Governance

The legal framework of the social inclusion of young people is set by the Constitution of Finland [1] (Chapter 2 - Basic rights and liberties). The Constitution is complemented by the Youth Act (Section 1 - The purpose of this Act is to promote the social inclusion of young people and provide them with opportunities for exerting an influence and improve their skills and capabilities to function in society; support the growth, independence and sense of community of young people and facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and adoption of skills necessary for this purpose; support young people’s free-time pursuits and engagement in civic society; promote non-discrimination and equality among young people and the realisation of their rights; and improve young people’s growth and living conditions), the Non-Discrimination Act [2] (Chapter 1 - The purpose of this Act is to promote equality and prevent discrimination as well as to enhance the protection provided by law to those who have been discriminated against) and the Language Act [3] (Section 2 - [1] The purpose of this Act is to ensure the constitutional right of every person to use his or her own language, either Finnish or Swedish, before the courts and other authorities. [2] The goal is to ensure the right of everyone to a fair trial and good administration irrespective of language, and to secure the linguistic rights of an individual person without him or her needing specifically to refer to these rights).

The areas of expertise of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health [4] are the promotion of welfare, social and health services, income security, insurance, working life, and gender equality. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health supports the welfare of people in Finland through social and health services, and by ensuring income security. The target group is not specifically young people but the policies also concern them.

The Ministry of Education and Culture [5] develops educational, science, cultural, sport, and youth policies in Finland. Therefore, its role in relation to the social inclusion of young people is important. On 11 December 2017, Youth Work Centres of Expertise [6] were approved by the Ministry of Education and Culture as eligible for state aid in 2018–2019, in accordance with the priorities set
in the National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme 2017–2019 [7]. The priority related to “Social empowerment”, which as a concept is very close to “social inclusion”, was chosen to be backed by several Centres of Expertise. Firstly by a consortium administered by the City of Espoo in co-operation with the National Workshop Association, Juvenia – Youth Research and Development Centre of South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences and HUMAK University of Applied Sciences; secondly, by a group administered by the National Workshop Association realised in co-operation with Juvenia - Youth Research and Development Centre of South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences; and thirdly by a group administered by the Finnish Association for Mental Health realised in co-operation with Finnish Association for Substance Abuse Prevention (EHYT) and Youth Mental Health Association - Yeesi.

Employment is very much part of social inclusion and thus unemployment can lead to at worst poverty and social exclusion. Therefore, the role of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment [8] must be taken into account in the when discussing social inclusion. For more information, visit: Youth Wiki/Finland: 3 Employment and Entrepreneurship [9]. Employment and Economic Development Offices [10] are provided by 15 regional TE Offices with some 120 branches in Finland. Institutionally, they work under the guidance of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment.

From the point of view of social inclusion, the Unit for Democracy, Language Affairs and Fundamental Rights is the most important unit of the Ministry of Justice [11]. It promotes and monitors the realisation of the right to vote and participate, as well as the general prerequisites for citizen participation. The tasks of the unit include promoting and monitoring the realisation of linguistic rights. Although these duties are strongly related to participation, they include provisions for social inclusion as well. For example, the Ministry of Justice organises campaigns, which especially target young people in vulnerable positions and who face discrimination based on their age and/or ethnic background. The goal is to promote possibilities to participate in society. In addition, promoting social inclusion is one of the most important goals of the Democracy Policy Programme (2017-2019). For more information, visit: Youth Wiki/Finland: 5.5 National Strategy to Increase Youth Participation [12].

Municipalities (see Youth Wiki/Finland Glossary [13]) actively promote and support the social inclusion of young people. Social and health services are arranged by municipalities. In the future, services will be organized at the regional level (for more information see Youth Wiki/Finland 1.9 Youth Policy/Current Debates and Reforms [14]). As mentioned previously, as per the Child Welfare Act, each municipality, or two or more municipalities together, must draw up a plan concerning the actions of the municipality or municipalities to promote the wellbeing of children and young people, and to arrange and develop child welfare services. There are six Regional State Administrative Agencies in Finland. The agencies work in collaboration with local authorities. Tasks of the Regional State Administrative Agencies (see Youth Wiki/Finland Glossary [13]) include for example the supervision and steering of outreach youth work in the regions. The ongoing regional government reform will affect their current role and tasks.

The Advisory Board for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities VANE [15] is a co-operative organ for authorities, disability organisations, and organisations for relatives of disabled people. It closely follows the decision-making in society, organises hearings, gives statements, and promotes the real implementation of the human rights of disabled people. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol entered into force for Finland on the 10th June 2016. A national coordination mechanism, Advisory Board for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, was established in connection with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to replaced the former National Council on Disability. The responsibility of the new mechanism will be to coordinate the implementation of the Convention in different administrative branches. At least five members of the Advisory Board shall represent persons with disabilities or their families. The Council works in close connection with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.
The **Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations** [16] works under the guidance of the Ministry of Justice. It engages in dialogue with immigrants, ethnic, cultural and religious minorities, public authorities, political parties, and NGOs. Through cooperation and discussion, they aim to build trust and an open Finland. The board brings together migration experts from national, regional and local levels ranging from public officials to civil society representatives. It also forms a network of experts on migration, integration and equality which promotes dialogue between different population groups.

The **Ombudsman for Children** [17] reports to the government on the welfare of children and young people, and on the implementation of their rights. The Ombudsman conveys the opinions of young people to decision-makers. The opinions are recorded by surveys, reports and by personal meetings with young people and children (for example, young people with disabilities, young people who have arrived Finland without their families, young people with a Sámi or Roma background, and young people whose parents are in prison).

The **Non-Discrimination Ombudsman** [18] advances equality in Finland. It is possible to turn to the Ombudsman if one has experienced or witnessed discrimination on the basis of age, ethnic or national origin, nationality, language, religion, belief, opinion, political activity, trade union activism, family connections, health, disability, sexual orientation, or other personal characteristics.

**Cross-Sectoral Cooperation**

Social inclusion demands cross-sectoral approaches. Various ministries and municipalities work and co-operate in the area of social inclusion policies. In this sense, the responsible actor depends on which area of social inclusion is being discussed.

Overall, the **Ministry of Social Affairs and Health** [4] coordinates social inclusion policies (*people living in poverty and social exclusion, health*). Its areas of expertise are welfare, social and health services, integration, income security, insurance, working life, and gender equality.

In terms of education (*the number of early school leavers*), the **Ministry of Education and Culture** [19] is the most important ministry. According to the Youth Act, the Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for youth policy.

Since employment (*employment rate*) must be taken into account in the area of social inclusion, the **Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment** [20] plays an important role and coordinates employment policies.

These three ministries represent the top-level authority in the context of Finnish social inclusion policy. Under the guidance of the ministries several advisory boards, institutes and services work in the area of social inclusion (e.g. the Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations, the National Institute for Health and Welfare, etc.).

At the local level, municipalities are responsible for arranging and developing child welfare services. According to the **Child Welfare Act** [21], each municipality, or two or more municipalities together, must draw up a plan, concerning the actions of the municipality or municipalities to promote the wellbeing of children and young people, and to arrange and develop child welfare services. This plan will be subject to approval by the council of each municipality involved and must be reviewed at least once every four years. The plan must cover the circumstances in which children and young people are being raised, and the state of their wellbeing.

According to the **Youth Act** [22], youth work and youth policy is implemented as cross-sectoral cooperation and as cooperation with young people, youth associations and other organisations doing youth work. The local authority has a coordinating body with representation from the local
educational, social and health care, and youth administrations and from the labour and police administrations for the planning and implementation of cross-sectoral cooperation.