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### Submission by the Human Rights Centre (NHRI)

This document contains observations by the Finnish Human Rights Centre (HRC<sup>1</sup>, NHRI) to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for the consideration of the study on the impact of mental health challenges on the enjoyment of human rights by young people, regarding Human Rights Council Resolution 57/30 on youth and human rights.

Should you have any further questions or need for additional information, do not hesitate to contact us at [info@humanrightscentre.fi](mailto:info@humanrightscentre.fi).

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<sup>1</sup> The Human Rights Centre represents the Finnish National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) in international NHRI cooperation and other international and European cooperation in human rights.

The NHRI comprises the Human Rights Centre, its pluralistic 39-member Human Rights Delegation, and the Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsman. The institution complies with the UN Paris Principles and the Global Alliance of NHRIs (GANHRI) has accredited it with A-status since 2014.

The role of the National CRPD Monitoring Mechanism (Article 33 (2) of the CRPD) was assigned by law to the Finnish National Human Rights Institution in 2016.

**1. What are the main mental health challenges faced by young people in your country and what is the impact on their human rights? Please consider the specific situation of marginalized young people and those in vulnerable situations in your response.**

Mental health issues in Finland have been growing in recent years, especially among youth. This is reflected *inter alia* in queues to mental health services and statistics on sickness absence.<sup>2</sup> A significant growth has also been visible in the amount of disability pensions granted for people under 35 years old, where the underlying reasons have primarily related to mental health issues.<sup>3</sup> Especially anxiety disorders have risen sharply among young people in a short period.

One grave concern is the lack of access to mental health support services. Queues are long and timely support is often not available. To gain access to public mental health services within reasonable time, many experience that the situation must be critical. This results in preventive care often being neglected. Young people also report that the social security and health care service network is not always easy to navigate, due to fragmentation of services and bureaucracy.

While much focus has been on improving access to services, a more comprehensive approach to tackling mental health challenges is needed, including more focus on prevention and addressing root causes. Mental health challenges among youth have been rising steadily in Finland for more than ten years. The covid-pandemic further aggravated the situation. Today different global crises, including conflicts and climate change, problems with discrimination and hate speech, record-high unemployment rates and radical cuts in social security benefits contribute to growing insecurity and mental health challenges especially among youth. These cannot be addressed solely by increasing access to mental health services.

Mental health challenges increase the risk of social exclusion and may broadly impact the enjoyment of different human rights, such as the right to equality, health, education, work and housing. Shortcomings in the realisation in these rights may in turn increase mental health challenges. The Human Rights Centre would like to draw attention to that many of the austerity measures imposed by the government in recent years have impacted especially young people and those already in a vulnerable position.<sup>4</sup> This risks further aggravating mental health challenges among youth.

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<sup>2</sup> [Information package: Sickness absence](#), Social Insurance Institution of Finland (9.4.2025).

<sup>3</sup> [Disability pensions and work ability - Finnish Centre for Pensions; Alle 30-vuotiaiden eläkkeelle siirtyneiden työhistoria on lyhyt – masennus yleisin syy nuorten aikuisten työkyvyttömyyseläkkeille - Eläketurvakeskus](#) (Finnish Centre for Pensions, 15.1.2026).

<sup>4</sup> [Mikrosimulointi: Sosiaaliturvavaleikkaukset iskevät jo ennestään pienituloisiin nuoriin](#), Social Insurance Institution of Finland (23.1.2024, updated 22.1.2025); [Analyysi: Näin hallituksen kehysriihen päätökset vaikuttavat nuoriin ja nuorisoalaan](#), The Finnish National Youth Council and Youth Sector (18.4.2024).

**2. What steps is the Government taking to address the root causes of the mental health challenges that young people face and ensure that young people’s human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled in this context? Please consider the specific situation of marginalized young people and those in vulnerable situations in your response.**

The increasing mental health problems among young people in Finland have been recognised in the political rhetoric for years. However, political action regarding the problems primarily concerns questions regarding access to services rather than addressing root causes.

