



DEVELOP CALL

Financial Support for Third Parties

Mid-term progress Report Part A (Public)

*Malta Agro-Leadership & Tech Entrepreneurship
for Sustainable Empowerment - MALTESE*

PoliRuralPlus has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101136910.

Disclaimer

Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Research Executive Agency (REA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



**Funded by
the European Union**

Project title	<i>Malta Agro-Leadership & Tech Entrepreneurship for Sustainable Empowerment - MALTESE</i>
Project short name	<i>MALTESE</i>
Pilot Region	<i>Rural pilot 9: Malta</i>
Organisation	<i>Projektberatung und Management Expert Assoziation - PAMEA</i>
Author(s)	<i>Dr.Eng. Daniel AMARIEI, Gianluca VALENTINO, Dr. Krisztina TOTH</i>
Submission date	<i>08.03.2026</i>
Version	<i>1.0</i>

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	4
1. Project Overview.....	6
2. Progress Against Objectives and Work Plan.....	7
3. Technical Results and Outputs.....	10
4. Integration and Contribution to PoliRuralPlus.....	11
5. Stakeholder Engagement and User Involvement.....	12
6. Communication, Dissemination and Visibility.....	13
7. Impact Assessment.....	15
8. Challenges, Risks and Lessons Learned.....	17
9. Sustainability, Replicability and Next Steps.....	18
10. Conclusions.....	18

Executive Summary

MALTESE, Malta Agro-Leadership & Tech Entrepreneurship for Sustainable Empowerment, is a pilot initiative implemented in Rural Pilot 9: Malta under the PoliRuralPlus framework. The project responds to structural challenges affecting rural Malta, including fragmented small-scale farming, low digital uptake, weak rural-urban market connections, and limited opportunities for youth engagement in agriculture and entrepreneurship. MALTESE addresses these challenges through an integrated approach that combines digital upskilling, circular economy learning, participatory innovation, and the gradual deployment of a user-friendly digital innovation hub tailored to the Maltese context.

The project aims to strengthen rural Malta by equipping rural youth and entrepreneurs with practical digital and entrepreneurial skills, improving access to digital advisory and planning tools, and supporting more direct links between rural producers and urban consumers. The planned MALTESE solution combines three main components: the JackDaw GeoAI Chatbot for smart advisory support, a collaborative mapping tool for community planning, and a rural-urban e-marketplace for local products and services. In parallel, the project develops a training and mentoring pathway designed to support long-term skills development, business incubation, and stakeholder engagement.

During the reporting period, the consortium focused on project launch, coordination, and implementation readiness. A face-to-face Kick-off Meeting was held in Vienna on 26-27 January 2026, bringing together PAMEA, SEMABLU, and SELFHOOD to confirm responsibilities, governance arrangements, work package priorities, reporting procedures, and the initial implementation roadmap. In addition, the partners maintained coordination through a series of online meetings. Progress was also made in communication setup, stakeholder mobilisation planning, and the preparation of key project deliverables.

At mid-term, several important foundations have been established. The consortium has set up its management and coordination framework, launched the project website and social media presence, and completed the first draft of the technical specifications for the Agro-Innovation Digital Hub. The final version of the training curriculum under Deliverable D3.1 has also been completed, defining a blended learning pathway based on three online preparatory meetings, a four-day face-to-face training in Malta, and follow-up mentorship and incubation support. Initial stakeholder engagement has begun, including contact with the MaYA Foundation, which expressed openness to collaboration and dissemination support.

The reporting period also clarified several implementation realities. While the overall concept of the digital hub remains valid and aligned with PoliRuralPlus objectives, some technical components require adaptation. JackDaw is available as an existing basis but still needs localisation and enhancement for the Maltese context. The originally foreseen Map Whiteboard is currently inaccessible, and alternative tools are being assessed. The Malta-specific E-Market platform is not yet operational and will require either adaptation from an existing implementation or a practical alternative solution. These issues do not change the project's objectives, but they do mean that mid-term progress is stronger on coordination, planning, technical specification, and curriculum design than on full user-facing deployment.

Even at this stage, the project is generating early positive signals. The consortium is operational, the implementation logic is clear, the training pathway is in place, and stakeholder interest has started to emerge. MALTESE also contributes to the wider PoliRuralPlus ecosystem by building on its tools and methodologies and by strengthening visibility through project communication activities and participation in PoliRuralPlus-related events.

In the next phase, the consortium will focus on finalising the technical configuration of the digital hub, accelerating stakeholder mobilisation, delivering the Malta training activities, expanding dissemination outputs, and moving from preparation to practical pilot implementation. The overall direction remains consistent: to create an inclusive, replicable model for digital empowerment, circular agri-business development, and rural-urban collaboration in Malta.

1. Project Overview

- *Context and rationale*
- *Alignment with the call objectives and selected pilot region(s)*
- *Target users and stakeholders*
- *Short description of the solution / service / methodology*

Context and rationale

MALTESE, Malta Agro-Leadership & Tech Entrepreneurship for Sustainable Empowerment, is implemented in Rural Pilot 9: Malta under the PoliRuralPlus framework. The project responds to a set of interconnected challenges affecting rural Malta, including the fragmentation of small-scale farming, low digital uptake, weak links between rural producers and urban markets, and limited opportunities for youth engagement in agriculture and rural entrepreneurship.

Rural Malta is characterised by very small farm holdings, a high share of part-time farming, and growing pressure on the viability of agriculture as a stable livelihood. At the same time, digital tools with strong potential for advisory support, planning, market access, and business development remain underused by many rural actors. This creates a gap between innovation potential and practical access, especially for young people, small producers, women, and digitally underserved groups. MALTESE was designed to address this gap through a combined approach based on digital transformation, capacity building, circular economy practices, and stronger rural-urban cooperation.

The project promotes a practical and place-based model for rural revitalisation in Malta by linking technology deployment with training, mentoring, stakeholder engagement, and pilot implementation. Rather than treating digital tools as standalone products, MALTESE frames them as part of a wider ecosystem intended to improve access to knowledge, markets, participation, and innovation opportunities in rural communities.

Alignment with the call objectives and selected pilot region

MALTESE is fully aligned with the objectives of the PoliRuralPlus Develop Call and with the priorities of the Malta pilot region. The project supports rural innovation through the localisation and practical use of PoliRuralPlus-inspired digital tools, while also strengthening entrepreneurship, participatory governance, and rural-urban connections.

Its intervention logic is closely linked to the needs of the Maltese rural context. Malta's compact geography, strong rural-urban interdependence, and fragmented agricultural structure make it a relevant setting for testing integrated solutions that combine advisory support, collaborative planning, digital market access, and capacity building. The project therefore contributes to the wider PoliRuralPlus ambition of demonstrating how digital innovation, local participation, and sustainable development can be combined in a way that is both usable and replicable.

MALTESE also aligns with the New European Bauhaus principles of sustainability, inclusion, and aesthetics. Sustainability is addressed through circular agri-business models, local value chains, and resource-efficient practices. Inclusion is reflected in the focus on youth, women, small-scale farmers, and digitally underserved groups. Aesthetics is reflected in the intention to create accessible, user-friendly, and locally relevant digital and training environments that support meaningful participation.

