

SUMMARY FOR CITIZENS – FINAL IMPLEMENTATION REPORT **(pursuant to Article 50(9) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013)**

What is the INTERREG V-A Italia–Malta Programme

INTERREG V-A Italia–Malta is the cross-border maritime European Territorial Cooperation Programme involving Sicily and Malta, with the aim of strengthening the economic and social cohesion of the cooperation area.

With a total budget of €51,708,438, of which 85% is EU co-financing and 15% national co-financing, the Programme has supported the smart, sustainable and inclusive growth of the cross-border area. It has enhanced the competitiveness of the two territories by reducing gaps and disparities and by taking action in favour of the most vulnerable people.

The Programme’s strategic priorities focused on:

- **Research and Innovation** in key and most challenging sectors for territorial growth and development: environment, cultural heritage, quality of life and citizens’ health.
- **Competitiveness of MSMEs**, also through social innovation practices and the creation/strengthening of enterprises operating in sustainable tourism, environmental protection and quality of life. Competitiveness was further supported through actions promoting **Employment and Labour Mobility**, by integrating the cross-border labour market and facilitating the circulation of human capital.
- **Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development**, through initiatives aimed at protecting Natura 2000 sites, conserving/restoring natural habitats and threatened or rare species, and raising environmental awareness for the responsible use of natural heritage. Environmental protection was also supported through actions for the **Prevention and Management of natural and anthropogenic risks**.

Physical and Financial Implementation of the Programme

Excluding operations under Priority Axis 4 dedicated to Technical Assistance, the Programme supported the implementation of **33 cooperation projects** selected through three calls:

- **Call 1/2016** for the submission of cooperation projects with a “one-step” procedure under the three priority axes of the Programme;
- **Call 2/2019 (targeted call)** for the submission of cooperation projects with a “one-step” procedure under Priority Axes I, II and III;
- **Call 3/2022** for the submission of *“Actions for the capitalisation of results of cooperation projects funded under the INTERREG V-A Italia–Malta Programme – Priority Axes I, II, III”*.

Overall, the funded cooperation projects involved **158 Italian and Maltese beneficiaries**, including Public Administrations, Universities and Research Institutes, Clusters and Districts, MSMEs, Business Incubators, Chambers of Commerce, Higher Technical Institutes and managing bodies of protected areas.

In general, all approved projects successfully implemented their activities and achieved their objectives by 2023.

The financial closure framework of the Programme shows a positive scenario in terms of financial absorption, with **92.72% of the total allocation covered by eligible expenditure declared by the selected operations.**

It should also be noted that the programme has adhered to the rules set out in the STEP Regulation which, among other things, raised the EU reimbursement quota to 100% for the last accounting period 2023-2024 and therefore the overall absorption percentage of the ERDF quota assigned to the program is equal to 98%.

The financial framework with financial information at priority and programme level, including technical assistance, is provided below.

Priority Axis	Fund	Category of regions	Basis for Union support	Total financing	Co-financing rate	Total eligible cost of selected operations (€)	Share of allocation covered (%)	Eligible public expenditure (€)	Total eligible expenditure declared (€)	Share covered by declared expenditure (%)	Number of operations	Certified eligible expenditure by 31/12/2023 (€)
1	ERDF	Less developed	Public	10.565.520	85%	10.964.078,78	103,77%	10.680.333,09	10.915.158,50	103,31%	8	10.915.158,50
2	ERDF	Less developed	Public	11.068.516	85%	10.219.889,24	92,33%	9.407.373,36	9.308.039,03	84,09%	6	9.308.039,03
3	ERDF	Less developed	Public	26.544.990	85%	27.072.075,54	101,99%	27.072.075,54	24.763.394,83	93,29%	19	24.763.394,83
4	ERDF	Less developed	Public	3.529.412	85%	3.018.568,21	85,53%	3.018.568,21	2.956.241,34	83,76%	15	2.956.241,34
Total				51.708.438		51.274.611,78	99,16%	50.178.350,20	47.942.833,71	92,72%	48	47.942.833,71

Under **Priority Axis 1**, the Programme supported **eight projects** that strengthened the innovative capacity of actors in the cooperation area in response to the economic and social needs of the cross-border space, ultimately increasing the number of enterprises adopting innovative technologies and services at cross-border level.

Within the framework of **Priority Axis 2**, through six cooperation projects, the Programme strengthened the competitiveness of the cross-border area by supporting the creation and strengthening of Sicilian and Maltese micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and by promoting labour mobility.

