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NATIONAL YOUTH WORK AND YOUTH POLICY PROGRAMME 2017–2019

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Foundation of the programme

The National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme (VANUPO) is a statutory cross-sectoral programme adopted by the Government every four years. Its aim is to promote young people's growth and living conditions. In the programme, the Government defines its youth policy objectives for the government term. The programmes are adopted as government resolutions. The current Youth Act (1285/2016) constitutes the legal basis for the programme. Owing to the transitional provision included in the Act, the present programme is drawn up for the period 2017–2019. The provision concerning the programme, section 5 of the Youth Act, is supplemented by the Government Decree on Youth Work and Policy (211/2017), which entered into force on 13 April 2017.

As defined in the Decree, the National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme coordinates the objectives and measures determined by the key ministries for promoting young people's growth and living conditions and designed to contribute to the attainment of the objectives defined in section 2 of the Youth Act during the programme period. In addition, the programme sets out the guidelines for supporting youth work and related activities, including the key criteria for eligibility for state aid by national youth work centres of expertise pursuant to section 19 of the Youth Act. The programme also establishes the national objectives for youth activities in the European and international context.

The starting point and frame of reference of the national programme is the Strategic Programme of Prime Minister Juha Sipilä's Government of 29 May 2015. As part of implementing the Strategic Government Programme, the Government carries out 26 key projects divided into five priority areas, many of which include objectives and measures concerning children and young people. The national programme supplements the existing basic activities and key projects.

The new Youth Act entered into force on 1 January 2017. Thus, the time for implementing the first National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme is about two years. In its mid-term review in spring 2017, the Government already outlined its key objectives when it comes to the promotion of young people's growth and living conditions during the latter half of its term. For this reason, the national programme gives priority to measures and objectives where clear progress can be achieved during the remainder of the government term. The programme focuses on executing the Government's policies from the perspective of implementing a horizontal youth policy.

The national programme encompasses all young people under 29 years of age, as referred to in the Youth Act. The key measures determined in the programme are, however, targeted at improving the living conditions of young people in the core group of youth, or roughly between 12 and 25 years of age.

1.2. Operating environment

Young people are a multifaceted population group; their principal common factor is belonging to a certain age group. Otherwise, young people's paths to independence proceed from different social and economic

backgrounds and from various family structures. Young people live in rural areas, sparsely populated areas and cities. The group of young people is comprised of different genders and both disabled and non-disabled individuals. Apart from the majority population, young people include young immigrants, young people from the indigenous Saami population, young Roma people and other language and cultural minorities. Young people's outlooks on life are not uniform; for instance, young people hold different ideological, ethical and religious views and have different sexual orientations and gender identities.

There are more young people in the world than ever before. It is estimated that over 1.8 billion people of the world's population are between 10 and 24 years of age. The largest youth population is in the least developed countries: there, children and young people account for the majority of the population. Also in the global migration flows, some of which focus on Europe, young people constitute a large group. In many areas, such as North Africa and the Mediterranean region, young people are in the focus of social change and often also the engines of social change. The future prospects of the world's children and young people and the opportunities for sustainable development depend on global development trends, which the United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development (Agenda 2030) seeks to influence. Finland is committed to the implementation of this agenda. At European level, the burning issues for young people, and thereby for the European youth policy, are the integration of young people into societies, employment and the possibilities to exert influence.

At least three significant trends with regard to young people are visible in Finland's demographic structure: 1) the share of young people in the total population is falling; 2) regional disparities in the share of young people are increasing; and 3) cultural diversity in society, especially among the young population, is rising. The implementation of the national programme must take into account accessibility and the realisation of equal opportunities for various groups of young people, regardless of the differing financial resources of families, for example. In practice, this means that effort is made to consider the needs of the different groups of young people as much as possible in the measures targeted at the whole age group, such as the provision of various services and the promotion of participation.

1.3. Selection of means for implementing the programme

The primary means for attaining the objectives of the programme are to root youth policy thinking in the core activities of different administrative branches and to build links supporting the living conditions of young people within and between different government policies. To support this work, a network of liaison officers consisting of officials in the key ministries for the growth and living conditions of young people has been identified during the preparation of the programme. The network will be used to coordinate youth affairs in state administration. The work of the network of liaison officers will be coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Youth policy work is broad-based by nature and carried out across the boundaries of various administrative branches. The programme channels the human and financial resources available to the various ministries so that they benefit young people's growth and living conditions in the best possible manner. The programme has a particularly great steering effect in the field of youth work and youth policy, which can use all the resources allocated by the government to the entire sector of youth work and youth activities

and can benefit from the effectiveness provided by them. In other words, the programme is not implemented using only a single specific appropriation.

The youth work centres of expertise referred to in section 19 of the Youth Act support the achievement of the objectives of the national programme and the implementation of measures. The centres of expertise develop and promote basic and specific skills in the youth sector by producing, gathering and utilising expert and other services and by disseminating information on young people, youth work or youth policy. The centres of expertise must also monitor the general development in their field of expertise and report on this. In their activities, the youth work centres of expertise selected must take into account the needs of various genders, language groups and young people with disabilities, as well as the promotion of sustainable development objectives and the equal treatment of young people.

1.4. Who is the National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme (VANUPO) intended for?

VANUPO is a central government programme

Ministries have the main responsibility for implementing the objectives specified in the national programme. The ministries use the objectives and measures determined in the programme as their guidelines when steering the activities in their administrative branches, including the activities of the regional administration. As the health, social services and regional government reform progresses, the objectives of the programme may also have an impact on regional work aiming to improve young people's growth and living conditions. VANUPO supports the implementation of the Government's key projects focusing on the wellbeing of children, young people and families and on the reduction of inequality.

VANUPO suggests themes for local governments – not obligations

The attainment of the programme's objectives requires good cooperation between the central government and local operators. Local governments are not bound by the objectives and measures set out in the programme when making decisions on how to organise their youth work. Instead, the objectives of the programme serve as indicators when the central government assesses municipal youth work as a basic service and evaluates work carried out to improve the living conditions of young people. In addition, VANUPO steers the granting of aid allocated by the central government to local governments. The national objectives of the programme may also provide a basis for municipalities' own youth policy programme work at their own discretion.

The field of youth activities is independent – VANUPO provides guidelines for funding

Civic activities typically have great significance in the youth field. Strengthening young people's wellbeing and active citizenship is often sought through joint efforts by the authorities, NGOs and youth research. A typical feature of young people's free time is that spontaneous activities occur outside structures and independent of them. The Nordic countries governed by the rule of law – including Finland – have extensive civil liberties and rights. The importance of free civic activities, independent of the authorities, is recognised and acknowledged. Citizens and their voluntary associations receive support for their activities but are not

given orders. Therefore the direct impact of the national programme on civic activities is most often realised through the allocation of state aid.

1.5. Preparation of the programme

The preparation of the national programme was based on the pre-existing Youth Act, which entered into force in 2006. Section 4 of the said Act contained provisions on the youth policy development programme. Two development programmes for child and youth policy (LANUKE), as referred to in the Act, were adopted. The Government adopted the first programme (for the years 2007–2011) in December 2007; the second programme for the period 2012–2015 was adopted in December 2011.

