

CITIZEN SUMMARY

Fund: European Social Fund (ESF)

Programming period: 2014-2020

Budget available (Malta): €168 Million (10% for Gozo)

Reporting Year: 2020

The European Social Fund, ESF, finances projects that aim at improving peoples' lives through projects intended to teach people new skills or strengthen existing ones and to supporting them in finding better jobs.

ESF Malta provides funding in four main areas that aim to support people in increasing their employability; supporting inclusion, particularly for those at a higher risk of exclusion; improving educational attainment; and improving the delivery of the public service while supporting social partners to engage in dialogue with government.


What were the main challenges faced in 2020?

In 2020, the projects being implemented through the ESF were impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, the challenges encountered were dealt with innovatively and the projects continued to progress through various alternative measures adopted in response to the new restrictions.

Traineeship schemes, job placements and work exposure schemes in several areas came to a halt due to the closure of businesses. This was mitigated by extension of the agreements in place to ensure that the aims of the activities would still be achieved.


The pandemic has also had a direct impact, specifically on vulnerable participants who due to restrictions had


€168 Million In Funds


39,000 Persons Supported



8,400 Qualifications Attained

2,309 People In Employment Upon Leaving



177 Loans Provided

€36 Million to support employees hit by Covid 19



1,754 Companies Benefitting

350 Mystery Shopping Recommendations



15 Research Activities Completed

8,194 Young people participated



79,200 Research Hours

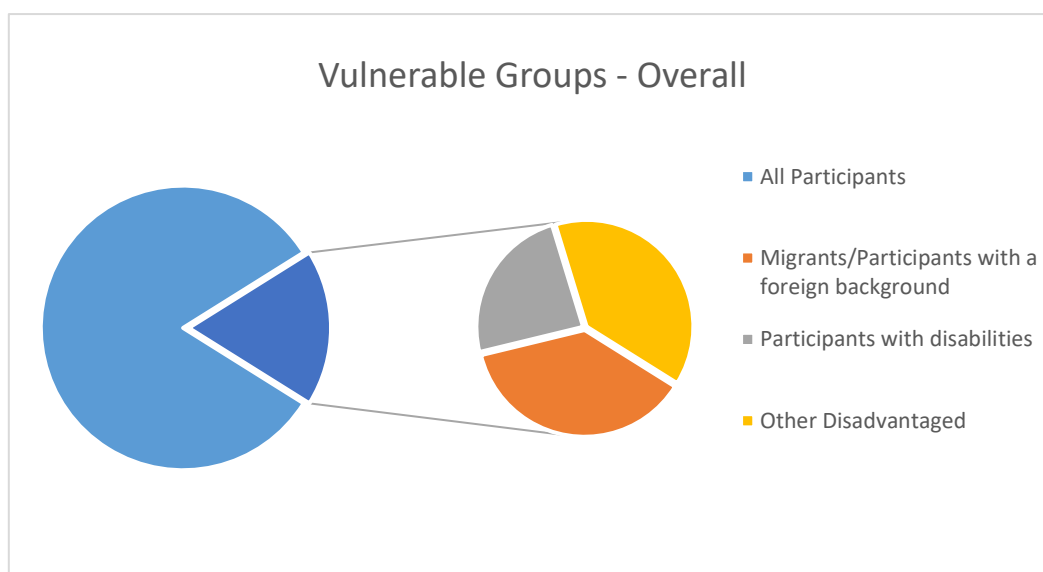
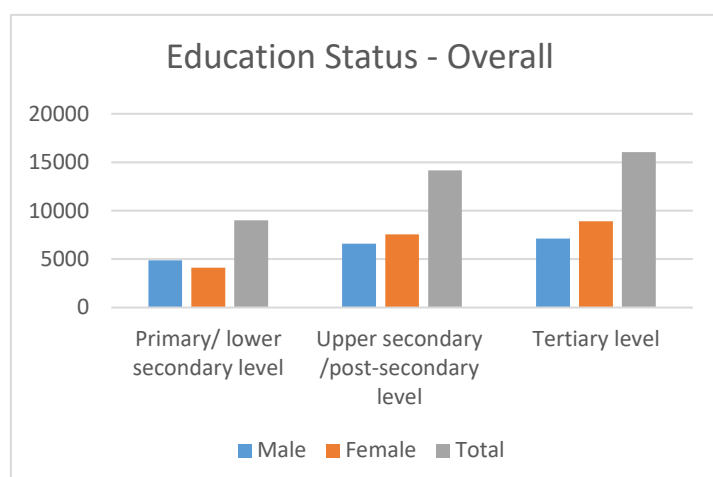
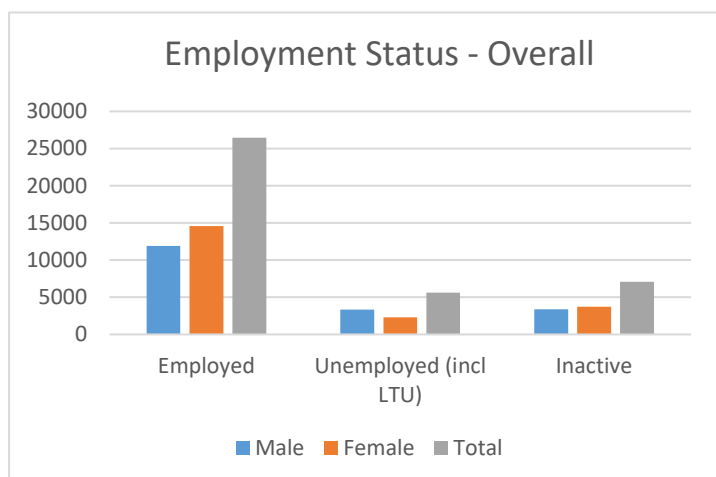
to stop attending training or therapeutic interventions. This brought about the need to introduce alternative approaches to keep the activities ongoing. Efforts in shifting to online learning for the training activities along with keeping contact with vulnerable groups through telephone and video calls mitigated the challenges brought about by health restrictions in place.

