



Final Report - Interregional collaboration of Malta in S3 priority areas

Smart Specialisation Community of Practice (S3 CoP)

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Arnault Morisson, PhD

Table of contents:

Executive summary	4
Objectives	4
Challenges Addressed	4
Results	4
Recommendations	4
Governance and animation	5
Tools and funding	5
Network and communication	6
1. Introduction and contextual setting	7
2. Methodology	8
3. Main Findings	9
a. Malta's assessment: inherent systemic gaps	9
b. Malta's S3 priorities – assessment overview	11
4. Recommendations	13
a. Governance and Animation	13
i. Map Maltese research and innovation ecosystem involve in interregional projects and identify interregional complementarities	13
ii. Revise Blue Med's mandate, if not possible, establish the Blue Economy Cluster in Malta	16
iii. Establish a Dedicated Liaison Office in Brussels	20
iv. Integrate and coordinate of existing networks to form the Malta European Research and Innovation Network (MERIN)	22
v. Adopt an Outward-Looking Approach to the Entrepreneurial Discovery Process (EDP)	24
b. Tools and Funding	26
i. Establish Malta's Fund for European Projects (MAFEP) piloted by Science Malta	26
ii. Strengthen Malta's Support Schemes for Networks	31
c. Network and communication	32
i. Leverage Networking Opportunities from S3CoP Working Groups	32
ii. Join Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships (TSSPs)	33
iii. Communicate, Raise Awareness, and Leverage the Maltese Research and Innovation Diaspora for Interregional Opportunities	34
iv. Apply for Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform Peer Review and Matchmaking	37
5. 5. Conclusions	38
7. References	39
Annexes	40
Annex I – Interview list	40
Annex II – Assessment of Malta S3 priorities (non-exhaustive mapping)	41
Annex III – New European Innovation Agenda actions and their relevance for Malta.	42
Annex IV – Interregional Innovation Investment (I3) Instrument	48
Annex V – Overview of the policy recommendations	49
Annex VI – Overview of the FRAPPE Programme in Hauts-de-France	51

List of tables

Table 1 Overview assessment of the capacity tripod and enabling conditions for interregional collaboration in Malta	10
Table 2 Participation in Horizon Europe: Cyprus, Malta, and total	11
Table 3 S3 priorities and sub-priorities IC readiness levels	12
Table 4 Relevant initiatives in Armenia and Cyprus for their diaspora	35

List of Figures

Figure 1 Overview of the capacity tripod and enabling conditions for interregional collaboration in Malta	9
Figure 2 Networks of H2020 projects in Calabria with their total costs (left) and betweenness centrality (right)	14
Figure 3 Complementarity map of Andalucía (Spain) for virtual and augmented reality	15
Figure 4 RIS3-MCAT Mapping	16
Figure 5 Blue Malta working transversally with other S3 priorities.	18
Figure 6 RERI model in Hauts-de-France. Source: own elaboration	24
Figure 7 Malta S3 governance overview. Source: own elaboration	25
Figure 8 MAFEP design process. Source: own elaboration	29
Figure 9 Relevant initiatives in Armenia and Cyprus for their diaspora	38

Executive summary

Objectives

The report aims to enhance the interregional dimension of the Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) for Malta, designed and implemented at the national level, which serves as a cornerstone for the country's research and innovation (R&I) efforts. Supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) under policy objective 1 (PO 1) for the 2021-2027 programming period, the strategy aims to boost competitiveness by aligning research and innovation strengths with business needs and skills through the entrepreneurial discovery process. Given the importance of interregional collaboration for the success of smart specialisation strategies (S3), the ERDF is also tasked with supporting the development of capacities necessary for an effective entrepreneurial discovery process and for updating these strategies.

Challenges Addressed

One of the primary challenges Malta faces is the limited access to and participation in interregional collaborative networks and platforms. This gap hinders the nation's ability to fully leverage the benefits of these networks, which are crucial for achieving the objectives set out in Malta's S3. Enhancing access to interregional opportunities is essential for bolstering Malta's national R&I ecosystem through access to complementary resources, skills, knowledge, capabilities, and lead users. This, in turn, will help generate critical mass, speed up demonstration, deployment, and scaling up of technologies.

Recognising this need, Science Malta aims to fortify the interregional collaboration aspect of the national S3 through the identification of interregional opportunities and good practices. This report provides tailored policy recommendations to strengthen Malta's capacity to participate in European interregional initiatives.

Results

This report, commissioned by Science Malta under the Smart Specialisation Strategy Community of Practice (S3CoP), was prepared by Dr. Arnault Morisson to enhance interregional collaboration within Malta's S3 priorities and innovation ecosystem.

Using primary and secondary data, including 22 interviews during a field visit (17–21 June 2024) and analysis of relevant reports and academic articles, the report identifies gaps and opportunities in Malta's S3 priorities. It provides 11 tailored policy recommendations and guidance to support stakeholders in improving interregional collaboration within the broader European research and innovation context.

Recommendations

The report assesses inherent gaps in Malta's S3 priorities and provides 11 tailored policy recommendations designed to address identified gaps and leverage opportunities for enhanced interregional collaboration:

Governance and animation

- To identify and map Maltese coordinators and partners involved in Horizon 2020, Horizon Europe, European networks, and other European interregional initiatives. This mapping will utilize social network analysis (SNA) using the CORDIS database to pinpoint the most central actors and existing interregional collaboration, thereby enabling Maltese actors to identify existing and potential partners within S3 priorities. The mapping effort can be complemented with patent analysis to identify interregional complementarities and technological opportunities in S3 priorities.
- Revise Blue Med's mandate, if not possible, establish the Blue Economy Cluster in Malta, 'Blue Malta,' functioning as the one-stop-shop hub for the blue economy sector in Malta. This blue economy cluster will work transversally across all Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) priorities. The organisation aims to enhance coordination for sustainable marine and maritime initiatives while reducing fragmentation within the blue economy sector. 'Blue Malta' will centralise existing national and European efforts such as the Blue Med Hub, BlueMissionMed HUB, and the WEST MED Malta National Hub on a dedicated website 'Blue Malta hub,' where stakeholders can access information on various initiatives.
- To enhance Malta's mission to the European Union (EU) in Brussels by establishing a dedicated liaison office focused on lobbying, networking, identifying interregional opportunities in Smart Specialization Strategy (S3) priorities, and supporting S3 chairs in Malta. This initiative aims to strengthen Malta's presence in EU research and innovation networks and promote bilateral agreements.
- To integrate and coordinate of existing networks to form the Malta European Research and Innovation Network (MERIN), regrouping the most relevant actors and networks in Malta participating in European projects. The network will aim to organise an annual event to anticipate and present research and innovation initiatives and calls, share tools and funding opportunities, showcase success stories from Maltese actors in European projects, and produce a quarterly newsletter.
- To adopt an outward-looking approach to the Entrepreneurial Discovery Process (EDP) by linking actions proposed by S3 chairs with relevant European projects and initiatives. This approach aims to align Malta's research and innovation (R&I) ecosystem with European opportunities, utilizing a "Follow the Policy" strategy to identify and leverage future EU initiatives and funding opportunities. Science Malta has to regularly conduct policy watch and anticipate EU funding opportunities within a more strategic approach to align Malta R&I efforts with the most promising EU opportunities

Tools and funding

- Piloted by Science Malta, Malta's Fund for European Projects (MAFEP) is an initiative designed to support Maltese research and innovation actors in (1) identifying calls and ideas (MAFEP Ideas), (2) facilitating the design of proposals (MAFEP Design), (3) supporting the monitoring of projects (MAFEP Monitoring), and assessing S3 sub-priorities

and actions in S3 priorities (MAFEP Expertise). This initiative aims to assist in identifying relevant European calls, developing high-quality project proposals aligned with Malta's S3 priorities, monitoring European projects, and assessing the relevance of Malta's S3.

- Enhance the effectiveness and reach of Malta's support schemes for research and innovation networks by facilitating the creation of networks and revising funding schemes to support participation in EIT KICs aligned with S3 priorities.

Network and communication

- Enhance Malta's S3 priorities by leveraging networking opportunities from S3CoP (Smart Specialisation Community of Practice) working groups to identify funding calls, potential partners, and collaboration opportunities.
- Support Malta's leadership and active participation in Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships (TSSPs) related to Industrial Modernisation and the Sustainable Blue Economy by joining existing partnerships and planning for potential future leadership roles in new initiatives over the long term.
- Enhance awareness of interregional collaboration opportunities and leverage the Maltese research and innovation diaspora to create networks, supporting Malta's interregional collaboration and S3 priorities. This will be achieved by updating online platforms, sharing success stories, and engaging the Maltese diaspora to strengthen Malta's research and innovation landscape.
- Enhance Malta's S3 through international peer learning and exchanges. Malta can apply for the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform peer review and/or matchmaking to gain valuable insights and recommendations from European peers dealing with similar S3 policy challenges.

1. Introduction and contextual setting

Background of the Request: The Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) for Malta, designed and implemented at the national level, serves as a cornerstone for the country's research and innovation (R&I) efforts. Supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) under policy objective 1 (PO 1) for the 2021-2027 programming period, the strategy aims to boost competitiveness by aligning research and innovation strengths with business needs and skills through the entrepreneurial discovery process. Given the importance of interregional collaboration for the success of smart specialisation strategies (S3), the ERDF is also tasked with supporting the development of capacities necessary for an effective entrepreneurial discovery process and for updating these strategies. Despite Malta's engagement in international collaboration through the Horizon Framework Programme (FP), there remains significant room for improvement in interregional collaboration, particularly evidenced by the limited success in initiatives like the Interregional Innovation Investment (I3) instrument.

For more information on S3:

The European Commission has long recognised that research and innovation are key for sustainable and smart economic transformation. In the current programming period, such commitment has become stronger and clearer, as it is clearly embedded in the "Policy Objective 1" of the European Regional Development Fund.

A smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation.

Smart Specialisation is considered essential to deliver this objective. This is why, increased emphasis is placed on having good governance for regional and national S3s, ensuring that strategies do not remain abstract documents, and that mechanisms and instruments are in place to reach and engage the territory.

[Learn more >](#)

One of the primary challenges Malta faces is the limited access to and participation in interregional collaborative networks and platforms. This gap hinders the nation's ability to fully leverage the benefits of these networks, which are crucial for achieving the objectives set out in Malta's S3. Enhancing access to interregional opportunities is essential for bolstering Malta's national R&I ecosystem through access to complementary resources, skills, knowledge, capabilities, and lead users. This, in turn, will help generate critical mass, speed up demonstration, deployment, and scaling up of technologies.

Recognising this need, Science Malta aims to fortify the interregional collaboration aspect of the national S3 through the identification of interregional opportunities and good practices. This report provides tailored policy recommendations to strengthen Malta's capacity to participate in European interregional initiatives.

Expert Summary Assessment: Malta, the smallest country in the European Union (EU) and a Mediterranean island, faces three main challenges in S3 interregional collaboration. The three main challenges are: first, the limited capacity in terms of time, skills, and to a lesser

extent, resources for engaging in interregional initiatives. Due to its small research and innovation ecosystem, Malta has a limited number of actors that can effectively engage in interregional collaboration. Second, there is a fragmentation of national initiatives to support interregional collaboration that complicates the readability of European opportunities and the offered support measures for the actors in the ecosystem. Third, Malta's S3 priorities have different levels of maturity and interregional readiness, requiring differentiated approaches.

There are three main recommendations to respond to the main challenges. First, there is a need to be more strategic when pursuing interregional initiatives. This requires anticipating and preparing for European opportunities that are most aligned and strategic for the development of Malta's S3 priorities. Second, there is a need to bridge the lack of capacities with competent intermediaries (Brussels liaison office, cluster, consultancy companies) that are well-connected to the European research and innovation landscape. Engaging relevant intermediaries will also aim to build critical mass through borrowed size, to limit fragmentation and enhance communication between Malta's funders. Third, there is a need to adopt a more outward-looking approach to the S3, not only at the level of priorities but also transversally across S3 priorities.

2. Methodology

This report was commissioned by Science Malta within the framework of a targeted assignment offered by the Smart Specialisation Strategy Community of Practice (S3CoP). The report was prepared by Dr. Arnault Morisson, who was selected as the expert to enhance interregional collaboration within Malta's S3 priorities and research and innovation ecosystem. The policy recommendations were developed through a robust methodology that triangulates both primary and secondary data sources, ensuring accurate assessment and context-specific recommendations.

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of Malta's unique context and challenges, the expert conducted an in-depth field visit to Malta from 17-21 June 2024. In total, 22 semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants both in Malta and abroad (see Annex I for details). These interviews provided valuable insights into the existing gaps, opportunities, and stakeholder perspectives on interregional collaboration.

In addition to the primary data collected, secondary data was gathered from a wide range of relevant academic articles, S3CoP and JRC reports, and policy documents on interregional collaboration. This data was meticulously analysed to contextualise the findings within the broader European research and innovation landscape.

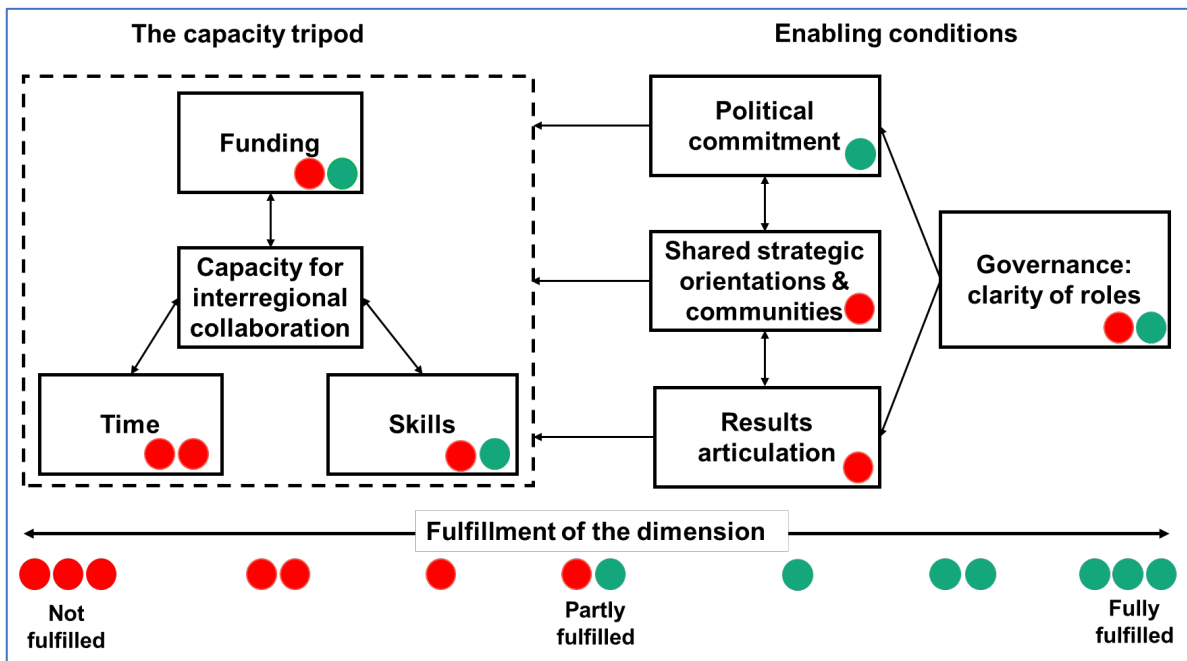
The report assesses inherent gaps in Malta's S3 priorities and provides 11 tailored policy recommendations designed to address identified gaps and leverage opportunities for enhanced interregional collaboration. To further support Malta's actors, the report includes annexed documents that provide detailed guidance and strategic insights for effectively engaging in interregional initiatives.

