

CONSULTATION DOCUMENT
GOZO REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
2021 - 2030

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GOZO REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Innovation Hub, Xewkija - Gozo, Malta

Tel: +356 22156333 www.grda.mt

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Introduction:

On the 11th of July, the Gozo Regional Development Authority (GRDA) initiated a public stakeholder consultation process to draw up a 10-year strategy for Gozo. The GRDA sought feedback on the Regional Development Strategy for Gozo 2021-2030 including the eight identified priority areas, their corresponding measures, and the methodology for assessment and prioritisation of measures. The list of questions which the GRDA identified were also included in the Consultation Document.

The Consultation process was designed to achieve the following goals:

- i. Create a transparent, inclusive development strategy process.
- ii. Engage a range of stakeholders with varying backgrounds and expertise.
- iii. Increase awareness within the Gozitan community that a new strategy for Gozo is being designed.
- iv. Provide opportunities for people to make their views known.
- v. Improve the relevance, quality and value-added of the regional development strategy.

This feedback report provides a summary of the consultation methodology, the feedback received from various stakeholders, including national entities and NGOs on the Strategy's Consultation Document as well as the Authority's response to the main points raised from such feedback. Details of individuals that have contributed to the consultation process are not included in this Feedback Document due to issues related to privacy, however, their views were equally taken on board.

Consultation Methodology

Throughout the consultation period, the GRDA solicited input from a broad set of stakeholders, to shape the Gozo Regional Development Strategy 2021-2030. The external engagement was extensive and included inputs from national entities, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders with different backgrounds and expertise.

The consultation process took place between the 11th July and 31st August 2021 and was led by the GRDA. Over the course of these weeks, the Authority organized 3 public meetings which were held at the Gozo Innovation Hub. Those who were unable to attend these meeting had the opportunity to engage in the consultation process through written contributions.

Public Consultation meeting organised by the GRDA

Date	Public Consultation meeting
10 th August 2021	Youth Public Consultation meeting in collaboration with Aġenzija Żgħażagħ and GUG.
17 th August 2021	Public Consultation meeting - held in Maltese.
19 th August 2021	Public Consultation meeting - held in English.

A central point of the consultation process was the formation of eight technical working groups. Each working group focused on one of the eight priority areas identified in the Consultation Document. These technical working groups met between mid-July to the first week of August and around 80 individuals with different backgrounds and expertise participated in these fora. National entities and NGOs were also involved in these technical working groups. Participants in these working groups engaged in written consultations as well as in contributions during the weekly workshops.

The GRDA also sought feedback from various stakeholders. In fact, the GRDA held over 30 bilateral meetings with government bodies, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders.

Summary of Stakeholder Feedback

Through this consultation process, the Authority received over 350 ideas, proposals, and suggestions which are being carefully analysed and considered by the Authority. These recommendations mainly focused on the eight priority areas highlighted in the Consultation Document. The feedback includes suggestions on how to enhance and adjust the measures as presented in the Consultation Document. The feedback also includes new suggestions and measures which were not captured in the Consultation Document.

Classification according to priority area

Priority area	Indicative Number of feedbacks
Priority Area 1: Gozo Spatial Planning and Sustainable Urban Development	73
Priority Area 2: Infrastructure and Accessibility	38
Priority Area 3: Economic and Talent Development	34
Priority Area 4: New Economy	17
Priority Area 5: Sustainable Tourism	38
Priority Area 6: Social Development	25
Priority Area 7: Rural Development and Eco-Gozo	88
Priority Area 8: Culture, Heritage and Arts	23
Other General Suggestions	16
Total	352

Classification according to relevance

Suggested Relevance	Number of feedbacks
High	142
Medium	171
Low	39

The Tables presented hereby gives an indication of the feedback received in terms of priority areas as well as the source, that is whether from national entities, NGOs or individuals.

A first indication of the level of relevance is also presented.

Consultative Person/ Group	Number of feedbacks
Consultation Meetings	75
Individuals	83
Individuals from Agencies & NGOs	92
NGOs and Directorates	102

Common feedback themes

The Authority notes with satisfaction the response and the quality of the feedback received during the consultation process. Several individuals with different backgrounds and expertise voiced their ideas and concerns while others recommended several future policy suggestions. These contributions will be used to improve the overall strategy to better reflect the present and future needs of Gozo. This section summarises the main feedback points put forward by several stakeholders, NGOs entities and other individuals during this process.

