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Contractor:

ICF GHK
146 Rue Royale
Brussels
B-1000
T +32 (0) 2 275 01 00
F +32 (0) 2 275 01 09
brussels@ghkint.com
www.ghkint.com

General report prepared by Allison Dunne, Daniela Ulicna, Ilona Murphy, Maria Golubeva and checked by Daniela Ulicna, Margaret James

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Working with young people: the value of youth work in the EU
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Working with young people: The value of youth work in the EU

Country report: Finland

Author: Anne-Mari Hall

This report presents the situation as of February 2013
1 Introduction: tradition, definitions and concepts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY FACTS</th>
<th>RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition for youth work</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal definition for youth work</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximate length of youth work tradition</td>
<td>120+ years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximate length of formal / professional youth work tradition</td>
<td>Around 90 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of relative importance of youth work in supporting young people</td>
<td>Increased</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Main sectors / fields of formal / professional / statutory youth work    | Prevention of social exclusion and substance abuse problems, supporting labour market integration, provision of facilities for youth clubs, youth and culture, international youth co-operation, local youth councils, youth information and advice, and youth research  
                                    | Note: No significant difference between 'formal' and 'non-formal' youth work in Finland (see Section 1.2) |
| Main sectors / fields of non-formal / third sector led youth work        | Hobby and leisure time activities, sports, work with specific groups of young people and work on specific issues, ‘spiritual’ and psychological guidance and support, participation and volunteering  
                                    | Note: No significant difference between 'formal' and 'non-formal' youth work in Finland (see Section 1.2) |

1.1 Definitions

Youth work is a relatively well defined concept and term in Finland, especially when compared to many other countries. It was first defined within legislation in 1972 when the legislation governing youth work was first introduced. The Youth Act 235/1995 defined youth work as “work aimed at promoting civic activity and improving the living conditions of young people”. Youth activities were defined as “activities aimed at promoting growth and citizenship skills”.

In the 2006 revision of the Youth Act, the definition of youth work was extended to include the promotion of the social empowerment of young people, with a focus on young people’s personal development and prevention of (social) exclusion: “youth work means the promotion of active citizenship in young people’s leisure time, their empowerment, support to young people’s growth and independence, and interaction between generations”.

There have been further definitions of youth work, for example, the Director of the Department of Youth in the City of Helsinki stated that youth work encompasses: the promotion of participation in the labour market, cultural life and public decision making; the creation of opportunities for discussing issues of identity, knowledge and moral issues; the development of participatory pedagogy; and the development of skills of participation.¹ Allianssi - the national service and lobbying organisation for youth work – classify the provision of stimulating leisure time activities for young people as the main goal of youth work, together with activities which help young people…

people in becoming active members of the society. They also emphasise the importance of a long-term approach to youth work which can play an important role in the prevention of exclusion among young people\(^2\). Sari Höylä, senior lecturer in the field of youth work, stresses the objective of youth work in helping young people in becoming active members of the society and emphasises voluntary participation of young people and preventive approach as some of the key principles behind youth work\(^2\). Finally, the latest Government Programme for Child and Youth Policy highlights ‘communality, non-discrimination, mutual respect and equality as well as local, regional and global solidarity’ as key principles behind youth work in Finland\(^4\).

The Finnish definition of youth work found within the Youth Act is not too different from the European definition for youth work, albeit the European one is more detailed and the Finnish one plays particular attention to leisure time activities and highlights the importance of youth work in helping young people becoming active members of the society. Both stress youth work methods as non-formal, voluntary learning methods taking place outside the formal education system.

### 1.2 Tradition and development of youth work

Youth work has a long tradition in Finland originating from Christian forms of association in the 1880s\(^5\). The Church began educating young people in 1868. In 1889 the YMCA was established in Finland in close cooperation with the Lutheran Church and it grew to be one of the most important youth movements in Finland. The YMCA helped to establish the early forms of Scouts as well as youth camp, choir and band activities. In 1897 the first Finnish youth association – called Nuorisoseuraliike – was established with the aim of educating rural young people. After the civil war in 1918, there was an influx of political youth organisations divided according to political divisions and the first student unions were established in the 1960s.

The early forms of youth work were based on voluntary work and were mainly concentrated on the provision of leisure time activities for young people. The early forms of youth work tended to be separate for boys and girls\(^6\).

Today, youth work is delivered by three key bodies / sectors: municipalities (public sector), youth NGOs and the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church (third sector organisations). Youth work in all these three bodies / sectors has for a long time already been and continue to be characterised by a high degree of professionalism. Professionalism in this context refers to the fact that by far the great majority of youth workers are trained / qualified youth workers (increasingly at the level of higher education) and this applies to youth workers employed by municipalities, youth NGOs and the Lutheran Church alike. Indeed, youth work has for a long time been seen as a profession itself – it is not seen as something to be practiced ‘just by anyone’.

It is for this reason that the terms ‘formal’ and ‘non-formal’ youth work do not really apply to the Finnish context since youth work delivered by both the public sector and

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\(^6\) Ibid.
third sector organisations (including NGOs and the Church) can be argued as being ‘formal’ youth work, with all three parties playing an important part in improving the lives of young people.

Indeed, the professionalisation of youth work has been ongoing since 1922 when the youth institute for training youth workers was set up. This process has seen several key events, for example in 1945 the first degree level studies for youth work were introduced and just four years later the Church started to train its own youth workers. Now formal training opportunities are available for aspiring youth workers at vocational upper secondary schools and HE institutions, including both universities and universities of applied sciences.

Youth work has continued to grow in importance in recent years and has a high position in the public discourse. Youth unemployment and inactivity (a high number of male NEETs in particular) is one of the most important reasons. In addition, the growing awareness of a number of young people ‘not feeling well’ in society, demonstrated for example by the school shootings, is another important reason. The new president, Sauli Niinistö, has spoken widely about his concerns over growing levels of exclusion among specific groups of young people and went to establish a special task force on the topic after his inauguration in early 2012. Youth policies are also included as a priority area in the Work Programme of the current coalition government, led by the Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen. It highlights the promotion of employment and prevention of social exclusion among young people as key areas. Following this, a high profile, tripartite working committee was set up in 2011 to revise and improve the Youth Guarantee, one of the existing flagship policies from the field of youth, which, however, was not seen as being fit for the purpose, given the scale of the challenge. As a result of the work of the working committee, an additional EUR 60 million per year will be invested as from January 2013 onwards on a social guarantee for young people. This new Guarantee ensures that each person under 25 years of age, and recent graduates under 30 years of age, will be offered either work, traineeships, study, workshops or labour market rehabilitation places within three months of registering as an unemployed jobseeker. The Guarantee also includes an educational guarantee, which promises a study place for each young person finishing basic education.

The growing importance of youth work is also evidenced by a survey of municipal youth workers and youth work managers, undertaken by Allianssi and the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (Suomen Kuntaliitto) in 2011. Around half of respondents to this survey stated that the importance of youth work had grown ‘somewhat’ over recent years and further 20% were of the opinion that it has grown ‘significantly’. This means that more than two-thirds of municipal youth workers and managers feel like youth work has been growing in importance.

Key trends in the development of youth work over the last decade include the following:

- Growing concern over social exclusion among young people, NEETs in particular, and related health problems, such as mental health issues and substance abuse. This has meant that youth work is becoming increasingly ‘issue’ and ‘target group’ driven, with a bigger share of the total youth work funding going on work with at-risk groups, rather than ‘universal’ youth work services, which has traditionally been the core concept behind

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7 Ibid.
9 Youth workers and managers of youth work services from 216 municipalities (out of the 310 municipalities where the survey was sent) responded to the survey.
youth work in Finland. This development goes hand-in-hand with a growing focus on outreach (‘street-based’ youth) work.

- Outreach work and work with at-risk groups more generally require new skills from youth workers. One municipal youth worker described this trend in the following manner: "youth work has changed over the course of my career from leisure-time activities to a challenging job that requires specific occupational skills from those practicing it"\(^ {10}\).

- Youth workers are increasingly highly educated: the majority of youth workers in Finland have already for a long time been qualified youth workers but the emergence of new HE qualifications in this field, at Master's degree level in particular, has meant that a growing share of youth workers hold a university level qualification (and increasingly a Master's degree level qualification) in youth work.