Moreover, a new priority entitled ‘Enabling job maintenance in the context of the COVID pandemic crisis’ was approved in 2020 under OPII with an allocation of €35.9M in order to further support the initiatives undertaken by the government, through the COVID Wage Supplement, to support local workers whose jobs were disrupted as a result of the pandemic.

Furthermore, the 4th Call for projects under the ESF was launched. The call was for projects aimed at furthering investment in the capacity building of social partners and in enabling NGOs to support people at risk of poverty.

What Results were achieved as at the end of 2020?

As at the end of 2020, **thirty six** projects were being implemented including **two** aid schemes and **one** financial instrument. The list of projects can be found on www.eufunds.gov.mt. By end 2020, **over 39,000 persons** were benefitting/benefitted through different opportunities provided by ESF projects implemented across Malta and Gozo. The following charts give a quick overview on the demographics and status of the persons supported:



What projects were in implementation throughout 2020?

The ESF supports activities in 4 main areas as follows, providing key highlights on progress achieved in the respective areas.

EMPLOYABILITY

€27.4M
committed

2 projects and 1
aid scheme

The **Access to Employment (A2E)** aid scheme, which is run by Jobsplus and has a budget of €12M, has helped 1,677 persons to date (49% women), and aims to increase employment opportunities for those who may have difficulties finding work on their own, especially those who have other barriers such as persons with disability and unemployed persons over 50. It is important to note that 70% of participants were in employment after completing the scheme.

The **Training for Employment** project provides training opportunities and grants to the working age population in order to improve employability by increasing their knowledge and hands on experience in a real working environment. The project, implemented by Jobsplus, has a budget of €9.6M and by the end of 2020 it has provided opportunities to 3,158 persons. The new challenges brought about by the Pandemic, increased the demand for support and training for individuals looking for employment or those looking for better opportunities. This can be seen through an increase in applications for both the Development Skills Scheme and the Work Exposure Scheme.

Aimed at reducing the number of youths who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs) the **Youth Guarantee 2.0** provides training and personalised assistance to those at risk of becoming long-term unemployed and of being socially excluded. It also includes SEC and MCAST prevention classes for those needing to re-sit exams and during the challenging period derived from the Covid-19 pandemic, participants of the SEC prevention classes were also provided with additional learning material through an online platform equipped with self-study short videos and tests covering all topics of the subjects offered. This is another project run by Jobsplus, with a budget of €5.9M and as of 2020 has assisted 4,045 persons under the age of 25 (49% women).

The projects that are currently being implemented in this area, are providing opportunities to persons with disabilities, long-term unemployed individuals, other vulnerable persons, as well as those at risk of poverty to improve their employability prospects.

By the end of 2020, through the **VASTE** and **INK** initiatives, over 1,700 vulnerable persons and persons with disabilities received training to prepare them for the work environment and were provided opportunities to maximise their abilities. This is being achieved through skills audit assessments, tailor-made training as well as work placements in the open labour market.

SOCIAL INCLUSION

Through the Home-Based Therapeutic Services initiative within the project '**Knowledge, Training, Communications and Support Measures in Support of Vulnerable Groups**', which is aimed at combatting poverty and promoting social inclusion, a total of 628 vulnerable persons benefitted from therapeutic support by the end of 2020. These interventions take place within their communities and are adapted according to the specific need of the families involved. Assistance to vulnerable students through mentoring proved successful through the project **Adding Value: Nurturing Learning Journeys at the MCAST Foundation College** where 1,750 students received mentoring services since the start of the project. The success was proven through a research study which found that mentors are contributing to improve the students' skills particularly in time-management, responsibility and their independence. The study also found that mentoring is addressing the early school leaving dropout rate, which is predominant amongst vulnerable students.

Moreover, a research with the aim to monitor the psychological impact of COVID-19 is being carried out by Richmond Foundation. Through this research Richmond Foundation is monitoring any emerging mental health problems, allowing **Richmond Foundation** to respond with the necessary interventions and put in place mechanisms to support vulnerable groups, to reduce mental health issues and boost wellbeing.