Promote sustainable tourism

The discussion on tourism centered around the importance that this sector has on the Gozitan economy. From the feedback received there is a consensus that the strategy should focus on sustainable forms of tourism. There were several suggestions in this regard including initiatives to attract more quality tourists and those who choose Gozo as a single destination. The strategy should also aim to promote Gozo as an ecoisland and attract authentic, rural and eco-friendly activities such as tracking, climbing, hiking, and other related activities which attract visitors all year round. Moreover, future tourism-related initiatives should ensure proper beach and coastal management. This entails measures which mitigate the reduction of marine life and other initiatives to improve access to divers and create a safer zone for boats at our beaches.

Foster social integration

Stakeholders pointed out that the strategy should aim at strengthening the social infrastructure of the island. Primarily, this could be achieved by aligning the social support assistance services in Gozo with those provided in Malta. Additionally, the measures identified in the strategy should ensure that social assistance is equally available across all sectors of the society irrespective of the nationality, ethnicity, and the language they speak. The strategy should also entail measures to aid persons with disability and the elderly, enhance migrant inclusion, increase activism and dialogue on a local and regional level and ensure the representation and participation of minorities and/or community groups, at all the different stages of the policy cycle.

Tackle the challenges of waste and water management

Other points drawn from the consultation process were related to measures on waste and water management. Despite the progress registered over the years, Gozo still faces considerable challenges and investment needs in areas of waste and water management. In this regard, more efforts should target water preservations procedures and more efficient waste management. The latter can be enhanced by reducing waste generation and moving towards a more circular economy. Meanwhile water preservation can be improved by removing sediment accumulated in valleys behind water dams. Efforts should also be directed towards an educational campaign to increase the awareness on Gozo's natural water resources and their effective protection. Additionally, the development of sustainable villages should take into consideration the opportunity to the utilise rainwater harvesting structures which are either already available, or which can be reinstated.

Enhance climate change initiatives

The feedback received during the Consultation period also emphasized on the importance of climate change initiatives and how these initiatives should be at the forefront of Gozo's strategy for the next ten years. Climate change is and will have an impact on the society and the economy and these initiatives will make Gozo more resilient to present and future climate related shocks. Therefore, it is important that climate change initiatives are incorporated in the strategy. These initiatives can include green and renewable infrastructure, measures encourage walking and cycling as an alternative form of commuting and investment in alternative and more energy efficient reduce vehicular traffic congestion and incentives transport, measures to to promote environmentally friendly produce.

Issue of Real estate and Construction

A pertinent topic which was thoroughly discussed during the consultation process was that of construction and real estate. Although widespread acceptance that real estate and construction sectors have an in the social-economic development development should be viewed vis-a-vis the natural and cultural resources. The broad view is that if properly managed the construction and real estate sectors can continue to grow and contribute to Gozo's economic development. However, what should be avoided is development which is 'excessive' and 'out place'. In this regard, the strategy should include measures safeguards Gozo's unique natural and historic landscapes, which are amongst the key factors that make the island attractive. Thus, the strategy should emphasise on measures that preserves undeveloped land and ecosystems and protects natural and historic landscapes.

Focus on the natural and rural environment

This largely entails the preservation of natural and rural landscapes, which is especially pertinent for Gozo, a healthy marine environment as a crucial element of blue economy, and the protection and conservation of biodiversity within which in turn would ensure the safeguarding and improvement of natural habitats and species. The planting of more trees together with afforestation programs will be important in creating a greener Gozo. Yet, it is important that such planting of trees fits into the particular landscape and characteristics of the place.

Invest in human capital

The future of the Gozitan economy should revolve around the human capital resources. The latter can be enhanced through better investment in skills which are lacking in Gozo such as machine learning, artificial intelligence, financial services, marketing, the film industry and cyber security. In this regard, different educational institutions should collaborate with each other to identify and offer educational courses which meet Gozo's future economic needs. Efforts should also be directed towards addressing the wage gap in Gozo, the shortage of qualified workers particularly in the tourism sector and the lack of professional employment opportunities.

Improve the overall living experience

One of the main objectives of this strategy is to improve the quality of life in Gozo. The aim of the strategy is not to simply improve the standard of living but the overall living experience. A better financial / material situation does not necessity mean an improvement in the quality of life. Quality of life and wellbeing reflect the overall state of an individual's life situation which includes other social and environmental considerations. Therefore, economic growth should not come at the expense of environmental and social degradation. To this end, the measures identified in the strategy should primarily enhance the wellbeing of the citizens which in turn contribute to economic growth. Thus, this strategy hinges on the need to move beyond GDP to measure success. Alternatively, development should be measured through other indicators which complement the more traditional indicators such as per capita GDP and factor in the wellbeing aspect that include the social and environmental dimension.

Common Questions raised during consultation process and the GRDA response

Q. How will the Authority be implementing the strategy?

A. The remit of the GRDA is relatively wide and touches several horizontal issues such as tourism and economic growth as well as more specific ones such as heritage and arts. The final regional strategy will reflect this wide interest.

