

**Minutes of the First Inter-Ministerial Consultative
Committee Meeting**

Venue – Xara Lodge

Wednesday, 20th September 2023



List of Participants

Members Present

Mr. Aaron Abdilla, Director, Office of the Prime Minister
Ms. Alison Mifsud Gilson, Senior Manager (EU Funds), National Contact Point for European Territorial Cooperation
Ms. Amanda Zammit, Director PDPI, Ministry for Tourism
Mr. Andrew Cachia, Assistant Director, Ministry for Health
Ms. Annalise Desira, Assistant Director, Human Rights Directorate
Ms. Anthea Fabri, Director, National Contact Point for Horizon Europe
Ms. Antonella Gatt, Director, Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation
Ms. Bernardette Borg Baldacchino, Senior Manager (EU Funds) MA HOME Funds, Ministry for the Economy, European Funds and Lands
Ms. Claudia Zammit, Senior Manager (EU Funds) MA ERDF/CF/JTF, Ministry for the Economy, European Funds and Lands
Mr. Darren Grasso, Head (Project Support) Servizzi Ewropej f'Malta,
Ms. Debbie Cachia, Chief Coordinator (Strategy & Programming), Ministry for the Economy, European Funds and Lands
Ms. Diane Muscat, Director, PDPI, Ministry for Finance and Employment
Ms. Francesca Muscat Camilleri, Director (PDPI), Ministry for Active Ageing,
Ms. Hanan Elkhatab, Senior Manager (EU Funds), MA CAP, Ministry for the Economy, European Funds and Lands
Ms. Jeanette Busuttil, Senior Manager (EU Funds), MA ESF+ Programme, Ministry for the Economy, European Funds and Lands
Ms. Jeffrey Bugeja, Director (PDPI), Ministry for Inclusion, Voluntary Organizations and Consumer Rights
Mr. Jonathan Silvio, Director (PDPI), Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights / Ministry for Social and Affordable Accommodation
Mr. Joseph Schembri, CEO, EUPA/Erasmus Representative, Ministry for the Economy, European Funds and Lands
Mr. Karl Vassallo, Senior Manager (EU Funds), MA RRP, Ministry for the Economy, European Funds and Lands
Mr. Keith Abela-Wadge, Senior Manager (EU Funds), MSD, Ministry for the Economy, European Funds and Lands
Ms. Louisa Formosa, Director General, Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Rights
Mr. Luca Lacitignola, Assistant Director, Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Enterprise
Ms. Mariella Pulis, Assistant Director Strategy & Support, Ministry for Justice
Ms. Maria Bellia, Assistant Manager, Ministry for Public Works and Planning
Mr. Mario Saliba, Director (PDPI) Ministry for Gozo
Ms. Marlene Agius, Senior Manager (Project Manager), Ministry for the Economy, European Funds and Lands /National Contact Point for CEF – Digital,
Ms. Moira Garzia, Assistant Director, Ministry for Transport, Infrastructure and Capital Projects /National Contact Point for CEF – Transport,
Ms. Raphael Scerri, Head of IB, ESF+/IB Representative – Jobsplus,

Dr. Sandra Hili Vassallo, Director, Ministry for the National Heritage, The Arts and Local Government,

Ms. Solange Bonello, Manager, CRPD,

Ms. Stephanie Bugeja, Alternate Representative, WESTMED National Hub Malta – alternate,

Ms. Therese Fiorini, Chief Coordinator, Evaluation Unit, Ministry for the Economy, European Funds and Lands

Ms. Yanica Grima, Senior Manager (EU Funds), MA EMFAF Programme, Ministry for the Economy, European Funds and Lands

Observer

Mr. Jonathan Bartolo, Senior Manager, EU Funds, Office of the Permanent Secretary for EU Funds.

Contributors with presentations

Ms. Maria Pia Pace, Director General, Strategy & Implementation Division, Ministry for the Economy, European Funds and Lands

Mr. Jonathan Bartolo, Senior Manager (EU Funds), Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry for the Economy, European Funds and Lands

Ms. Debbie Cachia, Chief Coordinator, Strategy & Programming Unit, Ministry for the Economy, European Funds and Lands

Absent

Mr. Leonard Scerri, Director (Operations), Ministry for Home Affairs, Security, Reforms and Equality

Secretary

Mr. Liam Farrugia (Programme Officer, Strategy & Programming Unit), Ministry for the Economy, European Funds and Lands

Time

Meeting commenced at 0900hrs and ended at 1130hrs

Abbreviations used

CEF – Connecting Europe Facility

CF – Cohesion Fund

CPR – Common Provisions Regulation

CRPD – Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability

EMFAF – European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund

ERDF – European Regional Development Funds

ESF+ - European Social Fund

EU – European Union

IMCC – Inter Ministerial Consultative Committee

JTF – Just Transition Fund

MA – Managing Authority

PA – Partnership Agreement

TOR's – Terms of Reference

1. Welcome address by the Permanent Secretary for European Funds

The meeting commenced at 0900hrs.

