

# National Programme to Promote Democracy and Participation

Government Resolution



MINISTRY OF JUSTICE  
FINLAND

# National Programme to Promote Democracy and Participation

## Government Resolution

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Ministry of Justice

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## National Programme to Promote Democracy and Participation Government Resolution

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### Abstract

The government resolution outlines the promotion of democracy and participation in 2025–2027 in line with the Programme of Prime Minister Orpo's Government. The Government adopted the resolution at its plenary session on 20 March 2025.

The National Programme to Promote Democracy and Participation (Democracy Programme) contains 15 policy goals as well as key measures to promote democracy and participation. In line with entries in the Government Programme, a particular objective of the Democracy Programme is to improve voter turnout and strengthen the participation of children and young people, and to develop good practices in education for democratic citizenship and human rights. In addition, the programme aims to strengthen a culture of good discussion and exchange of opinions in society, starting at an early age, while safeguarding the constitutional freedom of expression and opinion. The programme also aims to develop municipal government and ensure grassroots democracy. The programme also outlines the goals and measures for the development of national democracy policy and for the promotion of democracy in the European Union and internationally.

The resolution was prepared by a cross-administrative working group consisting of public officials and considered by the ministerial working group on internal security and administration of justice. Views of stakeholders including children and young people were consulted broadly during the preparation process.

**Keywords** democracy, participation, grassroots democracy, inclusion, government resolutions

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## Kansallinen ohjelma demokratian ja osallistumisen edistämiseksi Valtioneuvoston periaatepäätös

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Julkaisija	Oikeusministeriö		
Yhteisötekijä	Oikeusministeriö		
Kieli	Englanti	Sivumäärä	41

### Tiivistelmä

Valtioneuvoston periaatepäätöksessä linjataan demokratian ja osallistumisen edistämisestä vuosina 2025–2027 pääministeri Orpon hallituksen ohjelman mukaisesti. Periaatepäätös hyväksyttiin valtioneuvoston yleisistunnossa 20.3.2025.

Kansallinen ohjelma demokratian ja osallistumisen edistämiseksi (demokratiaohjelma) sisältää 15 tavoitelinjausta ja keskeisiä toimenpiteitä demokratian ja osallistumisen edistämiseksi. Hallitusohjelmakirjausten mukaisesti demokratiaohjelman erityisenä tavoitteena on äänestysaktiivisuuden edistäminen ja lasten ja nuorten osallisuuden vahvistaminen sekä demokratia- ja ihmisoikeuskasvatuksen hyvien käytäntöjen kehittäminen. Lisäksi ohjelmalla on tarkoitus vahvistaa hyvän keskustelun ja mielipiteen vaihtamisen kulttuuria yhteiskunnassa jo lapsesta lähtien perustuslaillinen mielipide- ja sananvapaus turvaten. Ohjelman tavoitteena on myös kehittää paikallishallintoa ja varmistaa lähidemokratian toteutuminen. Ohjelmassa linjataan myös tavoitteista ja toimenpiteistä kansallisen demokration politiikan kehittämiseksi ja demokratian edistämiseksi Euroopan unionissa ja kansainvälisesti.

Periaatepäätös on valmisteltu poikkihallinnollisessa virkamiestyöryhmässä ja sitä on käsitelty sisäisen turvallisuuden ja oikeudenhoidon ministerityöryhmässä. Valmistelun aikana on kuultu laajasti sidosryhmien, ml. lasten ja nuorten näkemyksiä.

**Asiasanat** demokratia, osallistuminen, lähidemokratia, osallisuus, valtioneuvoston periaatepäätökset

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## Nationellt program för att främja demokrati och deltagande Statsrådets principbeslut

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<b>Språk</b>	Engelska	<b>Sidantal</b>	41

### Referat

I statsrådets principbeslut anges riktlinjerna för främjande av demokrati och deltagande 2025–2027 i enlighet med regeringsprogrammet för statsminister Orpos regering. Principbeslutet godkändes vid statsrådets allmänna sammanträde den 20 mars 2025.

Det nationella programmet för främjande av demokrati och deltagande (demokratiprogrammet) innehåller 15 målsatta riktlinjer och centrala åtgärder för att främja demokrati och deltagande. I enlighet med föresatserna i regeringsprogrammet är ett särskilt mål med demokratiprogrammet att höja valdeltagandet och stärka barns och ungas delaktighet samt utveckla god praxis inom demokrati- och människorättsfostran. Syftet med programmet är dessutom att stärka en samhällskultur där god diskussion och utbyte av åsikter finns med redan från barndomen för att trygga yttrande- och åsiktsfriheten enligt grundlagen. Programmet syftar också till att utveckla lokalförvaltningen och säkerställa att närdemokratin förverkligas. I programmet fastställs därtill mål och åtgärder för att utveckla den nationella demokratipolitiken och främja demokratin i Europeiska unionen och internationellt.

Principbeslutet har beretts i en förvaltningsövergripande tjänstemannaarbetsgrupp och behandlats i ministerarbetsgruppen för inre säkerhet och rättsvård. Under beredningen har synpunkterna hos berörda grupper, inklusive barn och unga, hörts i bred utsträckning.

**Nyckelord** demokrati, deltagande, närdemokrati, delaktighet, statsrådets principbeslut

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# 1 Introduction

Democracy, the rule of law and human rights form a trinity that needs all three pillars to hold it together. A weakening of democracy, the rule of law or human rights affects stability, functioning and trust in society as a whole. A functioning democracy, the rule of law and the realisation of human rights are therefore also key elements for comprehensive security and economic activity.

The European and global security environment has become turbulent, and this has deteriorating effects on democracy and human rights. Russia's aggression against Ukraine has shown that living in a democratic society cannot be taken for granted. It is especially amidst crises that democracy requires active defence and actions to bolster its values. Democracy can only function if people have confidence in their own access to influence and in each other, societal institutions and decision-makers. Promoting democracy is a key means of preventing global security threats<sup>1</sup>.

Democracy policy promotes the realisation of people's access to participation and influence in accordance with section 14, subsection 4 of the Constitution of Finland<sup>2</sup>. The Constitutional Law Committee of the Finnish Parliament has regarded

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1 Security Committee (2017).

