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OPPORTUNITIES START HERE.
To revive investments and growth, the European Union supports people, ideas and visions across Europe

The European Union (EU) is all about opportunities that deliver real benefits and make a difference at a local level. The promotion of growth, employment and well-being across Europe is one of its main priorities. By investing in people’s ideas and visions, the EU is removing obstacles and creating favourable conditions for development and modernisation across the continent. In support of the pioneering and entrepreneurial spirit of Europeans, the EU opens doors and empowers people to pursue their own innovative projects.

Europeans have already come up with original ideas for better education, modernised healthcare and greener transport infrastructure, to cite but a few examples, and the EU has provided the means to get tailored projects off the ground. Where valuable projects struggle to win investment due to the reluctance of investors to take risks, the EU steps in by backing loans or providing funding for projects that have the potential to succeed.

When Malta decided to set up a Jobsplus training programme for jobseekers, the inactive and employed people wanting to upgrade their knowledge, EU investment supported the initiative. Overall, nearly 39,500 people were trained, with over 90% of them completing their training successfully. Over half of those who had undergone training through the scheme were in employment or furthering their studies six months after receiving assistance.

EU funding does not only offer people financial support for their projects. Project beneficiaries can also access hands-on coaching and expertise to ensure their projects provide real added value for the people and communities around them. Results are visible thanks to knowledge-sharing and research facilities, energy efficient buildings or smart mobility solutions, which, in turn, lead to a more sustainable future for Europe’s cities and regions.

Whether it’s generating more tourism and growing business by helping to build a new ferry terminal, making it easier for SMEs to take out loans, giving research into life sciences a boost with a new centre, improving roads, stepping up flood protection, improving treatment for cancer patients via a new oncology centre or helping consumers to use cleaner sources of energy, EU funding is helping Malta to make the most of projects that make a difference at the local level.

Only some of these stories feature in this brochure. But look around in your community and you will see that behind European investments there is a wealth of people’s stories to discover.
Maltese households increasingly turning to clean energy

Thanks to EU regional support, 570 households in Malta installed a solar water heater and 18,433 households set up solar PV panels between 2010 and 2017, generating considerable energy savings. This means lower energy bills for consumers and reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, which is good for the long-term health of Maltese people and of the planet.

Solar energy has been identified as one of the main sources of clean energy, i.e. energy that does not generate greenhouse gas emissions that are harmful to the planet. However, many people in Malta are not equipping their houses with solar power facilities because of the initial high installation costs. Malta’s very sunny climate means there is abundant potential to tap energy from this natural source. In addition, rooftops of private households, factories and public buildings such as schools offer a lot of surface area for Malta to take advantage of this natural resource.

Things are beginning to change thanks partly to the European Regional Development Fund, which aims to boost the development of regions across the EU. The Maltese government has used this fund to set up a project which helps the general public invest in solar panels and solar heaters. The aim was to encourage people to switch from using dirty fossil fuels to clean energy and shift people’s mindsets in favour of clean energy.

“After I installed photovoltaic (solar) panels on my roof the electricity bill has gone down and on occasions it is close to zero I consider this a very good investment for my family,” said Joseph Cassar, one of the individuals who has benefitted from the project.

The public were also provided with information about how to prevent excessive energy use, how to save energy and how to make the best use of renewable energy sources.

This EU funding has moved Malta to closer to meeting its targets for the increased use of solar energy in the country. Specifically, 570 households have fitted their houses with solar water heaters and 18,433 households have installed solar panels between 2010 and 2017. That has helped Malta achieving considerable energy savings and greenhouse gas reductions.

“Our hope is that this will continue to change mindsets so that more and more households install clean energy facilities,” said Marjohn Abela, the CEO of Malta’s Regulator for Energy and Water Services.
Improving the road network in Malta

A major programme to upgrade part of Malta’s main road network is cutting journey times, providing greater accessibility for motorists and increasing road safety thanks in part to the Cohesion Fund of the EU. The improvements are giving the island’s tourism industry a boost and are also expected to reduce costs for transport operators.

Growing numbers of traffic jams in Malta were slowing economic development by eating up productive working time. Malta’s response was to work out how to improve major roads across the country to ensure that traffic flows more freely. Large areas of Malta’s road network have been improved thanks to the project, which was run by Transport Malta and partly funded by the EU’s Cohesion Fund. This includes the Coast Road, a 7.3 kilometre stretch of road that is part of a major European Union transport corridor, known as the Trans-European Network for Transport (TEN-T).

The road has been widened and road alignments have been made to improve road safety. The road, which was previously associated with fatal and grievous accidents, was upgraded to a two-lane dual carriageway with physical separation between traffic travelling in each direction. The new road has made it easier to reach the northern side of Malta from the centre of the island and has reduced journey times.

