

POSITION PAPER REGARDING THE WHITE PAPER ‘TOWARDS THE STRENGTHENING OF THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON THE RESPONSIBLE USE OF CANNABIS’

In the light of the recently published White Paper regarding the responsible use of cannabis, the Malta Catholic Youth Network (MCYN), an entity of the Archdiocese of Malta, has put together the following observations and recommendations, which it is hereby presenting for further consideration.

Throughout the years, MCYN has consistently supported recreational activities which aid the young person’s development and community building, especially the work done through various youth groups, centres, associations and voluntary organisations. However, MCYN is against the use of any psychoactive and/or harmful substance, whether it be legal or not.

Our main concern is that this White Paper may lead to the normalisation and popularisation of cannabis use amongst adolescents and young people, who may be misled into believing that cannabis use has no harmful effects.

1. The difference between recreational and medicinal cannabis

- a. In the current White Paper, although initially the distinction is made between Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and Cannabidiol (CBD), it does not make a clear distinction between the benefits and harmful effects of either in the rest of the White Paper, speaking of them as though their harmful and beneficial effects seem to be equal.
- b. In order to have a fruitful national debate on the responsible use of cannabis, the two different modes of cannabis use – responsible use and medicinal use – should be left completely separate, and thus be discussed in two different White Papers.
- c. Moreover, the current White Paper should only discuss the responsible use of cannabis, and should include scientific references to the levels of THC and CBD.

In the case of responsible use of cannabis:

2. Decriminalisation

- a. We agree with the decriminalisation of cannabis for personal use by adults in such a way that those with substance dependence are not given a prison sentence but the opportunity to seek help from possible addiction.

b. We agree with the proposition that minors in possession of cannabis for personal use should not be subject to proceedings before the Courts of Criminal Jurisdiction, but to administrative proceedings before the Commissioner for Justice and the Drug Offenders Rehabilitation Board.

3. Educational campaigns

a. The starting point of such an educational campaign should be the preventative measures that should be taken to stay away from substances such as cannabis.

b. The risks and benefits should not be presented on equal ground, as the risks of this psychoactive substance heavily outweigh the benefits. A clear distinction between recreational and medicinal cannabis should be made when discussing its uses and effects.

c. The campaign should first aim at promoting other forms of recreational activity (such as sport and art) in order to reduce the use of psychoactive and/or harmful substances.

d. Funding for facilities and policies to promote alternative forms of recreational activity (such as sport and art) should also be prioritised.

4. The safeguarding of minors and the vulnerable

As studies have shown, the use of cannabis by young people below the age of 21-25 heavily increases the risks of cannabis' harmful effects. We propose that the legislation makes provisions that not only safeguard minors and impede the use of cannabis among minors, but also protect and support adults with a higher risk of harm (such as those between the ages of 18 and 25 and other vulnerable people).

Conclusion

In conclusion, mindful of lobbying groups trying to legalise the use of cannabis, MCYN believes that the repercussions of this lobbying will be felt by the most vulnerable in society and those who are least informed.