2 Under the Constitution, the public authorities shall promote the opportunities for individuals to participate in societal activity and to influence decisions that concern them. Under section 2, subsection 2 of the Constitution, democracy entails the right of individuals to participate in and influence the development of society and their living conditions. Under section 14, subsection 4 of the Constitution, the public authorities shall promote the opportunities for individuals to participate in societal activity and to influence the decisions that concern them. In addition, under section 20, subsection 2 of the Constitution, the public authorities shall endeavour to guarantee for everyone the right to a healthy environment and the possibility to influence the decisions that concern their own living environment. The provision laid down in section 2, subsection 2 of the Constitution safeguards the participation and influence of the individual at the various levels of societal activity. It therefore covers, for example, voting in elections and referendums, other access to participation and influence as well as self-organised activities of civil society and the influence of individuals in their local environment on decisions affecting themselves and their living environment. The provision also refers more generally to various forms of human collaboration. The rationale underlines that, together with section 6, subsection 3 of the Constitution, the provision requires that access to influence is also ensured for children in matters pertaining to themselves to a degree corresponding to their level of development.



the development of democracy policy as important and emphasised the efficient implementation of democracy policy in all administrative branches<sup>3</sup>. The state and development of democracy are affected not only by the functioning of the democratic political system and democracy policy measures but also by many other factors<sup>4</sup>. Literacy, language skills, Bildung and place of residence also play a role in the functioning of democracy<sup>5</sup>.

According to the Programme of Prime Minister Orpo's Government, Finland promotes the principles of democracy, civil society, fundamental and human rights and the rule of law in all its activities. The Government aims to strengthen democracy, participation and trust in society. The Government will examine new ways to foster these fundamental values with an open mind, work for an inclusive and just society and combat segregation. According to the Government Programme, a democratic society relies on people being able to take part and be heard. Finland's future will be built on the responsible use of public power and on open debate focused on finding solutions. The Government promotes social dialogue, which also plays an important role in education for democratic citizenship provided in schools. We must support and maintain broad-based freedom of expression across society. According to the Government Programme, Finland is determined to combat the emergence of parallel societies. The Government's vision is that Finland is a strong democracy whose people have confidence in public institutions. The Government will make firm and sustained efforts to safeguard the confidence of the people. The Government will support the rights of the Sami people to maintain and develop their languages and culture. The Government will promote constructive dialogue and cooperation with the Sami.

This resolution defines the key goals and measures for the promotion of democracy and participation during the term of office of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government. It is outlined in the Government Programme that the Government will prepare and implement a national programme to promote democracy and participation. In line with the Government Programme, a particular objective of the Democracy Programme is to improve voter turnout and to strengthen the participation of children and young people, and to develop good practices in education for democratic citizenship and human rights education. Another objective is to promote the inclusion and regional equity of young people, for

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3 Parliament (2017a).

4 See e.g. [Work Ability Programme](#), [Mental Health at Work Programme](#), [Development Programme for Work and Wellbeing at Work \(WORK2030 Programme\)](#).

5 See e.g. Moilanen et al. (2021).

example by reinforcing the status of youth councils in municipalities and wellbeing services counties. According to the Government Programme, the Democracy Programme will also strengthen a culture of good discussion and exchange of opinions in society, starting at an early age, while safeguarding the constitutional freedom of expression and opinion. The Government Programme also outlines that, by relying on democracy at the local level, the Government will accelerate a controlled transition towards more creative and dynamic municipal government, as well as ensure the implementation of grassroots democracy. The aim is to build high-growth communities that attract and retain residents and businesses and to strengthen democracy, inclusion and equality. A further aim is open and interactive governance bolstering citizens' trust in public authorities.

The Democracy Programme at hand is cross-administrative by nature and sets out the policy goals and key measures for the promotion of democracy and participation in the mandates of several different ministries as outlined in the Government Programme. The Democracy Programme does not include all of the Government's measures to promote democracy. Instead, the Government will, in addition to the programme at hand, also prepare other measures key to Finnish democracy, which relate to aspects such as improving the electoral system, developing the initiative and consultation systems, promoting an enabling environment for civil society organisations, preventing discrimination and promoting equality, and updating openness regulation. Furthermore, measures will be prepared in line with the Government Programme for the regulation of election campaign and political party funding, development of voting and election procedures and election security, and overlaps in decision-making will be investigated and the legal system developed. In line with its programme, the Government has submitted to Parliament its proposal for amending the Act on the Sami Parliament and chapter 40, section 11 of the Criminal Code.

When outlining its policy priorities for the current EU legislative cycle (2024–2029), the Government regarded it as important to continue the sustained development of fundamental rights and democracy policy in the EU.<sup>6</sup> In international cooperation, the Government will emphasise activities based on democracy, the rule of law, human rights and equality, including gender equality.<sup>7</sup>

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6 Prime Minister's Office (2024).

7 Finnish Government (2024a & 2024b).

### Children and young people's messages to decision-makers<sup>8</sup>

- **Access to influence and dialogue:** Young people want their voices to be taken seriously, and they want concrete access to influencing decision-making. They want a direct dialogue with decision-makers through, for example, school visits.
- **Importance of voting and participation:** Young people would like to receive clear information about voting, societal influencing and civil rights, especially through social media. Election communication should cover more topics relevant to young people.
- **Mental health and safety:** Young people underline the importance of the availability of mental health services and action against bullying. They would like to see regular mental health checks and more efficient action against bullying and violence.
- **School conditions and leisure opportunities:** Young people want improvements in school conditions and more youth facilities that are open in the evenings.

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Justice (2024d). As part of the preparation of the Democracy Programme, the Ministry of Justice consulted the views of children and young people on ways in which they could have access to participation and influence in society. Their views were collected through Timeout discussions and the Digiraati online service between 20 October and 21 November 2024.

