

PART A

VULNERABILITY REDUCTION IN SIDS

1. Enhanced Support for a Resilient Post-COVID-19 Recovery in SIDS

In recognition of the shared challenges which small island developing states (SIDS) face due to their particular characteristics, Malta's long-standing policy and practice of advocating for, and providing assistance to, small island developing states (SIDS) continued with increased vigour following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

During 2020 and 2021, Malta co-chaired, together with Antigua & Barbuda, the UN Steering Committee on Partnerships for SIDS, whose main objective is to promote the formation and consolidation of relevant partnerships to assist SIDS in achieving the objectives of the SAMOA Pathway and the Sustainable Development Goals. In the furtherance of this role, during this two-year period, a series of online webinars were organised which dealt with issues directly relevant to SIDS in their efforts towards a resilient post-COVID-19 recovery, including health service challenges and lessons learnt, the resilience of the tourism sector, the development of the blue economy and the sustainable use of marine resources, renewable energy resources and water management. These webinars attracted the participation of varied stakeholders and served as platforms for discussions on these priority themes with a view of promoting a resilient recovery from the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, the Commonwealth Small States Centre of Excellence which was established in Malta in 2017 following an agreement reached between the Government of Malta and the Commonwealth Secretariat, continued to train officials from SIDS in areas relevant to the socio-economic development of their countries. In view of the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, extensive use was made of online technologies in the delivery of this training. In 2021, the Centre entered into partnership with the Commonwealth Centre for Connected Learning (3CL) Foundation to provide additional training in 21st century learning technologies, under the auspices of the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs.

2. Enhanced and Tailored Development Cooperation for SIDS

As indicated above, Malta has always striven to promote the interests of SIDS. In recent years, this policy has been strengthened through the implementation of various initiatives designed to enhance cooperation with these states on both bilateral and multilateral levels.

Among the Strategic Goals incorporated within the Malta Foreign Policy Strategy that was launched in February 2022, and as a clear sign of the importance it attributes to its relations with SIDS, a specific provision was included related to Small States and SIDS whereby Malta aims to *"Promote and advocate for the interest of small states and Small Island Developing States in international fora"*. This follows the appointment, in 2021, of Prof. Godfrey Baldacchino as Malta's first-ever Ambassador for Small States.

Moreover, in 2021, Malta started awarding scholarships at Master's and PhD levels specifically to nationals of SIDS. Two scholarships were awarded at Master's level to nationals from Fiji and Mauritius, whilst a PhD scholarship was granted to a national of Belize. The total expenditure incurred on these scholarships during 2021 amounted to €18,500. A further two Master's degree scholarships are due to be awarded in 2022 and again in 2023 respectively.

Malta has also provided humanitarian and financial assistance to SIDS, responding to emergencies faced by fellow citizens from SIDS. Thus, following the eruption of the Volcano La Soufrière in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in April 2021, Malta donated €25,000 through the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) in emergency aid in connection with the ensuing humanitarian disaster. Furthermore, in December 2021, Malta donated €20,000 to the UN Trust Fund supporting developing states, in particular SIDS, in the preparation of their submissions to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. Moreover, in February 2022 Malta donated 20,000 COVID-19 vaccines and 25,000 rapid-test kits to Antigua & Barbuda, at a total cost of €153,360.

In pursuance of Malta's long-standing vocation of advocacy of climate-related issues, and in particular vis-à-vis small island states, at the November 2021 Conference of the Parties (COP 26), Malta's Prime Minister Robert Abela launched the 'Island for Islands' initiative aimed at supporting SIDS in their fight against the negative impacts of climate change.

Furthermore, in February 2022, an internationally renowned Maltese expert in small states' vulnerabilities was appointed as a member of a UN high-level panel of experts which is working on the development and finalization of a multidimensional vulnerability index for SIDS.