

Draft Discussion Paper



National Strategy On Volunteering

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1 Executive Summary

For decades the strong and energetic volunteer sector was one of the most effective mechanisms that the Maltese community counted on and that Government can engage to further a Social Inclusion agenda in Maltese society for the benefit of individuals, communities and government alike. While the work of the volunteer sector is acknowledged and over the years has left its mark within our community, there is the risk that due to the constraints under which the sector currently operates and the future challenges that it will encounter, its sustainability may be undermined.

In the past decade the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector was established as the body advocating on behalf of the voluntary sector with Government, while engaging with the same sector in its development and growth.

Following the European Year of the Volunteer 2011, the Council started to push further volunteering on the National Agenda which would eventually lead to the establishing of a National Volunteer Strategy establishing a long term vision for the sector.

A National Volunteer Strategy would provide connection and co-ordination across both National and Local Government to support better on all dimensions the volunteer sector and make better use of all available resources. A National Volunteer Strategy would focus on co-ordinating research, consultation with the sector and implementation of reforms to support the sector at an organisational and individual level. A truly national strategy must provide an opportunity for coordinated policy development and decision-making at the national and local levels that will be reflected in specific national and local actions.

To this end, the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector recommends the following:

1. That all levels of government make an in principle commitment to the development of a National Volunteer Strategy with a long term vision to strengthen volunteering in Malta;
2. That an appropriate level of government funding be allocated to support the development and ongoing viability of a National Volunteer Strategy;
3. That a National Volunteer Strategy be sector-driven with input and support from all stakeholders – community, government and business;
4. That the development of a National Volunteer Strategy would serve to expand volunteering infrastructure of national, regional and local organisations avoiding duplication of resources in the creation of parallel infrastructure.

2 Introduction

This discussion paper will:

- Present an overview of the current state of volunteering in Malta;
- Provide a rationale for the development of National Volunteer Strategy;
- Identify the challenges and opportunities for the volunteering sector;
- Outline the focus of a National Volunteer Strategy.

Volunteering has a high social value and is critically important in maintaining social capital. It should be viewed within the broader context of civic engagement, community participation and social inclusion.

While recognising that volunteering is only one mechanism by which social capital develops, community capacity grows and citizens become engaged, the unique role of formal volunteering needs to be recognised and supported by Government as does the more informal forms of voluntary participation and engagement.

Formal volunteering structures and opportunities are an effective means by which people join together in groups to provide a service or generate activities for others, and at the same time find expression of their own citizenship. Many of the services provided by the Australian community service, health and welfare sectors are underpinned by the work and contribution of volunteers, not to mention the important role of volunteers in providing safe and enjoyable community environments through their work in the emergency services, sport and recreation sectors and the environment.

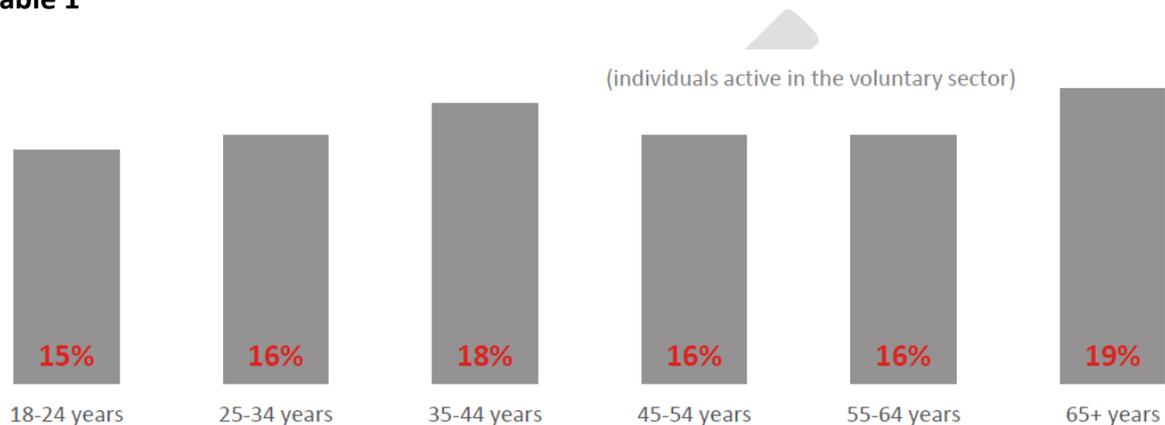
This is not to say that informal participation and mechanisms for broader civic engagement are not important or valid. Indeed they are critical and more study into the linkages between formal and informal participation and the creation of social capital and strong communities is needed.

Protecting and building on the contribution of volunteers requires that public policy and legislation recognise and are supportive of volunteering, and that investment in the volunteering sector itself is geared towards building the capacity of the sector and sustaining it.