The Ministry of Education and Culture started preparing the programme under the previous Youth Act in April 2014, in consultation with a wide range of field workers and experts of youth work and youth activities. However, the reform of the Youth Act changed the timetables, and the Government decided in December 2015 to extend the validity of the LANUKE programme for 2012–2015 to cover the year 2016 as well.

The Ministry of Education and Culture started preparing the National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme (VANUPO) proactively before the new Act entered into force. Although the new programme was partly based on the preparatory work that had already been carried out, the real launch took place at the discussion and information event convened by Minister Grahn-Laasonen on 12 September 2016. In accordance with its statutory mandate, the Advisory Council for Youth Affairs (nowadays the State Youth Council) gave its opinion on the issues to be included in the programme on 30 September 2016.

In November 2016, Minister Grahn-Laasonen sent her ministerial colleagues a request to define the youth policy objectives of their administrative branches and to appoint the liaison officers who would take part in the preparation. At the same time, it was decided not to appoint a traditional working group to prepare the programme, but to test a new, network-based preparation method. The proposals for objectives were received from the other ministries and the officials in charge were appointed by the end of January 2017. Following the entry into force of the new Youth Act at the beginning of 2017, officials at the Ministry of Education and Culture launched a negotiation round with the officials of other ministries on the more specific objectives, measures and other contents of the programme, based on the proposals for objectives expressed by the ministers.

During the spring of 2017, youth affairs were transferred to Minister Terho's portfolio. In its letter of 31 May 2017, the Ministry of Education and Culture asked the principal bodies dealing with young people's growth and living conditions to provide opinions on the draft programme by 21 July 2017 through the online consultation service *Lausuntopalvelu.fi*. A total of 67 opinions were received, mainly via *Lausuntopalvelu.fi*. A low-threshold forum for issuing comments, open to all, was also launched on the Ministry's website in the form of a Webropol survey.

The completion of the draft programme was announced through social media channels. In particular, young people and people working with them were encouraged to comment on the draft, for instance on Facebook and Twitter. The publication of the draft programme also prompted non-governmental organisations to act. For example Kepa, the Finnish umbrella organisation for development cooperation,

organised a discussion event on the topic on 13 June 2017 and spread information about the draft and the commenting options on its website. The Finnish Youth Co-operation – Allianssi also organised a discussion event on the topic on 21 June 2017. In addition to the Ministry of Education and Culture, certain other authorities and actors in the youth field also disseminated information about the draft and how to comment on it.

Opinions on the programme

On the whole, most of the opinions received were in favour of the programme. Some considered that the programme should be "more strategic" in terms of youth policy. Both the programme's objectives and its measures were considered to be in part realistic, but it was also suggested that the programme should strive towards more ambitious objectives. Some considered that the draft programme's measures for achieving the objectives in the various areas were insufficient. The draft programme was commended for being concise (in relation to the preceding development programmes for child and youth policy), despite the fact that many would have wanted the programme to also address other thematic areas besides those included in the draft. The feedback must be seen against the programme's short implementation period presented above.

The age limit set forth in the programme (in accordance with the Youth Act, all people under the age of 29, with the focus on young people between the ages of 13 and 25) strongly divided opinions. Some wanted the key target group to include younger people, while others considered that older people could also be included. However, many considered that focusing on the middle part of youth was very positive and felt that it gave some backbone to the programme and its implementation. The key target group selected for the programme in the further preparation consisted of young people between the ages of 12 and 25.

Some of those consulted said that the programme should put more emphasis on well-trying youth work practices. In their view, many important methods had been overlooked. The draft programme was criticised for failing to give enough credit for the valuable work done by NGOs. However, some emphasised that the programme should not concentrate so much on the presentation of the existing practices and work forms but on the future, which had in fact been the objective of those drawing up the programme. The programme is primarily a programme within state administration, and in Finland the state does not order what civil society should do.

One of the main feedback items was that the programme's objectives and measures should be tied more closely to other government policies, such as the key projects. As a result of the feedback, this point of view was emphasised in the further preparation of the programme. Some of those consulted felt that the draft's cross-sectoral/horizontal youth policy view was strong and desirable. It was considered particularly important to root youth policy thinking in all the processes that were essential to the growth and living conditions of young people. A smaller percentage of those who submitted an opinion criticised the programme for sticking to old sectoral thinking. This demonstrates well how differently the same draft programme can be seen.

A shortcoming mentioned in the opinions was that the draft programme largely failed to mention the resources available for implementing the programme. Indicators for measuring the effectiveness of the programme were also missed already at the draft stage. These two shortcomings were highlighted in further preparation.

The needs for centres of expertise, introduced in the draft, received varied feedback. Many felt that the sections concerning centres of expertise were not sufficiently clear. Especially the process for selecting centres of expertise as described in the draft needed clarification. Also the writing style, where partly the same needs for centres of expertise were repeated under different objectives, was seen as confusing. According to one opinion, however, the future centres of expertise were too easy to read from the draft programme. As a result of the feedback received, a decision was made to handle the centre of expertise needs as a distinct entity of its own and to describe the process of selecting centres of expertise in more detail.

From a thematic point of view, many of those consulted felt that cultural youth work was not identified sufficiently in the programme. The small role given to traditional or preventive youth work in the draft was also criticised broadly. This despite the fact that most of the measures listed in the draft specifically concerned activities aiming to prevent social exclusion. In addition, it was hoped that the programme would better identify issues such as sustainable development, Roma youth affairs, bullying, loneliness, the special situation of young people in rural areas, the regional government reform, and young people's spontaneous interests and activities ('doing') independent of the systems of youth work and youth activities. As far as possible, effort has been made to examine all these wishes as part of the further preparation of the programme.

The objectives set out in the draft programme for international and European cooperation in the youth field were generally considered to be good and timely. In many opinions, the importance of increasing the mobility of young people and youth workers was – quite justifiably – emphasised. The European Union programme for education, training, youth and sport, Erasmus+ (2014–2020), promotes the mobility of young people and youth workers and seeks to develop cooperation in the youth field and the quality of youth work. For this reason, increasing mobility is not among the key objectives of this programme.

The opinions paid attention, on the one hand, to the Europe-centred approach of the objectives and, on the other hand, to the omission of the objectives of the future EU Youth Strategy. The objectives concerning the European Union have been left open deliberately insofar as their preparation is included in the national decision-making process pertaining to the European Union. The global dimension was taken into account in the further preparation of the programme as a cross-cutting element of the implementation of the programme. Those consulted considered the development of digital youth work to be a worthwhile goal, but many criticised the fact that cooperation was limited only to Estonia. In fact, the draft proposed that the project be launched with Estonia and be later expanded into a European peer learning project. The procedure proposed in the draft is based on an assessment of what is realistic to achieve in the short programme period, when taking into account other obligations in implementing the European and international agenda.