- New forms of youth work have emerged, for example, more and more youth workers carry out work online (in 2011, 47% of municipal youth workers were active in web-based youth work\(^ {11}\) and the Lutheran Church has also been active in developing ‘spiritual’ youth work models through the internet – see for example Hengellinen elämä verkossa ja Poikien ja Tyttöjen keskus).

- There has been an increase in the outsourcing of youth work services to voluntary organisations, albeit this is still small-scale when compared to some other European countries. The 2011 survey of municipal youth workers and youth work managers\(^ {12}\) revealed that a quarter of municipalities have seen an increase in the use of outsourcing in the field of youth work over the past five years, while the situation has remained stable in nearly two out of three municipalities (63%) and declined in every tenth municipality.

- The latest amendment to the Youth Act (20.8.2010/693) introduced cross-sectoral, multi-agency working as a requirement for municipalities in terms of how to organise themselves to address youth issues. The new amendment states that municipalities, or groups of municipalities, have to set up youth information and guidance networks consisting of representatives from education, health, social, youth, employment and law enforcement sectors. The goal of the networks is to gather information on the lives of young people in their locality and in that way improve the reach, availability and responsiveness of local youth services, ensure the situation of young people is taken into consideration in municipal decision-making, and avoid duplication of services through improved collaboration between key actors.

There had been an increase in multi-agency working even without the amendment and many municipalities had such a network in place already before this change took place. Having said that, this is an important, new requirement for many other municipalities and remains a challenge.

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12 Ibid.
especially in some of the smaller ones. By the Autumn 2011 such network had been established in around 63% of municipalities\textsuperscript{13}.

In terms of trends in the sectors / fields in which youth work has grown in importance over the past decade, it is very clear that specialist youth work dealing with vulnerable groups has grown in importance and more funding has been allocated to such work. International / global issues are of great interest to many young Finns and youth work NGOs in this sector tend to be very active with a very enthusiastic core group of young people benefiting from their work. The Finnish Scouts (Suomen Partiolaiset) have made a number of reforms in recent times and consequently have managed to increase the number of young people taking part in their work. At the same time, a number of other youth NGOs have seen reductions in the number of participants.

Interviewees highlighted multi-cultural youth work as another significant growth area. Many new youth NGOs have emerged in this field and now the challenge lies in integrating the activities of those to the activities of larger, more established NGOs and thereby ensuring that their work moves from the periphery closer to the core of all youth work. Youth information and advice is another fast growing form of youth work. The aim of youth information and advisory services is to give young people professional support, help and advice in different issues relating to their lives\textsuperscript{14}.

1.3 Current situation: the delivery of formal and non-formal youth work

As mentioned in the previous section (Section 1.2), most of the youth work in Finland is seen as ‘formal’ rather than ‘non-formal’ youth work, given that the majority of youth workers in both public and third sectors are trained professionals.

Today, youth work is delivered within three, key spheres: by the public sector, youth and other NGOs and the Lutheran Church.

The three main goals of the youth work delivered by the public sector are to: (1) foster active citizenship, (2) empower young people, and (3) improve young people’s living conditions and provide opportunities for personal growth and learning\textsuperscript{15}. The main youth work activities funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture include\textsuperscript{16}:

- Funding of national youth NGOs and civic organisations carrying out youth work: Around 100 youth organisations are entitled to state support. They
cover 6,000 local association and 800,000 members.\textsuperscript{17} Discretionary government grants to organisations are based on performance criteria, including the quality, extent and cost-effectiveness of activities. Other aspects taken into account when deciding on grants include the current social relevance of activities and the organisation’s need for financial support.

\begin{itemize}
    \item Young people’s cultural pursuits, for example, through the Young Culture event, Young Culture ambassadors, Network of regional art centres for children and young people and the International Award for Young People.
    \item Prevention of social exclusion and supporting the (re)integration of inactive young people into employment, education and / or training, for example, through outreach youth work (Etsivä nuorisotyö – see Section 5.6) and Youth Workshops (see Section 5.2).
    \item National youth centres provide youth activities, such as school and nature camps and participate in international youth cooperation. They act as a safe operating environment in which children and young people, youth organisations and youth groups are able to undertake their activities. The centres are principally owned by local authorities and are available at a reasonable cost.\textsuperscript{18}
    \item Prevention of substance abuse, for example, by providing grants for different organisations to carry out work in this field and train personnel and volunteers.
    \item Building and maintenance of ‘youth centres’.
    \item Implementation of the four-year youth strategy: the Finnish Government’s Child and Youth Policy Programme.
    \item Youth research: The Ministry of Education and Culture supports applied research on youth work, activities and policy, and also funds the annual Youth Barometer which measures young people’s values and attitudes.
    \item International cooperation in the field of youth.
    \item Youth information and advice, which is one of the growing forms of youth work. The information and advisory services give young people professional support, help and advice in different issues relating to their lives.
\end{itemize}

The delivery of public youth work is principally undertaken by the municipalities. According to the Youth Act (72/2006), local youth work and youth policy should consist of educational guidance, facilities and leisure opportunities, information and advisory services, support to youth associations and other youth groups; sports, cultural, international and multicultural youth activities; young people’s environmental education; and, where needed, youth workshop services and outreach youth work (Amendment 693/2010) or other forms of activity suited to local circumstances and needs. Each municipality has the freedom to choose the form, methods and extent of its youth services. One of the most important tasks of the municipalities is the running of youth facilities / youth club houses which can be found in every municipality across

\textsuperscript{17} Ministry of Education and Culture (2012), \textit{Youth Work in Finland}. Helsinki: Ministry of Education and Culture.

the country: in 2012 there were around 1,000 such facilities maintained by municipalities\(^19\).

Non-governmental youth organisations and other NGOs are other important players in the delivery of youth work. They work independently and together with municipalities to deliver youth work.\(^20\) As mentioned before, around 100 youth organisations are entitled to state support and Allianssi is an umbrella, representative organisation for around 117 youth NGOs involved in youth work. Their members are involved in a broad range of youth work, starting from leisure time / hobby focussed NGOs, political youth organisations, student organisations and youth organisations specialised in international affairs, to NGOs supporting vulnerable children and young people, youth NGOs working on specific issues such as environment protection and NGOs representing certain groups of young people, like different minority groups\(^21\).

Another important body involved in the delivery of youth work is the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church. The Church has been active in this field for decades already and trains and employs youth workers (Nuorisotyönhjäajat) to work in most parishes around the country. The youth work leaders employed by the Church work with school-aged boys and girls, young people and their families. Their role is diverse, including education and training related activities, provision of information and spiritual guidance, organisation of events and youth camps, hosting youth clubs, and overall meeting, listening and supporting young people and their families on a one-to-one or group basis.

### 2 Legislative context and governance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY FACTS</th>
<th>RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legislative framework for youth work</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of regulation for youth work</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body(ies) with a responsibility for governing youth work</td>
<td>Ministry of Education and Culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 2.1 Legal background

Youth work has been regulated in Finland since 1972 when the first Act on youth work was introduced. The Act on Youth Committees and State Subsidies for Municipal Youth Work (117/1972) allowed for the development of a ‘statutory system of youth organisations’ and formalised state funding for local authorities to organise youth work\(^22\). Since then the youth work legislation has been amended several times (1986, 1995, 2006). In broad terms, the purpose of the latest Youth Act (2006) is to specify the objectives and values of youth work and policy\(^23\). It was introduced to support young

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19 Sjöholm, K. (2012), Nuorisotyö, \(<\w w w.k u nn at.net/f i/ a s i a n t u n t i j a p a l v e l u t / o p e k u / k u l t i / n u o r i s o / S i v u t / d e f a u l t . a s p x >\) date accessed:


21 A full list of the member organisations of Allianssi can be found here: \(h t t p : / / w w w . a l l i . f i / a l l i a n s s i / j a s e n j a r j e s t o t / \)


23 The 2006 version of the Act, in English, can be found here: \(h t t p : / / w w w . m i n e d u . f i / o u t p u t / s i t e s / d e f a u l t / O P M / N u o r i s o / n u o r i s o p o l i t i i k k a / l i t t e e t / H E _ n u o r i s o l a k i \)
people’s growth and independence and to promote ‘active citizenship, social empowerment of young people and improvement of their growth and living conditions’. The main reasons for recognising youth work as a specific youth sector activity within the legislation were to ensure ‘communality and solidarity, equality and non-discrimination, multiculturalism and internationalism, healthy lifestyles and respect for life and the environment’. The Act also lays down the provisions for expert bodies supporting the policy making at national level and specifies the funding arrangements for youth work. The Youth Act is complemented by the Government Decree on Youth Work and Policy (103/2006).

