of cultural heritage features, improvements of the cultural landscape		
Total investment in renewable energy sources and % funded by LDS	LAG Administration + Beneficiaries' applications	Upon Application
Total investment in livestock and % funded by LDS		
Areas (ha) concerned by investments in saving water		
Location of projects with respect to groundwater safeguard zone		
Total investment in water management projects and % funded by LDS		
Total investment in waste management projects		
Total energy produced from new renewable energy sources	LAG Administration + Beneficiaries' applications	Upon application (estimate) - Annually there-after
Environmental impact assessment results on the landscape assessment	MEPA & Beneficiary	Upon Application

Source: RDP Malta p.559

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[21] Ministry for European Affairs and Implementation of the Electoral Manifesto (MEAIM) (2013), *RDP access Malta's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020*. p.559

iii) Specific indicators for the Territory

The GXF has also decided to employ a number of indicators specific to the territory and in line with the measures set out in the LDS, to ensure that measures are successful and set benefits within the Strategy are being realised. The below indicators will be analysed and compared in relation to the target indicators outlined in *Section 5*, as per the different measure.

Table 43: Specific indicators in relation to the Xlokk LDS

Measure	Indicators (*)	Source	Frequency
General - For all measures	Number of funds needed for project	Beneficiary	Upon Application (Estimate) and Follow up (Actual)
	% of funds obtained through LDS	LAG Administration & Beneficiaries	Upon Application (Estimate) and Follow up (Actual)
	Time elapsed between application - notification of approval and draw-down of funds		Annually (Follow up)
	Number of jobs created	Beneficiary	Upon Application (Estimate) and Follow up (Actual)
Measure 1: Restoration of assets of artistic and cultural value	Number of beneficiaries receiving support for investment in non-agricultural activities in rural areas	LAG Administration & Beneficiaries	Upon Application (Estimate) and Follow up (Actual)
	Number of restoration projects of artefacts of important cultural value		
Measure 2: Strengthening a healthy cultural identity	Number of beneficiaries receiving support for investment in non-agricultural activities in rural areas	LAG Administration & Beneficiaries	Upon Application (Estimate) and Follow up (Actual)
	Number of new/improved quality cultural and/ or social activities in the GXF area		
	Number of participants to the cultural activities per year, up to the end of the programming period		
Measure 3: Promotion of the cultural heritage	Number of marketing and promotion projects by end of programming period	LAG Administration & Beneficiaries	Upon Application (Estimate) and Follow up (Actual)

	Number of visitors per project		
	Number of pilot/development projects in the LAG area		
Measure 4: Development of green infrastructure	Number of beneficiaries receiving support for investment in non-agricultural activities in rural areas	LAG Administration & Beneficiaries	Upon Application (Estimate) and Follow up (Actual)
	Number of projects for the development of green infrastructure		
Measure 5: Transnational and inter-national co-operation	Number of cooperative projects	LAG Administration + Beneficiaries	Upon Application (Estimate) and Follow up (Actual)
	Number of participating local operators and stakeholders		

(*) – Numerical target for this measure is available in Section

10.3 Data sources and collection

As clearly indicated in the previous section, the evaluation and monitoring process will entail the collection of different data derived from a variety of data sources to be most reliable and competent.

Desktop research is the first step for data collection. This process will allow the GXF to gather enough information on the contextual background of the territory. Through the use of standard data sources, the GXF will be able to establish contextual indicators and compare data through time and extract patterns. This type of research typically focuses on secondary data sources, enabling a fast and less costly collection of basic data which is already aggregated and ready for use.

The LAG will utilise NSO data in order to carry out some of its evaluation processes. The NSO publishes various press releases and periodic data sets, plus can also provide data upon request (if such data is available). Similarly, other data can be derived from the PA and the Environment and Resource Authority (ERA; formerly MEPA). These have specific data sets, such as permits awarded, which are already collected and compiled in data sets ready for use.

The data collection process from these sources might vary. The LAG will be able to derive some data through the desktop research by accessing publicly available data of such entities, from any of their reports, publications or websites. The LAG can also request any other data it requires, which might not be in the public domain but still held in the databases of the above mentioned sources. Alternatively, the LAG might partner with these entities, which might want to collect primary data themselves, which they would then forward to the LAG but also use for other purposes in their own operations.

Other data required for the evaluation process will be obtained through primary sources, more specifically from the applicants and/or beneficiaries of the programme. This is the preferred method which is used by the LAG since such data can be updated on a regular basis whereas over reliance on other available resources might result in obtaining outdated data. The collection of data from these particular sources can be divided into two different stages.

Stage 1 would entail information collected upon application stage. This would include data such as estimated total funds required for the proposed project; amount to be obtained through LDS as well as estimates of the results to be obtained through the project. Depending under which measure the applicant would be filing their project, they would need to provide specific estimates in line with the indicators specified above.

The collection of data in this stage will be mostly limited to the collection of data from the application form, which will be drafted by the LAG in line with set MA guidelines, and approved by the MA. These application forms will be formulated in a way to ensure that the minimum basic information required is collected in these initial stages. Nevertheless, the LAG will also keep in mind a balance between asking for an adequate amount of information while not making the application process unnecessarily complex, since this might discourage

applicants.

Stage 2 would involve the follow-up collection of data. This would not apply to all applicants but only to the beneficiaries/accepted applicants. Once the project is under-way these beneficiaries will be contacted on a regular basis (very often annually - up until 2023[22]), so as to obtain information on the various processes of the programme, their implementation as well as the results of the project. For example, requests could include the time taken till the reimbursement of funds and the actual number of jobs created by the project. Once again, the data to be collected will depend on the measure under which the application is filed.

The annual follow-up of the beneficiaries will predominantly be done through specific ad-hoc requests. In this regard, surveys had been used by the MA during the programming period 2007-2013 for the RDP's evaluation[23] and proved to be one of the most effective approaches. Surveys can be done by phone, on a one-to-one basis or online, depending on the target audience in question. This will enable the evaluator to gather the information necessary to understand how the programme is effecting the territory and its citizens. Other evaluation techniques might be also employed to gauge particular indicators - such additional methods could include site-visits, interviews as well as case studies, amongst others.

This form of data collection is very much in line with the LDS bottom-up approach since it allows for a participative evaluation approach, allowing for data to be collected directly from the citizens in the territory. This does not mean that the data to be collected will simply be qualitative. Indeed the LAG will make sure that quantitative data will also be collected so as to be able to gauge the added-value of the LEADER programme.