3. Main Findings

a. Malta's assessment: inherent systemic gaps

Malta faces systemic gaps in engaging in interregional collaboration (IC). The country's research and innovation actors are hindered by capacity issues, which limit their ability to participate in, sustain, and fully benefit from such collaborative efforts (see Figure 1). Capacity is formed by different components—funding, time, and skills—enabled by institutional conditions. However, Malta's main limitation is due to the insufficient critical mass of research and innovation actors in many S3 priorities, along with the absence of a systemic and institutionalised approach to interregional collaboration.

Figure 1 Overview of the capacity tripod and enabling conditions for interregional collaboration in Malta



Note: See each dimension in Table 1.

Time has received the most negative evaluation in terms of fulfilment, while shared strategic orientation & communities, and results also show negative evaluations. Governance, skills, and funding are partially fulfilled, and political commitment is moderately fulfilled. Source: own elaboration from the S3 CoP Working Group: Interregional Collaboration.

Malta's research and innovation ecosystem faces several systemic gaps that hinder effective interregional collaboration (IC). Funding instruments, though available, suffers from poor communication, underfunding, and a lack of systematization, limiting resources for networking and proposal writing. Time constraints are significant, as the few SMEs and researchers engaged in IC are overburdened and often work on a voluntary after-hours basis. While the necessary skills for IC, such as leadership, management, communication, and networking, are present, they are fragmented across various initiatives, diminishing their effectiveness. Politically, despite a commitment to IC, a silo mentality among different

ministries leads to fragmented initiatives and poor coordination, weakening the critical mass needed for S3 priorities to competitively engage in IC. There is also a lack of shared strategic orientation, particularly in university-industry collaborations, necessitating more interregional projects across S3 sub-priorities. The communication of results and benefits of IC for SMEs needs improvement to better convey the advantages of participation. Governance and ownership structures would benefit from a more strategic approach to IC, with continuous policy foresight and better alignment to anticipate relevant calls and enhance coordination and effectiveness.

Table 1 Overview assessment of the capacity tripod and enabling conditions for interregional collaboration in Malta

Dimension	Description	Malta's assessment overview
Capacity tripod		
Funding	IC requires funding (network, proposal writing)	Funding instruments are available but poorly communicated, underfunded, and not systematised.
Time	IC requires time 'one-person' situation and of 'voluntary after-hours'	Time is a major constraint for the few SMEs and researchers involved in IC, who are overly solicited.
Skills	IC requires skills (leadership, management, communication, networking, ecosystem-building)	Skills are available, but initiatives are fragmented, diluting their effective leverage.
Enabling conditions		
Political commitment	IC requires political commitment (roadmap, actions, funding instruments)	There is political commitment with new interregional support initiatives coming from the Office of the Prime Minister such as SEM and initiatives from Malta Enterprise, but a silo mentality from across different Ministries persists regarding IC leading to a fragmentation of initiatives and lack of coordination diluting critical mass in S3 priorities.
Shared strategic orientation & communities	IC leverages shared projects by R&I ecosystem and joint engagement	More shared interregional projects are needed, especially to enhance university-industry collaboration.
Results articulation	IC benefits from clear and convincing description of results	Better communication of results and benefits to participate in IC for SMEs is needed.
Governance and ownership	IC benefits from a clear ownership structure and governance.	Governance and ownership would benefit from a strategic approach to IC with continuous policy foresight and alignment with relevant calls.

Source: Own elaboration from the S3 CoP Working Group: Interregional Collaboration.

An example of a missed IC opportunity reflecting several gaps is the I3. The non-participation of Malta in the Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument highlights significant weaknesses in both the capacity tripod and the enabling conditions for interregional collaboration (see I3 introduction and success factors in Annex IV). Malta stands out as the only EU country that is neither a Regional Innovation Valley (RIV) nor a partner in an I3 project.

From the perspective of the capacity tripod, Malta exhibits deficiencies in funding, time, and skills among its research and innovation actors to motivate them to participate in the I3 calls. Regarding enabling conditions, Science Malta has shown weaknesses in aligning the ecosystem, prioritising, and supporting strategic initiatives, particularly in responding to calls of interest to become an RIV. Many I3 projects, such as I3-4-BLUE-GROWTH: Unlocking the Potential of the Sustainable Blue Economy¹, align with Malta's S3 priorities, further emphasising the missed opportunities for Malta.

¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/projects-details/44416173/101133055/I3?order=DESC&pageNumber=1&pageSize=50&sortBy=title&isExactMatch=true&programmePeriod=2021%20-%202027&frameworkProgramme=44416173>

Another point that has become a self-fulfilling prophecy is that Malta’s research and innovation actors often cite the country’s insular context as the reason for the lack of interregional collaboration. However, Cyprus, a Mediterranean island even more peripheral than Malta, has emerged as a strong innovator in the European Regional Innovation Scoreboard (RIS) 2024² and has achieved the highest performance increase since 2017. Consequently, Cyprus serves as a valuable benchmark for Malta. This calls for Science Malta to collaborate more closely with its Cypriot counterpart, the Research and Innovation Foundation³.

Benchmarking Malta against Cyprus in terms of participation in Horizon Europe reveals notable differences (see Table 2). Cyprus has 633 organisations participating in Horizon Europe, compared to just 163 from Malta, representing 0.8% and 0.2% of the total participating organizations, respectively. A key distinction lies in the participation rates of private companies: Malta’s private sector is underrepresented, while its public sector shows much higher involvement compared to Cyprus. This disparity is critical because Horizon Europe often serves as a gateway for companies to engage in other European initiatives. The lower participation rate of private companies in Malta puts pressure on the country’s capacity, particularly on small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which are often overburdened. Addressing this issue by boosting the involvement of SMEs and private companies in interregional collaboration is a strategic priority for Malta.

Table 2 Participation in Horizon Europe: Cyprus, Malta, and total

	Participation in Horizon Europe in number of organisations (in percentage the share of the type of organisations in the country)				
	Private companies	Higher education	Public sector	Research Centre	Other
Cyprus	342 (54%)	156 (25%)	42 (7%)	42 (7%)	51 (8%)
Malta	42 (26%)	56 (35%)	47 (30%)	10 (6%)	8 (5%)
Total Horizon Europe	22325 (30%)	25013 (34%)	3846 (5%)	16762 (23%)	6137 (8%)

Source: own elaboration from CORDIS database.

b. Malta’s S3 priorities – assessment overview

Malta’s S3 priorities and sub-priorities exhibit varying readiness levels for interregional collaboration (see Table 3). The readiness level is assessed based on four components: (1) involvement of SMEs and private companies in Horizon, (2) coordination or participation in European projects, (3) critical mass in European or national initiatives, and (4) interviews.

Sub-priorities with a high readiness level for interregional collaboration include artificial intelligence, digital tools to support healthcare, renewable energy generation and storage, turning waste into resources, maritime technology, and valorisation of marine resources. These sub-priorities are well-positioned to participate in the most competitive research and

² https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/document/download/1cf1a2a0-a667-40dc-9132-4466cc5e2d54_en#:~:text=Estonia%20and%20Cyprus%20have%20achieved,10%20and%2011%20in%202024.

³ <https://www.research.org.cy/en/>

innovation European calls (I3, Horizon Europe) and networks (TSSP). They are the ones that are the most advanced to benefit from European initiatives requiring a high Technology Readiness Levels (TRL), namely TRLs 5-9, such as I3 or EIC. Strategically, there is an opportunity to build synergies across these sub-priorities, such as, for instance, turning waste into resources for the valorisation of marine resources.

Sub-priorities with a medium readiness level for interregional collaboration include internet of things, cybersecurity, high-performance computing, drug development, zero-carbon buildings, flexible manufacturing, and sustainable manufacturing. These sub-priorities would benefit from working transversally with green or other yellow sub-priorities to strengthen their readiness levels. For instance, the internet of things and cybersecurity are promising areas for transversal collaboration with high readiness sub-priorities. Additionally, developing critical mass for these yellow sub-priorities can be supported through less competitive European initiatives such as EIT, Widening, or co-funded programmes (Interreg Med, Interreg Europe, PRIMA). For instance, the strategic focus on less competitive initiatives could enhance capacities. As evidenced by Lalanne and Meyer (2024), two EU R&I policies seem to display some synergies: participation in Interreg 2014-2020 Europe Programme is positively correlated with participation in Horizon 2020 (H2020)⁴.

Sub-priorities with a low readiness level for interregional collaboration include chatbots, blockchain, cancer research, biomedical engineering, maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO), and UAV drones. These sub-priorities would benefit from building critical mass through national initiatives combined with European funding opportunities (for instance Widening). These sub-priorities would most benefit from initiatives to support lower Technology Readiness Levels (TRL), such as TRLs 1-6, to build scientific capacities and potential academic spinoffs.

Table 3 S3 priorities and sub-priorities IC readiness levels

S3 priorities	S3 sub-priorities	SMEs/companies	Horizon Europe/2020	Critical mass	IC readiness
Future Digital Tech	Artificial intelligence	Green	Green	Yellow	Green
	The Internet of Things	Green	Green	Red	Yellow
	Cybersecurity	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
	Chatbots	Red	Red	Red	Red
	High-performance computing	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Yellow
	Digital games	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Yellow
	Blockchain	Red	Red	Red	Red
Health and well-being	Cancer	Red	Red	Red	Red
	Cellular Therapy	Red	Red	Yellow	Red
	Drug Development	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Yellow
	Digital tools to support healthcare	Green	Green	Green	Green
	Biomedical engineering	Red	Yellow	Red	Red

⁴ <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC136781>
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Sustainable use of resources	Toward zero carbon building	Green	Yellow	Red	Yellow
	Resource efficiency in industry	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
	Renewable energy generation and storage	Yellow	Green	Green	Green
	Turning waste into resource	Yellow	Green	Green	Green
Smart manufacturing	Flexible manufacturing	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
	Sustainable manufacturing	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Marine and maritime	Maritime technology	Green	Green	Green	Green
	Valorisation of marine resources	Green	Green	Green	Green
Aviation and Aerospace	Maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO)	Red	Red	Yellow	Red
	UAV drones	Red	Red	Red	Red

Legend: red: low, yellow: medium, and green IC high readiness.

Source: own elaboration from Annex II.

4. Recommendations

The policy recommendations presented in this report aim to provide concrete and context-specific strategies to rapidly build capacities for interregional collaboration within Malta's research and innovation ecosystem. These recommendations address the main challenges that hinder Malta's interregional collaboration efforts and leverage the existing readiness of specific sub-priorities. The policy recommendations focus on strengthening governance and animation, tools and funding, and network and communication.

By focusing on the unique context of Malta, this report seeks to enhance the country's ability to participate in and benefit from European research and innovation initiatives. The recommendations are designed to increase the involvement of Maltese SMEs, private companies, universities, NGOs, and public sector actors in interregional projects.

The recommendations are not ranked in order of importance.

a. Governance and Animation

i. Map Maltese research and innovation ecosystem involve in interregional projects and identify interregional complementarities

Objective: To identify and map Maltese coordinators and partners involved in Horizon 2020, Horizon Europe, European networks, and other European interregional initiatives. This mapping will utilize social network analysis (SNA) using the CORDIS database to pinpoint the most central actors and existing interregional collaboration, thereby enabling Maltese actors to identify existing and potential partners within S3 priorities. The mapping effort can be

complemented with patent analysis to identify interregional complementarities and technological opportunities in S3 priorities.

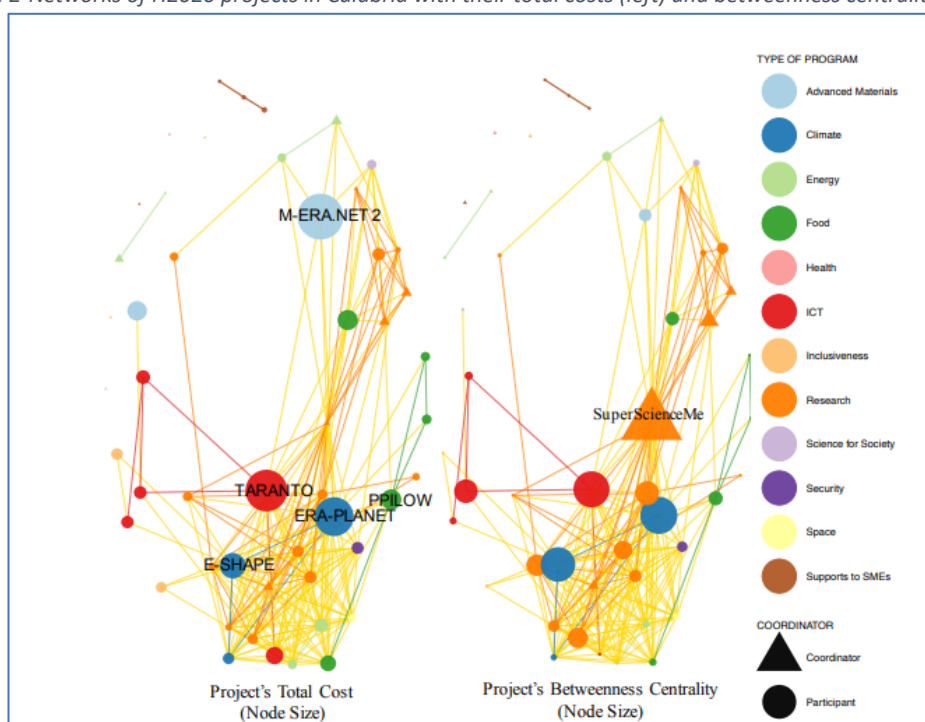
Rationale: Mapping the research and innovation ecosystem is essential to provide a clear picture of the current landscape of Maltese involvement in Horizon 2020, Horizon Europe, and other interregional initiatives, making it easier for stakeholders to identify and connect with key players. The recommendation aims to foster collaboration allowing Maltese actors to identify potential partners and collaboration opportunities and to inform strategic decisions through evidence-based approaches.

