

RIGHT TO BELONG

Proposals for strengthening the sense of belonging among multicultural youth in Finnish society

etno

Advisory Board for
Ethnic Relations

The report of a working group appointed by ETNO proposes measures to promote the sense of inclusion and belonging among multicultural youth in Finnish society.

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When everything is still possible



Youth is a challenging time for many. It can be particularly challenging for those who for one reason or another do not meet the expectations that Finnishness and our society as a whole places on young people. Many multicultural young people have to challenge these expectations every day due to their skin colour, language, name, clothing or origin.

I often think about the type of Finnish people our society has been built for and the people building it. Are politicians a reflection of the entire population? Do decision-makers understand that different groups of people have different needs? Do they make sure that all young people get ahead, including those who are not straight-A students or come from more challenging circumstances?

The responsibility for young people's wellbeing lies not just with politicians, but all of us: you and me.

Young people try to manage with the skills, knowledge and understanding that they have accrued in their lives so far. However, a young person is unfinished and therefore needs support from an adult.

This report was written by a working group that consists of a variety of experts in different fields.

I had the pleasure of chairing the working group. We also consulted external experts in order to broaden our understanding.

The purpose of the report is to further the dialogue between religions and cultures. We aim to highlight rights that may not always be implemented among multicultural youth and that thereby limit their possibilities to feel part of the Finnish society.

We need more unconventional interaction and multiprofessional cooperation so that we can support young people's growth and sense of belonging. Hope and belief in the future lay the foundation for mental health. Stereotypical assumptions about what young people can accomplish based on their background should not be an obstacle for fulfilling one's dreams.

Multicultural youth should not be considered a challenge and a problem, but a resource and an opportunity. No young person should feel shame or guilt that causes insecurity or a feeling of uselessness or inadequacy. Such feelings prevent people from pursuing things that are important and meaningful for them.

No young person should walk with their head down and fear the judging glances of others. Everybody should have the courage to look ahead without fear. It would be even better if everybody could look up to where only the sky is the limit.

Anu-Rohima Mylläri

Chair of the working group

Messages from young people

“Teachers don’t have the skills to stop bullying. They might have a talk with the bullies, but fail to monitor the situation afterwards.”

Boy, 18 yrs, Pirkanmaa

“Teachers have a very important role because they educate young people. They should encourage us to decide for ourselves what we want to be so that we wouldn’t crumble under pressure and just accept what others want us to be.”

Boy, 20 yrs, Uusimaa

“If you’re bullied in your own class, you should be able to switch to another class. I asked the principal if I could switch to 9C, but it didn’t work out.”

Boy, 20 yrs, Pirkanmaa

“I would like the teachers, authorities and everybody else to treat young people equally regardless of religion, skin colour, language or background. They should give young people space to decide and build their own identity and define themselves who they are.”

Girl, 22 yrs, Uusimaa

“I went to the youth centre exactly once. Everyone looked at me in amazement. The counsellors didn’t say a thing to me. They were incapable of making a contact.”

Boy, 20 yrs, Pirkanmaa

“I was bullied at school. My classmates didn’t include me in their games. They thought I wouldn’t understand the rules because I’m Russian. Often when I’m out with my Russian friends, people yell at us and call us Russkies.”

Girl, 16 yrs, Uusimaa

“If you come to Finland when you’re 8 years old, you can become a doctor or a principal. But if you come here at 14 years of age, then it’s very difficult.”

Boy, 18 yrs, Pirkanmaa

“There should be a place for people like me to discuss about my problems. A place where the staff speaks my mother tongue and understands my culture and the problems caused by cultural differences. I can’t express my feelings and experiences in Finnish even though I speak it well.”

Girl, 16 yrs, Uusimaa

“Teachers don’t know how to handle bullying. Or they just ask the bullies to stop. That doesn’t help at all.”

Boy, 23 yrs, Pirkanmaa

“I don’t have any lessons in my mother tongue at the moment. I read books and improve my native language skills independently. It should be every young person’s right to receive instruction in their mother tongue.”

Girl, 16 yrs, Uusimaa

“There isn’t much support available in Finland. Not in school, nowhere. There are not enough teaching assistants. More support is needed in schools.”