Apart from collecting data from external sources, some of the data used to populate the above indicators will already be in the LAG's possession as a result of the collaboration between the Paying Agency and the LAG and through the regular updating of the systems in place, such as the amount of funds disbursed from the Paying Agency or the number of applicants as well as awarded projects. In this case there will be no need for any specific collection requirements since such information is usually already being used by the LAG for administrative purposes. Rather, the LAG will make sure that such data is properly collected, classified, analysed and presented.

10.4 Collation, evaluation and reporting of data

Collection of data is only the first step of the evaluation plan. The EC made up of LAG representatives will then start the evaluation process by putting all the information together and analysing it. In the process, trends will be observed and data will be compared to specific benchmarks as approved in the LDS.

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[22] AIRs will have to be provided up to the year 2024; hence data will still have to be collected up to the previous year

[23] Ministry for European Affairs and Implementation of the Electoral Manifesto (MEAIM) (2013), *Malta's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020*. p.603

The GXF will be using a mix of two evaluation approaches/ techniques:

i)   **Participatory evaluation**

The participatory evaluation will require the residents of the territory to put forward their own evaluation of the LEADER both through surveys and consultation meetings. This will undoubtedly lead to a major qualitative information to be collected. Yet the Evaluation Committee and LAG, when devising the data collection tools, must make sure that quantitative information is also collected.

ii)   **Self-evaluation**

Self-evaluation means that the LAG will use its own expertise to carry out such analysis, as opposed to external evaluation which would require an external evaluator to be brought in the process. This means that some of the LAG staff making part of the Evaluation Committee must be trained so as to build their own analytical skill set and be able to reflect on specific and important elements of the LDS. The appointment of an external evaluator is not excluded, but would require the necessary funds to be allocated to the LAG. This approach fits in with the LAGs work and other internal monitoring and reporting, especially when considering the LAG's know-how of the systems, projects and territory, as well as 2007-2013 LEADER experience. In addition, throughout the programming period, this internal monitoring system might give the LAG greater empowerment to improve the Strategy results. Nevertheless it is important to point out that this system still requires the same amount of evidence and firmness when applying the various principles as an external evaluation would require.

The trained staff will then be able to compare the data gathered to the targets set earlier for each specific measure as specified in *Section 5*.

Once all the data necessary has been collected and analysed by the internal team, a report highlighting the major findings will be compiled. This report will present the findings and relay information to the MA - which will then use the information to populate its RDP Annual Implementation Report (AIR).

Reporting will also be important so as to inform the general public, NGOs, businesses, territory residents and any other stakeholder of the findings and allow for the correct promotion of the LEADER programme locally, both at a territorial but also at a national level.

10.5 Responsibilities and Roles

For the monitoring and evaluation of the LEADER to be carried out it is important to specify the different roles of the people and entities concerned. This will enable individuals to take ownership of each step and ensure the effective implementation of such evaluation plan.

Being the closest entity to the territory and the most familiar one to the projects at hand, the LAG will be the entity responsible for evaluating the LEADER Programme. As previously mentioned, the GXF will set an Evaluation Committee who will also be tasked with

implementing the evaluation plan. The LAG manager will form part of the EC. The EC has the role of identifying the necessary data required from internal administrative records as well as collect the data from other external sources as required.

If applicable, the EC will also design surveys/ interview questions once the Strategy is approved and launched. The LAG manager will also be responsible for doing site visits or interviews when/if necessary. The information collected will be put together in an evaluation report. The EC will draw up a summary of the report highlighting the most salient points underlining the areas in which the programme seems to have excelled and the areas in which objectives and targets have not been reached, or been suboptimal.

This summary shall then be presented to the GXF Board. For the purposes of monitoring and evaluating the LDS, this stage within this evaluation process would suffice. Nevertheless since the LDS and LEADER make part of a wider RDP, the Board will have to ensure that the methods and sources used for reporting were reliable and adequate and will have to approve the report which will then be forwarded to the MA.
The MA will then have the role of including the information outlined in the report in its own AIR – evaluating the RDP as a whole. This will then have to be presented to the Commission at an EU level.

The GXF might also be requested to give a preliminary account of the LDS evaluation and monitoring to the MA prior to the final report. This will allow the MA to start preparing the AIR as necessary and within the specified time-frames.
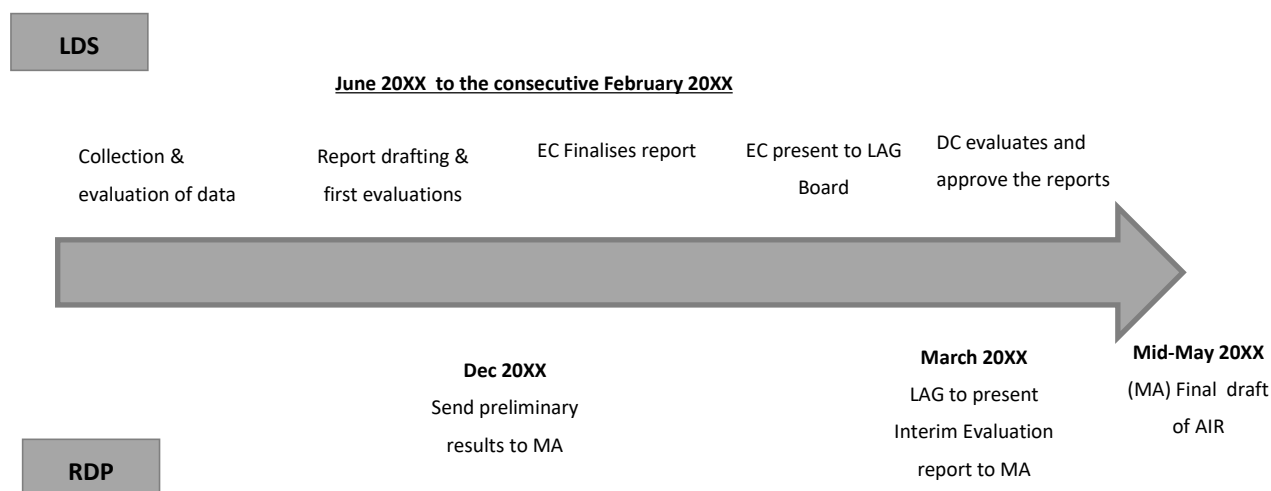
10.6 Time frames

For the monitoring and evaluation process to be effective an adequate and appropriate time plan must be devised so as to ensure that all steps are carried out on time.

