

Youth work as a profession

The Youth Work Profession Bill gives formal professional recognition and status to youth workers. It also regulates the profession and determines the qualifications and conditions under which youth workers can acquire such recognition.

The Bill is one of a range of measures being progressed by the government to promote non-formal learning and strengthen the professional capacity of the youth work sector.

Even though the term 'youth' varies in its relevance, significance and range from country to country it may be defined as a transitional concept. This means that it is viewed as a formative stage between childhood and adulthood, where young people have to negotiate personal and socio-economic changes, to move from dependence to independence and to assume social commitments.

Youth today is characterised by striking uncertainties generated by the process of economic and cultural globalisation. Such experiences are of concern and the need for effective policy to help young people to make the right choices, protect them from exploitation and ensure their participation in society is crucial. Accordingly, the development of a long-term, consensus based, integrated and cross-sectoral youth policy is an important component in supporting and energising young people.

In Malta, youth work is a non-formal learning activity aimed at the personal, social and personal development of people between 13 and 30 years of age.

Youth workers support young people at communities level and help them in realising their potential and in addressing life's challenges as well as its opportunities.

In light of the government's manifesto and agenda for inclusive change, a new national policy for and with young people is needed if the full potential of youth work and non formal learning is to be fully realised in the long term.

Accordingly, a policy advisory group has been established with the task of drafting a new policy for and with young people.

The advisory group will consult with young people, relevant ministries and public entities, the National Youth Council, youth NGOs and all other relevant stakeholders in drafting the new strategy.

The need for a new national youth policy is both opportune and pressing. The initiatives being taken by the government, which include Vote 16 and additional schemes and initiatives for young people as well as the professionalisation of youth work, complement and take account of developments at European level.

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The renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018) is now at its mid-point and there is a focus at present on how the framework should evolve over the duration.

The new financial support framework Erasmus+ will focus on such issues as mobility, innovation and good practice and policy reform over the next seven years.

These and other recent developments, in particular, the establishment of Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ, provide a coherent policy framework that not only facilitates but makes necessary the formal recognition of youth work as a profession.

The Youth Work Profession Bill will give youth workers the same professional status and standing as other professions working with young people such as teachers, social workers, guidance counsellors and psychologists.

Different EU member states have adopted varying approaches on the issue of equivalent to that of other educational or child welfare professionals. Malta is one of the few EU countries to enact specific legislation for the professionalisation of youth work.

Other member states, most noticeably Finland and Ireland, have legislation specifically related to the nature and role of youth work; youth work providers and the provision of such services for youth people.

The Youth Work Act (2001) provides a legal framework for the provision of youth work programmes and services in Ireland by the relevant minister, local education committees and national and regional youth organisations.

It also provides for a national youth work advisory committee and quality assurance measures.

The Finnish Youth Act (2006) aims to support young people's growth and independence as well as their active citizenship and empowerment based on principles of communality, solidarity, equity, multiculturalism, internationalism and health and well-being.

In the context of the government's policy of inclusive change and the development of a new national youth policy, consideration will be given to further legislation to ensure that youth policy and the provision of services for young people is on a statutory basis as provided for in both Ireland and Finland.

Stefan Buontempo is Parliamentary Secretary for Research, Innovation, Youth and Sport.

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