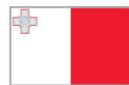


Rural Development Programme for Malta 2014 – 2020

Monitoring Committee
9th March 2023

Evaluation



European Union
European Structural and Investment Funds



1. THEMATIC EVALUATION ON Soil



Ongoing Evaluation

Thematic Evaluation

Soil

Objective

The effectiveness of Measures 4.4 and 10.1 in addressing prevention of soil erosion and improvement of soil management

Analysis

Field Data

Spatial
Analysis using
GIS

Meetings:
Government
beneficiaries

Focus Groups
(farmers)

Completion date: end of February 2022

Description of Measure 4.4

Restoration and Repair of Rubble Walls

	Count	Project Cost	Grant Value	Grant Value (%)
LOCAL COUNCILS	27	€ 3,114,773	€ 2,491,819	11%
Private Individuals (such as farmers)	152	€10,046,094	€7,712,765	0.035%
MINISTRIES	10	€ 17,596,462	€ 12,072,832	54%
TOTAL	189	€ 30,757,328	€ 22,427,265	100%

Description of Measure 10.1

Agri-Environment Climate Measures

	Description	Commitment (2020)	Hectares
AECM 1	Control of weeds (vineyards, orchards) by mechanical means	€285,458	290
AECM4	IPM Plan (vineyards, orchards)	€ 101,040	67.5
AECM5	Soil Management & Conservation Plan	€ 2,122,833	1,116.4

Spatial Analysis using GIS

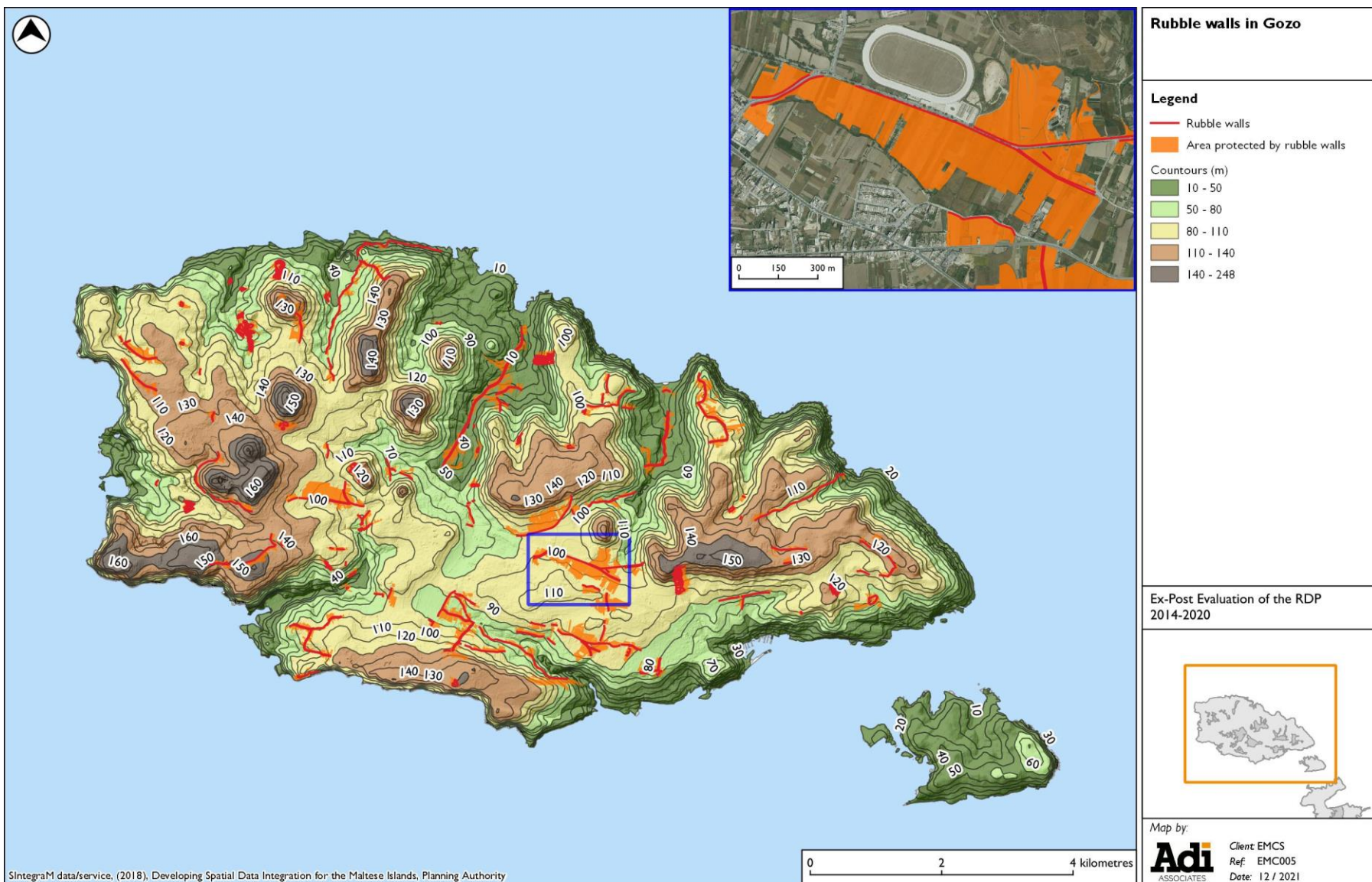
Measure 4.4:

