

THE NATIONAL REPORT OF FINLAND CONCERNING THE PRIORITY OF PARTICIPATION BY YOUNG PEOPLE

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The common objectives of EU Member States

Participation

1. To increase the participation by young people in the civic life of their community;
2. To increase participation by young people in the system of representative democracy;
3. To provide greater support for various forms of learning to participate.

Chapter 1 National situation at the moment of the adoption of the common objectives of the priority

Finland has been concerned about the lack of political participation by young people since the late 1980s, when the turnout of 18- to 30-year-olds at the polls in the parliamentary elections fell by almost 10 percentage points during one electoral period. A long-term study for 1975–2003 reveals that the decreasing turnout trend, which began in the 1983 elections, continued until the 1999 elections. The turning point is estimated to have been reached in the 2003 parliamentary elections, when the turnout of young people showed an increase. The turnout of young people was at its highest in the 1979 elections (75%) and at its lowest in the 1999 elections (53%). In the 2003 elections, the turnout of young people was 54%.

In local elections, where the turnout is traditionally lower than in national elections, the trend has been similar. The increase in the turnout in the 2003 elections was not an isolated phenomenon, as the trend was even more evident in the 2004 local elections. For the entire constituency, the turnout increased by nearly three percentage points to 58.6%, compared to the previous local elections. The turnout of young people of 18–24 years of age has been estimated at 42%, which shows an increase of approximately four percentage points over the previous local elections. More detailed data are available in Paakkunainen (2005, 2004, 2003). The lower turnout of young people is a sign of Finnish political culture, in which the turnout compared to the other Nordic countries is generally 10 to 20 percentage points lower. Nordic studies comparing the school systems of the five constituent countries show evidence that Finnish students' faith in being able to influence issues in their schools is significantly lower than in the other Nordic countries. This lack of confidence in having influence is learnt early on at school.

Particularly with regard to the lower turnout in local elections, the polarisation of the young constituent and the susceptibility to political populism are signs of the legitimacy crisis affecting the political system at local level. The political decision-making system is not able to reach young people, who according to research are, nonetheless, worried about the safety and future of their home municipalities and have stronger connections to NGO activities than young people in EU Member States on average. It is also noteworthy that the confidence of Finns in their national parliament is at the same level as in other Nordic countries.

The Finnish political culture has shifted from a president-centred system towards a more definite parliamentary system, emphasising the role of the Prime Minister as a result of the Constitution that entered into force in 2000. Since this change, the Government has employed increasingly detailed programmes as its policy-making tool, improving the possibilities of various political sectors to collaborate while streamlining the sectorial policies. Youth policies are a good example of this development. A wide spectrum of youth policy-makers (the minister, administrative officials, youth workers, researchers) were involved in formulating the youth participation project of Prime Minister Lipponen's government, launched in 2003. The programme was later incorporated into the

Civil Participation Policy Programme of the current government headed by Prime Minister Vanhanen. This incorporation brought the profile of the youth policy into sharper relief with respect to the other policy programmes of the government. The new, programme-based method of policy-making has also had the effect that the new Youth Act accepted by the Finnish Parliament in December 2005 will propose that the youth policy development programme be introduced as a tool for steering youth policies. The idea of a youth policy development programme has long been in development, but only now is the Finnish political culture ready to take this idea to the legislative level.

Over the past ten years, Finnish youth policy-making has consciously developed a so-called tripartite model, in which political decision makers, youth-work practitioners and researchers are engaged in interaction. The model emphasises ongoing dialogue, which may be realised in a variety of ways, such as through seminars, joint publications or established organisations. In terms of research, the model is based on the Finnish tradition, whereby both the academic and applied social research are strongly represented in the building of the Finnish welfare state. The objective is an evidence-based youth policy, where relevant information is understood to be the result of the dialogue of political decision makers, youth workers and researchers. The model was successfully employed in the drafting of the new Youth Act, and proved a positive learning experience thanks to the openness and interactiveness of the process.

After the 2003 Council Resolution, the central themes of the Finnish youth-policy debate can be summarised, on the basis of the above, as follows:

- The government policy programmes and their links to the youth participation programme
- The significance of the new Youth Act coming into force as of 1 March 2006 as regards youth policy programme work and the development of participation systems for young people
- The significance of influence groups (youth councils) as tools for representative democracy
- The possibilities of the Internet in building youth communities and increasing participation by young people
- Initiating the debate on the quality of participation
- The development of participation studies both as election studies in general and as project-specific evaluation studies

The present national report will introduce several forms of operations, which have been launched as processes before the monitoring period. It is, however, justified to present these as the activities have since developed and expanded. The positive development has been facilitated by the higher profile of the EU youth policy, which has made it easier for youth policy questions to reach the national political agenda.

The common objectives of EU Member States for the participation of young people have been divided into three categories, namely civic life, representative democracy and learning to participate. Most of the operations introduced in the present report involved all three dimensions. They have been organised in the report according to the most central dimension.

