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Strengthening young people's wellbeing through multidisciplinary measures

National youth work and youth policy programme
2024–2027

Strengthening young people's wellbeing through multidisciplinary measures

National youth work and youth policy
programme 2024–2027

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Abstract

The National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme is a horizontal programme, which the Government adopts every four years with the aim of promoting a good environment for young people to grow up and live. In the Programme, the Government defines its youth policy objectives and the measures to achieve them. The Programme also outlines youth work policy decisions, including the priorities determining the selection of national centres of excellence in the youth sector for this programme period, and sets Finland's national objectives for European and international activities in the youth sector.

The Programme has been adopted as a government resolution. The Youth Act (1285/2016) forms the Programme's legislative basis. Provisions on the Programme are laid down in section 5 of the Act and supplemented by the Government Decree on Youth Work and Youth Policy (211/2017). This Programme is the third of its kind.

In addition to the Youth Act and the Government Decree issued on the basis of it, the programme content is guided by the Government Programme's entries on young people. The 2024–2027 Programme is structured under the theme of using broad-based measures across administrative boundaries to improve the wellbeing of young people. With the help of the Programme, the Government strengthens the cross-administrative management of the measures improving young people's wellbeing.

Keywords youth policy, youth work, young people, well-being, multisectorality

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Vahvistetaan nuorten hyvinvointia monialaisin toimenpitein Valtakunnallinen nuorisotyön ja -politiikan ohjelma (VANUPO) 2024–2027

Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriön julkaisuja 2024:23

Teema

Nuoriso

Julkaisija Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö

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Kieli suomi

Sivumäärä

46

Tiivistelmä

Valtakunnallinen nuorisotyön ja -politiikan ohjelma VANUPO on valtioneuvoston nelivuotiskausittain hyväksymä poikkihallinnollinen ohjelma, jonka tavoitteena on edistää nuorten kasvu- ja elinoloja. Ohjelmassa hallitus määrittelee nuorisopoliittiset tavoitteensa ja toimenpiteet niiden saavuttamiseksi. Lisäksi ohjelma linjaa nuorisotyötä, mukaan lukien ohjelmakaudelle valittavien nuorisoalan valtakunnallisten osaamiskeskusten valinnan painopisteistä sekä asettaa Suomen kansalliset tavoitteet nuorisoalan eurooppalaiselle ja kansainväliselle toiminnalle.

Ohjelma on hyväksytty valtioneuvoston periaatepäätöksensä. VANUPO:n säädösperusta on nuorisolaissa (1285/2016). Lain 5 §:n säännöstä ohjelmasta täydentää valtioneuvoston asetus nuorisotyöstä ja -politiikasta (211/2017). Nyt laadittava ohjelma on järjestyksessään kolmas.

Nuorisolain ja sen perusteella annetun valtioneuvoston asetuksen lisäksi VANUPO:n sisältöä ohjaavat hallitusohjelman nuoria koskevat kirjaukset. Vuosille 2024–2027 hyväksytyn VANUPO:n teemana on nuorten hyvinvoinnin vahvistaminen laaja-alaisin toimenpitein ja hallinnonalojen rajat ylittäen. VANUPO:n avulla hallitus tiivistää nuorten hyvinvointityön poikkihallinnollista johtamista.

Asiasanat nuorisopolitiikka, nuorisotyö, nuoret, hyvinvointi, monialaisuus

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De ungas välbefinnande främjas genom sektorsövergripande åtgärder Riksomfattande program för ungdomsarbete och ungdomspolitik (RUNGPO) 2024–2027

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Referat

Det riksomfattande programmet för ungdomsarbete och ungdomspolitik RUNGPO är ett förvaltningsövergripande program som statsrådet godkände vart fjärde år och vars syfte är att främja de ungas uppväxt- och levnadsförhållanden. I programmet fastställer regeringen sina ungdomspolitiska mål och åtgärder för att uppnå dem. Dessutom drar programmet upp riktlinjer för ungdomsarbetet, inklusive prioriteringarna i urvalet av riksomfattande kompetenscentrum på ungdomsområdet som väljs för programperioden, samt ställer upp Finlands nationella mål för den europeiska och internationella verksamheten på ungdomsområdet.

Programmet har godkänts som statsrådets principbeslut. Författningsgrunden för RUNGPO finns i ungdomslagen (1285/2016). Bestämmelsen om programmet i 5 § kompletteras av statsrådets förordning om ungdomsarbete och ungdomspolitik (211/2017). Det program som nu utarbetas är det tredje i ordningen.

Utöver ungdomslagen och den förordning av statsrådet som utfärdats med stöd av den styrs innehållet i RUNGPO av regeringsprogrammets skrivningar om unga. Temat för RUNGPO, som godkändes för 2024–2027, är att stärka de ungas välbefinnande genom omfattande åtgärder och över förvaltningsgränserna. Med hjälp av statsrådets förvaltningsenhet intensifierar regeringen den förvaltningsövergripande ledningen av välfärdsarbetet för unga.

Nyckelord

ungdomspolitik, ungdomsarbete, ungdomar, välfärd, branschöverskridande

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INTRODUCTION

In 2022, there were almost 1.8 million young people under the age of 29 in Finland. In this programme, the core target group of youth policy is young people aged 12–25 who in our country number almost 870,000. The biggest changes in a young person's life take place during this period. They reach the adulthood, which significantly increases their rights and obligations. In this phase of life, their body and emotional life change dramatically. In the first years of the phase, they usually distance themselves from their parents and friends become increasingly important to them. Around halfway through the phase, most young people move out of their childhood home. For most young people, the phase also includes post-compulsory studies and the transition to working life. However, each individual's path from childhood through adolescence to adulthood is naturally different, so the challenges for young people's wellbeing and growth are also individual and come at different times.

The National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme (VANUPO) is a horizontal programme which the Government adopts every four years with the aim of promoting a good environment for young people to grow up and live in. In the programme, the Government defines its youth policy objectives and the measures to achieve them. The programme also outlines youth work policy decisions, including the priorities determining the selection of national youth work centres of expertise for this programme period, and sets Finland's national objectives for European and international activities concerning youth. The programme is adopted as a government resolution. The Youth Act (1285/2016) forms the programme's legislative basis. Provisions on the programme are laid down in section 5 of the Youth Act and supplemented by the Government Decree on Youth Work and Youth Policy (211/2017). This VANUPO programme is the third of its kind.

The Youth Act and the Government Decree issued on its basis give VANUPO its structure. The content of the programme is determined by the entries in the Government Programme concerning young people. For the period 2024–2027, VANUPO will implement the following entry of the Programme of Prime Minister Orpo's Government: *"The Government will draw up a broad-based action plan to prevent social exclusion among young people, and to address the gaps in wellbeing and mental health problems. We will reinforce multiprofessional work to promote*

young people's wellbeing." The programme will be implemented through broad-based measures and across administrative branches, focusing on the above-mentioned objectives in accordance with the Government Programme. With the help of VANUPO, the Government can strengthen the cross-administrative management of the measures improving young people's wellbeing.

Youth policy means improving the growth and living conditions of young people in various areas of society. When preparing and making decisions, matters are examined from the point of view of the wellbeing of the young population group.

Youth work refers to supporting young people's growth, transition into independence and inclusion in society. Youth work is an educational activity centred on interaction with young people, one on one or in groups.

VANUPO has a strong link to the National Child Strategy. The National Child Strategy is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is binding on Finland. According to the convention, every person under 18 years of age is a child. On the basis of the Child Strategy committee report, a cross-administrative implementation plan is drawn up for each government term to implement the Child Strategy's guidelines. The implementation plan for the current government term is the second of its kind. The measures of the plan are strongly linked to all three baskets of VANUPO 2024–2027. Actions in the implementation of VANUPO and the Child Strategy will be coordinated.