The Permanent Secretary for EU Funds, Mr. Jonathan Vassallo, welcomed the participants to the first meeting of the IMCC and thanked them for accepting the invitation. Mr. Vassallo underlined the importance of coordination and collaboration of all ministries and stakeholders towards ensuring the successful and the maximum use of EU Funds.

2. Opening Remarks by the Chair & Adoption of the Agenda

The Chairperson, the Director General for the Strategy & Implementation Division, Ms. Maria Pia Pace, explained the role of the IMCC in identifying the overlaps in possible interventions and programmes, as well as the coordination of new funds which may arise over time. The role of the MAs is also crucial in areas where overlaps are identified, to establish demarcation and monitoring mechanisms, and report back to the IMCC on the action undertaken.

The chairperson underlined that the Committee is not exclusive to members of the committee, but it will also invite experts/relevant persons on specific issues as required. Ms. Pace gave a short overview of the agenda of the meeting, indicating that there were items which required a decision from the committee and other items of an informative nature.

The agenda was circulated amongst the IMCC Members before the meeting. The Chairperson asked the Members whether there were any queries or any requests under 'Any other business.'

No queries or requests for 'Any other business' were made and the agenda of the first meeting for the IMCC was unanimously approved.

3. Presentation: Overview of the IMCC Terms of Reference

The Chairperson of the Committee gave a detailed overview of the draft resolution, explaining each article to the Members through a detailed presentation. The draft resolution was circulated amongst the IMCC Members before the meeting. The Chairperson explained that subcommittees may be set up that would allow for more technical/focused discussions on specific issues. The Chairperson notified that at least three (3) meetings of the IMCC will be held over the implementation period, including in 2025 and 2027.

Following the presentation, the Permanent Secretary for EU Funds intervened to emphasise the responsibility for Ministries and entities to secure the strong co-financing rate that is applicable to all programmes. Mr. Vassallo remarked that when designing schemes/strategies, Ministries should take into consideration the projects

which are being funded from EU funds to create complementarity between EU funds and National funds.

Mr. Vassallo once again stressed the importance of being conscious that when contributing to EU Funds, gaps should be addressed, and then actions should be discussed in relation to what can be funded from EU Funds.

4. Questions from the Floor

No questions arose from the floor.

5. Adoption of the IMCC TOR's (Decision)

The Chairperson asked the Members whether there were any queries regarding the Terms of Reference. No queries were presented by the Members and the Terms of Reference of the IMCC were adopted unanimously.

6. Presentation: Declaration of impartiality and conflict of interest (Information)

Mr. Jonathan Bartolo from the Office of the Permanent Secretary for EU Funds delivered a presentation on the declaration of impartiality and conflict of interest. Mr. Bartolo remarked that the European Commission stresses the importance of managing conflict of interest during the implementation of EU funds and programmes. Mr. Bartolo explained that there are different types of conflict-of-interest including direct conflict of interest, indirect conflict of interest and perceived conflict of interest.

Conflict of interest exists when the person's duty to act impartially is jeopardized and interfered with due to reasons involving family, emotional life, political or national affinity, economic interest or any other direct or indirect personal interest.

The financial regulation which deals with conflict of interest and the EU Guidance was enacted in 2021. Article 61 of the Financial Regulation (2018/1046) stipulates that, persons involved in budget implementation, under direct or indirect and shared management, shall not take action which may bring their own interest into conflict with those of the Union, while they should also take appropriate measures to prevent conflict of interest from arising and to address situations which may be perceived conflict of interest. If there is a conflict of interest the person shall advise his superior and when this exists, the person responsible must ensure that it seizes all responsibilities.

7. Presentation: Role of the IMCC (Information)

By way of a *tour de table* the Chairperson invited members of the Committee to introduce themselves and describe their role and the capacity in which they had been nominated to attend the IMCC. The IMCC constitutes a useful platform and network for discussion on how the use of EU funds can be maximised.

The Chairperson subsequently delivered a presentation on the Role of the IMCC. The presentation centered around the scope of the IMCC, the coordination of EU Funds

and the demarcation of funds through the composition of the Committee and the subcommittees which may be set up thereafter.