Chapter 2 Actions undertaken at national level since the adoption of the common objectives, by objective and by line of action (Objectives and lines of action in the Council Resolution of 25 November 2003)

Objective 1: Participation by young people in the civic life of their community

Lines of action:

- a) Promote the involvement of young people in participatory structures, for example NGOs, associations, voluntary work, local youth councils, and encourage the activities of youth NGOs, while respecting their independence and autonomy.**

NGOs play an important role in the organisation of the civic society in Finland. Most Finnish voluntary work is organised through NGOs. In Finland, private, non-profit-making organisations are defined in law as associations for public good and therefore they have been assigned, *inter alia*, certain tax privileges. The Civil Society 2006 committee, which is part of the Civil Participation Policy Programme of Prime Minister Vanhanen's government, proposes in its memorandum (to be finalised in February 2006) changes to legislation to further promote the operations of associations of public good.

Regional and local authorities support participation by young people through the allocation of funds to youth projects, steering the planning of the projects and providing training. For example, the State Provincial Office of Southern Finland allocated, in 2004 and 2005, funds to projects that supported the active citizenship of young people, their social strengthening and their living circumstances. Projects that were cross-administrative and improved the collaboration between regions were prioritised in the funding allocation.

The actions of regional and local authorities supporting young people are established and carefully targeted. The development work in recent years has focused particularly on young people's own experiences of the impact of their participation.

The local media throughout Finland has taken a positive attitude towards young people's projects and they have been widely publicised in the local press. According to the representatives of youth councils who were interviewed for the present report, the relations with local media are friendly and young people's initiatives receive good publicity.

The Civil Society 2006 committee has issued the following recommendations to encourage civic activity in young people:

1. Young people's voluntary civic actions and their action groups are supported through providing premises and tools to increase the different forms of young people's active participation in society (Responsibility of municipalities)
2. A model is to be created for municipal child and youth initiatives and municipalities are to be instructed that municipal child and youth initiatives are to be processed without delay. Those having put forwards initiatives are informed at each stage of processing and responses to the initiatives, including the grounds for a decision, are sent to those concerned. Guidance and counselling for the young is to be organised according to the 'one-stop' principle. (Responsibility of the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities)

3. Launch the investigation of lowering the voting age to 16 years in local elections.
(Responsibility of the Ministry of Justice and the government)

b) Encourage the development of activities, initiatives and projects intended to involve young people directly at regional and local levels.

Both the regional and local authorities direct funds to youth activities that are targeted at young people's own projects. The themes of the projects are often related to the growth and cultural activities of the young. Increased sense of membership and belonging among young people is deemed to result in increased participation.

In the past few years, youth workshops¹ have begun to be considered also from the perspective of participation. The aims of youth workshops exist not only to prevent civic exclusion but also as part of civic education in general. The development of leisure activities at these workshops has, in 2004 and 2005, been among the targets of funding. In practice, support is allocated to group activities, sports, cultural activities and various activating programmes, such as the International Award Programme in Finland.

The Young Culture programme is an established national form of development emphasising young people's independent cultural activity. The regional and national events of the Young Culture organisation are participated in by thousands of young people every year. Local training projects in cultural youth work have been developed in, for example, the Province of Southern Finland.

Finland has been able to exploit exceptionally well the opportunities offered by the EU Youth Programme to promote young people's own civil participation. The methods applied in Finland emphasise young people's own initiative, which is supported and steered by municipal departments of youth affairs.

c) Publicise and show greater recognition of the outreach work done by parents, youth workers and other persons.

Youth work has over the past few years become more strikingly multi-professional teamwork. Collaboration between authorities and various interest groups has improved the publicity and recognition of youth work. Multi-professional teamwork is based on two aspects. Firstly, cross-administrative work is, in general, emphasised in Finland; secondly, project-based work and nationally funded projects as well as ESF-funded projects oblige, in a positive sense, the parties to create co-operation networks.

The debate on the quality of youth work has reached the political agenda. An extensive report (Cederlöf 2004) has been produced on the quality of youth work at national level, and the quality of the participation by young people is currently being studied in a comparative study involving several municipalities (Gretschel 2005). Youth workers may also receive quality awards recognised at either local or national level.

¹ The youth workshops offer work and activities to young people with the aim to improve their life management, empower them socially and motivate them to seek education or job. Youth workshops are financed and administrated cross-sectorally. For further information, see: <http://www.valtakunnallinentyopajayhdistys.fi/>.

The public image of youth work is very positive, although the recognition of youth work may vary from one locality to another. The lack of recognition is mainly related to the relationship between two departments (youth affairs vs. education, in particular). The close contacts between youth work and parents, educational authorities and other interest groups are of paramount importance when measuring the level of recognition of youth work. For example in Espoo, youth leaders are in contact with the parents of every registered user of youth facilities. One form of outreach work is the 'street patrols', which are groups of parents and youth workers who look out for the safety of young people gathering together in the evenings. In addition, local youth authorities are members of networks supporting the well-being of regions. In Iisalmi, contacts with parents are maintained through parents' meetings and via e-mail.

d) Identify more clearly the obstacles in the way of participation by specific groups and by disadvantaged young people and encourage measures and mechanisms capable of overcoming those obstacles, in particular by making allowance for their diversities and priorities (cultural or ethnic background, disabilities, socio-economic factors, gender, etc.).

The main methods in working with specific target groups are projects and youth workshops. Both methods allow for tailoring the work according to the target group. The goals of youth workshops are to socially strengthen young people and to develop their sense of community. Social trust experiences in a close community may produce active citizenships and awaken interest in furthering common issues. Youth work projects may be both nationally funded (e.g. by Finland's Slot Machine Association, RAY) and ESF funded when related to youth social work (such as EQUAL projects). An example of working with specific target groups and innovative project work worth mentioning at this juncture is the International Award Programme in Finland, which has developed working methods to promote the participation of immigrant girls. Within young immigrants, girls present a special challenge, as cultural differences stemming from both religious and gender behavioural conventions mean that girls are under special protection in many immigrant families. The Award Programme has made a commendable contribution to developing methods that are safe and sensitive to the needs of such special groups.