Malta Public Transport, which is a private company, operates a regular bus service in the area, including eight routes on the Coast Road. “Before the road improvements, there was a single lane that was more prone to congestion and accidents. The dual carriageways lead to a smoother flow of traffic, which makes our bus service more efficient, and reduces emissions. The biggest saving is on time and safety on the road,” said Konrad Pule, the General Manager of Malta Public Transport.

Surveys conducted by Transport Malta show that road users and road operators are pleased with the improvements. Surveys were carried out in 2013, before the start of construction, and then afterwards, in the first quarter of 2017 and included important road safety issues such as the condition of the roads and road lighting. “The satisfaction rating score for both the case of road users and that of road operators was positive in all of the aspects,” said Kyle Ann Borg Marks, Project Leader for the Coast Road project at Transport Malta. The Maltese government’s Ministry for Transport, Infrastructure and Capital Projects is responsible for Transport Malta.
Tourism is one of Malta’s main economic sectors. The island of Gozo, which lies just off mainland Malta, is a major tourist destination for visitors to the country. Prior to 2011, passengers waited to board the ferry with no shelter or facilities but that all changed in 2013, when the construction of the Ċirkewwa ferry terminal was finished thanks in part to support from the European Regional Development Fund.

“Before the terminal, people were exposed to all kinds of weather as they waited for the ship. Now they have a modern ferry terminal with a sheltered waiting area, direct connection via gangways and linkspans from the terminal to the ferry ships and facilities such as rest rooms somewhere to get a cup of coffee. According to customer satisfaction surveys, people are much happier about the efficiency (timeliness), the safety, the comfort of the ferry service and about the facilities,” said Christopher Farrugia from Transport Malta, the Maltese government authority.

Passenger numbers have been increasing since 2010. According to Malta’s National Statistics Office, there were over 4.739.000 passengers between Malta and Gozo in 2015 and 5,133,000 in 2016. Ferries operate from the Ċirkewwa terminal to the port of Mġarr on Gozo. In the summer, boat trips to the island of Comino also operate from the port of Ċirkewwa, as well as organised diving excursions.

“The ferry terminal buildings help promote Gozo as a distinct tourist destination, and have also reduced congestion and improved the transportation network within the Maltese Islands. This infrastructure project enhanced visitor’s experience of Gozo and improved connections between the islands, which is the key to success,” said Joe Muscat, Chief Executive Officer of the Gozo Tourism Association.

“The building of the Cirkewwa Ferry Terminal brought to an end the hardships faced by the thousands of people from Gozo who cross to Malta daily for work, hospital visits and other appointments. It has also helped to portray a much better image to tourists and Maltese visitors,” said Joseph G. Grech, President of The Gozo Business Chamber.

Tourism is vital to Gozo’s economy and the ferry terminal development is encouraging more tourists to visit the island. Better transport links are also helping to unlock business potential within the region and boosting the quality of life for both the inhabitants of Gozo and visitors.

*These facilities have been designed to improve access to all and to provide a positive travel experience for travellers between Malta and Gozo. An improved inter-island transport network service with greater efficiency, safety and comfort will be an economic benefit to the whole community,” says Mr Farrugia. The new terminal building itself has one of the largest installations of photovoltaic panels in Malta. A wind turbine has also been erected at the south side of the port. Through these installations, plus other energy saving measures, green energy will help meet the terminal’s operating needs, substantially reducing its carbon footprint.
Flood prevention that lasts

Maltese people and businesses will be better protected from flood damage following storms thanks in part to the EU’s cohesion fund. A network of underground tunnels, canals and bridges have been built in the areas of the country that are most susceptible to flooding.

“Thanks to the project, a number of companies that used to have their premises flooded now have more peace of mind and many of them have invested in upgrading their premises and even enlarging their businesses. New businesses have also been attracted to these areas, especially in Valley Road Birkirkara/Msida, where new showrooms and offices are being built,” said Carmel Mifsud Borg, an advisor at the Maltese government’s Ministry for Transport, Infrastructure and Capital Projects.

More than 17,000 people and more than 1,000 commercial entities will benefit directly from this investment, which will help keep rising water levels in check during periods of relatively intense rainfall.

Given that water is relatively scarce in Malta, another positive outcome of the project is that it will lead to rainwater being collected through reservoirs and then potentially treated and re-used.

Improving treatment for cancer patients at the Mater Dei Hospital

EU regional investment has played a part in ensuring that cancer patients have more advanced treatment facilities and greater access to care in a new Oncology Centre. The Centre is located in Malta’s general public hospital in Msida.

The first cancer outpatients were admitted to the new Sir Anthony Mamo Oncology Centre, at the Mater Dei General Hospital at the end of 2014. It was built with the help of the European Regional Development Fund.

The Centre will help treat the high number of cancer patients in Malta. According to research, on average, almost 1,400 Maltese residents develop some form of cancer every year and this is expected to increase as a result of the ageing population.