## 2 Situational picture

This chapter provides a concise overview of the democracy situation in Finland and internationally and describes how democracy policy has been developed nationally and in the European Union and prioritised over the past decades, and how Finland participates in international cooperation for democracy. The concise situational picture presented here is based on the detailed description provided in the background material concerning the state of democracy internationally and in Finland, in particular from the perspective of the priority areas of the Democracy Programme at hand. The background material also describes the state of democracy policy in Finland and the European Union, the democracy policy approaches and measures of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government, the links of other policy sectors and programmes and Government strategies with the Democracy Programme, and the priorities of Finland's international cooperation for democracy.

**Internationally, the state of democracy has deteriorated over the past 15–20 years.** On a global scale, the number of democratic societies has declined to the 1989 level. Trust in the political system has eroded on the global level, the appeal of increasingly authoritarian forms of governance has increased, politics has become more elitist, people's political literacy has declined and the common rules of play of decision-making are being challenged. Institutions and systems of democratic societies face stronger information and hybrid influence activities threatening to undermine their legitimacy and capacity to function.<sup>9</sup>

**Finland – alongside the other Nordic countries – has done well in international democracy and rule of law rankings.** Finland has free and fair elections, a strong multiparty system and an independent judicial system. Corruption is low and respect for freedom of expression, religion and association is high. Finnish democracy does, however, face challenges due to increasing inequalities and accumulation in terms of participation occurring from an early age. Voting turnout varies by factors such as socio-economic status, language and gender, and differences between population groups and regions when it comes to perceived

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9 E.g. Council of Europe (2024); Borg, Kestilä-Kekkonen & Wass (2020a); OECD (2024).

trust are increasing. Risks of cyber threats, mis- and disinformation and information influence activities are increasing. Political dichotomy has gained strength, and the culture of discussion has become confrontational. Systematic harassment of officeholders, decision-makers, journalists, researchers and civil society actors has increased, and diversity in societal debate and freedom of expression has declined. Following the wellbeing services counties reform, Finnish regional and local democracy is undergoing a transformation and civic participation is in many places perceived as separate from decision-making and leadership. In addition, the financial capacities of civil society have changed due to the state of general government finances, and a segregation trend has been detected in education for democratic citizenship and human rights education of schools and other educational institutions.<sup>10</sup>

**Democracy policy has been developed systematically in Finland throughout the 2000s.** In previous years, the priorities of Finland's national democracy policy have included active citizenship and citizens' participation, civil society capacity-building, the functioning of representative democracy, and online democracy. In the 2010s, the focus in democracy policy was on equal access to participation and new participation methods, municipal and regional democracy, open government and consultation, an enabling environment for civil society organisations and volunteering, education for democratic citizenship, and societal operating environment and climate of discussion. In the 2020s, there has been a stronger focus in democracy policy on the functioning and security of the electoral system and the role of international democracy work. The Programme of Prime Minister Orpo's Government contains several policies relating not only to the Democracy Programme at hand but also to issues including the development of an enabling environment for civil society organisations, the electoral system and initiative and consultation systems, openness and transparency, and election security.<sup>11</sup>

**Democracy promotion has also gained prominence on the agenda of the European Union.** In 2020, the Commission adopted the European Democracy Action Plan promoting free and fair elections, strengthening media freedom, and countering disinformation. To deepen this action, in December 2023 the Commission put forward the Defence of Democracy package seeking to counter

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10 E.g. International IDEA (2023 & 2024); Freedom House (2024); World Justice Project (2023); Grönlund & Wass (2016); Borg, Kestilä-Kekkonen & Wass (2020b); Kestilä-Kekkonen, Rapeli & Söderlund (2024); Ruuskanen et al. (2020); Gretsches et al. (2023); Paananen et al. (2024); Sinkkonen et al. (2024); Tiensuu & Jäntti (2023); Jäntti & Kurkela 2021; Jäntti et al. (2023); Kurkela et al. (2024).

11 E.g. Ministry of Justice (2003, 2010, 2014, 2017, 2022); Finnish Government (2023).

the threat of foreign interference by increasing transparency while at the same time promoting civic engagement and participation. The Commission's priorities set out in the Political Guidelines for 2024–2029 are defence and security, sustainable prosperity, democracy and social fairness. To protect democracy, the Commission proposes measures including a new European Democracy Shield project. The implementation of the EU's digital, data and cyber regulation plays a key role for democracy, and the impact of digitalisation and the development of artificial intelligence on, for example, elections has become an important theme on the international agenda. The resilience of democracy will be strengthened. The new Commission will also put effort into citizens' participation through measures including European Citizens' Panels and engagement with civil society organisations. The EU's electoral law and law concerning European political parties and foundations will be reformed and EU funding will be targeted at democracy promotion. EU strategies and resolutions have also emphasised the need to strengthen the participation of children and young people in decision-making and the need to identify new communication and interaction tools suitable for young people.<sup>12</sup>

**Finland's international activities to promote democracy are based on a broad understanding of democracy** where human rights, the rule of law, good governance, citizens' participation and eradication of corruption are seen as important and interdependent elements of democracy. As a Member State of the European Union, Finland promotes human rights, democracy and rule of law development within the EU and as part of the Union's external action. Finland acts in bodies and institutions of the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) for respect for fundamental and human rights and freedoms as well as democracy. Finland also engages in international democracy cooperation through the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) and the Community of Democracies. Finland's development cooperation appropriations facilitate the utilisation of Finnish experience and expertise in the democracy and rule of law development of countries that are candidates for accession to the EU and of developing countries.<sup>13</sup>

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12 E.g. European Commission (2020, 2021, 2023c, 2024); European Union (2018); European Parliament (2021).

13 E.g. [2030 Agenda – Sustainable Development Goals – Ministry for Foreign Affairs \(um.fi\)](#)

### 3 Key policies and measures to promote democracy and participation in 2025–2027

Democracy policy will be implemented in Finland by means of numerous different measures relating to, among others, elections and the electoral system, representative and direct democracy, civil society, and government openness. Democracy policy is also closely linked with many other policy sectors.

