



'Young Future Makers of North Savo' project

The project 'Nuoret pohjoissavolaiset tulevaisuudentekijät' (Young Future Makers of North Savo) was aimed at determining how the region's 15-25-year-old youths feel about North Savo and the region's future and development. Another aim of the project was to promote young people's opportunities to participate and make a difference and support the enhancement of North Savo's appeal to improve the region's ability to meet the needs and expectations of young people in the future as well. The project was carried out between 16 March 2020 and 31 August 2022, and it was funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and the North Savo Development Fund.

In the course of the project, the needs and hopes of young people concerning the region's development were charted extensively with interviews and a survey targeted at them, among other methods. Additionally, professionals working with young persons were interviewed about supporting the well-being of youths. The region's businesses were also heard regarding provision of employment to young people. This information collection resulted in a comprehensive body of material on how young people feel about the region's services, participation opportunities and future prospects. The findings were compiled into the presentation 'Parempi Pohjois-Savo nuorille' (A Better North Savo for Young People), and the original summaries and compilations are openly available on the project's website. Materials have been distributed extensively in support of development work.

In addition to gathering information, the project entailed work to support young people's participation opportunities in the municipalities and the region. Various low-threshold participation activities, including a virtual escape game and 'Mikä v*tuttaa?' ('What's Bugging You?') theme evenings, were piloted in the project. Youth professionals were offered training for organising 'Vaikuta!' ('Make a Difference!') theme days. Additionally, the project together with the Union of Local Youth Councils in Finland conducted a study of the situation of youth councils in the North Savo region and offered training for young people. Together with Osallisuuden Osaamiskeskus (the Centre of Expertise in Participation and Influencing), the project organised the Participation Development Process, which featured discussions with young people and municipal decision-makers and workers on youth involvement and participation. The project also supported the establishment of a regional youth council, expected to take place in the near future.

Project Employees

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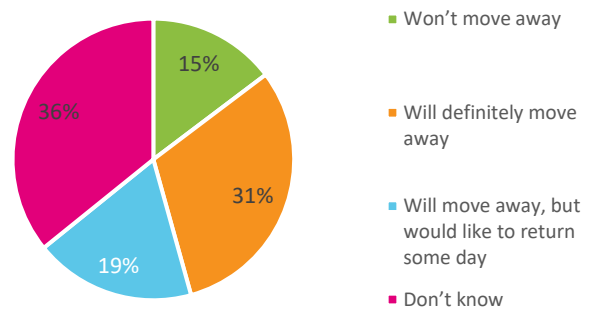




Young people in North Savo

- At the end of 2021, altogether 29,401 young people aged 15-25 years were living in North Savo. According to Statistics Finland's population forecast, their number in 2040 will be just 23,671, which translates into a decrease of 19%.
- In the survey, about one-half of the youths reckoned they will move away from North Savo over the next 10 years. Studying and working opportunities were the most significant reasons for moving away from the home municipality and the region, but many young people also wanted variety in their lives and an opportunity to live in a bigger locality.
- Young people consider North Savo as a warm-spirited region with a relaxed atmosphere, a safe place that is close to nature and where nature plays an important part in life. A majority of the services have been implemented fairly well. When asked about negative things in the region, young people mentioned the decrease in services available and population drain in smaller municipalities.
- Most young people in the region are doing well, but youth professionals estimate that a two-fold development is taking place in youth well-being. Polarisation of well-being has increased over the past years, and ill-being is more common among young people than before.
- Based on the information gathered, we present here a compilation of ten measures to help young people lead good lives in North Savo, support their well-being, facilitate their feeling of homeliness and belonging in the region and promote their participation opportunities.

What is the probability of your moving away from North Savo over the next 10 years?



1. Development of study opportunities and circumstances of studying

- One of the most important reasons for young people to relocate away from North Savo or their home locality is the lack of interesting study opportunities.
- Young people perceive the study opportunities available particularly in Kuopio as very good, and are happy with the quality of education, for example, in general upper secondary schools of many smaller localities and in international instruction in higher education.
- As opposed to the above, the quality of vocational training was criticised, and many young persons in several different localities considered it a problem that there was no vocational school in their home locality.
- For many young people particularly in the Upper Savo subregion (Ylä-Savo), the rather long physical distance from the home to the educational institution made studying more difficult.





- Young people have to rely on their parents to take them to school, because the school transport timetables are not always suitable for them.
- Some young persons relocate to another locality for their upper secondary studies.
- In the town of Iisalmi, young people feel that there are too few student residences available there. Additionally, hopes were expressed for reducing the cost of accommodation.
- Some young persons did not apply for studies at all owing to poor traffic connections.
- The factors that are making it more difficult for youths to study include remote learning, the large share of independent studying at vocational schools, and shortage of financial resources.
- Young people require more support in their studies, particularly in transition stages between different studies. They also expressed hopes for facilitating their search of a suitable line of work by education trials, for example.