[Webropol survey on the draft programme](#)

In addition to circulating the draft for comments, the Ministry of Education and Culture also launched an open online survey (Webropol) concerning the programme. While the survey was open to all, it was targeted specifically at youth workers and young people. All in all, 107 replies were received. Most of the respondents (65%) were adults involved in youth work. The age group of 0–28 years, encompassed by the Youth Act, accounted for 35% of all respondents. The majority of young respondents belonged to the age group of 13–17 years, which accounted for two out of three young respondents. The second largest group consisted of those between 18 and 25 years of age. In addition to the age distribution, the respondents

were also asked to provide background information on their gender and living environment. 75% of the respondents were women/girls, 23% were men/boys and 2% were in the group other. With respect to the living environment, responses were distributed fairly evenly. 28% of the respondents reported living in a big city, 37% in a small town and 35% in rural areas.

In general, the respondents were satisfied with the objectives and measures set out in the programme. When the opinions collected through the *Lausuntopalvelu.fi* service are compared to the responses received through the online survey, it can be seen that the *Lausuntopalvelu.fi* respondents hoped that the programme would have more ambitious objectives. In the online survey, the objectives were often considered too utopian and hard to reach. This was especially true for responses given by people from rural areas. For example, it was brought up that there are no jobs or hobbies in remote areas and therefore the programme's ability to influence these issues is very limited. It was hoped the most that the programme would include more mentions about the role of locally conducted youth work as a preventive service. This applied to both municipal youth work and youth work in organisations and parishes.

With regard to the objective of developing digital youth work in international and European cooperation, respondents drew attention to the participation of young people in the implementation of the objective. In the further preparation of the draft programme, the utilisation of young people's skills and strengths in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the project was added among the measures listed under the objective, especially with regard to the European peer learning project.

2. KEY YOUTH POLICY OBJECTIVES AND MEASURES TO BE COORDINATED

The programme coordinates the objectives and measures determined by the key ministries for promoting young people's growth and living conditions and designed to contribute to the attainment of the objectives defined in section 2 of the Youth Act (1285/2016) during the programme period.

Taking into account the work done within the Government key projects (based on the Government Programme) and within other strategies and programmes of the Government to improve the growth and living conditions of young people, the Government defines five youth policy objectives for 2017–2019:

- Every child and young person has the possibility to engage in at least one free-time hobby of their choice;
- Young people's employability skills are enhanced and social exclusion is reduced;
- Young people receive more opportunities for participation and exerting influence;
- Fewer young people suffer from mental health problems thanks to preventive work; and
- Young people receive sufficient guidance and other support for independent living.

In addition to describing the phenomenon related to each of these objectives, the programme sets out more detailed objectives and defines the measures necessary to achieve them. The ministries' responsibilities for coordinating and participating in the implementation of the measures are also presented below.

2.1. Every child and young person has the possibility to engage in at least one free-time hobby of their choice

Phenomenon – having a hobby

Hobbies provide meaningful engagement, inclusion and social relationships as well as opportunities to experiment and develop one's own skills. At their best, they reinforce a child's and a young person's self-esteem and confidence in their own abilities and reduce the feeling of loneliness. Hobbies are guided activities organised, for instance, by associations, municipalities and parishes. In addition, it must be noted that a significant proportion of hobbies take place on young people's own terms. There is no uniform definition of a hobby. For instance, youth clubs offer many opportunities to try different things, but are those activities perceived as hobbies?

The everyday lives of children and young people are polarised: people with low income numbered 674,000 in Finland in 2014 and poverty in families with children has become more common in the country. Giving up or not starting hobbies because of their high costs contributes to widening the gaps in health and wellbeing. According to the 2015 Youth Barometer, 47 per cent of young people whose native language is neither Finnish nor Swedish and 34 per cent of Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking young people have not started a hobby due to lack of money. 27 per cent of foreign language speakers and 18 per cent of Finnish- and Swedish-speaking young people have had to give up their hobby due to lack of money.

Influencing the cost of hobbies requires parallel policies and measures from different actors. The state, municipalities and organisations should evaluate the cost implications of their decisions from the perspective of an individual hobbyist and families. For example the competition systems for various sports and the related requirements concerning the necessary facilities and equipment can be developed while keeping the costs moderate. It is also important to disseminate information about local and municipal experiments considered to be effective in this respect.

Objective

Every child and young person has the opportunity to engage in a meaningful hobby with a low threshold. Discontinuation of a hobby because of the place of residence, disability, minority status or the family's financial standing is decreased. Children and young people with different cultural backgrounds engage in hobbies in the same groups increasingly often. As a result, fewer children and young people are lonely or bullied. The risk of social exclusion is diminished.

According to the Government's mid-term review (key project 4 for knowledge and education: Improved access to art and culture):

A new national 'Pupil survey' has been conducted to hear pupils and identify which fields of arts and culture and sports interest them. Recreational classes have been organised as indicated by the pupils' interests. 200,000 pupils responded to the survey.

In its mid-term review, the Government also defined its policy (DIMINISHING THE EXCLUSION OF YOUNG PEOPLE, item 3) as follows:

It is ensured that every child and young person has the possibility to engage in at least one free-time hobby of their choice (hobby guarantee). The hobby guarantee prevents intergenerational transmission of social exclusion, reinforces the self-esteem of children and young people, supports learning, and improves satisfaction at school. Implementation is based on the report of a working group set up by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The hobby guarantee requires close cooperation between the state, municipalities, schools, the third sector and homes.

The objective is to reconcile the best practices developed within the key project and the policy concerning the hobby guarantee. It is ensured that the results of the Pupil survey conducted as part of the key project will be utilised within the central government. The Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of Justice will intensify their cooperation to improve the effectiveness and consistency of the support allocated by the public sector to civil society so that the hobby guarantee can be fully realised.

Measures

1.1.

A survey designed to determine young people's favourite hobbies will be revised and expanded in 2017 to cover all young people aged between 7 and 16 years. The objective is that children and young people could more than before influence the provision and availability of hobbies. The results of the survey will be utilised when pupils are provided with recreational arts and culture classes before or after school hours and at or near the school premises as part of implementing the Government's key project on improved access to art and culture. The Ministry of Education and Culture will allocate discretionary government grants for organising these activities. Effort will be made to target recreational classes at pupils in grades 7–9 more than during the first key project year.

1.2.

The sports and youth sectors will implement a joint project to improve cooperation between local youth activities and sports activities in order to increase the availability of low-threshold physical activities for young people. In particular, the project will seek to improve the possibilities of both recreational activities that have no competitive elements and beginners' groups to use the premises of youth services, schools and educational institutions for their activities. Opportunities for recreational activities during school holidays should also be improved. Using the existing tools, especially those developed by the Ministry of Justice for the promotion of equality, the project will also evaluate the accessibility of recreational activities, any discrimination that may occur in the activities, and other mechanisms causing inequality.

1.3.

The Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health/the Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations (STEA) will work together to ensure that the support for children's and young people's affordable recreational activities is adequate and that shadow areas and overlapping in aid activities are minimised. Particular attention is paid to the children and young people of families in a difficult economic situation and to young people belonging to minorities, such as immigrants, Saami youth, Roma youth and young people with disabilities.

1.4.

As of 2018, a public official will be assigned at the Ministry of Education and Culture to assume responsibility for developing the aid system for recreational activities, together with other actors. The objective is that the aid system will, even better than before, be able to support the production of high-quality and affordable recreational opportunities especially for children and young people, gather information about hobbies and the effectiveness of recreational activities, and promote the spreading of best practices across sectoral boundaries, as presented in the Ministry's working group report 2017:19 (Ensuring possibilities for meaningful recreational activities for every child and young person).

Coordinated by: Ministry of Education and Culture

Also involved: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry of Justice

2.2. Young people's employability skills are enhanced and social exclusion is reduced

Phenomenon – employment

According to Eurostat statistics, 20.4 per cent of the workforce under 25 years of age in Finland was without work in May 2017, as compared to the EU average of 16.9 per cent. According to Statistics Finland, the unemployment rate of 15 to 24-year-olds was 21.7 per cent in July 2017, which was 1.7 percentage points more than the year before. Statistics compiled by researcher Mr Pekka Myrskylä in June 2015 reveal that in 2013 there were 44,463 young people (16–29 years of age) who were neither in education nor employed and who had not completed any qualification after comprehensive school. According to Myrskylä, the feeling of being an outsider has increased especially among young people whose native language is other than Finnish, Swedish or Saami.

Digitalisation and automation are changing both working life and the requirements placed on working life skills. Part 1 of the Government Report on the Future drawn up by Prime Minister Juha Sipilä's Government builds shared understanding of the transformation of work and the future of Finnish work. When examining the meaning of the transformation of work for society, attention must be paid to the priorities of both transgenerational thinking and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Important trends for youth policy are both change in livelihood and change in skills. These, as well as the change in the employer–employee relationship, fixed-term employment and self-employment, are already visible in young people's working life.

Although the transformation of work is a long-term process, some effects, such as digitalisation, are already clearly visible and are changing the operating environment as well as young people's experiences and expectations. According to the 2016 Youth Barometer, almost half of young Finns are concerned about whether they will have a job in the future. The reason for the high unemployment rate among young people is the insufficient supply of jobs but also the fact that some young people need clearly more support for job hunting and acting in working life.

Objective

In its mid-term review, the Government outlined its policy (REDUCING THE NUMBER OF EXCLUDED YOUNG PEOPLE (NEETs), item 10) as follows:

The activities of the One-Stop Guidance Centres (Ohjaamo) will be established as a permanent practice. The guidance, social, health, labour and youth services intended for young people will be intensified, simplified and integrated, and the duration of service processes will be shortened. Cooperation will be increased between the public, private, and third sectors.

Responsibility of the One-Stop Guidance Centres for arrangements will be defined as part of the ongoing reforms, and a steering group consisting of representatives from ministries, business life and the third sector will be appointed so that the goal-orientation of the activities of the One-Stop Guidance Centres can be strengthened.

According to the Government's mid-term review (key project 4 for employment and competitiveness: Reforming labour administration to support employment):

Youth employment will be increased by linking the youth guarantee and the activities of the One-Stop Guidance Centres (Ohjaamo) to the growth services.

Key project 6 for knowledge and education:

An overview of the key projects will secure the joint impact of different key projects on the wellbeing of children, young people and families and on reducing inequalities in the context of the regional government reform.

The Government will implement 19 measures to promote the wellbeing of children and young people, prevent exclusion and reduce the number of NEET youths (not in education, employment or training).

Key project 3 for health and wellbeing, Programme to restructure child and family services:

An overview of the key projects will secure the joint impact of different key projects on the wellbeing of children, young people and families and on reducing inequalities following the regional government reform.

In the mid-term review ('New openings'), the Government also outlined its policy on the entity of children, young people and families:

An overview of the key projects will secure their joint impact on the wellbeing of children, young people and families and on reducing inequalities in the context of preparing the new regional government system. The aims of the overview also include modernising established practices and promoting dialogue between different actors.

and

In order to achieve the objective of preventing inequality and social exclusion, the overview will focus on enhancing the joint impact of the NEET measures adopted by the key project on children and families and the key project on the youth guarantee.

The objective is to implement the outlined policies in order to ensure cooperation, operating practices and effectiveness.

Young people are better equipped than before to study and find work. Young people receive high-quality and timely study and career guidance in schools, educational institutions, youth work, youth workshops, PES/growth services and One-Stop Guidance Centres. The accumulation of problems in life management – an obstacle to employment and to uninterrupted and completed education – has been reduced.

Measures

2.1.

The activities of the youth guarantee key project will be restructured in such a way that the realisation of the policies outlined in the mid-term review, as mentioned above, is ensured, especially in order to ensure cooperation, operating practices and effectiveness.

2.2.

In connection with the regional government reform, it will be ensured that the PES services for young people (future growth services) provided by the state are integrated into social and health services in such a way that service capacity is maintained at all times. Continued operation of the One-Stop Guidance Centre services will be ensured, and nationwide support will be offered for developing the services. The division of labour between the information and advisory services for young people and the One-Stop Guidance Centres will be clarified.

2.3.

By developing a national online guidance service, it will be ensured that young people have equal opportunities, irrespective of their place of residence, to gain access to education and find a job or to seek rehabilitation. Cooperation between the public, private and third sectors will be enhanced to support young people. In order to utilise skills and competences acquired by young people in voluntary, leisure and organisational activities, the possibilities of identifying and recognising non-formal learning will be taken into account in the employment of young people.

2.4.

Support for young people's entrepreneurship education will be reinforced in schools and educational institutions.

Coordinated by: Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment

Also involved: Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health

2.3. Young people receive more opportunities for participation and exerting influence

Phenomenon – participation

Finnish young people's knowledge of society is top-ranking internationally, but their interest in societal affairs is low. Despite the fact that interest in politics has been growing, actual political involvement has not increased. According to the Youth Barometer, the main reasons for not getting involved were lack of time and the unavailability of channels of influence that would be meaningful to the respondents themselves.

Studies show that young people's societal know-how and the desire to exert influence are differentiated according to education. School is a central, though not the only, arena for increasing opportunities to participate. Many young people feel that their civic competence is inadequate. This has been acknowledged in the new national core curricula and in its implementation in the local level. Work to promote participation has also been carried out within schools and educational institutions. Among others, the Basic Education Act (628/1998) and the Act on General Upper Secondary Education (629/1998) contain provisions on the opportunities to participate. The provisions on student association activities, included in the Act on General Upper Secondary Education, entered into force in 2014.

Young people's membership in organisations did not change between 1998 and 2013. Slightly more than half of young people aged 10–29 were members of an organisation, society, club or similar. The participation of girls and boys is at the same level. The most active age group is those aged from 10 to 14, 61 per cent of whom belonged to an organisation or similar group. When considering young people's organisational activity, however, it should be borne in mind, for example, that young people participating in sports clubs may not necessarily think that they belong to an organisation.