The most recent updates were made in 2011 when the provisions for outreach youth work were specified. The amendments also made it compulsory for municipalities, or groups of municipalities, to set up cross-sectoral, multi-stakeholder co-operation networks in the field of youth.

With regards to the future, stakeholders are of the opinion that the likelihood of introducing some further modifications to the legislation in the next few years is quite high. For example, the current law defines young people as being all under 29-year-olds and some see this age bracket as being too broad and feel the age threshold for a ‘young person’ should be lowered (i.e. to 25 or even 20) so as to focus the limited resources on younger age groups.

Others are of the opinion that any possible changes should be seen in the context of recent, significant changes to the law: enough time should be given for those new forms of working to become a mainstream practice before further, ground-breaking changes are made to the existing law.

Overall, anecdotal evidence suggests that the law is fairly highly regarded by those working in the field and it is seen as the backbone of youth work in Finland. It is nevertheless recognised that its awareness at the grassroots level could be improved.

2.2 Governance

The Ministry of Education and Culture has the responsibility for the development of youth work and associated policy, as specified by the Youth Act (72/2006). In practice, the Youth Division of the Department for Cultural, Sport and Youth Policy at the Ministry of Education and Culture undertakes the development of youth work. This team had 15 staff in November 2012. The team steers and develops youth policy by means of legislation, studies, reviews and funding. There are two expert bodies that facilitate the Ministry of Education with regards to youth work, the Advisory Council for Youth Affairs (NUORA) and the Youth Organisation Subsidy Committee.

Even if the Ministry of Education and Culture is the leading national administration in this field, other ministries are involved in the development of a range of youth policies which again have an impact on youth work practice and policy. As an example, the recent modification of the Social Guarantee for Young People, which is due to come into force in January 2013, was developed by a national, tripartite working committee consisting of representatives from ministries in charge of labour, education, health, 

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25 The website of Ministry of Education and Culture:
http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/ Nuoriso/?lang=en
social, defence and finance matters, together with representatives of youth organisations, local authorities, trade unions, employers, entrepreneurs and the social insurance institute KELA. Furthermore, the Youth Act stipulates that the Government is to adopt a new development programme for matters concerning the lives of children and young people every four years with the aim of improving cross-sectoral action in the field of youth affairs. This programme is drafted through cross-ministerial collaboration too.

The Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY-keskukset) are the authorities dealing with youth affairs at regional level, although it is the municipalities which have the main responsibility for the delivery of youth work specified by national legislation, policies and programmes (in addition to youth NGOs and other organisations involved in youth work).

Youth work in Finland is funded mainly from municipal and church taxes as well as central government (Ministry of Education and Culture) subsidies. In terms of funding priorities of the Ministry, the section 1.3 of the report outlines the key areas of youth work action funded by the Ministry. They show that in addition to specific programmes and actions, the Ministry allocates government transfers to local authorities for youth work based on the number of young residents under 29 years of age. The Ministry also offers discretionary government grants for youth sector organisations to undertake youth work. Indeed, the central government has funded youth NGOs involved in the delivery of youth work systematically since the 1940’s. The state funding provided for NGOs comes primarily from the proceeds of the gaming industry (i.e. the lottery), and this funding covers around a quarter of their operating costs.

The following amounts are spent on youth work in Finland:

- In 2012 the municipalities spent in the region of EUR 200 million on youth work. The amount has increased from EUR 149 million in 2002 and EUR 168 million in 2008. The EUR 200 million per year forms around 0.5% of the total municipal budgets and translates to around EUR 35 per inhabitant.

The sum needs to be seen in the context of wider municipal funding for services for children and young people: in 2005, an annual municipal expenditure on all such services accounted for around 35-45% of municipal expenditure. Around 4.2% of the municipal expenditure on

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32 See: www.kunnat.net
34 Helve, H. (2005), Youth work, youth work policy and youth research. The Finnish perspective, <http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-
youth work is covered by State subsidies: and the rest are collected by the municipalities through taxation and other means. 

- In 2012, the State funding for youth work amounted to around EUR 69.9 million. The amount has increased from around EUR 30.8 million in 2004 to EUR 47 million in 2008. The 2012 figure accounted for about 0.13% of the total State budget.

- This sum also needs to be seen in the context of wider funding available for children and young people, which in the same year accounted for around 15% of the total State budget. Around a quarter of the State funding comes from general budget funds and the rest come from the proceeds of the gaming industry (around 9% of all proceeds of the gaming industry is allocated towards youth work).

- The Church spends in the region of EUR 190 per year on work with children and young people, out of which around EUR 100 million is spent on youth work. Overall, the work with children and young people account for around 30% of the Church budget.

3 Policy and programme framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY FACTS</th>
<th>RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General level of political commitment to the issue of youth work</td>
<td>Strong / Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated policy / strategy on youth work</td>
<td>Yes, in a form of Youth Act and Government Decree on Youth Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programmes on the development of youth work</td>
<td>Yes: Child and Youth Policy programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net impact of economic crisis on funding for youth work</td>
<td>Mixed: mostly increases in funding, albeit some municipalities, parishes and NGOs have seen cuts in funding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

36 See: www.minedu.fi
3.1 Policy commitment

All of the interviewees regarded ‘national political commitment’ on the issue of youth work to be either ‘strong’ or ‘medium’. None were of the opinion that it was weak. All were universally of the opinion that youth issues – including youth work as a way of preventing and tackling problems faced by young people - is one of the biggest priorities for the country and that a significant attention is being paid to the issue. The main reasons for the high priority status were explained earlier in the report (see Section 1.2).

Some concerns were raised over funding for youth NGOs as the current government programme foresees cuts in the state budget for them in order to increase funds for youth work carried out with vulnerable young people.

3.2 Policies and programmes to develop youth work

Three key documents guide the development of youth work in Finland:

- The 2006 Youth Act (and consequent updates), which is the regulatory ‘backbone’ behind youth work in Finland;
- The Government Decree on Youth Work and Policy (103/2006); and

With regards to the last document, the 2006 Youth Act stipulates that the Government is to issue a new national youth policy development programme every four years. This programme is to cover matters concerning children and young people in the country, with a goal of increasing cross-sectoral and cross-ministerial collaboration on matters concerning the lives of children and young people. The programme also identifies medium-term targets and priorities for the development of youth policy in the country and issues guidelines for local and regional implementation. The first programme was approved for the period 2007-2011.

The second Child and Youth Policy programme was approved in December 2011 and is valid a four-year period between 2012 and 2015\(^{41}\). It is built around the same principles than the Youth Act and the associated Government Decree on youth work (1 - Supporting young people’s growth and independence; 2 - Promoting young people’s active citizenship and social empowerment; and 3 - Improving young people’s growth and living conditions) and underlines non-discrimination, improvement of life management skills of young people, participation and social inclusion as the priority themes for youth policy in the next four years.

Throughout this document youth work is identified as a measure to achieve many of the strategic goals of the Programme, including as a tool to increasing employment amongst young people, fostering active participation of young people in community life, tackling substance abuse and prevention social exclusion, for example.\(^{42}\)

In terms of the impact of the economic crisis on policies and programmes on youth work, the situation is rather mixed. Youth policy is an area in which a lot has been invested since the start of the economic downturn\(^{43}\). This has been a result of a rapid increase in youth unemployment which has been seen as a priority to tackle, considering the potential long-term effect of youth unemployment on individuals and

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\(^{42}\) Ibid, p.26

society (e.g. Finnish studies show that the cost of exclusion at a young age can have a societal cost of over EUR 1 million over the course of his / her lifetime). For example, central government funding for youth work has increased practically every year over the past decade. Outreach youth work and other youth work carried out among unemployed / excluded young people has witnessed particularly significant funding increases.