Target users and stakeholders

The project's primary target users are rural youth, early-stage rural entrepreneurs, small-scale farmers, and other local actors who can benefit from improved digital skills, advisory support, and market access. Particular attention is given to participants with limited prior exposure to digital tools, as well as to groups that are often less visible in innovation processes, including women and marginalised rural users.

The broader stakeholder ecosystem includes educational institutions, agricultural advisory services, SMEs and agri-businesses, local and regional authorities, community-based organisations, NGOs, technology providers, and

urban consumers. This multi-actor structure is important because MALTESE is not limited to training individuals. It also seeks to build stronger cooperation between producers, learners, advisors, market actors, and local institutions so that innovation can be embedded in the wider rural system.

The consortium reflects this integrated approach. PAMEA leads coordination and dissemination, SEMABLU leads the technical setup and digital integration work, and SELFHOOD leads training, mentoring, and participant activation.

Short description of the solution / service / methodology

MALTESE develops an integrated approach that combines a digital innovation hub with training, mentoring, and stakeholder mobilisation. The intended solution brings together three main digital components: the JackDaw GeoAI Chatbot for smart advisory and decision support, a collaborative mapping environment for participatory planning, and a rural-urban e-market solution to improve direct connections between local producers and consumers.

These tools are complemented by a structured capacity-building pathway that includes online preparatory meetings, face-to-face training, practical learning activities, and follow-up mentorship. The methodology is based on co-design, iterative testing, blended learning, and community-oriented implementation. This means that the project does not only aim to introduce digital tools, but also to ensure that they are understandable, relevant, and usable for the intended Maltese target groups.

At mid-term, MALTESE should therefore be understood as both a technical and a social innovation process. Its purpose is to create a functional pathway through which rural users can strengthen digital competence, develop entrepreneurial ideas, improve collaboration, and gain more direct access to information, planning tools, and market opportunities. In this sense, the project combines technology adaptation with practical empowerment and local ecosystem building.

2. Progress Against Objectives and Work Plan

- *Objective description*
- *Work plan progress*
 - *Summary of activities carried out*
 - *Reference to planned phases/tasks*
 - *Milestones and deliverables status (status achieved / ongoing / delayed)*
- *Deviations from the work plan and corrective actions*
 - *Description of the deviation (what changed compared to the approved plan)*
 - *Reason for the deviation (technical, organisational, external) Corrective action taken or planned*
 - *Impact on objectives, timeline, or results (if any)*

Mid-term: focus on progress and partial results

Final: focus on completion and achieved outcomes

Objective description

The MALTESE project was designed to digitally empower rural Malta through a combination of technical innovation, capacity building, and stakeholder activation. The core objectives are to equip rural youth and entrepreneurs with practical digital and circular economy skills, pilot an integrated digital platform adapted to the Maltese context, support youth-led agri-business creation, strengthen collaboration among local stakeholders, and demonstrate a replicable model for rural-urban cooperation aligned with PoliRuralPlus priorities and New European Bauhaus values.

At mid-term, the project remains fully aligned with these objectives. Progress is strongest in project mobilisation, governance, technical baseline definition, curriculum finalisation, and preparation for pilot implementation. The project has therefore advanced from concept and planning into structured implementation readiness, with the next phase focused on delivery, deployment, training, and stakeholder uptake.

Work plan progress

Summary of activities carried out

During the reporting period, the consortium concentrated on launching the project, establishing internal coordination procedures, confirming work package responsibilities, and preparing the first implementation cycle. A face-to-face Kick-off Meeting was held in Vienna on 26-27 January 2026, where the partners confirmed governance arrangements, reporting rhythm, work package logic, technical priorities, training structure, communication workflow, and the initial action register. In parallel, the consortium maintained continuity through three online coordination meetings held on 20 November 2025, 9 December 2025, and 7 January 2026.

Under WP1, the project established its coordination framework, reporting logic, action tracking, and documentation routines. Administrative and compliance topics, including data protection, consent procedures, internal reporting, and budget tracking, were reviewed and translated into concrete internal actions.

Under WP2, SEMABLU completed the first draft of the technical specifications for the Agro-Innovation Digital Hub. This draft provides the baseline assessment for the three core digital components, namely JackDaw, Map Whiteboard, and the Rural-Urban E-Market, and clarifies the technical gaps, localisation needs, integration logic, and substitute options currently under consideration.

Under WP3, the consortium finalised Deliverable D3.1, the MALTESE Training Curriculum. The curriculum defines a blended learning pathway consisting of three online preparatory meetings, a four-day face-to-face training in Malta, and a post-training mentorship and incubation phase linked to WP4.

Under WP4, the consortium clarified the incubation logic, mentoring pipeline, and the intended connection between training outputs and youth-led agri-business support. At this stage, WP4 has progressed at design level and is positioned to advance after the training and early participant activation.

Under WP5, the consortium initiated the communication and dissemination workflow, launched the project's public communication channels, and started building the visibility package for the project. Initial stakeholder outreach also began, including contact with MAYA Foundation, which expressed openness to future collaboration and dissemination support.

Reference to planned phases/tasks

Progress during the reporting period corresponds primarily to the project's first implementation phase, namely mobilisation, setup, and readiness building.

For WP1, the focus was on project governance, coordination tools, reporting rhythm, administrative setup, and compliance procedures.

For WP2, the focus was on technical scoping, assessment of existing PoliRuralPlus components, refinement of the integration concept, and identification of alternatives where required.

For WP3, the focus was on curriculum design, training structure, learning objectives, methodology, and preparation for participant-facing delivery.

For WP4, the focus was on conceptual preparation of the incubation flow, mentoring logic, and alignment with post-training support.

For WP5, the focus was on communication setup, workflow definition, social media activation, and preparation of promotional and dissemination materials.

This means that the project has broadly followed the approved work plan logic, while mid-term results remain concentrated in preparatory and enabling actions rather than full operational deployment.

MILESTONE / DELIVERABLE	STATUS	MID-TERM PROGRESS
Kick-off Meeting and project launch	Achieved	Face-to-face consortium launch completed in Vienna on 26-27 January 2026.
Online coordination meetings	Achieved	Three online coordination meetings held during the mobilisation phase.

WP1 governance and coordination setup	Ongoing	Internal coordination structure, reporting rhythm, action tracking, and documentation procedures established and operationalised.
D1.1 Consortium Agreement and full administrative package	Ongoing	Governance and compliance actions initiated, with internal administrative setup progressing.
D2.1 Technical Specifications	Ongoing	First draft completed and used as the technical baseline for further WP2 refinement.
Digital Hub integration and deployment	Ongoing	Technical architecture and integration pathway defined at baseline level, but user-facing deployment not yet completed.
D3.1 Training Curriculum	Achieved	Final curriculum completed, covering online preparation, face-to-face training, and post-training mentorship.
WP3 training delivery	Ongoing	Training structure finalised, implementation and participant-facing delivery scheduled for the next phase.
WP4 incubation and mentoring framework	Ongoing	Bootcamp and mentoring logic discussed and aligned, with operational rollout pending training delivery.
WP5 communication setup and social channels	Achieved	Public communication channels launched and dissemination workflow initiated.
Promo video and planned blog outputs	Delayed	Communication package is in development, while blog outputs are scheduled for later implementation milestones.
Stakeholder mobilisation and co-design activation	Ongoing	Initial outreach has started, but wider stakeholder recruitment remains part of the next implementation phase.