Approach:

1. Social Network Analysis (SNA):

- **Data Source:** Utilize the CORDIS datalab⁵ to gather data on Malta participation in Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe and Keep.eu⁶ to gather data on Malta participation in Interreg.
- **Analysis:** Conduct SNA to visualize and analyse the relationships between various Maltese actors and their interregional partners (see Morisson et al., 2020 for the methodology, see also Lalanne & Meyer, 2024).
- **Outcome:** Identify the most central and influential participants within these networks, highlighting key collaboration hubs and existing partnerships.

Figure 2 Networks of H2020 projects in Calabria with their total costs (left) and betweenness centrality (right)



Source: Morisson et al. 2020

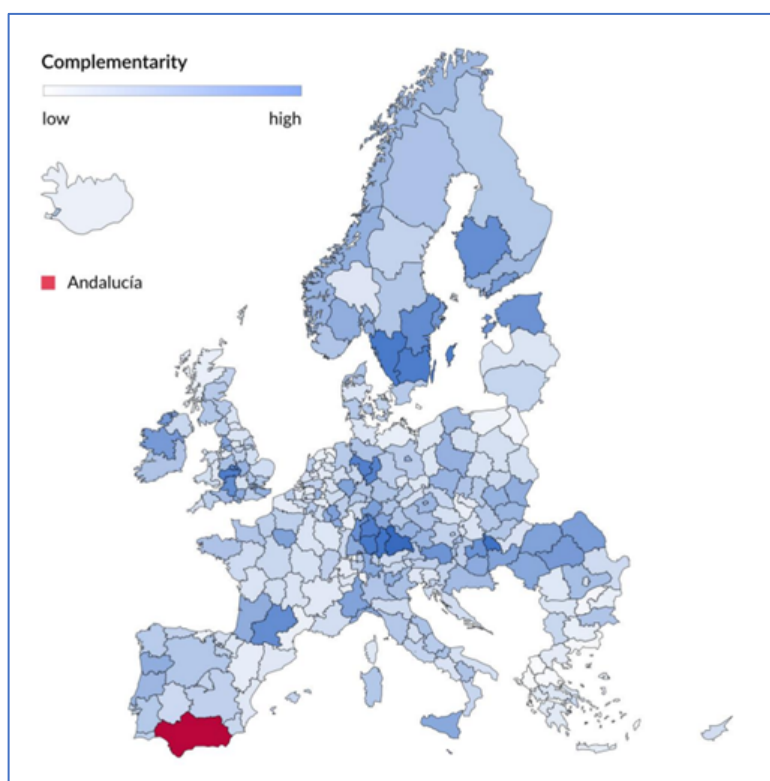
⁵ <https://cordis.europa.eu/datalab>

⁶ <https://keep.eu/>

2. Patent analysis:

- **Data Source:** Utilize the REGPAT database⁷ to gather data on EU and Malta patents.
- **Analysis:** Conduct economic relatedness and interregional complementarities on relevant patent class for Malta (see Bachtrögler-Unger et al., 2023; Balland et al., 2019; Balland & Boschma, 2021; Hidalgo et al., 2018; for the methodology).
- **Outcome:** Identify existing collaborative network, innovation strengths and related sectors, and uncover interregional complementarities and innovative strengths.

Figure 3 Complementarity map of Andalucía (Spain) for virtual and augmented reality



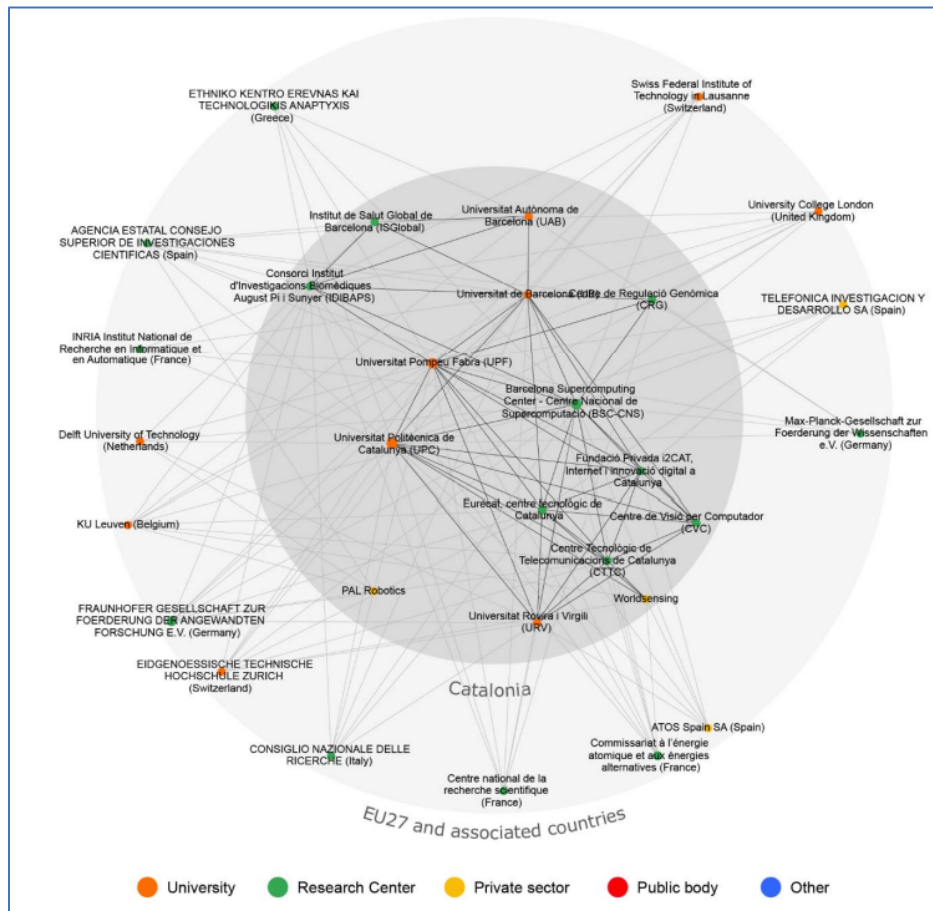
Source: Bachtrögler-Unger et al. (2023).

3. Mapping outputs:

- **Static Report:** Create a comprehensive report that can be shared with the Maltese R&I ecosystem detailing the findings, similar to Morisson et al. (2020) or Bachtrögler-Unger et al. (2023).
- **Dynamic Platform:** Develop a dynamic, interactive platform to be integrated with Plumtri, akin to the Platform RIS3-MCAT in Catalonia. This platform will enable continuous updates and user interactions.

⁷ https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/science-and-technology/the-oecd-regpat-database_241437144144
S3 Community of Practice – Arnault Morisson – Malta

Figure 4 RIS3-MCAT Mapping.



Source: RIS3-MCAT⁸.

4. Complementary tools:

- Add a dedicated page to Plumtri, allowing users to search for partners based on specific sub-priorities and collaboration interests.

Implementation:

- **Responsibility:** Managed by Science Malta (lead), with the assistance of a consulting company and/or university.
- **Outcome:** Enhanced visibility of potential partners, collaboration opportunities, sectoral opportunities, fostering stronger interregional ties and enabling targeted, strategic partnerships.

ii. Revise Blue Med's mandate, if not possible, establish the Blue Economy Cluster in Malta

⁸ <https://ris3mcat.gencat.cat/>

Objective: Malta Enterprise focuses on attracting foreign direct investment and supporting the growth of local businesses. Currently, Malta Enterprise has launched Blue Med serving as a focal point for blue economy businesses and has recently launched international challenges⁹. However, this initiative currently follows a silo approach and lack an interregional dimension. The expert recommends to expand the mandate of Blue Med to fulfill the following roles:

1. **Centralisation of information and resources:** serve as the primary platform for aggregating and disseminating Malta’s blue economy information, opportunities, and resources through a dedicated web portal.
2. **Coordination and facilitation:** act as the coordinating body that aligns Malta’s diverse blue economy initiatives with a shared strategic roadmap, ensuring synergies across different sectors.
3. **Direct engagement in European initiatives:** take on the role of directly engaging with key European blue economy initiatives, such as I3, EIE, ECCP, Interreg Europe, and TSSP.

If Blue Med’s mandate can be revised to accommodate these expanded responsibilities, there would be no need to create a separate entity like “Blue Malta” (see below).



If it not possible to expand the mandate of Blue Med, establish the Blue Economy Cluster in Malta:

Objective: to create “Blue Malta,” a not-for-profit organisation that will act as the central hub for the blue economy sector in Malta. Its mandate is to engage in interregional opportunities, to reduce fragmentation and foster collaboration among existing national and European blue economy initiatives, such as the Blue Med Hub, BlueMissionMed HUB, the WEST MED Malta National Hub and the S3 Chairs in Marine and Maritime and Sustainable Use of Resources, while ensuring that stakeholders can easily access information, opportunities, and resources through a dedicated web platform, the “Blue Malta Hub.”

Rationale: the goal is to enhance coordination and reduce duplication of efforts within the blue economy sector. Although existing initiatives have valuable roles, they operate with distinct objectives, often on separate timelines. “Blue Malta” will serve as the central mechanism for collaboration, acting as a bridge between these initiatives, while building the critical mass necessary for Malta’s effective participation in European opportunities, including Horizon Europe, Interreg, EIT Water, and other innovation programmes, such as I3 or ECCP. The cluster will provide a unified strategy that integrates with S3 priorities and addresses the need for more coherent coordination without merely adding another layer of bureaucracy.

Proposal:

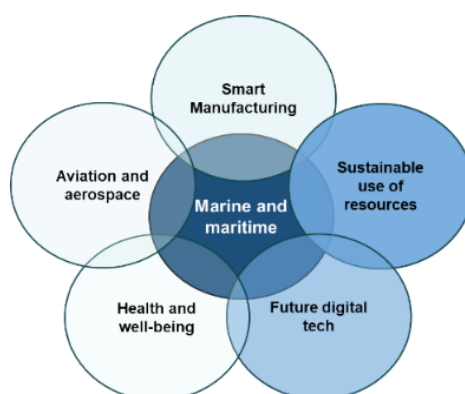
⁹ <https://maltaenterprise.com/node/1828>
S3 Community of Practice – Arnault Morisson – Malta

1. Formation of the Blue Economy Cluster:

- Establish “Blue Malta” as a non-profit entity dedicated to advancing the blue economy in Malta. It will work across all S3 priorities, especially focusing on marine and maritime sectors, sustainable use of resources, and integration with other S3 areas (e.g., green and yellow sub-priorities).

“Blue Malta” will begin as a small, agile organisation with 1-2 professionals who will coordinate and align Malta’s efforts with European blue economy initiatives.

Figure 5 Blue Malta working transversally with other S3 priorities.



Note: The darker the colour, the more potential for cross-sectoral projects.
Source: own elaboration.

- Stakeholder Collaboration and Strategic Roadmap:
 - Form a “Blue Task Force” comprising key stakeholders from government ministries, industry, academia, and existing initiatives (e.g., University of Malta, MCAST, Malta Maritime Forum, Transport Malta).
 - The task force will co-lead the cluster’s strategic roadmap, ensuring alignment with RIS3 priorities and improving collaboration mechanisms among stakeholders. This roadmap will include a clear governance structure, mission objectives, and action plans for the cluster’s activities.
 - “Blue Malta” will act as the key intermediary, coordinating among existing initiatives like the Blue Med Hub and providing a unified strategy for maritime and sustainable use of resources.
- Funding and personnel:
 - Launch a funding initiative to support 1-2 professionals with expertise in blue economy clusters. The professionals will be funded for an initial four-year term, with the possibility of renewal based on performance and impact.
 - These professionals will be hosted within an existing organization, such as Malta Enterprise or the Malta Maritime Forum, until “Blue Malta” is officially launched as an independent entity.
- Results orientation and key performance indicators (KPIs):

- Join the Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships (TSSP) and the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP) to enhance Malta’s presence in European initiatives.
- Aim to coordinate or partner in major European projects, such as Horizon Europe, Eurocluster, Interregional Innovation Investments (I3), and European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE).
- Alignment with existing initiatives:
 - Integrate and align the efforts of the Blue Med Hub, BlueMissionMed HUB, and WEST MED Malta National Hub with “Blue Malta” to ensure strategic coherence and avoid redundancy.
 - The dedicated web portal “Blue Malta Hub” will serve as a one-stop platform where stakeholders can access up-to-date information on blue economy projects, opportunities, and partnerships.
 - Key representatives from these existing initiatives will be included in the Maritime RIS3 Committee to foster collaboration and strategic planning.
- Short-term and long-term actions:
 - **Short-term (2025-2027):** Identify and implement cross-sectoral opportunities within S3 priorities, participate in TSSP and ECCP, and actively pursue partnerships in European initiatives.
 - **Medium-term (2027 onwards):** Expand “Blue Malta” impact through additional European projects, networks, and funding sources.
- **Why a non-for-profit?** The decision to establish “Blue Malta” as a non-profit rather than expanding the mandate of existing structures is driven by the need to overcome the siloed approach in blue economy initiatives. A non-profit model ensures neutrality, agility, and flexibility in brokering partnerships between initiatives, private companies, academia, civil society, and government actors. This structure allows “Blue Malta” to act independently, without being constrained by the objectives of a specific ministry or organisation, making it more effective in coordinating diverse stakeholders. Additionally, the non-for-profit model allows the organisation to leverage on European funding initiatives to become financially sustainable.
- **Unique role of Blue Malta:** Unlike existing initiatives, “Blue Malta” will serve as a hub entity across all blue economy projects, ensuring that efforts are aligned with national S3 priorities and European goals. It will differentiate itself by engaging in interregional European initiatives, fostering collaboration rather than competing with other initiatives, providing a centralised platform for engagement, and serving as the primary hub for Malta’s participation in European blue economy initiatives and networks.

Stakeholders involved:

- Science Malta (Co-lead)
- Malta Maritime Forum (MMF) (Co-lead)
- Malta Enterprise (Co-lead)

- S3 Chairs in Marine and Maritime and Sustainable Use of Resources
- Ministry for the Environment, Energy, and Regeneration (MEER)
- Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research, and Innovation (MEYR)
- Ministry for Transport, Infrastructure, and Capital Projects (MTIP)
- Funds and Programmes Division
- University of Malta
- Malta College of Arts, Science, and Technology (MCAST)
- Transport Malta
- Triple helix actors (academia, industry, government)

iii. Establish a Dedicated Liaison Office in Brussels

Objective: To enhance Malta's mission to the European Union (EU) in Brussels by establishing a dedicated liaison office focused on lobbying, networking, identifying interregional opportunities in Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) priorities, and supporting S3 chairs in Malta. This initiative aims to strengthen Malta's presence in EU research and innovation networks and promote bilateral agreements.