Through the project **Non-Technical Skills Training For Healthcare Personnel**, training has been provided to 2,068 health care providers such as clinicians, nurses, midwives, and allied health care professionals, amongst others in non-technical skills so that they will be able to provide better patient care and customer satisfaction, on a more one-to-one basis.

€41.7M committed

11 projects

EDUCATION

€36.7M
committed

Investment in education and lifelong learning has been addressing various dimensions from early school leaving through digital technologies, to scholarships, new VET Masters programmes and training opportunities.

The aim of the **One Tablet per Child** project is to improve the learning experience of students through the use of digital technologies. The abrupt schools closure brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic reconfirmed the absolute need for students to have personal devices to help them continue with their learning with the least of interruptions. With a budget of €12M, by 2020, over 12,000 students and educators have already benefitted through this project. The 5th round of tablet distribution was carried out in 2020/2021 scholastic year through national funds as part of government's commitment to the programme. Additionally, a research study on the introduction of portable technology in Middle and Secondary Schools was also undertaken in 2020 and resulted in several interesting outcomes and recommendations which will be included in the new National Digital Education Strategy.

5 projects

1 aid scheme

1 financial instrument

In 2020 the **Endeavour Scholarships Scheme** issued its 6th call for scholarships. This project is run by the Scholarships Unit within the Ministry for Education (MFED). By the end of 2020, 716 awardees had successfully completed their studies at Level 7 and 8 (MA and PhD), out of which 314 obtained a distinction.

Following the quick uptake of the funds available under the first ever financial instrument under the ESF, '**Further Studies Made Affordable**', the budget for the Financial Instrument has been increased to €3M. This instrument is complementary to the Endeavour scholarship scheme which is also funded from ESF. Through this initiative, students do not need to make any upfront contribution, nor provide collateral. By the end of 2020, 177 students (32% women) were being supported through this instrument, in order to further their studies in a number of different fields, most notably in Business, Law, Computer Science, Fashion, Art & Music, Veterinary studies and Aviation.

The **Investing in Skills (IIS) Scheme** continued to invest in lifelong learning by assisting employers in training their staff to increase productivity and enhance adaptability in the Maltese labour market. In 2020, a total of 3,224 applications were received bringing grants signed to a total of 2,371 by end of year, amounting to €3.7M of the €5M available under the scheme. Through the scheme over 600 unique undertakings were supported with 84% being SMEs, supporting more than 14,800 individuals to receive training (40% women, 18% vulnerable).

By investing in the public administration, the delivery, quality and cost effectiveness of public services delivered both internally within departments and entities as well as externally to the general public and enterprises, is improved. Consequently, this will also lead government to address the changes and developments needs of a modern economy.

Through the project '**Towards a More Professional Workforce in the Public Administration**', with a budget of €3.6M, training of public officers in various areas both through national and international events is taking place. This is considered as the leading project in this area, reaching over 1,600 participants (58% women). Noticeably, the Ministries for Health and Education were the most active in participation under the Academic Sponsorships Scheme, where master's degree level courses were the most popular.

Under the **Mystery Shopper** project in 2020, forty-eight reports were submitted in a number of areas such as Education, Science and Technology; Social Welfare; and Health among others, resulting in the successful implementation of over 350 recommendations targeting General Customer Care Management, issues regarding Directive 4-1, Online Accessibility, Tangibles, and Security.

Staff members of the Malta Chamber of SMEs received training on Financial Services with an aim to enable the union to offer new services to

STRENGTHENING
THE INSTITUTIONAL
ADMINISTRATIVE
CAPACITY

€15.6M
committed

accommodate the changing needs of its members, through the ESF project **STAR – SMEs Tuning the Art of Representation**, to foster a more active social dialogue. Furthermore, this BN invested in an awareness campaign activity with the intent of communicating the role of the organisation as a social partner whilst promoting the importance of social dialogue in a particular year for SMEs, during which they were faced with various challenges due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

As part of the Action Plan for MEUSAC which was based on the research study under the project **Engage: Enhancing Stakeholder Participation in Social Dialogue**, the agency implemented a change in its services offered to Stakeholders and the General Public. Through this change, SEM took over the functions previously carried out by MEUSAC and assumed new functions, mainly in terms of outreach and assistance in the implementation of EU-funded projects.

15 projects

LOOKING FORWARD

2021 will see further physical progress of ongoing projects across all of the ESF programme areas. The challenge now is in relation to the evaluation of the implementation and effective impact on the ground. The MA will continue in its work tied also to verification checks on procedures carried out and related payments, in collaboration with the Certifying Authority ahead of processing the related payment claims.

Furthermore, the 4th call for projects is expected to be finalised, and implementation will begin by NGOs and Social partners on a number of new small projects which will mostly target vulnerable groups.

A further increase in the budget of the programme is also being discussed in view of the inclusion of a new Priority Axis supported by REACT-EU with the specific objective of significantly increasing the support offered to the wage subsidy scheme partially funded under another new ESF Priority.

For more information:

Info.eufunds@gov.mt – subject ESF Citizen Summary 2020

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