Under the Local Government Act adopted in 2015, every municipality must have a youth council, and the relevant provisions became applicable on 1 June 2017. In 2014, about 70 per cent of municipalities had a youth council. According to the Union of Local Youth Councils in Finland, the biggest challenges facing youth councils' activities are how to make their work known in their own locality and how to increase their effectiveness. Half of the councils consider that their opportunities to exert influence are good; one in ten said that they had been able to exert much or very much influence in the municipal decision-making.

According to the proposal for the Counties Act, the county executive must appoint a county youth council or a similar advocacy group in order to ensure that young people have opportunities to participate and exert influence. These bodies must be able to have a say in the planning, preparation, implementation and monitoring of the county's activities in issues that are important to children, young people and people with disabilities and the services they need.

Objective

In its Action Plan on Democracy Policy, the Government has outlined measures that increase the effectiveness and accessibility of the Demokratia.fi services (2.2.1.):

The Ministry of Justice develops and maintains electronic democracy services. These are kansalaisaloite.fi, kuntalaisaloite.fi, lausuntopalvelu.fi, nuortenideat.fi and otakantaa.fi. The services are free of charge and available to everyone. The objective of the services is to increase the openness and transparency of administration and the possibilities for citizens to participate both in the preparation of matters and in the decision-making. The services are accessible through the website demokratia.fi.

One of the action plan's main topics is the development of democracy education.

According to the action plan (new projects to be started; 6.1.1.):

A pilot project will be carried out to determine how cooperation between schools and organisations could be strengthened with a view of providing teaching on and encouraging into civic and voluntary activities. The introduction of electronic democracy services into teaching and student association activities will be tested, and a model will be created for schools. Materials will be communicated and marketed to teachers so that they would have better tools to implement the objectives set for democracy education in the new curricula.

In the National Action Plan on Fundamental and Human Rights 2017–2019, the Government outlines the following:

It will be examined, within the resources available, how cooperation between schools and organisations could be strengthened with a view of providing teaching on and encouraging into civic and voluntary activities. It will also be examined, within the resources available, how the Nuortenideat.fi channel for submitting ideas could be introduced into teaching and student association activities. The results will be used for drafting a model for schools.

The objective is that young people feel that they are being heard and have better opportunities to be involved in making decisions on issues that interest and affect them also at national level, and that every municipality has a youth council or a similar youth advocacy group available for young people. Participation and being heard have increased young people's experiences of belonging to and being included in society, which has also reduced the attractiveness of belonging to extremist movements.

Measures

3.1.

Awareness of young people's equal opportunities to participate and exert influence and awareness of the possible ways to provide these opportunities will be raised for instance by informing municipalities, especially municipal education and youth services, as well as counties about the participatory rights set out in the new Youth Act, the Local Government Act and the future Counties Act, and about the models and means that can be applied to support young people's participation. Young people's awareness of their participatory rights and opportunities and channels for exerting influence will be raised. Activities relating to young people's equal participation will be reinforced by taking account of young people's participation and exertion of influence as part of the management by objectives in youth work centres of expertise. Studies and surveys will be conducted to obtain up-to-date information about which ways of exerting influence young people themselves see as the most interesting and most effective ones.

3.2.

The authorities' skills in consulting young people will be improved (incl. background provisions, methods of consultation, digitalisation and the use and development of electronic democracy services) by producing material concerning the consultation of young people (to be included e.g. in the Government Guide to Consultation in Legislative Drafting), by increasing cooperation with organisations representing young people, and by training public officials so that young people could exert genuine influence in an increasing number of decision-making processes. Various actors will be encouraged to have more cooperation

practices with young people, for instance to consult young people in urban planning from the perspective of safety.

3.3.

Human rights will have a strong role in the core curricula, and cultural diversity will be utilised as a strength. Critical thinking skills and language awareness (better judgement and communication) will be emphasised. Students' societal knowledge and skills will be enhanced through two additional weekly lessons of social studies per year. Cooperation between the education sector and NGOs, including political youth organisations, will be encouraged. The Finnish National Agency for Education will support schools in reaching the objective.

Coordinated by: Ministry of Justice

Also involved: Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of the Interior

2.4. Fewer young people suffer from mental health problems thanks to preventive work

Phenomenon – mental health

According to the publication *Mental Health Services and Substance Abuse Prevention in Student Health Care* (National Institute for Health and Welfare 19/2016), problems with mental health and substance abuse cause the bulk of young people's health problems. They are a major risk factor for social exclusion and long-term incapacity for work. Adolescence (ages 13 to 22 years) is a phase of transition from childhood to adulthood, which begins with physical puberty and ends with young adulthood. Mental disorders often appear in adolescence, and 20 to 25 percent of young people have a diagnosed mental disorder. Behavioural and attention deficit disorders are the most common in early adolescence, while anxiety, mood disorders and substance abuse dominate the period from middle adolescence to early adulthood. Psychotic diseases appear most commonly in late adolescence and in young adulthood. In addition, a typical feature of mental health disorders is that two or more disorders occur simultaneously. Mental health disorders are more common among girls than boys, which is explained by steeply increasing anxieties and depressions among adolescent girls. Mental disorders are linked to factors burdening wellbeing, such as difficulties with livelihood, unemployment, low education and substance abuse.

There are still differences in health behaviour, wellbeing, mental health symptoms and substance abuse between students in general upper secondary education and students in vocational education and training, to the benefit of the former. (Kaltiala-Heino et al. 2015, Marttunen & Haravuori 2015.) On average, half of all mental health disorders during one's lifetime appear by middle adolescence and three out of four before the age of 25 years (Coughlan et al. 2013). Young people's mental health problems are often accompanied by harmful health behaviour, such as smoking, abundant alcohol use, and experimentation with drugs (Kaltiala-Heino et al. 2015). The onset of mental health disorders can be prevented, their severity reduced and recovery from them promoted.

The report Finland as a Growth Environment for Young People (2016) studied the lifespans of all people born in Finland in 1987 in the light of multifaceted register data up to the age of 25 years. The use of psychotropic medication and specialised psychiatric services was common: 29 per cent of the entire cohort had used them. A psychiatric diagnosis had been recorded for 17 per cent of young adults in the cohort. The most typical diagnoses for both men and women were related to affective disorders as well as to neurotic, stress-related and somatoform disorders. Mental disorders were the largest disease group explaining retirement on disability pension.

Objective

In its mid-term review, the Government outlined (key project 2 for health and wellbeing: Health and wellbeing will be fostered and inequalities reduced) as follows:

The objective is to encourage healthy lifestyles, including exercise, and foster good mental health, reduce negative health impacts from buildings and to narrow down the differences in health and wellbeing.

The objective is that young people's mental health has strengthened thanks to protective factors so that fewer and fewer young people have to suffer from mental health problems and bullying, including bullying at school. Those working with young people have better knowledge and skills to recognise a young person's mental health and substance abuse problems and, if necessary, refer young people to help in a timely manner.

