

PASLET

Participation in action, sharing, learning and evolving together



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PREFACE

Participation of youth in decision-making is an integral part of an inclusive, democratic society. However, it is also a major challenge in many countries as the possibilities of youth to make their voices heard are often limited or youth may feel distrust towards political institutions and processes. Youth participation happens at many levels and in different ways, from conventional political ways to more non-formal and often innovative ways.

Participation in Action – Sharing, Learning and Envolving Together (PASLET) is a joint project by Demo Finland, Youth Network MaMa from Slovenia and the human rights organisation Odhikar from Bangladesh. With the support from the Youth in Action programme of the European Commission, the project aimed to support youth participation by offering a space and peer support for active youth, youth organisations and youth workers to share experiences, best practices and lessons learnt in supporting youth participation in the four project countries Bangladesh, Finland, Nepal and Slovenia. During the one-year project (10/2013-9/2014), youth from these four countries explored new solutions and creative methodologies to tackle the challenges youth face in order to meaningfully participate in their societies. The project provided youth with possibilities to learn from each other by observing and sharing their practical experiences and working methods during study visits that were organised to each of these countries.

This publication is a result of this project. It has been co-written by participants of the project, and is based on good practices identified during the cooperation. It is designed to give an overall picture of the youth context of the four countries and to share some of the good practices concerning youth participation and cooperation. These good practices are examples of ways for youth to raise their voice and influence issues that concern their lives and welfare.

We hope that this publication will be a source of inspiration for youth in these countries and elsewhere. The aim is to show that cooperation of youth - across political and organisational boundaries - is a way to promote youth participation, and that youth participation can have many faces. By learning from each other's experiences, youth can find new ways to engage and make their voices heard in their societies!



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1 YOUTH CONTEXT IN BANGLADESH, FINLAND, NEPAL AND SLOVENIA

This section is an introduction to the circumstances of youth and to the structures of youth policy and movements in Bangladesh, Finland, Nepal and Slovenia. The purpose is to give an overall picture of the context in which the youth in these four countries live. The chapters are written by the youth participating in the PASLET project, and thus reflect the views of the writers and the issues that the writers themselves find relevant for the youth in their own country.

1.1 YOUTH IN BANG- LADESH

Introduction

During the 1971 Liberation War, the Pakistani military committed genocide against the people of the then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The youth of the then East Pakistan fought against Pakistan's military and its collaborators for nine months after the declaration of independence on 26th March 1971. Bangladesh was liberated on 16th December 1971 when the occupying Pakistani military surrendered. During the war, many young people were killed and tortured by the Pakistani army. Even before the Liberation War, the youth of this land struggled to establish Bangla as one of the State languages and the right to self-determination.

The youth of Bangladesh, through 1990's massive democratic movement, toppled the autocratic mili-

tary government of Lt. General H. M. Ershad. However, even 43 years after the Independence of Bangladesh, the country is still struggling for democracy. The mainstream political leadership has gained vested interest by misdirecting the youth of this country after the 1990's, taking advantage of their economic instability and blocking the way for youth to play a positive role for the nation. The reality is that the leaders and activists of the mainstream political parties in power are involved in criminal activities. Presently, a small section of young people in Bangladesh are involved in corruption, manipulation and violence by the direct influence and interventions from the leaders of the mainstream political parties and in most cases, youth supporting the ruling party are reckless in committing crimes as they are 'protected' by the government and its agencies.

On the other hand, due to the criminalisation of politics and the lack of principle of the mainstream political leaders, many promising young people are no longer interested in joining politics, which creates a vacuum in the healthy political atmosphere in Bangladesh. Youth constitute one third of the total population of Bangladesh¹. In Bangladesh, the young people are suffering from unemployment. This trend is severe in the rural areas. The Ready Made Garments (RMG) sector has absorbed a big number of youth into the industry. Most of them are female workers. This is one of the major causes of rural to urban migration of youth. The Ministry of Youth and Sports has a youth policy.² However, their activities are not visible widely. In Bangladesh, human rights defenders, cultural activists and bloggers

constitute a section of the youth. These youth participate actively in various national and other related issues.

Definition of youth

According to the National Youth Policy of Bangladesh, people falling in the age group of 18-35 years are called 'youth'. But there is discrepancy with the international context. According to UNESCO, 'youth' is often indicated as a person between the age where he/she may leave compulsory education, and the age at which he/she finds his/her first employment. This latter age limit has been increasing, as higher levels of unemployment and the cost of setting up an independent household put many young people into a prolonged period of dependency.

The UN, for statistical consistency across regions, defines 'youth' as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States. All UN statistics on youth are based on this definition, as illustrated by the annual yearbooks of statistics published by the United Nations system on demography, education, employment and health. For activities at the national level, for example when implementing a local community youth programme, 'youth' may be understood in a more flexible manner. UNESCO will then adopt the definition of "youth" as used by a particular Member State. It can be based, for instance, on the definition given in the African Youth Charter where 'youth' means "every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years".³

¹ <http://www.moysports.gov.bd/policy-youth.html>

² <http://www.moysports.gov.bd/>

³ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/youth/youth-definition/>

Problems faced by youth in Bangladesh⁴

The young people of Bangladesh are facing lots of problems; such as

- i. Poor practical education;
- ii. Failing to complete formal education (dropout);
- iii. Unemployment and class based discrimination;
- iv. Involvement in antisocial, criminal and immoral activities;
- v. Drug addiction and being vulnerable to Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD's);
- vi. Lack of health care facilities;
- vii. Scarcity of credit and less scope for undertaking self-employment project;
- viii. Backwardness in technology and inefficiency in IT;
- ix. Absence of favorable environment in the fields of sports and games and sound recreations;
- x. Moral degradation;
- xi. Economic disparity etc.

Youth Development Institutions and Instruments in Bangladesh

The Ministry of Youth and Sports is responsible for youth development in Bangladesh. The Ministry has a wing named Department of Youth Development which organises trainings for youth. This department has two centers, the Sheikh Hasina National Center and the Central Human Resource Development Center.

There is no exact statistics on the number of youth organisations in Bangladesh.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports has a policy for youth development, National Youth Policy, which was formulated in 2003. The policy focuses on the problems and challenges faced by the youth and the ways to overcome these problems. However, in most cases, the policy remains in paper and merely exists in reality.

⁴ National Youth Policy, Bangladesh

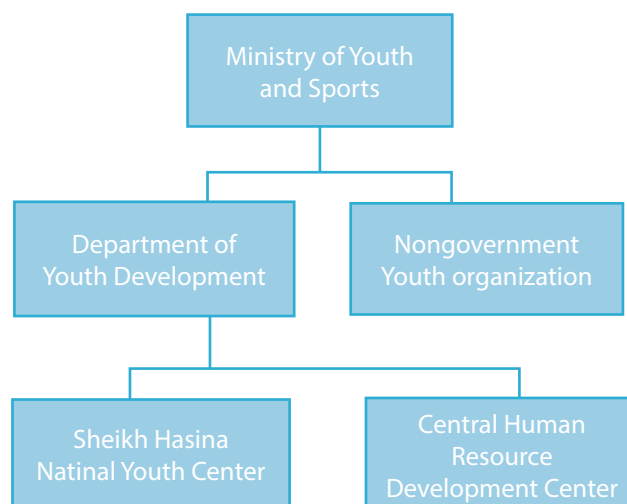


Figure 1: Ministry and Related Institutions

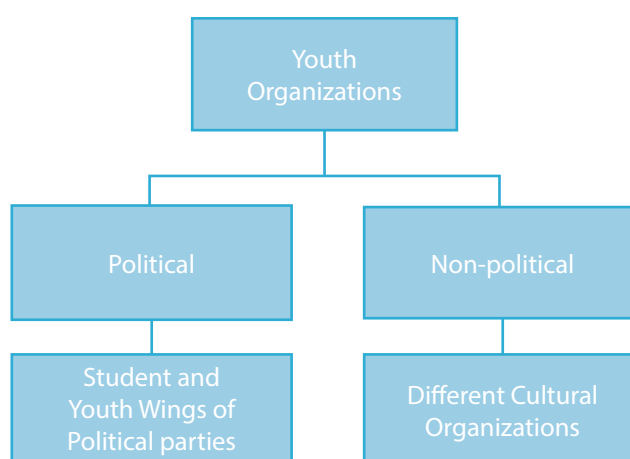


Figure 2: Youth organisations in Bangladesh

Youth Organisations

In Bangladesh, there are two categories of youth organisations; political and non-political youth organisations. Political organisations are mainly the student wings of different political parties; such as *Chhatra League*, *Chhatra Dal*, *Chhatra Shibir*, *Chhatra Federation* etc⁵.