Boy, 20 yrs, Pirkanmaa

“It’s common in Finland to always look at identity in a negative light. People focus on the bad stuff they follow in the media and make generalisations based on that. I have the impression that it’s easier for Finnish people just to look down on foreigners instead of giving them a chance to adjust.”

Boy, 20 yrs, Uusimaa

“We had a poor guidance counsellor at school. I was told that metal industry would be a good choice for me because I’m strong. Not once was I asked what I wanted myself. The counsellor didn’t suggest me to consider going to an upper secondary school, even though my grades were alright.”

Boy, 23 yrs, Pirkanmaa

More visibility for discrimination faced by young people

Cultural and ethnic diversity are on the rise in Finland. Young people as a group are particularly diverse. A significant part of the people who have roots outside Finland belong to younger age groups.

We, the authors of the report, want to draw attention to the views and experiences of discrimination among the multicultural youth living in Finland. This has required taking a closer look at the families, friendships and schools of young people and society in general.

We use the term 'multicultural youth' in the report. This refers to people living in Finland who are under 29 years of age and who either themselves were born outside Finland or at least one of their parents was.

Multicultural youth are a very diverse group with a variety of culturally, religiously, nationally and socially different backgrounds. It is too simplistic to divide people into a majority and minorities, or into a mainstream population and immigrants.

The definition of Finnishness has to be flexible so that all young people living in Finland can consider themselves part of Finland and Finnishness. People who have grown up in Finland, or live in Finland, have the right to define themselves as Finnish if they so desire.

Discrimination hurts all around

Multicultural youth feel like outsiders and face discrimination more often than other youngsters face. When young people are discriminated against, or treated unfairly, their sense of belonging in Finnish society declines. As a result, it becomes more difficult for young people to feel part

of a group in school, among friends and in society overall. Feelings of exclusion have an impact on young people's wellbeing and future.

Multicultural youth also have the right to experience that they belong to society. They have the right to feel cared for and reach for their dreams regardless of their backgrounds. Attention must be paid not just to the wellbeing of young people but also to their families and close relatives and friends.

It is important for young people to feel that they will make it. Experiments, mistakes and the search for identity or a way of life should not crush young people's self-confidence or trust in others.

More cooperation for the sake of young people

Many Finnish and international laws address youth issues. Finnish legislation in fact safeguards the rights of young people in many aspects. However, the problem is that the legislative ideals on equality or consultation of young people do not always materialise.

The most important work for promoting young peoples belonging and wellbeing is carried out at grass-roots level as part of everyday activities.

In this report, we propose measures to promote the sense of inclusion and belonging among multicultural youth in Finnish society. We provide ideas and views for all who are professionally involved with young people or who decide on matters concerning them.

The report includes nine proposals for making Finland a more equal and just country for multicultural youth.

The aim of the proposals is to strengthen the sense of belonging among multicultural youth in Finnish society. We believe that the sense of inclusion and belonging are built on four pillars.

The first pillar is *participation*, which refers to the right of young people to influence their everyday life and future.

The second pillar is *identity* and the right to define it. This makes it possible for young people to search for meaningful roles in their communities and in society overall.

The third pillar is *sense of security*. We define security not only as physical and psychological integrity but also as the right to care, financial security and a future in Finland.

The fourth pillar is *trust*. Trust is a two-way street: on the one hand, it is about the possibility to trust that Finnish society and its institutions are just. On the other hand, it is about the trust showed towards multicultural youth.

Report authored by a group of experts

The report was commissioned by the Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations ETNO. In March 2018, ETNO appointed an expert working group for religious and cultural dialogue to examine how the diverse identities of young people are constructed and how they could be supported in Finland.

ETNO appointed the following bodies as members of the expert working group: Auralan Nuoret ry (The Youth Association of Aurala) - House for Girls of Turku, Nicehearts ry, Nuoret Muslimit ry (Young Muslims' Association), Finnish Youth Research Society, Pakolaisnuorten Tuki ry (Refugee Children Support Association) / Kөлvi-toiminta, Suomen Afgaanijärjestö ry (Finland's

Afghan Association), Finnish Red Cross Youth Shelters, Suomen Venäjänkielisten Keskusjärjestö ry (The Central Organisation of Russian Speakers in Finland) and National Forum for Cooperation of Religions in Finland (CORE Forum).

The working group was chaired by Anu-Rohima Mylläri, chair of the Regional Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations in Pirkanmaa and Central Finland. Habiba Ali, a member of the national ETNO and an employee at Finn Church Aid, served as vice chair of the working group.