- ✓ Data from Paying Agency on GIS – rubble wall length of approved projects
- ✓ Establish impact of rubble wall on parcel (area)
- ✓ Estimate impact of rubble wall intervention on soil erosion using RUSLE equation
- ✓ Use of ESDAC database to verify Malta soil erosion factors

Measure 10.1: AECM 5:

- ✓ Obtain data on SOM by location
- ✓ Spatially analyse the data

Spatial Analysis using GIS



SintegraM data/service, (2018), Developing Spatial Data Integration for the Maltese Islands, Planning Authority

Copyright: Planning Authority. Basemap is for indicative purposes only, and shall not be used for direct interpretation.

Results

Result Indicator for FA4C

R10/T12 - % of agricultural land under management contracts to improve soil management and/or prevent soil erosion

EU Target: 14%

RDP Target: 3%

Actual target from evaluation: 12.6%

Soil erosion

	Annual average soil loss figure (t ha ⁻¹ yr ⁻¹)
National Figure	6.02
For parcels before RDP implementation	6.77
For parcels after RDP implementation	2.30

Assuming that the UAA is 10,730 ha (or 107,300,000 m²) then the area of soil protected by rubble walls in the RDP is 7.55% of the UAA

Results – Soil Organic Matter

- In 2013 the national average of soil organic matter stood at 2.3%
- Data from AECM5 for 2018-2020 used to evaluate change in soil organic matter as shown below:

	SOM%				% SOM increase	% SOM increase
Year	2013	2018	2019	2020	(2018-2020)	(2013-2018)
Dry agriculture	2.3	4.36	4.44	4.9	11	53
Irrigable Agriculture		4.42	4.44	4.94	10.5	52
Total dry + Irrigable		4.3	4.43	4.86	11.5	53.4

National Recommendations

Synergy between different national policies

Efforts are required to take stock of abandoned land and ensure that land regulations protect arable land and promote the use of land for productive purposes. Furthermore, there is the need for a better legal structure to avoid land fragmentation as this impinges on the use of land for productive purposes and does not allow for large production and expansion.

Organic Farming

The importance of organic farming and its promotion locally is also warranted – a deep understanding of barriers to organic farmers facilitates targeted interventions.

Soil Action Plan

The development of a Soil Action Plan is required to improve soil quality (to reduce soil borne diseases and nematodes, to improve soil organic matter, to enhance soil biodiversity), to improve knowledge on Maltese soils, to reduce soil erosion, compaction, and contamination and to assess the impact of the correct application of manure and other organic matter in Malta's soils. The CAP could then build on the Action Plan and supplement it with measures that will assist the agriculture community implement the plan.