⁵ Chhatra League is the student wing of Bangladesh Awami League; Chhatra Dal is the student wing of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP); Chhatra Shibir is the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh and Chhatra Federation is the student wing of Jatiyo Mukti Council.

In the category of non-political organisations, most of the organisations are cultural and left leaning mass organisations. There is no exact statistics of the cultural organisations. But using different sources, it has been found that a total of approximately 600 of these organisations exist in Bangladesh. There are also some international organisations in Bangladesh, working for youth empowerment, leadership, disabilities, health etc. In many cases they are working with the collaboration of the government. There are some NGOs such as the Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center, Bangladesh Youth

Environmental Initiative and the National Federation of Youth Organisations which are working in Bangladesh. However, these youth organisations are not active as change makers.

Young people's working conditions

In Bangladesh, the total number of youth labour force (age group 15-29) is 20.9 million, out of which the urban labour force is 5.1 million and rural labour force 15.8 million⁶. Unemployment in the age group 15-24 is 22 percent, of which 14 percent is female and 8 percent is male⁷. Job opportunities for young people are also very limited. The rural youth labour force is twice the number of urban youth labour force. But in Bangladesh, employment opportunities in the rural areas are very limited. The dependency ratio in Bangladesh is downward sloping. This trend is a very important indicator for Bangladesh in positive economic development. Therefore, creating working opportunities through economic development in a dem-

⁶ Labor Force Survey 2010, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics

⁷ Population Reference Bureau, The World's Youth, 2013 Data Sheet

ocratic society basing on equality, human dignity and social justice are the preconditions for positive developments for the youth in Bangladesh.

Concluding remarks

Even though the majority of young people in Bangladesh are trying to improve their conditions, they are still suffering from a lack of opportunities. There needs to be coordinated efforts, pressure, awareness and political will to change the present discourse of corrupt politics to create opportunities for young people to be future leaders.

1.2 YOUTH IN FINLAND

The definitions of young person vary among Finnish legislation, research and statistics. According to the Youth Law, a young person is determined to be under the age of 29 years. In some definitions, the minimum age limit for young person is 16. In the unemployment statistics everyone under 25 years is defined as a young person.

In 2012, the proportion of youth in the population (5 401 267) was 17,5 % (944 123). In the age group 20-24

years, almost 90 % of youth were not married. Even 70 % of women and 80 % of men in the age group 25-29 were unmarried. The average age of mothers giving birth to their first child was 28,4 years.

Education and employment

The youth in Finland emphasize the importance of friends, family and free time. Among the youth, social networks are valued more than work, education or (material) welfare. Work and education are still highly appreciated.

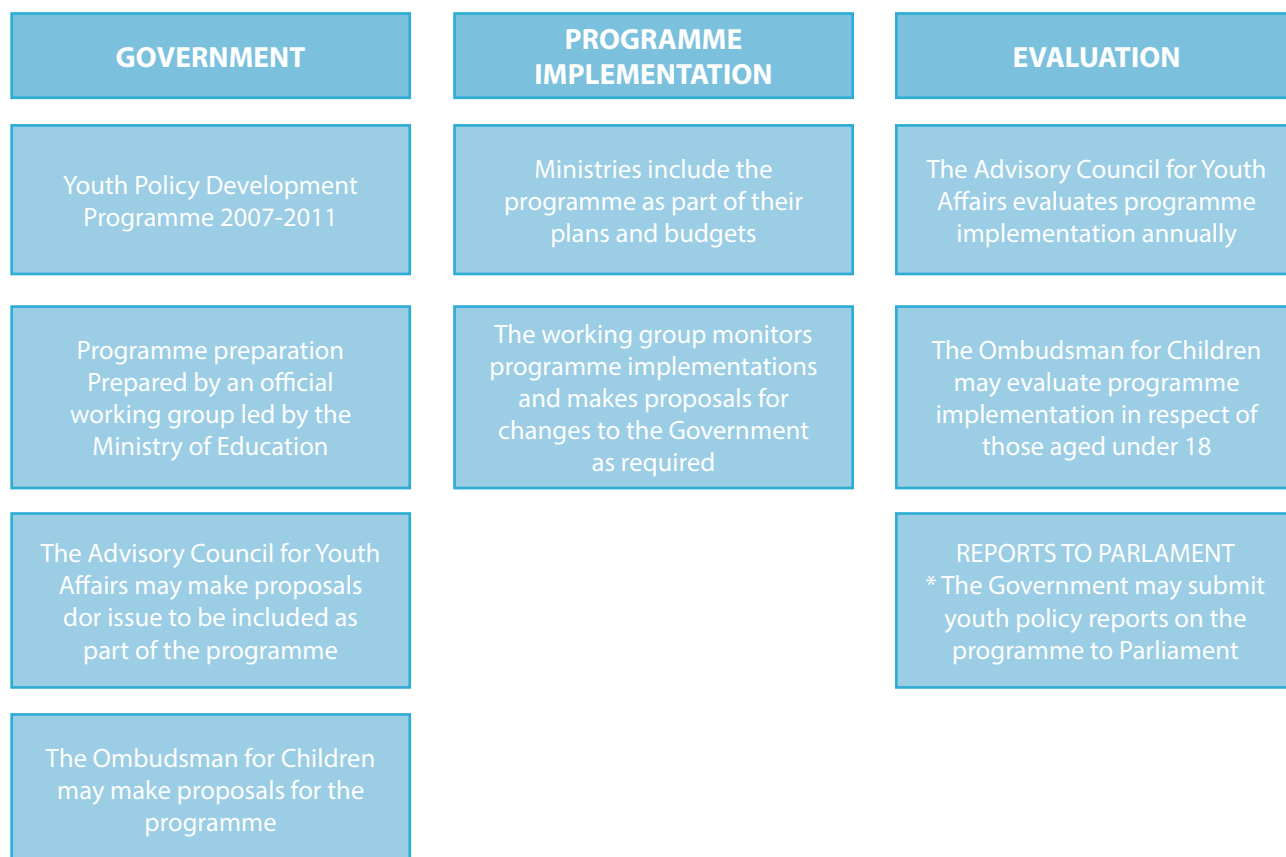
The Finnish education system is open and free of charge for everyone, all the way from pre-school to master's degree. The Finnish youth is among the most educated in Europe. After elementary school, 91 % of youth continue their education, either in upper secondary school or in vocational education. 39 % of Finnish people aged 24 to 34 years have a university degree.

Youth unemployment has become a serious issue for the young generation today. As a consequence, social exclusion of young people is one of the "hot potatoes" in the daily public debate.

Active youth discussing development policy with Pekka Haavisto, Minister of International Development. Photo: Demo Finland.



OPERATIONAL STRUCTURES OF YOUTH POLICY



In 2012, the unemployment rate of youth under 20 years was 30 %, and among the age group 20–24 20 %. The unemployment is higher among the youth than in other age groups. The rather long and high education in Finland might be one of the explanations for these youth unemployment rates. Even in the service sector where part-time jobs are a common praxis, employees are often far and highly educated.