The fact that Finland is a sparsely populated country creates a major challenge for developing youth work in rural areas. In the past few years, this challenge has been met by increasing and solidifying regional co-operation. For example in Mikkeli, a study is currently being conducted on the regional mobility of young people and the services accessible to them. The objective of the study is to improve the services available and facilities for young people to meet each other.

The disabled as a special group are involved in the development of youth work through disability organisations. When drafting the Commission White Paper on youth policy, the representatives of disability organisations were involved in the different stages of the process and they were given the financial resources to participate in the preparatory seminars and conferences. In evaluating the EU Youth Programme, disability organisations have played an active role in debating on issues and in disseminating information.

e) Examine qualitative evaluation methods of participation for young people.

The quality of participation by young people is currently being studied in a research project headed by Any Gretschel and involving 15 municipalities. The research project has a nationally representative steering group and is funded by the Finnish Youth Research Network.

The past few years have witnessed quite prolific publication of research on participation by young people. The Finnish Youth Research Network and the Ministry of Education have been active in carrying out such research. The object of the research has been electoral and civil participation of young people (Paakkunainen 2003 and 2004; Hoikkala et al. 2005). The research material has been both quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative voting statistics and surveys have been interpreted based on different disciplinary approaches and research traditions. Finland has also contributed to a comparative study on young people in the Baltic Sea Region (Yndigegn et al. 2005).

Notable studies on participation by young people are also produced as Master's theses. Each year the Finnish Youth Research Society organises the Master's Thesis of the Year competition, with 30 entrants coming from Finnish universities. Many of the Master's theses provide new and valuable knowledge for evaluating the quality of participation by young people. Some of the theses are published in full or as an abridged article. For examples of theses describing the quality of participation by young people, see Kananen (2004), Haikkola (2003) and Huhtala & Tontti (2005).

A salient local-level study entitled "The incidence of new youth phenomena and the services by the youth authorities" has been commissioned by the Cities of Espoo, Helsinki and Vantaa.

In addition to the above-mentioned, today's project work always includes external evaluation and self-evaluation.

Objective 2. Greater participation by young people in the system of representative democracy

Lines of action:

- a) Encourage and develop, at all appropriate levels, a regular, structured dialogue between the public and/or government authorities and young people and their representative structures (national, regional and local youth councils, youth organisations, the European Youth Forum, etc.)**

1. Civil Participation Policy Programme and the related projects pertaining to the participation of young people

Public debate and development projects concerning participation by young people have in recent years been carried out within the frameworks created by the government policy programmes.

The government of Finland issued a decision in principle on 7 April 2005 on the Government Strategy Document, which includes the policy programmes agreed upon for Prime Minister Vanhanen's Government Programme. The Civil Participation Policy Programme promotes active citizenship, civil society, civil participation and functioning of representative democracy.

The objective of the Policy Programme is to increase electoral participation of citizens and to improve their opportunities for active civil participation between elections. The programme will place particular emphasis on those groups whose participation and influence have remained low in the past.

The Policy Programme is carried out by the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry for Finance and the Prime Minister's Office. There are some 20 projects and development and research processes currently under way. The Civil Participation Policy Programme emphasises the status of young people. The objectives of the Programme can be summarised in four main points:

1. That schools and educational institutions support growth in active and democratic citizenship according to the principle of lifelong learning. In addition to Finnish citizenship, education shall value EU and global citizenship.
2. That the legal and administrative prerequisites for civil participation are favourable and up to date, and that the research, training and development services of the third sector are developed.
3. That traditional and new channels and opportunities for civil participation are developed so as to support full participation of citizens in the activities of communities and society. In addition, that authorities have the necessary tools and an appropriate attitude required for dialogue with citizens.
4. That the structures and practices of representative democracy function well at all decision-making levels and that they respond to large social changes, ranging from the information society to globalisation.

It is vital in terms of youth policies that the Civil Participation Policy Programme of Vanhanen's government is linked to the Youth Participation Project launched during the previous government of Paavo Lipponen. The implementation of the Youth Policy Programme was scheduled to take place from 2003 to 2007. The Youth Participation Project develops permanent practices to prevent the civic exclusion of young people and to advance youth participation through 38 projects in 70 municipalities targeted at young people who found it difficult to find study places or employment. The Participation Project is coordinated by a Management Group appointed by the Ministry of Education, with permanent expert members. The Management Group is cross-administrative and it has representatives from youth organisations as well.

As part of the Civil Participation Policy Programme, a project entitled "Participating student – communal school" was launched in autumn 2005, which involves 100 schools in 28 municipalities. The project is coordinated by the Ministry of Education.

The objective of policy programmes is to increase cross-administrative co-operation and that between public authorities and the organisations of civil society. The Civil Participation Policy Programme and its related projects, particularly those targeted at young people, have raised participation by young people on the political agenda. They have had a significant role when seeking practical measures to activate young people as citizens.