Rationale: Given the considerable workload of Malta's technical attaché at the Permanent Representation to the EU, it is impractical to add networking responsibilities for S3 opportunities to their existing roles. Establishing a dedicated liaison office in Brussels, focused on enhancing Malta's networking capacity with EU institutions and research and innovation networks, will address this gap. This initiative will ensure a more strategic and coordinated approach to identifying and leveraging interregional opportunities in S3 priorities, ultimately strengthening Malta's presence and influence in EU research and innovation networks.

Proposal:

1. Establish a Dedicated Liaison Office in Brussels:

- Create a liaison office under the aegis of Science Malta, in coordination with the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade. This office will focus on enhancing Malta's networking capacity with EU institutions and research and innovation networks such as ERRIN, EBN, and IGLO.
- **Mission:** To act as a hub for Malta's S3 priorities, lobbying for strategic European initiatives for Malta, providing support for identifying relevant calls and partners, contributing to MERIN and its newsletters, participating to relevant events, and facilitating bilateral agreements.

2. Appointment of an officer:

- Appoint an officer dedicated to networking and identifying interregional opportunities in S3 priorities.

- Roles and responsibilities:
 - Network with EU institutions and relevant stakeholders to identify opportunities aligned with Malta's S3 priorities.
 - Provide support to S3 chairs for identifying potential partners for projects and collaborations.
 - Contribute to the Malta European Research and Innovation Network (MERIN) and its newsletters.
 - Join, form, and lead Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships (TSSPs) (see recommendation 4.3.2.)
 - Participate in ERRIN Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) and blue economy working groups, IGLO, and EBN events.
 - Attend relevant events for different S3 priorities.
 - Provide a space for dialogue for bilateral agreements with European regions for enhanced collaboration in S3 Priorities.
 - Lobby for European initiatives like EIT Water.
- **Skills:** the officer must have:
 - Relevant knowledge of European research and innovation networks.
 - Relevant knowledge of Malta S3 priorities.
 - Relevant knowledge of European Commission initiatives.
 - High capacity to network, lobby, and collaborate.

3. Strategic Roadmap:

- Develop a clear strategic roadmap co-drafted by S3 chairs, Science Malta, Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade, and the liaison officer. This roadmap will outline the officer's roles, objectives, and key performance indicators (KPIs).
- **Update the role of the research attaché:** If feasible, consider updating the role of the existing research attaché in Brussels to ensure alignment with the new liaison office's mission.

4. Stakeholder Engagement:

- Facilitate regular communication and collaboration between the liaison office, Science Malta, Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade, S3 chairs, and relevant ministries to align efforts and maximize impact.

Stakeholders involved:

- Science Malta (co-lead)
- Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade (co-lead)
- Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation (MEYR) S3 Chairs
- Malta's technical attaché at the Permanent Representation to the EU

By implementing this policy recommendation, Malta can effectively enhance its networking capacity with EU institutions, identify and capitalise on interregional opportunities, and promote its S3 priorities more strategically and effectively. For instance, Cyprus has a dedicated team with a research and innovation policy attaché in Brussels¹⁰.

iv. Integrate and coordinate of existing networks to form the Malta European Research and Innovation Network (MERIN)

Objective: To integrate and coordinate of existing networks to form the Malta European Research and Innovation Network (MERIN), regrouping the most relevant actors and networks in Malta participating in European projects. The network will aim to organise an annual event to anticipate and present research and innovation initiatives and calls, share tools and funding opportunities, showcase success stories from Maltese actors in European projects, and produce a quarterly newsletter.

Rationale: The creation of MERIN aims to improve the visibility, information sharing, and coordination of Maltese participation in European research and innovation initiatives. However, it is critical to first integrate and enhance coordination among existing networks, such as Plumtri and other local research and innovation platforms, before establishing MERIN. Addressing fragmentation and improving communication between these existing networks is essential for the success of MERIN. Once foundational issues are resolved, MERIN will be able to leverage existing tools and networks to enhance Malta's participation in European opportunities.

Proposal:

1. Integration and coordination of existing networks:

- **Assess current networks:** use the MAFEP task force (see 4.2.1.) to conduct a comprehensive review of existing Maltese research and innovation networks (e.g., Plumtri, Servizzi Ewropej f' Malta (SEM), Science Malta) to identify areas where fragmentation and communication challenges exist to unify existing research and innovation network initiatives under MERIN.

2. Formation of MERIN:

- **Establish MERIN** as a formal network led by Malta Enterprise and Science Malta, with active participation from key stakeholders such as the Malta's Fund for European Projects (MAFEP) task force, SEM, Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade (MFET), Ministry for Education, Youth, Sport, Research and Innovation (MEYR), and S3 chairs.
- **Invitation to participate:** send out invitations to former and current Maltese coordinators or partners in European projects (see 4.1.1) to join MERIN and subscribe to its quarterly newsletter.

¹⁰http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/PermRep/PermRep_Brussels.nsf/page23_en/page23_en?OpenDocument&ExpandSection=3.2#_Section3.2
S3 Community of Practice – Arnault Morisson – Malta

- **Mission:** to foster collaboration, share knowledge, and enhance the visibility of Maltese participation in European research and innovation projects.

3. Annual event :

- Organise an annual event to:
 - Present and anticipate upcoming research and innovation initiatives and calls.
 - Share tools and funding opportunities – involving MAFEP consultants (see 4.2.1)
 - Showcase success stories from Maltese actors involved in European projects.
- **Event format:** incorporate presentations, workshops, and networking sessions to maximise engagement, encourage collaboration, and share best practices on interregional collaboration.

4. Quarterly Newsletter:

- **Newsletter Content:**
 - Provide updates on European research and innovation opportunities.
 - Highlight success stories and best practices from Maltese actors in European projects.
 - Share information on available tools, resources, and funding opportunities.
- **Coordination:** the newsletter will be a joint effort by MAFEP consultants, Science Malta, Malta Enterprise, and the Brussels liaison office, ensuring alignment with European Union (EU) initiatives.

5. Leverage existing tools and networks:

- **Enhance communication:** use tools like Plumtri to centralise information sharing and collaboration across all network members.
- **Integration into MERIN:** Ensure existing networks are fully integrated into MERIN activities, reinforcing their roles while fostering more effective coordination.

6. Stakeholder Engagement:

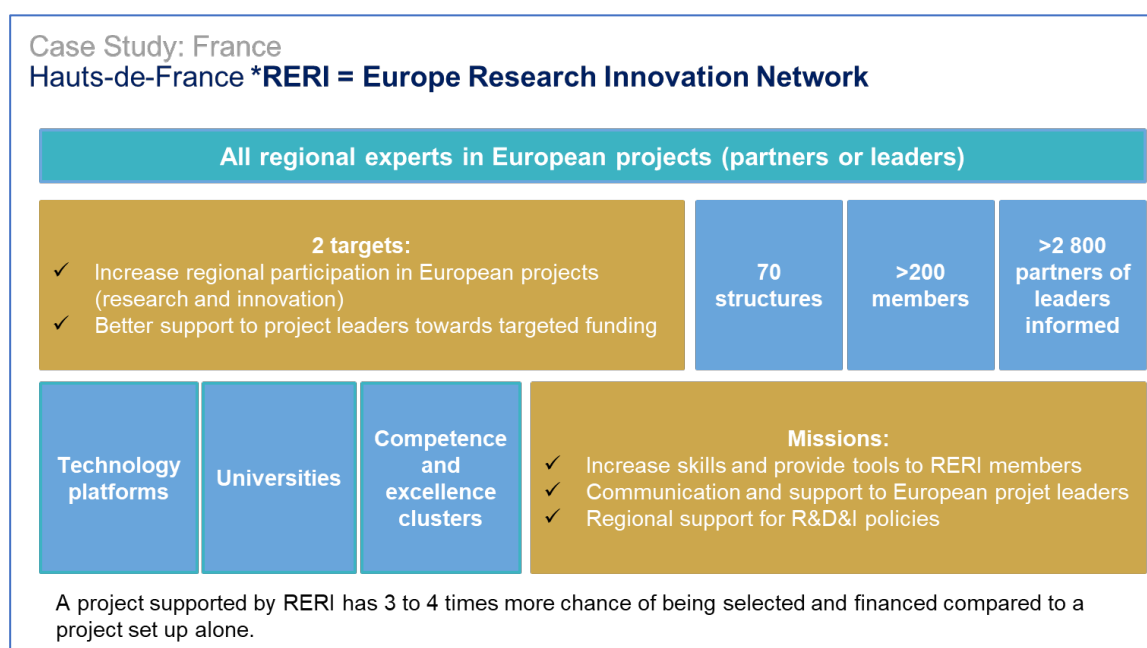
- Engage with key stakeholders to ensure broad participation and commitment to MERIN's objectives, including:
 - Malta Enterprise (lead and animation)
 - Science Malta (co-lead)
 - Liaison Office in Brussels
 - Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade
 - Funds and Programmes Division, Office of the Prime Minister, European Funds, Equality, Reforms and Social Dialogue.
 - Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation (MEYR)
 - MAFEP consultants
 - SEM

- S3 chairs

Implementation:

- **Leadership:** Malta Enterprise will take the lead in establishing and animating MERIN.
- **Coordination:** Regular meetings and coordination among Malta Enterprise, SEM, Science Malta, and S3 chairs to align efforts and maximise impact.
- **Resources:** Allocate resources for the organisation of the annual event and the production of the quarterly newsletter.

Figure 6 RERI model in Hauts-de-France. Source: own elaboration



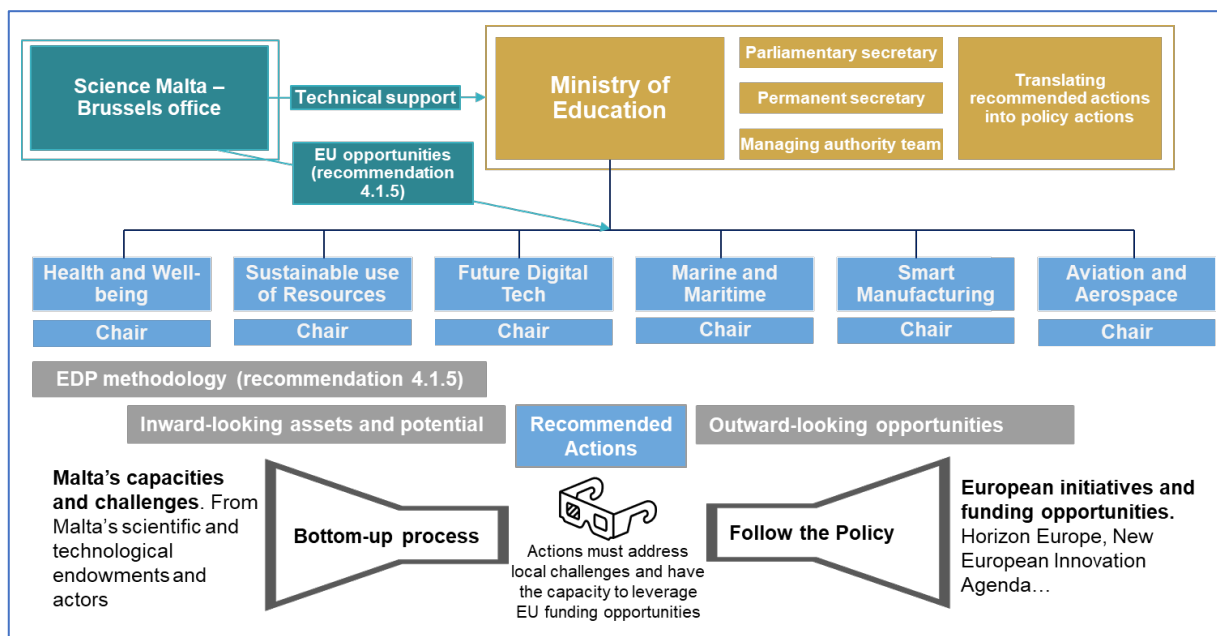
v. Adopt an Outward-Looking Approach to the Entrepreneurial Discovery Process (EDP)

Objective: To adopt an outward-looking approach to the Entrepreneurial Discovery Process (EDP) by linking actions proposed by S3 chairs with relevant European projects and initiatives (see Giustolisi et al., 2023). This approach aims to align Malta’s research and innovation (R&I) ecosystem with European opportunities, utilising a “Follow the Policy” strategy to identify and leverage future EU initiatives and funding opportunities. Science Malta has to regularly conduct policy watch and anticipate EU funding opportunities within a more strategic approach to align Malta R&I efforts with the most promising EU opportunities (see for instance Annex III).

Rationale: An outward-looking approach ensures that Malta’s R&I efforts are aligned with broader European trends and opportunities, maximizing the impact and relevance of local initiatives. By focusing on the “Follow the Policy” strategy, Malta can better identify and

capitalise on future EU funding opportunities, thereby addressing local capacities and challenges effectively. This integration will enhance the implementation of the RIS3 and ensure that Malta remains competitive and innovative within the European context.

Figure 7 Malta S3 governance overview. Source: own elaboration



Proposal:

1. Implementation of the “Follow the Policy” approach:

- **Strategy:** Science Malta will spearhead efforts to track and identify future EU initiatives and funding opportunities that align with Malta’s S3 priorities.
- **Action:** Develop a structured approach to continuously monitor and analyse EU funding landscapes and strategic initiatives.
- **Strategic approach:** adopt a differentiated strategic approach depending on the interregional collaboration readiness level of the S3 sub-priorities. For instance, S3 sub-priorities with a high IC readiness level will benefit most from European initiatives requiring a higher Technology Readiness Levels (TRL) such as I3 or EIC.

2. Support for S3 chairs:

- **Policy Watch:** Science Malta will provide S3 chairs with a policy watch service through the Malta European Research and Innovation Network (MERIN), offering strategic policy foresight and identifying relevant EU initiatives and funding opportunities.
- **Resources:** Equip S3 chairs with the necessary tools and resources to connect their proposed actions with pertinent European projects and initiatives.

3. Enhanced efforts in Brussels:

- **Brussels Liaison Office:** the officer in Brussels will support the identification and pursuit of EU funding opportunities and initiatives for S3 priorities.
- **Networking:** Facilitate increased networking and collaboration with European institutions and RTO networks such as ERRIN, EBN, and IGLO.

4. Capacity building and strategic alignment:

- **Training and workshops:** organise training sessions and workshops for S3 chairs and relevant stakeholders during the MERIN annual event (see 4.1.4.) to build capacity in identifying and leveraging EU funding opportunities.
- **Strategic alignment:** ensure that proposed actions and initiatives by S3 chairs are strategically aligned with EU priorities and funding opportunities.