1 State of young people's growth and living conditions and response to wellbeing challenges

Most of the young people in Finland are doing well. The number of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) has decreased significantly, and more and more young people are finding work. In recent years, suicides among young people have decreased, although they are still one of the most common causes of death among young people in certain age groups. However, even after the crises of the past few years, young people's faith in the future and trust in institutions have not decreased and remain at a good level. Young people's trust in society is one of Finland's most important resources and opportunities.

Young people are not a uniform group, so their wellbeing is also polarised. Socio-economic background and the situation at home strongly influence young people's opportunities to get an education, work, maintain their health and engage in hobbies. This means that young people may have very different starting points for growth and development, and it is important to take into account support for young people's families in promoting their wellbeing. Social inequality, as well as the accumulation and transfer of problems from one generation to another, sharpen the differences between the life realities and starting points of children and young people. The importance of the period of adolescence for a person's health and wellbeing over their entire lifespan must be recognised in order to support the growth of children and young people.

Approximately one in five young people in lower secondary school, vocational school or general upper secondary school experiences moderate or severe anxiety. One in three higher education students suffers from symptoms of anxiety or depression. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, an increase in anxiety, depression and school exhaustion was discernible, especially among girls and young women. The number of young people needing and receiving different kinds of support in primary and lower secondary education has increased, and only one in three young people exercise enough for their health.

Around 40% of students have such a low level of physical capacity that it makes daily life more difficult. Insufficient physical activity affects people's ability to study and cope at work. It also poses a threat to maintaining national defence capability and keeping up general wellbeing. Young people's independent everyday physical activity is reduced by things like motorisation, and land use planning does not always support young people's everyday physical activity. Non-compliance with the nutrition recommendations, low physical activity and increased obesity have a negative impact on the health and ability to cope of young people. Regular exercise, good physical shape, adequate sleep, healthy eating habits and good motor skills are also linked to learning. According to the Children and Youth Leisure Survey, sports remain the most popular leisure activity among young people. Young people's use of digital devices continues to increase and is an important part of the everyday lives of many young people, for example through the use of services, studies, play, hobbies and community. While the benefits of digitalisation are indisputable, the continuous use of digital devices also poses a threat to young people's concentration, mental health and physical activity, and may also expose them to online abuse, disinformation, propaganda and, consequently, radicalisation.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected young people's lives in many different ways in the years 2020–2022. The pandemic years brought long queues, for example to mental health services. According to the School Health Promotion study, young people's experience of inclusion also deteriorated during the COVID-19 pandemic in the entire age group. According to the Finnish Student Health and Wellbeing Survey (KOTT 2021), one in four female and one in three male higher education students reported not feeling like they belong to any of the groups related to their studies. In recent years, several studies have raised concerns about the segregation and clustering of young people's participation in society. In the long term, this phenomenon may erode social trust.

At the end of 2021, there were 113,115 persons aged 12–29 from a foreign background in Finland, which amounts to 11% of the age group. Finland's population from a foreign background has a younger age structure than the population from a Finnish background, and the proportion of children and young people from foreign backgrounds will increase in the coming years, especially in large cities. In its report on the wellbeing of young people in 2023, the State Youth Council states that, for example, young people from a foreign background, with disabilities or belonging to a sexual or gender minority are worse off than average by many indicators.

Financial challenges, non-payment records and over-indebtedness affect young people's ability to function in many different ways and hinder their transition to independent living. Over-indebtedness is a risk factor for social exclusion and one of the reasons for the rising inequality in Finnish society.

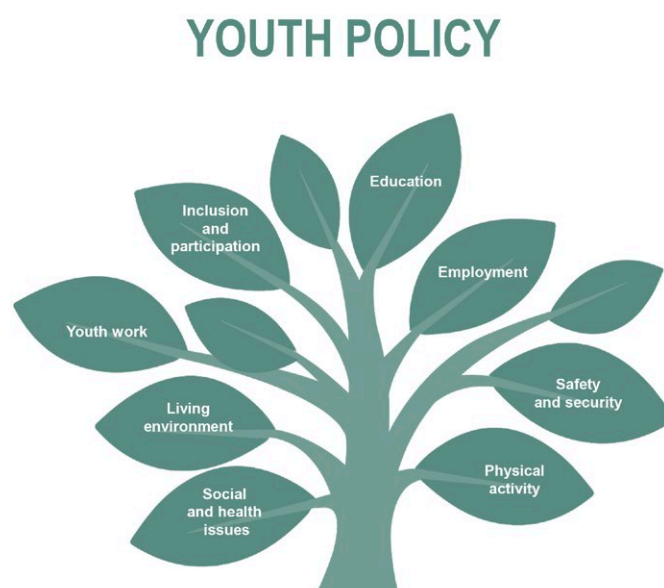
Although juvenile delinquency as a whole has decreased in recent decades, police statistics show a recent turn for the worse. Children and young people under the age of 18 commit more serious and brutal crimes than before. For example, youth-to-youth violence, property crimes, bragging about criminal acts and posting about said acts on social media have increased, with a particular rise in serious acts of violence by children under the age of 15. In recent years, a form of digital violence has become more common where acts of violence and humiliation of the victim are recorded and shared on social media. There are also new kinds of phenomena related to crime, such as the gang forming. According to the police, about 250 people in Finland are members of or associated with street gangs, most of them male and, in most cases, from a foreign background. In Finland, street gang crime has typically been linked to disadvantage, unemployment and school difficulties among young people.

The increase in sharing different types of hate speech and intentionally misleading or false information weakens young people's sense of security and willingness to participate in society. Young people, especially those from a minority background, are exposed to hate speech and harassment in their everyday environments. These experiences have serious detrimental effects on mental health, a sense of security and trust in public authorities. Human trafficking against young people also occurs in Finland, but it often remains hidden. Cases have been reported where a young person has been forced to commit or pressured into committing property, drug, violent or other crimes.

All of the aforementioned obstacles to the wellbeing of young people can be influenced by measures taken by the state, wellbeing services counties and municipalities, also taking into account support for families during childhood and adolescence. The growth and living conditions of young people can be improved through coherent, research-based and coordinated youth policy. The programme was prepared using the most current information on the living conditions of young people such as Youth Barometers, indicators describing the wellbeing experienced by children and young people, School Health Promotion studies, the Children and Youth Leisure Survey and the Youth Wellbeing Report.

2 Towards coordinated and cross-sectoral youth policy

No specific administrative branch or measure can solve the youth wellbeing deficit alone. Young people, their wellbeing and their immediate community, not various customer relationships or systems, are at the core of comprehensive youth policy. It is important for the wellbeing of young people that they have access to, for example, high-quality education and hobbies, employment services and health services.



A prerequisite for successful youth policy is that youth policy guidelines and choices are based on research data. Research on young people and their growth environments has been carried out in Finland for a long time. Data has been produced both through long-term monitoring such as Youth Barometers, School Health Promotion studies and the Finnish Student Health and Wellbeing Survey, as well as through topical studies such as data collected during the COVID-19 pandemic on the impact of the pandemic on the growth and living conditions of young people. Effective youth policy is managed by using the results of research information concerning young people as a basis for youth policy guidelines and

decision-making. Dialogue with researchers contributes to the success of youth policy. Young people also need knowledge and skills to understand the studied information and to distinguish its meaning from other communication. For example, scientific knowledge builds a young person's education and worldview in addition to society's scientific capital.

The Government strengthens comprehensive and coherent youth policy that supports the wellbeing of young people. Youth policy contributes, for example, to young people taking an active part in society, finding meaningful work, education and hobbies, and accessing the health and social services they need. Implementing successful youth policy requires clear policy coordination and leadership, as well as cross-cutting policies.