2. Young people's local influence groups

Youth councils, operating under slightly different names and rules, have in the past few years emerged as a form of local influence groups for young people. The common feature in all of them is that the young people in the influence groups are elected to represent other young people. They give voice to all young people and they are expected to have received their mandate from those that they represent. The influence groups include youth councils, youth forums, the Young People's Voice, etc. The development of youth councils began in Finland in the late 1990s and after their rapid spread in recent years, 190 Finnish municipalities have representational influence groups for young people. They are the most important form of representational institution for young people and hence their development is a priority. As institutions they look after young people's interests and teach young people about representative democracy. At the same time, they teach the local democratic system to better relate to young citizens. Nearly every youth influence group has its own website, some updated more frequently than others, depending on the resources available. Youth councils have established a national union, which lobbies for the influence groups of young people at national level and provides training and coordinates activities.

Young people have confidence in youth councils. For example, as many as 55% of students in educational institutions in Espoo voted in the youth council elections held on 22 November 2005. The youngest elected council members were 13 years and the oldest 18 years of age. Every 13- to 18-year-old resident of Espoo had the right to vote. The voting took place in schools and educational institutions, which has proved the best way to reach young people.

Based on this research, the Finnish Advisory Council for Youth Affairs has set the following criteria for municipalities to develop youth council activities:

- Municipal administration is to be developed for it to better receive messages from the citizens
- The facilities for influence groups of young people are to be improved
- Municipalities are to establish youth committees
- Subsidies for youth activities are to be increased
- Municipalities are to increase their provision of information specifically targeted at young people.

3. Youth elections

The Finnish Youth Co-Operation Allianssi has organised voting campaigns addressing young people in Finland since 1991. Youth elections have been held in conjunction with the parliamentary elections in 1991, 1995, 1999 and 2003 as well as the European Parliament elections in 1996. The elections have received ample positive publicity and, for example, in the 2003 youth elections approximately 100,000 young people in 100 municipalities used their vote.

The youth election voters are 13- to-17-year-olds, and they may vote for candidates standing for parliament from their own constituency or for the candidates in their local council elections. The youth election is a viable form of citizenship education, a channel for voicing young people's concerns and serves as a preparation for real elections. The voting turnouts vary widely between localities, from 15% to 90%. The big differences in turnout clearly show how active local outreach work will help capture young people's interest in representative democracy and in political participation.

4. The legislative process of the new Youth Act and consulting young citizens

The Youth Act determines where resources are directed in the field and provides the framework for the entire youth work system in Finland. The Youth Act stipulates on the allocation of and grounds for youth work appropriations from the state budget, youth work administration and the structure of national youth policies. Legislation forms the foundation for local youth work as well as for the subsidies to national youth organisations, youth work services organisations and youth work organisations.

The key amendments in the government bill for the new youth legislation are related to a novel conception of youth work and youth policies. Therefore, the title of the new law being proposed is the Youth Act as opposed to the present Youth Work Act.

The intent paragraph of the new Act defines the aim of youth work as being to support the active citizenship, social strengthening and independence of young people. "Youth policy" refers to the improvement of young people's growth and living circumstances at national, regional and local levels.

The value base of the bill has been reviewed to better support the goals of the Act. The obligation to coordinate youth policy measures defined in the present Youth Work Act has not been fulfilled to a satisfactory extent at national level. The new Youth Act proposes a youth policy development programme which would be confirmed by the government after being prepared following collaboration between government ministries that are central with regard to the growing and living conditions of young people. The proposed programme would introduce the objectives of national youth policies and promote youth policy programme work at regional and local levels.

According to the bill, young people shall be guaranteed opportunities to participate in the preparation of issues related to local and regional youth work and youth policies. Young people shall also be consulted on matters concerning them.

The processing of the new Youth Act was an extensive undertaking and it was carried out while observing the transparency principle. Youth organisations were consulted both through requests for comments as well as at numerous events organised throughout the country. The value debate on the new Act was initiated in 2003 and the bill was drafted in autumn 2004, after which it was submitted to an extensive round of debate and comments. The bill was accepted by the Parliament in December 2005 and it will enter into force on 1 March 2006.

5. Preparing for local elections

The preparations for the 2004 local elections were carried out with special attention being paid to activating young voters. According to an estimate based on the previous year's parliamentary elections, the downward trend in turnout had been reversed. This gave rise to positive expectations for the local elections. However, the 50% turnout goal was not achieved, although there was a definite increase compared to the 2000 local elections. The turnout of voters under 30 years of age increased by some five percentage points to 46–47%.

The Advisory Council of Youth Affairs organised an extensive campaign in 13 localities in preparation for the local elections. The campaign involved ministerial speakers. According to an estimate, the increase in young voters' turnout can be explained by well-targeted election

campaigns and the issues that were raised as key themes in the elections, in particular those linked to the development of the welfare state.

The Finnish Youth Co-Operation Allianssi organised the national Äänet kuuluviin (“Raise Your Voice”) citizen participation project connected to the European Parliament and local elections. The purpose of the project is to increase and support young people’s electoral and social participation. The project supports young people’s own initiative and brings to the fore issues and questions that are of particular interest to young people. It also aims to improve the dialogue between the public sector and NGOs as well as between politicians and groups of young people. It also forms part of the public debate on the content of democracy.

6. Municipal children’s ombudsman

The first Children’s Ombudsman in Finland was appointed in Tampere in 2003. Since then, the model has spread to other municipalities.