Structures of youth policy

Youth policy in Finland is steered

and developed in the Ministry of Education and Culture by means of legislation, studies and reviews, and by distributing budgetary and lottery funding to the benefit of youth. The processes and organisations involved in youth issues in Finland are mapped out above.⁸ The core aim of the youth policy in Finland is to improve the conditions in which young Finns live and grow. This is carried out by addressing three main themes stated in the youth policy: supporting young people's active citizenship, empowering young people social-

⁸ Original chart source: "Youth work and youth policy. Fact sheets - Youth" by the Finnish Ministry of Education. Retrieved from the UNESCO website; updated by Iiris Suomela on 31.1.2014. URL below: http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Youth/Finland/Finland_YOUTH_WORK_AND_YOUTH_POLICY.pdf

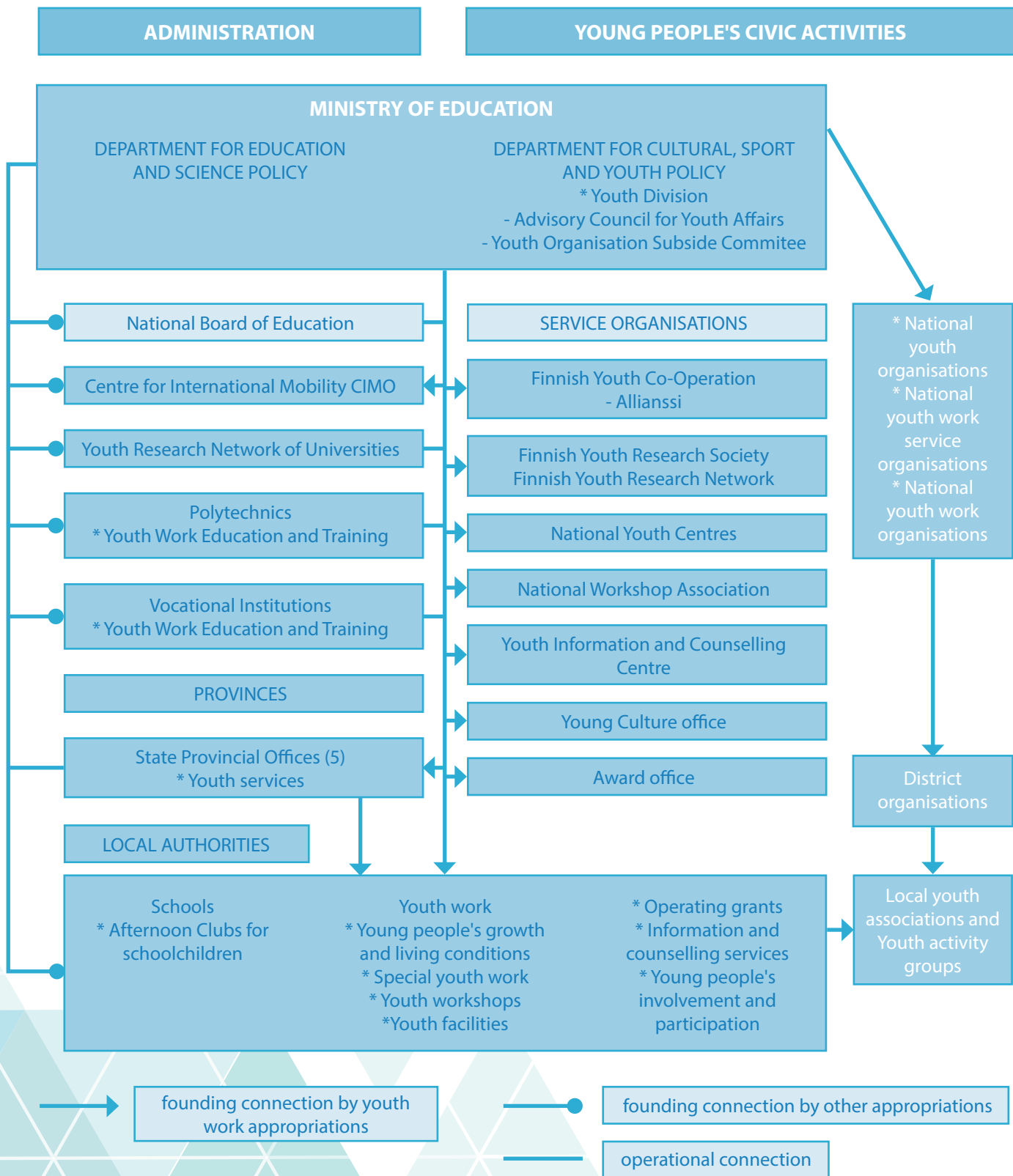
ly, and improving young people's living conditions.

Youth organizations and support to youth movements

The Finnish state institutions support active youth movements in Finland. The support from the government is often financial, but also political. The most influential youth organizations are the ones that are affiliated with the major political parties.

The Finnish state institutions are quite generous when it comes to youth movements. The government finds all forms of peaceful youth activism constructive and good for the youth and is therefore willing to support it. There are youth organizations that focus for example on religion, culture, education, sport, lifestyle or opinion. In

ORGANISATION OF YOUTH WORK



2013, the government supported different youth movements with over 11 million Euros. The biggest financial aid went to the Guides and Scouts of Finland that gathers around 60 000 members. In 2013, the Scouts received 1 270 000 € of financial aid from the government. Different political youth organisations in Finland also get financial support from the government. At the moment, nine parties are represented in the Finnish Parliament and eight of them have active youth organizations. The size of the financial support for these organizations depends on how active the organization is and how many members it has. This means that the party's size in the parliament doesn't affect the financial support the party's youth organization gets. Among the top ten youth organizations receiving financial aid from the government, there are four political youth organisations.

The support the different youth movements get is not only financial. Political parties may also show their support through endorse-

ment or by giving credence to specific issues that coincide with the agenda being driven by the organizations. Government institutions can also offer support by providing localities where the organizations can operate. Government institutions do not offer support to or condone movements that are violent or openly hostile. These sorts of movements are uncommon in Finland and there is no tradition of violent protests. However, it is possible to come together in support of everything that is in accordance with the law, since freedom of association exists and is respected. It gives citizens the possibility to build organizations without the control from the government. In the 1960s, there was a more radical period in Finland as in most of Western Europe. During this time period, social issues, civil rights and the future of democracy were a far greater concern to young people. This concern brought people together on the streets to voice their opinion. Nowadays politically oriented youth movements

are much smaller in size and they advocate their agendas within the major political parties.

There may be several reasons for why the Finnish youth has become less interested in politics and social phenomena. One is that people between ages 15–20 have grown up during an economic high. They come from upper to lower middle-class families and have fairly high standard of living. The overall consensus among young people is that everything is okay the way it is.

All in all, state institutions in Finland are interested in the youth movements and the government finds it important to preserve good relations with youth movements. By giving support to the different organizations involving young people, state institutions try to change the trend of youth becoming passive towards politics. The government wishes to encourage the active participation of young people in the society. However, this is more easily said than done.

Nepalese youth protesting against dowry. Photo: Demo Finland.



1.3 YOUTH IN NEPAL

Nepalese youth have actively engaged in political movements to change the country. The peaceful popular movement for republican Nepal, decade-long Maoist armed conflict, Madhesh movement and Tharuhat movement are examples of youth participation and engagement. As the youth strongly manifested their political potential and strength in the 2006 movement for republican state, the political power of youth was recognized by the political parties. In this context, the Interim Constitution of Nepal, in 2007 directed the State to pursue a special policy to mobilize the youth for the development of the country. The outcome of this reorganisation was the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

Youth in the population

The National Youth Policy defines youth as "women, men and third gender aged from 16 to 40 years". In contrast, United Nations defines youth as persons of 15 to 24 years. The Nepalese drafting committee that consisted of 23 members had 17 representatives from the youth wings of major political parties. However, most of them were above 30 years old themselves. The civil society didn't agree with the definition and submitted a note of dissent, but it was not approved.

According to the preliminary report of Census 2011, Nepal has a population of 26,6 million people who live in 5,66 million households. 51,44 % of the population are women. The population is growing at an annual rate of 1,4 %. In addition, there is a remarkable amount, almost 2 million Nepalese, living abroad. Of the people who live in Nepal, 83 % live in rural areas and the remaining 17 % live in urban areas. From a geographic point of view, 5,6 % of the population live in Himali (mountain) areas, 52 % live in hill areas and the

remaining 42,3 % live in the Terai (plain). In 2013, 32,6 % of the population was less than 14 years old, 22,6 % were between ages 15 and 24, 34,9 % between 25 and 54, and 5,5 % between 55 and 64. This relatively large percentage of young people ('demographic dividend') is seen as a great opportunity for the nation to take a leap forward in development, but unfortunately the unemployment rate in Nepal is more than 50 %.

