

# Malta & Child Advocacy

By Mary Gauci

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a large impact on children’s rights particularly, their right to Education, health services and recreational/leisure activities. However, this past year has also seen great developments in the field of children’s rights.

Some important milestones include the amendments and entering into force of the Minor Protection Act (Alternative Care). The Office of the Commissioner for Children advocated for this law to be implemented, a law which the Office contributed to so as to ensure that the best interests of children in alternative care are given priority. This Act is extremely important as it guarantees permanency for children in foster care, it has introduced mandatory reporting and has made important provisions for Unaccompanied minors who are seeking asylum to be provided with a guardian.

The Office of the Commissioner for Children was also pleased to note that the technical report that it had prepared, on the incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into Maltese law was welcomed by Cabinet. The required amendments to the civil code have now been placed on the agenda of the Maltese Parliament and are currently at first reading stage. Once children’s rights become part of Maltese law, children will be more likely perceived as rights holders. Incorporation will also guarantee a more extensive realisation of all children’s rights, especially their right to be heard.



The Office of the Commissioner for children has been advocating for children’s rights to be placed at the forefront of urban planning for many years. The Office embarked on a research project entitled child-friendly towns and villages. The project consists of a theoretical aspect being carried out in collaboration with the Centre for Resilience and Socio-emotional Health within the University of Malta and the Environment and Resources Authority. The aim of the study is to explore the views of children, parents and community stakeholders on how Maltese towns and villages may provide more child-friendly spaces and consequently drive key stakeholders to create such spaces in collaboration with children and young people themselves. The main findings of this study were launched at the beginning of December 2021 and clearly indicate that more needs to be done to protect the environment, to reduce pollution and to create more open spaces.

The second aspect of the study consists of a pilot project being carried out with the Hamrun Local Council in collaboration with the Faculty for the Built Environment. Through this project, children will be leading participants in bringing about positive change within their urban locality through the co-creation of green recreational spaces.

This two-part study is one of a kind as it brings together various stakeholders working towards the same aim, that of empowering children to be active within their communities and to ensure that their rights are prioritised.

Even though we are still facing a global pandemic, we have to look ahead and continue to work in the best interests of children. The Office looks forward to more positive developments and to continue to bring children’s views to the forefront when advocating for change.



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