The Children’s Ombudsman has an established role in Tampere, and various actors have endorsed this work and are committed to supporting it. The Children’s Ombudsman promotes co-operation between parties. The aim is to take children’s and young people’s perspectives into account in all decision making. Children and young people are perceived as participating residents for whom the local authorities have created participation channels. The Children’s Ombudsman also promotes the UN Convention on the Rights of Children.

The Children’s Ombudsman is in charge of coordinating the activities and the practical aspects of the office’s work. The work of the Children’s Ombudsman comprises three dimensions: 1) working with children and young people, 2) liaising with the administration and 3) promoting collaboration.

The aim of the work is to advance children’s and young people’s independent participation in collaboration with them.

7. National Ombudsman for Children

The Ombudsman for Children is an autonomous official working under the aegis of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The task of the Ombudsman is to further the realisation of children’s interests and rights in our society. The Ombudsman works in co-operation with other official bodies and organisations. The Ombudsman for Children monitors the living conditions of children and youth, legislation and public decision making and assesses the application of child and youth rights and welfare in Finnish society. The Ombudsman can create initiatives and offer advice and guidance on child and youth affairs. The Ombudsman also maintains contacts with children and the youth and conveys information from them to decision makers. The Ombudsman also promotes the carrying out of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Ombudsman for Children does not handle individual cases concerning children and families, such as matters concerning care orders or custody; these are dealt with by social services and the courts.

The first Ombudsman for Children took up office on 1 September 2005.

8. Children's Parliament

One of the central questions related to participation by young people under debate in recent years has concerned age. The activity known as the Children's Parliament has been problematised and has provided practical insight into the work.

The Finnish Children's Parliament Association was established to promote children's participation in Finland. The ideological basis of the activity is in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The purpose of the Association is to:

1. serve as an umbrella association for municipal children's parliaments
2. develop and diversify interaction between public authorities, schools and pupils
3. help municipalities to set up their own children's parliaments according to the model provided by the Children's Parliament in the City of Tampere
4. publicise statements and opinions issued by municipal children's parliaments or the Finnish Children's Parliament Association and to further initiatives that have been made
5. help authorities to inform the public about decisions concerning children and young people in the preparatory stage
6. maintain contacts with the authorities – the Ministry of Education in particular – and to provide information about current issues related to children's participation
7. organise training events and produce materials directed at children to improve their participation skills.

The first Finnish Children's Parliament convened in Tampere in 2001, and it has since established itself as a channel for children's participation. The Children's Parliament in Tampere has presented several initiatives to the administrative bodies of the City of Tampere. Children's proposals have been responded to and many of them have led to permanent changes. In other words, children's ideas and hopes have been realised.

The Tampere model has been productised and presented as an example for other municipal children's parliaments.

The Tampere model is not about a democracy model relying on party politics, rather it is about 'mandate democracy' built on the activity of local schools.

This strengthens the organisation, and gives it stability and security. Working through schools, the parliament serves as a motivation for teaching and offers a forum that allows for everyday implementation of what has been learnt and for children to participate. Here, theoretical teaching and practice walk firmly hand in hand.

9. Youth Parliament of the Finnish Parliament

The Finnish Youth Parliament convening in the Session Hall at the Parliament House is the culmination of the work of parliamentary clubs arranged for 8th and 9th graders. Students are supervised by a leader in these clubs and learn about representative democracy, the Parliament, its history and its current work. The clubs are supported by a club portfolio produced by the Centre for School Clubs which has also been available in electronic format since 2002. The parliamentary club

may be a joint project for the school subjects of history and civics, mother tongue and student guidance and counselling. The schools may organise the orientation in a manner they think is the best.

In 2004, the theme for the parliamentary clubs was "Young People and Participation". The Centre for School Clubs published learning materials for this purpose, targeted at 14- to 17-year-old club members. The other themes have been 'Elections', 'the EU' and 'the Constitution'. The Youth Parliament convenes on alternate years at the Finnish Parliament. The debate between the young attendees and ministers answering their questions has become increasingly relaxed and open. The debate is carried out in the form of oral question time. The ministers attending the session answer questions that students have prepared in parliamentary clubs. The session is broadcast live on television.

b) Ensure that such dialogue can also include young people who are not members of organisations and that their concerns are taken into account.

Reaching young people who are not members of any organisation is an element of all youth work. There are several work methods within the official school system that develop the school as a community. These endeavours (peer support in schools, student bodies) create a platform for more extensive societal participation.

Projects in social youth work entail more large-scale societal participation, while strengthening young people's social capacities.

Experiences of web-based youth work in several localities show that 'virtual youth workers' can encounter young people in difficult life situations over the web. The threshold to contact a virtual youth worker is low, which also creates an opening for therapeutic youth work. A virtual youth worker may be the one to reach the young person for the first time, and direct him or her, when necessary and as mutual trust is achieved, to a face-to-face relationship with a youth worker. For example, the experiences from the work by the Helsinki-based Habbo Hotel have been good, and the method is being transferred to other localities in Finland (<http://www2.habbohotel.fi/habbo/fi/help/>).

c) Promote and develop this dialogue, so that young people can be more involved in public life.