According to the Programme of Prime Minister Orpo's Government, *"The Government will give overall leadership responsibility to the Ministry of Education and Culture for wellbeing work among young people. However, several ministries will be involved in working together with the Ministry of Education and Culture in this area."* Comprehensive and broad-based youth policy defines common objectives, the role of each actor in the implementation of the measures that achieve the objectives and indicators of the success of youth policy. Youth policy is led by the Government's Minister of Youth, Sport and Physical Activity. The leadership methods include regular discussion of youth policy issues in the Ministerial Working Group on Children, Youth and Families, as well as bilateral or, if necessary, multilateral coordination meetings of the Minister of Youth, Sport and Physical Activity with the ministers with key youth policy issues in their remit.

A steering group and cooperation groups in accordance with the measures will be assembled for the implementation of the VANUPO programme. In terms of youth wellbeing work, the permanent secretaries of the key ministries will form a steering group for steering and coordinating the implementation of VANUPO, chaired by the Minister of Youth, Sport and Physical Activity. Groups consisting of ministries' expert officials will be assembled around VANUPO's key measures to coordinate and carry out monitoring of the measures agreed in the programme, as well as to inform the steering group formed by the permanent secretaries about the status of the implementation of the measures and any need to speed up the measures.

The Government's youth policy work will be supported by youth advocacy groups based on expertise by experience to be established in connection with ministries to help support the voice of young people in the implementation of youth policy. The activities of the youth advocacy groups will be piloted at the Ministry of Education and Culture. The central actor in the knowledge base and indicator work required

for the management of youth policy will be the State Youth Council in cooperation with other relevant parties (such as the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, the Finnish National Agency for Education and Statistics Finland).

VANUPO also recognises other strategies, programmes and processes related to the development of the growth and living conditions of young people. The objectives and measures will be coordinated, and their implementation monitored through VANUPO.

VANUPO outlines the current priorities of the state's youth policy, so the main responsibility for implementing the measures that develop the growth and living conditions of young people listed therein lies with the public administration. Schools, universities and other educational institutes play an important role. In addition, NGOs as well as parishes and other religious communities are important actors in the work for the wellbeing of young people. Sports, cultural and youth activities are key fields of action for the cohesion of civil society and the formation of social capital, which can be leveraged to prevent social exclusion and the emergence of substance abuse and mental health problems.

3 Government youth policy objectives and measures

The Government's youth policy objectives and measures to promote young people's wellbeing have been divided into three baskets, which the Government will implement between 2024 and 2027. In the early stages of the implementation, a more detailed schedule of measures and indicators of the success of the activities will be defined.

Basket I: A path forward for every young person

In accordance with the Government Programme, every young person has the preconditions to build a good life and to pursue their dreams. Support for learning will be clarified. Close cooperation between municipalities and wellbeing services counties is required to ensure the functioning of the student welfare system. The current model of labour market support will be reformed. An extensive initial assessment will be ensured for people who have become unemployed, after which they will receive individual and employment-promoting services linked to certain obligations. In particular, young people under 30 years of age will be quickly referred to employment services. At the same time, sufficient services and personal encounters will be ensured. In accordance with the Government Programme, every young person can pursue at least one leisure activity of their choice, paying particular attention to young people who either do not have a leisure activity or who have dropped out.

In the consultation related to the preparation of VANUPO, young people mentioned the prevention of social exclusion as one of the main societal challenges to be solved. According to young people, hobbies are one of their most important things for wellbeing.

Based on the 2023 School Health Promotion study, the proportion of pupils in grades 8 and 9 of comprehensive school and students of general upper secondary education and vocational education and training (VET) who were satisfied with their lives had decreased slightly from the previous survey in 2021. The proportion of young people who enjoyed school had decreased in all but VET. Among first-year and second-year VET students, 83% of boys and 73% of girls enjoyed their studies.

According to the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC), it is particularly important for a young person to feel part of their school or university community and to be accepted there as they are. An experience of not belonging to the community may be one reason for absenteeism, for example.

According to Statistics Finland, in 2022, young people aged 15–24 who were not in employment, education, training (NEET) or compulsory military service numbered 45,000, or 7% of the entire age group. Most of them, 32,000, were aged 20–24. The number of NEET youth and their proportion among their age group remained unchanged from 2021.

Hobbies have many positive effects on the wellbeing, growth and development of children and young people. Hobbies and volunteering help them learn new skills, make friends, belong to a community and succeed and fail in a safe environment. A skilled instructor has a great significance for and impact on the wellbeing of children. In Finland, NGOs play a key role in organising leisure and voluntary activities. According to the results of the Children and Youth Leisure Survey, nine out of ten young people have a hobby. Physical activity is still the most popular leisure activity, but 20–36% of boys and 30–46% of girls had very little active leisure time, less than an hour a week.

Main ministries involved:

Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry of Education and Culture

Objective 1: Young people are doing well in school and educational institutions

Measures:

- 1.1. In terms of primary and lower secondary education, general upper secondary education and VET, a functional and uninterrupted student welfare system is ensured through cooperation between municipalities, wellbeing services counties and education providers. The health and wellbeing of higher education students is promoted through cooperation between the Finnish Student Health Service (FSHS) and higher education institutions. Prevention, low-threshold support, presence and increasing the community spirit strengthen the wellbeing of young people of different ages and reduce the need for mental health services. The role of youth work in schools and other educational

institutes will be strengthened and clarified to ensure that the work method is better identified as a key method to increase the sense of community and the number of safe adults in a young person's everyday life.

- 1.2. The administrative branches of the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health have joint responsibility for the development of community-based student welfare as part of the preventive multidisciplinary work as a whole. The actors of the administrative branches in this are the education providers, the student welfare services of wellbeing services counties and the services of the Finnish Student Health Service. In order to promote community-based student welfare, organisers of primary and lower secondary education, general upper secondary education and VET must define the available methods of operation of community-based student welfare and the related measures for monitoring and promoting the health, the safety and wellbeing of the student and the study community, for example with regard to monitoring participation in education and training, preventing absenteeism and related measures, as well as measures to prevent interruptions in education and training. Student orientation, early intervention and multidisciplinary cooperation are also the operating principles of the student health care in higher education.
- 1.3. The joy of learning, learning itself and school satisfaction will be promoted by increasing the cooperation of education providers with arts and cultural actors, municipalities and wellbeing services counties. Diverse and interactive learning environments, youth and sport services, recreational activities and cultural and art education methods will be utilised. Cultural education plans will be promoted in municipalities that do not have them yet.
- 1.4. Well-functioning individual student welfare and student health care services are also very important in ensuring students' wellbeing and must be easily accessible to students. Wellbeing services counties provide services primarily at schools and other educational institutions. The Finnish Student Health Service provides services nationwide at localities with higher education institutions. The flow of information between different operators will be ensured, for example with the necessary legislative changes. Student guidance will utilise processes borrowed from the lifestyle guidance offered by wellbeing services

counties. Lifestyle guidance covers nutrition, sleep, physical activity, sobriety, cultural wellbeing and mental health.

- 1.5. The results of the Move! physical fitness measurement and feedback system will be better communicated such as to motivate and support physical and lifestyle changes in young people. Physical activity counselling and support for physical activity for young people, such as sports coach activities, Finnish Schools on the Move activities and the Work Capacity Certificate, will be strengthened.