Having one entity with the width and necessarily depth in terms of expertise, resources and experience to be able to implement such a wide range of topics is very difficult. Thus, the model that the GRDA will be adopting for the implementation of the measures will be through discussions with the Permanent Secretary within the Ministry for (MGOZ), measures in the Regional Development Strategy delegated to Departments within the same MGOZ and where applicable also to National Entities. To manage the collaboration with other external entities, the GRDA will be drawing a number of Performance Agreements (Schedule 1 of the Act) which will govern such relationships and make sure that roles and responsibilities are well defined.

Q. Would be Authority consider having a difference metric to GDP to measure success?

A. GDP is often used as a standard metric to measure the economic development of a particular country or region. However, it has often been argued that GDP is an inadequate representation of economic welfare and progress. This is because this metric excludes important well-being considerations including loss of leisure time, life expectancy, employment rate, air quality, level of education, land use and crime amongst others. This therefore means that an improvement in GDP does not necessarily mean a better well-being.

The GRDA recognizes the weaknesses of the current metric as it only captures one aspect of individual's well-being. In this regard, the Authority will consider alternative indicators to truly capture the overall well-being of the Gozitan society. The aim of such alternative indicators is to capture additional features which are currently excluded in the current metric and thus it will seek to capture a more balanced and nuance picture of the quality of life in Gozo. The GRDA is currently discussing with the Environmental Resources Authority to adopt the methodology being developed by the same ERA - https://era.org.mt/topic/wellbeing-first-a-vision-for-2050/

Q. How does the GRDA intends to create awareness and enforce the identity of Gozo?

A. The significance of Gozo's identity was outlined in the Consultation Document through several proposed measures which aim to protect and sustain Gozo's characteristics. The Authority will strive to protect, conserve and enhance Gozo's identity. We believe that Gozo's identity can be a central part of Gozo comparative advantage and a driver of its development for the years to come.

Through the publication of the Consultation Document, the Authority has instigated a public debate on the several issues pertaining to Gozo, including those related to Gozo's identity. During the consultation period various stakeholders and individuals expressed their concerns on how Gozo can lose its identity while others have shared their views on how policy implementation can help in this regard.

The Authority would also like to emphasis the importance of Regional Impact Assessment System as a tool to help protect Gozo identity. Through the establishment of impact assessments, the Authority will plan an important role in ensuring that any proposed project will need to take into consideration the impact it might have on Gozo's identity.

Q. Should 'double-insularity' be viewed more as an advantage and less of a disadvantage?

A. Gozo faces problems of double insularity, for movement of people, import, exports and other economic activities. The issue of double insularity is often regarded as a disadvantage. However, the issue of double insularity is directly and intrinsically linked with the concept of identity. Without its double insularity, Gozo identity will not be the same. Hence, the arguments raised in point 3 apply here as well.

Q. Development or better 'excessive development' is undermining the attractiveness of Gozo. What will the GRDA do to address this issue?

A. Gozo has experienced significant economic growth in the years prior to the pandemic largely on the back of enhanced tourism, construction and real estate activities. The surge in economic activity in these sectors have however created additional challenges. In particular, the developments in the construction and real estate sectors led to other negative repercussions, mainly the loss of land, and the visual and social impact on the villages and communities. This partly explains why the issue of construction and development is presently among, if not the most prominent, item under discussion in Gozo.

The Authority believes that the construction and real estate activities play an integral role in the present and future socio-economic development of Gozo.

These two sectors, if managed properly, can continue to contribute and add value. However, these developments should not come at the detriment of the environment while it should also reflect the present and future needs of Gozo.

The role of the GRDA is to ensure a medium-to-long term sustainable plan centred around Gozo's environmental, social and economic needs. The consultation document already outlines several measures in this regard. The Authority will also be responsible for the implementation of the Regional Impact Assessment studies for proposed intervention in Gozo.

The GRDA intends to continue discussing with other national competent authorities such as the Planning Authority so that policies are designed, and reviewed when and where necessarily, so they reflect the realities that Gozo is facing. Moreover, the Authority will over the coming months conduct a a Carrying Capacity Study and possible also Housing Needs Study. Such studies will aim to put into context the requirement in term of infrastructure that the Island needs and to identify the cost that further investments in such infrastructure entails.

Q. Can the GRDA factor in more the Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs) in the strategy?

A. Measures aimed at promoting sustainable development already featured extensively in the Consultation Document. However, from the feedback received from various stakeholders during the consultation process the Authority believes that linking the sustainable development goals to the measures in the final strategy adds value.

To this end, the final strategy will include additional measures to link each measures in its regional strategy with SDG's.