The appointed bodies independently chose their representatives for the expert group. The following persons participated in the preparation of the report: Nahla Hewidy, Meri Kianto, Antti Kivijärvi, Olga Liukkonen, Nina Pietikäinen, Jari Portaankorva, Mojtaba Qanezadeh, Leena Suurpää and Meriam Trabelsi. The secretariat of the expert group included ETNO's Secretary General Peter Kariuki and specialist Mia Luhtasaari. Anne Ignatius from Noon Kollektiivi served as rapporteur. The working group's term ended on 30 April 2019.



By acknowledging these rights, the sense of belonging among multicultural youth can be strengthened

- 1.** Right to self-definition and appreciation for one's own heritage

- 2.** Right to one's own language

- 3.** Right to healthy and happy parents

- 4.** Right to trustworthy authorities and decision-makers

- 5.** Right to equal treatment

- 6.** Right to receive support

- 7.** Right to organise one's own activities

- 8.** Right to live without racism

- 9.** Right to fulfil one's dreams

1.

1. Right to self-definition and appreciation for one's own heritage

Everybody has the right to be proud of his or her background. This increases the sense of security and trust.

The question "Who am I?" is on the mind of every young person. The answer can often be found in one's own group of friends, family, affiliation, idols and social circles. Sometimes young people will reinvent themselves by changing their social circles. Constructing a self-image is essential for a young person's self-esteem and future.

The attitudes of the majority population have an effect on how multicultural youth can define their identity and become part of Finnish society. The more positive the attitudes towards multicultural youth, the easier it is for them to feel part of the group.

The similarities between ethnicities and cultures should also be brought to a focus, not just the differences. All people have multiple cultures and multiple ways to live them. Culture changes constantly. As a result, no assumptions should be made about a person's customs based on their background.

Responsible bodies: We all.

Message to a young person: Use your right to define yourself and your identity. Respect other people's heritage and culture.

2.

2. Right to one's own language

A young person has the right to a home language that supports their identity and emotions. Home language instruction should be part of compulsory education.

Language affects one's entire life. Commanding a language has an impact on how safe and secure a person feels. Language makes it possible to understand connections and relationships between things, improve interaction, and express one's feelings and hopes. Language helps to form an emotional bond between a child and a parent and this bond functions as a basis for all the other relationships the child has.

Everybody has one or more home languages. Command of the home language lays the foundation for learning everything else. Currently, schools can organise mother tongue or home language instruction but it is not mandatory. Nor are pupils obligated to participate in such teaching. If instruction is organised at all, it usually takes place after school hours and in another school. Participation in such classes depends on the pupils and their guardians. A considerable part of multicultural youth whose mother tongue is not Finnish, Swedish or Saami do not participate in teaching of their mother tongue.

Home language instruction should be part of compulsory education, regardless of the language. Instruction must be organised in a manner that does not cause a significant burden on pupils.

Everybody should have the right to choose whether they wish to participate in the instruction of Finnish or Swedish together with the majority population or whether they wish to study Finnish or Swedish as a second language.

Responsible bodies: Ministry of Education and Culture, Finnish National Agency for Education

Message to a young person: Cherish your own language and show an open attitude towards other languages.





3.

3. Right to healthy and happy parents

The parents in multicultural families should have better opportunities to participate in the lives of their children.

Not all parents have the same possibilities to support their children. For example, financial scarcity, poverty and experiences of exclusion increase the sense of insecurity and powerlessness.

Parents may feel alienated from their children, if they do not know what is happening in their lives. If multicultural youth are more familiar with the societal customs and practices than their parents are, this may create a conflict within the family. It may be difficult for a young person to admire or respect a parent who is unable to help with homework or read messages in parent-teacher communication system Wilma, for instance.

This is an increased risk in situations where parents are excluded from society in other respects too. In those cases, the gap between generations within a family can grow large.

Participation of parents in their children's lives is important. They need support in that task. Support for multicultural parenthood should start in early childhood education and care. It is important to make sure that parents' wellbeing is supported in, for example, maternity and child health clinics and that the availability of social workers is improved.