Recommendations

Programme Recommendations

Avoidance of soil degradation	Given the poor quality of Maltese soils further measures to avoid soil degradation such as cover crops and maintenance and creation of permanently covered areas should be encouraged. Use of plastic in fields, use of continuously heavier machinery, land abandonment occurring on terraces, enlargement of field size impact is increasingly significant
Rubble walls	It is clear that Measure 4.4 was a successful measure both in terms of uptake as well as its potential impact on preventing soil erosion. While more field data is required to confirm this (such as measuring soil depth before and after project implementation), initial estimates and qualitative data shows that soil erosion is reduced through the restoration, repair, and maintenance of rubble walls.
AECMs	The continued popularity of the AECMs indicates that accompanying training measures are having a positive effect on farmers. It is therefore recommended to support the consolidation of knowledge and its transmission to farmers through quality advice on sustainable soil management. The choice of practices and appropriate innovation requires tailored agronomic expertise, taking into account the specific context at farm level. A broader implementation of the measures supporting training, knowledge transfer and cooperation among stakeholders can be a key to removing barriers to innovations and allowing farmers to implement sustainable soil management practices while limiting economic risks.

Recommendations

Recommendations on data, monitoring and evaluation

Information from beneficiaries	In order to improve future evaluations, more information from beneficiaries could be gathered. For example, to assess soil erosion, it would be beneficial if information on soil depth is provided at the start of the project and at the end to verify if soil has actually been retained on the field. Data should all be inputted into a GIS so that analysis can be undertaken spatially.
GIS data	It would be beneficial for the evaluation that as far as possible data is supplied to the evaluators in GIS. This would allow for a spatial analysis of the programme implementation. LPIS GIS data would enable analysis of impacts of both soil erosion and soil organic matter to be carried out in greater detail.
FADN	To further use the opportunity of the FADN sample to monitor environmental impact, such as the quantity of plant protection products / fertiliser used, or the area ploughed. The FADN is a powerful database, which can provide very useful information on changes in the implementation of agri- and environmentally friendly management practices and the impact of the CAP support. It could also be worth including data on the practices implemented or agri-environment and climate indicators.

3. THEMATIC EVALUATION ON LEADER

1. Published Data

2. Collection of Evaluation Information

LAGs Databases

Questionnaire/Survey
With Beneficiaries
16 responses

Case Studies

Focus Groups

	Focus Groups	Date	No. of Participants
Gozo	All Measures	Tuesday, 29 th November	7
Xlokk & Majjistral	Measures 1 & 2	Monday, 28 th November	5
Xlokk & Majjistral	Measures 3 & 4	Tuesday, 29 th November	4