The Chairperson remarked that the Partnership Agreement and all programmes were undertaken by the Strategy & Implementation Division giving an overall overview of coordinating and demarcating the EU Funds. However, this is not sufficient since from the strategic level it is also necessary to go down to the implementation level.

The demarcation of funds is also set by the regulatory framework. In this regard, the Managing Authorities will be taking the lead in the work of the subcommittees.

8. Presentation and discussion on future meetings & agendas

A Presentation was delivered by Ms. Debbie Cachia, Chief Coordinator Strategy & Programming, on the potential discussions, future meetings, and agenda.

Ms. Cachia explained that the scope is to have no overlaps between funds and programmes and when such overlaps are identified, the MAs will be mandated to address such overlaps and answer to the IMCC on the action taken. It was also highlighted that the programmes reflect interventions identified in national strategies and policies; hence, should there be any changes to such strategies and policies, the Strategy & Implementation Division, needs to be notified, to ensure that any changes are in line with the programmes.

With regard to future meetings, by 2025, the Strategy & Implementation Division will have more visibility on the implementation of the new programming period, while 2027 will give us a visibility of what has been done. Furthermore, the subcommittees of the IMCC will be organized by theme to allow for a more technical discussion. The secretariat will update the IMCC members on what transpired in these committees, while other stakeholders and experts may be invited to participate in such subcommittees. The discussion will also be based at the level of initiative therefore going beyond the programme/fund level.

Ms. Cachia also highlighted that more overlaps may be identified as the implementation of the programmes intensifies. By way of an initial exercise, the following areas have already been identified: the water sector where there could be potential for overlap under ERDF, CF and the CAP SP; and port infrastructure which may be addressed under CF, EMFAF and the JTF and CEF. Biodiversity is another area which may have overlapping actions under the ERDF, EMFAF, CAP SP, LIFE and ETC Programmes.

Other areas to be followed up at sub-committee level may include education, employment and mobility, social actions, equality and integration, innovation and support for enterprises, digitalisation, Gozo actions, transport, energy, health/active ageing.

9. Any other business & closing remarks

Questions by Mr. Luca Lacistignola – Mr. Lacistignola enquired on how, considering that the LIFE Programme addressed mainly the parameters set by the European Commission, the LIFE Programme could address, for instance, biodiversity. Mr. Lacistignola continued that the LIFE Programme is 60% EU funded and 40% nationally funded. He asked how it is envisaged that Malta's interests are safeguarded in implementing projects under the ERDF etc., but also giving LIFE the importance, it requires and that we should ensure that participation in certain funds is not excluded.

Ms. Cachia explained that the EU funding entities should be aware of what is being implemented under direct/indirectly managed programmes so that any overlaps are identified, and double funding is avoided; whilst direct funding should be explored even further, it is important that complementary actions and demarcation between initiatives is equally sought. The scope is not to exclude from one fund or another but rather to maximise funding and address any funding gaps that may exist.

Question by Ms. Hanan Elkhatib – With regard to data, Ms. Elkhatib asked if data on funds can be concentrated into one table therefore going beyond the programme level.

Ms. Maria Pia Pace held that we have a record of what is being funded through EU Funds and that it would be useful to explore the possibility of consolidating this information to cover also other EU funding instruments. Ms. Cachia explained that at programme level we do have earmarking at EU level. A database across all the EU funds would need to be addressed at project level and would go beyond the scope of this committee. Nevertheless, the centralization of information is useful and the ICT Unit within the SID will be notified of this recommendation.

Question by Mr. Raphael Scerri – Mr. Scerri suggested that a table is developed whereby IMCC members may recommend further themes for the subcommittees as well as participation at such committees. Through this network we can update the actions foreseen under different funding instruments from time to time.

Ms. Maria Pia Pace held that complementarity must happen even with national schemes. That is the scope of having line ministries here. She underlined that it was not only EU Funds that are driving the initiatives in certain areas, but also the national budget which is supporting initiatives in key areas. In this regard, we are reliant on input from ministries.

Next Steps

Ms. Pace remarked that having highlighted the possible areas of overlaps the secretariat would now begin to see what consultations are required in these areas so that the work of the subcommittees, which would be undertaken at a technical level, may be launched. The Chairperson also invited participants to come forward on their own initiative if there are areas with the potential of overlap which they have identified.

The Chairperson asked participants who have not filled the declaration of impartiality, to do so. The Chairperson informed participants that the Secretariat will circulate the minutes of the meeting. The Chairperson thanked everyone for their participation.

End of Meeting