Circumstances for youth

Hence, the major issue of priority for Nepalese youth is employment. Although the situation of youth is not very good, the urban youth culture is very modern and these days also youth from rural areas aspire to modernity. The state of health of young people is generally quite good, but the HIV/AIDS remains a threat because of an intense migration pattern. As far as education is concerned, government claims youth literacy rate to be 70,1 %. The rate of Nepalese students studying abroad is increasing due to difficulties to access quality education in Nepal. For example, Nepalese students are the 11th biggest group of foreign students studying in Australia.

Nepal used to be an agricultural country where more than 85 % of people lived of agriculture, but this is no longer the case any many Nepalese currently face unemployment. Daily, about 1500 youth enter into foreign labor markets because of the Nepalese state's inability to provide them with employment. In India, Nepalese Immigrant Association estimates the number of Nepalese as up to 3 million. As the number of Nepalese employees abroad is quite high, the amount of remittances to Nepal is also remarkable. Data until November 2008 shows that the amount was 215,3 million USD, which was provided mainly by the low skill work force in Arab countries. However, the working conditions of these employees are often poor, which has also been noted by international media. 726 Nepali migrant work-

ers have died in the East Asian and Gulf countries during the last year alone, which is also a challenge for global human right activists.

Reports also show that more than 70 % of Nepal's GDP is covered by international remittance which goes to people's daily use. The state doesn't have a policy for managing this money in a constructive and regenerating way. The issue of the migrant workers may also pose challenges as the workers return to Nepal with their acquired skills but don't necessarily have opportunities for employment that corresponds their skills and provides them with income.

Youth organisations and movements

Politics is a common topic in Nepal, and everyone can deliver a few minute speech over it. In every college there are political student organisations, and Nepal also has strong youth organizations affiliated with political parties. These organisations have nationwide influence, and membership in a political youth or student organization is quite common among Nepalese youth. Thus, these organisations have a remarkable number of members. There are three kinds of youth organisations active in Nepal; political, governmental and non-governmental. Although they have similar characteristics, student organisations are usually more influential than other youth organisations in Nepal. At the moment, there are more than twenty active political youth and student organisations on the national level and hundreds of youth associations, clubs and non-governmental youth organisations. However, the strength of youth and student politicians has not been utilised but it is rather restricted. Only few are challenging the old system and the benefits of youth's ideas for Nepal's development remain limited.

Non-governmental organisations that work with youth in Nepal include, for example, Youth Initiation (YI), Association of youth organi-

sations Nepal (AYON) and Youth NGOs Federation. Also, many foreign embassies in Nepal support youth.

During the last decades, Nepal has gone through remarkable and radical political changes. The role of youth in promoting change and making it happen has been important as they have actively engaged in political movements. However, youth have mostly been side-lined in decision-making and governance as they have been neglected in the development of new political institutions and practices in Nepal.

1.4 YOUTH IN SLOVENIA

The Act of Public Interest in the Youth Sector defines youth in Slovenia as young people and young adults of both genders aged between 15 and 29 years. At the end of 2012, 17,5 % of the Slovenian population consisted of youth (15–29 years). This percentage has been steadily decreasing since the year 2000.

In the national research of youth in 2010 ("Youth 2010", carried out by the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth (URSM) and Faculty

of Arts at the University of Maribor in 2010), the following findings were made:

- 1) The proportion of young people (15–24 years) involved in education increased right up to 2008, and in 2008 it was markedly higher than in the EU-27 average.
- 2) The proportion of students (full-time, part-time, without employment and those on hiatus) in the age group 19–24 years increased from 38,5 to 53,5 % from 2000 to 2010.
- 3) Since 2005, there is a marked trend of increase of fertility in the age group between 20 and 29 years, while among the youngest group, fertility has stagnated at a relatively low level.
- 4) The average age of mothers on the birth of their first child continues to grow, and in the period from 2000 to 2009 it rose from 26,5 to 28,5.

Also remarkable is a growing number of unemployed young people. In December 2013, 32 523 young people were without jobs.

Education and economic situation of young people

6,7 % of Slovenians only have primary education or less, while 66

% have a high school degree and 20,7 % a tertiary education degree. The proportion of young people in education determines the size of public funds earmarked for education. In 2009, Slovenia allocated 5,7 % of the GDP for education, which was slightly more than the European average (5,4 %). However, the share in Slovenia shrunk slightly since 2001 (5,9 %), while in the same period the share of the EU average slightly expanded (5,0 % in 2001).

The risk of poverty among young Slovenians is relatively low, which is explained mostly by the high average age of moving away from parents. In 2010, more than 60 % of 18–34-year-old Slovenians were living with at least one parent, while the European average amounted to slightly less than 50 %. Even when moving away from home, youth are often dependent on their parents.

Health and well-being

The health of young people in Slovenia is strongly linked to lifestyle, which emphasizes individualization. 90 % of young people between 15 and 29 years at least occasionally consume alcohol. At the same time, however, there is a decline in the proportion of ado-



lescents (15–16 years) who never drink alcohol (from 28,6 % in 1993 to 10,1 % in 2010).

Overweight, especially in rural areas, and lack of adequate physical activity are also among the causes of health problems for young people in Slovenia. The health of young people is one of the funding priority areas for the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth. At the local level, there are good examples of projects connecting youth organisations with health based organisations, contributing to the promotion among, and training of, young people on healthy lifestyles. At the national level, the issue of alcohol abuse, tobacco and other drugs is addressed in the Resolution on the National Health Care Plan for 2008–2013 and the Programme for Children and Youth 2006–2016.

Youth policies and structures

According to the Youth Act, adopted in 2010, the administrative body responsible for youth on the national level is the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth, which currently sits within the Youth Department in the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport. Among the responsibilities of the Office are preparing regulations and measures in the youth

sector, providing financial support to youth programmes and monitoring the situation of youth and the impact of the measures in the youth sector.

A National Programme for Youth was accepted in November 2013. It signals a policy commitment to supporting young people and includes specific reference to youth work in a chapter defining the priorities and measures that underpin the youth sector. The National Programme for Youth contains details of the programmes, financial plan with costs and sources, the providers, the expected development impact, impact assessment indicators, and the period and the time limits of implementing this programme. It is expected that the Government shall adopt the plans in accordance with the adopted national budget.

The level of national political commitment to youth work ranges from low to medium. Some argue that youth work is still “hidden” within formal education and is not transparently presented, nor properly addressed within the political discourse. For example, while there exists the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth under the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, its role is perceived as

weak. This is now changing and the Office for Youth will be moved under the Office of the Prime minister.

Up until 1991, Slovenia was part of Yugoslavia and within this context there was a relatively strong youth movement, which helped form the basis later on for the development of youth work. A formal approach to youth policy began in 1990 with the establishment of the National Youth Council, which was followed by a rapid development of local level youth work. With the declaration of independence in 1991, Slovenia also began to have access to European Union policy frameworks for the first time.

From 1999 and with the lead of the Slovenian National Agency MOVIT NA MLADINA, Slovenia has participated in a number of EU programmes for young people (such as the Youth in Action Programme). The EU framework has been one of the key drivers for supporting and developing youth work in Slovenia. Also, the EU White Paper on Youth published in 2001 created crucial incentives for the introduction of a national youth programme in Slovenia. In 2005, the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth published their first Strategy for Support and Development of Youth Work for the period 2005–2010. The strategy focused on different measures, and the overall aims were to develop youth actors at local and national levels, to introduce national legislation and to recognise youth work more generally.

Overall, and in more recent years, there has been a growth in the funding and support of publicly funded local government-led youth centres. For example, in 2012 and in response to growing unemployment among young people, the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs, through the National Employment Office, provided special support measures targeted towards the employment of young people that



are under 30 years old.

In this sense, it is possible to see that there has been a continued commitment to develop youth work both nationally and by the local municipalities. Nevertheless, due to the financial crisis and cuts in the national budget, there was a decrease in 2012 of 10 % in the annual budget (from 1.466.000,00 EUR to 1.280.000,00 EUR) for the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth in terms of co-financing youth work.

All other organisations active in the youth sector that are not publicly funded, including national youth organisations, NGO-run youth centres, other youth NGOs, and youth councils can be defined as organisations implementing 'non-formal' youth work.