At the same time, some individual municipalities and parishes have had to make cuts in their youth work services, followed by reductions in tax proceeds, financial pressures on municipalities caused for example by increases in expenditure on health and social care for the elderly citizens and other financial pressures caused by the downturn. The 2011 survey of municipal youth workers and youth work managers revealed that while municipal funding for youth work has grown in recent years in about 45% of municipalities of which representatives responded to the survey, its share from total municipal funding has declined. At the same time about a fifth of municipalities have seen reductions in overall funding for youth work. On the basis of the survey results, many municipal youth workers remain concerned about the future funding levels.

The new government programme requires the State to save EUR 6 million from central government funding for youth work while funding has been increased for outreach youth work and on the new Social Guarantee for young people. In practice this means that even if overall state funding for youth work has continued to increase even in 2012, the ‘traditional’ areas of youth work (such as funding for youth NGOs), is declining. This is an area of concern for the third sector organisations.

4 Youth workers: training, status, population and profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY FACTS</th>
<th>RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimum qualifications standards for youth workers</td>
<td>No [Minimum qualifications standards exist for youth workers employed by the Finnish Lutheran Church]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth worker as a recognised profession / occupation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of formal, dedicated qualifications for youth workers</td>
<td>Yes [several training and qualification opportunities at different levels of the education system, including HE and upper secondary VET]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education background of the majority of youth workers</td>
<td>The majority of youth workers are qualified youth workers having undergone specialised training on youth work or youth policy at an HE or VET institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of youth workers</td>
<td>Around 7,000 of which up to 3,000 are involved in core activities related to the delivery of youth work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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4.1 Training and qualifications

There are no longer minimum qualification standards for youth workers in Finland. In terms of public sector, the implementation of youth work is the responsibility of the municipalities who specify the qualification requirements for youth workers they employ. Qualification standards are also decided by each NGO that employs youth workers. The Lutheran Church however does have minimum qualification standards for youth workers that it employs. Youth workers within the Lutheran Church are required to have a Bachelor Degree either in Social Services or Humanities (Community Education), both of which include specialist youth work studies and a 90 ECTS module in ecclesiastical studies.

Despite not having minimum qualification standards (apart from ‘the church sector’), in practice, the majority of youth workers are trained / qualified youth workers. This applies to all three sectors involved in the delivery of youth work (municipal and NGO youth workers as well as youth workers employed by the Church) and in particular to youth workers who hold a permanent position. Occasionally other professionals and / or unqualified youth worker trainees / students are taken to fill up temporary / project based positions but they remain a minority when the whole youth worker population is taken into consideration.

There are no formal training requirements for volunteer youth workers either, albeit many NGOs and the Church in particular do provide non-formal training opportunities for many of their volunteers.

There are a number of formal training and qualification opportunities available to youth workers in Finland. These opportunities are available both at upper secondary (vocational) and higher education (Bachelor and Master’s degree) levels.

- At upper secondary level the Vocational Qualification in Youth and Leisure Instruction allows VET graduates from this field to work as youth and leisure instructors. ‘Youth and Leisure Instructors’ are trained by several vocational upper secondary schools across the country, but the qualifications can also be completed as an apprenticeship or as a competence-based qualification (i.e. demonstrating the relevant skills and competences gained through work experience through practical, competence-based tests). The qualification gives the graduates the eligibility to apply for further studies at HE level.

  In addition, persons obtaining a Further Qualification in Special Needs Instruction for Children and Young People are able to work in positions involving education, instruction and organisation.

- University level studies have existed already since the 1980s. At the higher education level, the degree programme in ‘Civic Activities and Youth Work’ is available at several universities of applied sciences in Finland. Graduates obtain a Bachelor degree in Humanities, with an exact title of ‘Community Educators’.

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45 Such standards were in place when the first youth work act was introduced in 1972
47 Ibid.
48 Unless otherwise referenced, information in the next four paragraphs comes from the following publication: Höylä, S. (2012), *Youth Work in Finland*. Helsinki: HUMAK University of applied Science.
Individuals who have gained a Bachelor’s degree and at least three years work experience in the youth sector can apply for the Masters programme in ‘NGO and Youth Work’ (Master’s in Humanities, ‘Community Educator’). Furthermore, at HUMAK University of Applied Sciences an English-language Masters programme in ‘Youth Work and Social Equality’ is available and the University of Tampere offers a Master’s Programme in ‘Youth Work and Youth Research’.

Finally, the Finnish Lutheran Church trains their youth workers at three universities of applied sciences (ammattikorkeakoulu) of their own. Qualified youth workers trained by the church are known as ‘youth work leaders’ (nuorisotyöohjaajat) and are educated to a Bachelor degree level. The qualifications they obtain are either Social and Health Science degrees (Bachelor of Social Services / Sosionomi) or degrees in humanities (Bachelor degree in Community Education / yhteisöpedagogi). Both programmes include specialist courses / studies on youth work and they meet the Episcopal eligibility requirements set by the Church.

In terms of non-formal training opportunities, there are many youth organisations that provide training for youth workers. For example, the Guides and Scouts of Finland trains peer instructors for voluntary youth activities. Furthermore, many volunteers carrying out unpaid youth work for the Lutheran Church are trained by the Church to carry out such roles. This includes voluntary leaders of children’s and youth clubs, voluntary outreach youth workers, voluntary leaders of courses leading to confirmation, etc. Some of the training courses last up to two years.

4.2 Status of youth worker profession

A youth worker has a recognised, professional status in Finland. This derives from the fact that training for youth workers has existed already since 1922 and now a range of training opportunities exists at different levels of the education system. Even if there are no longer minimum training standards (apart from youth workers employed by the Church), anecdotal evidence points out that most youth workers are qualified youth workers. There are however workers in the field who hold Bachelor degrees either in Culture, Arts or Social Services too, and youth workers collaborate closely with professionals such as teachers, guidance counsellors, psychologists, social workers, etc.

There is some research to suggest that training and status associated with youth work as a profession have helped to improve the relevance of youth work activities and methods. Senior lecturer in youth work, Sari Höylä, describes the ‘evolution’ of youth work practice in the following manner: "Only a few decades ago, most youth workers became qualified in their jobs through practical experience, and therefore youth activities were largely based on models developed through experience. Often the experience resulted in good, consistent practices, but the lack of a theoretical framework also resulted in wrong kinds of activities. Activities that are not inspired by the young people themselves, or are planned and organised too extensively by adult leaders, should not be called youth activities in the first place".

There is also evidence to indicate that the increases in the education opportunities at a Master’s degree level are having a positive impact on the ‘status’ of the profession. Anecdotal evidence indeed suggests that many youth workers feel more comfortable

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49 Further information can be found from the website of the Lutheran Church.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
and confident in their post after having obtained a Master’s degree in youth work as most of the other professionals they work with (such as teachers) are qualified to a Master’s degree level.

### 4.3 Youth worker population

It has been estimated that around 7,000 people are working in the Finnish youth work sector, of which around 3,000 are involved in core activities related to the delivery of youth work\(^{53}\). An important proportion of the 7,000 work with children, as opposed to older age groups, thus it has been estimated that only in the region of 3,000 work with ‘young people’. Out of the 3,000 involved in youth work, it is estimated that every two out of three employees have a permanent post\(^{54}\). Please note that the figures quoted above exclude non-direct youth worker personnel, such as those involved in administration, finance, cleaning or facilities, and include only those involved in the delivery. Table 4.1 gives more information on staff numbers by sector.

In addition to paid youth workers, there are a large number of people who help to organise youth activities in a voluntary capacity through youth associations and organisations. It is estimated that at least 80,000 – 130,000 volunteers are involved in the youth work sector.