The EC indicates that the LAG must set out its time-frames through a process of retro planning[24]. This refers to the fact that the LAG should first establish the major milestones of both the LDS as well as the RDP and then work backwards at what steps must be taken so as to implement such milestones. Since the LAG must meet both the LDS evaluation requirements as well as the RDP mandatory requirements, the plan has been drafted to coordinate between the two requirements so as to save on time and resources and avoid additional work.

Given this approach, the following time-frames is envisaged in terms of the monitoring and evaluation plans to meet both LDS and RDP milestones:

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[24] European Commission (2016), *8. LAG Monitoring and Evaluation Timelines*. Available at: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader/leader-tool-kit/monitoring_evaluation/timelines_en. Accessed on 1 August 2016

Figure 7: Timetable of the monitoring and evaluation plan (annual specimen)

LDS

June 20XX to the consecutive February 20XX

| Collection & evaluation of data | Report drafting & first evaluations | EC Finalises report | EC present to LAG Board | DC evaluates and approve the reports |

Dec 20XX
Send preliminary results to MA

March 20XX
LAG to present Interim Evaluation report to MA

Mid-May 20XX
(MA) Final draft of AIR

RDP

The final draft of the AIRs will be presented mid-May annually and following discussions and feedback with the Monitoring Committee, the final AIR should be published by end of June. Hence the evaluators, amongst which the LAGs, must send their own evaluation reports ahead this deadline. Indeed, the Interim Evaluation Report is envisaged to be forwarded to the MA by the end of March.

The current programming period rules require the MA to submit AIRs reporting on the previous calendar year: 2016, 2017 (Enhanced AIR), 2018, 2019 (Enhanced AIR), 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025. Therefore the above process will have to be carried out each year. [25]

Apart from the data collected upon application (which has to be collected only once and kept in the administrative files), all other indicators must be collected annually so as to maintain the right track record of the changes brought about by the LEADER projects. This is necessary since not all projects will bear fruit on the first year. Indeed some measures might take long to implement whilst others might witness benefits which take long to materialise or which do so over multiple years.

The LDS evaluation report will then also be disseminated amongst relevant stakeholders in the territory and made publicly available, so as to be able to circulate the results as already described in the Communication Plan.

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[25] Ministry for European Affairs and Implementation of the Electoral Manifesto (MEAIM) (2013), *RDP access Malta's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020*. p.604

11. Community involvement

This section describes the process undertaken to involve the local communities in the development of the Strategy.

As previously explained, the LEADER operates by utilizing a bottom up approach through the input and involvement of the local community, rather than having a central body deciding on the projects that need to be done in line with national priorities. In order to ensure the full participation of the community, various different approaches were used to inform the public regarding the LEADER programme, the need for a Strategy, consultation meetings that were to take place to serve as the backbone for this Strategy, and next steps.

11.1 Public Consultation meetings

Before the meetings

Way before the first public consultation meetings were under-way, the Xlokk LAG Manager together with the secretary, conducted several one-to-one meeting with interested potential applicants in order to better understand the projects being proposed for the new programming period. These meeting were minuted and were sent to the team of key experts leading this report.

In order to kick start the drafting of this Strategy, public consultation meetings were set up to gauge the local community's perception of the area's strengths, assets, needs and opportunities. Following a meeting with the GXF Board members, three venues were chosen in different localities within the territory to provide interested parties with better access to such meetings. The localities chosen were Zejtun, Luqa and Qrendi. An agreement was reached to hold such meetings in each chosen locality's respective public school, hence making use of schools' halls to cater for those interested in attending.

Once the venues were determined, the next process was to inform the general public. Adverts on local newspapers which included a poster highlighting the main objective of these meetings, the available dates/ venues, and the registration details. A total of six adverts were published on three major local newspapers (one in English and two in Maltese-based newspapers). The adverts were published on the two consecutive Sundays before the first public consultation meeting.

With the importance of social media and its wider reach in today's world, a Facebook page was also set up for the whole consultation process ("Xlokk Public Consultation"), together with respective event pages for each consultation meeting. The Facebook page also served as an online forum whereby stakeholders had the opportunity to exchange ideas, ask questions regarding the whole process and discuss ways of improving outcomes from the last strategy. In order to spur discussion, after each meeting a leading quote or topic highlighted throughout that meeting was posted on this page.

Moreover, the newspaper adverts were printed and distributed to Local Councils, band clubs, football clubs, schools and other local organizations, asking them to put them on their

noticeboards, given such venues are frequented by various territory stakeholders. Emails were also sent to public entities such as MEUSAC so as to market such meetings on their respective website or e-newsletter and also parish churches' participation.   The LAG manager also participated on a radio programme to explain the remit of LEADER and provide stakeholders with the available dates for these meetings. Furthermore, press releases were also written and sent to all media, emphasising the importance of LEADER with its unique bottom-up focus and also the role of the local community in presenting their views to aid the drafting of the Strategy. Not all media published such press releases.

Apart from the use of local newspapers and social media, stakeholder were also informed of the meetings through phone calls (where land line numbers were available), the use of bulk SMS (where mobile phone numbers were available) and emails (where an email address was provided). A separate Xlokk branded email was set up for this purpose. Part of the database was made available by the LAGs, but further research was carried to fill in data gaps and add other entities that might not have been included.

During the meetings

Attendees were asked to sign next to their registration details before the start of each meeting. At the start of each public consultation meeting, a brief overview of the LEADER programme was presented, the desired outcome of the meeting as well as a call for action for participation in the discussion. Additionally, one can add that although the LAG together with the team of key experts had planned to divide the attendees into 5 thematic groups, during the first consultation meeting it was evident that keeping them in the same room resulted in the stimulation of more ideas and varying opinions. This approach of retaining all attendees in one hall was applied for all Xlokk PCMs throughout. It is pertinent to note that, given LEADER funds allocated under the current programming period are less than previous funds (especially when considers the fact that previously LAGS also administered Measure 313 and Measure 125 respectively related to Encouragement for Tourism Activities and Infrastructure related to the development and adaptation of agriculture), attendees were informed of this fact at the outset of such meetings. Attendees were advised that large infrastructural projects (typically proposed by Local Councils) might need to be financed under other programmes, and that cooperation between different localities might be a way forward to address such limited funding. At the outset, attendees were also invited to put forward project ideas that are based on the principles of improving economic prosperity within the region, promoting social including and safeguarding the natural environment.