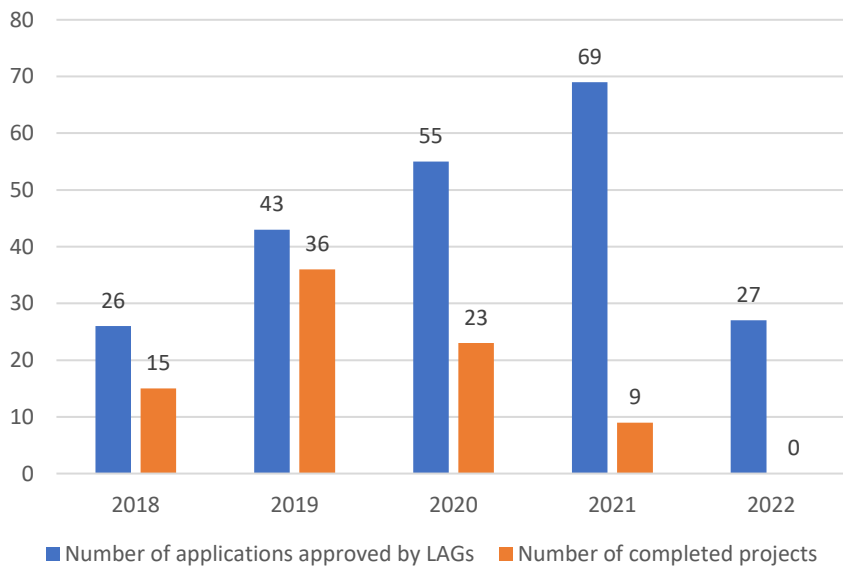
3. Other sources of information

- Applications submitted to LAGs
- Closure reports
- Meetings with MA and LAGs

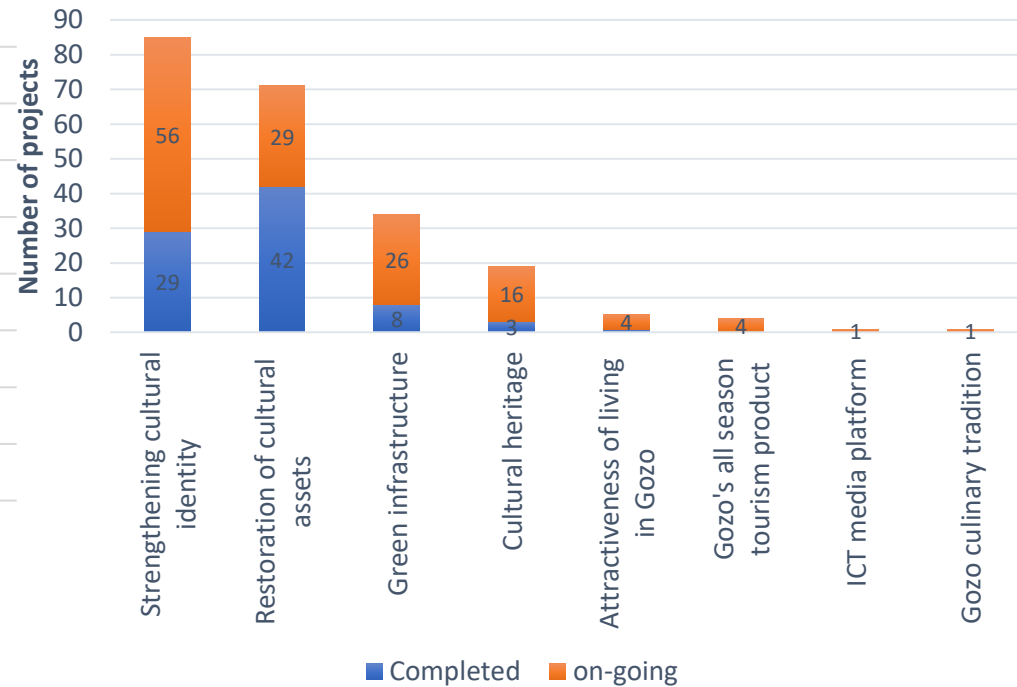
Key Findings – General context

There were a total of 220 approved applications between 2018 to mid 2022 of which 38% are completed projects.

Approved applications and completed projects



Approved applications by LAG measure



Source: Administrative data

Relevance: To what extent has LEADER been effective in addressing local needs?



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Judgement Criteria

The LAG strategy aims to address local needs

The local identity and local profile have been strengthened

Method of analysis

Focus Groups (FGs) with LAG beneficiaries, Interviews with LAGs/LAG Committee, Case Studies and Survey to LAG Beneficiaries (Q6)

Evaluation Findings

94% of the questionnaire respondents indicated that the LAG strategy aims to address local needs.

According to **the FGs participants**, the projects supported by the LEADER measure are all of local interest and have all in some way contributed to the local community.

This is also corroborated through the **case study analysis** which indicates that projects supported by the LEADER measure have **served to strengthen the local identity, chiefly in terms of allowing the public to appreciate the value of important landmarks in their localities.**

Effectiveness: To what extent has LEADER contributed towards conserving and increasing the valorisation of cultural assets?

Judgement Criteria

Participation in cultural activities has increased

The targeted number of projects of important cultural value to be restored has been achieved

The targeted number of new/improved quality cultural and/or social investment in the LAG area has been achieved

Method of analysis

Focus Groups with LAG beneficiaries, Interviews with LAGs/LAG Committee, Data received from LAGs

Evaluation Findings

Almost **80% of approved projects address cultural value, identity and heritage.**

According to FG participants, projects related to culture and heritage have led to **an increase in interest in local/national traditions.** Based on data from the Majjistral and Xlokk LAGs:

Measure 3 - Promotion of cultural heritage: 300 participants exceeding the target value of 250.

Target value of restoration projects (69) with a cultural value has been met.

Target value of new/improved quality cultural and/or social activities in the Xlokk and Majjistral areas is almost met. (Achievement of 80 – Target of 86)

Effectiveness: To what extent has LEADER contributed towards the improvement of environmental capital?