Based on several years of experience, the influence groups of young people are significant when and if their activities are allocated resources by the local authorities and when the young are genuinely listened to. In the last few years, the focus of debate has been, on the one hand, on the relationship between young people's influence groups and young people in general, in other words, how the members of such groups are elected, and, on the other, on the position of the groups in relation to municipal decision making. The dialogue developing between the authorities and young people is successful when based on the wide masses, which can only be reached if the selection of influence group members is organised through the official school system. The credibility of influence groups is based on how legitimate its position is within municipal decision making. If the group has no position or right to give voice to young people in the official decision-making machinery, the activity has neither sustainability nor credibility.

A topic that has been introduced to the Finnish debate is the question of lowering the voting age to 16 years in local elections. The debate on the matter has only started, so no conclusions as to its results can be made.

The media holds an important position in the societal debate with young people. The local press gives great publicity to young people's initiatives in questions related to participation. This also holds true for other initiatives by young people, such as those concerning youth culture. In fact, today's media has taken a highly favourable view on youth issues. The media prefers to place young people within a cultural context, rather than one of unhappiness or social problems.

- d) Identify more clearly and study the obstacles in the way to participation by young people in the system of representative democracy and encourage measures and mechanisms conducive to the inclusion of all young people in all their diversities (cultural or ethnic background, disabilities, gender, socio-economic factors, etc.).**

Young people's participation in representative democracy has been the topic of extensive study in Finland. Research has been conducted on the relationships of influence groups with municipal democracy, young people's electoral behaviour, and young people's extra-parliamentary citizen participation and protest movements (Paakkunainen 2003, 2004; Hoikkala et al. 2005). Participation by immigrants has been studied, for example, in a programme funded by the Academy of Finland, entitled "Marginalisation, inequality and ethnic relations in Finland" and involving several projects. Some of the research projects focus exclusively on young people. The research has led to proposals being presented to political decision makers.

The quality of participation by young people and the potential of web-based participation by young people are currently being studied in projects funded by the Ministry of Education.

Objective 3. Support for various forms of learning to participate

Lines of action:

- a) **Further develop and extend training for participation within formal education systems (in conjunction with the objectives approved under the open method of coordination as applied to education).**

The official education system employs several methods for the communal development of schools, such as the student peer support system in schools and the peer-to-peer mitigation in minor conflict situations. The purpose of these methods is to prevent bullying, to support pupils at risk of social marginalisation, and to teach students to solve conflicts in a constructive manner. Student welfare services have been systematically developed as a multi-professional system in Finnish schools.

The methods supporting the communal development of schools as places of learning of representative democracy include the aforementioned children's parliaments, the Voice of the Young and Youth Elections. They reach young people in their classrooms and their continuity is based on being incorporated into the official education system.

It is planned to strengthen the position of student bodies as an important channel of participation for young people by including their statutory position in the Basic Education Act.

An important project in training for participation in schools worthy of specific mention is the “Participating student – communal school” project, which is headed and coordinated by the Ministry of Education. The project involves 100 schools in 28 municipalities and it is part of the government’s Civil Participation Policy Programme.

Citizenship has also been acknowledged as a theme in the content development for school curricula. Youth work professionals have had the opportunity to comment on the curriculum content.

The National Board of Education has declared 2005 the Year of Citizenship through Education. The theme year adheres to the goals of both the Council of Europe work on education for democratic citizenship and Prime Minister Vanhanen's “Civil Participation Policy Programme”.

2004 saw a crucial structural change in the official education system of Finland, as the afternoon activities for schoolchildren became statutory. The aim of afternoon activity for schoolchildren is to prevent children’s social and civic exclusion. The afternoon activities involve many voluntary NGOs, which in effect makes these activities a means for schools to open their doors to civil society. Along with the introduction of afternoon activities for schoolchildren, there has been discussion about schools as multipurpose activity centres that need to be integrated into the surrounding community. The concept of an ‘integrated school day’ is the topic of a major research project currently under way in Finland (Mukava Project, funded by the Finnish National Fund for Research and Development (Sitra) and headed by Professor Lea Pulkkinen). The purpose of the afternoon activities is also to improve the interaction between children and the older generations and in many schools the activities are designed in collaboration with parents.

According to the situation in August 2005, morning and afternoon activities for children were organised in 379 municipalities for 46,500 children. These figures show an increase of 23 municipalities and 6,000 children compared to 2004. The National Board of Education controls and works towards improving the quality of morning and afternoon activities through a national network and supports municipalities in organising the activities.

The official education system of Finland also supports the parent-teacher associations (PTAs). The Finnish Parents’ Association has in the past few years supported the nationwide networking of PTAs. Parents have also adopted parliamentary terms for their work, thus improving the dialogue between homes and schools, and have entitled their annual national convention the Parents’ Parliament.

The Civil Society 2006 committee, appointed by the Ministry of Education as part of the Citizen’s Participation Policy Programme of Prime Minister Vanhanen’s government, has issued several recommendations with regard to civic education. The recommendations were directed to both the official education system and to non-formal and informal education (Civil Society 2006 committee).

b) Encourage the development of activities in the field of non-formal and informal education that promote the active participation of young people.

The municipal departments of youth affairs support, through various means, the establishment of associations and organise training in issues related to running an association.

For several years the Ministry of Education has hosted an unofficial working group on eDemocracy, which has charted and supported projects promoting participation by young people.

An encouraging example of participation by young people is <http://www.valtikka.fi>, which has attracted a large number of users and enhanced training in participation provided by schools.

c) Further develop interaction between formal, non-formal and informal education.

The youth work field is actively seeking new ways of collaborating with the official education system. This is done, for example, through multi-professional teams.