Objective 2: Every young person can pursue a hobby of their choice at a low threshold

Measures:

- 2.1. The availability of low-threshold leisure activities will be increased, paying special attention to the access of young people with special needs. The use of the methods of outreach leisure activities will also be extended beyond the Finnish Model for Leisure Activities. The purpose of the method is to find young people at risk of social exclusion and guide them to hobbies.
- 2.2. The knowledge base on the accessibility of hobbies will be strengthened, especially from the point of view of young people with sensory impairments and other special needs, for example to develop the Finnish Model for Leisure Activities. The organisers of leisure activities will be encouraged to take advantage of proven ways to interact with families.
- 2.3. The pathways from participation in low-threshold leisure activities towards long-term, deeper activities will be strengthened. The organisers of the activities will be encouraged to offer paths in the activities such as to enable finding the most suitable way of participating in leisure activities for each young person.

Objective 3: The number of young people who are not in employment, education or training decreases

Measures:

- 3.1. Employment, youth, education, social and health services for young people, including mental health, substance abuse and addiction services for minors, will be strengthened with national guidance so that they operate in a timely, multidisciplinary and coordinated manner. It will be ensured, through guidance and training, that services aimed at young people take into account their family and other communities important to them. The reception capacity of working life will be strengthened in accordance with the Government Programme.
- 3.2. The position and implementation of multidisciplinary low-threshold services for young people, such as Ohjaamo one-stop guidance centres and the like, will be strengthened at the regional and local level. The multidisciplinary activities of Ohjaamo centres will be supported in order to reach and bring NEET youth to the path of employment and education by strengthening the role and presence of wellbeing services counties in Ohjaamo activities. Physical activity counselling as well as guidance for youth, culture and sports leisure activities will be included in Ohjaamo activities. A connection to the services of wellbeing services counties, such as substance abuse and mental health services, will be ensured through Ohjaamo activities.
- 3.3. The implementation and development of youth workshops and outreach youth work as a multidisciplinary and preventive service will be continued. The comprehensive coaching methods of youth workshop activities will be developed and young people will be given the opportunity to complete compulsory education and competence modules smaller than qualifications in workshop activities with the necessary legislative changes. Efforts will be made to improve the availability of services in both national languages and the Sámi languages.
- 3.4. In accordance with the Government Programme, the Health Care Act, the Social Welfare Act and child welfare legislation will be reformed. This work will utilise VANUPO's intersectoral cooperation, especially with regard to youth services. Youth services will be implemented as a coordinated whole, with smooth cooperation between municipalities,

wellbeing services counties and the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kela). One of the key areas of joint development in this will be the support for young people through transition into adulthood. Youth homelessness will be reduced as part of the programme aiming to eradicate long-term homelessness by 2027 referred to in the Government Programme. The activities of the programme concerning young people will be taken into account in the implementation of VANUPO.

- 3.5. The child welfare legislation reform will ensure that the child's best interests, wellbeing and safety are realised, for example by defining the use of restrictive measures more clearly. Child welfare authorities and foster care units must have concrete resources and adequate powers to carry out their work. A service structure with a focus on early support, multiprofessional work for families with children and non-institutional services in child welfare will be promoted. Proper functioning of the treatment and rehabilitation chain of seriously violent young people will be looked into. The authorities will be obliged to cooperate actively and ensure sufficient powers and range of means to find a missing child placed or taken into care and to return the child quickly and safely.
- 3.6. The social security reform will be implemented through government projects reforming social security legislation and through the work of the Parliamentary Social Security Committee. The social security reform will take into account the special needs arising from young people's phases in life and the benefits and services for young people as a whole. Young people will be consulted and involved regarding their views on social security and its development. The work of the Social Security Committee will utilise research data on social security for children, young people and families.

Basket II: Diverse information and tools to support young people's mental health

In accordance with the Government Programme, the rising mental health issues among young people in particular call for determined efforts. The availability of mental health services will be improved promptly.

Mental health issues cause concern among young people, and they see mental health problems as being among the causes of social exclusion. In the youth consultation related to the preparation of VANUPO, young people stressed the need to reduce school pressures, increase low-threshold services and improve the quality of said services. In the consultation, young people highlighted mental health problems as being among the most important issues to be solved in terms of health.

According to the 2023 School Health Promotion study, approximately one-third of girls in the 8th and 9th grades in primary and lower secondary education, general upper secondary education and VET felt their health status was average or poor. The corresponding proportions for boys were 16–20%. Approximately one-third of girls in the 8th and 9th grades of primary and lower secondary education, general upper secondary education and VET experienced moderate to severe anxiety. Anxiety has increased from previous surveys, especially among 8th-grade and 9th-grade girls.

Main ministries involved:

Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Education and Culture

Objective 4: Young people have access to timely and high-quality mental health services

Measures:

- 4.1. The implementation of the National Mental Health Strategy and Programme for Suicide Prevention 2020–2030 will be continued. In this context, the strengthening of mental health skills in the services for children and young people will be promoted, measures will be taken to promote the mental health of young people belonging to gender minorities, the phenomena of eating disorders of children and young people, including services and treatments, will be investigated, and suicide prevention measures will be continued, for example to help children and young people in a vulnerable position or situation. The measures to be taken are based, in particular, on the focus of the mental health strategy “Developing positive mental health in the daily lives of children and young people.”

- 4.2. It is intended that a Government proposal concerning the maximum waiting time for access to therapy will be submitted to Parliament for consideration as a finance act in autumn 2024. In order to implement the maximum waiting time, additional funding of EUR 35 million per year will be allocated to the wellbeing services counties. The root causes of mental health problems and anxiety will be investigated and support measures targeted accordingly.
- 4.3. Particular attention will be paid to services for children with neuropsychiatric symptoms and support for their parents, including quick diagnosis and quick access to help. In connection with this, there will be a co-creation project coordinated by Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kela). In addition, additional fixed-term funding will be directed to the rehabilitation of children and young people with neuropsychiatric disorders and rehabilitation services through Kela's discretionary rehabilitation.
- 4.4. The low-threshold support for mental health, such as the ONNI activities of Ohjaamo centres to strengthen psychosocial wellbeing and inclusion, as well as walk-in and chat services, will be strengthened. Wellbeing services counties will also be encouraged to guide young people into culture and sports to increase their wellbeing and inclusion. Proven tools for this include lifestyle guidance, cultural referrals and cultural passports, as well as trained volunteer culture companions. Consideration will be given to the important impact of the living environment on human health and wellbeing.

Objective 5: Meaningful leisure activities strengthen the mental health of young people

Measures:

- 5.1. The harm to concentration and physical activity caused by increased use of digital devices will be reduced. The existing ways will be strengthened and new ways will be sought to utilise digital solutions to increase the physical activity and active life of young people. Opportunities for meaningful leisure activities offered by the digital environment will be strengthened. The importance and potential of digital communities and online services in promoting the wellbeing and inclusion of young people will be taken into account. Young people's

agency in a digitalised society will be supported. Digitally mediated youth work and recreational activities can also reach young people with different challenges or barriers to participation at a low threshold. The development of digital youth work will be continued.

- 5.2. The link between young people's mental health, mobility and physical activity will be strengthened further and made part of the structures. Young people's mental health will be supported by encouraging them to use nature for recreational purposes, such as camping and other nature activities, as part of the National Nature Recreation Strategy. In youth work, the development of guidance work to prevent the exclusion of young people and strengthen mental health, including adventure and outdoor education, will be continued.
- 5.3. Research has shown that cultural activities support young people's mental health. As part of children's culture activities, experiments will be launched to increase the interest of young people aged 12–17 in cultural offerings and the arts.
- 5.4. Cooperation between the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of Education and Culture will be intensified, identifying places for interventions and guidance. It will be ensured that adults working with young people, such as youth workers and leisure activity instructors, have sufficient expertise to organise high-quality and safe activities that support young people's mental health.