Deviations from the work plan and corrective actions

At mid-term, the main deviations relate to technical readiness, sequencing of public-facing outputs, and the pace of stakeholder mobilisation.

The first deviation concerns the digital platform components. The approved project logic assumed progress toward an integrated ecosystem built around JackDaw, Map Whiteboard, and the Rural-Urban E-Market. During implementation, the consortium confirmed that JackDaw provides a valuable starting point but still requires significant localisation, usability improvements, and functional enhancement before deployment in the Maltese context. The originally foreseen Map Whiteboard is currently inaccessible for practical use by the consortium, and the E-Market does not yet exist in a Malta-ready form. This deviation is mainly technical in nature.

To address this, the consortium adopted a corrective approach based on flexibility and continuity. SEMABLU completed a technical baseline assessment, identified key localisation and usability requirements for JackDaw, and evaluated alternative mapping platforms that could substitute for the inaccessible Map Whiteboard. For the marketplace component, the consortium is maintaining the original functional objective while considering either adaptation from an existing implementation or the use of a practical fallback solution. These actions preserve the project's strategic direction while reducing the risk of technical standstill.

The second deviation concerns the timing of some dissemination and engagement outputs. While communication channels were launched and the communication workflow was established, some planned outputs such as the promotional video and PoliRuralPlus blog posts were not completed within the early phase. Stakeholder mobilisation has therefore progressed more slowly than originally expected, with the first concrete external engagement confirmed with MAYA Foundation and wider activation planned for the next phase. This deviation is partly organisational and partly linked to the fact that technical clarification and curriculum finalisation needed to be prioritised during mobilisation.

The corrective action taken has been to secure the essentials first: management structure, technical baseline, curriculum completion, and public communication presence. The consortium has also maintained regular

coordination through online meetings and internal task tracking, enabling the delayed outreach and dissemination items to be carried forward in a structured way rather than lost.

A third adjustment concerns implementation sequencing. The project has evolved from an initially proposal-driven schedule into a more realistic operational sequence in which the mid-term phase concentrates on readiness, and the next phase concentrates on delivery, training, piloting, and stakeholder-facing application. This is not a change in objectives, but a refinement of execution based on real implementation conditions.

Overall, these deviations do not alter the core objectives of MALTESE. Their main impact is on timing and the distribution of results across the project lifecycle. At mid-term, the strongest results are in mobilisation, planning, technical scoping, and curriculum design, while the more visible user-facing results, such as training delivery, platform uptake, participatory mapping, and marketplace use, are concentrated in the next implementation period. The consortium considers this impact manageable and has already taken practical corrective steps to keep the project aligned with its intended outcomes.

3. Technical Results and Outputs

- *Description of the developed and functioning prototype of the digital application, and any other tools, services, datasets, methodologies*
- *Technical maturity (e.g. prototype, pilot deployment, operational)*
- *Screenshots, diagrams, links to demos or repositories (if public)*
- *Interoperability and standards used (if relevant)*

Final report additions:

- *Final architecture / solution description*
- *Access instructions (if applicable)*
- *Sustainability or maintenance considerations*

At mid-term, the main technical result of MALTESE is the establishment of a structured and validated technical baseline for the Agro-Innovation Digital Hub. This baseline defines the architecture, functional logic, maturity level, and integration pathway of the three core digital components foreseen by the project: the JackDaw GeoAI Chatbot, the collaborative mapping environment, and the Rural-Urban E-Market platform. In addition, the consortium has prepared an implementation and readiness framework covering infrastructure, hosting, DevOps, interoperability, security, and deployment planning.

The current technical status is not yet that of a fully operational integrated prototype. Instead, MALTESE has progressed to a clear technical specification and implementation readiness stage, with one existing component under adaptation, one component under substitute selection, and one component still at design and development planning stage. This is an important mid-term outcome because it transforms the original concept into a technically grounded and realistically sequenced implementation pathway.

The first core component is the **JackDaw GeoAI Chatbot**. JackDaw already exists as a context-aware advisory tool and provides the strongest starting point among the three components. Within MALTESE, it is intended to function as a bilingual smart advisory and decision-support interface for farmers, rural youth, and entrepreneurs. At mid-term, technical testing has confirmed that JackDaw offers a viable basis for the project, but also revealed several limitations that must be addressed before deployment in the Maltese context. These include insufficient localisation, limited source transparency, weak domain guardrails, lack of practical Maltese use cases, and interface elements that are too technical for the intended target groups. As a result, the technical work completed so far has not focused on claiming readiness prematurely, but on identifying the concrete enhancements required for a usable Malta-oriented version.

The second core component is the collaborative mapping environment originally foreseen as the **PoliRuralPlus Map Whiteboard**. During the reporting period, the consortium confirmed that the originally planned tool is currently inaccessible for practical evaluation and deployment. Rather than stopping the technical process, MALTESE used this stage to carry out a substitute assessment and identify realistic alternatives capable of

supporting participatory mapping, community planning, and stakeholder co-creation. Two platforms were shortlisted for this purpose, namely Atlas.co and ScribbleMaps, with Atlas.co emerging as the preferred option for piloting due to its no-code interface, collaboration features, AI support, and EU-based data handling. This means that, at mid-term, the mapping function has progressed from concept to technically informed substitute selection, even though final deployment is still pending.

The third core component is the ***Rural-Urban E-Market platform***. At this stage, no dedicated Malta-specific platform is yet operational. The technical work completed so far has therefore focused on defining the design direction, functional requirements, and implementation principles of the marketplace. The analysis carried out under D2.1 clarified that the future MALTESE E-Market should be simple, bilingual, mobile-friendly, low-barrier for producers, and capable of linking farmer profiles, local product visibility, map-based provenance, and future traceability features. The project continues to consider PrestaShop as the primary framework and WooCommerce as a practical fallback option, with the final decision guided by usability, maintainability, and integration needs.

Beyond the three application components, the project has also produced an important technical planning output in the form of the IT implementation and readiness framework. This framework defines the infrastructure strategy for development, testing, and production environments, cloud hosting requirements, domain structure, backup logic, repository strategy, CI/CD pipeline, access control, GDPR alignment, and accessibility expectations. It also specifies the intended interoperability model based on secure APIs, standardised documentation, and coordinated data flows between modules. In this sense, one of the most valuable technical outputs at mid-term is not yet a finished public-facing platform, but a coherent implementation model that reduces uncertainty and supports controlled deployment in the next project phase.

In terms of technical maturity, MALTESE is currently positioned between technical specification, partial prototyping, and implementation readiness. JackDaw can be described as an existing prototype under refinement for the Maltese context. The collaborative mapping component is at substitute selection and pre-pilot planning stage. The E-Market is at design and architecture definition stage. The digital hub as a whole is therefore not yet operational, but it is no longer conceptual. Its current maturity lies in the transition from initial technical planning toward integrated pilot deployment.

With regard to interoperability, the project continues to follow the original logic of a connected digital suite rather than three isolated tools. The intended architecture foresees API-based communication between modules, shared hosting logic, integration of geospatial and advisory functions, and future data exchange between the chatbot, mapping layer, and marketplace environment. The technical planning also includes provision for IoT-linked data flows, especially in relation to irrigation and environmental monitoring, although these integrations are still to be finalised and tested in practice.