3 About Volunteering in Malta

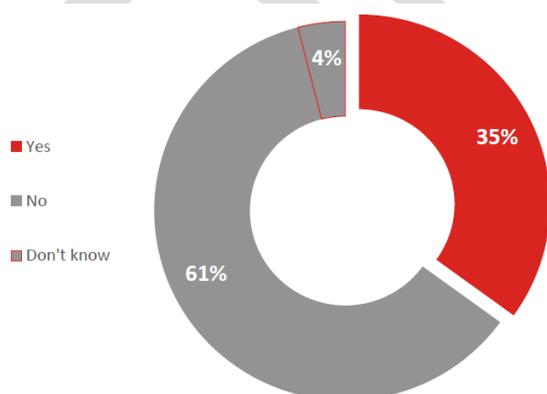
According to a research study carried out by MISCO on behalf of the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector in 2016, 19% of the adult population (18 years +) in Malta and Gozo state that they participate in voluntary way in the community. The ages groups of voluntary participation are found below in Table 1:

Table 1



In the same survey it emerged that a good number of non-participants, when asked whether they would consider to be active in the future., the replies were very encouraging as may be observed in Table 2 below:

Table 2



Though statistics are not yet available, it is agreed by all stakeholders that the voluntary sector has an economic value which needs to be quantified and measured as part of the GDP.

Volunteering in Malta has in the past decades evolved and is involved in a wide spectrum of areas with the participation of volunteers coming from diverse gender, age, ethnicity, and religious as well as educational and economic backgrounds.

Though the data available shows a statistic indicating the approximate number of volunteers participating in the community, it is the belief that some people do not identify what they are doing within their community as 'volunteering' thus the numbers may be larger. On the other hand, though the numbers of volunteers seem to be on the rise, many voluntary organisations have experienced a decrease in volunteer participation over the past years.

Though sector requirements vary, there are many aspects of volunteer involvement in organisations that are the same. A national perspective on the recruitment, management and retention issues for volunteer-involving organisations is a cornerstone of a National Volunteer Strategy.

4 Rationale for a National Strategy on Volunteering

Future challenges we will face as a nation such as the diverse needs of an ageing population, advances in and reliance on technology, and the impacts of climate change, to name a few, will necessitate greater support for our volunteer sector to help keep our communities resilient and strong. As the evidence suggests, volunteer participation cannot be taken for granted and a national approach to engage, recruit and retain volunteers could deliver untold rewards across all sectors utilising volunteers.

The development of the first sector-driven National Volunteer Strategy will provide a historic opportunity for all sectors, including representatives of all levels of government, to focus on a co-ordinated and strategic approach to addressing the diverse and ongoing needs of the volunteer sector.

4.1 Emerging National Perspectives

Since the first legislation addressing the voluntary sector by the enactment of the Voluntary Organisations Act in 2017 the regularisation of the same sector was put under the lens. Furthermore and as a result of the latest evolvement in various aspects of society in the last decades, various reviews of policy and legislation are being undertaken by Government addressing various aspects from health to disability, sports to environment. A recent example is the Subsidiary Legislation 455.12, Commercialisation of Sports Facilities Regulations 2017 and the White Paper published in 2016 on the Social Enterprise Act.

Developing and formalising a national strategic approach to the issues that impact upon the volunteering sector will strengthen the sector's capacity to continue its contribution to Malta's social and economic well-being into the future in a proactive and productive manner.

4.2 Volunteer Related Government Activity: Action Plans, Legislation and Reform

In recent years Government has enacted legislation and is now in the process of reforming related legislation to developed specific action plans to tackle issues relevant to the sector. For example:

- Voluntary Organisations Act 2007, emended in 2018;
- Child Protection Act 2012 emended to address VO issue in 2017;
- Common funding platform to support funding addressed to VOs;
- Private Public Partnerships between Government and VOs in the form of Service Agreements.

The support and collaboration between the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector and Government was crucial to open four Volunteer Centres, financed by Government. This support is a demonstration of government recognition of the importance of volunteering, though it may raise the concern of the independence of the volunteer sector.

4.3 Regulatory Reform

The rationale for developing a National Volunteer Strategy is further supported by newly enacted VO Act amendments which should address outstanding issues related to transparency and accountability as well as to the cut in bureaucracy.

In the past two decades the voluntary sector, mainly due to the its growth in capacity and quality of service, is facing great cost both in its operation as well as in its adherence to regulation, compliance and bureaucracy. Occupational health and safety, insurance, background checking (police and working with children checks), funding applications, accountability and reporting can create significant stresses for organisations that operate with limited resources and uncertain funding futures.