*Figure 4.1 The number of youth workers by sector*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector / employer</th>
<th>Number of youth workers</th>
<th>Number of volunteers engaged in youth work</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Municipalities    | Around 2,200 - 3,000 paid staff of which around 1,700 involved in the delivery of youth work (the rest include project officers, administrators, etc.) | NA | Allianssi (2012) Nuorista Suomessa. Tietoa nuorista, heidän asemastaan, elinoloistaan ja nuorisotyöstä 2012.  
| Lutheran Church   | 1,277                   | 30,000                                   | The Union of Youth Workers of the Finnish Lutheran Church (Kirkon Nuorisotyöntekijöiden Liitto KNT)  
| Youth NGOs        | Around 1,700 paid staff of which around 500 involved in the delivery of youth work (the rest include administrators, cleaners, finance personnel, etc.) | 50,000 – 100,000\(^{55}\) | Allianssi (2012) Nuorista Suomessa. Tietoa nuorista, heidän asemastaan, elinoloistaan ja nuorisotyöstä 2012. |

\(^{55}\) The number depends on how different studies have defined a volunteer.
Overall, the number of youth workers has remained stable over the last ten years. There have been some increases throughout the decade but the economic downturn is now affecting the numbers. For example, the 2011 survey of municipal youth work services revealed that youth work staff increases had been witnessed in 44% of municipalities which responded to the survey over the past five years. The staff numbers had remained the same in 41% of municipalities and 15% had witnessed reduction in the number of youth workers. The respondents however highlighted that the current youth worker numbers are minimal as they are and could not really see possibilities to reduce more staff, albeit every tenth municipality expected further staff cuts to take place in the years to come.

The finances of parishes have become tighter and consequently the number of youth workers employed by the Church has declined over the last decade by around 7%: from 1,328 in 2002 to 1,277 in 2011.

4.4 Profile of youth workers

Limited research based evidence is available on the profile of youth workers, but the following is known about them:

- As previously mentioned, the great majority of youth workers in the municipal, NGO and church sectors are qualified youth workers who hold one of the specialist youth worker qualifications. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many of the older youth workers hold an upper secondary level youth worker qualification while a growing share of younger workers are educated to a Bachelor and / or Master’s degree level. This is explained by the fact that more HE level education opportunities have emerged in recent years.

There are also individuals working in the sector who hold a Bachelor degree either in social services, Culture or Arts.

- The sector is dominated by female workers. For example, anecdotal evidence indicates that only around a tenth of applicants on some of the university courses on youth work have been male.

This trend applies to grassroots level workers in particular. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many more men are involved in the management of youth work services.

The results of the survey undertaken by Allianssi and the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (Suomen Kuntaliitto) among municipal youth work services also shed some light into the gender profile of municipal youth workers. Women made up 58% of all respondents. It is however believed that the gender breakdown is even more female dominated than this survey suggested, if the whole youth worker population is taken into consideration, because this survey captured a relatively high share of individuals in charge of youth services: a third of respondents were managerial staff.

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Limited information is available on the age profile of youth workers. Referring to the survey responses mentioned above\(^59\), every tenth respondent was 30 years of age or younger, youth workers in their thirties and forties made a quarter of respondents each, a third were 51-60 years of age and finally just under a tenth were already over 60 years of age. However, as stated above, these results must be read with caution because the survey was not carried out to analyse the profile of youth workers. Instead, the survey captured some personal details of the respondents.

### 5 The role and value of youth work

#### 5.1 Education and training

One of the aims of youth work is to support the educational development of young people. Youth work facilitates ‘goal-oriented, non-formal learning’ outside of the classroom context, in different settings and through various activities. Learning may not be the focus of the activity rather it is a result of it.\(^60\) For example afternoon activities for school children promote non-formal learning. These activities are organised according to school level and organised by municipalities who may purchase the services from public or private service providers.\(^61\) Furthermore, much municipal youth work is delivered through ‘youth centres / youth club facilities’ that provide different youth work activities.

Youth centres give young people the opportunity to meet other young people and youth workers who are trained to provide support and guidance to young people. There is at least one youth centre in every municipality in Finland and there are a total of around 1,000 youth centres in the country as a whole. Youth centres encourage the participation of young people in decision making with regular ‘house meetings’ organised to plan future activities.\(^62\) The new Child and Youth Policy Programme has assigned the youth centres with the task of further developing adventure and experiential education as a form of youth work.

In a similar manner, most leisure time activities offered by youth NGOs act as non-formal learning opportunities for young people. As a good example can be mentioned the Summer High School Association (Kesälukioseura ry) which was founded already in 1965 to promote the voluntary study and leisure activities of young people, and to organise experimental and research activities relating to studying and teaching.

The Summer High School Association runs summer high schools for young people living in Finland, organises courses in Finnish language and culture for Finnish ex-pat youths as well as summer high school courses for refugee youths living in Finland, in their own language and culture.

The summer high schools organised for refugee youths have been praised for their multi-cultural approach in that they help young refugees to maintain and strengthen their cultural identity. Courses are held in different parts of the country, and the duration of each course is approximately one week. Each year, about 300 students together with 60 refugee teachers.

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\(^{59}\) Ibid.


Traditionally youth work has not played as big of a role in the classrooms of primary and secondary schools, than outside the classroom. However, the Child and Youth Policy Programme 2012-2015 stresses the importance of bringing primary and secondary education closer to municipal youth work. This is to be done, for example, by improving information and counselling services for young people. Support in the transitional phases from lower to upper secondary level studies and from education into employment will also be improved through Youth Workshops (see Section 5.2) and various other measures. Schools are also encouraged to adopt some of the youth work working methods liked adventure and experiential education methods as a way of revitalising the interest of young people at risk of dropping out of their studies. Online youth work (together with a Virtual Community Police Team) is also recognised as one of the tools to address bullying in social media.

Youth work also plays a role in young people’s opportunities to validate informal and non-formal learning. It was in fact a Finnish youth NGO, Youth Academy, which developed one of the first ‘record books’ offering young people a chance to identify and record the competences they had developed during their voluntary engagements.

The Recreational Activity Study Book was created in 1996 by the Finnish Youth Academy and was aimed at all young people above 13 years of age who were involved in recreational and voluntary activities. At the end 80,000 Recreational activity study books were distributed and around 5,000 young people took up this activity each year.

In 2009, the activity book was introduced as a web-based tool. SKENE-X (www.skene-x.net and http://itsetehty.fi/) is an internet-based tool kit to support own projects of 13-19-year-olds. Small groups of young people can apply for a small amount of funding (EUR 100 – EUR 500) for the implementation of their own project. Since 2006, around 25,000 young people have been involved in running their own projects, which have been supported by a total of EUR 160,000.

The website also hosts an online based ‘activity record book’ in which young people can record their own project, hobby, voluntary work and other non-formal and informal learning experiences. The young people can also ask their youth worker, tutor or teacher to record an assessment of their performance in different activities. The system does not measure the young person’s competences and does not aim for formal accreditation, but it serves young people as a tool for making all the different experiences and learning of young people visible when applying for a job or a study place.

### 5.2 Employment and entrepreneurship

Youth workers play a growing part in the context of improving employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for young people in Finland. Youth work has been identified as a means to reduce youth unemployment as part of the implementation of the Social Guarantee, which ensures that everyone under the age of 25, and recent graduates under 30 years of age, will be offered work, a traineeship, or a study, workshop or labour market rehabilitation place, within three months of becoming unemployed\(^{63}\). Outreach youth work and youth workshops (nuorten työpajat) are some of the key measures used to carry out this programme and youth workers play a

central role in these measures, outreach youth work in particular which is discussed further in section 5.6.

Youth workshops (nuorten työpajat) have existed in Finland since the late 1980s. The workshops typically occupy a ‘middle ground’ between the education system, work, social and health services and aim to overcome a range of barriers and obstacles that early school leavers must overcome if they are to make a successful transition to further education / training or employment.

Youth workshops offer training and work practice to unemployed young people under 25 years of age. Two-thirds of beneficiaries are young people with compulsory education qualification at most and therefore in a vulnerable position in the labour market. The Youth workshop activity aims to support young people’s social growth, deal with social and personal problems and reinforce their skills in life (e.g. learning a daily training/work routine). Workshops have different orientations allowing young people to learn practical skills in different fields such as graphic design, metalwork, carpentry, textiles, catering, etc.

Young people are supported by a range of professionals during their time in the workshop: they are supported by teachers and two types of mentors. Professionals such as nurses, youth workers, psychologists and social workers deal with social and psychological concerns and labour market mentors help the young people to integrate into the labour market after their participation to the programme, or help to look for a study place. They also help with practical skills required in the labour market (e.g. time management, workplace behaviour).