2. Increasing the number of jobs and job opportunities

Young people's view

- Lack of job opportunities was one of the main reasons for moving away from North Savo or the home locality. This concerned many different localities.
- The following factors made it more difficult for young people to find employment:
 - The large number of applicants in relation to the number of vacancies
 - The difficulty in finding job announcements
 - Long commuting distances and poor traffic connections
 - Requirements for (long) work experience
 - Requirements for an already completed qualification, such as hygiene passport
 - The requirement for adequate proficiency in the Finnish language
- Young people hoped for:
 - Concrete support in job seeking
 - Opportunities for short-term employment
 - More traineeships and summer jobs, posting related announcements so that they are easier to find (on a designated website, for example)
 - More transparent recruitment processes
 - Job announcements that are easier to find, for example, on notice boards, windows of workplaces, the Duunitori website and the web pages of TE Services (public employment services)
 - Support for living in the locality where they work
- In job seeking, young people felt bad about not hearing back from all companies once they had submitted a job application.
- Young people hoped that the employer would onboard them properly and appreciate them.

Employer's view

- When recruiting people, employers appreciate education, willingness to learn, familiarity with the applicant, fitting in with the work community, being interested in the work and having good





interaction skills, job seeking skills and working life skills. Furthermore, employers value prior experience in the work and also require it for some jobs, but some of the tasks can be learnt by doing.

- Companies aim to make themselves more appealing in the eyes of young people by striving to paying attention to young people, well-being at work, and giving and collecting feedback. Employers have also identified young people's hopes concerning the company's operation (for example, opportunities to develop one's own competencies, an interaction-oriented and humane operating culture, good workplace atmosphere, flexibility, and sufficient onboarding).
- The following challenges have been faced in recruiting young people:
 - Small number of trained applicants
 - Problems in reaching the youths
 - Young people relocate to elsewhere in Finland and to more densely populated areas to work there
 - Young people commit to their employer for shorter periods than before.
- The following would support the recruiting:
 - Adequately resourced and more active collaboration with educational institutions and clearer communication between the parties
 - Making various fields of industry and companies appear more appealing and updating their image to correspond with the contemporary situation
 - Improving living opportunities and traffic connections
 - Facilitating young people's search for traineeships, for example, through a web portal intended for both employers and applicants
 - Increasing visibility and communication through social media, for example, arranging accessible company presentations and providing clear-to-use recruitment-oriented pages on company websites
 - Collaboration with the different entities that work with young people for the purposes of reaching and recruiting young persons
- The following would help young people find jobs and support their staying in the home locality/region:
 - Supporting youth entrepreneurship
 - Availability of communal remote working facilities and multi-location living and work opportunities
 - Increasing job offering by companies and the public sector
 - Training provision that meets the labour needs of companies; for example, more extensive university of applied sciences-level education in Iisalmi

3. Inputs in meaningful free time

- Hobbies
 - Youth professionals are of the opinion that the ability to spend meaningful free time and having at least one hobby are key to young persons' well-being.
 - According to youths and professionals working with them, there should be more...





- Affordable activity groups with a low threshold and opportunities for trying out new hobbies
- Physical activities, both those with competitive goals and those just for fun
- Inputs in opportunities for winter sports and water sports
- Hobby opportunities relating to music and culture in general
- Cultural and event offering
 - Young people hope that there were more events for youths of different ages, also in substance-free circumstances.
 - With regard to the offering of events and hobbies, hopes were expressed about giving more consideration to young persons with a foreign background or living in remote locations.
- Youth centres
 - Youth centres are important to young people, and hopes were expressed about having more youth centre-type activities in many localities, also for 18-25-year-olds.
 - Youth professionals feel that the opening hours of youth centres do not always meet the needs of young persons, as the facilities are often closed altogether in evenings and during the summer.
- Places for spending free time
 - Many young people had been asked to get out of public premises.
 - Young persons need more convening places and open spaces with a low threshold, also in the evenings.
 - Youths and youth professionals in almost every municipality hope that there was a place available that was separately designated for moped riding. Young persons also expressed a wish for motor club activities.
 - Youth professionals say that security guards should receive training for working with young people, since many young people like to spend time at shopping centres, for example.
 - It would also be important to maintain natural sites and outdoor exercise sites as well as increase the appeal of urban areas.