Given the wide publicity for these meetings, a large number of participants from different sectors/ economic areas, with projects of a different nature in mind, attended. The main discussions that were raised throughout the PCMs included the undertaking of various projects in order to continue ameliorating the quality of life.   Among others, such participants included private entities and natural persons including farmers, crafts person amongst other rural actors looking to expand their day to day activities and embarking on agritourism related diversification projects, embellishment projects and the setting up of activities from the Local Councils, band clubs and other entities and/ or natural persons operating in the arts and culture sectors looking on increasing their and the locality's cultural heritage, and NGOs putting forward projects to increase their reach and improve the impact on their beneficiaries/ target audience. Stakeholders who were looking on improving/ facilitating the transfer of their specific skills to interested individuals.

Additionally, during the meetings a short questionnaire was distributed among all participants to be able to understand their opinion on the LEADER and what issues they came across in the past programme, as well as asking them to rate the sessions and put forward further suggestions. The meetings were all minuted.

After the meetings

Additionally, after the meetings, each attendee was sent an email with further information, offering them the further opportunity to email/ call/ post on Facebook or use private messaging in case of other ideas or questions not addressed during the meeting. There were also cases where attendees preferred not to speak out during the meeting due to their deemed sensitivity of the project being considered. These individuals then directly contacted the LDS team via the means mentioned above. Additionally, some individuals/ entities requested one-to-one meetings to present further information regarding their projects. However, to remain impartial, given the limited funding available and not to raise any expectations and false hopes, the LDS team offered these individuals the possibility to present their project ideas via phone or email, while one-to-one meetings were addressed to the LAG teams.

11.2 Policy makers

As part of the LDS consultation process, meetings with various governmental entities (Ministries, regulators, other decision-making bodies) were held to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of the past programme, and see what needs to be done to ensure the implementation of this Strategy. The policy makers that were consulted include:

1. Funds and Programme Division, Ministry for European Affairs and the Implementation of the Electoral Manifesto
2. Planning and Priorities Co-ordination Division, Ministry for European Affairs and the Implementation of the Electoral Manifesto
3. Measures and Support Division, Ministry for European Affairs and the Implementation of the Electoral Manifesto
4. Agriculture Directorate, Ministry for Sustainable Development, the Environment and Climate Change
5. Policy and Planning Directorate, Ministry for Sustainable Development, the Environment and Climate Change
6. Agriculture And Rural Payments Agency, Ministry for Sustainable Development, the Environment and Climate Change
7. Department for Local Government, Ministry for Justice, Culture and Local Government
8. Local Councils' Association
9. Policy and Planning Directorate, Ministry for Tourism
10. Policy and Planning Directorate, Ministry for Energy and Health
11. Sustainable Energy and Water Conservation Unit, Office of the Prime Minister
12. Lifelong Learning Department, Ministry for Education and Employment
13. Malta Planning Authority, Office of the Prime Minister

14.   Malta Environment and Resources Authority, Ministry for Sustainable Development, the Environment and Climate Change

These meetings served as a backbone to further understand developments in national projects, as well as the pipeline of projects that could affect the territory, so as to avoid duplication (but this was unlikely given national projects have larger budgets) and see where LDS projects can complement national work. Additionally, policy makers also put forward ideas on where they see the LEADER programme focusing on, given their sectoral viewpoint. A number of these policy makers were also sent a draft of the measures for their further input.

11.3 Before submitting the draft

Another public consultation meeting was convened to discuss the draft measures (following approval from the DC members) and the general selection criteria. Again, any feedback received during this meeting was taken into consideration in this report.

12 LAG structure, roles and procedures

This section of the LDS looks into the set-up of the LAG and the implementation capacity, including the organizational structure and roles for each constituent of this structure.

12.1 The legal structure of the LAG

As stipulated in the Common Provision Regulation, Local Action Groups shall design and implement the community-led local development strategies. In this regard, and following up on the work initiated under the 2007-2013 RDP LEADER programme, the GAL Xlokk Foundation (GAL: "Grupp Azzjoni Lokali", or Local Action Group in Maltese) was set up as a corporate body having a distinct legal personality, full autonomy and a non-profit organisation[26]. Given its distinct legal personality, its Statute also allows the Foundation to enter into contracts - be it employing personnel, holding and disposing of finances for the purposes of both its functions and operations, of suing and of doing all such things and entering into such transactions as are incidental or conducive to the exercise or performance of its functions.

The legal and juridical representation of the Foundation is vested in the Chairperson, together with the Secretary of the Decision Committee (DC) of the Foundation (the DC is equivalent to the Board of Directors in a commercial entity. On the other hand, the Committee may appoint any one or more Committee members or staff to appear as necessary from time to time in the name and on behalf of the Foundation in any judicial proceedings and in any deed, contract, instrument or other document whatsoever.

The Foundation is a non-profit organization, although one can add that it is still able to carry out activities and undertakings of a commercial nature for the purposes of funding the implementation and furtherance of its aims and objectives, and thus ensuring its sustainability.

12.2 LAG objectives

The main objectives of the Foundation include the following:
- Promoting and improving the territory through a holistic approach with the aim to upgrade the quality of life of the rural community;
- Consolidating a public-private partnership with the intention of becoming a LAG;
- Define and implement an area-based LDS for the South East of Malta (which is this Strategy in question);
- Practising a bottom-up approach in decision-making for both the elaboration and implementation of the LDS;
- Participating in inter-territorial and trans-national actions, together with other partners or Leader-type organizations
- Participating actively in the National Rural Network (when operational), European Network for Rural Development as well as any other LEADER-related network.

The GXF also has the power to trade or carry on commercial activities – but only if the proceeds of such activities are destined to the social purposes for which the Foundation has

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[26] GXF (2020), *GAL Xlokk Statute* (updated)

been established for in the first place and also in accordance with Title III of the Second Schedule of Chapter 16 (Civil Code) of the Laws of Malta.

Other powers that the GXF has been vested with include the following:

- Engage in any business, project or undertaking that may be deemed desirable or necessary and that is consistent with the objectives of the partnership,

- Carry out financial administration of the Foundation in accordance with the budgets available,

- Apply, receive, administer and disburse EU and national funds related to its projects,

- Set up operational groups to achieve all or any of the purposes for which it has been established,

- Act as the administrative actor for the implementation of the approved LDS, including but not limited to issuing calls for proposals, receipt of applications, evaluation of applications and monitoring the satisfactory performance of the whole process,

- Be responsible for the animation of the LAG territory,

- Report progress on the delivery of the LDS to the MA, when requested,

- Ensure a continuous capacity build-up by providing the necessary training and skills acquisition to the DC and LAG staff. This includes attending training organised by the MA during the duration of the implementation program, and other training as permitted through the running cost funding provided to the LAG,

- Keep constant communication with the MA, including through the provision of requested information.

