



INCLUSION OF YOUNG PEOPLE FROM A HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE

Review of the second term of
the Young Experts Programme

**Inclusion of young people
from a human rights perspective**
Review of the second term of
the Young Experts Programme

Authors: Klara Fält-Simola and Mikko Pursimo
Layout: Joonas Tupala

ISSN 2670-1944
ISBN 978-952-7117-88-0

Human Rights Centre's publications 1/2026
<https://www.humanrightscentre.fi/publications/>
© Human Rights Centre
2026 Helsinki

Inclusion of young people from a human rights perspective

Review of the second term of the Young Experts Programme

Human Rights Centre's publications 1/2026

Publisher: Human Rights Centre

Authors: Klara Fält-Simola, Mikko Pursimo

Language: English

Abstract: The second term of the Young Experts Programme of the Human Rights Centre (HRC) began in December 2023. Established in 2022, the programme aims to strengthen the perspective of young people in the human rights discourse in Finland and to promote the realisation of young people's fundamental and human rights as part of the HRCs activities. The second term of the programme has consisted of monitoring social developments and their impact on the realisation of young people's rights. In addition, encounters with various young people from different backgrounds have been conducted at events and meetings during the term.

The Youth Barometer 2024 highlights that young people's confidence in the future has weakened significantly in a short period of time. While a majority of young people remain optimistic about the future, the sudden shift in opinion has sparked concerns in the society. The weaker voice of young people in public debate and traditional decision-making processes also raises the question of whether the position and challenges of young people are afforded sufficient societal attention. A weakened capacity for participation is a problem not only in terms of democracy, but also for the realisation of young people's fundamental and human rights.

This review examines what young adults' inclusion entails from a human rights perspective and how a rights-based approach can help identify barriers to young people's participation in society. The review draws from observations made during the second term of the Young Experts Programme on the realisation of young people's rights and the challenges involved. Discussions with young people involved, among other things, issues related to non-discrimination, health, work, education, and livelihood, which are also addressed in this review. Finally, the review marks already existing structures that could be utilised in Finland to strengthen young people's rights, and thereby their participation.

The review has been compiled by the experts of the Young Experts Programme at the Human Rights Centre.

Nuorten osallisuus ihmisoikeusnäkökulmasta

Nuorten asiantuntijoiden ohjelman toisen kauden katsaus

Ihmisoikeuskeskuksen julkaisuja 1/2026

Julkaisija: Ihmisoikeuskeskus

Tekijät: Klara Fält-Simola ja Mikko Pursimo

Kieli: englanti

Tiivistelmä: Ihmisoikeuskeskuksen nuorten asiantuntijoiden ohjelman toinen kausi käynnistyi joulukuussa 2023. Vuonna 2022 perustetun ohjelman tavoitteena on vahvistaa nuorten näkökulmaa suomalaisessa ihmisoikeuskeskustelussa sekä edistää nuorten perus- ja ihmisoikeuksien toteutumista osana ihmisoikeuskeskuksen toimintaa. Toisen ohjelmakauden aikana on seurattu yhteiskunnallista kehitystä ja sen vaikutuksia nuorten oikeuksien toteutumiseen Suomessa. Lisäksi kauden aikana eritaustaisia nuoria on kohdattu eri tilaisuuksissa ja tapaamisissa.

Vuoden 2024 nuorisobarometrin mukaan nuorten tulevaisuususkko on heikentynyt merkittävästi lyhyessä ajassa. Vaikka enemmistö nuorista suhtautuu edelleen tulevaisuuteen optimistisesti, barometrin osoittama nopea muutos on samalla herättänyt huolta yhteiskunnassa. Myös nuorten äänen heikko kuuluvuus julkisessa keskustelussa ja perinteisissä päätöksentekorakenteissa nostaa esille huolen siitä, saavatko nuorten asema ja haasteet jatkossakaan tarvitsemaansa huomiota yhteiskunnassa. Nuorten heikko osallisuus on ongelma paitsi demokratian, myös nuorten perus- ja ihmisoikeuksien yhdenvertaisen toteutumisen kannalta.

Katsauksessa tarkastellaan, mitä nuorten aikuisten yhteiskunnallinen osallisuus merkitsee ihmisoikeusnäkökulmasta ja miten juuri oikeuksiin perustuva tarkastelu auttaa hahmottamaan esteitä nuorten yhteiskunnalliselle osallistumiselle. Katsauksessa hyödynnetään nuorten asiantuntijoiden ohjelman toisen kauden aikana tehtyjä havaintoja nuorten oikeuksien toteutumisesta ja siihen liittyvistä haasteista. Nuorten kanssa käydyissä keskusteluissa nousi esiin erityisesti yhdenvertaisuuteen, terveyteen, työhön, koulutukseen ja toimeentuloon liittyviä ihmisoikeuskysymyksiä, joita tässä katsauksessa myös käsitellään. Katsauksessa nostetaan lopuksi esiin esimerkkejä olemassa olevista rakenteista, joita voisi hyödyntää nuorten oikeuksien ja siten myös nuorten osallisuuden vahvistamiseksi Suomessa.

Katsauksen ovat koonneet nuorten asiantuntijoiden ohjelman toisen kauden asiantuntijat.

Ungas delaktighet ur ett människorättsperspektiv

Översikt över andra perioden inom programmet för unga experter

Människorättscentrets publikationer 1/2026
Utgivare: Människorättscentret

Författare: Klara Fält-Simola, Mikko Pursimo
Språk: engelska

Sammanfattning: Den andra perioden inom Människorättscentrets program för unga experter startade i december 2023. Programmet inrättades 2022 och syftar till att stärka ungas perspektiv i människorättsdebatten i Finland och främja förverkligandet av ungas grundläggande och mänskliga rättigheter som en del av Människorättscentrets verksamhet. Under den andra programperioden har man följt med den samhälleliga utvecklingen och dess inverkan på förverkligandet av ungas rättigheter. Dessutom har man träffat unga med olika bakgrund vid olika evenemang och möten.

Ungdomsbarometern 2024 visar att ungas framtidstro har försvagats avsevärt på kort tid. Även om majoriteten av de unga fortfarande förhåller sig optimistiskt till framtiden har den snabba förändring som barometern visar väckt oro i samhället. Ungas svaga röst i den offentliga debatten och traditionella beslutfattningsprocesser väcker också frågan om huruvida ungas ställning och utmaningar får den uppmärksamhet de behöver i samhället. Ungas svaga delaktighet är ett problem inte bara för demokratin utan också för förverkligandet av deras grundläggande och mänskliga rättigheter.

I denna översikt granskas vad unga vuxnas delaktighet innebär ur ett människorättsperspektiv och hur en rättighetsbaserad granskning kan bidra till att identifiera hinder för ungas samhälleliga deltagande. Översikten bygger på observationer som gjorts under den andra perioden av programmet för unga experter om förverkligandet av ungas rättigheter och utmaningar kring detta. I diskussioner om mänskliga rättigheter har unga lyft fram frågor relaterade till bland annat jämlikhet, hälsa, arbete, utbildning och utkomst. Dessa frågor behandlas också i denna översikt. Slutligen lyfter översikten fram exempel på existerande strukturer som skulle kunna användas för att stärka ungas rättigheter, och därmed också deras delaktighet, i Finland.

