

## 10.8 Current debates and reforms

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### Forthcoming policy developments

Ireland's [National Youth Strategy](#) and [National Policy Framework for Children and Young People](#) both ended in 2020. Both documents recognised benefits of youth work. The government has announced its intention to publish a new youth strategy and new framework. The strategy is [reported](#) to include mechanisms for the voice and views of young people to be part of decision-making at community, county and national levels. It is also expected to include a 2- to 3-year Action Plan. Currently timelines for publishing these documents are not available.

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth is currently developing a Statement of Strategy 2021 – 2023. The Strategy will be informed by the Programme for Government, key Government priorities, policy frameworks and other significant issues. It will set out the Department's high-level goals for the period 2021-2023. Consultations took place during October-November 2020. It is expected to be published in 2021.

### Ongoing debates

#### A lack of reliable Wifi restricting digital youth work

A lack of reliable broadband has been criticised for limiting digital youth work. This issue had previously been raised, for example in NYCI's 2019 research into [Youth Work in Rural Ireland](#) identified a lack of quality broadband infrastructure in some rural areas as a significant limitation to digital youth work. This problem has been further highlighted during the Covid-19 pandemic. NYCI's [Review of the Youth Work Sector Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

identified broadband access and connectivity as particularly affecting rural youths and young Travellers.

This issue was expected to be addressed by the National Broadband Plan. However, there has [criticism](#) of gaps in the scheme and its roll out by the Oireachtas (Irish legislature) Committee on Transport and Communications Networks.

### **National Digital Plan and ICT Support Unit for the youth work sector**

The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) called for the development and resourcing of a [National Digital Plan for the youth work sector](#), to support the sector to embed social and digital media in youth work practice. NYCI recommended that such a plan should incorporate supports to promote continuous training and professional development for all youth workers and include measurable actions to:

- encourage and support youth workers to embed social and digital media in their youth work practice
- enhance ICT capacity and awareness in youth work in partnership with relevant Government Departments and stakeholders
- encourage a culture of innovation and creativity
- increase investment in the ICT infrastructure to support and enhance the use of social and digital media in youth work and improve broadband infrastructure throughout the country particularly in rural regions
- provide information, advice and tools to promote safer, more responsible and more effective use of the social and digital media.

NYCI also recommended the establishment of an ICT Support Unit for the Youth Work sector, which would be responsible for implementing the National Digital Development Plan. The Unit would support youth workers in all aspects of ICT use in their youth work practice. This would include coordinating training, offering on-line safety guidance and assisting youth organisations to develop organisational policy on use of ICT.

### **The effect of Covid-19 on Youth Work**

The global Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on youth work in Ireland. However, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) confirming that the Irish government considers youth work as an essential service.

The DCEDIY has issued [Guidance for Youth Work Organisations - Informed by the Government's Resilience & Recovery 2020-2021: Plan for Living with COVID-19](#). This guidance was prepared within the broader context of the Government's [Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021: Plan for Living with COVID-19](#), and the [Return to Work Safely Protocol](#).

Details on the pandemic's effects to youth work in Ireland are described in the National Youth Council's [Review of the Youth Work Sector Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).