

Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth



COUNTRY SHEET

ON YOUTH WORK

in Finland

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1. Context of youth work

The history of youth work in Finland has been mainly studied by one scholar, Juha Nieminen from Tampere University. His seminal work is *Nuorissa tulevaisuus* (The future is in the young) from 1995. This is a comprehensive history of youth work in Finland. Nieminen has continued to explore the historic origins of youth work. The following description is based on his article "History of youth work as a profession in Finland" from *The History of youth work*, vol. 4.

According to Nieminen, three phases in history can be classified. The first is from the 19th century up until the 1940s. During this time youth work was not a profession, and work was done mostly on a voluntary basis. There was no youth work training. Youth work was mainly done by organisations, and public resources were scarce.

The second phase, which Nieminen calls the age of professionalisation, dates from the 1940s to the 1980s. During this period different structures were created. Professional control and autonomy was developed. Youth worker training began, and even higher education structures were created. Youth work became differentiated as a field in its own right. There was a demarcation between youth work and the close social fields, such as formal schooling, social work, temperance work and sports. Youth legislation was created in the beginning of the 1970s. The municipalities got official permission to provide youth work activities in the 1970s and 1980s, which meant that the former emphasis on NGOs was shifted.

The third phase – the days of professional contradictions according to Nieminen's description – is currently going on. Finland began decentralising its governance in the 1990s. A lot of power was given to municipalities, which in the case of youth work meant that municipalities were able to organise youth work based on their own ideals and resources. For this reason, there is no uniform conception about the nature and scope of youth work. The municipal youth work boards have largely been integrated to the wider boards of education and leisure, for example. This means that youth work is increasingly seen as one component of child and youth policy measures (instead of emphasising different professions like we did in the 1970s).

2. Strategic and legislative framework of youth work

There is a legislation in Finland for youth work, and has been since 1972. The new Youth Act was passed on 21 December 2016. The previous one was passed in 2006. Therefore one can expect that the current Youth Act will set the norms for youth work for around 10 years. The Youth Act is of framework law type, and leaves relatively many decisions about the organisation of youth work to the actual organisers of youth work (local authorities). According to the law, municipalities are required to provide opportunities to both youth work and youth activities.

There is currently no official translation. According to the Youth Act (Nuorisolaki, §3):

young people are under 29 years old;

youth work is about supporting the growth of the young and helping them to become independent and encouraging participation of the young in society;

youth policy is about improving the growth conditions and the living conditions of the young and interaction between generations.

There is a growing body of scientific literature of scientific research on youth work. The research corpus has emphasised the following features of youth work in Finland.

Youth work is a distinct agent in the web of different services. It combines professional and voluntary work. One of the key strengths of youth work is the ability to understand and guide group processes and dynamics. Work with individual young people has always been there, and has increased lately due to the rise of targeted youth work. Participation of the young is both a goal and the product of youth work (the aim is to increase participation of the young in society as a whole, but participation is one of the premises of the young work as well). Voluntarism is one of the key principles. Even with the increase of targeted youth work, the emphasis of youth work is on the young as a resource to society (see for example Kiilakoski (2017), Thinking seriously about youth work in Finland).

There is also a Decree on Youth Work and Youth Policy (211/2017).

Finland takes part in European initiatives for promoting youth work recognition, such as Youthpass.

The youth policy program is adopted by Finnish Government every four years. The Youth Policy Program 2020-2023 features three broad national strategic goals for youth policy, and goals for European and international youth work. The youth policy program is a cross-sectorial program. The program covers all people under 29 years of age. The

emphasis is especially on young people from 12 to 25 years. The over-all aim of the programme is to improve the conditions young people live and grow in.

The national goals are as follows:

- 1) Young people will have equal opportunities for a smooth everyday life – social exclusion will decrease;
- 2) Young people will have the means and skills for participating and influencing;
- 3) The safety capital of young people will grow.