Översikten har sammanställts av experterna inom Människorättscentrets program för unga experter.

1 Introduction	7
Young people and the future	7
Young adults in the international human rights system	9
2 Inclusion of young people	11
Inclusion as a basis for democracy and the rule of law	11
Inclusion from a fundamental and human rights perspective	11
Structures that support social inclusion	12
Obstacles to young people's participation	13
3 Observations on the realisation of the rights of young people in Finland	15
Monitoring the rights of young people at the Human Rights Centre	15
Work as an enabler of an independent and dignified life	15
Access to health and social services	17
Equality and taking diversity into account	20
4 Increasing social inclusion by strengthening rights	22
Interdependence of inclusion and rights	22
Implementation of young people's rights	24
5 Conclusion	26

1 Introduction

Young people and the future

The Youth Barometer 2024 shows that there has been a significant decline in young people's faith in the future. Between 2008 and 2021, the number of young people with an optimistic attitude towards their future remained steady and fairly high, varying between 79 and 86 per cent. In the latest measurement, only 61 per cent of young people are optimistic about their future.¹

In the past few years, the public debate has been dominated by various crises, such as wars and conflicts in different parts of the world, climate change and biodiversity loss, increasing mental health problems, economic recession

and the cost-of-living crisis. In addition, the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic had a strong impact on the lives of many young people.

Although there is unlikely to be a one specific reason for young people's weaker faith in the future, it is easy to understand why they feel that way when public discourse both about the present and the future emphasises crises and exceptional times. The growing polarisation in the public debate and especially in social media easily highlights problems and the need to blame someone instead of looking for solutions.

The decline in young people's faith in the future has raised concerns in society, and there has also been a wider public debate about young people's wellbeing and risks of social exclusion. However, the debate often lacks a human rights perspective, which the Human

1 Konsta Happonen & Tomi Kiilakoski (eds.), *Three decades of youth. Youth Barometer 2024* (State Youth Council, Finnish Youth Research Society, Ministry of Education and Culture) (in Finnish, abstract in English).

The rights of young people must be strengthened

The Young Experts Programme was launched at the Human Rights Centre (HRC) in 2022 for people in the early stages of their career. The aim of the programme is to increase the youth perspective on fundamental and human rights in the HRC's activities and to strengthen the voice of young people in the public debate about fundamental and human rights. The programme focuses on the rights of young adults aged between 18 and 29 years.

In human rights work, it is typical to examine rights both at a general level - as rights that apply to everyone everywhere - and as rights that appear slightly differently in the lives of people belonging to different groups. The aim of the programme is to draw attention to the rights of young people and to increase the human rights field's understanding of young adults as a group with unique challenges in the realisation of human rights.

The Young Experts Programme offers the junior experts participating in it an opportunity to deepen their fundamental and human rights competence, familiarise themselves with the actors in the field of fundamental and human rights in Finland and participate in the expert work of the HRC together with the other officials of the HRC. The programme period lasts 1.5 to 2 years and employs two junior experts during the programme period.

The first programme period was 2022-2023, the second period 2023-2025, and the third period began in spring 2026.

Rights Centre's Young Experts Programme aims to strengthen in its work.

Highlighting the rights of young people - More room needed for the voice of young people (2023), the final review of the first period of the Young Experts Programme, examined how young people are taken into account in the international human rights system.²

The analysis showed that young adults are not recognised as an established group of rights holders within the human rights field. In contexts where attention is paid to the rights of young adults, the emphasis is often on economic, social and cultural rights. Less attention is paid to young people's rights to participate and other civil and political rights.

In this review, we examine the social inclusion of young adults and its significance for the implementation of young people's human rights in a wider sense. Concerns about the exclusion of young people and weaker social inclusion are a constant topic in the societal debate. The purpose of the review is to illustrate how the implementation of young people's rights and safeguarding their inclusion are two sides of the same coin. The review examines what the social inclusion of young people means from the human rights perspective and what kind of obstacles to young people's participation in society can be identified through a human rights-based examination.

The young experts' observations of how the rights of young people were realised during the second period of the Young Experts Programme and related challenges are also used in the review. The review thus serves as a follow-up to the final review of the first period of the Young Experts Programme.

2 See Elsa Korkman & Sanni Myllyaho, *Highlighting the rights of young people - More room needed for the voice of young people Review of the first period of the Young Experts Programme* (Human Rights Centre 2023) (in Finnish, abstract in English).

Young adults in the international human rights system

The term “youth” has different definitions in different contexts, and it is not possible to set a specific age range for the term. This review focuses primarily on young adults aged 18–29 years. According to Statistics Finland, there were almost one million young people aged 15–29 years in Finland at the end of 2024, and about 600,000 of them were aged 18–29.³

Young adults do not form a uniform group. For example, their life situations and needs naturally vary a great deal. However, the transition from childhood to adulthood and to an independent life is common to people at this stage of life. It involves major life transitions, such as moving from school to further education and entering the labour market, moving to live in one's own place and taking care of one's livelihood independently. These changes may bring challenges that affect young people's opportunities to enjoy their rights.

The strength of the international human rights system is that it creates shared standards for the implementation of fundamental and human rights. Human rights must be indivisible for everyone. This fundamental principle imposes requirements on states in terms of respect for, protection and implementation of rights. Such human rights obligations include the rights to life, equality, social inclusion, sufficient income, work, health and, for example, freedom of expression. In its Constitution (section 22), Finland has committed to guaranteeing the fulfilment of international human rights obligations.

In order to make it easier to fulfil the obligations, conventions have also been created in the human rights system to complement the obligations by providing additional protection for certain groups of people. The UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951)

adopted before the establishment of the UN's human rights systems served as a kind of predecessor of such conventions.⁴ Other conventions that have subsequently emerged in the human rights system include the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,⁵ the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,⁶ the Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers⁷ and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁸ The last one guarantees the rights of everyone aged under 18 years.

The final review of the first programme period of the Young Experts Programme already drew attention to the fact that the system of international human rights conventions does not have a specifying instrument focusing specifically on the human rights of young adults aged 18 or over.⁹ The review of the first period thus highlights how young adults do not form an established group whose rights would be examined in a very systematic manner in the international human rights system. This makes the examination of young people's rights prone to fragmentation, which may lead to challenges

3 [Statistics Finland's data on population and society \(in Finnish\)](#).

4 [Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, \(1951\)](#).

5 [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\), \(2006\)](#).

6 [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\), \(1979\)](#)

7 [International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families \(1990\)](#). Finland has not ratified the Convention.

8 [Convention on the Rights of the Child, \(1989\)](#).

9 For example, the following international agreements have been concluded at a regional level: [Ibero-American Convention on Young People's Rights \(2005\)](#) and the [African Youth Charter \(2009\)](#). Europe does not have a similar agreement on the rights of young people. See Elsa Korkman & Sanni Myllyaho, [Highlighting the rights of young people - More room needed for the voice of young people Review of the first period of the Young Experts Programme](#) (Human Rights Centre 2023) (in Finnish, description sheet in English).

in the coordination of young people's rights in decision-making and across public authorities.