Teachers and others working with young people need to have face-to-face meetings with parents to discuss how the education system functions and what the leisure activities of young people entail. Sufficient time should be reserved for the discussions and, if required, the discussions should be conducted in plain language or with the help of an interpreter. Parents should be encouraged to participate in youth leisure activities as volunteers, for example.

Responsible bodies: Local authorities responsible for education, culture, sports and youth work, social welfare authorities, civil society organisations, religious communities and the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Message to young people: You have the right to be surrounded by trustworthy and safe adults.

4.

4. Right to trustworthy authorities and decision-makers

Trust is a question of wellbeing. Whether a young person can trust society has an effect on his or her life overall.

Healthy and happy people have trust in society and in the availability of help in emergency.

If a young person does not trust authorities or others who offer help, the threshold for looking for help remains high.

Young people's belief that they will not find work because of their name or looks and the resulting lack of courage to apply for higher education also denotes lack of trust.

However, trust is not just about whether young people trust society. It is also important to evaluate and promote the trust shown by entire society in multicultural youth.

Trust must be visible in families, schools, workplaces, leisure activities, politics, activities of authorities and the media. It matters how decision-makers and those involved with young people speak about the young.

Trust is not built through some quick tricks but through long-term commitment to interaction that strengthens trust, and shared activities that go beyond the usual group structure. All young people should feel that help from adults is available, if needed.

Responsible bodies: Authorities and decision-makers

Message to young people: Challenge adults!

5.

5. Right to equal treatment

Young people have the right to be treated equally in school, at work and in free time.

Young people should be asked regularly whether they consider their role at school, work or recreational activities to be meaningful and just. It takes will, effort and different tools to discover what young people think and experience. The tools must be developed together with multiprofessional working groups and young people.

Essential questions that young people should be asked include: What is your role as a member of a group, for example in a class or at a hobby? If you are not at school or employed or in a recreational group, what is preventing you from participating?

Based on the dialogue and assessments, concrete measures should be undertaken so that multicultural youth are met and treated equally with other young people.

Discrimination can also be prevented if people employed at schools or recreational facilities come from a variety of backgrounds. Simultaneously, they serve as role models and help to create a diverse environment for young people.

A concrete measure would be for schools and educational institutions to hire professionals with different backgrounds in accordance with the principle of positive discrimination. The principle is based on the Non-Discrimination Act.

It is equally important that authorities, education providers, employers and others working with young people draw up an equality plan or a list of aims for promoting equality, as required by law. The plan or list of aims should be drafted together with young people and their guardians.

Responsible bodies: Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, schools and educational institutions.

Message to a young person: Nobody should be discriminated against.

6.

6. Right to receive support

If a young person needs support, they should receive it.

A young person may need support in learning a language, studying, defining his or her identity, dealing with his or her own culture or religion/faith, or finding friends, for example.

A young person may also need support and concrete tools in dealing with experiences of discrimination. In conflict situations, all parties should receive support that enables them to reflect on the matter and understand the consequences the situation may have.

Professionals working with young people should not leave them to ponder such matters alone. If a young person tells about racism or anything else occupying their mind, the answer should not be "Don't care about it." The answer should be "I care."

Responsible bodies: Professionals working with young people.

Message to a young person: You have the right to receive help when you need it.





7.

7. Right to organise one's own activities

It is important that young people can organise different kinds of recreational groups themselves. Funding should be available for a variety of activities. Not all activities need to be integration-oriented.

Participation in associations and recreational clubs is important for many young people. Peer groups have a positive impact on young people's lives. Civic activity, however, requires not just familiarity with Finnish society but also money. Receiving funding, in turn, requires that the activities are organised by an association that has the skills to apply for funding and to report about its activities.

It is important to equitably support activities that young people want to organise themselves. Young people should be asked more often, what kinds of activities they would like to see funded or otherwise supported. If all funding goes to established activities, other forms of activity may not be created. It is valuable that associations offer different kinds of activities.

Responsible bodies: Municipalities, state, civil society organisations and Veikkaus, the Finnish National Lottery.

Message to a young person: Interest in civic and societal matters will help you understand your rights and duties.

8.

8. Right to live without racism

School curricula and society as a whole should talk about racism and discrimination, and not just about tolerance.

Many multicultural young people experience discrimination and feel threatened and excluded. Racism separates people. It has a harmful effect on school performance, for example. Many also experience racism in public places.