3. Recognition

Youth work is generally seen as an independent agent. It is financed by the state, local authorities and parishes. There is youth worker education in vocational education, in universities of applied sciences and on the university level. Even a doctoral program in the university of Tampere exist. There has been education on youth work in formal education since 1945.

Youth work is mentioned in the National Core Curriculum as one of the co-operating partners for schools. There are many policy programmes in different policy levels integrating youth work services to service systems.

Youth workers have associations. There is a state-sponsored network of centres of excellence for promoting youth work (one of them financing the original reporter of this template).

The political and social recognition of youth work is in relatively good shape at the moment, and has increased in the current decade. According to the future expectations survey done by an umbrella organisation of youth organisations, Allianssi, 80% of the respondents thought that the significance of youth work has increased in the last five years. Over 80% believed that the significance of youth work will increase in the future as well (Nuorisotyön tulevaisuusodotukset 2017, 12-15).

The recognition of learning taking place in the youth work has, however, not been on the agenda in Finland. For example, in the study comparing recognition and validation in the IVS, Finland was among the countries least interested in providing recognition (Kiilakoski 2015, Youth work, volunteering, recognition and employability). Also, the discourse of learning has been slow to develop in Finland. A notable exception is the Scouts, who have been developing recognition tools in co-operation with the representatives of formal education systematically. Also, youth workshops which have been developed since the 1980s have been actively developing different recognition and validation tools to make visible the learning taking place in these facilities.

There are no national competency descriptions, nor are there legal requirements for youth workers. This is due to the emphasis on the professional autonomy and decentralisation policies, which together mean that the core decisions are made on the local level.

(Source: Kiilakoski, Tomi 2019. Youth Work Education in Finland. https://www.nuorisotutkimusseura.fi/images/youth_work_education_web.pdf)

4. Funding youth work

Youth work is done by municipalities, NGOs and parishes in Finland. In addition to this, there are youth workers employed by the employment sectors and sometimes formal education. Youth work training also has its own budget.

The government funding for youth work, according to the National budget in Finland in 2017, has been as follows (in euros):

2020 budget 54 250 000

2019 budget 55 320 000

2018 budget 53 294 828

(State Budget 2020 Ministry of Finance <https://budjetti.vm.fi/indox/sisalto.jsp?year=2020&lang=fi&maindoc=/2020/aky/aky.xml&id=/2020/aky/YksityiskohtaisetPerustelut/29/91/91.html>)

2017 budget 53 617 000

2016 budget 53 100 000

2015 financial statements 53 025 013

(State budget 2017. Ministry of Finance <http://budjetti.vm.fi/indox/download.jsp;jsessionid=D9CCB3D8652D19BE1DE516D2F4913A69?lang=fi&file=/2017/tae/valtiovarainministerionKanta/YksityiskohtaisetPerustelut/29/91/91.pdf>)

This money is used to support the NGOs, different youth work projects, to finance outreach youth work, to support centres of excellence for promoting youth work.

In addition to this, money is allocated to workshops, to outreach youth work and for youth guarantee measures. This amount is as follows:

2020 budget 23 263 000

2019 budget 21 323 000

2018 budget 19 923 000

2017 budget 15 023 000

2016 budget 19 673 000

2015 financial statements 21 000 000

In addition to these, there are other smaller sources for state funding. In 2018, the total state funding for youth work was €74 070 000 million euros. Details can be examined using statistics for youth work: <https://nuorisotilastot.fi/#!/en/avustukset/perus/choice-1/prosentit/whiteblue/Koko%20maa/table//null/kunta/donut/%5B%5D/kohteet/%5B%5D/sortToimija>

However, the money given by the state is smaller compared to the money spent by local governments. In 2018, municipalities spent €178 million on youth work – in total 0.59 per cent of their total budget. Divided by the number of young people under 29, the municipalities spent €103 on youth work per each young person.

(<https://nuorisotilastot.fi/#!/fi/kunta/Asukasluku/perus/choice-1/prosentit/whiteblue/Koko%20maa/Koko%20maa/table//null/kunta/donut/%5B%5D/%5B%5D/>)

Parishes used €332 million in 2011 on child and youth work (Allianssi, Nuorisotyön rahoitus [The financing of youth work] <http://www.alli.fi/edunvalvonta/nuorisotyon+rahoitus/>).