Most young people participate in the workshops for five to six months. There were 196 youth workshops across the country in 2010, covering about 80% of all municipalities, but youth workshop activities can be found in 264 municipalities. They benefited some 13,016 under 29-year-olds in 2010, of which 10,859 were under the age of 25. Three out of four beneficiaries (75%) found a job, a study place or another activity after their participation in the programme (Ministry of Employment and the Economy, 2012).

Another example of a policy from the field of youth work which supports labour market integration efforts of young people is the local Youth Information Centres and Services, which provide information and counselling to young people on all aspects of their lives, including employment issues.

Youth Information Centres and Services (nuorten tieto- ja neuvontapalvelut) are funded by municipal youth work budgets. The first youth information centre was opened in 1983 and in 2007 there were 79 centres providing these services. Around 450 youth workers were trained to work in the centres.

The centres cater for a broad range of young people: from young people who are able to find information independently and young people who need help in clarifying their own needs, to young people who experience problems and may need more intense support. Furthermore web based services are available with an interactive question and answer function. In fact, internet based municipal youth information and counselling services current cover 230 municipalities and therefore around 90% of young people aged 13 to 24.

Youth NGOs are also involved in supporting labour market integration efforts of young people. Two examples are offered below.

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The Finnish 4H organisation is a youth development organisation, which aims its activities at young people aged between 6 and 28 years old living in both rural and urban areas. The youth work carried out by the 4H organisation has an educational purpose with long-term goals to endorse entrepreneurship, employability and active citizenship in young people.

The NGO operates a ‘Three Steps to Employment’ model:

- With regards to the first step, in the 4H clubs children learn practical skills by doing fun TOP-task bank activities led by a trained club leader.
- The Hands-on courses are designed to give a young person the basic skills and knowledge to be employed to do babysitting, dogsitting, housekeeping, gardening and forestry tasks.
- The Passport to work – courses help a young people make the transition from education to employment by improving their employability skills and knowledge of the rules of the working world. The course handles with matters such as job applications and CVs, job interviews, workplace rules, views of employers, views of customers and customer service roles, and difficult customer service situations. 15,000 young people have already taking part in the course.

The Youth Cooperation Allianssi has organised a number of employment projects in recent years. For example, Employing Young People 2009, funded by the Ministry of Education, organised jobs for young people in the youth work sector. Organisations received EUR 1,500 a month for every young person that they employed. In total 205 young people found temporary placements with youth organisations and municipalities. In 2010 Allianssi aimed to find work placements for at least 1,100 young people for at least three months. The project ran for one year and provided 1,200 young people with placements many of whom became employed in the organisation they were place in after the completion of the project. This project targeted unemployed young people, recent graduates and those at risk of becoming unemployed.67

5.3 Health and well-being

Youth work in Finland aims to encourage young people to lead healthy lifestyles. One of the main issues addressed by youth work is the prevention of substance abuse including drugs, alcohol and tobacco. Municipalities and third sector organisations play an important role in this work.68 The Child and Youth Policy Programme for 2012-2015 in particular specifies the importance of investing in preventive substance abuse work and highlight its development as a form of youth work. It also identifies youth work methods to be used as one of the means of carrying out preventive mental health work among young people.

In terms of specific measures already introduced, educational activities have been run in Youth Workshops to education young people about the adverse effects of drinking and smoking and to prevent the experimentation with illegal drugs. In addition, drug and alcohol free cafes have been set up with funding from central government. In more generic terms, youth work concerning substance abuse prevention has so far consisted of both group work and one-to-one sessions and takes place in youth clubs, youth centres, open cafes and self-organised groups of young people. The role of the youth worker is to facilitate discussion on the issues surrounding substance abuse to encourage young people to view illegal drugs in a responsible way. Issues discussed

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may include the various consequences of substance abuse and should provide young people with information on the risks of different substances.\textsuperscript{69} Some youth work initiatives have focused on issues surrounding sexual health.

In Helsinki the municipality runs a Girls’ Centre, an area where girls and young women aged between 10 and 28 are able to attend. The Centre runs a sexual health advice service called \textit{Pop In} that can be visited without making an appointment.\textsuperscript{70}

An example of a youth counselling programme can be found from Helsinki.

The programme \textit{Luotsi} is a targeted youth work programme, in Helsinki, run in association with the Youth Department, the Social Services and the Health department. The aims of the programme are to help teenagers to develop and grow, to prevent social exclusion and to provide early support for the target group. The programme aims to help young people aged 12-15 who have a variety of problems, for example, depression, antisocial behaviour or attention deficit disorder. A network of professionals supports an individual teenager to aid them in their development and help them to tackle their particular problem. An individual support plan is developed with the individual to identify their goals. The individual has regular meetings with a counsellor. In total about 350 young people participate annually and 90% complete their personal plans.\textsuperscript{71}

\section*{5.4 Participation}

The promotion of young people’s participation in society is another important part of youth work in Finland and involves the development of citizenship skills and promotion of participation in democratic activities. The main objective is to increase ‘enthusiasm, motivation and skills as well as practical experiences in active citizenship’.

The role of youth work in promoting participation stems from strong legal background and focus on the issue:

- The Constitution of Finland (731/1999) guarantees every person the right to participate in civil society and politics, and to influence the decisions concerning themselves\textsuperscript{72}.

- The Local Government Act (365/1995) also guarantees the residents and service users of a municipality the right to participate in and influence decision making in their municipality. The responsibility for providing opportunities to do so rests with municipalities\textsuperscript{73}.

- Last but not least, the Youth Act stipulates young people’s right to be heard in matters concerning them and to be given opportunities to take part in the handling of matters concerning local and regional youth work and youth policy.

Despite of the strong legal background, the declining interest of young people in political and democratic processes has caused a lot of concern. International studies

\textsuperscript{69} Ministry of Education and Culture (2009), \textit{What is Youth Substance Abuse Prevention}, Helsinki: Ministry of Education.
\textsuperscript{70} City of Helsinki (2012), Advice and Guidance, \texttt{<www.hel.fi/hki/nk/en/Advice+and+guidance>} date accessed: 5\textsuperscript{th} of November.
\textsuperscript{71} City of Helsinki, Youth Work Unit “Luotsi”, \texttt{<www.nji.nl/nji/download/congressen/101110Youth_work_unit_Luotsi.pdf>} date accessed: 5\textsuperscript{th} of November 2012.
\textsuperscript{72} Höylä, S. (2012), \textit{Youth Work in Finland}. Helsinki: HUMAK University of applied Science.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
have shown that in comparison to many of their foreign peers, young Finns show relatively little interest in politics, elections and democratic processes and even interest in youth NGO activities has declined in recent years\textsuperscript{74}. Research shows that today’s young people most value ‘spontaneous free time with their friends’, followed by ‘leisure time spent with the family’ and then ‘organised civic activity’\textsuperscript{75}.

A concern for the declining interest among young people to influence matters concerning themselves has resulted in the establishment of municipal youth participation environments. In 2011, there were active youth councils or similar groups in about 170 municipalities\textsuperscript{76}. Their goal is to empower young people and in practical manner involve them in decision-making.

Under the Youth Act, young people under 29 years of age must be offered opportunities to participate and be heard in matters relating to local and regional youth work and youth policy at the local level. Thus, 170 municipalities have established municipal youth councils of which goal is to make young people’s views, wishes and initiatives known to local policy-makers, even if the youth councils do not have actual decision powers.

Overall, there are around 2,000 youth councils, youth organisations, youth parliaments and other youth associations which seek to influence matters concerning young people. The Finnish Children’s Parliament includes representatives of children and young people from 240 municipalities\textsuperscript{77}.

As a pilot activity, around 60 municipalities have run annual youth discussion days since 2008. The day starts by young people evaluating existing municipal youth services and then communicating the improvement needs to the local decision-makers.

Two further examples of youth work initiatives aimed at increasing the participation of young people can be found below. Both are run by youth NGOs.