Finally, through the **nineteen projects** under **Priority Axis 3**, the Programme made a significant contribution to environmental protection and biodiversity conservation. At the same time, several projects promoted technological and systemic solutions to address the effects of climate change and natural and anthropogenic risks in the cross-border area, with a view to protecting coastal populations.

Programme Results

In terms of project outcomes, **Priority Axis 1** projects, in particular, developed tools and solutions to address socio-economic challenges in the cross-border area by leveraging research and innovation, especially—though not exclusively—to support the growth of

SMEs. Through the development of innovative technologies, the supported projects fostered integration between research and enterprises, involving local companies and generating new products for various industrial sectors, particularly in the fields of quality of life and citizens' health, sustainable development and cultural heritage.

Bythos	Extraction of biomolecules from fish waste and development of products for the cosmetics industry and aquaculture at a cross-border laboratory in Lipari and Fort San Lucjan.
Bythos extend	Strengthening of the modelling chains for the identification, tracing and mitigation of negative impacts deriving from hydrocarbon spills in the Mediterranean Sea, expanding the calculation domain of the Sicilian–Maltese–Tunisian channel area.
Microwatts	Water saving through technological systems for the treatment and reuse of grey water in domestic and industrial environments.
I-Access	Physical and cultural accessibility of historic city centres in Palermo (Vucciria) and Valletta (Bijeria) for people with disabilities.
Mediwarn	Real-time remote monitoring of patients' clinical conditions through an integrated biosensor system enabling faster medical intervention.
Itama	Optimisation of the diagnostic process for coeliac disease in the Mediterranean area through the development of an AI-based system supporting early diagnosis.
Itamacap	Application of IT procedures and tools for the early diagnosis of coeliac disease in the Mediterranean area, involving schools and general practitioner clinics.
Natiflife	Development and testing of assistive smart home technologies for people with reduced mobility at healthcare centres in Adrano and Mosta.

Within **Priority Axis 2**, the projects supported spaces and initiatives for social innovation, fostering the creation of new enterprises and the consolidation of existing ones. In parallel, through a further four projects, cross-border labour mobility was promoted by improving the matching between labour supply and demand and addressing SMEs' needs for specialised skills. Overall, these initiatives contributed to the upskilling of human capital, the strengthening of cooperation between education and productive institutions, and the economic and social growth of the cross-border area.

Enisie	Promotion of good practices for social innovation and provision of services for the creation and strengthening of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises with a social vocation in the cross-border area, in the digital health, food tech and sustainable tourism sectors.
I-Know	Support for the creation of innovative start-ups in environmental sustainability, quality of life and health through Open Innovation processes and cooperation between research and enterprises.
Job Match 2020	Creation of an Italian–Maltese cooperation centre for employment through counselling, tutoring, recruiting and human resources services to improve labour market effectiveness, mobility and competitiveness.
Men	Creation of a cooperation network between schools and public institutions to promote labour mobility of young people in Sicilian and Maltese enterprises in the

blue economy, environmental protection, quality of life and sustainable tourism sectors.

Move on

Signing of memoranda of understanding between Sicilian and Maltese enterprises and public institutions to establish a cross-border network and implement labour mobility and job placement initiatives for young people and newly qualified professionals.

Crosswork

Provision of vouchers for internships for young people and newly qualified professionals in Sicilian and Maltese SMEs to promote cross-border labour market integration and mobility.

Finally, within **Priority Axis 3**, the projects supported environmental protection and awareness-raising on the conservation of the sea and the territory, as well as the prevention of natural and anthropogenic risks, by promoting coordinated actions at cross-border level.

Harmony

Monitoring seabed integrity in protected marine areas and applying control measures to safeguard biodiversity and counter the spread of non-indigenous species.

Simaseed

Improvement of the conservation status of Natura 2000 habitats through the strengthening of threatened plant species and containment of invasive species.

Simaseed Plus

Regeneration of natural heritage and ecosystem services through tools to enhance the resilience of plant species to climate change.

Fast

Contrasting the spread of harmful plant species affecting Natura 2000 biodiversity and developing guidelines applicable in the Mediterranean basin.

Bioblu

Development of an intelligent system for the remote identification of marine litter transported by sea currents, automated collection and disposal of plastic waste from beaches.

Corallo

Environmental education and edutainment tools to promote awareness of biodiversity in Sicilian and Maltese marine protected areas.