5. Structures, actors and levels in youth work provision

1. State structures/public authorities deciding on or providing youth work

Taken from the web pages of the Ministry of Culture and Education, public authorities have the following duties:

“The Ministry of Education and Culture subsidises youth work carried out by municipalities and NGOs and its development by means of central government transfers or discretionary transfers, and steers and supports regional youth work through performance guidance. The Ministry also wishes to promote young people’s participation and inclusion by its activities.

The municipalities are responsible for local youth work, such as maintaining youth facilities, supporting young people’s associations and groups and special youth work. Associations and organisations that engage in youth work also operate in municipalities.

In regional government, youth sector tasks are handled by the Regional State Administrative Agencies. These tasks are associated with supporting young people’s possibilities of finding a place in education, training or work, providing information and advisory services for young people and organising recreational and leisure activities for them. The Regional State Administrative Agencies provide aid for youth workshop activities and youth outreach work. They also collect information on municipal services, train actors and handle some of the Ministry of Education and Culture’s aid for the youth sector.” (<http://minedu.fi/en/youth-work>)

2. National or local youth councils

Local youth councils are mandatory in Finland. According to the Municipal Act:

“Section 26

Youth councils

(1)

To secure the opportunity for young people to participate and exert an influence, the local executive must set up a youth council or similar group representing young people’s views (youth council) and ensure the operational preconditions for it. A youth council can be shared by two or more municipalities.

(2)

Youth councils must be given the opportunity to influence the planning, preparation, execution and monitoring of the activities of the municipality's different areas of responsibility in matters of importance to the well-being, health, education, living environment, housing or mobility of the municipality's residents and also in other matters that the youth council considers to be significant for children and young people. Youth councils must be involved in the municipality's work to develop children's and young people's participation and the opportunities for their views to be presented."

At the time of writing, Finland is preparing a regional model for governance. If the plans at the time of writing are executed, regional youth councils will be established in Finland over the next years.

The National Youth Council is appointed by the government. Its role is defined in the Youth Act.

"According to the Youth Act, the Council shall:

address issues of fundamental and far-reaching importance to young people and assess the impact of the measures taken by central government on the young people and the services and activities intended for them;

introduce initiatives and proposals to develop youth policy;

generate up-to-date data on young people and their living conditions;

issue a statement to the Ministry of Education and Culture on the issues to be addressed in the national youth work and policy programme;

monitor international developments and co-operation in this field. The Council may include sub-committees responsible for the preparation of the issues to be addressed.

Further provisions on the duties and appointment of the State Youth Council shall be issued by government decree. The composition of the Council shall also be determined by government decree."

<https://tietoanuorista.fi/en/nuora/>

3. Youth and youth work NGOs

Finnish Youth Co-operation – Allianssi is a national service and lobbying organisation for youth work.

It is a politically and religiously non-aligned lobbyist with more than a hundred national youth and educational organisations as members.

<http://www.alli.fi/english/>

Nuoli

An expert organisation for youth work and sports activities. Includes students of youth work as well.

Trade union which promotes the recognition and working conditions for youth work.

Trade Union for the Public and Welfare Sectors

Includes a department for youth work, sports and leisure time activities.

Other relevant actors

Kanuuna network of urban youth work

A network of youth services in the 27 biggest cities in Finland.

<http://www.nuorisokanuuna.fi/what>

Finnish Youth Research Society

A research society providing youth research and youth work research

<https://www.youthresearch.fi/>

Also, in December 2017 12 organisations were nominated as centres of excellence for promoting youth work. In March 2020 new centres of expertise were chosen. The scope is now broader and centres works as consortiums. There are 6 centres of expertise.