Project Mahis, run by the Finnish Youth Academy, is a youth work project aimed at youth workers and the young people they are working with. First, the Mahis project provides additional non-formal training for youth workers on how to deal with at-risk youth and how to stimulate young people to take part in leisure time activities. Following their participation in the training course, the youth workers together the young people they work with can apply for their own project funding, up to EUR 600. Examples of types of projects implemented by the youth groups include graffiti art projects, set up of a multi-cultural youth club, renovation of a youth club, comic cafe, theatre project, etc. The first Mahis project was funded in 1998 and since then over 1,600 Mahis projects have been funded, involving 15,000 young people. In total, over EUR 810,000 have been allocated for different youth groups.

A project run by Allianssi ‘Assessing the basic services with young people’ provides an opportunity for young people and youth groups to participate in decision making by evaluating the basic services in their municipality. The young people are encouraged to talk about the services available and critically assess them within a group context.\textsuperscript{78}

A local initiative Ruuti from Helsinki is a similar initiative.

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\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{75} Based on research carried out by Myllyniemi, S. (2009), quoted in Höylä, S. (2012), \textit{Youth Work in Finland}. Helsinki: HUMAK University of applied Science.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Allianssi, Allianssi - Different Together, \texttt{<www.alli.fi/english> date accessed: 5th of November 2012.}
In Helsinki, a project called Ruuti gives young people the opportunity to partake in the decision making process. The project consists of events, gatherings, activities and initiatives organised by young people. For example an annual meeting between young people and decision makers within Helsinki is held and ‘open-activity groups’ are held for young people to discuss ideas and important issues. The aim of Ruuti is to allow young people to debate issues that they consider to be important with decision-makers within Helsinki.79

5.5 Voluntary activities / volunteering

Organisational and voluntary activities are a significant part of life in Finland: by international comparison, Finns participate very actively in voluntary activities. Voluntary activities are typically undertaken in NGOs, under conditions created by the State. In recent years, however, there have been indications that young people's commitment to traditional organisational and volunteering activities has decreased, particularly among those under 15 years of age. Of all young people between 10 and 29 years of age, approximately 45% report that they belong to a youth or other non-governmental organisation.80 Consequently the previous Child and Youth Policy Programme (2007-2011) already highlighted the importance of integrating an element of volunteering into secondary level education in Finland. The programme stressed the significance of an understanding of the importance of volunteering from a young age.

As an example of an international volunteering programme can be mentioned Allianssi Youth Exchanges (see introduction below).

Allianssi Youth Exchanges is a youth exchange agency providing young Finns opportunities to carry out voluntary work and other exchanges abroad. Every year around 1,000 young Finns volunteer abroad and around 100 international volunteers come to volunteer in Finland.

5.6 Social inclusion

The role of youth work in preventing social exclusion is growing as a result of increased funding to support social integration of disfranchised, unemployed young people in particular. This is an area which has seen the greatest increases in funding in recent years and youth workers play a central role in the new initiatives in this area, as shown by the examples below.

For the last few years, municipalities have been encouraged to apply for special grant funding from central government in order to recruit outreach youth workers (Etsivä Nuorisotyö) who identify, contact and follow up young people at risk of exclusion, in particular young people who have left the education system before obtaining an upper secondary level qualification and are now outside education, training and employment and who may need extra support in accessing ‘mainstream’ public services which would help them with their reintegration. Importantly, at the core of the initiative is the outreach, street-based youth work which means youth workers go out on the streets, youth clubs, shopping centres, and other areas where young people ‘hang out’ to identify young people who may be in need of help, rather than expect them to ‘come to look for help’. This outreach youth work approach was first piloted in a selection of municipalities, before being written into the Youth Act in January 2011 as one of the mainstream approaches to tackling social exclusion among young people.

This year (in 2012), around 340 outreach youth workers – many of whom are qualified youth

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79 Youth Department City of Helsinki, *City for the Young*. Helsinki; Youth Department City of Helsinki.

workers – were carrying out such work in 279 municipalities across the country. In 2010, the outreach workers reached almost 11,000 young people and more than half of them (5,724) benefitted from a support exercise which mapped the availability of support (health, employment, education, training, social etc.) for the young person and more than a third of beneficiaries (3,937) were guided into such services. In 2011, outreach youth workers reach over 15,000 young people.

The initiative has made the funding and approach to reaching out to marginalised groups more systematic and as shown above, youth workers play a critical part in this initiative.

Nuorten Keskus (The Evangelical Lutheran Association for Youth in Finland) is a nationwide central and service organisation in youth work which was founded in 1905. One of the activities of the organisation is Saapas-project which is a form of youth work carried out by the youth workers of the Church and unpaid volunteers, who are trained for the role. The Saapas project involves meeting young people outside formal establishments where young people normally get together. This means meeting young people on the streets, festivals, etc. The aim is to help, guide and listen to young people. The project has also started to operate online.

Myrsky ("Storm" in Finnish) aims to prevent social exclusion of young people through arts education. The project supports art projects carried out by young people, guided by professional artists through funding, networks and training. During 2008-2011 over 14,000 young persons participated.

Similar trends can be seen within the youth work that is undertaken with young people from an immigrant background. The demand for youth work activities is high within immigrant communities, for example the majority of users of some youth facilities in Helsinki are young immigrants. As a result, cities have been developing targeted measures for young immigrants and youth organisations are promoting immigrant participation.81

5.7 Youth and the world

International youth work is an area that engages an active group of young people to work around issues such as human rights and the environment. It is also very common for young Finns to take part in different exchange programmes abroad, including exchange programmes for secondary school students, work experience exchanges and language courses. An example of a programme aimed at HE students is offered below.

The North-South-South Higher Education Institution Network Programme (North-South-South) opens up opportunities for cooperation between higher education institutions in Finland and developing countries. The main focus is on reciprocal student and teacher exchange.

The purpose of the programme is to enhance human capacity in all participating countries through interaction and mobility. The aim is also to generate and disseminate knowledge and to create sustainable partnerships between higher education institutions in Finland and in the partner countries. The focus is especially on the enhancement of higher education in partner countries.

The programme contributes both to the Millennium Development Goals for reducing poverty and supporting sustainable development, which are crucial for the Finnish development cooperation policies.

5.8 Creativity and culture

Youth work helps to facilitate young people’s access to cultural and creative activities. Some examples of good practice are provided below.

The Young Culture (Nuorikulttuuri) initiative encourages young people to participate in cultural activities and consists of events that showcase young people’s artistic work and provide the participants with feedback on their performances and works. Their events are aimed at young people aged between 10 and 20. The events include performances workshops and seminars and young people are also involved in organising these events.

Taikalamppu, ‘Aladdin’s Lamp’, is a network of 11 regional art centres for children and young people that was established by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The network offers art and cultural services to children and young people throughout Finland. Through artistic actions children and young people learn to express themselves, find creative solutions and discover their own way of being. The network is on its third term in Finland (2009-2013). Collaboration with government, municipalities and third sector is important for the network. Multi-professional networking gives an opportunity to create new ways to operate.

Avarti - nuoret sen tekevät! is an international action programme for young people aged 14-25, which is also known as The International Award for Young People. Avarti is a form of youth work which is based on collaboration between existing youth NGOs and other stakeholders. These organisations get together in a form of a network to provide opportunities for young people to get involved in as broad range of organisational and leisure time activities organised by the network. Avarti is active in 50 municipalities and currently involve around 600 young people.

A local NGO from Helsinki, Oranssi Ry, won an award this year for youth work it has been undertaking since 1990. The NGO renovates old houses and then offers them as reasonably priced rental apartments for young people who take part in their renovation and maintenance. The aim is to encourage young people to find their independence by providing low-cost housing and create stable housing communities. At the moment Oranssi ry maintains approximately 80 apartments, and also offers a range of cultural activities.

6 Outcomes and impact of youth work

6.1 Target and reach

6.1.1 Target groups

Traditionally, youth work has been seen as universal practice, meaning that it should be available to support all young people, rather than being available to support specific groups alone. The Youth Act specifies that the target group of youth work is young people under the age of 29.

In practice however, the youth work provision comprises both universal and targeted activities, with a growing focus on the latter. As already identified throughout the document, at-risk young people, especially (male) NEETs, unemployed youth and generally disfranchised young people, are the group of young people whose situation is of particular concern to policy makers and who are receiving special attention in a form of new policies and funding (i.e. outreach youth work introduced in Section 5.6). Multi-cultural youth work is seen as another area which needs to be strengthened and consequently new activities are being piloted and carried out with migrant youth.