12.3 LAG structure

The Foundation is made up of both public and private partners from locally based socio-economic sectors. Specifically, 49% of representation within the DC emanates from the public sector (i.e. Local Councils and the University of Malta) and the remaining 51% from the private sector.

The term of office of each DC member is three years, after which an election is held during the Annual General Meeting (AGM) which appoints the DC members. A simple majority of 50% plus one vote approval of the registered members is required for the appointment of a new member. The members of the Committee are subject to contestation as per LAG's statute. Selected members from this Committee also have to take up the role of Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Treasurer and DC Secretary.

- The Chairperson of the DC, together with the DC Secretary, is the legal representative of the Foundation. The Chairperson of the DC can also entrust to one or more committee member specific tasks.

- In case of the Chairperson is not able to perform his or her duties, or resigns/ is removed, the Vice Chairperson assumes the functions of the Chairperson until the next election. The Vice Chairperson also replaces the Chairperson in case of temporary absence or in case of any other impediment from the Chairperson's part.

- The role of the Treasurer is restricted to monitoring purposes only and not to an administrative and policy role. He/She is responsible of overseeing the proper financial management of the Foundation.
- the DC Secretary is ultimately responsible for recording the minutes of the DC's meetings and distribute them in a timely manner.

The roles of both the accountant and the auditor of the LAG is usually outsourced as per Guidelines to LAGs. The accountant plays a key role in successful LAG management and complete the LAG's structure. The committee must keep the accountant informed on all financial matters such as the approval of invoices as well as the LAG's administration funding decision. This allows for better reporting throughout the year. The auditors also help the LAG throughout the tear by giving good administrative and financial advice.

As already mentioned previously, the term of the Chairperson and the other members is for a period of three years, subject to contestation at the AGM. At the end of the three-year period the Chairperson and other members are eligible for re-appointments for subsequent terms of three years. When the term expires, the members sitting on the decision committee and the chairperson continue to function until a new general election is held.

12.4 Membership

The GXF also issues memberships, which is open upon application. The application requires the potential applicant to specify from which sector he/ she belongs to. New membership requires the approval of at least 75% of the registered members during the AGM or at least two thirds majority of the DC. It is important to note that under the 2007-2013 LEADER programme, Local Councils' membership in the LAG was against the payment of a membership fee. Local Councils who failed to pay the stipulated fee were not allowed to apply for projects. However, in such a case, the local entities and private individuals within that locality were still eligible to participate in such programme. The Xlokk LAG envisages and intends on adopting this same procedure for the 2014-2020 programme.

In order to ensure sustainability, the Statute has provisions that safeguard the Foundation from the risk of having to cease to operate upon the cessation of any of the founder members and/ or any of the members from being a member of the Foundation itself. Indeed, any of the founder members and any of the members of the Foundation can be replaced, yet such replacement requires the approval of at least 75% of the registered members during the AGM or with at least two thirds majority of the DC.
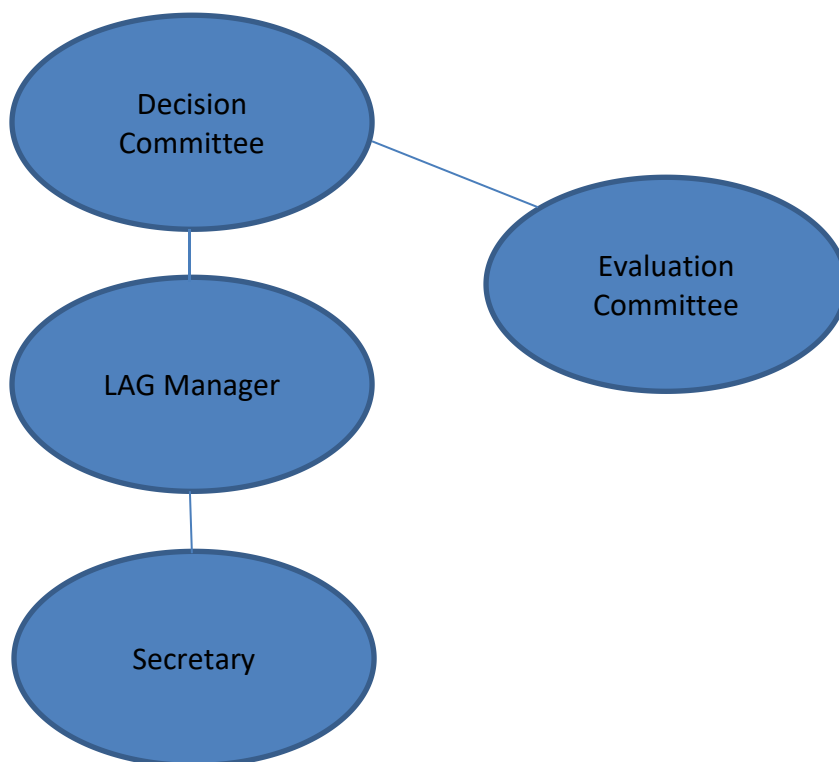
12.5 Roles and responsibilities

The DC is responsible for selecting a LAG Manager and a Secretary to provide administrative and secretarial support, including minuting of meetings and the decision-making process) upon the approval of the LDS by the MA, and the receipt of the required funds. The LAG Manager will be entrusted with a pivotal role in the implementation of the Strategy, including assistance to potential beneficiaries in the application process. The LAG Manager is in fact the person responsible for the administration of the Foundation and to provide leadership and co-ordination of the LEADER programme. In case the LAG Manager is not able to perform his/ her duties, or resigns/ is removed, an open call for vacancy will be

issued according to the Operating Rules. In the (temporary) absence of the LAG Manager, the DC Secretary shall assume the functions and duties of the Manager.

The figure below presents the structure of the LAG. Each constituent's role is described in more detail below.

Figure 8: LAG Structure

The following sub-section provides details on the roles and responsibilities of the constituents of the LAG structure. However, before focusing on the demarcation of internal roles, it is pertinent to start with the link between the Managing Authority and the LAG.

12.6 Managing Authority

The Managing Authority is responsible for programme planning, implementation, delivery and evaluation of the RDP funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), and hence the LEADER since it makes part of the RDP.