Corallo + SI

Creation of a stable community of authorities managing protected marine areas and natural parks in Malta and Sicily to protect biodiversity and promote ecosystem services in Natura 2000 sites.

Sea Marvel

Awareness-raising campaigns to promote responsible citizenship, knowledge of marine ecosystems and understanding of risks caused by human activities.

Senhar

Citizen science initiatives to promote correct use of protected areas and awareness of Natura 2000 sites in the cross-border area.

Capsenhar

Expansion of the network of sea observers involved in citizen science initiatives to assess the impact of heatwaves on marine biodiversity.

Ampa

Development of an integrated management model for Sicilian and Maltese marine protected areas involving public bodies, fishermen, tourists and local communities.

Calypso South

Network for the surveillance of the Maltese and south-west Sicilian marine area based on an HF radar system for monitoring deliberate hydrocarbon spills from ships travelling in the Mediterranean Sea.

Beyond Calypso	Strengthening of the modelling chains for the identification, tracing and mitigation of negative impacts deriving from hydrocarbon spills in the Mediterranean Sea, expanding the calculation domain of the Sicilian–Maltese–Tunisian channel area.
i-WaveNET	Monitoring network based on the integration of various measuring technologies such as HF radar, seismic sensors, wave buoys and weather stations for emergency management at sea and risk mitigation along the Sicilian–Maltese coastlines.
Simit Tharsy	Strengthening of the data collection network and risk assessment systems in case of catastrophic events along the Ibleo–Maltese fault, integrating a tsunami alert system for coastal communities.
Bess	Remote data collection network of Sicilian and Maltese pocket beaches, naturally resilient to climate change effects, to monitor their conservation status and define a sustainable management system.
News	Wave monitoring system based on a network of wave buoys integrated with HF data from the Calypso South system to calibrate flood, erosion and collapse risk prediction models and provide early warning to coastal populations.
Gifluid	Testing of green infrastructures such as porous pavements, rain gardens and green roofs to be integrated into urban planning tools to mitigate the effects of Mediterranean floods following long periods of drought.
Remaco	Integration of monitoring systems for sandy and rocky coastlines subject to flooding and erosion along Sicilian and Maltese coasts for the definition of alert plans and sustainable territorial management models.

Programme Evaluation

In 2023, the **Impact Evaluation of the Interreg V-A Italia–Malta Programme** analysed the entire implementation period of the Programme, providing assessments of its effectiveness, usefulness and relevance with respect to four strategic areas: quality of life and citizens' health, enhancement of cultural heritage, environmental protection and risk prevention.

According to the evaluation findings, in relation to the objectives of the **Europe 2020 Strategy**, the Programme made a significant contribution to the pillar of **smart growth**, supporting innovation pathways consistent with the Smart Specialisation Strategies of Sicily and Malta. In particular, strong support emerged for the adoption of advanced scientific and technological solutions in the fields of life sciences, blue economy and health, with a focus on e-health, active ageing and biotechnological applications in marine and tourism-related sectors.

The contribution to **sustainable growth** was also positive, especially in terms of efficient resource use and the strengthening of environmental resilience, thanks to projects dedicated to ecosystem protection and risk management. Indirect effects on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions were also observed, while no significant results emerged with regard to the diffusion of renewable energy. The impact on employment and social cohesion proved more limited, due to the Programme's relatively small financial scale and the limited number of projects.

With reference to the Programme's core thematic areas, the evaluation acknowledged the **high usefulness** of interventions aimed at improving quality of life and citizens' health,

through the development of new products, services and innovative diagnostic and care techniques, with potential long-term sustainability effects supported by strengthened cooperation among research institutions. The contribution to the enhancement of cultural heritage was weaker, being limited to a single small-scale project and therefore insufficient to trigger lasting cooperation processes.

By contrast, the contribution to **environmental protection and risk prevention** was considered relevant and overall effective. The funded projects improved marine environmental protection, the sustainable management of marine resources and public awareness, demonstrating good performance in terms of output and result indicators. Similarly, in the area of risk prevention, the Programme supported the development of technological solutions for the systematic collection and use of data to underpin climate change adaptation strategies, achieving results that in some cases exceeded initial expectations. In both areas, the broad involvement of institutions and stakeholders strengthened the potential sustainability of impacts.

Finally, the evaluation highlighted the **added value of the cross-border approach**: cooperation between Italian and Maltese partners enabled the achievement of outputs that would have been difficult to attain in isolation, fostering knowledge sharing, policy coordination and network building, with potential effects extending beyond the cooperation area.