At this stage, no public demo repository or open access deployment is available for inclusion in the report. However, technical documentation, architecture logic, hosting structure, and module responsibilities are clearly defined. The next technical phase will focus on refining the architecture, finalising platform choices, implementing localisation and usability improvements, and preparing the system for stakeholder-facing testing and training-linked use in Malta.

Overall, the mid-term technical output of MALTESE should be understood as a realistic and necessary transition from proposal logic to deployable system planning. The consortium has clarified what already exists, what is missing, what must be adapted, and what must be replaced. This reduces technical ambiguity, supports better decision-making, and creates a stronger basis for effective implementation in the next phase of the project.

4. Integration and Contribution to PoliRuralPlus

- *Use of PoliRuralPlus tools, platforms, or data (if applicable)*
- *Data generated, their integration into PoliRuralPlus and how it contributes to the wider ecosystem*
- *Synergies with other projects or initiatives*
- *Reusability and interoperability aspects*

Final report: clearer statement on long-term contribution and reuse

MALTESE is directly rooted in the PoliRuralPlus framework and is designed as a pilot-level contribution to its wider ecosystem of digital innovation, rural transformation, and stakeholder-driven development. The project does not operate as a standalone local initiative. Instead, it adapts and applies core PoliRuralPlus concepts, tools, and implementation logic to the specific realities of rural Malta, while generating experience and materials that can support reuse beyond the pilot region.

The most visible form of integration is the project's planned use and adaptation of PoliRuralPlus digital components. MALTESE builds its digital innovation approach around the JackDaw GeoAI Chatbot, the collaborative mapping function originally linked to the Map Whiteboard concept, and the Rural-Urban E-Market logic. Even where technical adjustments or substitute solutions are required, the project continues to follow the original PoliRuralPlus objective of creating an interoperable, user-friendly digital environment that supports advisory access, participatory planning, and stronger rural-urban market connections.

MALTESE also contributes to PoliRuralPlus through methodological alignment. The project applies the wider programme logic of combining digital tools with stakeholder engagement, training, iterative testing, and local adaptation. This is important because the project's value does not lie only in deploying technology, but in demonstrating how PoliRuralPlus-inspired tools can be translated into a practical model for a small-island, fragmented-farm context with low digital uptake and strong rural-urban interdependence.

In terms of data and knowledge contribution, MALTESE is expected to generate several useful inputs for the broader PoliRuralPlus ecosystem. These include anonymised user interaction patterns, implementation insights, stakeholder feedback, training materials, documentation on localisation needs, and practical lessons on how digital tools can be made more accessible to low-digital-literacy users. As the technical setup advances, the project is also expected to contribute mapping-related insights, marketplace experience, and evidence on the use of AI-supported advisory tools in the Maltese rural context. At mid-term, the contribution is therefore more methodological and preparatory than data-intensive, but it already adds value by reducing uncertainty around adaptation and deployment in small-scale rural settings.

The project also contributes to PoliRuralPlus by strengthening synergies with related activities and visibility actions. A relevant example is the participation of PAMEA in the PoliRuralPlus JackDaw Code Camp 2026, which supported exchange with the wider ecosystem and reinforced the project's connection to ongoing technical and innovation developments linked to JackDaw. This kind of participation increases coherence between pilot-level implementation and broader PoliRuralPlus learning processes.

Reusability and interoperability remain central to the MALTESE approach. The project is designed so that its outputs are not limited to one-off local use. The training curriculum, implementation logic, stakeholder engagement approach, technical specifications, and future replication materials are all intended to support reuse in other regions facing similar challenges, especially where agriculture is fragmented, digital confidence is low, and rural actors need practical rather than overly complex innovation pathways. In this sense, MALTESE contributes to PoliRuralPlus not only by applying existing tools, but also by testing how those tools and methods can be adapted into a more transferable and community-oriented model.

At mid-term, the project's contribution to PoliRuralPlus can therefore be summarised in four ways. First, it operationalises PoliRuralPlus concepts in the Maltese pilot region. Second, it provides practical feedback on the usability and adaptability of key digital components. Third, it generates transferable training, implementation, and stakeholder engagement resources. Fourth, it reinforces the wider PoliRuralPlus ecosystem through visibility, cross-project exchange, and future reuse potential.

5. Stakeholder Engagement and User Involvement

- *Stakeholder groups involved*
- *Engagement methods (workshops, pilots, interviews, testing, etc.)*
- *Feedback received and how it influenced the work*
- *Evidence of user uptake or interest (if available)*

MALTESE follows a participatory, multi-actor approach in which stakeholders are not treated only as beneficiaries, but as contributors to the design, validation, testing, and future uptake of the project results. From the outset, the project was conceived to combine technical development with community engagement, co-design logic, training participation, and feedback-based refinement. This is especially important in the Maltese context, where fragmented farming structures, low digital uptake, and weak coordination between actors can limit the real use of innovation unless stakeholders are actively involved throughout the process.

The project's main target groups include rural youth, early-stage rural entrepreneurs, small-scale farmers, agricultural advisors, education and training providers, local and regional stakeholders, NGOs, community-based actors, and urban consumers connected to local food and rural value chains. Particular attention is given to groups that are often less visible or less digitally confident, including women, young people with limited access to innovation opportunities, and users with low digital literacy. The intention is not only to invite participation, but to reduce barriers to participation through simple tools, practical training, bilingual delivery, and locally relevant engagement methods.

During the reporting period, stakeholder engagement focused mainly on preparation, mapping, and initial contact rather than large-scale activation. The Kick-off Meeting in Vienna included a dedicated working session on the stakeholder engagement plan for Malta, covering target groups, outreach channels, local champions, and inclusion measures. This helped the consortium define a first outreach logic linked to co-design sessions, training recruitment, and future pilot participation. The initial mobilisation framework also included preparation of invitations, consent forms, participant lists, and a structured co-design methodology based on the Circle of Coherence approach.

At mid-term, the most concrete external engagement achieved is the contact established with MAYA Foundation. This first exchange resulted in a positive signal for future collaboration and dissemination support. While broader stakeholder recruitment is still limited at this stage, this early connection is relevant because it confirms external interest and opens a pathway for cooperation with a local actor already active in the agri-tech and youth engagement ecosystem in Malta.

User involvement has also been embedded in the project design through the final training curriculum. The curriculum foresees a phased learning pathway built around three online preparatory meetings, a four-day face-to-face training in Malta, and post-training mentorship and incubation support. Within this structure, participants are not expected to remain passive learners. They are expected to complete self-assessments, idea development tasks, sustainability canvases, tool-use exercises, collaborative work, final pitches, and follow-up action planning. In this sense, the project treats user involvement as a practical and iterative process connected to learning, testing, and entrepreneurial activation.

The planned approach to user involvement remains strongly linked to co-design and pilot testing. As technical components become ready for use, stakeholders are expected to contribute through feedback loops, practical testing, participatory mapping, training participation, mentoring interaction, and future marketplace onboarding. Educational and advisory actors are expected to contribute to the translation of project tools into learning and support environments, while community organisations and local champions are expected to help mobilise participants and improve inclusion.

At mid-term, stakeholder engagement should therefore be understood as being in an early but structured phase. The project has established the target stakeholder logic, defined the initial mobilisation framework, opened the first collaboration channel, and embedded user participation into the training and implementation model. Wider stakeholder activation is planned for the next phase, once the promotional package, training rollout, and technical configuration are sufficiently advanced to support more effective recruitment and engagement.