It will allow patients to be treated locally and is expected to help reduce the number of cancer-related deaths by detecting it earlier.

The new Centre has 113 beds, an additional 35 beds compared to the previous oncology centre at Sir Paul Boffa Hospital. It has been divided into in-patient areas, out-patient areas, treatment areas and will provide cancer patients with a wider range of support services (including physiotherapy, social work and psychology).

New equipment has been replaced with new equipment, such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and radio therapy equipment. This will lead to quicker and more effective diagnosis and treatment whilst also reducing side effects.

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Enhancing knowledge and innovation - Setting-up a Life Sciences Centre

With EU regional support, a Life Sciences Park has been built in Malta with facilities dedicated to advanced research and development. Already over 400 highly skilled workers from 40 companies are developing, for example, medical devices and systems for the Internet of Things. The Malta Life Sciences Park in San Gwann, Malta, provides technology enterprises with laboratory and office space so that they can carry out research and development in the life sciences sector. The facilities include state-of-the-art laboratories (including medical and environmental testing labs), modern offices and seminar and meeting facilities. It has been open since January 2016 and covers an area of 10,000 m².

"The park already hosts 40 businesses with over 400 highly skilled workers who are developing pharma dossiers, medical devices, medical isotopes and nutraceuticals. In the park’s digital hub, companies are developing secure data transfer systems, cloud storage solutions, as well as systems for the Internet of Things. A number of the enterprises are start-ups," said Mr Joseph P. Sammut, the Chief Executive Officer of the park.

This effort complements Malta’s successful track record in developing services and products in the areas of healthcare and life sciences such as medical devices, generics and private healthcare. The park has also been awarded the Malta Engineering Excellence Award for Industrial Excellence for 2017 in recognition of its contribution to improving the country’s research, technology development and innovation infrastructure.

Jobplus training programme helping Maltese find work

With support from the EU’s Employability Programme, Malta has provided training for nearly 39,500 jobseekers, the inactive, and the employed who are interested in upgrading their knowledge. Six months after receiving assistance, over half of those taking part in the programme were in employment or furthering their studies.

"The scheme was very attractive as it covered all fees and expenses related to the diploma that I followed. In fact, I was awarded the scholarship and studied for a Diploma in Computing and Information Systems by the University of London in conjunction with St. Martin’s Institute of IT, Malta," said Mr Antoine Psaila (Assistant Head of School). "I had originally decided to study this diploma to increase my knowledge in computing, which ultimately helped me improve my teaching skills since I deliver computing lessons. Thanks to this funding my main aims were reached and my overall experience was very positive." Employers were also able to take part in the traineeship schemes and had the opportunity to train their future employees, thus increasing their chances of reducing labour skills shortages.
Better loan conditions for small and medium-sized enterprises

Banks in Malta have been able to provide loans to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with better conditions such as lower interest rates thanks to EU guarantees. This is giving the SME sector in Malta a boost.

Small businesses often struggle to persuade banks to provide them with loans so that they can grow their businesses. But this situation improved in Malta thanks to a combination of EU funds. With the help of the European Investment Fund (EIF), the Joint European Resources for Micro to Medium Enterprises (JEREMIE) fund, a financial engineering tool, which came under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), provided guarantees that enabled banks to offer SMEs loans at more advantageous conditions from 2011 - 2014.

The guarantees were set out in agreements between the Maltese government and the European Investment Fund and between the European Investment Fund and the Bank of Valletta, one of the country's main local banks. To give an idea of the amounts of money involved, these guarantees were expected to unlock around 11 million euro of preferential loans for around 100 SMEs and the 11 million euro investment was estimated to generate around 83.5 million euro of investment in the economy as a whole.

The loans were preferential because the EU funding provided guarantees so that banks could offer SMEs lower interest rates on their loans. The JEREMIE programme was a predecessor to the current SME Initiative - a European Structural and Investment Fund backed instrument managed by the EIF under the new 2014-2020 programming period that has been generating SME financing since July 2015.

“Thanks to the EU guarantees, we as a bank are offering a 1% lower interest rate on the loans we provide small businesses. That makes it easier for SMEs to access loans,” said Mark Scicluna Bartoli, EU & Institutional Affairs Executive at the Bank of Valletta’s EU Representative Office in Brussels.

They are also preferential because they enable the bank to offer reductions in collateral obligations. They require from the SMEs. Major assets such as houses are examples of collateral that banks require from SMEs before granting a loan. By having this collateral, banks can get some if not all the money back in the event that the SME goes bankrupt.

“For example, for a 100,000 euro loan, we need 100,000 euro in collateral. Thanks to the EU fund, the EU provides 75,000 euro of that collateral in the form of a guarantee, which means the SME only has to provide collateral of 25,000 euro rather than 100,000 euro,” added Mr Bartoli.
WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION:

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