There are examples of good practices in relation to young people's participation within decision-making processes at the local level as developed by some local municipalities. For example:

- The Commission for Youth at municipality level which is appointed by the mayor as his consultative body on youth issues. It consists of young representatives and those from the local community
- The Board of the Local Community Council for Youth which is a forum that brings together citizens to discuss municipality level youth issues as regulated by law

In spite of the support for youth sector, there are some issues where youth are still not supported fully. On the field of employment, adequate measures have not been taken to facilitate young people's employment, and as far as housing is concerned, youth often have difficulties to find apartments due to high rents and low income.

Youth organizations in Slovenia

The National Youth Council of Slovenia (MSS) is an umbrella organisation uniting all national youth

organisations irrespective of their various interests or ideological and political orientations. MSS, founded in 1990, has contributed to co-operation among youth organisations at the national, local and international levels. Since 2001, MSS has been registered on the basis of the Youth Councils Act, which regulates its status, operation, activities and financing and imposes on the Government, ministries and other state authorities the requirement to inform MSS about the drafting of laws and regulations that have an immediate impact on the life and work of young people.

Youth Network MaMa brings together and represents organisations that run youth centers or are active in the field of youth work in Slovenia in order to support the youth, their spending of quality free time and a better life in the society. MaMa represents the common interests of its members but also organises events and meetings and offers support and training for youth and youth workers. It also encourages cooperation and creative activities of MaMa club members and young artists, promoting the principles of tolerance, good cooperation and social awareness.

Youth councils of local communities unite youth organisations in the local community and represent them in relation to local authorities and all other institutions. They organise trainings and other joint events for youth and youth organisations, especially if individual organisations couldn't finance it on their own. By participating in youth council of local community the youth leaders learn democracy, participation and how to find common ground for young people and how to represent their opinions.

Youth councils in particular serve to unite youth organisations in a given locality with a requirement that at least 90 percent of members are up to 29 years old and that 70 percent of members in the management are between 15

and 29 years. In turn, youth centres are more like organised functional centres provided within local communities. In recent years, there has been a rise in the number of youth centres and a corresponding decline in youth councils. In 2012, the number of active youth councils in Slovenia was just 18, compared with 45 in 2000. The number of established youth centres, however, in 2012 was 54.

The National Youth Organisation is a voluntary organisation whose members and leadership are mostly between ages 14 and 29. It is organised and operates on the national level and has a large number of members that are organised in local units. Its purpose is to represent and develop young people's interests, to implement youth work in accordance with the statutes of the organisation and to encourage young people to integrate and participate in the society.

All these movements are mainly non-political, and in general young Slovenians show little interest in participating in formal politics although these organisations work closely with, for example, advocacy of youth issues in politics.

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2 GOOD PRACTICES FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION FROM THE FOUR COUNTRIES

This section introduces good practices from Bangladesh, Finland, Nepal and Slovenia. These are real and practical examples on how youth cooperation and participation is supported and promoted in the four countries. All of these practices include some country-specific features, but they are adaptable to other contexts, too.

2.1 BANGLADESH

2.1.1 Young human rights defenders

Since the independence of Bangladesh, many youth in the country have remained politically active through political movements. Young men and women are traditionally active politically in universities, but are very often disappointed with political leadership

and political institutions and are excluded from policy development. As a result, political activism of youth is not organised according to formal groups. Political parties in Bangladesh have their youth and student wings, which fail to attract many young people due to the lack of innovative programmes. Those who wish to be involved in the human rights movement find no space to air their views in such forums; and such political party affiliation is, unfortunately, bereft with violent and confrontational politics, constant rivalry and domination and obeying political party mandates. This is definitely not an atmosphere conducive to human rights activism.

After the downfall of the autocratic regime of Lt. General Husain Mohammad Ershad, a group of human rights activists initiated discussions regarding the need to uphold the civil and political rights of the people of Bangladesh along with social, cultural and economic rights. Eventually, a decision was made to form an organisation in order to advance such rights. In October 10, 1994, Odhikar was established with the aim to create a wider monitoring and awareness raising system on the abuse of civil and political rights. Several of

the founding members of Odhikar were youth or had taken part in socio-political movements in the past to bring changes in the society. Since 2005, Odhikar has trained over 400 local level human rights defenders (HRD), of which almost 80 percent have been youth.

In Bangladesh today, it is still the youth that voice the first protest against any form of injustice. More often than not, the loudest voices come from colleges and universities. However, most of the injustice is related to politics. Odhikar has found that among the youth there is a will to focus on the defence of human rights – but what is missing is a strong foundation and framework that would protect and support such activities.

Odhikar has a vast network of young human rights defenders. The human rights defenders of Odhikar have different backgrounds, and among them are for example lawyers, journalists, cultural activists and teachers. They work with the different issues of human rights like violence against women, extrajudicial killing, enforced disappearances, border killing and torture. In these issues, young HRDs' are involved with activities like fact-finding, documen-





Human rights defenders on the International Day of the Disappeared

tation, advocacy and urgent appeal. The tasks are very risky as the local political power often threatens them in their activities. The young human rights defenders face a huge threat from the government and live under constant risk of arrest and detention. However, the youth continue their voluntary activities, armed with their knowledge of what entails human rights, and due to their dedication to the defence of human rights.

From its establishment, Odhikar has been trying to mobilise youth to bring social changes and it has successfully engaged youth in human rights activism. Young human rights defenders have, in many cases, become pro-active in the defence of human rights. They were encouraged to stand beside victims and protest against human rights violations. Youth utilise two predominant forms of public demonstration, namely, procession and rallies or blockade. Odhikar also created a network of 'victim families' with the help of its human rights defenders, which is mainly involved in mobilisation of the families of the disappeared, of extrajudicial execution and custodial torture. Furthermore, mass mobilisation can be used in order to ensure human rights and to secure social justice. Youth leadership and social networking play a vital role in organising these protests.

2.1.2 Combating violence against women

One of the focus areas of Odhikar's work is combating violence against women, which is in the core expertise of the organisation. This programme is research-based. Odhikar is very vocal on the issues of violence against women. It also has 80 young women human rights defenders in four districts. The women human rights defenders are working strongly in violence against women issues, and all of them have been to trainings on human rights issues. Their main task is to conduct fact-finding missions, documentation, organise rallies and advocacies. However, their work is not without risk. For example, one of the women human rights defenders lost her job because she had been protecting a young victim of rape. In total, 400 human rights defenders all over Bangladesh work on the issue of violence against women.

2.1.3 Uthan Boithak

In addition to attending workshops, trainings and discussions organised by human rights organisations, an easier and more informal way to get the message through is by organising 'Uthan Boithak' (courtyard meeting). Such meetings are popular in the rural areas and usually or-

ganised by youth for instant mobilisation of plans and activities; and for sensitisation of women who are either victims of abuse or who want to volunteer as human rights defenders. Courtyard meetings are an innovative way of organising women's groups too. Uthan Boithaks are also called to discuss issues of violence against women. This kind of local level practices promotes potential victims' self-confidence to face situation related to social exploitation and abuse.

2.2 FINLAND

2.2.1 Cross-party youth cooperation for development and democracy

As a cooperative organisation of the Finnish parliamentary parties, Demo Finland has eight member parties. The youth and student organisations of all these parties have representatives in Demo Finland's youth working group, which is a non-formal group that brings together youth politicians from different political backgrounds and supports the work of Demo Finland on youth participation.

The political participation of youth is one of the focus areas of Demo



Representatives of political youth organisations participated in a training programme on global issues, organised by Demo Finland and UNDP. Photo: Demo Finland.

Finland, whose main objective is to strengthen pluralistic and representative democracy. As youth are often under-represented in politics, strengthening their voice in decision making and enhancing their capacities for meaningful political participation has been an integral part of Demo Finland's activities.

To support this work, Demo Finland uses the expertise and experiences of Finnish youth politicians and political youth organisations, represented by the youth working group. The idea is that youth are the best experts of issues concerning youth participation. The working group comes together seven or eight times a year, and its role is to comment on and participate in the planning of Demo Finland's programmes and activities. For example, when Demo Finland has produced toolkits for youth in its projects, the working group has commented on the draft and also contributed to the content by sharing good practices from youth participation in Finland.

For the working group, another important and concrete way of engaging is planning contents for the study visits of international youth delegations that come to

Finland. Demo Finland builds the programmes of these visits together with the working group, and the political youth and student organisations also participate in the programme by organising events for delegations or by participating in the non-formal experience sharing with the guests. These non-formal meetings are a chance for mutual learning and often highlight that youth face similar challenges regardless of their home country.