Overall, MALTESE remains aligned with its original ambition of building a community-oriented and demand-driven innovation process. Although stakeholder uptake is still limited at mid-term, the project has laid the organisational and methodological foundations needed to move from preparation to active user participation in the next implementation stage.

6. Communication, Dissemination and Visibility

- *Describe the progress towards the obligatory media outputs, including:*
 - *At least 2 news articles (for external media or institutional websites)*
 - *At least 3 blog posts for the PoliRuralPlus platform,*
 - *A set of social media summaries highlighting key milestones, implementation steps, and results, tailored to different stages of the project (launch, mid-point, final).*
 - *Note: These outputs must include GDPR compliant visual elements where applicable (photos, screenshots, infographics) and acknowledge PoliRuralPlus funding.*
- *Events, demonstrations, presentations*
- *Links to public materials*
- *Compliance with EU funding visibility requirements*
- *Final report: complete overview of all dissemination outputs*

Communication and dissemination activities in MALTESE are designed to support visibility, stakeholder awareness, knowledge sharing, and alignment with PoliRuralPlus dissemination requirements. From the beginning of the project, the consortium treated communication not as a secondary activity but as an operational work stream linked to project launch, stakeholder mobilisation, training preparation, and future uptake of results. During the reporting period, the focus was on setting up the communication workflow, establishing public channels, preparing dissemination materials, and creating the basis for wider visibility in the next implementation phase.

A dedicated communication and dissemination approach was initiated during the Kick-off Meeting in Vienna, where the partners reviewed the structure of WP5, the communication workflow, content approval logic, and the minimum media outputs expected during implementation. This early alignment helped ensure that dissemination activities would follow a coordinated approach across partners and remain consistent with PoliRuralPlus branding and reporting expectations.

At mid-term, the main communication achievement is the establishment of the project's public visibility presence. The MALTESE website is live and serves as the main public information hub for the project. It provides a public-facing description of the initiative, presents the project identity, and supports the publication of updates, news, and project-related content. In parallel, dedicated social media channels have been launched on Facebook and LinkedIn in order to support wider outreach, milestone communication, and future stakeholder-facing visibility. Progress has also been made on the obligatory media outputs, although these are not yet complete at mid-term. Public dissemination has already started through website-based visibility content, including project-related updates and public information on MALTESE activities. A relevant dissemination item already available is the article covering PAMEA's participation in the PoliRuralPlus JackDaw Code Camp 2026, which strengthens MALTESE's visibility while also reinforcing its connection to the wider PoliRuralPlus ecosystem. In addition, the project website includes visual documentation from the consortium's kick-off activities, supporting early-stage public communication.

At the same time, the consortium considers the communication package to be still under development. The promotional video is currently being prepared and has not yet been finalised. The three PoliRuralPlus blog posts foreseen in the original dissemination commitments have also not yet been published at mid-term. Their sequencing has been adjusted to better match implementation progress. The first blog post is planned once the e-learning and technical preparation stage is sufficiently advanced, while a second dissemination wave is planned after the Malta training activities. This means that, at mid-term, dissemination is active but still concentrated on visibility setup, early news items, and communication groundwork rather than full output delivery.

Social media communication is being structured around key project milestones. The intention is to publish tailored summaries and visual updates linked to the launch phase, implementation preparation, training rollout, and final project results. At the current stage, the social channels mainly support project introduction, visibility building, and continuity of public presence. Their stronger mobilisation role is expected to grow during the next phase, especially in connection with training recruitment, stakeholder engagement, and dissemination of pilot-related results.

In terms of events, demonstrations, and presentations, the reporting period includes the Vienna Kick-off Meeting as the main face-to-face project launch event, complemented by three online coordination meetings that supported continuity and preparation across work packages. In addition, participation in the PoliRuralPlus JackDaw Code Camp 2026 constitutes a useful external-facing dissemination and networking activity, helping to position MALTESE within the broader innovation and pilot ecosystem.

With regard to public materials, the project can already point to its live website, active Facebook presence, active LinkedIn presence, and the publicly available article on the JackDaw Code Camp participation. These materials provide a first layer of public visibility and can be referenced in the report as current dissemination assets. Further public outputs, including additional website updates, blog posts, the promotional video, training-related materials, and visibility content from the Malta activities, are scheduled for the next implementation period.

Compliance with EU funding visibility requirements has been taken into account from the communication setup stage. The project identity and public-facing materials acknowledge PoliRuralPlus and European Union funding, and the consortium has addressed GDPR considerations in relation to photos, participant data, and public communication materials. This is especially important because MALTESE combines physical meetings, online activities, and future stakeholder-facing visibility outputs that require consistent handling of visual and personal data.

Overall, mid-term communication and dissemination progress can be described as established but not yet complete. The essential communication infrastructure is in place, initial public materials have already been published, and the project has begun building visibility within both the Maltese context and the wider PoliRuralPlus environment. The next phase will focus on expanding the volume, regularity, and depth of dissemination outputs so that communication better reflects the transition from project mobilisation to active implementation, training delivery, and pilot demonstration.

[MALTESE website main page](#)

[MALTESE Facebook page](#)

[MALTESE LinkedIn page](#)

[PAMEA JackDaw Code Camp 2026 article](#)

7. Impact Assessment

- *Mid-term:*
 - *Expected impacts*
 - *Early signals of impact*
 - *Qualitative indicators (interest, adoption potential)*
- *Final report (expanded):*
 - *Achieved impacts (technical, social, economic, environmental, policy)*
 - *Evidence and indicators*
 - *Contribution to regional / pilot-level objectives*
 - *A reflective assessment of how the project addressed the principles of the New European Bauhaus (NEB) — sustainability, inclusion, and aesthetics — in both process and outcome*

At mid-term, the impact of MALTESE should be assessed primarily in terms of expected effects, implementation readiness, and early signals of change rather than fully achieved end results. This is consistent with the current stage of the project, in which the strongest progress has been made in mobilisation, governance, technical scoping, curriculum completion, and communication setup, while the most visible user-facing results are expected during the next implementation phase.

Expected impacts

MALTESE is expected to generate impact across technical, social, economic, environmental, and territorial dimensions.

From a technical perspective, the project is expected to improve digital access and usability for rural users in Malta by adapting an integrated set of tools that combine smart advisory support, participatory mapping, and direct market access. The long-term technical impact lies in making advanced digital functions more understandable, practical, and accessible to users with low or moderate digital confidence.

From a social perspective, the project is expected to strengthen digital inclusion, youth empowerment, and stakeholder collaboration. Through training, mentorship, co-design, and participatory implementation, MALTESE aims to create a more connected and confident rural user base, especially among rural youth, women, small-scale farmers, and other groups that are often underrepresented in digital innovation processes.

From an economic perspective, the project is expected to support the emergence of youth-led agri-business ideas, strengthen rural entrepreneurship, improve access to urban markets, and reduce some of the barriers that keep small producers isolated from higher-value opportunities. The marketplace logic and mentoring pipeline are intended to help users move from ideas and skills development toward practical business activation.

From an environmental perspective, MALTESE is expected to support more sustainable and circular rural practices. This includes resource-aware irrigation approaches, low-cost smart farming demonstrations, circular business model development, shorter supply chains, and more informed decision-making through digital tools.