5. Stakeholder engagement and communication:

- **Regular updates:** provide regular updates and communication to all relevant stakeholders about emerging EU opportunities and strategic initiatives through MERIN newsletters, reports, and events (see 4.1.4.).
- **Collaborative Platform:** Utilise and enhance existing collaborative platforms such as Plumtri to facilitate information sharing and stakeholder engagement.

Stakeholders involved:

- Science Malta (lead)
- Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation (MEYR)
- S3 Chairs
- Brussels Liaison Office
- MAFEP consultants

b. Tools and Funding

i. Establish Malta's Fund for European Projects (MAFEP) piloted by Science Malta

Objectives: Piloted by Science Malta, Malta's Fund for European Projects (MAFEP) is an initiative designed to support Maltese research and innovation actors in:

1. Identifying calls and ideas (MAFEP Ideas),
2. Facilitating the design of proposals (MAFEP Design),
3. Supporting the monitoring of projects (MAFEP Monitoring),
4. Assessing S3 sub-priorities and actions in S3 priorities (MAFEP Expertise).

This initiative should be led by Science Malta given this initiative's alignment with existing Science Malta activities and capacities for interregional European projects (i.e. voucher schemes for networks, Horizon applications). This initiative aims to assist in identifying relevant European calls, developing high-quality project proposals aligned with Malta's S3 priorities, monitoring European projects, and assessing the relevance of Malta's S3.

Rationale: Given the competitive nature of European funding, Maltese actors require dedicated support to successfully navigate and respond to relevant calls. While Science Malta offers some support voucher schemes, they are not sufficiently structured, are not well-known within the ecosystem, offer limited funding, and require proposal leaders to identify their own consultants. This approach does not allow for the capitalisation on and building of long-lasting relationships with relevant and well-connected consultancy companies. By leveraging the expertise of a consortium of European consultants, MAFEP will enhance the capacity of Maltese stakeholders to secure funding and implement projects that align with national and European priorities. This initiative builds on best practices, such as the FRAPPE programme in Hauts-de-France, to ensure a structured and effective approach to proposal development and project identification (see Annex VI for a description of FRAPPE)

Proposal:

1. Form the MAFEP Task Force:

- From the leadership of Science Malta, create the MAFEP task force that will involve representatives from Science Malta (lead and owner); Malta Enterprise; National Contact Points (NCPs) for Interreg MED, Interreg Europe, Digital Europe (Tech.mt), Horizon Europe Pillar II and III, Widening; SEM; Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation (MEYR); University of Malta, and MCAST.
- The MAFEP task force will have the responsibility to:
 - Design and launch the call.
 - Select the list of European calls and initiatives to be supported through MAFEP.
 - Evaluate proposals from consultancy consortia.
 - Participate in the kick-off meeting.
 - Participate in the yearly monitoring committee.
 - Evaluate the consortium and renew or revise the consortium.

2. MAFEP Call Criteria:

- The MAFEP call must be for a three-year framework programme (renewable upon positive evaluation).
- The MAFEP call includes four different work programmes: MAFEP Ideas, MAFEP Design, MAFEP Monitoring, and MAFEP Expertise.
- A consortium of 3 to 4 European consultancy companies must be established.

- The consulting companies must be geographically diverse. One or two must be located in strong innovator or innovation leader regions in the European Regional Innovation Scoreboard 2023¹¹. One must be located in Italy. One must be located in a Widening country in Horizon Europe.
- The consulting companies must be different; that is, not one company established in different countries.
- The consulting companies can participate in consortium proposal with Maltese actors.
- Consultancy companies that are not well-evaluated in the mid-term or end of the framework programme can be replaced.
- **Rationale:** The rationale for having geographically diverse and different consultancy companies is for proposal leaders to tap into geographically diverse innovation ecosystems to build consortia. Moreover, it will be a selling point for Maltese actors when building their own consortium for applying for a European call, as they can take advantage of MAFEP. Additionally, besides the geographical diversity, having a consultancy company from Italy allows leveraging Mediterranean-specific opportunities (Interreg Euro-MED), and a consulting company from a widening country allows leveraging widening-specific funding opportunities.
 - **Track Record:** Require a successful track record and European references (70%).
 - **Price:** Consider price as a factor in the selection process (30%).

3. MAFEP Ideas:

- Idea identification: establish MAFEP Ideas to support the identification of project ideas for Maltese actors, ensuring alignment with Malta's S3 priorities and European funding opportunities.
- Consultants will participate in the elaboration of the quarterly MERIN newsletter.
- Consultants will informally share ideas and calls with Maltese research and innovation actors.
- Consultants will participate in the yearly MERIN annual event to share funding opportunities, success stories, and meet the ecosystem.

4. MAFEP Design:

- The consultancy consortium will support Maltese applicants (coordinator and/or partner) in writing proposals for a predefined list of European calls and initiatives.
- The predefined list of European calls and initiatives will be defined by the MAFEP task force. This list must be of strategic importance for Malta S3 priorities, must have a competitive nature, receive high funding (EUR >100,000), and involve consortium building...

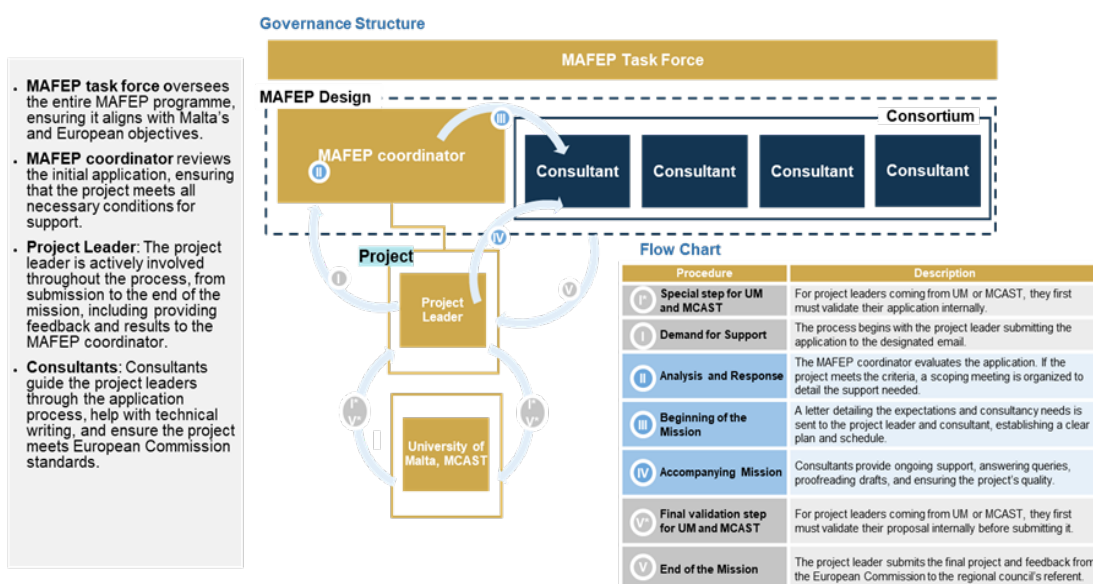
¹¹ <https://projects.research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/en/statistics/performance-indicators/european-innovation-scoreboard/eis-2024#/ris>

- The predefined list of European calls and initiatives can include (to be defined by MAFEP task force):
 - Horizon Europe Pillar II and III,
 - Interreg Euro-MED,
 - Interreg Europe,
 - Widening,
 - Digital Europe,
 - Interregional Innovation Investments (I3).
- The consultancy consortium will have between 5 to 15 days to support Maltese applicants (coordinator and/or partner) in writing proposals. The number of days will depend on the strategic importance of the call, the funding, and whether Malta is a coordinator or partner within the proposal.

5. MAFEP Design Process (see Figure 8):

- The MAFEP task force will designate the MAFEP coordinator, who can be NCPs and/or Science Malta.
- The coordinator will be in charge of connecting Malta proposals, proposing the number of days (between 5 to 15), with the European consultant leader, who will be in charge of dispatching the proposals to the right consultant(s) within the consortium.

Figure 8 MAFEP design process. Source: own elaboration



Source: own elaboration

6. MAFEP Monitoring:

- Guidance document: the European consultant consortium will develop and provide guidance documents for monitoring and management tools for European projects.
- MAFEP task force will identify what guidance documents are most needed to not duplicate existing efforts from SEM.
- Ongoing support: provide continuous support and updates to ensure the guidance document remains relevant and useful.

7. MAFEP Expertise:

- Each year or 6 months, the consulting consortium will provide their assessment of the S3 sub-priorities and the proposed actions in S3 priorities to ensure their alignment and relevance with other European initiatives.
- The consulting consortium will provide a strategic roadmap to anticipate and prepare for European interregional initiatives most relevant for Malta's research and innovation ecosystem (see recommendation 4.1.5.).

8. Upgrade Plumtri/Fondi/SEM:

- **Integration and explanation:** Upgrade Plumtri, fondi.eu, and SEM platforms to include detailed information on the MAFEP process, guidelines, and support services.
- **User-friendly interface:** ensure the platforms are user-friendly and provide clear explanations of the MAFEP support scheme.

9. Implementation and alignment:

- **Communication:** communicate widely about the MAFEP opportunities for Maltese research and innovation ecosystems through MERIN and other channels.
- **Evaluation:** regularly evaluate the consortium's performance and the effectiveness of the MAFEP initiatives, making adjustments as necessary.

Stakeholders Involved:

- MAFEP Task Force (lead)
- Science Malta
- Funds and Programmes Division
- Ministry of Education
- Tech.mt
- Malta Enterprise
- SEM
- S3 Chairs
- European Consultancy Companies (selected through the call)

Outcome: By establishing MAFEP, Malta can significantly enhance its capacity to secure European funding, support high-quality project proposals, and align national efforts with broader European initiatives. This structured approach will strengthen the capacities and enabling conditions for Maltese actors to compete in European calls.

ii. Strengthen Malta's Support Schemes for Networks

Objective: Enhance the effectiveness and reach of Malta's support schemes for research and innovation networks by facilitating the creation of networks and revising funding schemes to support participation in EIT KICs aligned with S3 priorities.

Rationale: Supporting the creation and development of research and innovation networks is crucial for fostering collaboration and driving innovation in Malta. The Malta European Research and Innovation Network (MERIN) and S3 chairs can propose relevant network initiatives. Revising the network scheme to include co-funding opportunities will further incentivize local entities to participate in EIT KICs and other co-funded partnerships aligned with Malta's S3 priorities.

Implementation strategy:

1. Facilitate network creation:

- Encourage MERIN and S3 chairs to propose new network initiatives.
- Improve communication about the Network Scheme to ensure all potential participants are aware of available opportunities and support.

2. Revise the network scheme:

- Update the network scheme to include the possibility of co-funding partners in EIT KICs aligned with S3 priorities.
- Provide co-funding up to EUR 8,000 to support local entities participating in these partnerships.

3. Launch co-fund initiative:

- Establish a co-fund specifically designed to enable local entities to participate in co-fund partnerships and EIT KICs.
- Ensure the co-fund is accessible and well-publicized among potential participants through MERIN annual event and newsletter.

4. Monitoring and evaluation:

- Develop a monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the impact of the revised network scheme and co-fund initiative.
- Gather feedback from participants to continually improve the support schemes.

Stakeholders involved:

- Science Malta (lead)

- Malta European Research and Innovation Network (MERIN)
- S3 Chairs
- Malta Enterprise

c. Network and communication

i. Leverage Networking Opportunities from S3CoP Working Groups

Objective: enhance Malta's S3 priorities by leveraging networking opportunities from S3CoP (Smart Specialisation Community of Practice) working groups to identify funding calls, potential partners, and collaboration opportunities.

Rationale: participation in S3CoP working groups provides Malta with access to some of the most well-connected and innovative European regions, such as Emilia-Romagna and Brainport. By effectively utilizing these connections, Malta can identify relevant funding opportunities, forge strategic partnerships, and establish bilateral agreements that will support and advance its S3 priorities.

Implementation strategy:

1. Active participation in S3CoP Working Groups:

- Ensure consistent and active participation by representatives from Science Malta in S3CoP working groups.
- Engage in discussions and activities that align with Malta's S3 priorities. Be proactive in speaking at S3CoP events and webinars.

2. Identify shared S3 priorities:

- Map the regions participating in S3CoP working groups to identify shared S3 priorities and sub-priorities to strategically engage with other participating regions.

3. Network to identify calls and initiatives:

- Monitor and identify relevant funding calls through the network of S3CoP working groups.
- Disseminate information about these calls to relevant stakeholders within Malta's research and innovation ecosystem (MERIN).
- Use the networking opportunities provided by S3CoP to connect with potential partners in well-connected European regions.
- Facilitate introductions and collaboration between Maltese stakeholders and their counterparts in these regions.

Stakeholders involved:

- Science Malta (lead)

ii. Join Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships (TSSPs)

Objective: Support Malta's leadership and active participation in Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships (TSSPs) related to Industrial Modernisation and the Sustainable Blue Economy by joining existing partnerships and planning for potential future leadership roles in new initiatives over the long term.

Rationale: Participation in TSSPs provides Malta with access to collaborative networks, the latest funding opportunities, policy initiatives, and expertise in key S3 sub-priorities with high IC readiness, such as Industrial Modernisation and Sustainable Blue Economy. Due to limited time from Maltese research and innovation actors, relevant intermediaries must participate in the TSSPs, namely Science Malta, Malta's liaison officer in Brussels (if recommendation 4.1.3. is implemented) and Blue Med or Blue Malta (if recommendation 4.1.2. is implemented), and then diffuse knowledge within the research and innovation ecosystem. If necessary, Malta's liaison officer in Brussels could step in to support this role (see recommendation 4.1.3). While Malta may not be ready to lead the creation of a new TSSP immediately, this could be considered a long-term objective.

Implementation strategy:

1. Join existing TSSPs:

- **Industrial Modernisation - Water Smart Territory:** This partnership would be highly beneficial for sustainable use of resources, smart manufacturing, and the marine and maritime S3 priorities. Connect to the partnership through the Malta Intelligent Energy Management Office (MIEMA), which used to be part of the partnership. If the proposal for Blue Med or Blue Malta is pursued, as outlined in recommendation 4.1.2, it is suggested that Blue Med or Blue Malta take the lead.
- **Sustainable Blue Economy - Maritime Sustainable Blue Bioeconomy:** This partnership would be highly beneficial for sustainable use of resources and the marine and maritime S3 priorities, with a specific focus on the Mediterranean context and policy orientation. Connect to the partnership through previous participation in European initiatives such as Blue Bio Med and highlight current ones. If the proposal to establish a Liaison Office in Brussels is pursued, as outlined in recommendation 4.1.2, it is suggested that Malta's Liaison Officer take the lead.
- **Sustainable Blue Economy - Circular Smart Aquaculture:** This partnership would be highly beneficial for sustainable use of resources and the marine and maritime S3 priorities. Connect to the partnership by bringing in other regions such as Emilia-Romagna, which has an aquaculture S3 priority. If the proposal for Blue Med or Blue Malta is pursued, as outlined in recommendation 4.1.2, it is suggested that Blue Med or Blue Malta take the lead.