At the same time, the under-representation of young adults in democratic decision-making is also linked to the poor visibility of the legal perspective of young people. Representative politics, which is often dominated by older population groups, easily leads to situations where the interests of young people do not necessarily gain the weight they need in decision-making. Of course, the societal visibility of young people can be realised through social media or different kinds of activism. Nevertheless, young people's voices tend to easily remain invisible or symbolic in official decision-making processes, even when decisions are made on matters related to young people themselves.¹⁰

The low representation of young people in democratic decision-making may in turn create structures that discriminate against young people in society, which may have a further negative impact on the realisation of the rights of young people. The rights of young people are therefore not only a legal matter, but also a matter linked to democracy and its effectiveness.

■ ■ ***The rights of young people are therefore not only a legal matter, but also a matter linked to democracy and its effectiveness.***

10 In its sixth foresight review, Sitra has called the phenomenon young people's invisibility paradox. See Lilli Poussa, Sanna Rekola, Otto Tähtäpää, [What if young people lose their faith in the future? Young people's faith in the future at a time of uncertainties](#) (Sitra 2025) (in Finnish).

2 Inclusion of young people

Inclusion as a basis for democracy and the rule of law

An individual's right to participate in and influence the development of society and their living environment is a key principle in a democratic society and the rule of law. It has also been recorded in the Constitution of Finland (section 2, subsection 2) and in international human rights conventions. Wide participation by members of different social groups helps the authorities to deepen their understanding of different issues and identify shortcomings and the impacts of decisions on different persons and groups. This makes decision-making more knowledge-based, sustainable and open. This in turn increases the legitimacy of decisions made by states and the ownership of the decisions by members of society.¹¹ Strengthening inclusion and ensuring that decision-making is flexible, inclusive and representative at all levels has been listed, for example, in the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda.¹² The strengthening of inclusion is thus about widely promoting democracy, the rule of law and good governance.

11 [Guidelines for States on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs](#), (OHCHR 2018).

12 [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), Goal 16.7 (Resolution of the UN General Assembly 2015, A/RES/70/1).

Inclusion from a fundamental and human rights perspective

From the perspective of fundamental and human rights, inclusion and participation can be treated both as a separate right and as a prerequisite for the realisation of other rights. Electoral and participatory rights have been widely recognised in international human rights instruments. Article 21 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights already sets out the right for everyone to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. A similar right has also been included in Article 25 of the subsequently concluded UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Both articles emphasise equal opportunities and equality in participation.

In national legislation, subsection 2 of section 2 of the Constitution of Finland states as one of the fundamental provisions that "democracy entails the right of the individual to participate in and influence the development of society and his or her living conditions." Subsection 4 of section 14 of the Constitution guarantees an individual's electoral and participatory rights as fundamental rights. In addition to electoral rights, "promoting the opportunities for the individual to participate in societal activity and to influence the decisions that concern him or her" has been recorded as a task for the public authorities in this section.

In a narrow sense, electoral and participation rights guarantee the right to vote and stand for election, free and regular elections and the secrecy of the ballot. In the human rights system, inclusion and opportunities to influence decisions affecting oneself are, however, a more widely recognised basic principle and a prerequisite for the realisation of other rights and democracy.

When examining inclusion, it has become evident that, even though there would not exist actual discrimination in political or public participation, inequalities in access to the other human rights may hinder effective exercise of participation rights.¹³ This has also been considered in international human rights conventions that take different groups into account. For example, in the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, special attention is paid to inclusion in politics and public activities and it is recognised that there are special barriers to participation for women and persons with disabilities in society.¹⁴ The Convention on the Rights of the Child also safeguards the right of the child to form and express their views in all matters affecting the child. The Convention requires that the child's views be considered in accordance with the child's age and maturity. For example, even though children do not have electoral rights, their consultation and their opportunities to influence their own life have been recognised as a right.¹⁵

When discussing inclusion and consultations, it is important to also pay attention to the

■ ***Inequalities in access to the other human rights may hinder effective exercise of participation rights.***

quality of inclusion. Including young people in societal activities only to meet certain formal requirements or for the sake of appearances in politics does not fulfil the criteria for genuine, human rights-based inclusion.

Structures that support social inclusion

There has been a great deal of discussion about the social inclusion of young adults, and young people have been identified as a group that is unable to make its voice heard enough in society. Young people are under-represented in political decision-making globally. For example, the voter turnout among young people under the age of 30 in Finland is clearly lower than in other age groups.¹⁶

The challenges of inclusion have been taken into account in Finland, for example, in the National Programme to Promote Democracy and Participation, approved by the Government for the period 2025-2027 in May 2025.¹⁷ Among other things, increasing the voter turnout among young people and strengthening the social inclusion of children and young people have been highlighted as priority areas of the programme. In its Reykjavik Declaration of 2023, the Council of Europe also identified strengthening the inclusion of young people as one of its key principles for promoting democracy in the future.¹⁸

13 [Website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "OHCHR and equal participation in political and public affairs"](#).

14 [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(1979\)](#), see Articles 7 and 8, in particular, [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(2006\)](#), see Article 29, in particular.

15 [Convention on the Rights of the Child \(1989\)](#), see Article 12, in particular.

16 [Website of the Finnish National Youth Council and Youth Sector, "Young people and democracy"](#) (link in Finnish).

17 [National Programme to Promote Democracy and Participation: Government Resolution \(Ministry of Justice 2025\)](#).

18 [Reykjavik Declaration \(Council of Europe 2023\)](#).

At the international level, the UN Youth Office was established in 2023 to increase the inclusion of young people. The Youth Office strives to strengthen commitment and advocacy to promote young people's affairs in the whole UN.¹⁹ It is not purely a human rights actor, but strengthening the voice of young people in human rights matters is also one of its tasks.²⁰ Similarly, the Advisory Council on Youth, a body strengthening the inclusion of young people, has also been operating in conjunction with the Council of Europe since 1999.²¹

While international human rights actors have created structures for political participation for young people as described above, young people or their inclusion has not been taken into account, for example, in the general comments of the Human Rights Committee overseeing the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).²² The inclusion of young people and the prerequisites for it therefore continue to need a more comprehensive, human rights-based interpretation framework in many respects.

In Finnish legislation, provisions on the inclusion, participation and consultation of young people are laid down both in the Youth Act (1285/2016) and in the Municipalities Act (410/2015). The Youth Act states that "municipal

pal and central government authorities shall provide and organise opportunities for young people to participate in and exert influence in the handling of matters related to local, regional and national youth work and youth

policy, or they shall otherwise be consulted in these matters. In addition, young people shall be consulted in matters that affect them" (section 24). The Municipalities Act lays down provisions on youth councils (section 26), the aim of which is to ensure young people's opportunities to participate and exert influence in municipal activities and, in particular, in matters that the youth council considers to be significant from the point of view of children and young people. Similar youth councils also operate in the wellbeing services counties.²³

Youth councils are a concrete way of strengthening young people's participation and opportunities to exert influence. There are no provisions on the age limit for youth councils, and it varies between different municipalities and wellbeing services counties. However, the most common age range is 13–18 years.²⁴ In other words, the focus in the activities is on underage young people, rather than young adults who have already reached a more independent phase of life.