The fragmented service system for young people's mental health has been replaced by a clearer and more coherent service model that better recognises the connection between social exclusion, substance abuse and mental health.

Measures

4.1.

The wellbeing of pupils and students, including their mental health skills, will be reinforced. The Pupil and Student Welfare Act (2014) obliges education providers to arrange preventive and communal student welfare services in order to support their students' holistic wellbeing. Mental health skills have a natural connection with these objectives. Supported by the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Finnish Association for Mental Health has developed material for this purpose. The National Institute for Health and Welfare has produced material for teaching mental health skills. The use and dissemination of these and other proven materials and methods will be supported. Activities will be targeted at preventing loneliness, discrimination, bullying and suicides.

4.2.

The Pupil and Student Welfare Act lays down provisions on communal student welfare. The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre will evaluate how the promotion of pupils' and students' mental health and preventive substance abuse work as part of the communal student welfare services have been taken into account in the implementation of the Act. The role of mental health and substance abuse work will be strengthened in the annual health check-ups done in school and student health care, which reach all pupils and students, and in other individual student welfare services (including school social workers, school

psychologists and cross-sectoral expert groups) in accordance with the policies outlined in the Programme to Address Child and Family Services. The role of physicians in school and student health care will be developed in individual and communal student welfare by utilising well-functioning models and the guide on mental health work methods in student health care published by the National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL Ohjaus 20/2016).

4.3.

A publication corresponding to the guide on mental health work methods in student health care (cf. THL Ohjaus 20/2016) will also be drawn up for school health care to serve as support for mental health and substance abuse work. Methods affecting young people's diverse growth environments will be spread and established in order to prevent and reduce young people's use of intoxicants. This work will also take into account the early recognition and support of intoxicant abusers among those in the weakest position. Where necessary, the methods of outreach work will be developed further. Work practices that are in line with the Pakka model for reducing local alcohol, tobacco and gambling hazards will be incorporated into youth work and the activities of educational institutions. The Pakka model has proved to be effective in activating communities and encouraging them to engage in cooperation to reduce the use of alcohol, tobacco and nicotine products and gambling among minors, and binge drinking among young adults, among other things. The work done by sports clubs to prevent intoxicant-related hazards will be strengthened by introducing practices supporting temperance.

4.4.

Measures will be taken to secure the continued implementation of the *Time out! Aikalisä! Elämä raiteilleen* operating model that offers psychosocial support measures to prevent the exclusion of young men. The model enables the provision of active support for young men during call-ups and if their military or non-military service is discontinued. The operating model has been evaluated and found to be effective. The continued implementation of the operating model is secured by ensuring that the Ministry of Education and Culture continues to allocate funding for outreach youth work.

4.5.

The inclusion of young mental health rehabilitees will be strengthened by spreading the Culture House model throughout the country. The activities are targeted at mental health rehabilitees between the ages of 18 and 35. A culture house provides a setting where rehabilitees do things that interest them in groups. Through creative group activities, the objective is to find natural tools for developing life management and social skills, and further for improving work ability and functional capacity. The activities focus on the participants' resources and strengths and on the opportunities to learn new things.

Coordinated by: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health

Also involved: Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Defence

2.5. Young people receive sufficient guidance and other support for independent living

Phenomenon – housing

In Finland, young people become independent relatively early, and rental housing is the most typical type of housing for young people. On average, the income available for young people seeking housing is low and they fare poorly in the stiff competition over rental housing, especially in the Helsinki metropolitan area and other growth centres. A young person runs the risk of becoming homeless if the transition to independent living happens too soon, suddenly or before the young person has learned the skills required in independent living. The risk of becoming homeless is particularly high for mental health and substance abuse rehabilitees moving from institutions to independent living, young immigrants and clients in the after-care of child welfare, for instance.

According to a housing market survey (Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland ARA, Report 1/2017), Finland was able to reduce the number of homeless people again in 2016. The number of homeless young people decreased by 250. In 2016, there were still 1,399 homeless people under 25 years of age, most of whom lived with friends and relatives. However, the actual number of homeless young people is probably higher. The uncertainty of housing and homelessness significantly limit young people's opportunities to become independent and commit themselves to studies and working life. It is therefore important to improve young people's skills in housing and daily life management and, whenever necessary, to use support services to secure the success of independent living for some young people.

Objective

According to the Action Plan for Preventing Homelessness in Finland 2016–2019, adopted by the Government in 2016:

The Ministry of the Environment and ARA promote the expansion of housing guidance to cover all large cities and periurban municipalities.

The possibilities of making the cooperation between the National Administrative Office for Enforcement, debt recovery, and social welfare authorities, as well as financial and debt counselling actors more efficient in order to prevent evictions and enable the city-specific monitoring of evictions are investigated. The possibility of establishing a practice based on cooperation between authorities, to ensure that housing guidance receives information in advance if persons under 25 years of age are threatened by eviction, is investigated.

In the One-Stop Guidance Centres and other similar low-threshold service points for young people, young people's housing situation and special needs are also investigated, a personal social worker is appointed, if necessary, and cooperation practices are built in order to ensure the success of housing.

The objective is that young people's ability to live independently is improved. The threshold for young people belonging to different groups to get expert, multidisciplinary and solution-oriented counselling and other support for their independent living is lowered. As a result, young people's housing problems are resolved at an earlier stage, which reduces serious housing problems, including the number of evictions.

Measures

5.1.

Individual housing guidance will be strengthened in low-threshold service points, such as the One-Stop Guidance Centres.

5.2.

Possibilities for cooperation between the dormitory services offered by VET providers and youth work will be examined. Through cooperation, preparedness for independent living can be strengthened and more leisure activities can be provided in dormitories.

5.3.

Institutional care for developmentally disabled young people and mental health rehabilitees will be reduced and the focus of housing will be shifted towards ordinary housing units and groups. Housing networks, support for daily living at home and models for cross-sectoral support work will be developed.

5.4.

Agreement will be made with the National Administrative Office for Enforcement on the compilation of city-specific eviction statistics where the evictions of young people under the age of 25 are specified separately. This will cover the cities included in the AUNE programme for the prevention of homelessness. Well-functioning models for solving situations where young people are under the threat of eviction will be collected from organisations receiving housing guidance subsidy. Well-functioning models will be described in the housing guidance manual and actors will be advised to make use of the models. It will be examined in what kind of situations and under what conditions the lessor could have the opportunity (or obligation), without prejudice to secrecy provisions, to contact the social welfare authorities in order to avoid an imminent eviction, to enable them to determine the need for social welfare measures and to ensure that the young client's interests are protected.

Coordinated by: Ministry of the Environment

Also involved: Ministry of Social Affairs And Health, Ministry of Education and Culture and Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment

3. FINLAND'S OBJECTIVES FOR INTERNATIONAL AND EUROPEAN COOPERATION IN THE YOUTH FIELD

The European Union's cooperation in the youth field is steered by the Council Resolution 2009/C 311/01 on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010–2018), i.e. the EU Youth Strategy, while the youth activities of the Council of Europe are steered by the Resolution of the Committee of Ministers on the youth policy of the Council of Europe (CM/Res(2008)23). Through political commitment to the implementation of these strategies, Finland has recognised their objectives for attainment in its

national youth policy as well. For their part, the national objectives of the National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme also steer Finland's activities in European and international cooperation.