4. Other relevant actors

n/a

6. Forms and examples of youth work in your country

Youth work structures in Finland are rather strong. For example, a curriculum of youth work made in the city of Kokkola (and later adopted by other municipalities) defined youth work as follows (taken from the manuscript of Kiilakoski, Kinnunen, Djupsund, also Ord 2016, Curriculum Process, Product and Practice.)

| Form of youth work | Methods used | Aims | Timescale and target group | Supports relations of the young to: |
|---------------------|---|--|---|---|
| Communal youth work | <p>Youth clubs</p> <p>Co-operation with school</p> <p>Local co-operation that enables long-term support for young people.</p> | <p>Offers guidance and support for young people.</p> <p>Works locally to improve the quality of life and the status of young people.</p> | <p>Key age range is 9-17.</p> <p>The duration of the relationship with the young varies from months up to four years.</p> | <p>Other young people</p> <p>Adults</p> <p>Local area and communal networks</p> |

| | | | | |
|---------------------------------|--|---|---|--|
| <p>Societal youth Work</p> | <p>Operates at the macro level</p> <p>Assisting Youth organisations</p> <p>Collecting data about the living conditions and situations of the young</p> <p>Evaluation of the youth work and guiding resources</p> | <p>Improves the living conditions of young people in co-operation with young people, networks, and decision makers.</p> <p>Promotes youth affairs in municipal decision making as well as in regional co-operation.</p> | <p>Indirectly targeting all young people of Kokkola, the main target group being 12-18 year olds.</p> <p>Implementation requires long-term multi-disciplinary co-operation with other sectors and decision-makers partners.</p> | <p>Society</p> <p>Local area and communal networks</p> |
| <p>Participation activities</p> | <p>Activity groups</p> <p>Youth Council</p> | <p>Promotes youth activity in democratic decision making</p> <p>Develops inclusive practices in co-operation with partners</p> | <p>13-29 year olds</p> <p>interested in influencing the living conditions of young people.</p> <p>From a couple of weeks to three years, depending on the activity or group.</p> | <p>Society</p> <p>Other young people</p> |

| | | | | |
|----------------------------|---|--|---|--|
| <p>Cultural youth work</p> | <p>Rock school</p> <p>H o b b y groups</p> <p>Organising events</p> | <p>Amplifies the voice of youth on local using art-based and cultural methods</p> <p>Supports the personal growth of young people through cultural events and performances</p> <p>Supports youth cultures</p> <p>Promotes cultural diversity</p> | <p>The age of young people usually between 10 and 20.</p> <p>Duration of contact varies strongly. A young person can participate in an event or participate in organised recreational activities for up to several years.</p> | <p>Personal development (tolerance, self-expression, creativity, and social skills)</p> <p>Local area and communal networks</p> <p>Other young people</p> <p>Society</p> |
|----------------------------|---|--|---|--|

| | | | | |
|---------------------------|--|--|---|--|
| <p>Focused youth work</p> | <p>Small group activities</p> <p>Outreach youth work</p> <p>Substance-abuse prevention</p> <p>Multi-professional collaboration with social services and the police</p> | <p>Supports the individual development and transitions of the young</p> <p>Builds the capacity to cope with difficulties related to life management growth, or social relations</p> <p>Supports inclusion into society</p> | <p>Key age group 10-25 years</p> <p>The contact varies between a couple of weeks and several years.</p> | <p>Personal growth</p> <p>Social structures</p> <p>Local area and communal network</p> |
|---------------------------|--|--|---|--|

As can be seen, many forms of youth work are represented in one municipality alone. Targeted youth work services are an important part of the youth work palette. They have been promoted by the state, which has allocated money to outreach youth workers working with NEETs, and to workshops.

Digital youth work has been developed with the co-ordination of Verke, a centre of excellence for promoting the development of digital youth work. In a new book, *Digital youth work – A Finnish perspective*, 2017, the development of digital youth work is

described as follows by Suvi Tuominen, one of the leading experts on digital youth work on the national and international level:

“As the brief description of history indicates, compared to many other countries, Finnish digital youth work has tended to emphasise low-threshold online help services, built especially on social media platforms. Many youth workers do not yet wholly understand what digital media includes besides social media (Verke 2015). In near future, we hope to see more innovative methods of digital youth work, where face-to-face work with young people is supported by online elements. In addition, maker culture approaches, digital craftsmanship and other methods of encouraging creative use of technology are not yet common enough in Finnish youth work. We are, in fact, behind some other countries in this aspect.