In localities where polytechnic training in youth work is available, the students' work, such as theses or practical training, has been successfully utilised to meet the needs of local youth work. This has also increased the regional impact of the polytechnics.

An example of international activities is provided by the State Provincial Office of Southern Finland, which takes part in a Council of Europe working group developing a European portfolio for youth workers and youth leaders in the context of non-formal education.

d) Foster the development of experience of participation where young people live their lives, in particular within the family, at school, in youth organisations, at university, at other places of education or training and at work, in sporting and leisure time contexts.

Finland has in recent years developed ways of involving children and young people in decision making from as young an age, and in as many different ways, as possible, ranging from listening to children in day-care centres to strengthening the position of student bodies in schools. Sports organisations and federations are contributing to the debate particularly under the Young Finland Association on how young people should be listened to and treated equally in sports teams.

Although the achievements vary, it is strategically important that the attitude towards listening to children and young people has taken a positive turn.

e) Recognise the important role of persons working with young people and facilitating their learning to participate and develop training actions in this field.

Training in the youth field has been strongly developed in the past few years in Finland. This training is multifaceted and widely available at secondary vocational and polytechnic levels and, since 2005, at university level up to Master's degree. The Master's programme in youth education launched in Finland is the only academic Master's programme in Europe focusing on youth education and policies. It is also possible to earn competence-based qualifications in youth work in Finland.

The importance of youth work is also emphasised by a study on youth work funded by the Ministry of Education. Publications on methods in youth work and theories in youth education are scheduled to be released in 2006, and they will serve as textbooks in the field.

Research on the quality of civil participation and debate on the quality of youth work are seen as important openings for the recognition of the importance of youth work.

- f) Promote and increase awareness of the benefits to all of the participation of committed young people and combat prejudices against young people which prevent them from playing an effective part.**

The local media in Finland has a very positive attitude towards participation by young people, and the way it covers initiatives made by young people and the activities of their influence groups reflects this. The foundation for the work by the media is the freedom of the press in Finland and the way media is consumed in Finland. Papers are subscribed to and most households follow both the national and local press.

- g) Analyse more carefully the phenomena that lead to the civic exclusion of certain groups and encourage approaches focused on prevention.**

Social polarisation, or the increasing distance between advantaged and disadvantaged young people, has been under public focus in Finland in the past few years. In addition, the membership and participation of immigrants in Finnish society has received relatively significant attention.

Schools play a major role in preventive measures, aiming at keeping the number of school dropouts to a minimum, and these measures have been successful. The student welfare services at schools have been allocated resources, but their standard may still vary from one municipality to another to an unacceptable extent. Problems are markedly manifest in the field of child protection and in child and family policies. The number of child protection cases is on the rise. On the positive side, however, the increasing trend of teenage abortions has turned around.

Chapter 3 Actions taken for identifying existing knowledge in participation and for implementing measures to supplement, update and facilitate access to it

Evaluation, both external and internal, is often an integral part of programmes and projects aimed at increasing civil participation.

Moreover, civil participation has been studied as an independent topic of study, using quantitative and qualitative data and methods. The present report draws in this respect from an extensive range of sources.

The Finnish Youth Research Network has participated in an EU project between 2003 and 2005 which involves eight countries. The project is coordinated by an independent research institute, SORA (Institute of Social Research and Analysis, Vienna, Austria). Included also are countries that are not members of the EU, and material is gathered from further afield than the participating countries. The basic data include 15- to 24-year-old Europeans. (Political Participation of Young People in Europe – Development of Indicators for Comparative Research in the European Union,

Chapter 4 Ways young people have been consulted for the implementation of the common objectives and for drawing up the report

Civil participation projects as a rule include young people in the process from the very beginning. That is the only way to invite commitment to obtaining common goals. The best way to involve young people in such projects is to assign them preparation tasks and other responsibilities. The tasks of officials and youth workers are to provide the facilities, resources and supervision for the work.

The material for this report arose from a national seminar, to which representatives of youth organisations were invited. The voice of the young is represented in the report by secondary sources, that is, results from surveys and other empirical studies.

Regional and local authorities provided information about the current state of affairs via email surveys and telephone. In addition, interviews with experts and scholars in youth work and education have been utilised in the writing of this report (as reference material to the report).

Chapter 5 Obstacles met in the implementation of the objectives and lines of action at the national level

The most salient obstacles in promoting participation by young people have been:

- The tardiness of municipal decision making, which in some cases has hindered young people from seeing their own achievements and grasping the entire process of implementing decisions. Young people may have moved away from a municipality before decisions have been implemented.
- Municipal decision making has become more removed from young people or the current political system is unable to reach young people.
- Local authorities do not heed young people's messages sufficiently.
- The attitudes of local authorities. Some local authorities question young people's ability to handle issues. Young people are not trusted and they are not assigned responsibilities.
- Youth work and the professional skills of youth workers are still not recognised and appreciated enough.
- The status and significance of non-formal education is not recognised and appreciated enough.
- Problems of small localities and rural areas. In rural areas, problems are related to long distances and are practical in nature. The number of young people is small in rural areas.

- Polarisation in growth centres, particularly in the 18-to-24-year age bracket has increased. For example, in the last local elections, the polarisation between low income areas and middle class well income areas increased in the 18-to-24-old voter groups, while the opposite was true for the 25-to-34-year age bracket.
- The low turnout of young people (18–24 years) at the polls continues in the high-rise areas of Helsinki, and also voting rates of young male adults (25–28 years) have remained low. The biggest increase in voting rate in local elections is shown by 29- to 34-year-old women. Challenges in election work are particularly noticeable in those who have only recently reached voting age, and in young adult males.