Although the situation of young people in Europe has improved in many ways in recent years and the proportion of young people who have completed a higher education degree has grown, the economic crisis has been particularly challenging for young people. The EU's youth unemployment rate is double the overall unemployment rate, and within the European Union there are 6.6 million young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET). According to the European Commission, around 60 per cent of young people who have dropped out of school are unemployed or outside the labour force. On average, young immigrants have a greater risk of remaining outside education and employment. To address these challenges, cross-sectoral cooperation and the formal education system are needed, but, to an ever greater extent, so are skills and methods developed within youth work. In consequence, the role of youth work has been highlighted in recent years in the cooperation conducted by both the Council of Europe and the European Union in the youth field. Improvement of the quality of youth work has become a key objective.

The objective of the National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme 2017–2019 in European and international cooperation is to improve the quality of youth work by investing in:

- youth workers' competence, networking and the exchange of best practices
- development of digital youth work
- generation of information concerning the youth field

In addition to these objectives, cooperation will be steered by the common national objectives and agendas during Finland's Chairmanship of the Council of Europe (2018–2019) and Presidency of the European Union (2019).

3.1. Developing the competence of youth workers

Current situation

According to studies conducted by the European Commission, the educational backgrounds and educational requirements of both volunteer and paid youth workers vary considerably between the Member States of the European Union. In order to improve the quality of youth work, it is essential to invest in the development of youth workers' skills at European level. Education and training based on peer learning and practice can speed up the exchange of best practices and innovations and increase the appreciation of youth work and youth workers.

Compared to many European countries, youth work has a strong position in Finland. Youth work is based on its own legislation and, in international and European comparisons, education in the field of youth work is of a high standard and focused on development. The scope, quality, professionalism and innovativeness of Finnish youth work are among the best in Europe, and are widely recognised as such. Youth work is highly advanced when it comes to digital youth work and the development of new forms of participation for young people, and the youth sector has been recognised as an active partner in cross-sectoral cooperation.

Objective

Finland's objective is to export Finnish youth work competence to other Member States of the Council of Europe and the European Union and at the same time raise the level of education and know-how of Finnish youth work actors through networking and interaction. The development of youth workers' skills supports the realisation of the youth policy objectives of the Council of Europe and the European Union while it at the same time promotes a common understanding of youth work based on European values.

Measures

Finland will provide models and development partnerships for youth work training and for networking between trainers and trained youth workers.

Activities will be carried out in cooperation between educational institutions providing youth work training and the youth work field, with emphasis on respect for local conditions, administrative structures, youth work practices and traditions. Activities can supplement the work done by civil society actors in Europe, which is supported by international organisations, in particular by the Council of Europe and the European Union.

In cooperation with local actors, such as youth organisations, training sessions will be provided for actors in the youth field. Thematic modules will be piloted and made available for representatives of stakeholders, such as administration, decision-makers, organisations, training providers and youth research. Apart from serving as key thematic seminars on youth work and youth policy, the training sessions will also serve as forums where training taking place within local youth work is planned. The training is practice-based and supported by e-learning environments. The objective is that, as a result of the training, the actual local youth work education could be initiated by local actors and Finnish experts together. Another result is European networking of trainers, trained persons and stakeholders.

3.2. Development of digital youth work

Current situation

Finnish youth work has made use of the applications of new media and technology fairly soon after their introduction. In particular, the development of mobile technology has been reflected in youth work through the spreading of new types of online tools and social media services. It is no longer practical to examine digital youth work as its own form of work or to limit it only to youth work done online. Instead, digitalisation should become part of all goal-oriented forms of youth work, such as open youth work, information and counselling, outreach youth work and youth workshops.

Digital technology and media can be part of youth work either as a tool, as a mode of action or as content. However, digital youth work refers not only to various ways of working with young people but also to the digitalisation of the entire youth field in a wider sense.

Digital youth work has gained an established position in European cooperation in a relatively short time and is also included in the European Union Work Plan for Youth for 2016–2018 adopted by the EU youth

ministers in 2015. The objective of EU-level cooperation is to produce recommendations concerning digital youth work and guidelines supporting the training of youth work professionals for the Member States by the end of 2017.

Objective

In European and international cooperation on digital youth work, Finland's key objective is to increase holistic understanding of the use of digital media and technology in youth work. Digitalisation is often understood from the point of view of tools, which means that the ultimate objective of digital youth work is overlooked: supporting the growth of young people in a media-oriented and ever more digitalising society.

Measures

In 2017, the Ministry of Education and Culture will launch a cooperation project with Estonia in order to develop digital youth work. In Finland, social media is widely used in youth work and Finland is one of the pioneers when it comes to e.g. different youth work games, while Estonia has developed the concept of digital citizenship. Thus, Estonia's know-how can be utilised in the promotion of young people's digital inclusion.

The objective is to extend the project at a later stage into a European peer learning project, which will take advantage of the recommendations and guidelines prepared by the above-mentioned EU expert group for youth and support their implementation in the Member States. In addition, the possibilities for including the project in the next EU work plan for youth will be explored.

3.3. Producing information in the youth field

Current situation

The EU Youth Strategy provides tools for supporting the implementation of national youth policy programmes and the generation of information. EU youth reports, dashboard of youth indicators and other data obtained from Eurostat provide information on the status of young people and the measures taken. The youth database to be published in 2017, Youth Wiki, will provide information on the institutional structures, operating environments and practices of youth policy in all areas of the EU Youth Strategy. The European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKYCP), which is part of the Partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Commission in the field of youth, also collects and provides information on the situation of non-EU countries, thereby complementing information production within the EU. The objective of the country-specific analyses of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is to produce surveys starting from each country's own needs and situation, and to provide international reference information and recommendations for the development of national systems.

The Nordic Committee for Children and Young People NORDBUK works in cooperation with several other child and youth policy actors, such as the Nordic Welfare Centre (NVC). It maintains a Nordic database on school drop-outs, related to young people not in employment, education or training (NEET). The purpose of the database is to increase the exchange of best practices and research findings concerning the discontinuation of upper secondary education and how to prevent it.

Objective

Finland's objective is that the European and international cooperation in the youth field would focus on the generation of information from the perspective of the effectiveness of youth work and would evaluate the results of the current models and methods of youth work and policy in relation to the objectives set for them.

Measures

The Nordic Committee for Children and Young People (NORDBUK) will implement a project for harmonising the collection of data on young people and their status in the Nordic countries. The aim of the project is to provide comparable information on the different everyday lives and living conditions of young people in the Nordic countries. To start the project, the existing Nordic and international research material will be compiled and reviewed in terms of age groups, topics and themes. Information on best practices and research models will be exchanged by means of networked cooperation. As the project progresses, the potential for establishing a common Nordic statistical database on young people will be assessed.