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Judgement Criteria

The attitudes and perception of the community towards the environment has improved

The targeted number of projects receiving support for the development of green infrastructure has been achieved

Supported projects are contributing to a carbon neutral economy

Method of analysis

Focus Groups with LAG beneficiaries, Interviews with LAGs/LAG Committee, Data received from LAGs, Case Studies, Data from Closure Reports

Evaluation Findings

Based on conclusions derived from the FGs and Case studies, some projects have resulted in an improvement of environmental awareness. **By putting together, the educational and environmental aspects, the projects have also sought to reach out to people and increase environmental awareness.**

27 projects have received support for the **development of green infrastructure, representing 12% of approved projects (2018 – mid-2022)** . **The target on green infrastructure (20) has been met.**

36% of closure reports projects contributed to a carbon neutral economy.

Impact: To what extent has LEADER contributed towards Improving Social Capital?

Judgement Criteria

Cooperation projects been developed and implemented by LAGs, nationally and/or internationally

Younger generation are enabled to link their future perspectives with a vision of the area they live in

An increase in trust and confidence among local actors in the LAG territory has been achieved/ Capacity of local actors to organise themselves in various forms of partnerships, networks, lobbies and interest groups has increased.

The density and quality of interactions between local actors has improved

Method of analysis

Focus Groups with LAG beneficiaries, Interviews with LAGs/LAG Committee, Data received from LAGs, Case Studies, Data from Closure Reports

Evaluation Findings

37 participants stakeholders in inter-territorial and trans-national cooperation projects including local operators and stakeholders. – Target of 30 has been exceeded.

5 inter-territorial and trans-national cooperative projects – Target of 2 projects has been exceeded.

Based on data received from the Gozo LAG, there were 35 local councils, businesses and NGOs offering new and improved amenities for young persons and families such that the target value of 9 has been exceeded.

Trust and confidence are two factors that require further work. The Partnership criterion was a difficult element to implement specifically because of the lack of trust between stakeholders and the level of bureaucracy involved.

Cooperation has improved between local actors even with those not directly involved with the project, which is a recognition of the projects' local importance.

Impact: To what extent has LEADER contributed towards more effective Multi-Level Governance?

Judgement Criteria

The involvement of local actors in decision making (bottom-up approach) has been strengthened

A quick and flexible decision process was achieved by reducing the administrative burden

The shared management of LEADER between different levels (vertical) has improved

The shared management of LEADER at the same level (horizontal) has improved

Method of analysis

Focus Groups with LAG beneficiaries, Interviews with LAGs/LAG Committee, Data received from LAGs, Case Studies, Data from Closure Reports

Evaluation Findings

Extensive consultations undertaken for the development of the LAG strategies.

69% of survey respondents indicated that their organisation was involved in the design of the LAG strategy for their region.

88% of survey respondents agreed that the project application procedure encourages local stakeholders to participate in LEADER. Notwithstanding different challenges were identified by different types of applicants ex: Voluntary organisations, NGOs and Local Councils

Vertical governance has improved since the introduction of LEADER but coordination could possibly be enhanced further.

Despite facing challenges in terms of resources, all LAGs provide significant assistance to beneficiaries throughout the application stage as well as during the monitoring phase.

Impact: To what extent has LEADER contributed towards enhancing the Rural Economy?

Judgement Criteria

Similar investment results would not have been achieved over the same time frame and scale in the absence of leader

Local businesses and NGOs have been supported by LEADER

LEADER has contributed to improving human capital in the area

LEADER has contributed to fostering innovation in the local community

Method of analysis

Focus Groups with LAG beneficiaries, Interviews with LAGs/LAG Committee, Data received from LAGs, Case Studies, Data from Closure Reports

Evaluation Findings

Based on the focus group discussions there is **no deadweight in the application of LEADER**. This has also been confirmed from the survey respondents who indicated that in the absence of LEADER, they would have abandoned the project or reduced its scale.

88% of survey respondents indicated that LEADER is supporting businesses in their locality/region.

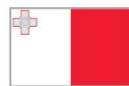
44% of survey respondents agree that LEADER has contributed to improving the skills set of employees in the area.

94% of survey respondents indicated that LEADER has facilitated innovation.

23% of the projects that submitted a closure report have an innovate element.

Thank you for your attention.

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