

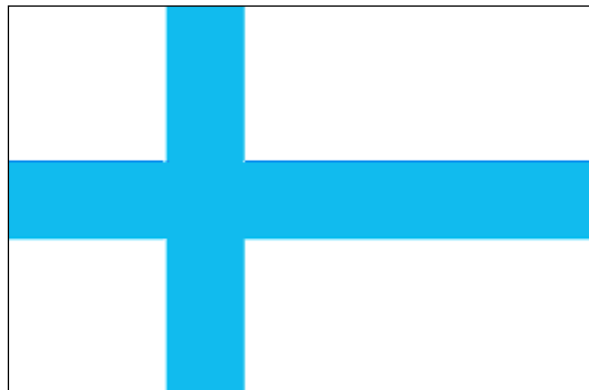


YouthPartnership

QUESTIONNAIRE

“PARTICIPATION”

FINLAND



YouthPartnership
Council of Europe
European Commission



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1. Context of youth participation in the country

Youth Act (72/2006), which made the participation and the right of the youth to be heard in the municipalities obligatory, came into force in 2006. Section 8 of the Youth Act states that “the opportunity to participate in the handling of issues relating to local and regional youth work and policy must be provided for young people. Additionally, young people must be heard during the handling of issues concerning them.”

Participation and action opportunities, for all individuals without age limits and also beyond voting have been taken into account in chapter 2 section 14 of the Constitution of Finland (731/1999) requiring that “public authorities shall promote the opportunities for the individual to participate in societal activity and to influence the decisions that concern him or her.” Constitution gives the frame for every new law or additions to laws enacted in Finland, so it is important that the aspects of participation of individuals without age limits are mentioned there.

At the municipal level, section 27 of the Local Government Act (365/1995) defines the participation and action opportunities of local citizens. The law states that the municipal “council shall ensure that local residents and service users have opportunities to participate in and influence their local authority's operations. In the same law, the section 28 also gives all local residents the right of initiative: “Local residents have the right to submit initiatives to the local authority in matters related to its operations. Persons submitting initiatives shall be informed of action taken as a result of an initiative.” Everyone has the right to make an initiative despite of their age.

The Basic Education Act (628/1998) (for classes 1–9) in turn, comments on participation and being heard in the context of school environment. Section 47 (addition, in force from 1.8.2007) states that a school can have a student council consisting of its students. Student participation and being heard is also regulated by the Upper Secondary School Act (629/1998) and the Vocational Education and Training Act (630/1998) (both are for classes 10–12). Both acts state that organiser of education must provide the opportunity for students to take part in the development of education. They are to hear students before they make decisions which will essentially affect their studies or their role as students. The acts named also state that every educational institution, which provides upper secondary education and vocational education and training, has a school council formed of students.

Land Use and Building Act (132/1999) ensures that everyone has the right to participate in the preparation process of planning, the use of land and water areas, and building activities on them, and that planning is high quality and interactive.

According to the Finnish Government's Child and Youth Policy Programme 2007–2011, all municipalities in Finland are, by the end of 2010, actively implementing an influencing and hearing system for 5–17-year-olds, which functions in accordance with the various requirements and prerequisites of different age groups. This aim is supported by the development of eDemocracy tools.

Student unions are actively heard in matters concerning them.

(<http://www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/OPM/Julkaisut/2008/liitteet/opm21.pdf?lang=en>)

2. Structures of participation at the local regional or national level

2.1. Youth councils

2.1.1 National youth councils

Finnish Youth Co-operation Allianssi ra is a national youth council, an interest organization which has some 100 member non-governmental organizations. http://www.alli.fi/index.php?lk_id=18, member organizations of Allianssi are found here: http://www.alli.fi/sivu.php?artikkeli_id=1370

Suomen Nuorisovaltuustojen Liitto - NUVA ry (Federation of Finnish Youth Councils) works as the co-operational organisation between the local youth councils, and one of it's main goals is to support the work of the local youth councils by providing services. NUVA is also a member of Finnish Youth Co-operation - Allianssi. <http://www.nuva.fi/>

The Children's parliament association of Finland was founded in February 2004. The aim of the association is to improve children's participation and use of influence in Finland. Association's ideological ground is based on the Children's Rights Agreement of the United Nations. The Children's Parliament Association of Finland is the uniting element of the children's parliaments. This Association is helping the municipalities to found children's parliaments, promote attitudes and declarations and to support the progress of initiatives already taken (http://www.lastenparlamentti.fi/in_english).