The Programme of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government<sup>14</sup> sets out the preparation and implementation of the Democracy Programme at hand. In line with the Government Programme, a particular objective of the Democracy Programme is to improve voter turnout and to increase the participation of children and young people. The aim of the Democracy Programme is to develop good practices in education for democratic citizenship and human rights education and to strengthen a culture of good discussion and exchange of opinions in society from a young age, safeguarding the constitutional freedom of expression and opinion. Another objective is to promote the inclusion and regional equity of young people, for example by reinforcing the status of youth councils in municipalities and wellbeing services counties. The Government Programme also outlines that, by relying on democracy at the local level, the Government will accelerate a controlled transition towards more creative and dynamic municipal government, as well as ensure the implementation of grassroots democracy. The objectives are to strengthen democracy, inclusion and equality for local residents.

This chapter presents the strategic-level policy goals and key measures by means of which Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government will implement the policies outlined in the Government Programme to promote democracy and participation in 2025–2027. The measures will be specified with regard to details including responsible parties and timeframes in the implementation plan prepared after the

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14 Finnish Government (2023).

approval of the government resolution at hand. The measures of the Democracy Programme will be coordinated with the Government's other policy and action programmes and strategies relevant to democracy and participation.

The aim is for the Democracy Programme to primarily develop general government measures. In addition to central government, the work to promote democracy and participation requires the involvement of local and regional-level actors, that is, the municipalities, wellbeing services counties and other authorities. There will be extensive cooperation during the implementation of the programme with various societal actors, such as civil society and research institutes.

The policy goals and key measures of the Democracy Programme are based on recommendations made by international human rights monitoring bodies and the European Commission, European Union and European Parliament and on academic research findings, evaluation of democracy work carried out during previous government terms, and feedback received from stakeholders.

### 3.1 We will promote high voter turnout

In 2023, the European Commission issued a recommendation to the European Parliament on inclusive and resilient electoral processes in the Union and enhancing the European nature and efficient conduct of the elections<sup>15</sup>. The recommendations relating to supporting voter turnout and inclusive participation concern matters such as introducing new kinds of voting methods and informing citizens about them, communicating activities addressing the needs of the different population groups, measures to support gender equality regarding access to and participation in elections and in governing bodies of electoral management bodies, and safeguarding the electoral rights and participation in the electoral process of persons with disabilities.

In its recommendations issued in 2018 and 2022, the Council of Europe recommends that<sup>16</sup> member States develop election communication and voting arrangements, and strengthen youth participation in democratic life by means such as supporting their growth into active citizens, investing in building young people's democratic competences, developing an enabling environment for democratic

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15 European Commission (2023a).

16 Council of Europe (2018b and 2022).



culture, and engage in open and structured dialogue with young people and create the requisite conditions for the widest possible political participation by young people.

In consultations organised in conjunction with the preparation of the Democracy Programme, children and young people pointed out that the right channels should be found to activate young people to vote and participate in societal debate. It is unclear to many young people what is being voted on in the various elections. Election panels and other election communication should also include more topics relevant to young people.<sup>17</sup>

As regards this theme, the measures of the Democracy Programme will be planned and implemented in a manner coordinated with the work of the parliamentary working group reviewing certain practices relating to voting and elections.<sup>18</sup> The working group is tasked with submitting its proposal concerning matters such as ensuring the accessibility of polling stations and council meeting rooms.

### Policy goal 1

**We will look for ways to increase voter turnout among young people in particular, to reduce the gaps in voter turnout detected between population groups, genders and areas and to halt the segregation trend.** Key measures include providing intelligible and accessible election information and communication, ensuring the accessibility of voting and polling stations, and encouraging the municipalities to consult young people and take account of the different age groups and people living in different areas in the placement of polling stations, and cooperation with civil society organisations, religious communities and other key stakeholders especially to reach first-time voters and eligible voters belonging vulnerable groups.

<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Justice (2024d).

<sup>18</sup> Parliamentary working group to develop certain practices relating to voting and elections [in Finnish and Swedish] <https://oikeusministerio.fi/hanke?tunnus=OM137:00/2023>.

## Policy goal 2

**We will increase access of children and young people to information about the importance of free elections and to opportunities to practise voting.** Key measures include cooperation and interaction between the Government, the wellbeing services counties and municipalities, libraries, early childhood education and care, schools and other educational institutions and civil society organisations, and the production of child- and youth-friendly, intelligible and party-politically neutral information and communication about elections, the duties of the various levels of government, the values of political parties, and voting using the channels where children and young people spend their time and as part of education for democratic citizenship.

## 3.2 We will strengthen the inclusion of children and young people

In the Democracy Programme at hand, the inclusion of children and young people refers to their opportunities to participate in decision-making processes and to influence decisions made in their community as well as their perception of being heard<sup>19</sup>.

In 2023, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child issued recommendations to Finland concerning the realisation of children's rights.<sup>20</sup> The Committee recommends, among other things, that the right of children to participate in society and in particular in local decision-making be guaranteed by means of appropriate policies and structures, such as youth councils. The Committee recommends the reinforcement of measures to promote the meaningful and empowered participation of all children, including children in disadvantaged situations, within the family, communities, schools and the inclusion of children in decision-making in all matters related to children in the area of policymaking at the municipal and national levels, and taking into account the digital environment. In addition,

19 E.g. Gretscher (2002); nuoretjaosallisuus.fi.

20 United Nations (UN) (2023); see also Ministry for Foreign Affairs (2024).

the Committee recommends that Finland strengthens the systematic training of professionals working with and for children on the right of the child to be heard and have their opinion taken into account in accordance with their age and maturity.

In recent decades, the Council of Europe has issued several recommendations to strengthen the democratic participation of children and young people and to integrate the consultation of children and young people into legislative processes and policymaking<sup>21</sup>. The OECD in turn has recommended that adherents strengthen the trust of young people in government by establishing the legal, institutional and administrative settings to promote the participation of young people in society<sup>22</sup>.