Obstacles to young people's participation

When looking at the inclusion of young people, it is important to define what kind of activities are seen as participation in society. In the public debate, attention is often focused on the voter turnout and influencing through the traditional democratic institutions. However, participation can be seen more broadly as acting and influencing in different communities, for example, in

19 [United Nations Youth Office website](#).

20 [Establishment of the United Nations Youth Office](#) (Resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly 2022, A/RES/76/306).

21 Council of Europe, [Advisory Council on Youth](#) (7 November 2025). About the establishment of the Advisory Council of Youth, see e.g., Committee of Ministers, [Progress Report of the 1st Meeting of the Joint Council on Youth Matters](#) (CM(99)70, 1999).

22 The Human Rights Committee has discussed inclusion as referred to in Article 25 of the ICCPR in its general comment of 1996. The focus of the comment is on political participation. See [General comment no. 25, The right to participate in public affairs, voting rights and the right of equal access to public service \(Art. 25\)](#) (CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.7, 1996).

23 [Act on Wellbeing Services Counties](#) (611/2021), section 32.

24 The Union of Local Youth Councils in Finland (Nuva ry), [What is a Youth Council?](#)

It is therefore alarming that the atmosphere of the public debate is found so harsh and the polarisation so strong that they prevent young people's participation in society and, consequently, the full realisation of their civil and political rights.

a recreational club, local association or student or work community. Sitra's report on barriers to societal participation in the lives of young adults shows that if participation is defined more broadly, young people's participation will also look stronger than when looking merely at voter turnout and participation in party politics, for example.²⁵ When compared to other age groups, young people are more active in using direct civic participation methods, such as boycotting, influencing on social media and demonstrations.²⁶

However, young adults often face obstacles to their societal participation. Compared to other age groups, under 30-year-olds feel more often that their knowledge and skills and personal characteristics, such as social skills, are not sufficient for participation. In addition, concerns about stressfulness and excessive responsibilities, the absence of one's own community, and fear of conflicts and harassment were obstacles to inclusion brought up by young people in Sitra's report.²⁷

Uncertainty about whether one's own skills and knowledge are sufficient raises the

question whether societal structures and, for example, the language used in politics are sufficiently accessible. Studies show that Finnish young people have a good level of knowledge of societal issues, but still have low confidence in their own competence.²⁸ The fact that, for example, young climate activists easily face belittling, ignoring, and sometimes even direct hatred because of their actions, is not likely to help.²⁹ It is therefore alarming that the atmosphere in the public debate is found so harsh and the polarisation so strong that they prevent young people's participation in society and, consequently, the full realisation of their civil and political rights. The atmosphere may silence especially those in a more vulnerable position, who have to be afraid of discrimination or belittling.

Increasing inequalities have also been identified as an obstacle to young people's participation. For example, the socio-economic background, family and place of residence have a strong impact on the young person's ability to participate.³⁰ Because the prerequisites for inclusion are often created in the childhood home, young people therefore easily end up in a vulnerable position. To ensure that young people's civil and political rights are realised, society must level down the differentiation caused by the family background. When examining the inclusion of young people, it is essential to consider whether the realisation of young people's other rights in society in general is at the level required for meaningful social inclusion.

25 Kirsi Hantula, Heikki Lauha, Rosa-Maria Mäkelä, Jukka Vahti *Democracy as a part of everyday life. A study on the barriers to social participation in the lives of young adults* (Sitra 2024).

26 Janette Huttunen, *Young people, democracy and political participation: Four perspectives on younger citizens' democratic engagement in Finland* (lectio praecursoria), *Politiikka* 64(4) (2022) (in Swedish).

27 Kirsi Hantula, Heikki Lauha, Rosa-Maria Mäkelä, Jukka Vahti *Democracy as a part of everyday life. A study on the barriers to social participation in the lives of young adults* (Sitra 2024).

28 Ibid.

29 See, e.g., Mikko Piispa, Anni Ojajärvi and Tomi Kiilakoski *Faith in the future missing? Young climate activists and the debate on the future* (Sitra 2020) (in Finnish); Heidi Kosonen & Riku Löf, *Pansy asses and terrorists: Sensibilities of anti-environmentalist toxic speech against Extinction Rebellion Finland*, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 28(3) (2024).

30 Silja Porkkala, *Obstacles to young people's inclusion*. Consultation and discussion event on the democracy programme on 23 March 2024 (Finnish National Youth Council and Youth Sector) (in Finnish).

3 Observations on the realisation of the rights of young people in Finland

Monitoring the rights of young people at the Human Rights Centre

The aim of the HRC's Young Experts Programme is to collect information on the challenges young people face in the realisation of their rights and to provide the human rights discussion in Finland with the youth perspective. The programme also aims to raise young people's awareness of human rights.

During the programme period, the Young Experts Programme has monitored especially the societal development and decision-making affecting the lives of young adults. During the period, young people were also met and their views on human rights were heard at various meetings and events as well as at the human rights workshops organised in Helsinki and Jyväskylä in autumn 2025. A total of about 150 young people were met during the programme period, of whom around 50 participated in the workshops. In particular, the aim has been to hear young people who do not necessarily get their voices heard enough in society, such as young people from different minorities and young people who are not in working life or studying. The review's observations of how the rights of young people are realised are based particularly on discussions held in the human rights workshops.

Equality, in particular, was brought up as a key human rights issue in all meetings with young people. In addition, the topics discussed

in the human rights workshops organised in cooperation with the Deaconess Foundation included the basic preconditions for a decent life and what kind of issues the State should primarily pay attention to in order to promote an equal, dignified and inclusive life. Support for strengthening the sense of community among young people was also considered particularly important. Safeguarding equal opportunities for young people to engage in leisure activities, intervening in bullying and in the hardened societal atmosphere, and obtaining support for good lifestyles or civic skills through different communities were often brought up in the discussions.

Work as an enabler of an independent and dignified life

In the life stage of young people, the path related to education and work is a key issue, and success in them also requires significant inputs from society. The right to work is a fundamental human right, and how it is implemented for young people as adults who have just started their independent life can be regarded as a kind of indicator of how the right is realised. Even by international standards, the right to work comes across as a meaningful right for young people, as several conventions also explicitly safeguard the work and working conditions of young people. Such conven-

tions include the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and the Revised European Social Charter of the Council of Europe.³¹

Obstacles in the labour market

During the programme period, the discussions with young people focused on the challenges young people are currently experiencing when entering the labour market and looking for employment. The most commonly identified challenge was the shortage of jobs, combined with unreasonable experience and skills requirements in recruitment processes. In general, the societal pressure related to finding work was considered strong, which increases the strain on young people when the availability of jobs is poor and affects coping and wellbeing.

The stronger competition in the labour market has led to a situation where a significantly large number of job applications is required. In addition, job application processes have become longer and more complicated. According to young people, decision-makers should actively prevent stricter job search practices to safeguard equal opportunities in job search. For example, the development of an anonymous application process to improve the current situation received wide-ranging support from young people.