Basket III: Supporting the wellbeing of young people by strengthening inclusion, communality and safety

In accordance with the Government Programme, the wellbeing of young people will be supported in broad-based cooperation with a range of social parties. Along with actions to combat climate change and reduce emissions, Finland will promote measures that improve the ability of society to adapt to climate change. Everyone has the right to be happy and safe in Finland. The Government will strengthen democracy, inclusion and trust in society.

In the consultation related to the preparation of the programme, young people named climate change and the preservation of nature as the most important societal challenge to be solved. Young people's message to decision-makers is

that equality should be achieved everywhere. Young people believe that bullying and discrimination should be tackled more strongly for greater equality and non-discrimination.

Based on the 2023 School Health Promotion study, slightly less than 10% of pupils in grades 8 and 9 had experienced weekly bullying from their peers. Weekly bullying had also been experienced by 1–2% of general upper secondary school students and 4% of VET students. According to studies, young people's societal interest and political participation are strongly differentiated by, for example, socio-economic status, education and gender. Participation also accumulates for the same young people. The key challenge for young people's social participation is uncertainty about their own knowledge and skills, as well as concerns about the burden and complexity of participation.

Main ministries involved:

Ministry of Justice, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry of Education and Culture

Objective 6: Young people's opportunities to participate in and influence social debate and decision-making improve

Measures:

- 6.1. The youth policy perspective and the consultation of young people will be better integrated into the preparatory work of ministries, including legislative work and the preparation of strategies and action programmes. The competence of the ministries' management and legislative drafters on the participation and consultation of young people will be strengthened, for example through training and communication. Particular attention will be paid to the consideration of young people in vulnerable situations.
- 6.2. Participation structures for young people in central government administration will be piloted. The activities of the Young People's Climate Change and Nature Group and the Youth Agenda 2030 group can be used as models in this work. The activities of the groups will be consolidated. Measures to promote the consultation of young people will take into account in particular the equal opportunities of young people belonging to different groups, plain language and

multi-channel communication. The measures will create an atmosphere in which everyone promotes equal, respectful and open discussion.

- 6.3. Strengthening the inclusion of children and young people is a priority in the national programme to promote democracy and participation led by the Ministry of Justice. The Democracy Programme is also intended to promote the development of good practices in democracy education, human rights education and youth voting activity and to strengthen a culture of good debate and exchange of opinions in society. VANUPO's objectives and measures will be coordinated with the implementation of the Democracy Programme. In addition, the inclusion and trust of young people in society will be promoted through measures of open administration.
- 6.4. Young people's inclusion and opportunities for influence will be strengthened in the discussion and action on stopping and preventing climate change and nature loss in a variety of ways, including by developing youth delegate activities and by cultural means. Equal opportunities for young people to understand and use research data on climate change and biodiversity loss will be supported, for example as part of the implementation of the Finnish National Strategy and Action Plan national science, mathematics and technology.

Objective 7: Young people have a stronger sense of safety and security

Measures:

- 7.1. Measures to increase the inclusion of children and young people and research-based measures (including youth work) to prevent bullying and violence will be promoted. Measures addressing crime, violence and substance abuse committed by and against young people will be enhanced from the perspective of both prevention and sanctions.
- 7.2. Pedagogical competence related to the promotion of wellbeing and safety, the prevention of bullying, violence and harassment, and the support of mental health will be defined as a priority area for continuing education for teaching and early childhood education and care staff and management for the next three years.

- 7.3. Anchor work will be developed and, in particular, cooperation with schools and other educational institutes and the competence of teaching staff will be strengthened, for example by developing the manual on multi-professional Anchor work and increasing the discussion of the theme in the continuing education of teaching staff to enable earlier intervention. In addition, the role of health care in Anchor work will be promoted.
- 7.4. Substance abuse and the harm caused by intoxicants will be combatted, for example by continuing the implementation of the Substance Use and Addiction Strategy. Special attention will be paid to reducing drug-related deaths among young people and to supporting young people acting out with substance abuse and violence.
- 7.5. The training needs of professionals working with young people related to human trafficking and similar exploitation will be investigated and, if necessary, additional training will be organised.
- 7.6. Young people's ability to understand the logic of social media and protect themselves from related security threats will be improved. Media education carried out by schools and other youth actors will be continued and support will be provided to various media education measures carried out by the third sector targeting young people and particularly vulnerable groups, in addition to which Finland's Safer Internet activities will be strengthened.
- 7.7. The objectives and measures of VANUPO will be coordinated with the measures of the action plan to prevent and combat juvenile and gang crime, led by the Ministry of Justice. Emerging good practices in the prevention of juvenile delinquency will be identified, including legal mediation in criminal matters and certain civil cases, as well as mediation carried out by organisations, and their implementation for national use will be supported.
- 7.8. The objectives and measures of VANUPO will be coordinated with the activities of the national financial literacy strategy led by the Ministry of Justice, which will strengthen young people's everyday financial skills in many different ways.

Objective 8: Community, equality and resilience in the lives of young people are supported

Measures:

- 8.1. The resilience of young people in facing social crises and challenging situations will be strengthened by clarifying and increasing the role of youth work in strengthening community spirit and preventing loneliness. In addition to municipalities, third-sector actors, parishes and other religious communities are significant sources of support in strengthening the resilience of young people. Youth work in schools and other educational institutes will be further developed to strengthen young people's sense of community.
- 8.2. The role of recreational activities in promoting young people's sense of community and equality will be reinforced. Harassment and discrimination among young people in leisure and civic activities will be addressed by strengthening and expanding the operations of the You Are Not Alone (Et ole yksin) -service. Equality, gender equality and non-discrimination will be strengthened in accordance with the Government statement to Parliament on promoting equality, gender equality and non-discrimination in Finnish society through sports/culture and youth sector measures, including education, government grant activities and equality plans.
- 8.3. Cooperation between different cultural heritage actors and providers of art and cultural services will be encouraged with the aim of strengthening the agency of young people. Equal rights and opportunities for all children and young people to participate in and influence cultural heritage will be supported. The opportunities for Sámi young people to learn about their own cultural heritage will be strengthened, and measures related to it will be examined as part of the implementation of the Cultural Heritage Strategy 2023–2030. Diverse documentation of youth cultural heritage will be promoted as part of the collections policy of memory institutions.
- 8.4. The pedagogical and event activities of public libraries and museums will be targeted at young people. The activities of public libraries will be promoted as a means of strengthening young people's diverse reading skills. Particular attention will be paid to young people with reading difficulties. Libraries and museums will be made more

community-oriented and youth-oriented so that young people feel comfortable in these spaces and can actively influence their development and activities.

- 8.5. The possibilities of art and culture as well as sports activities in integrating young people from immigrant backgrounds into society will be utilised more and in broad-based cooperation.
- 8.6. The measures of VANUPO, the “Get Finland Moving” programme and the Government's non-discrimination Communication concerning young people will be coordinated.

4 Policies for supporting youth work and activities

According to the Youth Act, youth work refers to supporting young people's growth, transition into independence and inclusion in society. Youth work is an educational activity centred on interaction with young people, one on one or in groups. The preconditions for the success of youth work are strengthened by the fact that it is increasingly carried out in multidisciplinary cooperation with various partners, such as education and sports, social and employment services and the police.

In addition to being multidisciplinary, youth work is also carried out in diverse operating environments. Interaction with young people takes place, for example, at youth centres, camps and excursions, shopping centres, schools and digital environments. In principle, youth work can be carried out in any environment where there are young people.