The EU strategy on the rights of the child, the European Union Youth Strategy and a European Parliament resolution invite Member States to encourage children and young people to participate in the democratic life of the Union so that their long-term participation in European democracies as active citizens and agents of positive change can be supported. Commission Recommendations issued in 2023 have also identified supporting the participation of children and young people as a key objective.<sup>23</sup>

In consultations organised during the preparation of the Democracy Programme, children and young people emphasised the importance of accessibility of information. Young people would like to receive more information about access to influence and civil rights, especially through social media. They also want the voices of those without the right to vote to be heard. The opinions of children and young people, too, should be listened to in decision-making and the voices of persons with disabilities should be better heard in society. Young people want their voices and opinions to be taken seriously, and they want concrete access to influencing decision-making. They would like student bodies to have more decision-making power.<sup>24</sup>

As regards this theme, the measures of the Democracy Programme will be planned and implemented in a manner coordinated with the implementation of the National Child Strategy and the National Youth Work and Policy Programme.

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21 E.g. Council of Europe (2004, 2006, 2012a, 2016, 2022 and 2023).

22 OECD (2022).

23 European Commission (2021); European Union (2018); European Parliament (2021); European Commission (2023a and 2023b).

24 Ministry of Justice (2024d).

### Policy goal 3

**We will strengthen the status of the youth councils of the municipalities and wellbeing services counties as well as cooperation and interaction with other bodies representing children and young people, such as student bodies and associations, and actors working for and with vulnerable children and young people<sup>25</sup>.** Key measures include assessing the functioning of the Municipalities Act and the Act on Wellbeing Services Counties with regard to provisions concerning youth councils, as well as support and training for personnel of municipalities, wellbeing services counties, schools and other educational institutions in both general education and vocational education and training.

### Policy goal 4

**We will strengthen child- and youth-friendly participation and consultation in matters concerning children and young people.** Key measures include emphasising the significance of consultation and participation of children and young people in the development of an open legislative drafting process, supporting government officials and increasing consultation and interaction competence, making more efficient use of existing structures for consultation and participation of children and young people in preparation and decision-making, compiling and disseminating best practices, developing assessment, measurement and monitoring of the effectiveness of participation and consultation measures, and stakeholder communication about the results of participation.

25 In this resolution, 'vulnerable children and young people' refers to children and young people who are in a more disadvantaged position than other children and young people. Vulnerability may relate to, for example, the family's disadvantaged financial situation, disability, asylum seeking or being a refugee. Particularly vulnerable children and young people also include those who are in child welfare foster care, those who belong to sexual or gender minorities, those with functional difficulties, those belonging to ethnic minorities and those who are foreign language speakers. See e.g. [UNICEF's Child-Friendly Municipality initiative \[in Finnish\]](#) and [Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare: Vulnerable groups](#).

### 3.3 We will develop good practices for education for democratic citizenship and human rights education

The UN and the Council of Europe have issued numerous declarations and recommendations concerning education for democratic citizenship (EDC) and human rights education (HRE)<sup>26</sup> as well as a Reference Framework inviting Member States to ensure quality and comprehensive education and teaching concerning democratic participation and human rights for all.<sup>27</sup> EDC/HRE can also support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda of the UN<sup>28</sup>.

In November 2023, the EU's Education, Youth, Culture and Sport (EYCS) Council adopted conclusions on the contribution of education and training to strengthening common European values and democratic citizenship<sup>29</sup>. The conclusions invite Member States to promote common European values and democratic citizenship in all levels and types of education and, in particular, to promote citizenship education and strengthen a sense of identity and belonging at the local, regional, national and EU level. In addition, Member States are invited to enhance media literacy, help newcomers to the EU to develop their competences for active participation, and promote the right of children and young people to be heard, and ensure that learning environments are safe and inclusive.

One of the sub-goals of the Nordic Co-operation Programme of the Nordic Council of Ministers for Education, Research and Language 2025–2030<sup>30</sup> is to strengthen the population's democratic skills, as well as its critical thinking, digital formation and ability to navigate a new media and information reality.

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26 In this context, the concept pair of 'education for democratic citizenship and human rights education' (EDC/HRE) refers to education, training and information which, on the one hand, aims for global respect for and observation of human rights and fundamental freedoms and therefore prevents human rights violations and which, on the other hand, seeks to educate citizens into becoming members of democratic society. In terms of objectives and contents, EDC/HRE has a great deal in common with concepts such as international education, global citizenship education, peace education and citizenship education.

27 E.g. United Nations (2011, 2024); Council of Europe (2010, 2012b, 2018a).

28 United Nations (2015).

29 European Union (2023).

30 Nordic Council of Ministers (2024).

In 2017, the Constitutional Law Committee of the Finnish Parliament pointed out in its statements the particular importance of the democracy, fundamental and human rights competences of teachers. According to the Committee, EDC must be included in teacher training and continuing education.<sup>31</sup> The Education and Culture Committee of the Finnish Parliament in turn has emphasised on several occasions that media literacy is a key means of strengthening security in society and functioning democracy and that the promotion of media literacy lays a foundation for the resilience of society as a whole<sup>32</sup>.

Prepared on the initiative of the Education and Culture Committee and published in 2021, the National Literacy Strategy<sup>33</sup> contains concrete objectives and measures for strengthening the diverse literacy skills of people of all ages. Diverse literacy skills are the foundation of a safe society, functioning democracy and equality. The aim of the National Literacy Strategy is a strong, diverse and inclusive reading culture. In the strategy, literacy is defined as 'multiliteracy', which includes the skills of reading and producing all kinds of texts from traditional written texts to audiovisual material.

Alongside schools and other educational institutions, democracy education and multiliteracy education<sup>34</sup>, including media literacy education, is provided by a broad group of societal actors that reach different age and population groups in a cross-cutting manner. These include the authorities responsible for organising immigrant integration, non-military service training and military training as well as municipalities' youth work, public libraries, civil society organisations and liberal adult education actors.

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31 Parliament of Finland (2017a, 2017b).

32 E.g. Parliament of Finland (2020, 2021, 2022).

33 Finnish National Agency for Education (2021).

34 'Multiliteracy' means 'the fluent ability to read, understand, interpret, produce and value different kinds of texts. This is based on a broad definition of text: multimodal texts may be written or spoken or contain graphs, symbols, image or sound or mixes of these combined with static or moving images. Students are increasingly surrounded by digital texts. Smart devices and fast data transmission makes these available all the time. Multiliteracy is a set of different text skills developing critical and cultural literacy that help students to manage the world of text. Using the languages and text skills of different branches of knowledge is also part of multiliteracy.' (Source: oph.fi.)