The main role of the Managing Authority is to manage and implement this Programme in an efficient, effective and correct way in respect to:

- Selection of applications for funding according to established criteria (in the case of the LEADER, applicants refers to the LAGs, not the end beneficiary within each territory);
- Monitoring and evaluation with regards to the implementation of the Programme;
- Communication and publicity activities to ensure that the programme reaches prospective beneficiaries;
- Reporting obligations to the EC on the progress of implementation;

- Provision of necessary information regarding obligations and requirements;
- Liaising with ARPA by providing all the necessary information regarding procedures to be followed and controls before payments are affected.

12.7 Foundation Decision Committee

The DC is the decision-making body in relation to all activities within the LAG and is also responsible for all the recruitments and appointments throughout the whole process, as previously indicated. All decisions taken during the DC's meetings is formally recorded in the minutes. This Committee is also in charge of evaluating the correct implementation of the LDS. Additionally, the DC will act as supervisor of all the initiatives undertaken under the LEADER. The DC generally meets regularly (typically once every month), but has the autonomy to meet as the needs arise (on the Chairperson's discretion or if requested by the LAG Manager or any other committee member), to direct the running of the Foundation and take strategic decisions. The current DC is made of nine members, with five coming from the private sector and four from Local Councils and the University of Malta. The DC might also appoint and refer to thematic working groups when taking decisions.

A quorum (with at least five Committee members) has to be reached for the proceedings of the DC to be initiated and continued. Decisions are taken by means of voting by the DC members present only. In case there are equal votes on a motion, the Chairperson has a casting vote. The Committee also regulates its own procedure and takes decisions on matters related to:

- The running and ongoing operations of the Foundation;
- Launching of projects/ measures;
- Monitoring of projects during and after realisation;

Moreover, a DC member cannot vote for a decision if he or she can direct conflict of interest in the matter (e.g. being a direct personal financial beneficiary in the project). DC members act with prudence, diligence and attention in both the execution of their duties and the exercise of their powers. Execution of business and procedures are conducted in a fair and transparent way and all potential beneficiaries are offered equal opportunities. Additionally, it also the DC's remit to ensure that the projects/ measures endorsed by it are administered efficiently, effectively and with efficacy and also that the rules and criteria of the responsible authorities are adhered to.

In this regard, all decisions taken by the DC need to be in conformity with the Commission Guidelines, EU regulations, national legislation, the 2014-2020 RDP, the LAG's eventual grant agreement with the MA and the Operating Rules issued by the MA. The role of the DC includes the assessment and review of all pre-recommendations made by the Evaluation Committee (EC – discussed in more detail later), giving points to each eligible project and eventually ranking and selecting the projects together with the subsequent allocation of funding. Where the DCs decision is not in accordance to the pre-recommendations made by the EC, reasons backing the decision must be documented. In cases where the DC members have a conflict of interest, these cannot sit on the selection board assessing that particular call (this aspect is discussed in more detail later. Once the selection process is concluded, the DC will proceed to publish the preliminary result.

The DC will also need to set up an autonomous and independent Appeals Board. Any appeals presented must be lodged with the Chairperson of the Appeals Board. No members

from the DC or EC can be nominated to sit on this Board. The outcome of the appeals process is final and cannot be altered by the DC. The MA has the right to undertake checks on the process to verify the results and ensure a fair and transparent process. In case of irregularities identified by the MA, the LAG will be requested to revise the process accordingly.

12.8 Evaluation Committee

As previously indicated, it is the remit of the DC to appoint the EC. The EC consists of a Manager and Secretary. The Manager of the EC and the secretary of the EC are also the LAG Manager and LAG Secretary respectively. The EC members will have the role to administer and check the applications. A Technical Expert may also be selected to assist the EC, depending on what expertise is required. The Technical Expert's role on the EC could include assistance to perform technical checks for each application. The sole role of the EC is one that evaluates all project proposals as well as tenders.

The role of the EC is to make pre-recommendations to the DC on administrative and technical aspects of each application. This Committee shall prepare two reports for consideration by the DC:

(a) Administrative Report – this report should include an administrative checklist signed by the Secretary of the EC, who shall be responsible for the first set of administrative checks, and then signed and verified by the LAG Manager who shall be responsible to verify the first round of checks undertaken by the Secretary.

(b) Technical Report - this report should include a reference to verifiability of costs, feasibility of projects, reasonableness of costs and timing. The Project Assessment Sheet is to be attached to this report.

The DC is to evaluate and perform any other technical checks deemed appropriate on projects before ranking and selecting projects. The role of the EC is to assess project applications, and ensure that:

- The projects meet the eligibility criteria set in the respective guidelines,
- The projects are complementary to the objectives set out in the LDS,
- The projects contribute to the economic, social and environmental background,
- The applications are administratively compliant and that quotations are valid, comparable and legitimate.

Checks will be undertaken by the LAG to ensure that no other funding has been sought for the project proposals presented. This will be undertaken by liaising with the competent bodies that oversee this aspect.

12.9 The LAG Manager

The LAG Manager, selected by the DC, is responsible for ensuring the sound operational and financial management of the LAG and the overall management and implementation of the LDS in line with the procedure set by the MA in the Operating Rules. The Manager together with the DC, have the role of appointing a LAG secretary. The Manager will be responsible for updating the DC on the implementation of the actions identified in the Strategy as well as on the management and administration of the Foundation on a regular basis. It is crucial

to take into consideration that the budget allocated to LEADER is very limited and hence the operations of the LAG and the Manager's remit are curtailed by the running costs funding available. In this context, the Manager will be key in the successful implementation of the LDS, given these budget limitations.

In this regard, the Manager must hence be able to tackle situations that require prompt and flexibility and also deep knowledge of EU project management, the local government system, NGO legislation, and public procurement principles, amongst others. Additionally, the Manager must be able to realise when consultation is required in order to tackle ad hoc matters which may arise and which require expertise not possessed within the LAG. The LAG Manager is also the Manager of the EC. The LAG Manager is also responsible for liaising with the MA whenever necessary and shall also be available for meetings with the MA. The LAG Manager, the DC, members of the LAG and other stakeholder can be supported by external key experts through the training actions identified for LAGs within the LEADER programme.