Since beginning its work in 2023, the government has primarily diverted its attention to the economic downturn and ongoing geopolitical security concerns, which has led to sparse attention to the realisation of social rights.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, these rights have in many ways been weakened. While growing mental health concerns are a significant issue in terms of the realisation of young people’s human rights, the government has afforded minimal attention to the issue in its core strategy papers, such as the National Action Plan on Fundamental and Human Rights.<sup>6</sup>

In 2023, a nation-wide reform saw municipalities relinquishing their responsibility for social and health care to 21 newly formed welfare service counties. The counties have suffered of budgetary challenges, often struggling to meet adequate service requirements in social and health care, across Finland. The Human Rights Centre has been informed of an increasing trend of civil servants within the counties struggling whether they should heed the legal obligations pertaining to the realisation of fundamental rights (e.g. the right to health), or whether they should abide by the budgetary constraints placed upon the counties.<sup>7</sup>

**3. What are the main barriers to the right to mental health for young people in your country and what is their impact on young people’s human rights? Please consider the availability, accessibility, acceptability, and quality of mental health care and the specific situation of marginalized young people and those in vulnerable situations in your response.**

Social exclusion of those already in vulnerable situations has accelerated, thereby contributing also to growing mental health challenges among such groups. The decline in the realisation of social rights is visible also on how Finland was, for the first time, placed under EU monitoring in its Social Convergence Framework.<sup>8</sup>

While the unemployment rate in general has risen, unemployment among the

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<sup>5</sup> Cuts have been enacted *inter alia* in unemployment, housing and student benefits, sickness and rehabilitation allowances and social assistance (the last resort form of social security).

<sup>6</sup> National Action Plan on Fundamental and Human Rights 2024–2027: Fundamental and Human Rights as Part of the Rule of Law. The Plan makes three offhand mentions to mental health, in connection to the access to legal remedies for people with disabilities, to long-term homelessness and to the access of social and health care services among the Sami people, respectively.

<sup>7</sup> As opposed to municipalities before them, the welfare service counties cannot levy taxes to cover their social and healthcare expenses, making them directly reliant on state funding.

<sup>8</sup> Proposal for a joint employment report from the Commission and the Council COM(2025) 958 final, see e.g. p. 5 and 168.

younger population has increased even more drastically. The economic downturn has under recent years also heralded a spike in poverty, which has been further exasperated by the Government's austerity measures. The Finnish Federation for Social Affairs and Health (SOSTE, Finnish umbrella organization for social affairs and health NGOs) estimated that almost 65 000 new people will suffer of poverty between 2023–2027.<sup>9</sup> Even more distressingly, the childhood poverty rate has considerably risen during the past years, with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health estimating that over 150 000 children will suffer of poverty in 2026.<sup>10</sup> This would signify an increase of over 30 000 children, when compared to year 2023.

A significant factor worth mentioning is that mental health risk factors are 2–5 times more common among young people who have disabilities, who belong to sexual minorities or who are of foreign origin.<sup>11</sup> Combatting prejudices and discrimination is thus key to improve mental health. Studies have shown Finland has significant challenges with racism and hate speech,<sup>12</sup> as well as increased prevalence of discrimination and prejudice against LGBTIQ people.<sup>13</sup>

Access to mental health services for the indigenous Sámi people in their own languages is also one concern. In 2021 Finland established the Sámi Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and in connection with it a unit providing national psychosocial support for the Sámi. The unit provides culturally sensitive services in all three Sámi languages spoken in Finland and has meant a significant improvement in mental health services for Sámi. While the truth and reconciliation process came to an end in December 2025, the government has plans to secure the continuation of the unit until the end of 2026. Discrimination, historical trauma and threats against the continuation of Sámi culture and traditional livelihoods increase the risk of vulnerability for Sámi, who are overrepresented in suicide statistics. Thus, the continuation of the psychosocial support unit is crucial and was one of the recommendations included in the truth and reconciliation commission's final report.<sup>14</sup>

#### **4. What laws, policies and programmes exist in your country concerning the mental health of young people?**

**a) Please provide examples of specific laws and regulations, strategies, action plans, public policies, and programmes directed at realizing young people's right to mental health.**

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<sup>9</sup> Köyhyys kasvaa arvioitua enemmän, SOSTE (4.6.2025).