2. Leadership and coordination:

- Appoint a dedicated team to lead and coordinate Malta's participation and leadership in these TSSPs, specifically Blue Med or Blue Malta (if pursued), Malta's liaison officer in Brussels (if pursued), and Science Malta.
- Develop a strategic plan outlining Malta's goal, contributions, and expected outcomes from participation in each platform.

3. Collaboration and networking:

- Foster partnerships with key stakeholders, including academia, industry, government, and international organisations.
- Actively participate in TSSP meetings, workshops, and collaborative projects to share best practices and innovations.

4. Funding and resources:

- Leverage TSSP and partner networks to secure funding opportunities to support Malta's activities in S3 priorities related to the TSSPs.
- Communicate about MAFEP opportunities and support schemes in Malta.

Stakeholders involved:

- Science Malta (lead)
- Blue Med or Blue Malta (co-lead if pursued)
- Malta's Liaison Officer in Brussels (co-lead if pursued)

Enclosed: Methodological Manual Developing Thematic Interregional Partnerships for Smart Specialisation (for further guidance)

iii. Communicate, Raise Awareness, and Leverage the Maltese Research and Innovation Diaspora for Interregional Opportunities

Objective: Enhance awareness of interregional collaboration opportunities and leverage the Maltese research and innovation diaspora to create networks, supporting Malta's interregional collaboration and S3 priorities. This will be achieved by updating online platforms, sharing success stories, and engaging the Maltese diaspora to strengthen Malta's research and innovation landscape.

Rationale: Effective communication and diaspora engagement are essential for maximizing participation in interregional collaboration. By updating key online platforms, sharing success stories, and tapping into the expertise of the Maltese diaspora, Malta can inspire more SMEs, NGOs, intermediaries, and public actors to participate in EU projects and interregional initiatives. Engaging expatriate researchers and innovators can significantly enhance Malta's capabilities, drawing inspiration from successful diaspora initiatives in Cyprus and Armenia (see table 4).

Good Practices:

Table 4 Relevant initiatives in Armenia and Cyprus for their diaspora

Country	Initiative	Description
Armenia	<u>Repat Armenia Foundation</u>	This organization encourages the return of Armenian professionals from the diaspora by offering integration support, job placement assistance, and networking opportunities. The foundation focuses on connecting returnees with local businesses and innovation initiatives to foster entrepreneurship and economic development.
Armenia	<u>Collaborative Innovators (for Armenia)</u>	Partnering with the Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs and Impact Hub Yerevan, a Collaborative Innovation process was kicked-off to develop innovative solutions that the Office of Diaspora Affairs will integrate in their service delivery as an official tool to interact, reach and serve the needs and worries of the diaspora and repatriates, in terms of providing precise, efficient, timely, and direct quality information needed. 10 Startups were selected to explore the feasibility of their innovation in the service delivery context of the Office of the High Commissioner.
Cyprus	<u>Cyprus Diaspora Forum</u>	This forum aims to strengthen relations through entrepreneurship, innovation, and cultural engagement. It attracts prominent business professionals, foreign investors, and members of the Cypriot diaspora, fostering connections and highlighting investment opportunities in Cyprus. The forum also emphasizes Cyprus as a tech hub in the EU and a promising location for business expansion and startups (Cyprus Chamber, Invest Cyprus).
Cyprus	<u>Research and Innovation Foundation</u>	This organization supports the engagement of expatriate researchers through various programs aimed at fostering research and innovation. RIF collaborates with Cypriot researchers abroad, encouraging their participation in national and international projects and helping integrate their expertise into the Cypriot R&I ecosystem.
Cyprus	<u>Cyprus Seeds</u>	An 18-month program offering grants, mentoring, training and networking opportunities with international investors. This program helps bridge the gap between academia and industry, promoting innovation and entrepreneurship within the Cypriot diaspora.

Source: Own elaboration.

Implementation Strategy:

1. Update online platforms:

- Plumtri website:
 - Include comprehensive information on funding tools, mapping, and the Malta Fund for European Projects (MAFEP).
 - Highlight interregional collaboration success stories involving SMEs, NGOs, and diaspora professionals.
- SEM website:
 - Ensure the SEM website is updated with relevant interregional collaboration opportunities and resources.
 - Provide links to Plumtri, success stories, and funding opportunities.
- Fondi website:
 - Ensure the fondi.eu website is updated with relevant interregional collaboration opportunities and resources.
 - Provide links to Plumtri, success stories, and funding opportunities.
- Diaspora engagement page:
 - Develop a dedicated page on the Plumtri website to facilitate connections with the Maltese research and innovation diaspora, including profiles of expatriate researchers, collaboration opportunities, and success stories.

2. Cross-reference existing platform initiatives:

- Align and integrate content across Fondi, Plumtri, and SEM platforms to ensure consistency and comprehensive coverage of interregional opportunities.
- Develop a clear framework for ownership and responsibilities for maintaining and updating content on these platforms.

3. Leverage Maltese diaspora:

- Partner with stakeholders to identify and engage Maltese researchers and innovators living abroad.
- Create a comprehensive database of Maltese diaspora professionals in research and innovation.
- Draw inspiration from successful diaspora initiatives (e.g., Collaborative Innovators in Armenia, Cyprus Seeds) to attract and engage diaspora members in Malta’s research and innovation efforts.

4. Communicate success stories:

- Collect and showcase success stories of Maltese SMEs, NGOs, and diaspora professionals who have participated in EU projects and interregional collaborations.
- Use channels such as MERIN newsletters, social media, and events to disseminate these stories and highlight the benefits of participation.

5. Organize engagement events:

- Organize MERIN awareness-raising events and workshops to inform stakeholders about interregional opportunities and updated online resources.
- Collaborate with Malta Enterprise, Chamber of Commerce, University of Malta, MCAST, intermediaries, NGOs, and diaspora networks to reach a broader audience.
- Invite Maltese diaspora to the annual MERIN event to engage with local stakeholders and encourage their participation in Malta’s interregional projects.

6. Monitor and evaluate:

- Implement a system for monitoring the effectiveness of the updated platforms, diaspora engagement, and communication efforts.
- Gather feedback from users to continuously improve the content and usability of the platforms.

Stakeholders involved:

- Science Malta (lead)
- Fondi Platform Administrators
- Plumtri Platform Administrators
- SEM Platform Administrators
- Malta Enterprise

- MERIN
- Maltese Research and Innovation Diaspora

iv. Apply for Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform Peer Review and Matchmaking

Objective: Enhance Malta's S3 through international peer learning and exchanges. Malta can apply for the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform peer review and/or matchmaking to gain valuable insights and recommendations from European peers dealing with similar S3 policy challenges.

Rationale: The Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform offers peer review and matchmaking services free of charge, enabling Malta to gain interregional knowledge and expertise on key policy challenges. These challenges could include recommendations presented in this report (e.g., 4.1.2, 4.1.3, or 4.2.2) or other topics identified as weaknesses in the Malta research and innovation ecosystems through interviews, such as university-industry collaboration and promoting multi-actor projects.

The services:

- **Matchmaking sessions:** Two-hour meetings, either online or face-to-face, designed to bring together a group of policymakers with the expertise to discuss specific policy questions. For two hours, these experts are at your disposal to discuss your challenges and offer solutions.
- **Peer-reviews:** Two-day meetings, either online or face-to-face, involving an international team of experts and peers. Based on your specific needs and challenges, peers selected through targeted calls among community members share their expertise. After thoroughly analyzing your policy context, they provide targeted feedback and offer concrete solutions for you and your stakeholders.

When drafting your application, you can contact Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform to receive feedback and suggestions on your application.

Stakeholders involved:

- Science Malta
- Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation (MEYR)

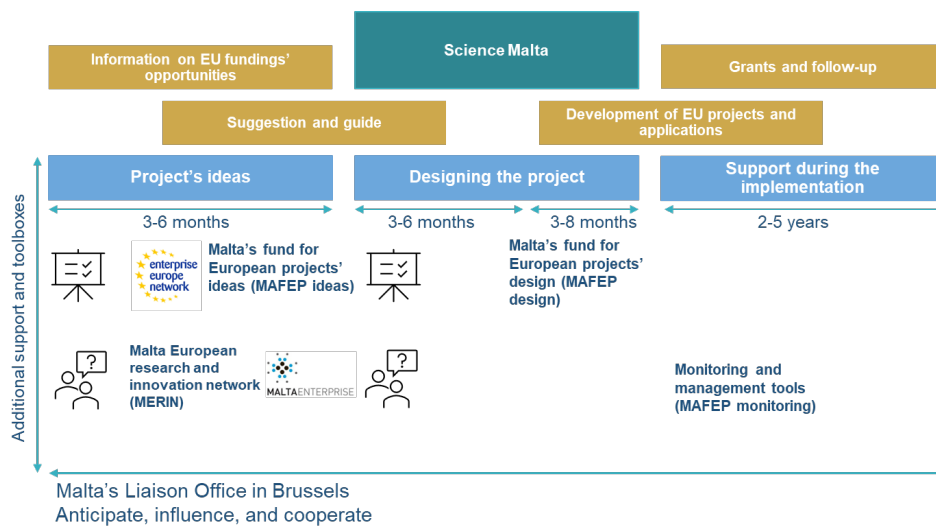
Benefits: By engaging with the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform, Malta can leverage interregional European expertise to refine and enhance its S3.

Contact: Arnault Morisson, Thematic Expert for a Smarter Europe, Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform (a.morisson@policylearning.eu)

5.5. Conclusions

This report identifies key areas for improvement and offers 11 targeted policy recommendations to address the systemic gaps in Malta’s research and innovation ecosystem related to interregional collaboration (see Table 5). These recommendations focus on various aspects of capacity building and the enabling conditions necessary for effective interregional collaboration (see Table 5). The expert is confident that these policy recommendations will significantly enhance Malta’s capacity for interregional collaboration. If the recommendations were to be narrowed down to just three, the expert would recommend pursuing 4.1.3. Malta’s Liaison Office in Brussels, 4.1.4. MERIN, and 4.2.1. MAFEP for maximum impact (see Figure 9).

Figure 9 Relevant initiatives in Armenia and Cyprus for their diaspora



Source: Own elaboration

MERIN will serve as a vital platform for connecting Maltese stakeholders with European research and innovation opportunities, fostering collaboration, and enhancing the visibility of Maltese actors participating in EU projects. MAFEP will provide much-needed support for identifying, designing, and managing European project proposals, thus overcoming the challenges related to funding, time, and skills. The Brussels liaison office will strengthen Malta’s presence in the European research and innovation landscape, facilitating strategic networking, and ensuring that Malta is well-positioned to capitalize on emerging opportunities.

7. References

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Annexes

Annex I – Interview list

Interviews				
Interview	Name	Position	Date	Topic
1	Science Malta S3 Team	Science Malta S3	06/05/2024	S3 governance in Malta
2	Richard Tuffs	Chair S3CoP Working Group on interregional collaboration	06/05/2024	Interregional collaboration and networks opportunities
3	Lucie Durocher	Head - Région Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur EU office at Région Sud - Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, France	31/05/2024	Setting up a Brussels office
4	Balázs Barta	Founder, managing director - am-LAB and PBN	12/06/2024	EIT and clusters
5	Marc Pattinson	Director G.A.C Group Sophia Antipolis, France	13/06/2024	FRAPPE and I3
6	Maria Azzopardi & Anthea Fabri	Science Malta International team	17/06/2024	International initiatives and gaps
7	Mario Borg & Jurgen Buhagiar	GRDA	18/06/2024	Gozo's perspective on IC
8	Antonella Gatt	Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education	18/06/2024	Ministry of Education commitment for IC
9	Simon Fabri	University of Malta	18/06/2024	University-industry collaboration and ecosystem building
10	Brian Camilleri	Malta Enterprise	19/06/2024	Innovation ecosystem SWOT
11	Karmenu Vella	Marine and Maritime RIS3 Committee	19/06/2024	Blue economy assessment
12	Sandro Lauri	Climate RIS3 Committee	19/06/2024	Climate assessment
13	Tatjana Chircop	MCAST deputy Principal	19/06/2024	University-industry collaboration and ecosystem building
14	Kenneth Chircop	Aviation RIS3 Committee	19/06/2024	Aviation assessment
15	Emmanuel Francalanza	Smart Manufacturing Committee	20/06/2024	Smart manufacturing assessment
16	Ivan Filletti	Future Digital Technologies Committee	20/06/2024	Future digital technologies assessment
17	Kevin Mizzi, Philip Seifert & Nick Xuereb	Malta Chamber of Commerce	20/06/2024	Innovation ecosystem and support schemes
18	Rachel Camilleri & Jean Marie Mifsud	MDIA/DiHubMT	20/06/2024	Digital initiatives
19	Christian Scerri	Health and Well-being Committee	20/06/2024	Health assessment
20	Anthony Camilleri	Science Malta FPD	21/06/2024	International support schemes
21	Science Malta S3 Team	Science Malta S3	21/06/2024	Discussion on draft recommendations
22	Stephanie Vella	WestMED Malta Blue Economy	06/08/2024	Blue economy recommendations

Annex II – Assessment of Malta S3 priorities (non-exhaustive mapping)