During the programme period, an in-depth analysis of the situation of young people in Finland will be carried out in cooperation with the OECD. The project will utilise the experiences of other Nordic and Baltic countries on the impact of assessments and recommendations on the development of national youth policies. For Finland, the focus will be on the effectiveness of measures targeted at the NEET youth and on the functioning of services provided for young people. The intention is also to use the findings of the report in multilateral cooperation.

4. CRITERIA FOR THE APPROVAL OF YOUTH WORK CENTRES OF EXPERTISE

4.1. Centres of expertise in the Youth Act

Section 19 of the Youth Act (1285/2016) contains provisions on the granting of state aid to national youth work centres of expertise. Youth work centres of expertise develop and promote basic and special expertise in youth-related issues as well as expert and other services in youth-related fields by generating, compiling, making use of or sharing knowledge and information on young people, youth work or youth policy. In accordance with the definition laid down in the Youth Act, a national youth work centre of expertise means an entity that seeks to develop and promote competence and expertise in youth-related issues on a nationwide basis.

A consortium based on an agreement between two or more communities can also form a centre of expertise. Together with the regional state administrative agencies and the statutory State Youth Council and the Assessment and State Aid Commission, the centres of expertise form a network that provides close support for the Ministry of Education and Culture and reinforces know-how, development and communication in the youth field.

4.2. Selection process for centres of expertise

The Ministry of Education and Culture will approve the eligibility of the centres of expertise for state aid in 2018–2019 in accordance with the criteria and priorities laid down in the National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme. Determination of the eligibility for state aid and allocation of funding, i.e. discretionary government grants, for youth work centres of expertise is a multi-stage process based on discretion.

Eligibility for state aid

The Ministry of Education and Culture will invite applications for eligibility for state aid by the end of September 2017 once the Government has adopted this programme. The centres of expertise will be selected among the bodies that have applied for eligibility for state aid by the deadline. The Assessment and State Aid Commission will give its opinion in the matter. An application may be submitted by a municipality, a joint municipal authority, a limited liability company, a cooperative, a university or a university of applied sciences, an association or a foundation, or a consortium formed by these on the basis of an agreement. The parties to the consortium shall among themselves appoint an entity administering the activities of the centre of expertise. If the applicant is a consortium of more than one entity, it must have an agreement concerning the consortium. The agreement must specify the division of labour between the parties and the cost implications of this division of labour.

Evaluation of applications is based on an overall assessment where the criteria set out in the Youth Act (1285/2016) and the Government Decree on Youth Work and Policy (211/2017) are taken into account. Section 7 of the Government Decree contains more detailed provisions on the approval of eligibility for state aid. Under the Decree on Youth Work and Policy, the national significance and social impact of the youth work centre of expertise in the field of youth work is assessed by evaluating its activities, tasks and expertise in the light of the then-current National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme. When assessing the existing system and network of centres of expertise as a whole, due consideration is given to the activities and expertise of the centres in view of the need to develop youth work and policy in the national context.

Under the Youth Act, when the eligibility of a centre of expertise for state aid is assessed, due consideration is given to the centre's management of its finances and its operational resources, its national role in the context of youth work, social impact, the National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme and the existing system and network of centres of expertise. Eligibility for state aid is granted for a fixed period of time. Operational resources refer to operating or service capacity and know-how that help to meet the changing needs of the youth field, as well as the network of stakeholders that enables the activities of the centre of expertise. The centres of expertise must also be able to monitor and report on the general development of their field of expertise.

Granting state aid to a centre of expertise

The Ministry of Education and Culture, together with each centre of expertise approved as eligible for state aid by the Ministry, agree on the centre's more detailed tasks. The centres of expertise apply to the Ministry for state aid to manage the agreed tasks. The application for state aid is made for one year at a

time, in accordance with the Ministry's instructions. The Assessment and State Aid Commission makes a proposal on the matter, after which the Ministry decides on granting the aid.

The Ministry of Education and Culture regularly assesses the performance of the centres of expertise it subsidises. In this assessment, the Ministry examines, in cooperation with the Assessment and State Aid Commission, whether the centre of expertise has achieved the objectives agreed.

4.3. Priorities of the centres of expertise for the years 2018–2019

Participation of young people

Strengthening the preconditions for civic activities among young people; promotion of young people's participation, consultation and influence, as referred to in section 24 of the Youth Act; promotion of the realisation of municipal residents' opportunities to participate and exert influence, as referred to in sections 22 and 26 of the Local Government Act, with respect to young people; and participation and democracy education of young people, including the promotion of the use of online services for participation.

Social empowerment of young people

Coordination of youth workshop activities and outreach youth work, reinforcement of the implementation of the youth guarantee, and cross-sectoral cooperation to promote the living conditions of young people.

Digital youth work and information and counselling services for young people

Promotion of the use of digital methods in the different areas of youth work and competence development in the field of digital youth work; support for information and counselling services for young people.

Improvement of the quality and methods of youth work

Promotion of versatile effectiveness of youth work, including youth work done in schools and libraries as well as cultural and sports-related youth work; generation of research data and development of indicators concerning young people; collection, storage and analysis of information concerning young people; and development, documentation and introduction of new forms of youth work.

The centres of expertise selected for 2018–2019 shall carry out their tasks in the areas mentioned above and in other areas mentioned in the National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme.

5. MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT OF THE PROGRAMME

Under the Youth Act (section 6), the State Youth Council shall, among other things, address issues of fundamental and far-reaching importance to young people and assess the impact of the central government measures on the young people and the services and activities intended for them. In addition, the Council shall issue a statement to the Ministry of Education and Culture on the issues to be addressed

in the National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme. As mentioned in the introduction of this programme, the Council gave its opinion on the issues to be included in the programme on 30 September 2016.

The above mentioned provision of the Act is specified and supplemented by the Decree on Youth Work and Policy. Under section 3 of the Decree: “When assessing the impact of the measures taken by government, the State Youth Council shall take into account the budget appropriations allocated for promoting the growth and living conditions of young people. The State Youth Council shall, once during each government term, prepare an assessment of the progress made in the implementation of the National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme and make proposals for changes as appropriate.”

Although the State Youth Council is an institution appointed by the Government, it shall carry out its assessment work independently and impartially in relation to the ministries implementing the programme. The Council decides independently on the organisation, form and contents of its assessment work. Under the Youth Act, the Council may, for example, set up a sub-committee to prepare for an assessment-related task.

This programme consists of three main content areas: national policies, international and EU policies, and centres of expertise. The exceptional period of validity of the present programme, 2017–2019, in practice two years, poses special challenges for the application of customary indicators.

The effectiveness of the work done by the centres of expertise is assessed as part of their state aid process. The international and EU objectives for Finland’s cooperation provide a framework for the operations. However, the nature of these objectives and measures is different from that of the national objectives and measures. Monitoring is therefore primarily targeted at national youth policy objectives and measures that promote young people’s growth and living conditions.