From a regional and territorial perspective, MALTESE is expected to contribute to stronger rural-urban connectivity in Malta by linking producers, learners, advisors, institutions, and consumers through a shared innovation framework. In the longer term, the project is also expected to provide a replicable model that can be adapted by other small-island, peripheral, or fragmented-farm regions across Europe.

Early signals of impact

Although the project is still at mid-term, several early signals indicate that MALTESE is already creating meaningful enabling conditions for future impact.

First, the consortium has successfully moved the project from proposal logic to implementation structure. Governance arrangements, coordination rhythm, reporting procedures, action tracking, and KPI logic have all been established, which is important because impact in a pilot project depends heavily on disciplined execution and continuity.

Second, the project has already produced two core enabling outputs that directly shape future impact. The first is the technical baseline for the Agro-Innovation Digital Hub, which clarifies what is technically available, what must be adapted, and what substitute options are needed. The second is the final training curriculum, which provides a concrete pathway for participant activation through three online preparatory meetings, a four-day face-to-face training in Malta, and post-training mentorship and incubation support. Together, these outputs show that the project now has an operational structure for turning objectives into real participant-facing activities.

Third, the project has established its public visibility presence through the website and social media channels, creating the communication foundation needed for recruitment, awareness raising, and future dissemination of results.

Fourth, an initial external signal of stakeholder interest has already emerged through contact with MAYA Foundation, which expressed openness to collaboration and dissemination support. At mid-term, this does not yet amount to broad stakeholder uptake, but it does show that the project is beginning to connect with relevant actors in the Maltese ecosystem.

Fifth, the consortium's participation in the PoliRuralPlus JackDaw Code Camp 2026 is an additional signal of integration and learning potential. It shows that MALTESE is not developing in isolation, but is engaging with the wider PoliRuralPlus environment in ways that can strengthen adaptation, visibility, and technical alignment.

Qualitative indicators and adoption potential

At this stage, the most relevant indicators are qualitative rather than outcome-heavy. The project already shows signs of adoption potential in several areas.

There is a clear fit between the identified rural challenges in Malta and the project's intervention logic. The combination of practical skills, user-friendly digital tools, mentoring, and direct market access responds to real barriers such as low digital literacy, market fragmentation, weak coordination, and youth disengagement.

The training curriculum also indicates strong practical relevance. It is designed around progressive learning, concrete outputs, hands-on activities, and follow-up support rather than passive information delivery. This increases the likelihood that participants will not only attend, but also use the tools, refine ideas, and continue engagement after the training phase.

The technical review has also created adoption value, even where it exposed limitations. By identifying the weaknesses of the current JackDaw deployment, the inaccessibility of the original Map Whiteboard, and the absence of a Malta-ready E-Market, the consortium has reduced the risk of deploying unsuitable tools. In practical terms, this increases the likelihood that the final configuration will be more usable and relevant for the target groups.

Another qualitative indicator is the degree of internal partner readiness. At mid-term, the consortium shows clear role alignment between coordination, technical implementation, and training delivery. This matters because pilot impact depends not only on good ideas, but on whether the partnership can translate them into a coherent user experience.

Contribution to regional and pilot-level objectives

MALTESE contributes directly to the objectives of the Malta pilot by addressing digital transformation, entrepreneurial capacity building, rural-urban connectivity, and community-oriented innovation. The project's integrated logic is well suited to the Maltese context, where small farm size, compact geography, and close rural-urban interaction create both constraints and opportunities.

Its contribution at pilot level is already visible in the way it frames rural development as a connected process rather than a set of isolated actions. The project combines digital advisory, collaborative planning, entrepreneurship support, and communication tools into one implementation pathway. This is important because Malta does not only need more digital tools. It needs a practical model through which those tools can become usable, trusted, and linked to real local opportunities.

The project also contributes to the wider PoliRuralPlus pilot objectives by testing how interoperable digital tools, participatory methods, and training-based activation can be localised in a small-island setting. Even before the pilot reaches full deployment, MALTESE is already generating useful lessons on sequencing, localisation, accessibility, and stakeholder preparation.

Reflection on New European Bauhaus principles

MALTESE remains strongly aligned with the New European Bauhaus principles of sustainability, inclusion, and aesthetics.

Sustainability is reflected in the promotion of circular agri-business models, local value chains, shorter supply chains, smart irrigation demonstration, and resource-aware rural practices. The project is not limited to digitalisation for its own sake, but connects digital innovation to more sustainable forms of production, exchange, and local development.

Inclusion is one of the strongest dimensions of the project. MALTESE specifically targets rural youth, women, small-scale producers, and digitally underserved users. The emphasis on bilingual delivery, practical training, simple interfaces, mentoring, and co-design is intended to lower entry barriers and widen participation beyond already confident or highly connected users.

Aesthetics is reflected in the project's ambition to create clear, accessible, and locally relevant user environments. In this context, aesthetics should be understood as usability, clarity, and meaningful design rather than decoration. The project seeks to make tools and learning environments understandable and engaging for real users in the Maltese rural context.

Overall mid-term assessment

At mid-term, MALTESE has not yet reached its final impact stage, and this should be stated clearly. The strongest impacts achieved so far are enabling impacts: strengthened consortium readiness, clarified technical direction, a completed training pathway, initial stakeholder interest, and the establishment of communication and coordination systems. These are not the final outcomes of the project, but they are the necessary conditions for them.

The project therefore shows a credible impact trajectory. If the next phase succeeds in converting readiness into delivery, training participation, technical piloting, and stakeholder uptake, MALTESE is well positioned to generate

meaningful benefits for rural Malta in terms of digital empowerment, youth activation, circular entrepreneurship, and stronger rural-urban cooperation.

8. Challenges, Risks and Lessons Learned

- *Key challenges encountered*
- *Risk mitigation actions*
- *Lessons learned (technical, organisational, stakeholder-related)*

Final report: include recommendations for future projects or scaling

At mid-term, MALTESE has made solid progress in mobilisation, coordination, technical baseline definition, curriculum completion, and communication setup. At the same time, the implementation period has highlighted a number of practical challenges and risks that are important to acknowledge openly. These do not undermine the relevance of the project, but they do affect sequencing, delivery pace, and the balance between preparatory work and user-facing results.

Main challenges encountered

The first and most significant challenge has been technical readiness. The project was designed around the integration of JackDaw, the Map Whiteboard, and the Rural-Urban E-Market into a coherent digital innovation hub for Malta. During implementation, it became clear that the three components are not equally mature or equally ready for immediate deployment. JackDaw offers a promising starting point, but it still requires substantial localisation, interface simplification, source transparency, bilingual refinement, and the future integration of Maltese datasets and sensor-based inputs. The originally foreseen Map Whiteboard is currently inaccessible for practical use by the consortium, and the Malta-specific E-Market is not yet operational. This has created a more complex technical implementation path than initially assumed.

A second challenge has been implementation timing and sequencing. At mid-term, several foundational tasks had to be advanced in parallel, including governance setup, administrative compliance, technical assessment, curriculum finalisation, communication setup, and early stakeholder outreach. In practice, this meant that the consortium had to prioritise the establishment of a stable implementation framework before moving more aggressively into deployment, recruitment, and user-facing piloting. This has been a reasonable choice, but it has slowed visible output delivery in some areas.