S3 priorities	S3 sub-priorities	ERDF OP (2014-2020)	Top 25 companies in H2020/EU (€-EUR200,000)	Coordinator in H2020/EU (€-EUR200,000)	Participant in H2020/EU (€-EUR400,000)	Interreg MED	Interreg Europe	JPI, European Partnerships	TSSP	Other programmes	Networks	
Future Digital Tech	Artificial intelligence		ACCELER8 LIMITED GREENROADS LIMITED	LT BRIDGE (UNIVERSITY OF MALTA)	UNIVERSITY (MALTA) ELECTROMOBILITY MANUFACTURING (LIMITED) TAPAS (AQUABIOTECH LIMITED)					Bilateral SINO-MALTA Fund		
		The Internet of Things	CON@GEC (Connected eGovernment)	ICON STUDIOS LTD	ASTRA (UNIVERSITA TA MALTA)	PISTIS (UNIVERSITA TA MALTA) SUN (KPEOPLE RESEARCH FOUNDATION) DECIDIO (KPEOPLE RESEARCH FOUNDATION)					Bilateral SINO-MALTA Fund	
	Cybersecurity	CON@GEC (Connected eGovernment)	MERCURY CYBERSECURITY LIMITED REACT24 LTD		CRITERIA (UNIVERSITA TA MALTA)					Bilateral SINO-MALTA Fund		
	Chatbots									Bilateral SINO-MALTA Fund		
	High performance computing	Strategic AI - Developing Spatial Data Integration for the Maltese Islands (Planning Authority)	MERCURY CYBERSECURITY LIMITED		HyperSpace MERCURY CYBERSECURITY LIMITED ASPECTS (UNIVERSITA TA MALTA) HOT (UNIVERSITA TA MALTA)					Bilateral SINO-MALTA Fund		
	Digital games				LAW GAME (UNIVERSITA TA MALTA)					Bilateral SINO-MALTA Fund		
	Blockchain									Bilateral SINO-MALTA Fund		
Health and well-being	Cancer				ERVIN (OMNISCOPE LIMITED)					Bilateral SINO-MALTA Fund		
	Cellular Therapy									Bilateral SINO-MALTA Fund		
	Drug Development		MALTA LIFE SCIENCES CENTRE LIMITED	TrainMALTA (UNIVERSITA TA MALTA) Targem (UNIVERSITA TA MALTA)						Bilateral SINO-MALTA Fund		
	Digital tools to support healthcare	Connected eGovernment (Office of the Prime Minister) REACT-ELU - Fostering Resilience in the healthcare system (Ministry for Health)	BRANTRIP LIMITED OMNISCOPE LIMITED	EHW17 (Ministry for Health and Active Ageing - Government of Malta)	VARSITIES (UNIVERSITA TA MALTA) FASTER (KPEOPLE RESEARCH FOUNDATION)		INTENCIVE (Ministry for Gozo)	Transforming Health and Care Systems Partnership		Bilateral SINO-MALTA Fund		
Biomedical engineering				AMPIJRI (UNIVERSITA TA MALTA) BioGEM (UNIVERSITA TA MALTA)								
Sustainable uses of resources	Toward zero carbon building	Investing in an Energy Efficient System for St. Vincent de Paul Residence (Ministry for Active Ageing)	MALTA ELECTROMOBILITY MANUFACTURING LIMITED		DESTINATIONS (AUTHORITY FOR TRANSPORT IN MALTA)	SHERPA (EcoGozo, MGCC)	ZEROCO2 (University of Malta)					
		Retrofiting of Street Lighting in Arterial and Distributor Roads in Malta (The Energy and Water Agency)			JUSTNeat (GDRA LOCAL COUNCIL)	CESEA MED (University of Malta)	ENERSELVES (Malta Intelligent Energy Management Agency)					
		The Upgrading and Retrofiting of the Administration Centre, Victoria Gozo (Ministry for Gozo)	ELECTRICARS LTD		TRANSITION ZERO (UNIVERSITA TA MALTA)	ENERJ (Gozo Regional Committee)	SUPPORT (GRC)					
	Resource efficiency in industry	Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE) - Malta Instrument (SFSB) (Ministry for the Economy, European Funds and Lands)	INTEGRATED RESOURCES MANAGEMENT (IRM) COMPANY LIMITED			Consumers (Energy and Water Agency (EWA), EcoGozo, Ministry for Gozo)	PROMETHEUS (Transport Malta)					
		Towards carbon efficiency within IPN buildings (AFM)	STMicroelectronics (Malta) Ltd.			AMARE (University of Malta)						
		Improving Energy Efficiency within the People & Standards Division - QPM premises (Office of the Prime Minister)										
	Renewable energy generation and storage	Investing in Energy Efficient Measures at St. Vincent de Paul Long Term Care Facility (Ministry for Active Ageing)	ECOSTACK INNOVATIONS LIMITED			metCOAZE (MALTA PUBLIC TRANSPORT SERVICES (OPERATIONS) LIMITED)	CAMPUSUM (University of Malta)	GPP4Growth (MGCC)	Clean Energy Transition Partnership		Bilateral SINO-MALTA Fund	
		SMITHS. Introduction of Sustainable Multi-Intermodal Transport Hubs across Malta and Gozo (Authority for Transport in Malta)				STEPPING (Malta Intelligent Energy Management Agency) NEW FINANCE (DNA) MOBILITAS (Paragon Europe) ENERNETMob (Transport Malta)						
		Enhancing National Monitoring and Public Engagement Capacity for improved Water Resources Management (Energy and Water Agency)	ELECTRONIC SYSTEMS DESIGN LTD			INCOROLE (Energy and Water Agency (EWA)) CON@ELESS PLUS (Energy and Water Agency)	RESINDUSTRY (Ministry for Gozo)					
		MITA Data Centre Photovoltaic System (MITA Data Centre)				LOCAL@GREEN (Malta Intelligent Energy Management Agency)						
Turning waste into resource	Promotion of RES in the Domestic Sector (Regulator for Energy and Water Services (REWS))				TRANSIT (FOUNDATION FOR INNOVATION AND RESEARCH - MALTA)	TW@ENERGY (WORLD ENERGY CONSORTIUM PLC)						
	Malta Red Cross Solar Panels (Malta Red Cross)											
	Going Solar - GMSI PV Panels (GMSI Foundation)											
Smart manufacturing	Flexible manufacturing	The Extension of Xewkija Industrial Park (Industrial Innovative Solutions - Malta)	AQUABIOTECH LIMITED	VEN@RE (UNIVERSITA TA MALTA)	ESY (EPSILON INTERNATIONAL LTD)	MAESTRALE (INA)		JPI Oceans, PRIMA, Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership	(MEMA) Water Smart Territory	BlueMed initiative, European Universities Alliance	Gozo in Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR)	
	Sustainable manufacturing											
Marine and maritime	Maritime technology	Sustainable Living Complex (The University of Malta)	EPISILON MALTA LIMITED	NEEMO (MALTA COLLEGE OF ARTS SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY)	BCTHub (DIVERS ALERT NETWORK FOUNDATION)	CASTWATER (Energy and Water Agency - MGCC)						
	Valorisation of marine resources	Invest in Chetkwick Lakes for Tourism Purposes (Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Enterprise)										
Aviation and Aerospace	Maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) UAV drones											

Annex III – New European Innovation Agenda actions and their relevance for Malta.

Flagship	Initiative	Action	Status	Malta S3 Priority	Relevance	Relevant Links
Flagship 1: Funding for deep-tech scale-ups	Listing Act	Simplify and ease listing requirements, reduce costs, and increase legal certainty for issuers, while safeguarding investor protection and market integrity, and harmonizing national regimes on dual class share structures	completed		Low	Listing Act
	Rebalancing debt-equity incentives	Rebalance debt-equity bias reduction allowance (DEBRA) to encourage equity financing over debt, enhancing business resilience and risk-bearing investments, and allowing SMEs to receive a higher allowance than larger firms	ongoing		Low	DEBRA
	European Scale-Up Action for Risk Capital (ESCALAR)	Mobilize venture capital funding for high-growth scale-ups by encouraging risk-averse investors to participate in scale-up VC funds, reducing their risk in exchange for capped returns, and offering favorable co-investment opportunities to attract untapped institutional capital.	ongoing		Low	ESCALAR Pilot Programme
						ESCALAR Information
	EIT Women2Invest Programme	Facilitate career transitions for women with STEAM backgrounds into venture investment through 8-week internships in VC funds	completed	Future Digital Tech	Low	
	Innovation gender and diversity index	Develop a European Innovation Gender and Diversity Index through an EIC pilot programme to measure the gender and diversity gap in investment in deep-tech startups, with first results expected by the end of 2024.	ongoing	Future Digital Tech	Low	
	European Innovation Agenda	Leverage the EIC under Horizon Europe to turn deep-tech research into scalable innovations by investing over €1 billion in 200+ companies, attracting private investments, and		Future Digital Tech	Low	

Flagship	Initiative	Action	Status	Malta S3 Priority	Relevance	Relevant Links
		supporting strategic areas like quantum technologies, space tech, cell and gene therapies, hydrogen, and batteries.				
	European Tech Champions Initiative (ETCI)	Provide late-stage, larger-scale venture investments in deep-tech scale-ups through the European Tech Champions Initiative (ETCI) to mobilize over €10 billion in private investments by making 10-15 investments in large VC/growth-capital funds, leveraging €3.75 billion in public funds managed by the EIF		Future Digital Tech	Low	What is ETCI ?
						Launch of New Fund of Funds to Support European Tech Champions
	Startup Europe	Strengthen networking opportunities for deep-tech scale-ups and ecosystem builders to accelerate the growth of the European startup scene.	closed	Future Digital Tech	Medium	
	Green Deal industrial plan for the net-zero age	Promote faster access to funding for the green transition		Sustainable use of resources	Medium	
	Innovation Fund	Extend and reinforce the Innovation Fund to support innovative low-carbon technology projects, and boost investments through the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP)	(ongoing)	Sustainable use of resources	Medium	Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform
	SME relief package	Implement measures to improve access to finance for SMEs by easing access to sustainable finance and public-procurement markets		ALL	Medium	Unleashing the Potential of Europe's Small Businesses
	Talent Sourcing	Actively promote the NEIA and European innovation ecosystems in the US by visiting Silicon Valley with business and academic representatives to attract talents, innovators, and investors, fostering the development and growth of European startups		ALL	Low	
Flagship 2: Enabling deep-tech innovation through experimentation spaces and	Guidance document on experimentation tools	Providing guidance on how the EU and national governments can support and engage innovators in the regulatory process through existing	completed	ALL	Medium	Staff working document

Flagship	Initiative	Action	Status	Malta S3 Priority	Relevance	Relevant Links
public procurement		examples of experimentation spaces				
	Stimulating Experimentation Practices	Foster testing and experimentation facilities to offer both physical and virtual environments to allow technology providers across Europe to test and experiment at scale and in real-world environments state-of-the-art AI solutions	ongoing	ALL	Medium	European Innovation Ecosystem
	General Block Exemption Regulation	Facilitate, simplify and speed up support for the EU's green and digital transitions (fishery and aquaculture sectors)	completed	Marine and maritime	High	Commission Regulation 32023R1315
	State Aid Framework for Research & Innovation & Development	Simplify the rules applied by EU Member States and allow, under certain conditions, public support for testing and experimentation infrastructures required to develop, test, and upscale new technologies	completed	ALL	Medium	
	Innovation-Friendly Regulations Advisory Group	Provide upstream policy advice on emerging digital technologies in the public sector and their regulatory implications	completed	ALL	Medium	
	Open innovation test bed in renewable Hydrogen	Provide access to physical facilities, capabilities, and services to support the development of a vibrant clean-hydrogen economy	ongoing	Sustainable use of resources	Medium	Horizon Europe's OITBs
	Specialist advisory service on innovation procurement	Launch a call for the provision of a specialist advisory service on innovation procurement under Horizon Europe	ongoing	ALL	Low	Call for Proposal
	EU wide benchmarking on innovation procurement	Conduct a second benchmarking of national policy frameworks and investments in innovation procurement from 2022 across the EU, UK, Switzerland, and Norway	ongoing	ALL	Low	Call for Proposal
	Govtech4all (Incubator)	Foster a single EU GovTech market by promoting interoperability and new public sector innovation models	completed	Future Digital Tech	Medium	

Flagship	Initiative	Action	Status	Malta S3 Priority	Relevance	Relevant Links
	Net-Zero Industry Act	Establish regulatory sandboxes for strategic innovative net-zero technologies (focusing on solar photovoltaic and thermal, onshore wind and offshore renewable energy, batteries and storage, heat pumps and geothermal, electrolyzers and fuel cells, biogas/biomethane, carbon capture and storage (CCS), and grid technologies including EV smart and fast charging)	completed	Sustainable use of resources	Medium	Industrial policy
	AI Act	Create an innovation-friendly, future-proof, and resilient legal framework for AI, reducing the regulatory burden on SMEs and startups	ongoing	Future Digital Tech	Medium	
	Horizon Europe's Cluster 1 (Health): Procure4Health Network	Facilitate the efficient delivery of better public services by focusing on public procurement of innovation, attracting both experienced and inexperienced procurers, and empowering all actors involved		Health and well-being	Medium	Project Description
Flagship 3 Accelerating and strengthening innovation in European innovation ecosystems across the EU and addressing the innovation divide	Regional Innovation Valleys	Fostering connected regional deep-tech innovation valleys across the EU	completed	ALL	High	Regional Innovation Valleys matchmaking map
						Call for Expression of Interest to become Regional Innovation Valley
						Implementing co-funded action plans for connected regional innovation valleys & Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument
	Synergy Engineering	Synergies between cohesion policy programmes and Horizon Europe	ongoing	ALL	High	Synergies guidance
	Hydrogen Valley	Double the number of hydrogen valleys in the EU	ongoing	Sustainable Use of Resources	Medium	Project Location REPower EU Plan
European Innovation Space	Set up a one-stop shop for players in innovation ecosystems	ongoing	SME focused	High		
EIC Scaling Club under EIC Scale Up 100	Launch the 'Scale-up 100'	ongoing	Future Digital Tech	High	EIC Scaling Club European Innovation Council: Article	

Flagship	Initiative	Action	Status	Malta S3 Priority	Relevance	Relevant Links
	European Research Area (ERA) Forum	Create a sub-group under the ERA Forum to establish synergies between R&I and cohesion policy administrations to maximize impact	completed	ALL	High	Testing
		Launch ERA Hubs to enhance regional R&I ecosystems through assessment, benchmarking, and upgrades in coordination, support services, and interconnection, aligned with the 'Widening' part of Horizon Europe.	ongoing			
	Fast Track and Plug In schemes to the EIC Accelerator	Implement the Fast Track and Plug-In schemes under Horizon Europe, allowing eligible funding bodies to directly submit reviewed projects from their portfolios to the EIC Accelerator's full application stage.	completed	Future Digital Tech	Medium	EIC Accelerator
						Fast Track and Plug-in Scheme
	Mission Innovation	Support Mission Innovation's global clean energy initiative to reduce the green premium and develop 100 clean-hydrogen valleys, advancing hydrogen, sustainable aviation fuels, energy storage, CO2 capture, and energy decarbonization.	completed	Sustainable Use of Resources	Medium	Mission Innovation
	Task-Force on climate-neutral technologies in energy intensive industries	Establish a Task-Force on climate-neutral technologies to analyze EU-funded demonstrators for net-zero technologies in energy-intensive industries, as detailed in the 2023 report.	completed	Sustainable Use of Resources	Medium	
	Strategy Energy Technology (SET)	Issue a Communication to revise the SET plan, enhancing its role in coordinating European and national R&I strategies for low-carbon energy, and establish a new working group to implement the ERA pilot strategic agenda on green hydrogen.	completed	Sustainable Use of Resources	Medium	Communication
AI Act	Assess the impact of AI on research and innovation through an opinion under the Scientific Advice Mechanism, alongside proposals for	completed	Future Digital Tech	Medium	Opinion under Scientific Advice Mechanism	




Flagship	Initiative	Action	Status	Malta S3 Priority	Relevance	Relevant Links
		innovation-friendly regulations under the AI Act.				
	EDIH tech network enforcement	Promote AI and digital technology adoption through a network of over 200 European Digital Innovation Hubs, supporting companies in innovating competitive AI products and services, and boost AI startups with AI factories and access to HPC via the EuroHPC Joint Undertaking	ongoing	Future Digital Tech	Medium	Characteristics and regional coverage of the European Digital Innovation Hubs network
	Chips Act	Implement the Chips Act to boost Europe's technological leadership by facilitating knowledge transfer and promoting the industrialization of innovative technologies by European businesses	ongoing	Future Digital Tech	Medium	Chips Joint Undertaking
	CASSINI Space Entrepreneurship Initiative	Launch the CASSINI Space Entrepreneurship Initiative (2021-2027) to accelerate the growth of startups and SMEs in the space industry, enhance business ecosystems, strengthen supply chains, and achieve EU strategic autonomy	ongoing	Aviation and Aerospace	Low	
	EU Mission "A soil deal for Europe"	Support rural innovation ecosystems and launch two EU partnerships, including one on agroecology living labs and research infrastructures."	completed	Sustainable Use of Resources	Low	EU Mission: A Soil Deal for Europe
		Establishing 100 living labs and lighthouses to lead the transition towards healthy soils by 2030	ongoing			
	Common Agriculture Policy	Co-create practical solutions for agriculture, forestry and rural communities in innovation projects at local level	ongoing	Sustainable Use of Resources	Low	
	Council guiding principles for knowledge valorisation	Set out common policy principles and measures for national, regional and local policy makers to transform R&I results into solutions that benefit society	completed	ALL	Medium	Council Recommendation (EU) 2022/2415 of December 2022 on the guiding principles for knowledge valorisation (OJ L 317, 9.12.2022, p. 141).