As Demo Finland also organises trainings, seminars and study visits for Finnish youth politicians, these youth have an opportunity to deepen their knowledge on development issues and to get first-hand experiences of democracy support in Demo Finland's partner countries. The participants of these visits and trainings are from different political parties, which strengthens the cross-party cooperation of youth as the participants can learn together and from each other. The study visits have often been an opportunity for the participants to get to know each other's organisations and views more thoroughly than other ways of cooperation, which has been highly appreciated by the youth.

The participation of youth from all

Demo Finland's member parties offers Demo Finland a wide range of ideas, experiences and good practices to be used in its work. For Demo Finland, this is a valuable resource that gives added value and brings the expertise of Finnish political youth organisations in international development and democracy support in a concrete way. Although the participating youth and student organisations have very different agendas, they cooperate for mutual goals in Demo Finland's youth working group, at the same time developing their understanding on each other's different viewpoints.

All in all, this is a form of cooperation that contributes to international development cooperation, facilitates cross-party dialogue and strengthens the capacities and knowledge of the Finnish youth politicians. In addition, it also offers the youth unforgettable experiences and new networks.

2.2.2 The network of young Finnish parliamentarians

In the 2011 Finnish general elections 10 out of 200 elected MPs

were born in the eighties and 25 out of 200 were under the age of 35. Of these three became ministers in the new Government. The youngest MP elected was born in 1986. Young parliamentarians are not a new phenomenon - some of Finland's most prominent and longest serving MPs were elected at a young age, such as Mr Ben Zyskowitz at the age of 25 and Mr Ilkka Kanerva at the age of 27. In this regard it is accurate to say that some of the young MPs may become future leaders of Finland.

Early on, the young parliamentarians established an unofficial network for those born in the eighties, and organised regular events to share ideas and thoughts on how to jointly bring added value into Finnish politics, as young people.

In a globalised world, international networking has become all the more important. International events and crises have an impact on national politics and states are increasingly learning from each other's best practices in order to improve themselves. It has become evident that national politics is no longer possible without international exchange as new ideas to improve democracy and boost growth can stem from anywhere around the world. This requires new approaches also from politicians, and bilateral and multilateral exchanges have increased in all national parliaments.

During an official international visit in 2012 the Speaker of the Parliament of Finland first put forward the idea of including young parliamentarians in international exchange. Through large networks early on during their political careers they could establish long-standing international friendships and partnerships with counterparts around the world. The idea of creating a Network of Young Parliamentarians in the Parliament of Finland was born and the Network was founded in February 2013 electing Mr Heikki Autto MP (cons) as its first chairperson. In 2014, Ms

Aino-Kaisa Pekonen MP (left) took over as chair. The Network includes all Finnish MPs that were 35 or less during the election year.

The main task of the network is to establish parliamentary contacts with young parliamentarians from other countries, with a special focus on larger countries and important partners such as China, India, Russia and the United States. This requires an understanding of world politics, foreign cultural traditions and frequent exchanges. Another important aim was to include young parliamentarians in delegations receiving important international visitors to Finland. Top Finnish politicians have also mentioned the Network during international meetings and events, which has resulted in the establishment of a similar Network within the Russian Duma in 2013.

As a result, the first meeting between the two networks and young MPs from the Duma was organised in Finland in November 2013. The exchange of views proved very fruitful and it was found out that similar issues are being debated in both Parliaments. This led to a call for strengthened cooperation to discuss ways to tackle problems and find sustainable solutions. At the same time it was decided that regular meetings should take place between young MPs of both parliaments in order to establish long-term ties. The year 2013 also included a high-level visit from China and the Network's young chairman Mr Autto co-hosted their visit to Northern Finland. The rate of young people in China's decision-making structures is rather low but the leadership is taking action to improve this.

Another important event took place at the end of the year when the Network hosted an event for young decision-makers from Tunisia. The country is undergoing a major democratisation process as a result of the Yasmin revolution and the young participants were eager to learn more about Finnish

experiences of building a democratic and egalitarian state and especially to hear the young MPs views on elections and possibilities to wield influence.

Already during its short existence the Network of Young Parliamentarians has come a long way in establishing its role as a forum for promoting better understanding of foreign policy and cultures and engaging in various forms of international exchange. The young generation is the future of all countries and this kind of activity should therefore be encouraged at all levels of society.

2.2.3 Youth cooperation in the field of education

The National Union of University Students in Finland (SYL) was founded in 1921. It is nationally and internationally recognized as a professional, responsible and dependable stakeholder in all matters. Local student unions enjoy the same position within the local university. SYL is a member of the European Students' Union, which does not only represent Finnish students but students from the 38 countries where ESU has members. Through this umbrella organisation SYL works actively improving advocacy work in the European level as well.

National Union of University Students in Finland has 15 member unions in all universities of Finland. All Finnish student unions play an active role in their local areas and their members consist of all the students of their home university. Due to this, SYL, the national union has around 135 000 members and that's why it represents 100 % of the university students in Finland. Finland has also universities of applied sciences, whose national union, SAMOK takes a stance on matters affecting students at universities of applied sciences and informs stakeholders about these views. SAMOK consists of



Advocacy work in Brussels with the European Students' Union. Photo: SYL.

student unions that have approximately 59 000 members. However, SAMOK speaks for close to 140 000 UAS students all in all.

SYL and SAMOK represent students in various national committees and working groups, speak out and make statements in various student related issues and influences and co-operates with political decision-makers, civil servants and organisations. SYL's advocacy work is carried out mainly in the fields of social policy, educational policy, and international affairs. Also, one of the sectors SYL is active on is development co-operation.

Social politics impact students' working ability. The social politics section in SYL takes care of health-care, welfare issues, financial support like student grants and loans, housing and equality of students. In its statement, SYL demands that the Government stops pressuring students through cuts in student financial aid, and instead focuses on genuinely expediting graduation by increasing the level of students' livelihood. Social politics section also takes care of the Finnish Student Health Service (FSHS).

FSHS provides general, mental and dental health care services for students of universities and other institutions of higher education.

You can use FSHS's general, mental and dental health services if you are studying for a Bachelor's or Master's degree at a university or other institution of higher education and you have paid your student union membership fee to a student union that is affiliated to the FSHS. FSHS was founded by SYL in 1954 in its original purpose to take care of consumption controls, and later on to get good student health services for university students. Students administer FSHS and take part in its decision-making. Students also finance 20% of its budget, the rest comes from public funding. Student unions pay a health care fee to the FSHS for each of their members, similar to an insurance contribution.

The educational politics section takes care for example of the quality of teaching, general structures of the educational system, state's funding system to universities and student representation in university administration. It also takes care of the international educational politics, like for example the very important Bologna process.

In educational politics SYL has a very interesting project called University of the Future, which visualizes the ideal university. A change of attitude is required in order for the University of the Future to become a reality. We are living in a time where every day brings

along new technological innovations – the kind of technologies that give us unforeseen opportunities to collectively work and communicate from one side of the globe to the other. For example in the University of the Future, exams in their current form are rather rare. Instead of traditional examinations, future students will use existing and new technological methods to produce reports, papers, presentations and learning diaries, and to reflect over their individual learning or the learning of their peers. Education needs to be improved all the time because the working life is also changing. The learning objectives are defined and evaluated in collaboration between students and teachers, as everyone's mutual objective is to learn with and from each other.

Another example of educational politics is students' participation to the pension negotiations. Lately the independent student and youth organisations together with SYL and SAMOK negotiated suggestions for pension reform from the perspective of youth. These are guidelines the young want to give the actual pension negotiators for the negotiations where reforms on work pension system will be decided upon.

The international affairs section concentrates on EU lobbying and international relations between organisations alongside European Students' Union membership and Nordic student cooperation. The international affairs sections also takes care of mobility and immigration issues, international dimension of social and educational politics and student representation (student democracy) and interest work in Europe.

The European elections 2014 are over and now it is time for student unions to establish contacts with the elected MEPs. In a joint campaign, SYL, SAMOK and local student unions called for a more open Europe. The campaign, Listen EU! was visible also on social media. Just before the EU elections,

SYL and SAMOK issued a statement calling for more transparency in Parliament's decision making and for improved access to information.