<sup>10</sup> Hallitus sysääkin jopa 31 000 lasta köyhyyteen – asiantuntija: "Tästä tulee vielä kallis lasku", YLE (24.9.2025).

<sup>11</sup> National Mental Health Strategy and Programme for Suicide Prevention 2020–2030, p. 23

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. Being Black in the EU – Experiences of People of African Descent (2023), Being Muslim in the EU – Experiences of Muslims (2024) (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights). See also ECRI report on Finland (sixth monitoring cycle) (2025).

<sup>13</sup> LGBTIQ Equality at a Crossroads: Progress and Challenges Country data, Finland (2024).

<sup>14</sup> "I want a better life for my people" – A summary of the proposals given by the Sámi Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Finland (2025).

Finland has adopted a National Mental Health Strategy and Programme for Suicide Prevention 2020–2030<sup>15</sup> to ensure the continuity and purposefulness of mental health work. Children and young people's mental health and mental health rights are among the strategy's five focus areas.

In May 2025, the new legislation providing “therapy guarantee” for children and young people under the age of 23 came into force. According to the law, brief therapy or other psychosocial treatment must begin within 28 days of a professional identifying a need for care. The focus is on brief interventions and low-threshold services delivered by basic health care.

Furthermore, mental health is also one of the priorities in the National youth work and youth policy programme 2024–2027.<sup>16</sup> The objectives in the programme concerning mental health focus on access to services and ensuring meaningful leisure activities to strengthen mental health.

The effects of social media on children and young people's mental health have also raised concern. The government has tried to address this by restricting the use of cell phones in schools and is currently also preparing a proposal on restricting children's access to social media.<sup>17</sup>

**b) Please indicate whether these measures were developed in consultation with young people and describe their impact on the availability, accessibility, acceptability, and quality of mental health services.**

The Human Rights Centre does not have information on whether or how young people were consulted in the preparation of the National Mental Health Strategy, or how the focus area on children and young people's mental health is monitored.

In the process of amending the legislation to introduce the therapy guarantee, children and young people could provide input e.g. on what type of support is needed through two online surveys. The Human Rights Centre does not yet have information on how the guarantee works in practice and whether the welfare counties have managed to fulfil their obligation to provide services within four weeks. The overall system retains a possibility for unequal treatment in the way the Finnish system provides the right to appeal in decisions regarding therapy, which depends on whether the decision is made in the health care system (no right to appeal) or in social care (right to appeal in Administrative Courts). This discrepancy is not addressed by the therapy guarantee legislation.

One concern that many CSOs working with young people brought up during the open consultation round of the drafting process was that the therapy guarantee is

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<sup>15</sup> [National Mental Health Strategy and Programme for Suicide Prevention 2020–2030](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Strengthening young people's wellbeing through multidisciplinary measures: National youth work and youth policy programme 2024–2027](#)

<sup>17</sup> See e.g. [Finland looks to end "uncontrolled human experiment" with Australia-style ban on social media](#), YLE (31.1.2026).

a narrow initiative focusing only on one type of support. Limiting the guarantee to under 23-year-olds has been criticised for excluding a large part of those covered by the Youth Act in Finland (i.e. under 29-year-olds), despite mental health challenges having grown significantly in the excluded age group. Concerns were raised also that the guarantee could actually delay access to services for those not covered by it, as resources are focused on a limited age group.