As regards this theme, the measures of the Democracy Programme will be planned and implemented in a manner coordinated with the implementation of the National Action Plan on Fundamental and Human Rights and the national media education policy.

### Policy goal 5

**We will strengthen the continuum of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education (EDC/HRE) between the various levels from early childhood education and care to upper secondary education as well as in liberal adult education in accordance with the principles of lifelong learning, and we will intensify national-level cooperation, coordination and monitoring and connections with multiliteracy, including media education, in EDC/HRE.** Key measures include work to develop the national development of the coordination and monitoring of EDC/HRE in cooperation and interaction with key actors, such as the Teacher Education Forum, universities and universities of applied sciences, the Finnish National Agency for Education and liberal adult education actors, and the development of measurable monitoring data on the achievement of targets concerning EDC/HRE set in national core curricula and in national qualification requirements in early childhood education and care, primary and lower secondary education and upper secondary education.

### Policy goal 6

**We will improve the national quality and availability of good practices and teaching materials and methods for education for democratic citizenship and human rights education (EDC/HRE).** Key measures include scaling and disseminating existing good practices, materials and methods nationally from early childhood education and care to upper secondary education and liberal adult education and developing practical implementation options and solution models for EDC/HRE in cooperation and interaction with key stakeholders such as public libraries, civil society organisations, parents and other local community actors.

### Policy goal 7

**We will strengthen the democracy knowledge and competence of those participating in non-military service training, integration training, multilingual civic orientation and military training.**

Key measures include the examination of curricula and contents of non-military service training, integration training and multilingual civic orientation as well as military training from the perspectives of democracy and inclusion themes.

## 3.4 We will strengthen a culture of good discussion and exchange of opinions in society.

The 2023 recommendation of the Council of Europe on deliberative democracy<sup>35</sup> invites the governments of Member States to complement representative democracy and to support decision-making by putting in place methods of deliberative democracy, such as mini-publics and citizens' panels and juries. The recommendation also sets out the principles of conducting deliberative processes, including the availability of a legal framework, clarity of mandate and design, accountability and competent facilitation. Recommendations issued by the UN and the Council of Europe to Finland<sup>36</sup> have, in addition, emphasised the role of the State and leading politicians in creating a positive culture of discussion and strengthening dialogue between population groups. The international IFLA-UNESCO Public Library Manifesto<sup>37</sup> emphasises the central role of libraries in endeavours including sharing and exchange of information and promoting civic engagement.

A policy brief produced by projects funded by the Strategic Research Council of the Research Council of Finland in 2021<sup>38</sup> underlines that 'polarisation can be alleviated by bringing different people and groups together in order to hear out others in a constructive and respectful environment.' Solutions presented to alleviate

<sup>35</sup> Council of Europe (2023a).

<sup>36</sup> United Nations (UN) (2017); Council of Europe (2019); United Nations (2023).

<sup>37</sup> Krass et al. (2022).

<sup>38</sup> Värttö, M. & al. (2021).



polarisation and improve the culture of discussion are deliberative mini-publics, collaborative methods and constructive journalism. The Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra has emphasised that it is particularly important to create space for dialogue and deliberative debate<sup>39</sup>.

It is important to learn a constructive culture of discussion and respect for different options from an early age. According to the Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC)<sup>40</sup>, a key duty of education systems, schools and universities is to prepare learners for democratic citizenship. The RFCDC lists listening and observing, empathy and cooperation and conflict resolution skills as some of the important democracy skills to be learned.

In consultations organised during the preparation of the Democracy Programme, children and young people called for a direct dialogue with decision-makers. They hope for decision-makers to discuss directly with them through, for example, school visits or various events. This would help them to express their thoughts and feel important.<sup>41</sup>

As regards this theme, the measures of the Democracy Programme will be planned and implemented in a manner coordinated with the implementation of the Government's A New Boost for Equality in Finland action plan.

### Policy goal 8

**We will improve multichannel access to participation, influence and dialogue, taking account of the different prerequisites for participation of different regions and population groups, in particular vulnerable children and young people and indigenous Sami people.** Key measures include developing and testing new kinds of national means and structures for participation and influence, consolidating existing participation structures, strengthening the role of public libraries as a structure for civil society dialogue, making digital channels of influence more child- and youth-friendly and increasing awareness of them, strengthening solution-oriented partnerships between government and civic actors in particular to reach vulnerable groups and to increase dialogue in decision-making concerning them.

39 Alhanen, K. & Henttonen, E. (2022).

40 Council of Europe (2018a).

41 Ministry of Justice (2024d).

### Policy goal 9

**We will support the development of deliberative democracy<sup>42</sup> models and the introduction of dialogical methods in decision-making processes at different levels of government.** Key measures include introducing, for example, citizens' juries or panels and dialogical methods in the preparation of the Government's strategic policies and as part of existing consultation and participation channels, further developing the National Dialogues model, implementing dialogues and making better use of their results, disseminating locally and regionally developed good dialogue practices and models nationally, and encouraging Parliament, wellbeing services counties and municipalities to use deliberative debate to support their decision-making.

## 3.5 We will develop municipal government and ensure the realisation of grassroots democracy

The Council of Europe has recommended that its Member States should improve their legal framework for local participation and ensure that national legislation and regulations enable local and regional authorities to employ a wide range of participation instruments.<sup>43</sup>

A policy brief produced by the Participation in Long-Term Decision-Making (PALO) research project funded by the Strategic Research Council of the Research Council of Finland points out that municipal residents' experience of decision-making being fair could be increased by providing new participation channels. Participation in decision-making would also strengthen residents' democracy skills

42 'Deliberative democracy' means decision-making where citizens take part in in-depth debate before decisions are made. The aim is to generate well-reasoned opinions and reduce political polarisation. See e.g. sitra.fi; Setälä & al. (2022).