SYL's board and staff work persistently and proactively for the benefit of students' wellbeing, livelihood, and higher education. This is done by means of statements and declarations, as well as participating in and arranging seminars and committees. To make sure the voices of students are heard, SYL provides training events for the board members of the student unions. This supports the unions in their advocacy work at local level. SYL is also an active player raising students' awareness to global responsibility questions. SYL coordinates development co-operation projects which focus on education, for example in Guatemala and Mongolia.

Each sector organises meetings, seminars and education for representatives of member unions and constantly share current information on topical issues on web-pages and e-mail lists. The highest decision-making body of SYL is the General Assembly (convenes once a year) which chooses the executive board, which then selects the secretariat/officers. The executive board works full time at the office. Executive board has President and six members. In the organisation there are also officers like secretary general, administrative manager, six officers and part-time coordinator for development co-operation. SYL cooperates with other student and youth organisations, party political organisation, labour market organisations, and ministries. The most important partner in the state administration is the Ministry of Education and Culture. SYL also works closely with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Other important cooperation partners include the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC), the Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities (UNIFI), the Social Insurance Institution of Finland

(Kela), and the Finnish Student Health Service (FSHS, in Finnish YTHS).

2.3 NEPAL

2.3.1 JYSP – Political youth and students together in peaceful dialogue and co-operation

Demo Finland's youth programme in Nepal started soon after the 10-year internal conflict in Nepal had ended. The cooperation model where the youth and student wings of the political parties are brought together has been found to be a sustainable way to build up a culture of dialogue and cooperation among future leaders and to support multi-party cooperation and more inclusive and accountable politics. The relations between the youth and student organisations of different parties were very bad directly after the conflict, but today they cooperate and can even solve local conflicts of their members together at the central level.

Demo Finland supports the **Joint Youth and Students' Platform (JYSP)**, which today brings together 20 major political youth and student organisations from different ideological backgrounds. The forum offers a neutral space for effective cross-party cooperation, thereby enabling good relations between youth of different parties and increasing their ability to influence political decision-making together. Besides engaging the organisational leadership it also organises district-level programmes across the country, giving emphasis to building the capacity of youth and student politicians in less developed and more conflict-affected areas of Nepal. The Joint Youth and Students' Platform has become a major forum for politics and a channel of young people's voice in Nepal. During its

seven years of existence the JYSP and Demo Finland have organised more than 100 events for more than 10000 young participants in different parts of Nepal.

The platform has had meetings on a regular basis to discuss the different activities. The chairpersons' meeting decides the topics and other general outlines of the cooperation twice a year. In the present model, the trainings have been organised in thematic series. Central-level facilitators from each organisation take part in trainings on a topic and will then travel in small groups to the selected districts to coordinate trainings for the local youth politicians from all organisations in the platform. External consultants or NGOs have been assigned as trainers. The topics have varied from important sources of youth employment, such as agriculture and tourism to education, and in 2014 anti-corruption. Also arts in the form of forum theatre and painting murals together have been used to raise and process difficult topics, such as dowry practice or electoral violence.

Gradually the cooperation has moved from central level to work more with youth and students in the districts, across the country. The process has been slow but sustainable. Working in the districts has also provided a meaningful role for the central-level youth participants, as they can facilitate the trainings as representatives of the platform and connect their organisations' leadership to the local-level youth leaders. Now several members of the JYSP organisations have been elected in Nepal's Constitutional Assembly, which also acts as the parliament. This will provide new opportunities for making influential cooperation among youth across party lines.

After seven years of peaceful dialogue, the first and foremost objective of the cooperation, peaceful and constructive relations between the youth leaders, has to a large part been reached and the

platform is moving towards stronger advocacy for goals shared by all youth and students. The youth chose to take anti-corruption as the topic for the cooperation in 2014. The goal is to raise popular support for anti-corruption measures in Nepal and to prove to the public that political youth and students are successfully working against corruption. Already we have seen great enthusiasm taking place in the trainings and campaigning concerning this topic.

Thanks to its composition by Finnish political parties, Demo Finland is sometimes referred to as the only organisation the Nepalese youth and student organisations trust as a neutral actor, not pursuing its own hidden agendas in the cooperation. They have repeatedly expressed their gratitude for Demo Finland for helping them to cooperate and even to become friends with each other, despite their different political backgrounds.

2.3.2 Youth preventing electoral violence

Demo Finland and the Joint Youth and Students' Platform joined hands with UNDP and organised a series of Cultural Peace Festivals

before the second Constitutional Assembly election in November 2013. Youth and students are usually both the perpetrators and the victims of political violence in Nepal. To reduce tension in five sensitive districts in the Terai plains, training was first given to altogether 100 Promoters for Peace, who then with the help of Demo Finland organised two-day Cultural Peace Festivals in their districts. The Festival consisted of a participatory forum theatre and a peace mural painting where youth worked together with renowned artists.

More than 2000 people participated in the events in different ways. Anti-violence statements were given to the public on the street, as well as to local media. In addition, UNDP arranged a campaign in the national media, which deployed the well-known chairpersons of the JYSP member organisations to speak for peace in the elections. The short campaign worked well. The positive and constructive way of working together attracted a lot of media attention both locally and nationally. The forum theatre method made everyone present participate in thinking about solutions to the problem of political youth being pressured to use violence in the election campaign. This viewpoint does not come out

in the media, which usually only reports acts of violence as they occur.

Each of the peace murals painted together by members of various political parties' youth and students stayed in their places and have been seen by thousands and thousands of people. The painting was a joint experience of constructive cooperation with people from rivaling parties, for many the first one.

The election turned out to be the most peaceful one in Nepal in recent history. In their assessment of the project, the youth and student leaders found it very beneficial for a peaceful election environment and also for the Joint Youth and Students' Platform.

2.3.3 Mobilizing Nepalese youth for gender equality in politics

As part of their objectives the Joint Youth and Students' Platform and Demo Finland have organized more than a hundred different trainings throughout Nepal during the past seven years. In 2013 Demo Finland and the JYSP launched an EU-funded project Mobilizing Youth for Gender Equality in Politics. The main objective of

A colourful mural was produced in the campaign against electoral violence. Photo: Demo Finland.



the project is to give practical tools and enhance the political competence of local level young women to gain more influence in politics both at local and at national level. The need and necessity to enhance gender equality in politics in Nepal was obvious. Nepalese women's involvement in politics has been nominal throughout the past decades. Women are subjected to work in a patrimonial model of society enshrined with inequality. Therefore the full potential of the society cannot be reached, since women are obliged to stay committed to the home and family life only, instead of being active members of their society.



Young women participating in a training on political participation. Photo: Maria Santto.

All the activities of the project have been designed mainly by local experts keeping in mind the specific needs of the target group of the project, young Nepalese women. The main activity has been gender equality trainings that have been conducted in various districts at local level throughout the country by local professional female trainers.

The trainers have used a participatory teaching method which has been highly valued and appreciated by the participants themselves. The trainings have given young women practical tools and new political skills to challenge the ongoing obstacles on the way of full realization of their fundamental political rights.

The same type of cooperation could easily be used in other countries as well. However, when deciding what kind of action is needed at least the following factors must be closely reflected. Firstly, the request for help and support should come from the local actors. The close-knit collaboration with local actors when planning and implementing various activities of each project or training in question is utterly important. In other words, it is imperative to keep the ownership of the project as close to the local level as possible. In Nepal, young female participants have appreciated tremendously the fact that

the trainings were planned and implemented by the local female professionals offering participants a perfect role model and a much needed source of inspiration.

Secondly, every country has its specific needs for development and its own unique societal, cultural and political environment. Therefore the means of intervention, that development cooperation and other forms of international cooperation undoubtedly are, must be in line with the local wider framework. This aspect was in fact closely analysed when deciding the focus of the project in Nepal.

The actual needs of the target group reflected through the national framework and the close collaboration with local actors have indeed been the key factors of success in Nepal. Keeping in mind the specific environment each country reflects there is no doubt that this could not be achieved in other countries as well.

2.4 SLOVENIA

2.4.1 Youth Network MaMa

Youth Network MaMa combines and represents organisations that run youth centres or are active in

the field of youth work in Slovenia in order to support the youth, their spending of quality free time and a better life in the society. It has a long history of active youth work on local, national and international level. MaMa cooperates on different activities such as structural dialogue, together at work, interesting educational projects and different international co-operations.