Silence is not the answer. The mere acknowledgement that racism exists and discussing it enhance the feeling among multicultural youth that they are an important part of the Finnish society and education system.

Racism should be discussed in all education, including vocational education and training. Eradicating racism requires that we critically assess what we see and experience and whether we consider that normal. Racism is not always overt and intentional. Often racism is hidden and those who face it remain silent about their experiences.

Responsible bodies: Finnish National Agency for Education, departments of teacher education, educational institutions.

Message to a young person: You do not have to accept racism.

9.

9. Right to fulfil one's dreams

Young people have the right to reach for their dreams and decide where and what they wish to study, for example.

Young people should be left to define their dreams themselves. Multicultural youth should not be guided towards certain professions based on stereotypes. All professions should be presented as real choices in guidance counselling and career planning.

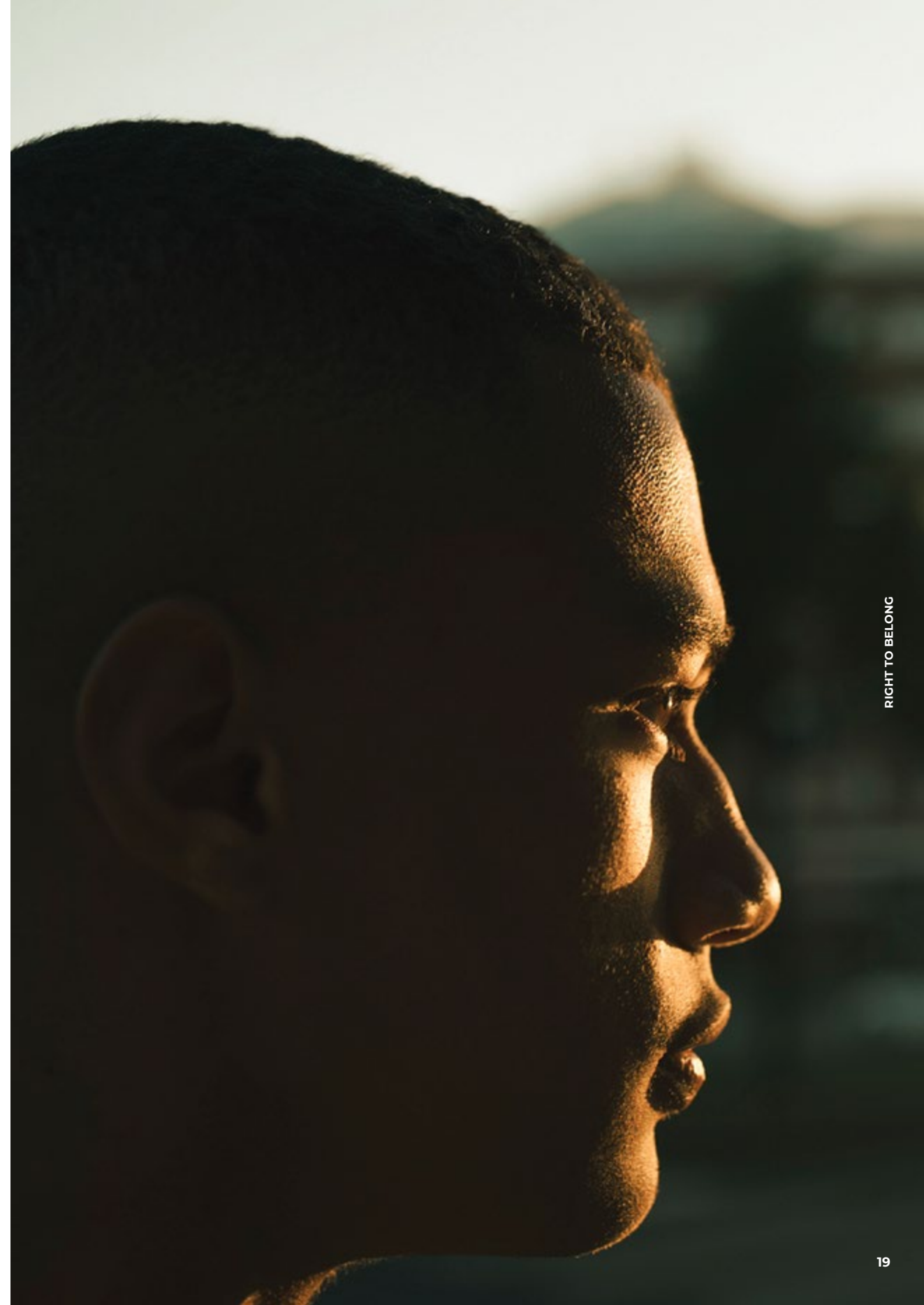
If needed, professionals working with young people can offer support to a young person in realising his or her dreams, for example by helping them to draw up a concrete plan for achieving their goals. The young person him- or herself will make the final decision on what to study.