4. Developing services to make them more accessible

- Availability and offering of services for young people (and their entire families) are significant factors for the appeal and pleasantness of an area.
- Young people feel that the actual provision of many services is quite good, but deficiencies were also perceived particularly in the offering of low-threshold services and accessibility of services in view of opening hours, location, price level and language barrier, for example.
- Young persons need more support and counselling in how to find and use various services. More information on the services is needed in general.
- Services should be made quicker and easier to access, and the threshold for accessing them should be lowered. Youth professionals consider it a good solution to have all the services available in a single location, such as a social welfare and health centre.





- Youths and interviewed professionals hope that the grown-ups dealing with young persons in their work help the youngsters and aim to get to the bottom of the situation when identifying the need for support.
- The following are some key development needs relating to the services:
 - Getting access to health services, particularly mental health services, is difficult.
 - Public transport affects young people's opportunities to study, engage in hobbies, and go to work. Ineffective timetables and routes of public transport and limited availability of public transport connections outside population centres were perceived as problems.
 - Young people in Upper Savo (Ylä-Savo) and in the Leppävirta area criticised the poor condition of roads.
 - Young people considered it a problem that (commercial) services are becoming increasingly concentrated in larger localities with fewer and fewer of them available in smaller localities, and the same goes for the increasing concentration of businesses in the Matkus district of Kuopio away from more remote and sparsely populated areas of Kuopio.
 - In smaller localities, availability of residences was considered to be good and the opportunities to live with ample space were commended, but more rental apartments at more affordable rent levels were hoped to become available particularly in Iisalmi, Kuopio, and Tervo.

5. Supporting the well-being of youths and tackling their ill-being

- According to youth professionals, the ill-being of young people has increased, as has also the polarisation of well-being among youths.
- The problems are varied:
 - Life management challenges
 - Anxiety and loneliness
 - Challenges related to studies
 - Homelessness
 - School bullying
- Youths and youth professionals are particularly concerned about the state of young people's mental health and the poor availability of services.
 - For young persons, the process of gaining access to mental health services has come across as challenging and cumbersome.
 - Young people also criticise the fact that they themselves should be aware of what type of mental health services they need. Hopes were expressed for young persons to have more counselling and support available for assessing their own situation and finding the kind of help they need.
 - Additionally, hopes were expressed for more low-threshold services (i.e., without requiring a doctor's referral) and proactive support measures, supporting mental health in schools and having resources for therapy services.
- Use of intoxicating substances; substance abuse related work





- Young people feel that use of substances is visible in many places in the region, adding to the experiences of insecurity
- People requiring substance abuse care may have to wait for access for months on end, and it may require great efforts from young persons to gain access to care
- For youths and grown-ups working with them, it appears that young persons need to experience a crisis situation before they get help.
- Supporting the well-being of young people requires supporting the mental resources and attitudes of young persons and their parents and adding more resources in youth services and various support services. According to youth professionals, there is a particular shortage of services for 16-18-year-olds and of what are referred to as intermediary services (that is, non-goal-oriented activities or hobby activities guided by trained instructors).

6. Strengthening the opportunities for participation and change-making

- Fewer than half of the youths who responded to the survey feel that they were being listened to and that their opinions were considered in decision-making. Lack of information was the biggest hindrance to participation, and motivation was decreased by the belittling attitudes that grown-ups exhibit towards youth participation.
- Young people want to have a say in a broad variety of things, ranging from matters concerning their everyday life (educational institution, hobby opportunities) and municipal decision-making (traffic, health services) to global phenomena (rights of minorities, climate change). They want to bring up young people's viewpoints and make them heard in public discussion. However, it should be remembered that not all young persons want to participate.
- There need to be different channels of impact-making requiring varying levels of commitment. Young people were particularly keen to participate...
 - In surveys conducted online and per e-mail, for example
 - Through social media
 - By co-operating with other people in associations and housing companies, for example
 - In the activity of student bodies' boards
 - By providing feedback on services through a feedback box, for example
 - In open discussion events, such as shadow municipal councils, "Mikä v*tuttaa?" ("What's Bugging You?") theme evenings and joint events with decision-makers.
 - Participatory budgeting
 - Acting as experts by experience
 - Voting candidates that promote youth interests in elections or standing as candidates themselves.
- Additionally, many young people were interested in youth council activity, and respondents were fairly happy with youth councils' work. Hopes were expressed to develop youth council activity in municipalities, for example, by increasing the visibility of youth councils and marketing them more extensively (through social media, for example), by introducing mentors to support their activity, by guaranteeing continuation of their activity, by rendering their activity less formal and by familiarising young people with the youth council concept and inspiring them to be more active.





