

# Reaping the Benefits of EU Membership

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The Maltese Islands became members of the European Union just over two years ago. The country has gone through dramatic changes, not all easily visible, with many slowly transforming the way we Maltese think and operate. In recent months, the materialisation of projects funded through European Union funds is starting to be seen and felt, not least in Gozo where projects and initiatives of different kinds are today very noticeable.

Certainly, projects that are tangible and that one comes across in daily life are the ones mostly known, with road works probably topping the list in people's minds. With the heavy road reconstruction works currently underway on the Victoria-San Lawrenz three kilometre stretch that is presently closed off one cannot but be aware of the heavy investment that is coming Gozo's way through the funds that the island managed to obtain from the European Union.



Works in progress on the Victoria-San Lawrenz road.

Yet, the 8.6 million Euros that are being specifically invested in Gozo, and that constitute 10% of the Structural Funds that Malta, as a country, obtained, are not being solely directed towards the road rebuilding programme but also towards 'softer' projects that could also have an immediate as well as a longer-term effect on the island's economy.

Such 'softer' projects include the courses currently underway at the University Gozo Centre, at the

Wistin Camilleri Gozo Centre for Art and Crafts and at the Institute of Tourism Studies temporarily transferred to Xewkija. The courses being offered are funded through the EU's European Social Fund, and range from agriculture, business studies, e-commerce and IT, and environment planning and management – such as those offered at the University Gozo Centre, to craft disciplines, and tourism and hospitality-related courses offered at the other two institutes.



Dr Matthew Montebello delivering a lecture during the course 'Introduction to E-Commerce and IT' at the University Gozo Centre.

The attendance to these courses, being offered free of charge to Gozitans over sixteen years of age having an O'level standard of education or equivalent, is quite positive with certain courses having to shortlist the number of participants attending and other courses being offered twice this year to accommodate the number of applicants.

Gozitans are realising the benefits that educational opportunities can offer, not just for one's personal interests or hobbies but also for one's advances in a modern and ever changing world. Gozo too, although small in size, can – and should – face up to the changes out there, not simply by strengthening and upgrading its physical infrastructure and providing newer services but also by having a work force and a human resource base that is flexible and ready to embrace change and keep itself at the forefront of what happens outside one's border.



Mr Antoine Vella delivering a lecture during the course 'Introduction to Agricultural Studies' held at the University of Malta Gozo Centre

Although every educational opportunity serves as a bonus to any community, the aim behind the organisation of these EU co-financed courses is not simply to offer an even wider range of possibilities on Gozo but also to present opportunities for adults to acquire those additional skills needed in view of sustainable career prospects.



One of the participants during a practical session of the course on Glass Works held at the Wistin Camilleri Gozo Centre for Art and Crafts.

For, considering the continuous changes brought about by globalisation, and the shift in the island's economy from a traditional manufacturing to a more services-oriented market, Gozo has to orient itself towards producing products and services of

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