Both access to employment and wellbeing at work are strongly influenced by the prevailing assumption of full-time employment. The views of young people conveyed the idea that work models based on part-time or temporary work should also be developed. In addition to their positive employment impact, it was pre-

sumed that flexible working time models also improve coping at work while being used to improve the poor employment situation.

Stricter social policy and bureaucracy related to income

Young people also found the stricter obligations related to looking for work and the cuts made to unemployment benefits burdensome. In many respects, they considered the cuts to be working in an absurd way: an ethos that seemingly rewards active job search is hard for young people to understand in a situation where there are simply no jobs available.

Many young people feel that the bureaucracy related to receiving social assistance and the continuous applications make the process dysfunctional and unreasonable. For example, young people could not understand why the function of disregarded earnings in unemployment security was abolished in 2024. In the discussions, the complexity of the benefit system, combined with weak structures supporting young people's employment, was seen as a combination that led young people to experience despair, reduced coping capacity, and even feelings of humiliation. In some discussions, unconditional basic income was seen as a potentially more humane alternative for solving the social tension related to social security and working.

At the same time, young people called for significantly better mechanisms supporting finding employment and career choices to be available starting from comprehensive school. Young people considered their career choices to be their responsibility, but they also often felt that school did not provide sufficient support or guidance based on a realistic situational picture of the labour market. They also called for strengthening the support mechanisms in society's structures outside education.

The pressures already affecting young people when selecting their studies also came up in the discussions. For example, the quotas for first-time applicants in higher education

31 [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#), (1966), article 10 (see also [General comment no. 23](#) to the Covenant, 2016 (the right to just and favourable conditions of work, article 7); [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (1989), article 32; [Revised European Social Charter of the Council of Europe](#), (1996), articles 7, 8.

institutions were found crippling: the applicant hesitates to accept the offer of admission if they have doubts about their choice and worry that accepting it will make it harder to change the field of study later. Or, on the other hand, it will be more difficult to get an offer because they have already accepted an earlier offer and thus lost the opportunity to be admitted in the quota for first-time applicants. Young people have less space to try out and find their own place. Pressures to graduate fast were also brought up in the discussions. Young people felt that increasing pressures may rather prolong studies when the student becomes stressed and exhausted.

Work conditions and discrimination

Young people also highlighted how persistently discriminatory practices still affect job search and working life. For example, young people with a foreign surname said they had had better results in their job search after having changed their surname to a native Finnish form in their applications. Demonstrating an identity different from native Finns through clothing was also considered a factor that made the job search more difficult. To address this issue, young people emphasized the need for policymakers to require employers to strengthen the implementation of equitable recruitment practices and equality plans.

In the discussions held with young people, a phenomenon also emerged that involved job application processes in which the applicant is required to provide a video CV. For example, video CVs highlight the jobseeker's external characteristics or features emphasising an extrovert character, factors that may have little or no relevance to their ability to perform the job. These types of job application processes were considered not only very burdensome but also prone to lead to outcomes in which the decision to hire a candidate is ultimately based on factors unrelated to their competence for the job.

■ Young people brought up the need for decision-makers to require that employers improve the implementation of equal recruitment practices and equality plans.

In the discussions, young people also hoped that employers would have more consistent, flexible practices related to employees' illnesses. There is often a fear of illness at workplaces because of strict sick leave practices on the one hand and poor opportunities for access to treatment on the other. Young people also hoped for better support when referred to get help with coping at work and with mental health. The discussions conveyed the perception that there are still strong prejudices among employers against employees with a chronic illness, as well as against employees with disabilities. For example, remote work practices that are unnecessarily inflexible may significantly weaken the work performance of employees with disabilities or neuroatypical employees.

Access to health and social services

The right to the best achievable health is a human right recognised in international human rights conventions.³² The Constitution of Finland (section 19) also provides that public authorities shall guarantee for everyone adequate health and social services and promote the health of the population. However, the availability of health and social services emerged as a key concern in the discussions with young people, and they experienced different obstacles

32 [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(1966\)](#), Article 12; [Revised European Social Charter \(1996\)](#), Article 11.

with access to services. The growing waiting lists to services and especially the congested mental health services have been very concrete problems in the daily life of many young people struggling with mental health challenges.

Fragmentation of the service system and bureaucracy

The fragmentation of health and social services in general and insufficient access to information on support services for young people came up repeatedly in the discussions with young people. It was felt that even the authorities do not always know what services there are and where a young person should go in order to obtain appropriate support. A common view was that the flow of information between different health and social services does not work and that different instructions may be given by different authorities and officials. As a result, many of those in a vulnerable position are “bounced” between different services, and getting an appropriate service is very arbitrary. More information about support services for young people in schools and educational institutions was also called for.

Communication of information about the services and clarification of the services is essential. Especially a young person in a difficult life situation may not have the resources to work out matters independently. The bureaucracy related to services and social benefits was also considered burdensome, which may partly prevent the person from receiving the benefits they are entitled to. Many young people did not see the bureaucracy as appropriate but felt instead that it rather seemed to be aimed at “punishing the individual”. It is a common view

■ **Currently, the service system cannot sufficiently meet the needs of children and young people who seek help for mental health problems.**

that society increasingly sees needing support and help to be caused by laziness, which contributes to the stigma imposed on those in need of help.

Congestion in the services

In addition to lack of knowledge and the complexity of the service system, access to services is strongly affected by congestion in the services. Currently, the service system cannot sufficiently meet the needs of children and young people who seek help for mental health problems.³³

Many young people had experienced not getting help with mental health problems until they were very unwell. Even self-harm may not be enough to get help. Postponing help often leads to the accumulation of problems and causes suffering. Some of the young people felt they had to prepare for a meeting with a health-care expert to be able to present their situation in such a way that they get help. In the discussions, many young people also brought up experiences of often having to queue for a long time for crisis phones and chat services that serve as low-threshold mental health services even though the purpose of these services is to provide help as soon as the person's situation becomes a crisis. Other observations included regional differences in support services, for example. Getting help in small localities was highlighted as particularly challenging, and taking into account and respecting diversity may also be at a lower level in small localities than in the largest ones.

Economic inequalities and their impacts on receiving support also emerged in the discussions. Young people were also aware that many support services currently rely on NGOs and are at risk of being reduced or ending as a

33 THL website, [Mental health services for children and young people](#).

result of the cuts made to support for organisations. The financial distress of NGOs is thus also reflected on service users.