Students are represented by National Union of University Students in Finland

(<http://www.syl.fi/english/>), Union of Students in Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences – SAMOK ra

(<http://www.samok.fi/content/view/2/3/>), The Union of Finnish Upper Secondary School Students ra

(<http://www.lukio.fi/en/main>), Finnish Federation of Vocational Trainees ra (<http://www.sakkinet.fi/>),

and their respective member organizations on local level. Finnish

2.1.2 Regional youth councils

In addition to local participation projects, regional networking among young people has taken place.

Examples include the projects by the Regional Council of North Karelia and North Karelian youth, the regional program evaluation conducted by the regional growth project and North Karelian Youth Forum and young peoples comments on it, as well as plans on the regional youth council. Youth Parliament of Pyhäjärvisuut functions in the area of four communities (Eura, Säkyliä, Kiukainen ja Köyliö). Each community organizes elections every second year to choose four young people (13-25-years) to represent their community.

2.1.3 Local youth councils

Some of them are simply called “youth council”; others are called “student councils” or “pupil councils”. You may find other councils representing particular groups of young people.

Results from Evaluation of basic services 2007 made by State Provincial Offices of Finland

(quantitative questionnaire survey responded by main official of youth work in each municipality)

In 2007 there were youth or children action groups (of which mostly are called youth councils but some of them are also called for example youth parliaments even if there is no structural difference to youth councils) in 223 municipalities of the 378 municipalities who responded to the questionnaire. A majority of these groups have been established during the 21st century. A fourth of the groups were established in the years 2006–2007 after the Youth Act came into force. The situation was particularly good in the Province of Lapland. The worst situation was in the Province of Western Finland.

The most common target group consisted of 13–18-year olds since a fourth of all the groups’ activities were aimed at this age group. The majority of the action groups (approximately half of them) were chosen by vote approximately a fourth of the groups was selected by appointment. The remaining groups were formed in some other way e.g. by interview. Elections are an important part of democracy and democratic education. It is therefore also necessary to promote democratic selection processes in the formation of child and youth action groups.

The groups’ operations were based on decisions made by the municipal council, the municipal board or a committee. A little under half of the groups had obtained a mandate for their activities from the municipal council or board. A little under a fourth of the groups’ activities were based on a committee’s decision and a tenth of the groups’ activities, on a municipal official’s decision. A few groups’ activities were based on municipal rules and regulations. The support of decision makers is essential for the activities of youth action groups and thus such group operations should be given a mandate based on a decision by the municipal council or board.

The action groups’ activities were fairly evenly divided between having a say, representation of interests and organising events. In 100 municipalities the local youth council has seated its representatives to take part in official committee work, this method of co-working and regular interaction between adults and youngsters in system level is determined in core rules of each of these 100 municipalities.

2.2. Youth parliaments : Please list youth parliaments on national, regional and local level

There are no official Youth Parliaments in Finland. Nevertheless, the usage of terms parliament and council is somewhat ambiguous. A new form of participation is the recently introduced Children’s Parliament, which is an Internet-based parliamentary forum for children to participate through their

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schools. The project is facilitated, for example, by the national teledemocracy portal www.valtikka.fi.

3. Participation in representative democracy

3.1. Number and percentage of young people who are members of a political party or political youth organizations

According to the survey of leisure time activities of the youth (Myllyniemi 2009), approximately 1% of the young people (here 10 to 29 years old) in Finland are members of a political party or political youth organization. This means approximately 13 000 youngsters, in this case. There are more men than women who are members. The number of young people that are members of a political party is decreasing.

3.2. Number and percentage of young people who are members of a trade union

11% of young people (aged 10-29) are members of a trade union, which adds up to 143 000 people.

3.3. Percentage of young people who are members of a youth non-governmental organization, which are not trade unions, political parties or political youth organizations. If possible give information about the type of organizations.

In total, 45% of young people (age 10-29) in Finland are members of a non-governmental organization according to the Leisure Time Survey. 21% of the youth are members of a sport association, 7% are members of scouts, 6% are members of student associations, 3% are members of a charity or benevolence organization or organization of disabled people, 3% are part of environmental organizations and 1% part of human rights or peace organizations.

4. Explain the existing support measures, of national, regional or local scope, to promote the participation of young people in local life and follow-up mechanisms

4.1. Financial actions to support the various structures for youth political and NGO participation

According to the governmental decree on youth work and youth policy (103/2006), a national youth organization is an organization that has at least 1000 individual members and of whose total number of members at least 2/3 are under 29 years old. National youth organizations and national youth work

service organizations are given general subsidy from the Ministry of Education based on their plan of action and budget and their resultant activity.

The Youth Organisation Subsidy Committee, whose members are nominated by youth organisations, submits an annual proposal to the Ministry for state subsidies that should be allocated to national youth organisations. It also evaluates and develops the subsidy system.