Flagship	Initiative	Action	Status	Malta S3 Priority	Relevance	Relevant Links
		Establish two 'communities of practice' on industry-academia collaboration and citizen engagement for knowledge valorisation	completed	ALL	Medium	Commission Recommendation (EU) 2023/499 of 1 March 2023 on a Code of Practice on the management of intellectual assets for knowledge valorisation in the European Research Area, (OJ L 69, 7.3.2023, p. 75).

Annex IV – Interregional Innovation Investment (I3) Instrument

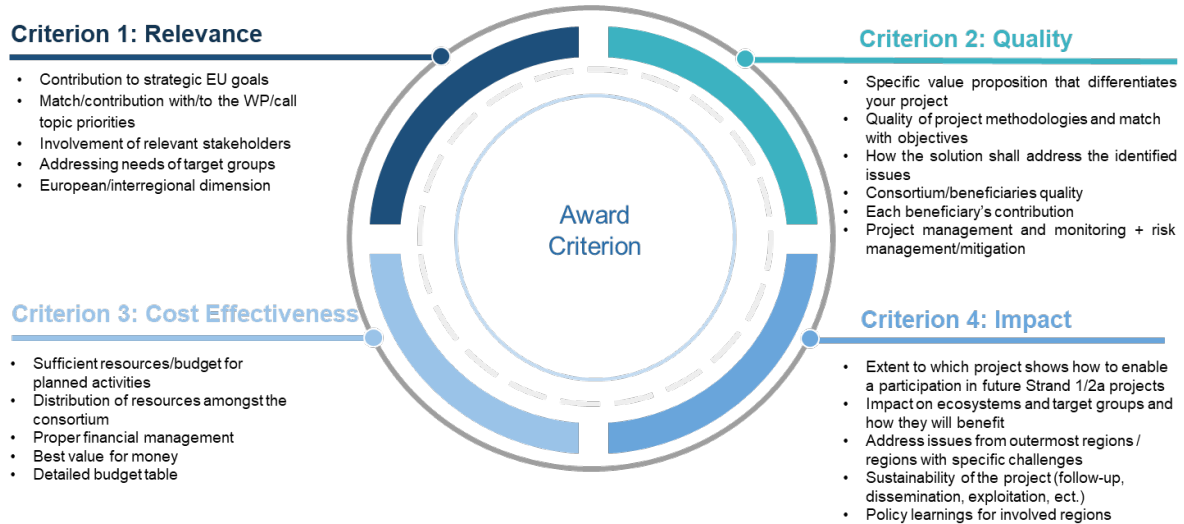
I3 Instrument Introduction

Strengthening innovation in Europe's regions through Smart Specialisation and Interregional Collaboration

	I3 Instrument	Requirement
	<p>Interregional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creating links between EU regions around shared or complementary smart specialisation (S3) areas and involving all components of the regional or national innovation ecosystem - Supporting the development of value chains in less developed regions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minimum 3-5 partners from different Member States and regional ecosystem
	<p>Innovation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Testing, demonstration, piloting, large-scale product validation and market replication, adaption of existing prototypes - Accelerating innovation, bringing innovative solutions and new products in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Digital transition o Green transition o Smart manufacturing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Close to Market activities (TLR 6-9) - Innovation and impact oriented investments
	<p>Investment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Financial and advisory support for joint innovation projects - Smart economic transformation by moving from investment ideas to actual implementation - Direct investment to companies (mainly SMEs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - > €570 million available in 2021-2027 programming period - UP TO €10 million per project - 70% of EU contribution for all beneficiaries and cost categories

13 Success Factors

Strength of proposals are judged based on four criterion that determine whether a project is selected or not



Annex V – Overview of the policy recommendations

Number	Recommendations	Conditions	Lead	Difficulty (* low to **** high)
Governance and animation				
4.1.1.	To identify and map Maltese coordinators and partners involved in Horizon 2020, Horizon Europe, European networks, and other European interregional initiatives. This mapping will utilize social network analysis (SNA) using the CORDIS database to pinpoint the most central actors and existing interregional collaboration, thereby enabling Maltese actors to identify existing and potential partners within S3 priorities. The mapping effort can be complemented with patent analysis to identify interregional complementarities and technological opportunities in S3 priorities.	None	Science Malta	*
4.1.2.	Revise Blue Med's mandate, if not possible, establish the Blue Economy Cluster in Malta, 'Blue Malta,' functioning as the one-stop-shop hub for the blue economy sector in Malta. This blue economy cluster will work transversally across all Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) priorities. The organisation aims to enhance coordination for sustainable marine and maritime initiatives while reducing fragmentation within the blue economy sector. 'Blue Malta' will centralise existing national and European efforts such as the Blue Med Hub, BlueMissionMed HUB, and the WEST MED Malta National Hub on a dedicated website 'Blue Malta hub,' where stakeholders can access information on various initiatives.	None	Malta Enterprise, Science Malta, Malta Maritime Forum (MFF)	****

4.1.3.	To enhance Malta's mission to the European Union (EU) in Brussels by establishing a dedicated liaison office focused on lobbying, networking, identifying interregional opportunities in Smart Specialization Strategy (S3) priorities, and supporting S3 chairs in Malta. This initiative aims to strengthen Malta's presence in EU research and innovation networks and promote bilateral agreements.	None	Science Malta, Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade	***
4.1.4.	To integrate and coordinate of existing networks to form the Malta European Research and Innovation Network (MERIN), regrouping the most relevant actors and networks in Malta participating in European projects. The network will aim to organise an annual event to anticipate and present research and innovation initiatives and calls, share tools and funding opportunities, showcase success stories from Maltese actors in European projects, and produce a quarterly newsletter.	4.1.1., 4.1.3., 4.2.1	Malta Enterprise, Science Malta, Liaison Officer in Brussels, MAFEP consultants	***
4.1.5.	To adopt an outward-looking approach to the Entrepreneurial Discovery Process (EDP) by linking actions proposed by S3 chairs with relevant European projects and initiatives (see Giustolisi et al., 2023). This approach aims to align Malta's research and innovation (R&I) ecosystem with European opportunities, utilizing a "Follow the Policy" strategy to identify and leverage future EU initiatives and funding opportunities. Science Malta has to regularly conduct policy watch and anticipate EU funding opportunities within a more strategic approach to align Malta R&I efforts with the most promising EU opportunities	4.1.1., 4.1.3., 4.1.4., 4.2.1.	Science Malta, Liaison Officer in Brussels, MAFEP consultants	**
Tools and funding				
4.2.1.	Piloted by Science Malta, Malta's Fund for European Projects (MAFEP) is an initiative designed to support Maltese research and innovation actors in (1) identifying calls and ideas (MAFEP Ideas), (2) facilitating the design of proposals (MAFEP Design), (3) supporting the monitoring of projects (MAFEP Monitoring), and assessing S3 sub-priorities and actions in S3 priorities (MAFEP Expertise). This initiative aims to assist in identifying relevant European calls, developing high-quality project proposals aligned with Malta's S3 priorities, monitoring European projects, and assessing the relevance of Malta's S3.	None	MAFEP Task Force	***
4.2.2.	Enhance the effectiveness and reach of Malta's support schemes for research and innovation networks by facilitating the creation of networks and revising funding schemes to support participation in EIT KICs aligned with S3 priorities.	4.1.4.	Science Malta	*
Network and communication				
4.3.1.	Enhance Malta's S3 priorities by leveraging networking opportunities from S3CoP (Smart Specialisation Community of Practice) working groups to identify funding calls, potential partners, and collaboration opportunities.	None	Science Malta	*
4.3.2.	Support Malta's leadership and active participation in Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships (TSSPs) related to Industrial Modernisation and the Sustainable Blue Economy by joining existing partnerships and planning for potential future leadership roles in new initiatives over the long term.	4.1.2., 4.1.3.	Science Malta, Malta Enterprise, Blue Malta, Liaison Officer in Brussels	**
4.3.3.	Enhance awareness of interregional collaboration opportunities and leverage the Maltese research and innovation diaspora to create networks, supporting Malta's interregional collaboration and S3 priorities. This will be achieved by updating online platforms, sharing success stories, and engaging the Maltese diaspora to strengthen Malta's research and innovation landscape.	4.1.4., 4.2.1.	Science Malta, MAFEP Task Force	**
4.3.4.	Enhance Malta's S3 through international peer learning and exchanges. Malta can apply for the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform peer review and/or matchmaking to gain valuable insights and recommendations from European peers dealing with similar S3 policy challenges.	None	Ministry of Education, Science Malta	*

Annex VI – Overview of the FRAPPE Programme in Hauts-de-France

Contact FRAPPE: Laetitia Turlutte - Direction Europe Service animation et montage de projets européens Chargée de mission Laetitia.TURLUTTE@hautsdefrance.fr

Enclosed: FRAPPE Call, FRAPPE application, FRAPPE description Leaflet.

Case Study: France

FRAPPE supports entities in the Hauts-de-France region in accessing European funding by providing assistance for project setup and application



Le FRAPPE Consulting consortium (KEA, G.A.C Group, and N-able).



Fonds régional d'aide aux porteurs de projets européens (FRAPPE) aims to enhance the region's capacity to develop and implement innovative European projects, fostering economic growth and social cohesion.

The main beneficiaries are infra-departmental local authorities, public and semi-public organisations, associations, business groups, consular or trade chambers located in Hauts-de-France.

Offers workshops and training sessions to equip regional project leaders with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the complexities of European cooperation projects

Expands the network of partners for project leaders and increase their visibility at the European, national, and regional levels

Case Study: France

FRAPPE's strategy centres on a triple-helix approach, targeting the 2021-2027 funding periods and emphasizing regional, interregional, and sectoral funding

Strategy

It focuses on integrating the Hauts-de-France region to Regional, Interregional, and Sector EU funding programs focused on 2021-2027 funding period to provide comprehensive support for innovation and development of SMEs in the region.



Regional Program

Support territories, enhance economic sector competitiveness, address environmental and energy challenges, and contribute to future territorial development.



Interreg Program

Encourage cooperation between European regions by removing border effects, fostering common solutions to shared challenges, and promoting the exchange of best practices.

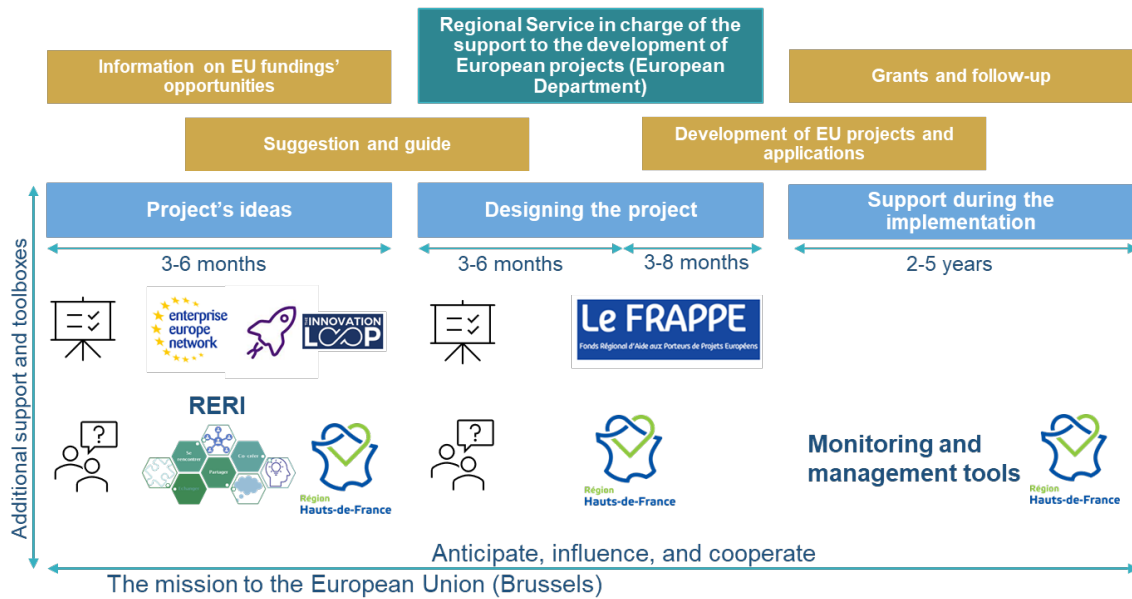


Sectoral Program

Address major European challenges, seize single market opportunities, and provide international recognition despite high competition.



Case Study: France Hauts-de-France The innovation ecosystem support



Case Study: France Hauts-de-France INNOLOOP



What does the service provide:

- ✓ To detect European funding opportunities adapted to the project
- ✓ To confirm upstream the adequacy between the project and the targeted European call
- ✓ Evaluate the innovation nature of the project, its chances of success and formulate avenues for improvement
- ✓ Access to a watch opf past calls for projects and excellent projects already funded to enrich the proposal

Case Study: France

FRAPPE supports entities in the Hauts-de-France region in accessing European funding by providing assistance for project setup and application



Case Study: France

Its governance structure allows it to seemingly integrate stakeholders to tailored EU funding programs