Problems with access to mental health services have long been a cause for concern. Mental health problems among children and young people have been increasing over the past few years, and the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the situation because of both an increase in problems and a decline in the availability of services. The Deputy Chancellor of Justice examined the problem from the perspective of fundamental rights in 2023 and stated in his statement that the long-term inadequacy of psychiatric and mental health services for children and young people "is a fundamental rights problem that has not been resolved and therefore causes extensive human suffering. It also cannot be justified legally and conflicts with the rights guaranteed to children and young people by the law."³⁴ However, the challenges have continued, and a report by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health on the situation in 2024 estimates that the health and social services needed by children and young people with mental health problems and substance abuse have been seriously endangered in all wellbeing services counties and in the City of Helsinki.³⁵

In order to address these problems, the Parliament approved the maximum waiting time for access to therapy for children and young people in December 2024. The maximum waiting time guarantees access to certain mental health services for everyone under the age

■ ***In order for the right to the best possible mental health to be realised, not only the availability of services, but also the root causes of mental health problems should be addressed and their prevention enhanced.***

of 23 within one month from when the need was established. The services are free.³⁶ As the maximum waiting time entered into force in May 2025, it is too early to say how effective it has been in practice in different parts of Finland at the time of writing this review. However, before its entry into force, many wellbeing services counties anticipated that the implementation of the one-month time limit was likely to be challenging, especially in the beginning.³⁷ The HRC's Young Experts Programme has been monitoring the societal development concerning young people's mental health problems, and the HRC gave a statement on the maximum waiting time at its preparatory stage. In the statement, the HRC drew attention to, among other things, equality problems in access to therapy that is subject to the maximum waiting time and called for a life stage-based approach in assessing the vulnerability of young people.³⁸

34 Deputy Chancellor of Justice, [The provision of mental health and psychiatric services for children and young people during the COVID-19 epidemic](#). OKV/294/70/2020 OKV-4, 2023. (in Finnish)

35 [Report on the realisation of the wellbeing services counties' responsibility for organising healthcare and social welfare \(2024\)](#) (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2025) (in Finnish, description sheet in English).

36 Ministry for Social Affairs and Health, [Maximum waiting time for access to therapy for children and young people](#), 30 December 2024 (in Finnish).

37 YLE, [Maximum waiting time for access to therapy for young people into force on 1 May - still not everyone will definitely have access to the correct treatment in one month \(1 May 2025\)](#) (in Finnish).

38 [Statement of the Human Rights Centre on the draft government proposal for amendments to legislation to implement the maximum waiting time for access to therapy for children and young people](#) (IOK/3232/2024, 5 June 2024) (in Finnish).

A well-functioning maximum waiting time for access to therapy improves access to mental health services. However, the maximum waiting time is limited to persons under the age of 23, which means that a large part of young adults are not covered by it. To realise the right to the highest attainable standard of mental health, it is necessary not only to ensure the availability of services, but also to address the root causes of mental health problems and strengthen their prevention. Young people's mental health may be affected by factors such as uncertain employment prospects (right to work), income challenges (right to an adequate standard of living, right to social security) and problems related to equality and discrimination. The HRC already drew attention to the complexity of the mental health problem in the review of the first period of the Young Experts Programme in 2023. This is a textbook example of the interdependence of human rights and of a situation in which the lack of comprehensive consideration of human rights may contribute to the continuation of the problem.

Equality and taking diversity into account

Equality and non-discrimination are the core of human rights and a key theme that emerged in the discussions with young people. A strong message from young people was that society should focus more on preventing discrimination and taking diversity into account better. Many felt that they are defined or discriminated against on the basis of personal characteristics, such as ethnicity, mother tongue, place of residence, neuropsychiatric challenges, or sexual or gender identity.

Young people with an immigrant background and from different ethnic groups reported that they are often treated as "others". They are not seen as "completely Finnish" even if they have lived in Finland all their

life.³⁹ LGBTQ+ youth reported that they had encountered belittling or bullying on the basis of their sexual or gender identity.⁴⁰ Many also feel minority stress for often having to play the role of an "educator" in discussions about their LGBTQ+ identity, even though they talk about personal matters. Many said that they felt society does not have room for them to be themselves but expects them to conform with certain norms.

Young people who in their daily life use other languages in addition to Finnish, such as speakers of Arabic and Russian, said they avoided using their own language in public places in fear of discrimination and racism. Many had the experience that outsiders do not intervene in discrimination in public places or show support for the victim. Speakers of Russian also feel that discrimination against them is more acceptable in Finnish society because of the war of aggression started by Russia in 2022.

A common message from young people with different backgrounds and situations was that they wanted adults and parents to take more responsibility for preventing discrimination and taking diversity into account. For example, those who had been bullied in educational institutions often felt that their experiences were belittled and problems were not addressed with the severity required by the situation. Furthermore, teachers' lack of

39 The issue also emerged in the report published by the Ministry of Justice: "No one is born to hate" Dialogues between young people on racism and discrimination (Publications of the Ministry of Justice, Reports and guidelines, 2023:34) (in Finnish, description sheet in English).

40 Several studies also show that rainbow youth experience more bullying and harassment at school. See e.g., [LGBTIQ equality at a crossroads - Progress and challenges](#) (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2024); Jukka Lehtonen, Satu Majlander, Laura Sares-Jäske, Aino Jehkoi, Pauliina Luopa [Wellbeing of 8th and 9th-graders belonging to gender or sexual minorities - School Health Promotion Study 2019-2023](#) (THL 2024) (in Finnish).

■ **Particularly politicians and other people in a position of power were urged to also take responsibility for the style of the social debate.**

knowledge about neuropsychiatric challenges may result in individuals' needs not being sufficiently taken into account, even if it is possible to find solutions to the challenges.

Particularly politicians and other people in a position of power were urged to also take responsibility for the style of the social debate. Racist and discriminatory language in political debate and in social media has a strong impact on the daily life of young people from minorities. International bodies monitoring the realisation of human rights conventions have indeed paid attention to increased hate speech and urged Finland to take action to eradicate the problem.⁴¹

The discussions showed that young people's trust in politics has suffered, for example, as a result of the racist controversies that have

made the headlines in the past few years. Young people do not trust projects and programmes proclaimed by decision-makers if there is not a genuine will to plan and implement them. Their attitude to the effectiveness of the use of projects and declarations to resolve such issues was sceptical anyway. The Government's 2023 statement on promoting equality⁴² was seen as an example of a bluff aimed at avoiding having to deal with problems rather than to genuinely respond to them. The polarised public debate in general was found stressful, and intentional provocation frustrated many young people. The recent debates on the banning of burkas and niqabs by legislation⁴³ were seen as an example of an issue where it is difficult to believe that decision-makers genuinely want to protect the rights of children or women, even though that is the argument used to justify the possible ban.

41 See e.g., the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance ECRI's [Report on Finland \(sixth monitoring cycle\) 2025](#); [Concluding observations of the UN's Human Rights Committee on the seventh periodic report of Finland 2021 \(CCPR/C/FIN/CO/7\)](#) and the Committee's [follow-up report 2024](#). For sexist hate speech, see the [Concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of Finland 2022 \(CEDAW/C/FIN/CO/8\)](#) by the CEDAW Committee monitoring the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Committee's [follow-up report](#) of 2025.

42 [Government statement to Parliament on promoting equality, gender equality and non-discrimination in Finnish society \(Finnish Government 2023\)](#).

43 See e.g., YLE, [Sanni Grahn-Laasonen wanted to ban burkas and niqabs in schools - Secretary general of the Muslim Forum: "This makes me very sad"](#) (13 August 2025) (in Finnish); [Iltalehti, Ban on Muslims' scarves in Finland? Parties outline their policies now](#) (11 August 2025) (in Finnish).