Youth work is carried out by different types of organisations such as municipalities, NGOs, parishes and other religious communities. According to the Youth Act, youth work and youth policy are the tasks of the municipality. When implementing the objectives and starting points of the Youth Act, municipalities must, taking into account local conditions, arrange services and facilities for young people and support their civic activities. Youth work is a community-enhancing and preventive activity that promotes the wellbeing of young people and supports their growth and agency through voluntary and guided activities. In addition, municipal youth work is an active participant in multidisciplinary guidance and service networks in accordance with the Youth Act.

Regional coordinators promote regional cooperation, support youth work expertise in their region, develop the quality of youth work and communicate about the activities of the sector. They bring together regional cooperation networks and organise meetings and events. The tasks of regional coordination are carried out in youth workshop activities, outreach youth work and basic youth work. The regional coordinators cooperate with the Regional State Administrative Agencies.

Municipal youth work

In municipalities, youth work is carried out in many different ways depending on the needs and resources of the municipality and its young people. The various forms of youth work include outreach youth work, youth workshops, youth work in schools and other educational institutes, and mobile youth work. In this programme, 'basic youth work' refers to youth work carried out in municipalities, which comprises easily accessible activities open to all offered in young people's free time, for example at youth centres in the form of open nights and small groups, various events produced for the purpose and free or inexpensive activities organised during school holidays.

According to the Youth Act, the Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for the general steering, coordination and development of youth work and youth policy and for providing the general prerequisites for it in central government. The Ministry of Education and Culture will launch a process aimed at developing and strengthening the structures, quality and awareness of the results of municipal basic youth work. The process will be carried out under the leadership of the Ministry of Education and Culture in cooperation with municipalities, Regional State Administrative Agencies, regional coordinators of basic youth work and other actors.

Objectives of the development work:

- create recommendations to ensure the resources and practices of municipal youth work (including quality and safety) in different operating environments;
- advance the skills and knowledge of those working with young people: basic youth work in municipalities is done by youth workers who have received training that is suitable for the field and provides vocational skills;
- improve the accessibility of youth work in municipalities of different sizes and numbers of young people and the possibility for young people to participate in activities offered by municipal youth services;
- promote the realisation of equality and non-discrimination: in accordance with the objective of the Youth Act, pay attention to the prevention of discrimination, ensuring accessibility, promoting gender equality and taking into account cultural diversity; and
- strengthen knowledge-based leadership: the long-term and sustained development of youth work requires strengthening both the local and national knowledge base. The prerequisite for this is that municipalities enable the free of charge youth work documentation system (nuoDo).

The objectives of the development work are based on consultations of municipal youth workers carried out regionally during the VANUPO preparation process.

The development process of municipal basic youth work will be implemented, where applicable, in conjunction with the ongoing development work of multidisciplinary guidance and service networks carried out by the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Regional State Administrative Agencies and the Association of Finnish Municipalities in cooperation with municipalities. The Association of Finnish Municipalities is also implementing a project to support the work of the networks, with practical measures. The project has been granted funding until the spring of 2025. The development of the guidance and service networks takes into account the interfaces of the growth and living conditions of young people in the wellbeing services counties and the employment services reform.

5 Priorities for approving the eligibility of national youth work centres of expertise for government grants

5.1 Background

According to the Youth Act, a youth work centre of expertise is defined as “a community that develops and promotes knowledge and expertise regarding youth nationwide; the centre of expertise may also be formed by a consortium based on an agreement between two or more communities.” The prerequisite for the approval of eligibility for government grant is that the centre of expertise “develops and promotes basic and special skills in the youth sector by producing, compiling, utilising or sharing information on young people, youth work or youth policy.”

The youth work centres of expertise are among the tools for the strategic steering of the Ministry of Education and Culture’s youth work. They operate under the ministry’s performance management. This means that their activities are guided only by the objectives and tasks that they have agreed on together with the ministry, not by the objectives and tasks the organisation operating the centre of expertise sets for itself. The steering interest of the Ministry of Education and Culture varies by grant application call. It is the strongest for the centres of expertise.

The priority choices of the centres of expertise respond to the current development needs of the youth sector for which the Ministry has a performance management interest. Other topical development needs are supported by the Ministry in other ways, such as through information guidance or other forms of assistance.

A centre’s eligibility for government grants is issued for a fixed term in accordance with the Youth Act. The priorities of the centres of expertise are defined in VANUPO, in which case the eligibility period is linked to the programme period.

Acceptance of a centre’s eligibility for government grants and the issue of said grants are discretionary. After the approval of VANUPO, the Ministry of Education and Culture will open a call for eligible applications for government grants, which will specify the needs of the centres of expertise on the basis of the programme’s priorities. The action plans for centre of expertise activities presented

in applications for government grant eligibility will be evaluated according to the criteria laid down in the Youth Act and the Government Decree on Youth Work and Policy. These plans for the activities of the centres of expertise form the basis for negotiations between the Ministry and the centres of expertise approved as eligible for government grants on their actual tasks as centres of expertise. Government grants are awarded for tasks jointly agreed by the ministry and the centre of expertise.

5.2 Priorities for 2024–2027

The Government will invest in the wellbeing of young people, especially in preventive measures, in cooperation with a range of social parties. Supporting the wellbeing of young people forms the framework for the activities of the centres of expertise of this programme period. Centre of expertise activities will be structured through two interlinked priorities. There may be one or more centres of expertise under each priority. Common objectives will unite centres of expertise under the same priority. Centres of expertise operating under both priorities will form the centre structure for the 2024–2027 programming period and an entity within which cooperation and exchange of information is open and smooth. The centres of expertise will create a set of indicators that assess the impact of their activities and draw up plans for equality, non-discrimination, communication and bilingualism in their internal and external activities. They will operate in accordance with good governance.

Promoting the wellbeing of young people through youth work

Youth work plays an important role in supporting the wellbeing of young people. The different areas and activities of youth work can strengthen young people's sense of community, comprehensive wellbeing, resilience and emotional and interaction skills, preventing loneliness, bullying and acting out with violence. Youth work can support, in particular, the young people of minority groups, promoting equality and non-discrimination and addressing the causes of malaise. The above-mentioned aspects emerged in national and regional consultations with young people and youth experts during the preparation of the programme.

The youth sector needs diverse expertise in promoting the wellbeing of young people. This expertise must be applicable to the strategic planning, knowledge management, work management and cooperation networks of the actors in the youth sector. The expertise must also be utilisable in the work of youth workers in the group and individual guidance of young people in different operating

environments, with the main emphasis on preventive action. The activities of the centres of expertise will strengthen the understanding and awareness of youth sector actors and youth workers about factors affecting the wellbeing of young people, as well as the necessary skills, primarily through training and communication activities, but also through situation monitoring and, if necessary, surveys.

Support for the management of youth wellbeing work

The Government has assigned to the Ministry of Education and Culture the responsibility for the management of the work to support young people's wellbeing. According to the Youth Act, the Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for the management and development of youth work. Youth work is part of the work for young people's wellbeing.

Up-to-date and high-quality information is needed to support the management of youth work in order to ensure the anticipation of measures and the appropriate allocation of resources. The knowledge base of youth work has been developed through studies, surveys and various data collection systems. In addition, various areas of youth work have conducted their own quality work and strengthened their impact expertise.

The activities of the centres of expertise support the work of the Ministry of Education and Culture in promoting the wellbeing of young people. The centres of expertise produce analysis and research data to support knowledge-based management and strengthen the quality and effectiveness of youth work in order to verify the societal significance of the sector. The centres of expertise also develop and coordinate youth sector services.