Young people need role models that resemble them and opportunities for different career choices in future Finland. Journalists should interview multicultural youth also for other purposes than just as representatives of multicultural people in Finland.

Young people should not be discouraged or underestimated but supported in their goals.

Responsible bodies: Media houses, educational institutions teaching journalism, all of us who guide young people.

Message to a young person: Have courage to look for different role models.



Report glossary

Multicultural youth

A multicultural young person was born outside Finland or at least one of his or her parents was born outside Finland. Multicultural youth are a very diverse group with a variety of culturally, nationally and socially different backgrounds. The group includes internationally adopted children, children born to immigrant parents in Finland and young people who have recently moved to Finland. Despite their diverse backgrounds, the young people share experiences of exclusion in Finnish society.

Majority population

Majority population are people of Finnish descent whose right to live here is not questioned. The term 'majority population' also refers to a majority and their decision-making power in politics, the media and other institutions, for example. Consequently, the majority population carries a large responsibility for shaping the lives of multicultural youth in Finland.

Culture

Culture means a learned way of life shaped by beliefs, traditions and valuations. Cultures have changed and continue to change due to new influences and it is not possible to make strict distinctions between them.

Culture is not linked just to the country where a person is born or lives. Instead, there is a range of cultures within a country or a community.

Ethnicity

The word 'ethnicity' refers to an idea of the origin of a certain group of people and the link of this origin to the culture they have adopted.

Ethnicity is often more about personal associations and classifications that people make, rather than about real and distinctive groups. For example, Finnishness can be considered an ethnicity, which is under constant discussion on its contents and limits.

Identity

On the one hand, identity refers to the experience people have about their own uniqueness. On the other hand, identity is about belonging to larger groups or communities of people. Identity changes through lifetime.

The construction of identity is not only an inner process within a single person. It is also connected to the surrounding society and the values that are held in regard in that society. For instance, a society may have a negative attitude towards drawing attention to the identities of certain minority groups.

Equality

Equality is a desired state of affairs where all people are equal regardless of their background. In an equal society, people's origin, gender, sexuality, disability or political activity, among other things, do not have an effect on their treatment or basic rights. A society striving towards equality takes active measures to stop discrimination.

Discrimination

Discrimination is about placing people in an inferior position because of their background or membership in a certain group. Discrimination can also refer to the disregard for the special needs of certain people in a situation where attending to these needs would be possible.

Racism

Racism means classifying groups of people based on their ethnicity, culture or religion and considering these groups unchangeable and hierarchical.

Racism can manifest itself as ideological action but also as unconscious bias.

Reading

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Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations (ETNO)

Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations (ETNO) is a state-appointed body of experts tasked with promoting dialogue and cooperation between different actors. ETNO consists of a national advisory board operating under the auspices of the Ministry of Justice and seven regional advisory boards.

ETNO's 300 members represent ministries, immigrant associations, political parties, religious communities, labour market organisations, municipalities and civil society organisations, among others. The members assist and support authorities and Parliament in the preparation of legislation. ETNO is the formal channel of influence for immigrant associations, multicultural organisations and religious communities. Its next term will start in 2020.

ETNO serves as an expert in matters pertaining to good relations between population groups and functions as a forum for dialogue. The purpose of the good relations policy is to affect society through increasing dialogue and trust between different population groups and through strengthening positive attitudes, experiences of inclusion and sense of security.

More information about ETNO is available at:

www.om.fi/etno

 www.youtube.com/watch?v=WHrY6b74dTM

 @etnoetno

 @meistäönmoneksi

“It would be great if there was a place for young people with many different services under one roof. We could get help with problems at school or planning the future. Maybe we could just hang out there too or do some kind of activity.”

Girl, 15 yrs, Uusimaa



**Advisory Board for
Ethnic Relations**