For the youth work field, the most interesting and significant technological developments are related to mobile technology, the internet of things, virtual reality and augmented reality. The concept of “online” is expanding and constantly being redefined. In the society of the future, the physical and the virtual world, the web and augmented reality are even more closely knit together. Understanding large developmental trends in technology is vital for the innovations of (digital) youth work. We should not stick to the past too closely, but we should think more openly: what kind of youth work services do young people need and want in the future?”

(https://www.verke.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Digital-youth-work-a-Finnish-perspective_web.pdf)

7. Quality standards

There are no official competency frameworks in Finland for youth work. However, there are no competency descript. The ethical code of youth work was prepared in co-operation with youth work associations, youth organisations, youth work education and research.

Quality standards have been developed using bottom-up strategies. The quality model for youth work was first developed in the capital region. This model has within the last decade been implemented in municipal youth work all over Finland. However, it is important to emphasise that this has been due to the independent decisions made by local youth work professionals, not by top-down state decisions.

The model was originally during the 2000s. A new version was produced in 2015. According to Taina Nöjd the model has the following characteristics:

“The self and peer assessment model is developed by youth services of capital cities Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa. Nowadays the Kanuuna network– network of youth services of the 27 biggest cities in Finland – co-ordinates the tool (European Commission 2015, 53). The model is acquired from Kent, Great Britain, where youth work is inspected by Ofsted, The Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Hovi, Luukkonen, Mäkelä, Pakka, Taponen and Westman 2009, 8). In Finland, peer assessment in youth work means the youth centres are audited by other youth workers, usually from another municipality. The model is based on the idea of reciprocity: If you do an audit, you’ll have one.

The peer assessment provides not only evaluative information but also a possibility for mutual understanding and learning (European Commission 2015, 53-54.) The aim is not to inspect or merely audit but to develop everyday youth work. In audit peer auditors – usually two youth workers from another municipality – observe the activities for a particular period of time, guided by the criteria (European Commission 2015, 54).” (Nöjd 2015, in Nöjd and Siurala, Youth Work Quality Assessment, http://www.nuorisokanuuna.fi/sites/default/files/filedepot/youth_work_quality_assessment_verkkoversio.pdf.)

Currently the Kanuuna Network, which has been nominated as a national centre of expertise since 2018, has been developing digital tools to evaluate the impact of youth work. In 2018-2019 the digital tool used was Logbok tool developed in Sweden to gather information and find indicators to highlight the effectivity of youth work. Since 2020, there are efforts to create a national tool which can be used to provide statistical data on youth work.

8. Knowledge and data on youth work

Youth work is studied by the following organisations (in alphabetical order):

Finnish Youth Research Network: <http://www.youthresearch.fi/research>

Humak University of Applied Sciences:

<https://www.humak.fi/en/innovation-service/>

Juvenia Research Centre:

<https://www.xamk.fi/en/rdi/juvenia-centre-for-the-development-and-research-in-the-field-of-youth/>

Tampere University, Youth Work and Youth Research-programme:

<http://www.uta.fi/yky/en/studies/disciplines/youthworkandyouthresearch.html>

The Ministry of Culture and Education hosts a website offering statistical data on youth work in Finland: Finnish Youth Work Statistics (<https://nuorisotilastot.fi/#!/en/frontpage/undefined/perus/choice-1/prosentit/whiteblue/Koko%20maa/Koko%20maa/table//null/kunta/donut/%5B%5D//%5B%5D/>)

The representative study the Youth Barometer has estimated that roughly 25 per cent of young people join youth work activities (basically meaning municipal youth work). Of these, 10% join youth work activities on a permanent basis. There are no exact numbers for the young people attending youth work services. One explanation of this is the voluntary nature of youth work, and sometimes no registry of young people joining local services is kept.