6 Finland's national objectives for youth activities in the European and international context

In accordance with the Government Decree on Youth Work and Policy (211/2017), VANUPO sets the national objectives for European and international activities regarding youth sector (section 2). The objectives of international cooperation are in line with Finland's national youth policy objectives. The objectives and measures outlined in this section are promoted as part of the youth sector activities of the Ministry of Education and Culture in the European Union, the Council of Europe, other international organisations and transnational cooperation structures. In addition, international cooperation in the youth field is carried out extensively in non-governmental organisations, municipalities, parishes and other religious communities.

Finland actively implements the EU Youth Strategy (2019–2027), participates in the preparation of the next Youth Strategy and supports the implementation of the EU Youth Dialogue. Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps programmes play an important role in developing competences and inclusion in the youth field. Finland promotes the participation in the programmes of an increasing number of young people and increasingly broad target groups. In accordance with the objectives of the programmes, Finland promotes the social participation of young people by supporting active citizenship and promoting the development of social and intercultural skills, environmental responsibility, critical thinking and media literacy.

Finland will promote youth sector objectives during its Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers starting in 2025. Finland takes note of the discussion on the inclusion of young people in the United Nations and its organisations and actively participates in it.

Finland promotes the wellbeing of young people in accordance with the youth policy objectives of the National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme 2024–2027. These are also promoted in international and European cooperation. Sector consultations carried out for the preparation of the programme in connection with international cooperation highlighted, among other things, the promotion of peace work and democracy education, as well as climate issues and sustainable development.

Important themes for Finland in international and European cooperation in the youth field include young people's mental health, the quality of youth work, strengthening young people's inclusion and democracy, and young people's inclusion in sustainable development and climate policy. In addition, Finland continues to attach importance to the objective of the European year of Youth 2022 to mainstream youth policy into all relevant policy sectors.

The following objectives are being set for 2024–2027:

6.1 Mental health of young people

According to several studies, young people's mental health has been put to the test, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. Up to 20–25% of young people have a mental health disorder. In the most severe cases, these disorders can affect the young person's balanced development. The European Commission's communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health mentions children and young people as a separate target group and emphasises the importance of preventive work in the development of resilience.

Youth work plays an essential role in supporting mental health. Creating a sense of community and engaging young people gives them various skills to deal with issues that hinder their mental health.

Measures:

- Finland advances the role of youth work in mental health promotion and preventive action.
- Finland strengthens the position of youth work as an activity that strengthens community spirit.
- Finland supports the competence and training of youth workers in matters related to mental health.
- Finland promotes the consideration of disadvantaged young people, such as various minorities, in mental health support.

6.2 Quality of youth work

According to the Youth Act, youth work refers to supporting young people's growth, transition into independence and inclusion in society. Youth work is an educational activity centred on interaction with young people, one on one or in groups. Youth work is carried out both professionally and as a volunteer activity in a wide range of environments.

Finland is a well-known promoter of high-quality youth work and related education in international and European contexts. Finland has a long history in youth work education and training, which is available at all levels of education and in various non-formal environments. In international forums, Finland has promoted digital youth work and emphasised its importance as a cross-cutting element in all youth work. In addition, the long-term development of youth work and the related decision-making must be based on knowledge. The promotion of these themes remains important in international cooperation.

Measures:

- Finland increases the importance of high-quality youth work as an educational activity.
- Finland improves the quality of education for youth workers.
- Finland highlights and promotes the opportunities of digital youth work in strengthening the wellbeing and inclusion of young people.
- Finland promotes the development of youth work on the basis of knowledge and research, for example through youth research.

6.3 Inclusion and strengthening of democracy

According to the Government Resolution on Finnish Democracy Policy in the 2020s, the aim is for Finland to continue to be among the most democratic countries in the world. The resolution outlines that Finland actively participates in the EU's democracy work and supports the development of international democracy.

Finland considers it important for young people to be included in matters close to them and in society in general. Particular attention must be paid to strengthening the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities and equality as a cross-cutting theme. Young people's experience of inclusion and the strengthening of active citizenship must be better taken into account and doors opened for youth inclusion. Young people's voice should be heard in all decision-making.

Measures:

- Finland continues to promote the principles of UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security and the related national action plan.
- Finland promotes the participation of youth delegates nationally, in the Nordic countries, in Europe and globally, where possible. In the national preparations, the participation of young representatives, such as Sámi young people, in the EU preparation processes of the Ministry of Education and Culture will be promoted.
- Finland promotes the objective of the EU's 2022 European Year of Youth to mainstream youth policy across all relevant EU policy fields.
- Finland participates in the implementation of the OECD's Youth Recommendation (Creating Better Opportunities for Young People) on trust and inclusion and takes advantage of the OECD's forthcoming work to share good practices and methods for strengthening the inclusion of children and young people in particular.

6.4 Young people and climate change

Climate change is one of the key solvable societal global problems threatening the wellbeing and future of young people. According to several studies and surveys, climate change causes anxiety in young people. Climate change also creates uncertainty and weakens young people's confidence in their own and the world's future.

Climate change and halting nature loss were also among the most important issues to be solved that emerged in the youth consultation carried out for the preparation of VANUPO. When asked about their thoughts about climate change, young people most often mentioned anxiety. Young people recognised the global consequences of climate change and also the fact that economic concerns often outweigh climate issues. Young people's clear message to decision-makers is to move from discussion to concrete actions to stop climate change and nature loss.

The Government's aim is for Finland's handprint in climate policy to be larger than its physical size. Along with actions to combat climate change and reduce emissions, Finland will promote measures that improve the ability of society to adapt to climate change.

In addition, Finland promotes young people's opportunities to participate and be heard in the matter both at home, in EU politics and globally. Youth work is one way of supporting young people in dealing with the emotions caused by climate change and nature loss, as well as in supporting active citizenship and inclusion. The root causes of young people's environmental anxiety will be investigated for measures. Providing young people with researched data on climate change is one factor in alleviating anxiety.

Measures:

- Finland strengthens the role of youth work in supporting young people in climate and nature issues.
- Finland promotes the inclusion of young people in climate and nature issues both nationally, at EU level and globally.

7 Preparing the programme

7.1 Consultation of young people

The background preparation of the National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme was started in the autumn of 2022 by hearing young people's thoughts on the societal challenges to be solved in Finland and the things that bring wellbeing to young people. The consultation was targeted at 13–25-year-olds. Young people were able to exert influence by answering a survey in Finnish, Swedish or English. A total of 7,081 respondents from all over Finland responded to the survey.

In addition to the survey, 24 consultation workshops were organised for young people at lower secondary schools, general upper secondary schools, vocational schools and youth workshops in Finnish and Swedish. Approximately 350 young people participated in the workshops. In the responses to the survey, climate change, social exclusion and the global political situation emerged as the most important challenges for young people in Finland. Young people also saw equality and non-discrimination, as well as the mental health crisis among young people, as important challenges that need to be solved. Most of the respondents ranked good health among the top four things that bring wellbeing. In the world of young people, family and loved ones, hobbies or leisure opportunities, friends and not having to worry about money also repeatedly emerged as sources of wellbeing.

7.2 Consultation of key actors in youth work and youth policy

In addition to young people, the Ministry of Education and Culture consulted youth sector actors extensively during the spring of 2023 on the issues to be included in the programme. In cooperation with the Regional State Administrative Agencies, the municipal youth work coordinators organised regional consultation of youth work actors in a diverse manner. The themes of the consultations were the role of municipal youth work and youth activities in solving the issues raised in the youth consultation, the national policies for supporting youth work, and the priorities of the future national youth work centres of expertise. In the regional consultations, the participants hoped, among other things, for policies to secure the resources of

municipal youth work, the development of the documentation and effectiveness of youth work, and the enhancement of the role and appreciation of youth work. Priorities proposed for the centres of expertise include wellbeing and mental health, the development of municipal youth work, equality, non-discrimination and inclusion.