4 Increasing social inclusion by strengthening rights

Interdependence of inclusion and rights

The discussions with young people reveal a wide range of societal challenges that directly affect young people's opportunities to enjoy their human rights. Many of these have also been discussed in public debate, such as challenges related to the employment of young people, sufficient social security, the availability of services, and equality.

The employment-related challenges reported by young people reflect the alarming rise in the unemployment rate in Finland. In August 2025, there were 267,000 unemployed people in Finland, an increase of 53,000 from the previous year.⁴⁴ Youth unemployment and the increasing long-term unemployment of young people are particularly worrisome phenomena.⁴⁵

While finding employment has become more difficult, significant cuts have at the same time been made to social benefits. Many cuts have weakened the livelihood of young peo-

ple, in particular.⁴⁶ In addition to the cuts in social benefits, funding for the youth sector has decreased.⁴⁷ The uncertainty and fragmentation of funding in the sector do not promote the kind of long-term work that is often required to address the root causes of problems encountered by young people and to find sustainable solutions.

In addition, the cuts made to social benefits have a direct impact on health and social services of young people. For example, the conditions for access to vocational rehabilitation for young people have been tightened while the conditions for rehabilitation subsidy have also become stricter.⁴⁸ In addition, major cuts to the discretionary government grants awarded to organisations in the healthcare and social wel-

44 Statistics Finland, [Fewer employed persons and more unemployed persons in August 2025 compared to one year ago](#), release 23 September 2025.

45 MTV News, [Number of young long-term unemployed people exploded - these professions and regions have been hit hardest](#) (7 April 2025); Finnish Confederation of Professionals (STTK) (in Finnish), [Finland cannot afford increasing long-term youth unemployment](#) (8 April 2025) (in Finnish).

46 Kela, [Microsimulation: Social security cuts hit young people already on a low income](#) (23 January 2024, updated on 22 January 2025) (in Finnish); YLE, [The cuts hit young people with a low income hardest - these benefits from Kela will fall at the beginning of April](#) (18 March 2024) (in Finnish).

47 Finnish National Youth Council and Youth Sector, [Analysis: How the Government's decisions in the government discussion on spending limits affect young people and the youth sector](#) (18 April 2024) (in Finnish).

48 Kela, [Vocational rehabilitation for young persons, rehabilitation allowance and rehabilitation allowance for young persons: changes in 2025](#) (21 November 2024); YLE, [Government's cuts to social security hit with their full intensity - these amendments will enter into force now](#) (31 December 2024) (in Finnish).

Progressive overall implementation

In situations where the societal structures discriminate against young people, their fundamental and human rights are in fact more prone to weaker realisation than those of the older, working-age majority of the population. This is a challenge in the realisation of equality. Equality is guaranteed both in international human rights conventions and in the Constitution of Finland (section 6).

The thinking according to which guaranteeing human rights is based only on the needs of the average majority population living a “normal life” is not in line with human rights. The legal basis for this is provided by the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which imposes a key obligation on states to take steps with a view to achieving *progressively the full realisation* of these rights. The most important aspect of this principle is how, on the one hand, it obliges the State to fully guarantee the economic, social and cultural rights, while at the same time taking into account the resources available to the states, in which case full implementation is not required immediately (but progressively). Therefore, the human rights system requires a genuine effort from states to fully implement the economic and social rights. The effort must be reflected in societal decision-making, policy programmes and public administration.

For this reason, social security cuts affecting young people do not necessarily constitute grounds for a human rights violation on their own, even though article 9 of the Covenant guarantees the right to social security. Instead, it may be a violation when the state does not, with the resources at its disposal, seek to eradicate youth poverty by means of any alternative measures when making these cuts. When a state in this way violates the so-called *non-retrogression of human rights*, it fails in its duty to strive for the full realisation of the rights.

fare sector significantly weaken their ability to operate, including their work that strengthens the wellbeing of young people.⁴⁹ At the same time, the resource-related challenges of wellbeing services counties will continue.

Problems related to equality have also been widely discussed during the current government term. In addition to political controversies, several reports have shown that there are hostile attitudes and structural racism towards people with a foreign background in Finnish

society,⁵⁰ and that racism and discrimination have become part of everyday life of young people in Finland.⁵¹

The accumulation of problems among young people has been widely recognised to increase the risk of social exclusion and reduce social inclusion. In other words, young people’s ability to engage in all kinds of societal activities and social inclusion is therefore directly

49 Between 2024 and 2027, cuts totalling EUR 140 million (more than one third of the grants) will be made to government grants to healthcare and social welfare organisations. See e.g., *Soste Government abandoned the detrimental additional cuts proposed for healthcare and social welfare organisations* (release 2 September 2025) (in Finnish).

50 See e.g., *Being Black in the EU – Experiences of people of African descent* (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2023); *Being Muslim in the EU - Experiences of Muslims* (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2024).

51 “No one is born to hate” *Dialogues between young people on racism and discrimination* (Ministry of Justice 2023) (in Finnish, description sheet in English).

■ ***In other words, comprehensive examination and promotion of rights are needed to strengthen the inclusion of young people.***

linked to how their fundamental and human rights are realised. The more problems an individual accumulates in meeting basic needs such as work, education, livelihood or sufficient health, the more difficult inclusion becomes. For example, in its 2024 analysis of cuts affecting young people, the Finnish National Youth Council and Youth Sector stated that "Studies show that young people's experience of inclusion is differentiated according to almost all the same indicators as other wellbeing. The cuts affecting young people deepen this experience. Young people are under-represented at all levels of decision-making - as voters, candidates and decision-makers. Without a comprehensive approach to improving the wellbeing of young people, we will not have active future citizens, either."⁵² In other words, comprehensive examination and promotion of rights are needed to strengthen the inclusion of young people.

Implementation of young people's rights

When the realisation of young people's rights is examined in societal decision-making and societal debate, it is essential to avoid generalisations that typically concern young people's age, such as generalisations unnecessarily assessing the level of their mental development or other

forms of "maturity", or other stereotypes arising from decision-making. The less young people are involved in the decision-making affecting them, the more the need for this is emphasised.

Structural equality problems should therefore be examined through the special features in the life stage of young people and on the basis of a solid knowledge base, in which case the state has the opportunity to promote young people's rights and inclusion in a human rights-friendly manner. A similar life stage-oriented approach has been called for, for example, by the Ombudsman for older people who, in the context of the implementation of the rights of older people, has emphasised the need to consider equality problems and the greater-than-usual social vulnerability of older people in the drafting of legislation.⁵³

The human rights of young people should be taken into account, especially in the National Action Plan on Fundamental and Human Rights. The Constitutional Law Committee has stated that the promotion of fundamental and human rights in central government should be goal-oriented and systematic and that a separate action plan on fundamental and human rights should be drawn up for each government term to implement the work.⁵⁴ Petteri Orpo's Government published its Programme in November 2025.