12.10   The LAG Secretary

As previously mentioned, the LAG Secretary will be in charge of supporting the LAG Manager in the management and implementation of the LDS, in particular from an administrative and secretarial point of view. The LAG Secretary is also a member of the EC in order to keep tabs on the tasks being assigned to the LAG. The employment of the Manager and the Secretary allows the LAG to follow the four eye principle especially during the evaluation of projects that are 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 44: Roles and responsibilities

Body	Role
Managing Authority	• manage and implement this Programme in an efficient, effective and correct way • reporting progress of implementation to the Commission • liaise with the Paying Agency
Decision Committee	• Decision-making body • Responsible for selecting the LDS Manager and Secretary • In charge of evaluating the correct implementation of the LDS • Act as supervisor of 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	• Ensures the sound operational and financial management together with

	the Accountant of the LAG • Oversees and implements the LDS • Update the DC on the implementation of actions identified in the Strategy • Liaise with the MA whenever necessary

12.11 Addressing conflict of interest

As previously discussed, in cases where DC members have a potential conflict of interest, they cannot sit on the selection board assessing that particular call. Once the selection process is concluded, the DC must proceed with publishing the preliminary result. As previously mentioned, the DC will set up an autonomous and independent Appeals Board, who can also address any appeals on the grounds of conflicts of interest. In situations where an individual is involved or has a direct interest in a project, and is connected to any of the DC members (including EC Members) this shall be considered as a conflict of interest. All LAG staff should refrain from entering into situations that involve a conflict of interest. A conflict of interest may arise but is not restricted to the following circumstances:

- The DC member's spouse, parent, brother, sister, child or step-child, other relative or co-habitee;
- A body corporate controlled by the members;
- Any business partner or associate.

12.12 Training and development

The LAG staff are key to the success of the LEADER programme implementation. It is hence deemed crucial for such staff/ personnel to acquire the required skills and expertise with regards to various areas required in the implementation of such strategy.

The LAG Manager is responsible in ensuring the sound operational and financial management of the LAG and hence must have the necessary training in areas such as financial and project management, as well as an overview of audit matters. Public speaking is also beneficial due to the various meetings that he/ she will need to be actively involved in throughout the whole process. Needless to say, the LAG Manager should also have the necessary management skills to ensure the sound management of the Foundation.

It is important for all LAG members to familiarise themselves with the list of criteria stipulated in the LEADER Operating Rules. The LAG staff should also be provided with training to help them acquire evaluation skills. Like various other public tenders, the LEADER projects have to be evaluated in an objective manner and a score is given based in a pre-determined list of criteria. All LAG staff and members should be provided with the necessary training to undertake such evaluation by the local responsible authority. Other areas, such as the identification and recording of conflicts of interest, are also vital for all LAG members to be acquainted with.

13 Sources of information

EC, (2015), *Malta – Rural Development Programme*

NSO (2014), *Demographic Review*

Local Councils Act, Chapter 363

EEA, (2006), *Corine Land Cover*

Planning Authority's GIS datasets (2016)

MA (2015), *Guidelines to Local Action Groups*

MA (2015), *Operating Rules for the 'LEADER' Programme*

NSO (2010), *Census of Agriculture*

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2015), *Communication Strategy for Malta – European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development 2014-2020*

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2014), *Partnership Agreement of Malta 2014-2020*

14 Appendix 1: Additional measure emerging from territory stakeholders

Measure 4.1: Facilitating farm diversification and rural enterprise

Measure title: Facilitating farm diversification and rural enterprise
Measure Code: not applicable

Note: In view of strategic considerations that are explained in detail in section 4.3.2 of this document, the measure for farm diversification and rural enterprise has been included as a dormant measure within this LDS that would only be activated should a suitable demarcation with the measure 6.4 of the RDP supporting similar interventions, be established.

Given the very strong demand for support for these types of interventions allowing small-scale investment in farm assets for the provision of business services such as social and/or therapy agriculture, and educational farms, shown by a significant number of local actors, such as small producers and persons wishing to invest in rural business development on a small scale, the Foundation sees that sufficient evidence and justification exists to include this type of measure, albeit on the reserve list for the time being, within the strategy for the Xlokk region.

As explained in previous sections, this proposition is seen to serve many important functions including that of ensuring that the LDS is built around genuine bottom-up needs of the community, that it is inclusive, and that the LEADER programme supports small-scale projects that in some cases do not have the same ability to compete for funds when assessed against criteria that cater for larger investments.

It is precisely with this evidence and rationale that the measure for facilitating farm diversification and rural enterprise has been programmed. In recognition of the need for demarcation with the RDP measure, the following measure has been designed to support small-scale interventions up to an investment level of 50,000 EUR.

   a) **Aim, Rationale and Scope of Action**

Specific Objectives

The general aim of this measure is to facilitate farm diversification and rural business, with a special focus on social and educational agriculture. The objective is to support rural business activities that are of interest to the territory and beyond, and that are intended to educate consumers and to provide other social services connected to the rural environment.

The specific objective of this measure is, by end of programming period, to improve the economic and social performance of the LAG territory.

Rationale

This measure allows for creativity on the part of potential applicants and is deemed highly relevant given that the territory can be identified with particular agriculture products that can be showcased in a local setting. Showcasing agricultural products such as vintage wine and olive oil can attract visitors to the territory who can learn about the history and traditional production methods, as well as about the territory itself. This builds on the variety of genuine, wholesome products that are found solely within the territory, and are known for their unique quality. Moreover, this type of business activity can generate revenue from sales and educational tours that can be injected in characterisation and certification efforts, aimed to continue to guarantee the authenticity and quality of the product.

The consultation findings also show the possibility for supporting existing social agriculture services, particularly when these are intended to provide a partial income or therapy to vulnerable persons, persons with disabilities, or people with social issues, and to create new services for the same purpose. These include the use of farm animals, and aromatic plants/herbs for therapy, the transformation of farms into multi-sensory play-grounds, and the provision of other forms of social agriculture services.

Scope of action

This measure supports farm diversification and creation of rural business activities of two types:

- The modernisation and/or upgrade of premises for the creation of small-scale educational farms and/or farm shops;
- The modernisation and/or upgrade of premises for the creation of small-scale centres for the provision of social agriculture services (therapy, employment, mobility and leisure).

This measure shall only support investment operations which do not exceed a total investment cost of 50,000 EUR.

b) **General description of the Action**

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 showcasing of typical agricultural products in specially designed small-scale farm shops and outlets, supported by research aimed at producing interactive facilities, workshops, or publications related to the agriculture products and their historical association with the territory;

- the creation of small-scale centres aimed at educating residents and non-residents of the territory about the nutritional value or about the benefits of typical and traditional agricultural produce and knowledge about the techniques used in traditional farming, including indigenous breeds in livestock farming;
- the development of small-scale demonstration farms for education focusing on the use of sustainable, innovative techniques (such as vertical farming, hydroponics, integrated pest management, etc);
- the transformation of farms/premises into small-scale centres for therapy and leisure and mobility.

Type of support

The form of support provided by this measure is a grant support in the form of reimbursement of eligible costs that have been actually incurred and paid, together with, where applicable, other contributions.