According to research professor Tommi Hoikkala (Hoikkala and Kuivakangas 2017, Repa, Kirsti ja maisteri nuorisopedagogiikoiden pyönteissä – johdanto, 10-11), there are 3 853 man-years in municipal youth work. The exact number of youth workers is hard to estimate because some of the youth workers work on a part-time basis. Association of Finnish Municipalities estimates that the number of youth workers is lower, roughly 2800-2900 man-years. Parishes employ 1 212 youth workers, and the NGOs 1 102. The

number of volunteers is over 100 000 people. If the number of Association of Finnish Municipalities is used, there are 5000 professional youth workers in Finland.

One has to take into account also that people with a degree in youth work education may work in youth care (not seen as part of youth work in Finland), social welfare, community work etc.

9. European and international dimension of youth work in the country

According to the Ministry of Culture and Education, the international dimensions of Finnish youth work can be divided to four categories (EU, the Council of Europe, Nordic Co-Operation, Barents Regions). The summary of the ministry is as follows (abridged by TK):

5. “European Union cooperation in youth issues

The European Union’s competence in the youth sector is based on Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

The main responsibility for monitoring and drafting EU issues and formulating Finland's positions on youth issues rests with the Ministry of Education and Culture. The sub-committee EU-32 (youth and sport) appointed by the Committee for EU Affairs has a key role in preparing EU issues. Link to: [EU affairs and the Finnish government .Link to an external website](#)

Youth sector cooperation is funded under the EU programme for education, training, youth and sport, or Erasmus+ (2014-2020). The total budget of this programme for the seven-year programming period is EUR 14.7 billion. Of the programme’s total budget, 10% is dedicated to youth affairs. The Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for implementing the programme and disseminating information on it in Finland.

[Erasmus+ Programme](#)

6. Cooperation within the Council of Europe

The basic task of the Council of Europe is to secure and develop human rights, a pluralistic democracy and the rule of law.

No binding conventions exist in the youth sector. Youth sector cooperation is based on the resolution of the Committee of Ministers on the youth policy of the Council of Europe (CM/Res (2008) 23). The target group for Council of Europe’s youth work and policy is children and young adults up to the age of 30.

The Council of Europe supports the Member States in developing their youth policies by creating standards and implementing national youth policy reviews and advisory missions.

The recommendations of the Committee of Ministers serve as instruments that steer the Member States in matters of policy and legislation.

10. Current debates and open questions/policies on youth work

Multi-professional co-operation is increasing. There has been a significant interest in the school-based youth work which has also been studied scientifically (Kiilakoski 2014, Koulu on enemmän [School is more]). There is also integration of youth, employment, social and health policy within the creation of the youth guarantee model in Finland. In practice this has meant integrating outreach youth work and youth information and counselling to different active employment policy measures.

There has been an increase in targeted youth work due to the increasing youth policy attention paid at NEETs and at social exclusion of the young. While the universal youth work services are still strong, the emphasis on outreach youthwork has changed the traditional balance between universal and targeted youth work. This has been a matter of debate in a country that has traditionally favoured universal, group-based youth work. In practice this has meant also that the target group of youth work has widened from 13 to 18 to young people over 20 as well.

There have been efforts to promote participation of the young in different levels of society. Due to this, youth work has worked in different levels of local government and has been integrated to local decision making (thus moving from streets to the corridors of power, so to speak).

Digital youth work has been developed, and the integration of online and face-to-face services has been developed. This development is far from complete, but a lot of resources have been put to this.

There have been efforts to explicate the nature of youth work through productisation, development of quality assurance, basic mission efforts, curriculum of youth work explication using bottom-up approach and using different theoretical apparatuses, such as capability approach as developed by philosopher Martha Nussbaum.

Multicultural youth work has developed strongly in the last two decades with the growing number of young migrants in Finland. Lately the emphasis has been emphasis on developing anti-racist youth work. In connection to this, there have been initiatives to promote a human rights perspective in youth work.