43 E.g. Council of Europe (2018b).

and understanding of decision-making being demanding. At the local level, access to participation and influence has also been found to be linked with trust in the political system and with a positive view of one's own access to influence.<sup>44</sup>

The structures of the wellbeing services counties must support diverse and inspiring ways of influencing decisions. Everyone should be able to find a way to participate in decision-making that suits them<sup>45</sup>. This requires that the design of participation methods takes account of the needs of the various target groups. The majority of people in Finland would like to have low-effort access to participation using mobile devices, so it is important to identify topics suitable for low-effort influencing and to introduce agile digital participation tools.

To be effective, participation must, however, be linked with decision-making and its preparation as part of the processes of municipalities and wellbeing services counties. This requires, among other things, timely participation and adequate knowledge of the matter considered. An important starting point for participation is that it is targeted at issues that are significant in terms of substance. This increases both motivation to participate and the significance of participation outputs.

Democracy is not only a political system but also a way of life that can be strengthened in all everyday activities. Public services must provide people with an experience of society where everyone's issues are important and where situations are addressed together, respecting and hearing all those concerned.

### Policy goal 10

**We will monitor and promote the realisation of access to participation and influence of residents, service users and civil society organisations in the wellbeing services counties and municipalities.** Key measures include assessing the impacts of the wellbeing services counties reform on the de facto access to participation and influence of residents, service users and civil society organisations and on regional equality, developing local and regional democracy and promoting access to participation and influence in cooperation with a variety of actors.

44 Rapeli, L.; Jäske, M.; Värttö, M. and Kulha, K. (2019).

45 Jämsén, P.; Kaartinen, J.; Westinen, J.; Turja, T. (2022).

### Policy goal 11

**We will support the perspective of democracy and participation as part of leadership and decision-making in local and regional government.** Key measures include clarifying the interfaces between the wellbeing services counties and municipalities and the division of tasks between the ministries with regard to promoting regional and local democracy and participation, examining the participation of residents, service users and civil society organisations as a leadership and governance issue and as part of decision-making, investigating awareness, use and development of information requests as well as local residents' initiatives and wellbeing services county initiatives, and increasing democracy competences in the activities of public organisations, such as services, leadership and decision-making.

## 3.6 We will develop national democracy policy

A European Commission recommendation<sup>46</sup> issued in 2023 recommends that Member States should create a general framework or strategy for the effective participation of citizens and civil society organisations in public policy-making processes. The recommendation emphasises ensuring that citizens and civil society organisations have equal opportunities for participation and engagement, supporting the participation of underrepresented groups, developing provision of information relating to policy-making processes, and periodically evaluating the recommended framework for participation.

In 2014, the Finnish Government issued a report on democracy policy<sup>47</sup> based on an extensive assessment of democracy policy. In its report issued in 2014<sup>48</sup> and its statement issued in 2017<sup>49</sup>, the Constitutional Law Committee of the Finnish Parliament underlined the significance of a broad debate on the state and

<sup>46</sup> European Commission (2023b).

<sup>47</sup> Ministry of Justice (2014).

<sup>48</sup> Parliament of Finland (2014).

<sup>49</sup> Parliament of Finland (2017b).

development needs of Finnish democracy and of democracy research not only to understand the state and problems of democracy but also to develop democracy policy measures and study how well they function.

As regards this theme, the measures of the Democracy Programme will be planned and implemented in a manner coordinated with the implementation of the CSO Strategy. As part of the implementation of the strategy, a visionary dialogue will take place on the interaction of government and civil society organisations and the role of civil society organisations in Finnish democracy in the decades ahead.

### Policy goal 12

**We will continue the systematic development of democracy policy based on an understanding of democracy where fundamental and human rights, freedom of expression, the rule of law, good governance, citizens' participation and an autonomous civil society as well as eradication of corruption are seen as important and interdependent elements of democracy.** Key measures include closer and more systematic coordination of democracy policy in relation, for example, to governance, information, media and technology policy measures and cooperation with academic research to strengthen the knowledge base of democracy policy and knowledge-based decision-making.

### Policy goal 13

**We will strengthen the effectiveness evaluation, monitoring and transparency of national democracy policy and democracy promotion measures.** Key measures include developing national democracy indicator work and participating in the evaluation and auditing of the state of Finnish democracy in cooperation with scientific research, civil society organisations and other key stakeholders, and communicating about the Government's democracy policy measures and their effectiveness openly, accessibly and transparently.

### 3.7 We will promote democracy in the European Union and internationally

Under section 1 of the Constitution, Finland participates in international cooperation for the protection of peace and human rights and for the development of society. Title II of the Treaty of the European Union contains provisions on democratic principles. These principles include that the Union shall observe in all its activities the principle of the equality of its citizens; every national of a Member State shall be a citizen of the Union; the functioning of the Union shall be founded on representative democracy; citizens are directly represented at Union level in the European Parliament; and every citizen shall have the right to participate in the democratic life of the Union. The European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights affirms that the Union is built on the values of fundamental rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Protecting and defending democracy and supporting civic activity have been at the core of the activities of the European Commission in recent years<sup>50</sup>. To promote citizens' participation, the Commission is going to implement European Citizens' Panels and cooperate more closely with civil society organisations. EU funding has also been targeted at the promotion of democracy. In the EU enlargement process, countries aspiring to join the Union are encouraged to implement democratic and economic reforms, consequently promoting stability and prosperity in Europe. Promoting human rights and democracy is a principle, strategic interest and objective also emphasised by the EU in all of its international activities. With the world's democratisation declining, there is a particular need for international action.

The Council of Europe has also adopted securing and strengthening democracy as a stronger goal. The Member States of the Council of Europe have committed to securing and strengthening democracy and good governance in accordance with the democracy principles of the Reykjavík Declaration<sup>51</sup>, and the recommendations of the Council of Europe concerning the development of democracy and democratic governance<sup>52</sup> set standards for the Member States.

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50 European Commission (2023c, 2023d and 2024).

51 Council of Europe (2023c).

52 Council of Europe (2023a).

According to the Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy<sup>53</sup> and the Report on International Economic Relations and Development Cooperation<sup>54</sup>, Finland's foreign and security policy is founded on value-based realism. Its goal is to safeguard Finland's independence and territorial integrity, to avoid becoming involved in a military conflict and to improve the security and wellbeing of the people of Finland. Our activities are founded on democracy, the rule of law, human rights, equality and non-discrimination. Finland strengthens the rules-based, multilateral system and cooperation and acts globally to strengthen international law, democracy and human rights.