The Youth Act requires a national youth work and youth policy programme to be drafted every four years, in consultation with young people. For the current programme, more than 7000 young people and youth work sector representatives were engaged in the hearing process through a survey and consultation workshops.<sup>18</sup> For some reason, however, the consultation was targeted at 13-25-year-olds, although the programme should target young people under 29. The implementation of the programme, including its objectives on mental health, will be reviewed when it expires by the State Youth Council.

**5. What proportion of total public expenditure is allocated to health, specifically to mental health services for young people? In particular, please indicate any changes (including cuts or increases) in funding for programmes and services addressing youth mental health.**

The Human Rights Centre does not have information on what proportion of total public expenditure is allocated to mental health services for young people or how it has changed in recent years. However, the Centre expresses concern that the strict cuts in social welfare benefits and services may both directly and indirectly impact young people's mental health. The cuts have also targeted CSOs, including those working in the social and health care sector. CSOs in this sector have lost around 40 percent of their public funding during this government term, and many organisations are currently forced to restructure and reduce staff.<sup>19</sup> CSOs often provide low threshold services and preventive care. When these services are reduced, more pressure will be put on the already strained public sector.

**6. How can States deliver more effectively to ensure the full and effective realization of young people's human right to mental health, including through international cooperation? Please share any promising practices.**

Improving the possibilities for youth participation, both in decision-making processes as well as in terms of hobbies, activism and work, is paramount in improving young people's right to mental health. Enabling young people to better function in the society requires a systematic approach to the problem. This is especially crucial as a weakened mental health situation in itself also weakens the levels of participation.

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<sup>18</sup> [Strengthening young people's wellbeing through multidisciplinary measures: National youth work and youth policy programme 2024–2027](#), p. 41.

<sup>19</sup> [Sote-järjestöt ahtaalla – hallituksen leikkaukset ovat viemässä yli kolmanneksen valtionavustuksista](#), YLE (28.1.2026).

Pertaining to legal protection, Finland counts among the countries where the justiciability of economic, social and cultural rights poses systemic and practical challenges. While the Finnish Constitution fully adheres to ESC rights, the Finnish legal system places certain limitations for the litigation of the progressive realisation of ESC rights, as per ICESCR art. 2. The courts' capacity to assess constitutionality is limited to individual cases where a "manifest conflict" with a constitutional provision is required to deem violations to constitutional rights. Furthermore, the Finnish system places the primary responsibility for constitutional review to the Parliament's *ex ante* procedure, conducted by its Constitutional Law Committee. This procedure furnishes regular legislation with a presumption of constitutionality, which the courts quite rarely question. The overall system thereby limits the courts' capability to assess the doctrines of maximum available resources and the prohibition of retrogressive measures and has thereby served to essentially rule out any type of court activism regarding ESC rights realisation in Finland.

The determination of "right" levels of social rights thereby remains a matter of politics, which further influences how the realisation of social rights is perceived more generally in the society. Herein, NHRIs are in a key position to advocate for rights-oriented approaches towards the realisation of social rights, as well as in increasing their visibility in the society. In addition, developing and improving human rights education remains key.

**7. Can you provide information on any programmes or activities your organization has implemented regarding the impact of mental health challenges on young people's human rights?**

In 2022, The Human Rights Centre established the Junior Experts Programme, where the Centre periodically hires two junior human rights experts for a two-year fixed-term employment. The Programme is designed to facilitate direct participation of freshly graduated (master's level) employees in the activities of the Finnish NHRI. The goal of the programme is to strengthen the voice of young adults in the human rights discourse in Finland.

As the Programme specifically targets the realisation of the rights of young adults (roughly aged 18–29), mental health issues appear as a frequent and cross-cutting theme that is seen to affect virtually every facet of human rights realisation. Recently, the Programme has organised human rights workshops in cooperation with the civil society, where the goal was to hear directly from young adults their views on the realisation of their human rights, especially in terms of social rights and discrimination, as well as to disseminate information about human rights directly to the younger population. The employees under the Programme have also written statements on issues regarding mental health and given speeches on the topic at different events.