The Ministry of Education supports youth work of municipalities by state subsidies that are based on the number of young people in a given municipality. The Ministry of Education also supports renovation and equipment of youth premises of municipalities or other communities. Some activities receive targeted state grants. For example development of adventure education and international projects of civic organizations or youth centres of municipalities are granted this way.

Youth participation is supported nationally and on a local level through separate projects by the EU-funded Youth in Action programme.

Local, political or other, youth organizations also receive grants from their respective municipalities.

4.2. Which financial actions on national level aimed at certain specific groups of young people exist?

The workshops for young unemployed people received 6 500 000 euros financial aid of the youth work allocations of the Ministry of Education in 2008. The appropriations are distributed by the State Provincial Offices.

The Ministry of Education also allocated 2,5 million euros for outreach work pair activity (“street work” where youth workers go in work pairs to “seek” young people otherwise not taking part in youth services).in 2008. Seeking youth work activity is meant for finding and giving support to those young people who have fallen out of work or place to study and are socially excluded.

5. The vote

5.1 Is voting obligatory?

No. In every election it is voluntary to vote.

5.2 Age of the right to vote

From 18 year.

5.3 Please describe who is entitled to vote in national, regional and local elections.

In the parliamentary and presidential elections, all citizens of Finland who have turned 18 before or on the day of the elections have the right to vote. In municipal elections, the right to vote belongs to every

citizen of Finland and the European Union Member States, as well as those of Iceland and Norway, who has turned 18 before or on the day of the election and permanently resides in the municipality in question. Other foreigners who have turned 18 before or on the day of the election and permanently reside in the municipality in question, and have resided permanently in Finland for a minimum of two years without interruptions, also have the right to vote in the municipal elections. Recently there has been discussion about possibility for 16 years old to have right to vote, at least in municipal elections. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland decided in 2006 that parishioners who are 16 can vote in Church elections.

5.4 Requirements for being entitled as a candidate in national, regional or local elections

In the general elections, anyone with the right to vote, unless he or she is placed under legal guardianship, has the right to stand as a candidate. Those holding a post in the military may not, however, be elected as a Member of the Parliament. Only those Finnish citizens who are Finns by birth may stand for the presidential elections. In municipal elections, anyone permanently residing in the municipality in question and with a right to vote in the municipal elections in some municipality, unless he or she is placed under legal guardianship, is eligible to stand as a candidate. According to the Orthodox Church of Finland, a clergyman may not stand as a candidate or hold a post entitled to in general elections.

6 The elections

There are no accurate statistical information on how young people votes or have voted in different types of elections (Development programme on child and youth policy of the Government, 2007).

6.1 Indicators of participation related to the election of the European Parliament

6.1.1 In the election of the European Parliament, the number and percentage of young voters in relation to the number of young people who have the right to vote

No data available.

6.1.2 In European elections, the percentage of young voters in relation to the total population voting

No answer

6.2 National indicators of participation in the polls

6.2.1 In national elections, the percentage of young voters in relation to the number of young people who have the right to vote (in total, by gender and by age groups)

According to estimations based on several surveys (e.g. Peltola 2007; Pekonen, Sänkiaho, Borg 1993), approximately 56% of young people aged 18 to 29 would have voted in the parliamentary elections in 2007.

6.2.2 In national elections, the percentage of young voters in relation to the total population who has voted.

6.3 Regional and local indicators of participation in the polls

6.3.1 In regional and local elections, the percentage of young voters in relation to the number of young people who have the right to vote

According to the estimations based on surveys, about 48% of the young people would vote in the local elections in 2008 (Myllyniemi 2008).

6.3.2 In regional and local elections, the percentage of young voters in relation to the total population voting

In municipal election 2008 were totally 2570600 votes given. Since the voter participation of young people is lower (ca. 48 percent) that of the whole population (ca. 61 percent), the ratio of young voters to the population of voters is lower than the ratio of group of 18 to 30 year old in relation to the Finns older than 18. It can be estimated that the percentage of young voters in relation to the total population voting is ca. 16.

6.4 Number of young people elected at the national, regional and local level: overall and by gender (please specify the age range)

In municipal elections in 2008, 648 persons from 18 to 29 years of age were elected to municipal councils in Finland. 284 were women and 364 of those were men. There are 6017 members of local municipal councils overall in Finland.

In parliamentary elections in 2007, 2 men and no women from 18 to 29 years of age were elected. There are 200 members of parliament in Finland (http://www.stat.fi/til/vaa_en.html).

7 List actions, programmes, and financial or social support that promote the participation in the system of representative democracy, in particular to young people under the age of 30?