It could therefore be argued that this development means that today youth work plays a bigger role than before in filling the gaps for young people left by other services. The
more targeted approach than before also means that in relative terms more funding is going on ‘rehabilitative / corrective’ youth work, rather than ‘preventive’ work, which has traditionally been the cornerstone of youth work (and still continues to be, albeit more funding is allocated towards corrective actions than before).

6.1.2 Reach

There are no studies, statistics or estimates on the number of young people reached by youth work at national or local levels. Anecdotal evidence indicates that migrant youth, disfranchised inactive young people / NEETs (especially young men), and some other minority groups such as the Gypsy and LGBT communities are not being currently addressed / reached by youth work as well as they could / should be. Youth work carried out among migrant youth and young people with disabilities could also be brought closer to the mainstream youth work services.

6.2 Outcomes and impact

There is common agreement that youth work contributes to the personal and social development of young people and thereby makes a considerable difference to the lives of many young people. Youth work is seen as contributing to many areas of young people’s lives including, for example, enhanced levels of aspiration, increased opportunities to take part in non-formal leisure time activities, making new friends, addressing a range of health and crime related risk factors, learning new skills, becoming more active members of society, increased confidence, preventing social exclusion and being more prepared to enter the labour market or re-enter education / training.

A number of factors make youth work as distinct from work carried out by other professionals who work with young people:

- One of the main success factors behind youth work is that youth work is based on relationships voluntarily entered into, while schooling and relationships with professionals such as Public Employment Service (PES) advisers and social workers, for the most part, is compulsory.

- Youth work aims to empower young people to make their own decisions that can improve their lives and adopts a youth focussed approach where the young person and his/her wishes are at the heart of the activities – rather than being driven by organisational targets or requirements.

- The credibility of youth workers in young people’s eyes often derives from being close to the community and having a genuine insight and non-judgemental attitude towards young people they work with.

- A good relationship between youth worker and young person is usually rooted in a relationship of mutual trust and respect. Building such relationship, particularly with high-need young people can take considerable time. ‘Troubled’ young people may be more likely to build such relationship with an adult (i.e. youth worker) who they do not see as ‘authority’ (like they may view teachers, social workers, etc.), but someone who simply offers to listen and support them at a pace that suits them the best. Indeed, in order to work successfully with the most

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82 This was confirmed by the interviewees.
83 The LGBT community stands for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community.
disenfranchised young people, youth workers believe that they need time to engage the young people and get their trust.

6.3 SWOT

**Table 6.1 Summary of key strengths and weaknesses of the youth work sector in Finland**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
<th>OPPORTUNITIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>■ Majority of youth workers working in public and third sectors (both youth NGOs and the Lutheran church) are trained / qualified youth workers.</td>
<td>■ Funding for outreach (‘street’-based) youth work has grown in recent years, improving opportunities to reach some of the most disenfranchised young people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ A long tradition of diverse forms of youth work.</td>
<td>■ A growing share of youth workers is educated to a Masters degree level in youth work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Legislation on youth work defines the scope of youth work and the tasks of key stakeholders.</td>
<td>■ Strong collaboration between the national research network on youth work, policy makers and practitioners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Youth work is seen as its own professional sector. The sector seems to have a growing ‘value’ in the Finnish society.</td>
<td>■ New requirement for municipalities to set up cross-sectoral, multi-agency partnerships as a way of bringing key parties together to tackle the problems faced by young people in a co-ordinated manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Established delivery structure for youth work.</td>
<td>■ The role of web-based youth work methods has strengthened and such methods have been relatively well adopted by youth workers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Municipal youth workers themselves feel that they are particularly successful at providing stimulating leisure time activities and facilities for young people, offering educational guidance, supporting youth clubs and organisations, offering sports opportunities and organising outreach work (Etsivä nuorisotyö)84.</td>
<td>■ Collaboration between the formal education system and youth work is expected to strengthen in the years to come.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Specialist education and training on youth work is seen as being ‘current’ and responsive to the demands of youth work today. I.e. the training covers new, innovative youth work methods and the importance of cross-sectoral cooperation.</td>
<td>■ New innovative, youth-centered forms of youth work have been piloted, such as municipal or NGO led youth clubs in facilities favoured by young people, such as shopping malls and petrol stations.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEAKNESSES</th>
<th>THREATS</th>
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<tr>
<td>■ There is room for improvement in multicultural youth work provisions85 and integrating youth work carried out among minority groups (such as immigrant youth and young people with disabilities) into mainstream youth work services.</td>
<td>■ There is a concern that the growing focus and investment in targeted youth work for vulnerable young people is funded at the expense of universal youth work services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Great improvements have been made in improving collaboration between different authorities and agencies at local level, but anecdotal evidence</td>
<td>■ The role of Finnish youth NGOs in the provision of youth work remains strong, but there are concerns over funding in the future and increasing ‘competition’ over young people’s leisure time: young people are less</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
suggest that room for improvement remains in achieving this in all municipalities across the country. Collaboration between youth workers from the public, NGO and church sectors could also be strengthened, especially in some of the smaller municipalities.

- The Youth Act is seen as the backbone of youth work in Finland. It is nevertheless recognised that the awareness of its content among grassroots level workers could be improved.
- Involvement of enterprises in youth work could be strengthened.
- Disparities in the quality and quantity of youth work between municipalities.
- Even if opportunities for young people to be heard and influence municipal decision-making have increased, surveys show that young people themselves still feel insufficiently heard and consulted and wish more electronic consultation models to be introduced\textsuperscript{86}.

| likely than before to commit to one activity / traditional forms of participation / one youth NGO for a long period. This challenges even the most established youth NGOs to develop new methods and activities that appeal to today’s young people, even if the various new forms of activism can also be considered as an opportunity for enhancing democracy. It is also more important than before to involve young people in decision-making. The budget concerns at the NGO sector also challenge them to identify new fundraising methods, i.e. involve companies as sponsors and engage more volunteers. |

### 7 Conclusions and recommendations

The Finnish youth work sector is characterised by a high degree of professionalism and a relatively high status, especially when compared to many other European countries. This is mainly a result of the sector having qualified, highly educated workers who are specialists in their field and the sector is relatively well defined, with relevant legislation dating back to early 1970s.

Some challenges however remain. While the investments in the use of youth work as a way of reaching out to the most disfranchised young people is warmly welcomed by all stakeholders, there is some concern that funding for such activities comes at the expense of spending on traditional, leisure-time youth work activities. This development also suggests that youth work is starting to play a growing role in filling the gaps for young people left by other services – a trend which has been detected in other European countries too. This also calls for the need to equip youth workers with specialist skills in outreach and other work with most vulnerable young people because such work requires specific skills and experience.

New legislation requiring local authorities to establish cross-sectoral, multi-stakeholder ‘youth work working groups’ are a positive development, albeit achieving success in all municipalities across the country is expected to take some time. Recent reductions in funding for youth NGOs as well as declining memberships are some of the greatest concerns for the third sector driven youth work. The sector needs to innovate and come up with fresh youth work methods that appeal to young people and greater collaboration with enterprises may be needed to fill in gaps in funding.

With regards to recommendations for EU level actions in the field of youth work, the interviewees highlighted the importance of continuing funding specific programmes

and activities in this field, as well as opportunities for the Member States to exchange experiences and successful practices. They also called for European level action to highlight the economic and social significance of youth work. The importance of recognising and valuing the contribution made by non-governmental youth organisation to youth work was also stressed, as was the need to maintain the special status of NGOs so that they can continue to contribute to youth policy objectives. Existing national youth research and associated networks could also be better utilised to support EU level policy making in the field of youth.
8 Sources

8.1 Interviewees

The Union of Youth Workers of the Finnish Lutheran Church (*Kirkon Nuorisotyöntekijöiden Liitto* KNT). Date of interview: 10th of November 2012.


School of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Tampere. Date of interview: 11th of November 2012.

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8.2 Bibliography


Ministry of Education and Culture (2012) *Youth Work in Finland*.