Chapter 6 Impact noted so far and impact expected

- Participation in representative democracy began to increase in the 2003 parliamentary elections and in the 2004 local elections. Well-targeted and carefully themed political election work is deemed to influence young people's voting participation.
- It is to be expected that in the 2006 presidential elections, young people's turnout will increase, provided the candidates manage to target their message towards the young people.
- The most progress has been made in developing representative democracy (various influence groups of young people). Influence groups of young people operate currently in 186 municipalities and every municipality has at least some kind of a group promoting young people's interest that the young residents of the municipality can identify.
- Debate on participation has shifted towards increasingly stressing the quality of participation. The analysis of the quality of participation has entered the debate in the past two years in Finland. The topic is currently studied in a research project covering empirical data from 15 municipalities; the steering group for the study is nationally representative. The issue has been and is also the topic of many Master's and Doctoral theses. In addition, the youth affairs departments of some municipalities are conducting their own studies and surveys on the quality of participation. On a national level, the basic security study to be carried out by the State Provincial Offices in autumn 2006 will incorporate a section on participation by young people. Research on the quality of participation will have an impact on the allocation of resources aimed at promoting participation.
- Debate on civil participation and membership has led to a change in attitudes, whereby participation is increasingly understood as being part of citizens' well-being and quality of life. This is evident particularly in that the dimension of participation has been given more emphasis in the official education system and in social youth work.
- Finland's excellent performance in the PISA study of learning results has led to the question: why does Finland fare poorly in such comparative analyses as the IAE Civic Education Study or surveys about children's satisfaction with school? The ongoing public debate on participation and the diversity of projects related to the topic conducted by various bodies indicate that progress can be expected in young people's participation and satisfaction with school.

- Web-based forms of participation have improved. Previously the Internet has served mainly as a channel for disseminating information, but its potential as an interactive and activating channel for young people has become a key development target.
- The Finnish media has a very positive attitude towards young people's civic activity. Both the local and national press give space and publicity to issues concerning young people. The themes are discussed by knowledgeable reporters with insight into the matter, which has guaranteed good quality of coverage.

Chapter 7 Indication of the inventoried lines of action which were most and least useful, the easiest and the most difficult to implement, and proposals for adding, deleting, modifying these lines of action

The most useful lines of action

Supporting young people's influence groups and developing their work as well as targeting the work towards special groups. These aspects are linked to lines of action both in civic life and in representative democracy, and in learning to participate. The central lines of action are 1 A, B, D, E; 2 A, B, D; and 3 A, C, E, F, G.

The least useful lines of action

None of the lines of actions are useless as such. The least useful of them, however, can be estimated to be 2 C, mainly because it partly overlaps with 2 B.

The lines of action easiest to implement

The lines of actions easiest to implement have been those related to young people's participation in representative democracy, but bearing in mind that participation in civic life and representative democracy are often closely interlinked.

The lines of action most difficult to implement

Activating and including young people who are socially excluded or who are not members of any organisations in political activity, that is, lines of action 1 D and 2 B and C.

Experiences arising from projects concentrating on social youth work show that it is difficult to coax young people who are excluded from civic life to step out of their private space. Young people's active citizenship and participation in taking care of common issues can be promoted through strengthening young people's social position. Political participation can only be achieved through social and economic well-being. In Finland, the disaffection of excluded young people is manifest through their passiveness and apathy. This may also serve as a future breeding ground for political populism.

To remain outside political organisation does not mean that one is at risk of civic exclusion in Finland. That would be more a question of individual choices, with which young people manage their lives. Their personal contributions and their level of commitment to common issues are determined by how they see their own future. Taking little interest in political activity does not mean that one should be anti-political; rather it only shows that one does not see one's own life as being linked to common issues. Convincing young people that this link exists is the greatest challenge of Finnish political culture.

Proposals for adding lines of action

We propose a line of action which would better recognise the potential of information technology in enhancing participation by young people.

Proposals for deleting lines of actions

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Proposals for modifying lines of action

We propose that lines of action 2 B and C be combined, as in practice they are one and the same thing.

The concept active citizenship could work as a general concept, with young people's civic activity and young people's participation in representative democracy as its sub-concepts. Young people's civic activity produces social capital and reinforces communities. Participation in the representative democratic system creates a new political culture and strengthens the legitimacy of the political system. The aim of personal life management will then meet the common issues of citizens.

The preparation of this report was entrusted to Tapio Kuure, an independent researcher for the Finnish Youth Research Network. The draft report was discussed by a Ministry of Education working group coordinating the national actions prescribed by EU co-operation in youth policy. The members of the coordinating group represent different fields and levels of public administration as well as youth researchers and youth organisations. Members representing youth organisations have been responsible for bringing the views of youth organisations to the fore. The Advisory Council for Youth Affairs has contributed to the working group as a permanent advisor. The Section for Youth and Sport of the Committee for EU Affairs discussed the report in its meeting on 8 December 2005.

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E-mail consultations:

State Provincial Offices

- Southern Finland
- Western Finland
- Eastern Finland

Municipalities

- Espoo
- Iisalmi
- Elimäki
- Tampere

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