Of the existing structures, the Finnish Youth Act could also serve as a key channel for strengthening the youth perspective on human rights. The objectives of the Youth Act are linked to improving young people's inclusion, sense of community and opportunities for exerting influence and emphasise the importance of safeguarding the equality, non-discrimina-

52 Finnish National Youth Council and Youth Sector, *Analysis: How the Government's decisions in the government discussion on spending limits affect young people* (18 April 2024) (in Finnish).

53 *Statement of the Ombudsman for older people on the draft instructions for impact assessments of legislative drafting*. 19 May 2022 (in Finnish).

54 *Statement of the Constitutional Law Committee (PeVL 56/2017, National Action Plan on Fundamental and Human Rights 2017-2019* (in Finnish).

tion and rights of young people. The preparatory work of the Act emphasises that rights in this case refer specifically to the implementation of the fundamental and human rights of young people.⁵⁵ The Youth Act also obliges the Government to draw up a national youth work and youth policy programme every four years. The HRC's Young Expert Programme examined the latest National youth work and youth policy programme drawn up for the period 2024–2027, and the HRC issued a statement on its preparation to the Ministry of Education and Culture.⁵⁶

The latest programme has highlighted objectives for eradicating mental health problems (Objective 4, 5) and supporting young people who are not in employment, education or training (Objective 3). The programme also includes entries related to equality, but they remain fairly sporadic (Objective 8). However, the programme does not pay much attention to young people belonging to different minorities, such as persons with disabilities, young people belonging to sexual and gender minorities and young people with an immigrant background.⁵⁷

In its statement, the HRC stated that the policy objectives of the programme do not sufficiently serve the entire age group that the Youth Act applies to. Young people at the upper end of the age range referred to in the Youth Act (under 29 years) are in a less favourable position regarding the policy objectives of the programme. In the consultation feedback received by the National youth work and youth policy programme 2024–2027, calls were also made for more ambitious targets for improving the wellbeing of young people and comments

were made on the small number of policy objectives for preventing discrimination and racism.⁵⁸ The situation is absurd in the sense that it is precisely the themes related to equality that young people consider to be among the most important human rights themes. This has emerged in practically every stakeholder discussion or meeting with young people organised by the Young Experts Programme during its programme period.

A key policy, especially from the point of view of strengthening inclusion among children and young people, is the National Democracy Programme, which was completed in 2024 under the leadership of the Ministry of Justice and in which strengthening the inclusion of children and young people is highlighted as one of the key objectives. In the programme, participation refers to opportunities to participate in decision-making processes and influence decisions made in the community as well as to the experience of being heard. In the programme, such means to promote the political participation of children and young people are envisaged in a positive way, but at the same time the inclusion of young people is left at the level of narrow, political decision-making and consultation.⁵⁹ The programme's measures to promote inclusion do not address young people's opportunities to participate in society from a broader perspective, such as through issues related to youth unemployment, social exclusion, and their prevention. However, like this review also aims to show, such perspectives would be necessary for the examination of social inclusion.

55 Government proposal to Parliament for the Youth Act (HE 111/2016 vp) (in Finnish).

56 The Human Rights Centre's own initiative statement to the Ministry of Education and Culture on the National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme 2024–2027 (IOK/851/2024) (in Finnish).

57 See also National youth work and youth policy programme 2024–2027.

58 Ibid. (see 7.3 General consultation feedback).

59 Objective 3 outlined in the National youth work and youth policy programme 2024–2027 concerns strengthening the position of youth councils of municipalities and wellbeing services counties and other representative bodies consisting of young people. Objective 4 in turn concerns the strengthening of child-friendly and youth-friendly consultations in "matters affecting them", for example, with reference to the development of legislative drafting processes.

5 Conclusion

In Finland, the decline in young people's faith in the future has taken place at a time when the social atmosphere has also become harder. Factors such as the weaker international security environment, but also the increased hate speech and racism in society contribute to the situation. More unpredictable developments in the international environment and the increasing tensions in the national social climate emphasise the importance of maintaining a democratic social order relying on human rights. In the Youth Barometer carried out in 2021, 97 per cent of young people considered it important to "maintain human rights by any means possible".⁶⁰ In the 2023 Barometer, 90 per cent of the respondents considered human rights to be one of the most important things in life together with home and family, peace, equality and the wellbeing of nature.⁶¹

In international comparisons, Finland is consistently seen as a country that is successful when matters such as social happiness, the level of corruption, and trust in the rule of law and democracy are measured. This is another reason why the recent decline in young people's faith in the future must be considered a serious signal forcing us to investigate whether the Finnish system can continue to safeguard wellbeing and social stability also in the future. According to the observations collected from young people, especially the erosion of equality in society seems to take this development in a wrong direction.

When examining young people's rights, the perspective must be sufficiently comprehensive so that the public debate can also be advanced to better address the poor inclusion of young people and its root causes. In October 2025, Sitra published a foresight review on young people's faith in the future, in which the improvement of young people's faith in the future is considered to be strongly linked to sorting out the "fundamental issues" in society.⁶² In the foresight review, addressing poverty in families with children, youth unemployment, mental

60 Tomi Kiilakoski (ed.), *Young people and sustainability. Youth Barometer 2021* (State Youth Council, Finnish Youth Research Society, Ministry of Education and Culture) (in Finnish, abstract in English).

61 Tomi Kiilakoski (ed.), *Building blocks of world-views. Youth Barometer 2023* (State Youth Council, Finnish Youth Research Society, Ministry of Education and Culture) (in Finnish, abstract in English). A similar question was not asked in the most recent barometer, *the Youth Barometer for 2024* (published on 19 March 2025) (in Finnish, abstract in English).

62 Lilli Poussa, Sanna Rekola, Otto Tähkäpää, *What if young people lose their faith in the future? Young people's faith in the future at a time of uncertainties* (Sitra 2025) (in Finnish).

health problems among young people, and racism and discrimination faced by young people are included in such fundamental issues.

Unlike in the final review of the HRC's Young Experts Programme, the perspective of the foresight review is not focused on human rights or on examining the inclusion of young people specifically from the human rights perspective. However, the messages of both reviews are similar in that they recognise the same requirements to safeguard the basic preconditions for young people's life in terms of improving the position and inclusion of young people.

The observations made during the second programming period by the HRC's young experts in discussions with young people show that safeguarding rights is closely linked to better social inclusion of young people. When the definition of inclusion is examined from a human rights-based perspective, it can include not only traditional political participation but also the possibility of inclusion in the local community, working life or, for example, societal activism. Social inclusion reveals the interdependence of human rights.

Efforts to promote youth inclusion should focus in particular on equality, as well as on ensuring that not only those young people who are already socially active are heard in decision-making. Although the development of structures for political participation is important in a democratic state governed by the rule of law, it is equally necessary to pay attention to how difficult it is to increase participation if the barriers to participation and their root causes are not identified and addressed. This is precisely why the right to work, health, sufficient income, freedom of association and non-discrimination are all elements that, when safeguarded, can make stronger social inclusion of young people possible.

■ ■ ***Inclusion reveals the interdependence of human rights.***

IHMISOIKEUSKESKUS
MÄNNISKORÄTTSCENTRET
HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE



FI-00102 Eduskunta,
Helsinki, Finland
www.humanrightscentre.fi