#### Policy goal 14

**We will promote democracy and the realisation of human rights in the European Union and internationally and in this way also strengthen security, stability and resilience.** Key measures include promoting the development of the continuum of democracy measures, good governance and openness as well as deeper efforts to strengthen election security and crisis resilience of democracies in the EU, increasing awareness at the national level of EU funding sources aimed at supporting democracy and civil society, and active participation in the preparation of the new multiannual financial framework, active influencing in the development of the role of the Council of Europe in democracy issues, taking part in the Team Europe Democracy Initiative, and allocating development cooperation appropriation strategically to support democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the free space of civil society, taking account in particular of the activities of countervailing institutions<sup>55</sup>.

53 Finnish Government (2024b).

54 Finnish Government (2024a).

55 'Countervailing institutions' (CIs) are the set of governmental and non-governmental institutions, such as popular movements, human rights organisations and trade unions, that balance the distribution of power between the branches of government and ensure that popular priorities regularly and consistently feature in decision-making. IDEA, The Global State of Democracy in 2023. See also Mäkelä, R-M and Lindqvist, J. (2023). [Demokratian tila jatkoi heikkenemistä, kansalaisten aktiivisuus herättää toivoa](#) [Decline in state of democracy continues, civic activity fuels hope]. Sitra. Published 6 November 2023. [Accessed 2 May 2024.]

### **Policy goal 15**

**We will step up the coordination of Finland's international democracy work and the monitoring of the implementation of international democracy recommendations at the national level.**

Key measures include establishing the Government's coordination system for international democracy issues and investing in the national implementation of the recommendations of international monitoring bodies and organisations.



## 4 Programme preparation, implementation and monitoring

### 4.1 Working group consisting of public officials

In November 2023, the Ministry of Justice appointed a working group to prepare and coordinate a national programme to promote democracy and participation. With its term extending from 13 November 2023 to 17 April 2027, the working group is tasked with:

1. preparing a national programme to promote democracy and participation as outlined in the Programme of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government. The programme will be issued as a government resolution;
2. coordinating, monitoring and promoting the implementation of the programme in the Government. The working group will monitor progress made in the measures set out in the programme, draw up a summary of the measures implemented for the Government's mid-term policy review and submit a proposal for additional measures required;
3. making other proposals it finds necessary, particularly concerning the promotion of voter turnout, the strengthening of the participation of children and young people, the development of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education, and the strengthening of a culture of good discussion.

The working group consists of representatives of various ministries. The working group is co-chaired by the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Education and Culture.

### 4.2 Timeframe and resources

The working group prepared the National Programme to Promote Democracy and Participation at hand during 2024. The Democracy Programme was approved as a government resolution in the government plenary session in March 2025 and will be implemented in 2025–2027. The key measures set out in the programme will be

specified with regard to details including responsible parties and timeframes in the implementation plan prepared by the working group consisting of public officials after the approval of the government resolution at hand in spring 2025.

There is no separate appropriation available for the implementation of the Democracy Programme. Instead, efforts will be made to implement the measures with available resources and as part of the ministries' official duties. Efforts will also be made to use EU funding sources in the implementation of the programme.

### 4.3 Preparation, communication and interaction

Efforts have been made to prepare the Democracy Programme at hand openly, and the intention is to coordinate its implementation in close interaction with key stakeholders. To support the Democracy Programme, a communication and interaction plan will be drawn up, specifying the Democracy Programme's main messages and stakeholders, communication and interaction objectives, risks and monitoring indicators as well as primary communication channels. The plan will also present the timeframe, measures and responsible parties for the communication and interaction measures. The plan will be updated as progress is made in the implementation of the Democracy Programme.

To support the preparation of the Democracy Programme, the Ministry of Justice conducted at the turn of 2023 and 2024 a stakeholder mapping and questionnaire to survey stakeholder willingness and opportunities to participate in programme planning and implementation and stakeholder views of and proposals for the programme priorities. In February–March 2024, the Ministry of Justice organised consultation and discussion events aimed at stakeholders to gain a more detailed situational picture of Finnish democracy and to discuss challenges and solutions for the development of democracy in Finland. The draft government resolution was released for comments in October 2024 and, concurrently with that consultation round, events to consult children and young people were organised. In addition, on 30 January 2025, the Ministry of Justice organised, at the request of the Sami Parliament, a negotiation on the Democracy Programme under section 9 of the Act of the Sami Parliament. A synopsis of the results of the stakeholder questionnaire<sup>56</sup>, a summary of the consultation and discussion events<sup>57</sup>, a summary of comments

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<sup>56</sup> Ministry of Justice (2024a).

<sup>57</sup> Ministry of Justice (2024b).

submitted in the consultation round<sup>58</sup> and a synopsis of the results of the consultation events organised for children and young people<sup>59</sup> are available in the Government Project Register.

## 4.4 Monitoring and effectiveness assessment

In line with its mandate, the Democracy Programme working group consisting of public officials will monitor progress made in the measures set out in the programme, draw up a summary of the measures implemented for the Government's mid-term policy review and submit a proposal for additional measures required.

The implementation plan of the Democracy Programme will, where possible, determine the indicators for the assessment of the effectiveness of each measure. It typically takes several years for impacts of policy and legislative measures to be seen. Lack of precise baseline or monitoring data is also often a challenge faced in assessment. In addition, democracy development is affected not only by individual measures but also by many other factors, such as the political climate, global trends, and development of the Finnish economy and discussion climate. This is why it may be difficult to assess the effectiveness or direct impacts of individual measures set out in the Democracy Programme on the development of democracy. Efforts will, however, be made to use academic research and monitoring data, national and international democracy indicators as well as stakeholder estimates of the effectiveness of the measures of the Democracy Programme available during the Government term.<sup>60</sup> (Älä poista tätä sivunvaihtoa.)

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58 Ministry of Justice (2024c).

59 Ministry of Justice (2024d).

60 On the monitoring and assessment of democracy policy, see e.g. Männistö, L. (ed., 2023).

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