In addition to regional consultations, the Ministry of Education and Culture organised two national consultations for national actors in the youth sector. The themes were youth policy objectives and measures, objectives for international and European cooperation concerning youth, policies for supporting youth work, and the priorities of the national youth work centres of expertise. Participants in the national consultations emphasised the prevention of young people's social exclusion, the strengthening of inclusion and democracy, and equality as youth policy objectives and measures. They hoped that the objectives of international cooperation would include the utilisation of mobility programmes and the strengthening of democracy education. Things that the participants considered important included the strengthening the intersectoral nature of youth work and low-threshold support, long-term funding and the use of experience data collected from young people. The priorities proposed for the centres of expertise included the social empowerment of young people, youth work in schools and other educational institutes, and the further development of youth work methods and impact assessment.

During the spring of 2023, the Ministry of Education and Culture also held preliminary discussions on the programme with other ministries relevant to the development of the growth and living conditions of young people, as well as with the State Youth Council. To support the preparation of the programme, the State Youth Council published an overview of the wellbeing of young people and proposed issues to be included in the programme.

7.3 General consultation feedback

The Ministry of Education and Culture requested feedback on the draft National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme. The general consultation started on 20 December 2023 and ended on 26 January 2024. As a result of the consultation, 199 opinions were received as feedback on the draft programme.

Government youth policy objectives and measures

Many of the contributors of opinions on the *Government youth policy objectives and measures* considered the programme's youth policy themes relevant and central to young people's wellbeing. However, some of the contributors thought that the programme should be broader in terms of themes than presented in the draft. A common concern of a number of contributors was that the spending cuts planned by the government may weaken the growth and living conditions of young people and thus undermine the draft programme's objectives and measures aimed at preventing the social exclusion of young people. The contributors considered that the draft programme does not sufficiently identify the impact of poverty and economic inequality on the growth and living conditions of young people.

Some contributors, especially NGOs, thought that the draft should be more ambitious and comprehensive in terms of objectives related to youth wellbeing. On the other hand, contributors judged that the objectives set in the draft programme could not be achieved through the measures listed. New youth policy openings were also called for. One opinion, which several of the other contributors agreed with, suggested detaching the youth wellbeing programme mentioned in the Government Programme from VANUPO and launching separate preparations based on a working group to prepare a wellbeing programme.

Continued implementation of the Finnish Model for Leisure Activities, which promotes youth wellbeing by enabling young people in primary and lower secondary education to have free leisure activities of their choice after their school day, was considered important. Proposals also to extend the support for leisure activities in accordance with the Finnish Model for Leisure Activities to post-secondary education levels and, in general, the need to increase funding for the implementation of the model, came up often in the opinions of municipal contributors, which also repeatedly expressed concern regarding the funding of youth work.

The aim of the programme to invest in the accessibility, quality and timeliness of mental health services was considered important in the opinion feedback. Many of the contributors were concerned with the implementation and functioning of personalised student welfare services, including the need to improve the availability of psychological and school social work services, taking into account the savings pressures of the wellbeing services counties. Many opinions considered that the statutory individual student welfare services are not fully realised even now.

Several opinions suggested that the youth work provided in schools and other educational institutes should be better identified in the programme as an important support for youth wellbeing work in schools and other educational institutes, including communal student welfare services. The development of the activities of Ohjaamo one-stop guidance centres, especially their multidisciplinary nature, was considered important, including the strengthening of the role of youth services at Ohjaamo centres, as well as the extension of Ohjaamo services to smaller localities.

Many opinions praised the importance given to young people's cultural hobbies and art in youth wellbeing work. However, several contributors felt that mentioning certain specific forms of art hobbies in the draft programme narrows its scope. The recognition of the importance of youth sports activities and, more broadly, young people's physical activity in youth wellbeing work was also praised. In the opinion of many contributors, the role of youth organisations and, more generally, NGOs and parishes, in the implementation of the programme's objectives should be identified better than in the draft.

Some of the contributors pointed out that although young people had emphasised, in the youth consultation conducted during the preparation, the reduction of school pressures as a means of supporting mental wellbeing, as well as themes related to climate change, these issues are not sufficiently taken into account in the measures. Several contributors considered that the programme should also pay more attention to young people's housing, digitalisation, the position of higher education students, the road safety of young people and tackling underage drinking, drug use and smoking. The contributors also felt that education policy, which is an important part of youth policy, is not given sufficient prominence in the draft programme.

They considered that hate speech, structural racism, harassment and discrimination, for example in the labour market, are commonplace for many young people and put them in unequal positions compared to each other. Some of the contributors noted that the draft programme states that minority groups are exposed to hate speech and harassment in their everyday environment. Many contributors considered that the draft raises the immigrant background of young people involved in street gangs in a stigmatising way, stating that it weakens the wellbeing of minority youth and contributes to branding them and increasing prejudices against them. Several contributors considered that young people from various minority groups (e.g. sexual and gender minorities, immigrants, young people with disabilities) are not sufficiently taken into account in the programme.

Policies for supporting youth work and activities

Contributors who expressed opinions on the *policies for supporting youth work and activities* generally welcomed the fact that the draft programme takes good account of the importance of basic youth work and its development needs. However, some of the NGOs that contributed opinions considered that the programme should take better account of the many dimensions of youth work, including the role of NGOs in youth work and activities.

Ensuring a common knowledge base for youth work was considered important in the opinions, as were the entries on multidisciplinary cooperation and regional coordination of youth work. The opinions generally approved of the regional coordination of youth work and the activities of regional coordinators, but some opinions called for the role and tasks of regional coordinators to be clarified further. One opinion, signed by several parties, considered the programme to view municipal youth work as a subject of central government steering instead of appreciating municipalities' local knowledge management and evaluation work.

Regarding the individual themes of youth work, the contributors hoped, for example, for better consideration of the needs of equality and non-discrimination, including equal regional access to youth work services, the sobriety of youth work, and young people belonging to different groups, such as young people with disabilities and from different cultural backgrounds.

Priorities for approving the eligibility of national youth work centres of expertise for government grants

Those consulted who shared an opinion on the *priorities for approving the eligibility of national youth work centres of expertise for government grants* to be selected for the programme period often pointed out that the priorities of the centres of expertise in the draft programme are too broad and extensive. Some of the opinions also considered the centre of expertise activities to be too short-sighted, while some also raised concerns about the bilingualism and Swedish-speaking activities of the centres of expertise.

Opinions on the priorities for the selection of centres of expertise also noted that the draft programme does not sufficiently highlight the various minority groups that experience discrimination. The opinions also presented some suggestions for thematic contents of the centres of expertise.

Finland's national objectives for youth activities in the European and international context

Those who gave their opinion on *Finland's national objectives for youth activities in the European and international context* considered the objectives set out in the draft to be, in many respects, correct and justified. Themes related to young people's mental health, their inclusion in climate action and the strengthening of inclusion and democracy in general were considered particularly important. The contributors called for more concrete terms concerning the implementation of the objectives, such as the support of the role of youth work in climate and nature issues and the promotion of digital youth work.

Several contributors hoped that equality, as well as the aspects of tackling and preventing discrimination, would be more visible in the section. They also hoped that the Sustainable Development Goals, peace work and conflict prevention, tackling the feeling of exclusion and the prevention of the radicalisation of young people, would be included as objectives. In addition, they also considered it important to emphasise the consideration of disadvantaged young people and those in need of special support.

Some contributors considered the draft's perspective on internationality to be Europe-centric and hoped for a more global approach in goal setting and a better outlook on youth, peace and security issues. In the goal related to young people and climate change, several contributors thought that, instead of reducing climate anxiety, the focus should be more on channelling young people's climate emotions to support constructive social actions.



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