Q. Can the GRDA provide more details on the prioritisation method mentioned in the Consultation document?

A. The measures identified in Consultation Document were designed to be consistent and coherent. The suggested measures aim at addressing a number of constraints that Gozo is facing or will face in the near future. However, although each listed measure is deemed important, the GRDA will have to prioritise measures over the course of the strategy period.

The Consultation Document provided a brief outline of how the measures outlined in the document will be prioritised. The final document will include more information on the prioritisation method.

Q. Would the GRDA consider adding KPI and deliverables for each measure in the final strategy?

A. One of the points that was raised during the consultation process was the suggestion for the final regional development strategy document to include

specific actions, deliverables and where possible also Key Performance Indicators (KPI's). Such remark is a very valid and is in tune with GRDA plans. Indeed, the GRDA will be attesting this by publishing on its website all the measures and their respective main deliverables, KPIs, and the entities responsible for the implementation of that particular measure. To aid communication, use of graphics such as summary dashboard will be included. The information will be updated regularly.

Q. The strategy covers 10 years. However, due to uncertainty and changes in the macro, social and political environment, changes might be required. Will the GRDA update the strategy periodically?

A. The strategy will serve as a guideline on the direction that Gozo as a region should head to over the next 10 years. This strategy also serves as a platform for future policy implementations, regardless of the future political environment.

However, Gozo as any other region and economy worldwide is subject to unforeseen social, political and economic shocks. This is particularly prevalent given the current environment of health and economic uncertainty, and other events which might also occur over the next decade. To this end, the strategy will be updated during the course of the strategy period to factor in unexpected events which might arise in the future.

Q. Apart from the measures that will be included in the strategy, will the GRDA consider providing its official views on several other areas that are of interest to Gozo?

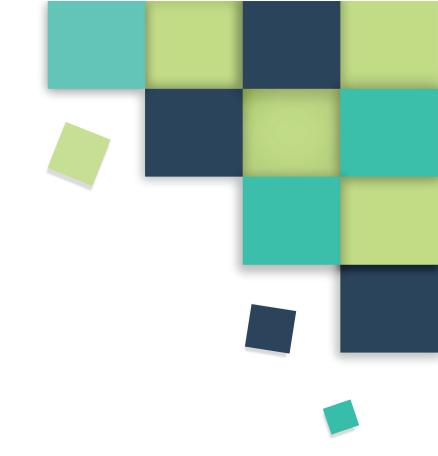
A. It is the role of the GRDA to keep in touch with issues pertaining Gozo. Although the Authority has only been recently established it has already voiced its views on contemporary issues. The Authority aims to regularly publish ad-hoc reports, studies and other surveys on topics which are of interest to Gozo. As an example, one of the main topics currently at the fore of discussion in Gozo is that of construction and overdevelopment. The Authority acknowledged the general interest in the subject and has subsequently carried out a survey on the construction sector in Gozo. The results, which will be published by the end of the year, should provide valuable insights on the demand, concerns and sustainability of the property market in Gozo.

Apart from expressing its own views the Authority also intends to offer interested parties including NGOs, the opportunity to contribute and participate in the formation of policy. For this aim, the GRDA will be launching a periodic publication that will serve as a platform for authors and researchers to publish articles, opinions and initiate discussions on several topics regarding Gozo. Furthermore, the Authority is already contributing to several consultation documents issued by National Entities by putting in its structured feedback. These are being published on the GRDA website and social media.

Annex A - List of entities that participated in the Public Consultation

National entities and NGOs who engaged in this consultation process

- Għawdix
- LGBTI+ Gozo
- Din I-Art Helwa Ghawdex
- Association for Gozitan Employees in Malta
- Environment & Resources Authority
- Gozo University Group (GUG)
- Director General for Civil Aviation at Transport Malta
- FKNK Federazzjoni Kaccaturi Nassaba U Konservazjonisti
- Wirt Għawdex
- Gozo Tourism Association
- FSWS
- Malta Trust Foundation
- Moviment Graffitti
- INDIS
- Malta Mental Health Association
- BirdLife Malta
- Malta Communications Authority
- Heritage Park Federation
- OASI
- Friends of the Earth
- Rural Development Directorate MGOZ
- Cultural Heritage Directorate MGOZ
- Chief Information Officer MGOZ
- Maintenance Dept MGOZ
- Services Gozo Dept MGOZ
- Planning Authority
- MCAST
- Commission of the Rights of Persons with Disability
- Malta Sociological Association
- Kopperattiva Agrikola
- Nature Trust Malta
- Malta Tourism Authority
- Gozo Business Chamber
- FORUM
- Building and Construction Authority
- Gozo Regional Council





Tel: +356 22156333

Email: info@grda.mt

www.grda.mt