A third challenge has been stakeholder mobilisation at an early stage. Although the project has clear target groups and a defined co-design logic, broader stakeholder activation has progressed more slowly than originally expected. This is partly because effective mobilisation depends on having a clear technical and training offer in place, and partly because communication materials and outreach assets were still under development during the reporting period. As a result, stakeholder engagement at mid-term remains structured but limited in scale.

A fourth challenge concerns communication output timing. The website and social media channels are in place, but some planned dissemination outputs, including the promotional video and PoliRuralPlus blog posts, were not completed within the early phase. This reflects the reality that the consortium placed early emphasis on internal coordination, technical clarification, and curriculum completion before scaling up outward-facing communication.

Administrative and compliance coordination has also required careful attention. As with many small consortia working under time pressure, the project has needed to align reporting procedures, evidence requirements, financial discipline, GDPR-related practices, and internal document control from the beginning. These are not unusual difficulties, but they remain a real operational challenge and require continued discipline to avoid later reporting or audit problems.

Main risks identified at mid-term

At this stage, the project identifies three main categories of risk.

The first category is technical risk. This includes delays in infrastructure readiness, integration difficulties between digital components, slower-than-planned TRL progression, and the risk that originally foreseen tools may not be

practically deployable in the Maltese context without adaptation or substitution. The current status of the Map Whiteboard and E-Market makes this risk especially relevant.

The second category is administrative and management risk. This includes potential delays in reporting, incomplete internal documentation, evidence gaps, budget-tracking weaknesses, and compliance issues related to finance, documentation, and data protection. Because the report is public and the project combines physical meetings, online coordination, and future stakeholder-facing activities, document discipline and GDPR compliance remain important risk areas.

The third category is engagement risk. This includes slower participant recruitment, weak stakeholder response, communication gaps, and lower-than-expected uptake among rural users with limited digital confidence. For MALTESE, this is especially important because the project depends not only on technical delivery, but on actual use by youth, entrepreneurs, farmers, and local actors.

Mitigation measures and response

The consortium has already adopted several mitigation measures in response to these risks.

For technical risk, the main response has been to move from assumption to verified baseline. SEMABLU completed a structured technical assessment of the three digital components and identified both the required enhancements and the substitute options needed to keep implementation realistic. For the mapping function, alternative platforms have been assessed. For the E-Market, fallback logic has been retained so that the functional goal can still be delivered even if the original pathway proves impractical. For JackDaw, the focus has shifted to localisation, usability, data transparency, and practical readiness rather than premature deployment claims.

For management and administrative risk, the consortium has strengthened governance and monitoring procedures. Internal coordination rhythm, action tracking, reporting cadence, budget discipline, documentation logic, and KPI tracking were all addressed early in the project. This is important because a small pilot can absorb some technical uncertainty, but it cannot absorb disorganised management without serious consequences.

For engagement risk, the consortium has chosen a phased approach. Rather than forcing early outreach before the project offer is sufficiently clear, MALTESE is preparing a more grounded mobilisation phase linked to the final curriculum, the Malta training activities, and a clearer technical configuration. The use of local champions, targeted outreach, co-design methods, and practical training remains central to reducing participation barriers.

For communication-related delays, the response has been to secure essential visibility infrastructure first and then expand outputs in the next implementation stage. This means that the current communication base is already in place, while the larger volume of public outputs is expected to follow as the project moves from preparation into delivery and demonstration.

Lessons learned

Several lessons have already emerged from the first implementation phase.

The first lesson is that early technical validation is essential. Proposal logic can set a strong direction, but actual deployment decisions must be based on what is accessible, usable, and realistically adaptable. MALTESE has shown that it is better to identify technical limitations early and adjust accordingly than to continue pretending that all planned components are equally ready.

The second lesson is that governance from day one matters more than people like to admit. Clear responsibilities, meeting rhythm, action tracking, documentation control, and reporting discipline are not administrative decoration. They are what make it possible to manage uncertainty without losing momentum.

The third lesson is that technical work and training design must evolve together. In MALTESE, the curriculum is not separate from the digital platform. It depends on platform readiness, user flows, tool access, and practical demonstration capacity. This means that pedagogical planning and technical planning must remain tightly coordinated.

The fourth lesson is that stakeholder engagement works better when linked to a tangible and understandable offer. For many rural users, interest increases when they can see what the training includes, what the tools actually do, and what practical benefit participation can bring. This suggests that mobilisation should be closely linked to concrete demonstrations, accessible communication, and real user scenarios.

The fifth lesson is that flexibility is not a weakness in a pilot project. A rigid commitment to original technical assumptions would have created more risk, not less. By allowing substitute assessment, fallback options, and implementation resequencing, the consortium has kept the project aligned with its objectives while reducing the chance of avoidable failure.

Overall mid-term reflection

At mid-term, the main challenges and risks of MALTESE are real but manageable. The project has encountered technical uncertainty, sequencing pressure, and slower-than-planned outward-facing activation. However, it has also shown the capacity to respond through structured coordination, realistic technical assessment, curriculum completion, and practical mitigation planning.

The key lesson so far is simple: pilot projects succeed when they stay honest about constraints and disciplined in execution. MALTESE has not yet reached its most visible implementation phase, but it has created the conditions to enter that phase with more clarity, fewer illusions, and a stronger operational basis.

9. Sustainability, Replicability and Next Steps

- *Mid-term:*
 - *Planned next steps*
 - *Adjustments to the work plan*
- *Final report:*
 - *Sustainability plan (technical, organisational, financial)*
 - *Replication or scaling potential*
 - *Follow-up activities or exploitation intentions*

Sustainability

MALTESE was designed not as a one-off training or standalone pilot, but as a structured pathway for longer-term rural empowerment in Malta. Its sustainability logic rests on the combination of digital tools, practical skills development, stakeholder engagement, mentoring support, and rural-urban market connectivity. This means that the project's value does not depend only on short-term activities completed within the funding period, but on whether the consortium succeeds in leaving behind usable tools, transferable materials, stronger local capacities, and a practical cooperation model that can continue beyond the project lifecycle.

At mid-term, the sustainability potential of the project is already visible in several areas. First, the consortium has established a stable implementation structure with clear partner roles, internal coordination routines, and operational task tracking. This creates continuity and reduces the risk that project outputs remain isolated or disconnected from follow-up action.

Second, the final training curriculum provides an important sustainability asset. It defines a blended and structured learning pathway that can be reused, adapted, and delivered again in future editions or in related rural capacity-building initiatives. Because the curriculum combines preparatory online meetings, face-to-face learning, practical exercises, and follow-up mentoring, it offers a format that can support continued use even after the funded pilot phase ends.

Third, the project's technical approach aims to build sustainability through usability and adaptability rather than through overly complex bespoke development. By clarifying what already exists, what must be adapted, and what substitute solutions are needed, the consortium is building a more realistic basis for future continuity. A technically modest but usable solution is more sustainable than an ambitious system that cannot be maintained or adopted by local users.

Fourth, the project supports sustainability through ecosystem thinking. MALTESE is designed to connect youth, farmers, entrepreneurs, advisors, institutions, and community actors rather than addressing each group in isolation. This increases the chances that project results will remain active through local cooperation, follow-up mentoring, stakeholder partnerships, and practical reuse of training and communication materials.