What does MaMa do? With its operation the MaMa Network:

- Connects organisations performing their activities of youth centres or operating in the field of youth work in Slovenia;
- Represents common interests of members against government sector and other persons;
- Regularly informs members and other interested public on all activities concerning youth and work with them;
- Organises meetings and encourages communication and project interaction between members
- Offers professional help to members;
- Ensures interaction between members of the MaMa club and young artists;
- Enables young artists to access youth scene and supports their cooperation;
- Provides non-formal education for youth and youth workers;

- With its operation the MaMa Network encourages and promotes creative activities of youth among the MaMa Club members and general public, and enforces principles of tolerance, good cooperation and social criticism as well.

With its activities the Youth Network MaMa stimulates and promotes creative activities of the youth and emphasises the principles of tolerance, cooperation and at the same time social awareness among the Club MaMa.

2.4.2 Structured dialogue

The National Youth Council of Slovenia (MSS) – the umbrella organisation of youth organisations and Youth Network MaMa - network of youth centres in Slovenia strive to create an environment that enables young people to develop into autonomous and responsible adults. The active participation of young people in decision-making and activities at the local level is crucial if we are to build a more democratic and inclusive society. The essence of inclusion and active citizenship is to provide young people with the opportunity, space and support for participating and influencing the decisions and being included in actions and activities that contribute to the quality of life in local communities and in the society as a whole.

Structured dialogue is an instrument that gives young people – through participation in civil society and in the system of representative democracy – the opportunity to directly participate in the dialogue with those responsible for youth policy, and through that, the possibility to develop local and national youth policy, which encourages active citizenship and fosters a mutual understanding between young people from all over Slovenia. Structured dialogue is a process of youth participation in the formulation of youth policy

measures at the local, regional, national and European level.

The essence of structured dialogue in the area of youth is its emphasized vertical dimension. We wish to enable young people to become more included in decision-making processes and to give them the opportunity to express their views and thereby develop measures to support policy decisions with which they can later more easily identify and find them legitimate. At the same time, through consultations with young people, we identify their real needs in different environments. Through a structured approach to developing solutions to the issues that concern young people, we strengthen constructive communication between young people and the wider public, especially with decision-makers.

Structured dialogue is an initiative of the European Union, resulting from the resolution for the implementation of structured dialogue (1,2). At the European level, the process is structured in terms of time (each cycle lasts 18 months and is divided into 6-month phases) and thematically (each cycle deals with a central theme, from which three sub-themes originate).

By bringing together key actors in the youth field, we strive for the implementation of proposals made by young people. We are aware that this is a long-term process, where the effects are not immediately visible. Nevertheless, the numerous, increasingly positive effects give us motivation for further work.

For the fourth consecutive year, MSS and MaMa are implementing a national structured dialogue project for young people, youth organisations, and other organisations working with young people, youth councils of local communities and local and national authorities, with a view to achieving common objectives for better social in-

clusion of young people, focusing on their employability and awareness of acquired competencies. We are organising two-day consultations with local young people and decision-makers across Slovenia, offering a quality learning experience and support in identifying informally acquired experience and expertise to local youth. The structured dialogue process in these consultations is conducted and led by qualified MSS coaches. The programme makes use of methods which are used in youth work and non-formal environmental education. These participatory and active methods allow for greater flexibility, attractiveness, opportunity to participate, as well as a more equal participation of all participants.

Within the 2011–2012 Youth Dialogue project we conducted 12 regional events, included over 668 active participants and informed over 20,000 people about the project. At regional events, six MEPs, 6 National Assembly members, representatives of 33 municipalities, and 28 representatives of the Employment Service of Slovenia participated in the dialogue with youth.

In 2012–2013, we carried out the Youth on the Environment project, during which we implemented 12 local structured dialogue meetings. More than 230 youth participants actively participated in the process of structured dialogue. The project also involved MEPs, mayors, deputy mayors, councillors, officials in the field of social activities, directors of municipal administrations, heads of the Slovenia Forest Service departments, museum directors etc.

In 2013, on the basis of our experience and established partnerships, we set up two new structured dialogue projects: Youth Dialogue 2.0: We Include! and Youth Dialogue 2.1: Activate! aimed at improving the social inclusion of young people with an emphasis on their employability and awareness of

acquired competences. Both projects began in 2013 and will be completed in 2014.

In addition to local consultations, the youth are invited to prepare submissions on the issue of youth for each phase of structured dialogue. MSS and MaMa are obtaining the views of young people through online questionnaires in which all young people, national youth organisations, other organisations and experts in the field of youth have the opportunity to participate. Based on the collected responses, MSS will prepare a national report with proposals for improving the situation of young people. All EU member states send national reports to the European Steering Committee for Structured Dialogue, which then summarizes the suggestions of European youth and prepares a baseline document for the discussion between young people and decision-makers at the European level. The discussion takes place within the European Youth Conference, organised by the chairing member state, and which includes representatives of young people and representatives from relevant ministries from all EU countries.

The project's concrete result is the campaign and financial support for Youth Guarantee, a mechanism which offers financial and political support for the regulation of this issue in the EU countries with the highest youth unemployment rate.

2.4.3 Pekarna Magdalenske mreže

Pekarna Magdalenske mreže (PMM) is a non-governmental, non-profit institution, founded in 1997 as an organisation for encouraging and supporting programme and project cooperation among individuals and groups conducting artistic, cultural, educational, research, ecological, informative and humanitarian activities as well

as for granting assistance in solving their short or long-term residential needs for creative spaces. Our organisation is one of the leading cultural producers in the complex of Cultural Centre Pekarna, as well as in the city of Maribor, with focus on independent, 'alternative', under-represented forms of art, culture and youth programmes.

All of PMM's programmes are declared "Programmes in Public Interest" by the Municipality of Maribor and Slovene Ministry of Culture. Pekarna Magdalenske mreže and its Youth Centre provide the public with more than 250 events in the domains of culture and youth per year. PMM is a member of CN-VOS (Centre of Non-Governmental Organisations of Slovenia), Trans Europe Halles (European network of independent cultural centres), a regional partner of Clubture (a non-profit participatory network that connects independent cultural organisations from Croatia and their regional partners) and member and supporter of many other relevant national and international networks in the field of Culture and Youth. Programme-wise our organisation works in three main areas: independent culture, youth and volunteer work.

Our cultural programme includes organisation, co-organisation, promotion and realisation of non-profit cultural events, mainly from the fields of visual arts, films, photography and theatre, which find it harder to gain recognition within the established environment and are actually shaping the distinct programme image of the Cultural Centre Pekarna, paying special attention to the idea and message behind them. We are also the home of Aunt Rosa Library (named after Rosa Luxemburg), library with radical and critically engaged literature.

Within the institution, the Youth Informative-Counselling Centre INFOPEKA is active in providing the public with youth programmes. Its basic activity is providing free

information, counselling and non-formal education programmes for the young, aged between 15 and 29 (children, students, employed and unemployed young people) and for all who live and work with them and to the interested public (teachers, parents, counsellors, youth-workers ...), with the focus on volunteer and community work. An important part of our programme are also Critical Literacy workshops for high school students and youth workers. Critical literacy being a concept that provides literacy with ethical and political dimensions. We are also a part of the Maribor initiative *Odločaj o mestu* (www.odlocajomestu.si) that tries to introduce participatory budget to the municipality of Maribor.

In the field of volunteer work, INFOPEKA is the local coordinator of the network "Volunteer Work in Maribor", a network of 61 organisations from Maribor, which provide organised volunteer programmes. We have been organising volunteer programmes for young volunteers for fourteen years now. The programmes which our volunteers are working on are providing free instructions for pupils, weekly educational and creative workshops for children with fewer opportunities, different informational initiatives, creative writing sessions for elementary school pupils, in the form of active citizenship youth projects/initiatives and different prevention workshops for school children.

We also provide technical, organisational and service support to interested producers of programmes and projects, not only to regular active users of the premises, but also to other interested users with their own programme schemes and to a variable number of external organisers of cultural, educational activist and other events.

We have been an EVS hosting and sending organisation from 2004 onward and have since hosted 27 and sent abroad 18 volunteers.

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