- In addition to listening to youth council delegates, other youths of all ages should be listened to as well. The youth councils could have a supporting role in ensuring that other young people become heard.
- Young people's experience of being and feeling included and making a difference and the opportunities related to these are supported by the following:
 - Grown-ups coming to meet young people in youth centres and at youth events
 - An opportunity for commitment at varying levels and anonymous participation
 - Enough information on participation and different opportunities to participate
 - Participation channels that appeal to young people
 - Genuinely listening to young persons prior to making decisions
 - Opportunities of youths to have a say in concrete matters
 - Fortright and honest discussion between youths and grown-ups
 - Making sure that promises are kept
 - Avoidance of excessive formality
 - Taking young change makers and their viewpoints for real
 - Providing information on the processes of change making and communicating how young people are making a difference
- According to young people, getting opportunities to have a say in municipal matters increases their willingness to stay and live in their home municipality.

7. Fostering more positive attitudes towards young people & encountering youths

- The attitudes towards young people can be contradictory: at times, young persons are regarded as the hope of the future, whereas at others, they have to face negative preconceptions. Many young people feel that they are being guilted and condescended to and that their opinions are belittled.
- Young people hope that...
 - They are valued as equals and encountered as individuals
 - Young people and youth as a life stage are seen in a more positive light
 - People ask them about things instead of making assumptions
 - Prejudices and racist attitudes are tackled and dealt with
 - Gossiping and suspicious hostility occur in a lesser extent, particularly in smaller localities
- A more positive and youth-friendly atmosphere is considered important for the feeling of homeliness and belonging.
- The grown-ups and decision-makers who work with young people need to be provided with training for encountering and listening to young people and paying attention to diversity.
- All those who encounter young people can support young persons' experience of being and feeling included.

8. Development of communication and information provision

- Respondents considered it very important to improve communication and information provision in all services.





- Problems have been experienced in finding information particularly on mental health services, recreational opportunities, and events.
- Similarly, information has been poorly available on the opportunities and means of participation, and it is precisely the lack of information that is identified as the biggest factor preventing youth involvement.
- Young people suggested mailing an information kit about youth services directly to the homes of new residents in the region.
- The means for more functional communication:
 - Information readily available (location and format)
 - Concentrated in one place (e.g., an application, one website)
 - Provided in clear and intelligible language
 - Both in Finnish and English
 - Contact details up to date and easy to find
 - Provision of information across multiple channels
 - Utilisation of channels that young people already use, such as various social media and the Wilma student administration system. More communication and information provision could also take place in schools and through services that young people already use.
 - Co-ordination and planning
 - Communicating in a way that appeals to youngsters; involving young people in the planning and implementation.

9. Strengthening collaboration within the region

- Youth professionals perceive the region's size as a strength from the standpoint of collaboration. Many of the professionals are already acquainted with one another.
- They nevertheless call for even more cross-municipal and cross-subregional collaboration between the different actors in youth work and promotion of participation.
- Companies, too, emphasise the need to strengthen collaboration between businesses, municipal decision-makers, and other involved actors, such as schools and youth services.
- Co-operation with young people and taking youth into consideration should be a fundamental principle in decision-making and regional development.
 - Based on the survey conducted in the project, only one-third of the young people feel that they are appreciated as equally valuable residents in their municipality.
 - Hopes were expressed towards increasing the participation and involvement of young people in municipal committees and councils as well as workgroups.
 - Young persons could, and should, be included in the planning and implementation of activities, communication and projects that concern them, as well as in recruitment processes (such as those concerning teachers and youth workers).
 - Moreover, tools that already exist (e.g., child impact assessment) should be utilised more extensively in the development work.





10. Work done to improve the region's image and the people's confidence in the future

- Young people are concerned about the future of their home localities, and many don't perceive staying there as an option.
- Marketing can be utilised to affect the region's image in the eyes of people. Municipalities should pay attention to whether there is room for diversity; flying of Pride flags by municipalities and tackling prejudices are two examples of measures that young people consider important.
- Youth work professionals estimate that the pandemic has caused young people to feel less confident about the future, and some of the impacts of the exceptional time period remain yet to be seen.
- The strengths of the North Savo region and its municipalities should be highlighted and marketed to young people more actively than before. This is a way to make people feel more confident about the prospects of staying in the region and fulfilling their dreams here.

Summary

1. The willingness and ability of young people to stay and live in North Savo are mostly affected by the study and working opportunities that interest them.
2. Meaningful free time and accessible and functional services are important for the everyday life and enjoyment of young people. More resources are needed for services aimed at young people.
3. A more positive and youth-friendly atmosphere is considered important for the feeling of homeliness and belonging. The public discussion on young people and the region's future needs to change, and people need to be trained to encounter young persons.
4. Polarisation of youth well-being should be addressed, for example, through provision of low-threshold services, proactive support, and quicker access to help.
5. Young people should be enabled to get involved and participate, and they should be considered in all development work.
6. The region and its existing and future opportunities and potential should be marketed to young people, and inputs should be made in communication and information provision aimed at youths.