Finnish Youth Co-operation – Allianssi ra (http://www.alli.fi/index.php?lk_id=18) supports young candidates in national elections and encourages young people to give their vote. Young candidates are supported by offering visibility, lobbying the political parties and by raising awareness of youth matters on a nation-wide scale.

In connection with the parliamentary elections Allianssi organizes a specific Nuorisovaalit (Youth Elections)-project that activates young people to vote. The project consists of a series of panel discussions in schools and of certain “shadow elections” where also those young people who do not have the right to vote yet can vote. In the shadow elections young people vote from the actual candidate lists. The results are collected on national scale and published afterwards. The Youth Elections–project also includes an internet-based test to search for the most appropriate candidate. The results of this project are measured by numbers of participants, by the user number of search-for-your-candidate -internet test and by the number of young people who have been elected.

8 Learning to participate

8.1 Please list existing actions and mechanisms within the systems of formal education aiming at developing and deepening learning to participate (citizens’ education). Please also list related guidelines and teacher training programmes aiming at integrating citizens’ education into the curriculum.

Schools organize youth parliament-discussion groups in order to support young people’s participation. They are not, however, official in such a way that their aim would be actual participation in the political system. Annual National Youth Parliament gathers each year in the Parliament of Finland in plenary session. In this question hour members of parliament answer young people’s questions. The session is broadcasted live on national television.

8.2 In which fields, other than formal education, do actions and/or support - of national or regional scope- exist, which aim at promoting learning to participate amongst young people? What is the nature of these actions/this support?.

The Finnish Government’s Child and Youth Policy Programme 2007–2011 names several measures on how hearing children on matters pertaining to themselves are addressed. For example, children’s

parliament activities and youth councils as users of eDemocracy (internet hearing and participation tools) are supported, a provision for allowing universities and military garnisons to be advance polling stations is added to the Election Act; and student unions will be actively informed about the right of every resident in the municipality regardless of their age to submit initiatives to the municipal authorities.

Respectively, children and young people's opportunities to influence the content of leisure time activities are promoted by increasing organisations' and schools' awareness of children and young people's right, willingness and ability to influence matters concerning them; attention is paid to the quality of youth facility activities particularly from the perspective of young people's active citizenship and social empowerment; an information campaign on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child will be implemented in collaboration with the Ombudsman for Children in Finland and non-governmental organisations in 2009.

<http://www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/OPM/Julkaisut/2008/liitteet/opm21.pdf?lang=en>

The State Provincial Offices estimate the implementation of the Child and Youth Policy Programme yearly in their Evaluation of basic services made in co-operation with the municipalities.

Several mechanisms for the evaluation and follow-up of actions promoting youth participation have thus been developed. Also Finnish Youth Research Network and the Advisory Board of Youth Affairs have annual publication Youth Barometer, which gauges young peoples attitudes and opinions. Local and regional level participation are charted by the Finnish Youth Cooperation Allianssi and the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities.

8.3 Do some of the existing or planned actions aim at certain specific groups of young people?

Not applicable

9 Describe other, informal ways young people choose to participate in your country.

Local and near democracy forms of participation

Results from Evaluation of basic services 2007 made by State Provincial Offices of Finland (quantitative questionnaire survey responded by main official of youth work in each municipality)

In 2008 young people were integrated in the evaluation process of basic municipal services made by State Provincial Offices of Finland. In addition to quantitative questionnaire survey responded by main official of youth work in each municipality, are young themselves given opportunity to give response and ideas on development of municipal youth services."

Children and young people were able to influence a variety of issues in the municipalities. Most of the issues related to the development of youth services, e.g. the opening hours of youth facilities and cafes, activities and acquisitions. However, less than fifth of the municipalities provided its young people with the opportunity to make decisions concerning youth centre funds.

In several municipalities young people influenced the planning of local sport facilities and school issues such as the length of school lunch breaks and the quality of the food. In some municipalities young people were able to have their say in traffic, town planning and land use matters, employment of staff as well as strategy and programme related work. (These matters were asked with open question so there is not adequate evaluation information available if all municipalities take children and young people to participate in various sectors of city planning like different law texts and policy program of government supposes.) One year after in Evaluation of Basic Services 2008 was for example found out that only half of municipalities organize participation possibilities for children and people to take part in formulating obligated wellbeing programmes for children and young people in municipal level.

Some informal ways of participation that have become more common and increased in recent years, are for example signing up petitions (25% have done this) and contacting politicians and officials (13%). Other informal ways of participation are taking part in discussions of matters concerning self, taking part in the activities of residents' associations and attending information meetings. However, different forms of being active tend to accumulate to the same young people.

More information on the new forms of political participation of youth and the diversity of youth citizenships in the European Union in the following article by research professor Tommi Hoikkala:

<http://you.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/17/1/5>