A National Volunteer Strategy would enable the regulatory constraints and burdens that affect the volunteer sector to be acknowledged and actioned at a national level with the support of government. Increasing effectiveness and efficiency is as important to the volunteer sector as it is to business – to work smarter, not harder to achieve critical societal objectives.

4.4 Corporate Partnerships: support beyond Government

An emerging trend, nationally and internationally, is for the development of stronger corporate / not-for-profit partnership models that support shared vision and values around corporate / community investment. This approach goes beyond traditional cheque book partnering, with corporations now looking for long term and sustained partnerships that provide aligned goals and measurable outcomes.

The Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector therefore believes that engagement of the business sector is important to the development, growth and enduring impact a National Volunteering Strategy.

4.5 A National Voice for a National Strategy

Since its setting up in 2008 the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector Current has acted as a voice on volunteering and improved connection and co-ordination on volunteering across the sector and with government. The newly amended VO Act shall establish within the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector a direct representation of the main six umbrella groupings thus giving a specific voice to sectoral issues as a result of the strengthening of the representative role in the sector.

In the past decade the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector (MCVS) has, through its contact with the sector as well as through regular research in various methodologies, has realised that there are various aspects which needed to be addressed in support of the voluntary sector. Some of the areas are:

1. Ensure that all funding issued by government and earmarked for the voluntary sector is specifically taken up by VOs which are enrolled and compliant according to the VO Act. In support of this MCVS drove forward a one-stop-shop structure to inform of and facilitate the access for funding addressed to VOs;
2. Ensure that all new legislation, by-laws and public policies developed at any level of government, which may affect volunteers and their work, work only to facilitate and sustain volunteering.
3. Publicly respect and value in enduring, formal and tangible ways, the essential contribution that volunteers make to building and sustaining the Maltese community. This was strengthened by establishing the National Volunteer Award in 2011 intended to celebrate and promote volunteering;
4. Acknowledge that the growth of the sector and its capacity is not without cost and should be supported and thus MCVS set up structures, which will be further

strengthened in the coming months, so that voluntary organisations are supported and funded to provide training.

5. Ensure excellence in all levels of volunteer involvement and volunteer management in order to encourage, protect and enhance the work of volunteers.

Though progress has been made in addressing actions from the above, there still remains much to be done.

5 Recommendations for the Development of a National Volunteer Strategy

The Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector's vision is to continue to build on the foundations already laid while setting up a pact between volunteers and volunteer organisations with Government to achieve a brighter future for the community through volunteer involvement.

To achieve this respect the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector recommends the following:

1. That all levels of government make an in principle commitment to the development of a National Volunteer Strategy with a long term vision to strengthen volunteering in Malta;
2. That an appropriate level of government funding be allocated to support the development and ongoing viability of a National Volunteer Strategy;
3. That a National Volunteer Strategy be sector-driven with input and support from all stakeholders – community, government and business;
4. That the development of a National Volunteer Strategy would serve to expand volunteering infrastructure of national, regional and local organisations avoiding duplication of resources in the creation of parallel infrastructure.

Question for Discussion:

How relevant is a National Volunteer Strategy to the future of volunteering in Malta?

What issues need to be addressed in a National Volunteer Strategy?

What resources are required for the development of a National Volunteer Strategy?

What would success of a National Volunteer Strategy look like for you?

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the stated recommendations for the development of a National Volunteer Strategy?

6 Conclusion

Over the past century the Maltese community has benefited of the dynamic and essential contribution of volunteers and voluntary organisations which through their work have contributed to the social fabric and well-being of the country. The voluntary sector has also both directly and indirectly contributed economically to the growth of Maltese society. While the sector is there to stay and, through its ups and downs, will strive and survive, the sector cannot be taken for granted.

The demand of the sector has increase not only in a quantitative perspective but also at the qualitative level, thus increasing ever more the financial burden on the same sector to train its volunteers and equip its organisations to support the emerging expectations. Due to this evolvement of social reality it is evident that while the culture of volunteering remains strong, certain sectors are experiencing declines in volunteer participation, which has serious implications for future service provision and social inclusion endeavours.

Volunteer organisations face increasing regulatory requirements and challenges. These trends and impacts require full attention at a national level to enable the volunteer sector to achieve greater efficiencies and for individual volunteer effort to thrive while the sector is adhering to the same regulations.

The Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector takes the lead in the discussion of the merits of a National Volunteer Strategy to map the future of volunteering in Malta with input from all sectors – community, business and all levels of government.

Investment in a National Volunteer Strategy will have the benefit of greater coordination of effort and resources, minimisation of duplication and fragmentation across the sector, and provide the wealth of opportunities, flexibility and satisfaction that volunteers seek.