Action intervention logic

This measure is intended to create business and employment opportunities by capitalizing on rural assets and resources that are unique to the territory and offer possibilities for the development of products and services that cannot be created elsewhere. This link to the territory – the 'terroir', the varieties, the breeds, the rural communities and social clusters – is the central premise for this action, because it provides the unique distinction and a barrier of demarcation to other larger-scale initiatives that support rural business development. In this way, this measure may be seen to complement RDP measures for farm business development, farm diversification and development of joint collaborative action for creation of social agriculture services and other rural services to the community.

The programming of the measure, also through the selection criteria and other requisites, is intended to fulfil business-oriented objectives in a socially-sensitive manner, by creating opportunities for the consideration of social needs within the community. The emphasis on small-scale interventions, even when the actions are intended to result in the creation of farm shops, outlets, demonstration centres, and other premises for the carrying out of business activities, aims to ensure that preference is given to projects that would not be cost-effective without the support, and serves to give priority to projects with a social agenda.

As such, this measure is a classical LEADER-type intervention supporting balanced territorial development and development of the wider rural economy, structured around the capital assets of the rural areas and the social needs of the people within the territory.

Contribution to cross-cutting objectives of the RDP

Support for farm diversification and rural business growth is a cross-cutting objective of the RDP that is seen to contribute to innovative developments as a younger and more

highly-trained generation enters into the rural development sector. The innovative element of this measure is strengthened via its emphasis on social inclusion and integration in the scope of actions, and the facilitation of social agriculture services, that are, by their nature, innovative for Malta.

c) Eligible Beneficiaries

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

- Registered Voluntary Organisations & Non-Governmental 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 Xlokk territory)
- Private entities (legal persons) limited to micro and small enterprises defined in the EU recommendation 2003/361 , and regularly operating within the Xlokk territory
- Natural persons

d) Eligible and non-eligible costs

Only costs incurred from the date of signing of the contract/grant agreement with the Foundation shall be eligible.

The following is an indicative list of eligible and non-eligible costs. More detailed lists may be issued by the Foundation in the specific call for applications.

Eligible costs

The eligible costs to be reimbursed through this grant support relate to investments in property and assets, and related expenses. .

In the case of improvement to immoveable property, 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 improvement in the immoveable property needs to be in line with all relevant planning and development permits.

The following are eligible costs relating to structural investments:

a. the improvement of immovable property;
b. the purchase of new machinery and equipment up to the market value of the asset;
c. general costs linked to expenditure referred to in points (a) and (b), such as architect, engineer and consultation fees, fees relating to advice on environmental and economic sustainability, including feasibility studies. Feasibility studies shall remain eligible expenditure even where, based on their results, no expenditure under points (a) and (b) is made;

d. the following intangible investments: acquisition or development of computer software and acquisitions of patents, licenses, copyrights, trademarks.

General costs referred to in point (c) are eligible up to 10% of the total eligible costs of the project.

All costs shall be eligible if incurred within the project duration (between the project start date and termination date).

Non-eligible costs

The following costs shall not be eligible:
a. interest on debt, except in relation to grants given in the form of an interest rate subsidy or guarantee fee subsidy;
b. value added tax except where it is non-recoverable under national VAT legislation.

e) Eligibility and selection criteria

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 as 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 Xlokk 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 shall not exceed a total cost of 50,000 EUR.

Selection criteria

An evaluation of the proposed actions that meet all the eligibility criteria shall be carried out in accordance with the selection criteria set out in the selection criteria grid below. This permits the proposed actions that are eligible for funding to be ranked with priority being given to proposals that are deemed to be more value-for-money.

Although some of the selection criteria may be seen to overlap with eligibility criteria, their

inclusion in the selection permits the evaluators to assess the quality of the evidence that is presented in the project proposal in relation to a specific criterion, and thus to be able to give preference to higher-quality project proposals.

To be considered for funding or to be placed on the reserve list, a project proposal must pass all the eligibility criteria and must also obtain a minimum of 50 marks out of the total marks allocated to the selection criteria.

		Selection criteria and sub-criteria	Maximum points
1		Relevance to the objective of the measure	20
1a		Evidence of financial feasibility of proposal through business plan	10
1b		Evidence of the educational value of the proposal	5
1c		Evidence of the social value of the proposal	5
2		Link to the territory	20
2a		Evidence that the proposed project capitalises on rural resources that are found within the territory (breeds, varieties, landscape features, other rural assets of importance that are distinct in the area)	10
2b		Evidence that the proposed project links to other similar initiatives of rural enterprise in the area	5
2c		Evidence that the proposed project links to other similar initiatives of educational and/or social value in the area	5
3		Type of project	20
3a		The project is an integrated project in that incorporates the achievement of more than one objective (business, education, tourism, social inclusion, environment, etc.)	10
3b		The project is area-based and is to be conducted in more than one location/facility	5
3c		The project makes use of a product that has achieved certification (product of quality) in accordance to the relevant national criteria	5
4		Social impact on the community	15
4a		The project foresees the employment of persons from a socially-disadvantaged background	10
4b		The project provides educational content that is targeted to children or to persons with learning difficulties	5
5		Preparedness	15
5a		Evidence that the necessary consultation with stakeholders and regulatory entities has taken place	10
5b		The development permitting process has already been initiated (where applicable)	5
6		Sustainability	10
6a		Evidence that the project has a neutral or positive impact on the environment and the climate	5
6b		Evidence that the project has a neutral or positive impact on gender and other forms of non-discrimination policies	5

f) 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.

g) Risks in implementation and mitigation factors

The risks are mainly related to the capacity of the applicant to provide own financial resources where applicable and to be able to execute the project on time. This risk is mitigated through the use of relevant criteria for evaluation and selection of projects.

The risk of double funding similar operations, or parts of, through this LDS and the RDP is to be mitigated through the setting of the 50,000 EUR threshold for investments; moreover, the Foundation shall commit to maintaining a constant dialogue with the Managing Authority and the Agency for Payments to ensure that such risks are identified at an early stage of the application process, and eliminated.

h) Overall assessment and relevance of the Action

By way of overall assessment, this measure provides for the creation of opportunities that make use of unique capital assets found in the rural areas, to address social and economic needs of the rural communities. The significance of this measure results from the value that these synergies provide, by facilitating actions that are aligned with national priorities and the spirit of LEADER programmes, and by providing scope for actions that, by virtue of their inclination towards the social enterprise sector, would not be eligible for support in funding programmes with a stronger economic agenda.