**­­Questionnaire on the Right to a Safe, clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment: Toxic-free places to live, work, study and play**

Input from the Republic of Malta

**1.Please provide examples of ways in which toxic environments—characterized by unhealthy levels of pollution and high risks of exposure to toxic substances—are having adverse impacts on human rights. Adversely affected rights could include, among others, the rights to life, health, water, sanitation, food, livelihoods, non-discrimination, a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, the rights of the child, cultural rights and Indigenous peoples’ rights.**

Ozone in Malta has a principally transboundary origin. However, the presence of ozone may give rise to breathing problems, eyes, nose, and throat irritations, or cardiovascular diseases.

Particulate Matter, sourced from traffic congestion and to a minor extent power generation, are the main sources of particulate pollution in Malta (although a relatively large fraction of PM10 can be apportioned to salt from sea spray as well as Saharan dust). As a result of this, there may be impacts on the central nervous system, the reproductive system, give rise to breathing problems, cardiovascular diseases, or pulmonary diseases.

Nitrogen Dioxide (NO2) concentrations have remained largely within the annual limits in Malta, although there have occasional exceedances recorded in particular traffic congested areas. Exposure to high concentrations of NO2 may pose a significant health problem such as breathing problems; eyes, nose, and throat irritations; or impact the liver, spleen, and blood.

Access to open spaces have been recognised to be conducive to physical activity and mental health, since it encourages personal mobility and physical exercise which are both important for health; including mental health and prevents obesity. Due to limited access to open spaces and safe environments in Malta, this has partly contributed to Malta’s population gaining the highest prevalence of overweight and obesity in the European region.

Noise pollution, that can lead to negative health issues, is being considered an equity issue in relation to socioeconomic status (income and education), age and place of residence. This indicates that the poor, the old and those living in dense places in Malta are exposed to heavy traffic and are the most affected.

The increasing use of chemicals through various sectors including industry, agriculture and transport, has increased our exposure to a large number of chemicals. The misuse, poor collection and treatment of chemicals and other hazardous substances, may pass into the environmental media of air, water, sediment and soil, resulting in chemical exposure in different environments and media: home, school, playgrounds, recreational and consumed water, and food. Chemicals may have immediate acute as well as long term chronic health effects depending on dosage and length of exposure and give rise to respiratory diseases and cancers. Pesticides, mercury, and blood lead levels are of particular concern.

More information, can be found through the below links:

* NSE: Recognizing Malta’s Environmental Challenges - <https://era.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Recognising-Maltas-Env-Challenges.pdf>
* State of the Environment Report 2018 - <https://era.org.mt/topic/soer/>

**6. Please provide specific examples of good practices in preventing, mitigating, or rehabilitating toxic environments. These examples may occur at the international, regional, national, sub-national, or local level. Examples may involve monitoring concentrations of toxic substances in air, water, soil, food and people; guaranteeing procedural rights (e.g. public access to information, public participation in decision making, access to remedies); legislation, regulations, standards, jurisprudence and policies that address toxic substances; and initiatives to achieve toxic-free environments (e.g. banning the use of specific substances, reducing air and water pollution, remediation projects). Where possible, please provide evidence related to the implementation, enforcement, and effectiveness of the good practices.**

Monitoring of emissions to air and water discharges are carried out by the Ministry for Environment, Climate Change and Planning (MECP)/ Environment and Resources Authority (ERA) in accordance with legislative measures and include issuing of permits with emission limits and monitoring reports according to reporting obligations.

**7. Please specify ways in which additional protection is provided (or should be provided) for populations who may be particularly vulnerable to toxic environments (e.g. women, children, persons living in poverty, members of Indigenous peoples and traditional communities, older persons, persons with disabilities, ethnic, racial, religious or other minorities, migrants and displaced persons). How can these populations be empowered to protect their rights?**

MECP/ERA is currently working on a National Strategy for the Environment (NSE), following the earlier publication of the [Wellbeing First Vision for Malta’s Environment 2050](https://era.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/NSE-Wellbeing-First-Vision-Final.pdf). The NSE will be a strategic governance document serving as an umbrella framework for environmental elements targeting all national plans, policies and programs. This Strategy shall include strategic goals and targets for different environmental topics to set out the direction to follow to protect and improve Malta’s environment until 2050. The Wellbeing First vision seeks to put environmental, social and economic factors at par, with the ultimate priority being given to ensuring a better quality of life.

The NSE shall seek to ensure that its benefits shall be equitable amongst all demographics and sectors of society. This is being ensured by actively involving various entities who are involved in wellbeing, public health, and sustainable development, including policy makers, academics, and the voluntary sector.

Through the [National Strategy for the Environment NSE: Recognising Malta’s Environmental Challenges Paper](https://era.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Recognising-Maltas-Env-Challenges.pdf), it was identified that there is limited understanding, awareness, and management of chemical flows through our food and living systems.

* + Malta became signatory of the Minamata Convention on Mercury in 2014 and ratified the agreement in 2017, through which the government commits to implement measures to control human-made pollution from mercury and covers the entire lifecycle of man-made mercury pollution.
	+ The establishment of a poison-control centre would facilitate the continued analysis of existing databases used for the registration of imported chemicals and exotic animals in order to ensure that suitable antidotes are available at all times for effective treatments.

The creation of safer roads and safer areas (e.g. playgrounds which are ideally located away from traffic-congested areas), and planning for greener corridors and areas in our localities may encourage more physical activity and the consideration of a modal shift from the private car to cycling and walking, while also having various psychological and emotional health benefits.

According to the Environmental Noise Directive (END, 2002/49/EC), environmental noise is unwanted or harmful outdoor sound created by human activities, including noise emitted by means of transport, road traffic, rail traffic, air traffic, and from sites of industrial activity. In this regard, the first Noise Action Plan ​was prepared in accordance with the requirements of the END, which outlines a long-term strategy which aims to prevent and reduce environmental noise where necessary, particularly where exposure levels can induce harmful effects on human health and preserving environmental noise quality where it is good. The Plan also includes an overview of noise management legislation and guidance, description of the area covered by the plan, an overview of public participation in the development of the plan and an implementation plan.

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