From a thematic perspective, sustainability is also embedded in the content of the project itself. Circular economy principles, local value chains, direct market access, smart resource use, and sustainable rural business models are integral parts of the MALTESE approach. The project therefore supports sustainability both operationally and conceptually.

Replicability

Replicability is one of the strongest strategic features of MALTESE. Although the project is tailored to the Maltese rural context, its overall logic is highly transferable to other regions facing similar barriers such as fragmented agriculture, low digital confidence, weak rural-urban integration, and limited opportunities for youth-led entrepreneurship.

The replicable elements of MALTESE include the integrated model itself: a combination of digital advisory support, participatory mapping or local planning tools, marketplace logic, practical training, mentoring, and community-oriented mobilisation. This is not a Malta-only formula. It can be adapted in other rural territories where local actors need simple and usable innovation pathways rather than highly technical or resource-intensive systems.

The project also creates several outputs with direct reuse potential. These include the training curriculum, technical specifications, implementation logic, communication methodology, stakeholder engagement approach, and future lessons from platform deployment and user testing. Together, these outputs form a pilot package that can inform similar initiatives in other PoliRuralPlus regions or in wider European rural innovation contexts.

Replicability also depends on realism. One of the useful features of MALTESE is that it openly documents technical gaps, substitute options, and implementation constraints. This increases transfer value because other regions can learn not only from what worked, but also from what had to be adapted. In that sense, MALTESE contributes to replication by offering a grounded model rather than an idealised one.

The project's small-island setting further strengthens its transfer relevance. Malta is a compact but complex territory with strong rural-urban interdependence, limited land, fragmented agricultural activity, and a high need for practical digital support. If the MALTESE model proves workable in this setting, it can offer meaningful lessons for other peripheral, island, or small-scale agricultural regions across Europe.

Next steps

The next implementation phase will focus on converting the current readiness stage into delivery, piloting, and stakeholder-facing results.

The first priority is the refinement of the Agro-Innovation Digital Hub. This includes final decisions on the mapping substitute, continued localisation and usability improvement of JackDaw, clarification of the marketplace pathway, and the progressive preparation of the technical environment for real user interaction. The immediate aim is not to over-engineer the system, but to ensure that the selected configuration is practical, understandable, and suitable for the Maltese target groups.

The second priority is stakeholder mobilisation. The consortium will move from early preparation and initial outreach into more active recruitment and engagement of participants, local actors, and collaborating organisations. This phase will be supported by the project website, social media presence, communication materials, local outreach, and partner networks.

The third priority is the delivery of the MALTESE training activities in Malta. Based on the final curriculum, the consortium will implement the three preparatory online meetings, the face-to-face training programme, and the linked post-training support logic. This phase is expected to become the main bridge between project preparation and practical user involvement.

The fourth priority is the strengthening of dissemination and visibility outputs. The consortium will expand website content, social media communication, training-related visibility, and the planned blog outputs in order to better reflect project progress and connect communication with actual implementation milestones.

The fifth priority is the activation of mentoring, incubation, and follow-up support under WP4. This will help ensure that participants move beyond training attendance and are supported in developing ideas, testing business concepts, and connecting with relevant actors and opportunities.

Finally, the consortium will continue monitoring progress through regular coordination, task tracking, and evidence gathering so that project implementation remains transparent, manageable, and aligned with reporting requirements.

Overall outlook

At mid-term, MALTESE is in a credible transition phase. The project has already secured the essential foundations for sustainability and replicability through governance, technical clarification, training design, communication setup, and early stakeholder contact. The next challenge is execution. If the consortium succeeds in translating these foundations into actual training delivery, usable digital support, stakeholder participation, and visible pilot results, MALTESE will be well positioned to leave behind a durable and transferable model for digital rural empowerment in Malta and beyond.

10. Conclusions

- *Overall assessment of the project*
- *Key achievements*
- *Strategic value of the results*

MALTESE has made credible and meaningful progress during the reporting period. At mid-term, the project can be assessed as operationally well launched, strategically coherent, and sufficiently mature in its planning and preparation phase to move into the next stage of implementation. The consortium has succeeded in translating the original proposal into a functioning project structure with defined partner roles, agreed work package responsibilities, an active coordination rhythm, and a clear implementation pathway.

The most important achievement at this stage is that MALTESE has moved beyond proposal logic and into practical implementation readiness. The project has established its governance and reporting framework, completed the Kick-off Meeting and follow-up coordination process, launched its public visibility channels, and produced the key technical and pedagogical baseline documents needed for the next phase. In particular, the first draft of the technical specifications has clarified the real status of the three digital components, while the final training curriculum has provided a concrete and structured pathway for participant-facing delivery through online preparation, face-to-face training, and post-training support.

A second key achievement is the consolidation of an integrated project model that links digital tools, training, mentoring, stakeholder engagement, and rural-urban connectivity. Even where certain technical components still require adaptation or substitution, the project has preserved the coherence of its core concept. This is strategically important because MALTESE is not merely developing isolated outputs. It is building a practical ecosystem for rural empowerment in Malta, aimed at improving digital confidence, entrepreneurial capacity, and access to more sustainable and connected local development opportunities.

A third achievement is the creation of a strong implementation foundation for future impact. The project now has a validated curriculum, a clarified technical direction, a functioning coordination mechanism, initial dissemination assets, and early stakeholder contact. These may still be enabling results rather than final outcomes, but they are the necessary conditions for successful delivery in the next phase. At mid-term, this should be considered a positive result rather than a limitation, because the project has chosen realism, sequencing, and implementation discipline over premature claims of completion.

The strategic value of MALTESE lies in its potential to offer a replicable, community-oriented model for digital rural transformation in Malta and beyond. The project addresses real structural weaknesses in the Maltese rural context, including fragmented agriculture, limited digital uptake, weak market integration, and low youth attraction to the sector. Its value therefore goes beyond the production of tools or training sessions. MALTESE offers a framework through which digital innovation, circular economy thinking, and stakeholder activation can be combined into a more accessible and usable model for rural communities.

The project also holds strategic value within the wider PoliRuralPlus ecosystem. By adapting PoliRuralPlus concepts and components to the Maltese context, documenting implementation realities, and building reusable training and technical resources, MALTESE contributes lessons that may be relevant to other regions facing similar constraints. Its small-island setting, fragmented farming structure, and emphasis on inclusion make it particularly relevant as a pilot of how digital and social innovation can be translated into practical rural action under real-world conditions.

In conclusion, MALTESE is at a solid and honest mid-term stage. It has not yet achieved its final user-facing impacts, but it has established the structures, documents, direction, and operational readiness needed to pursue them. The next phase will be decisive in converting this preparation into visible results through training delivery, stakeholder mobilisation, technical piloting, and rural-urban innovation activities. On the basis of progress achieved so far, the project can be considered well positioned to deliver meaningful value for rural Malta and to generate transferable knowledge for future replication.

Optional Annexes

- A.1 KoM Agenda
- A.2 KoM Minutes
- A.3 Signed KoM Attendance List
- A.4 Proof of the 3 online meetings
- A.5 D2.1 Technical Specifications Draft
- A.6 D3.1 Final Training Curriculum
- A.7 Trello board screenshot, as supporting evidence of operational task tracking
- A.8 MALTESE website main page
- A.9 PAMEA JackDaw Code Camp 2026 article
- A.10 MALTESE Facebook page
- A.11 MALTESE LinkedIn page