Political Youth Organisations: Strengthening the Voice of Youth in Politics

The Finnish Experience
This booklet is based on information given by the political youth organisations and student organisations themselves. Neither Demo Finland nor the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland claims responsibility for the validity of this information.

Contents

Political Youth Organisations: Strengthening the Voice of Youth in Politics 3
Youth issues advanced in unison 5
Innovators for the mother parties 9
Effective influence 14
Democratic and open organisation 17
Members are the starting point of action 21

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Political Youth Organisations: Strengthening the Voice of Youth in Politics

Protesting against inequalities in society is essential for the activists of Left Youth of Finland.

**Political youth organisations are significant political actors**

Political youth organisations are a significant part of the Finnish political system. They are an important support base for their mother parties, as well as central actors in getting new members and recruiting future decision-makers. One of their core functions is influencing policy in their mother parties. In addition, they work to oversee the interests of young people, and work to improve youth affairs in general.

Political youth organisations complement the work of their mother parties. They offer young people between the ages of 15 and 30 the chance to take part in making decisions, learn about society and how to run societal affairs, as well as opportunities to make a difference. The organisations seek to awaken the interest of youth in politics and matters of social development, and to
disseminate information about them in a suitable form to young people.

Youth organisations are important for the whole party. It is often through youth organisations that parties get new, young members. Young people also challenge their parties ideologically to reform and develop. Political youth organisations are a necessary critical voice within their mother parties.

Youth organisations ensure that young people are nominated for key positions in elections. They help to instruct young candidates in election matters and campaigning. Without youth organisations there would undoubtedly be fewer young candidates and fewer young representatives selected to positions of power in different areas. The participation of young people in policymaking is important for the representative nature of democracy. Young people are the experts on youth affairs.

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**The Finnish political system**

Finland is a republic. The head of state is the President who is appointed to office for a six-year term by direct ballot. The President ratifies laws, appoints top officials and runs the country’s foreign policy together with the government.

The Council of State, which is the government led by the Prime Minister, is the chief executive. It carries out the decisions of the Parliament and the President and issues regulations. The Prime Minister is chosen by inter-party government negotiations, and the Prime Minister appoints 15–20 other ministers to the government. Drawing up national budget and the preparation of draft legislation for the most part takes place in the ministries under the authority of the ministers.

According to the Constitution, power in Finland belongs to the people. The highest governmental power in Finland is exercised by the Parliament, which is chosen by the people. The parliament is a unicameral body of 200 members elected on a proportional basis. Parliamentary elections are held at four year intervals. A parliamentary majority may change the government by a no-confidence vote. Parliament enacts legislation and adopts the state budget.

Members of the Parliament are elected every four years in direct elections in which every Finnish citizen over the age of 18 is entitled to vote. Elections are also held to choose municipal councilors and the Finnish representatives to the European Parliament. Every adult Finn who is not declared incompetent is eligible for nomination. By voting, each Finnish citizen is able to exert an influence on common affairs.
Youth issues advanced in unison

Although political youth organisations compete for members, support, and political power to realise their objectives, they work well together in order to improve issues affecting the well-being of youth. They also stimulate young people’s interest and participation in policymaking.

The majority of political youth organisations work with other children’s and youth organisations under the auspices of the Finnish Youth Co-operation – Allianssi. Political youth organisations have, for instance, made joint tours in schools, universities, and events of various organisations in order to jointly present their political goals and candidates.

Political youth organisations have many common political objectives they seek to influence. These include the level of financial aid to students, lowering the voting age, as well as increasing the esteem of youth politics. The organisations also carry out joint projects and campaigns.

Political youth organisations consider their joint work to be productive and effective. For example, the fact that fixing the level of student aid to the general index was finally written down in the government programme was one of the results of their joint efforts.

According to the political youth organisations, it is especially fruitful when cooperation is carried out on issues which they already have a common line. It requires a lot of effort if they have to start from working out common policy lines.
Political youth organisations also cooperate with various international organisations. The scope of their activities is captured by a Left Youth slogan: “We act both on the streets and in the cabinets”. The organisations try to bring youth issues into public and political discussions, for instance through different kinds of events, campaigns and public statements. Political youth organisations also influence their mother parties’ policies internally as well as through direct contacts with those in positions of influence, from MPs to ministers.

Political youth organisations cooperate with other civil society organisations that are ideologically close to them. For example,
the Social Democratic Youth cooperates with the trade union movement, and Left Youth and the Federation of Green Youth and Students are in regular cooperation with environmental organisations.

All youth organisations also have political influence at the international level. They work with their sister organisations in Nordic, European and worldwide umbrella associations. European umbrella organisations are an important channel to influence EU policies. In general, the organisations gain new experiences and resources from international work for their own activities in Finland, but also an understanding of global issues and development trends, as well as knowledge of international collaboration.

International conferences in particular enable activists from political youth organisations to get involved with international questions. The international umbrella associations of youth organisations design their own policy programmes and stands on current issues. The Finnish representatives in these associations can take these experiences and discussions back to their respective organizations.
Young people as voters

Youth voting in national elections has gradually declined from the 75 % level of the 1975 elections. Approximately 55 – 60 % of people under the age of 30 used their right to vote in the 2011 parliamentary elections.

In Finland, as in several other European countries, there has been consideration to lower the voting age in local elections from 18 to 16. Supporters of this initiative argue that youth interest in local municipal affairs and ties to their local area is the strongest before young people move from their local municipalities, usually for work or study purposes when they are 18–20. Supporters also say that lowering the voting age would strengthen young people’s commitment to democracy. Those who have a more negative attitude do not believe that this alone would increase youth voting activity.

A campaign called “Someone hopes you to remain silent” encouraged youth to take part in policymaking across party-lines.
Political youth organisations have good and close relations with their mother parties. Some parties also have a separate student organisation. The Christian Democrat Students, Centre Party Students, Coalition Party Students, Social Democratic Students, Liberal Students, and Left Students focus on student matters and education policy. Federation of Green Youth and Students deals with both youth and student issues as suggested by its name. Young members take part in policymaking in their mother parties. Political youth organisation’s activists are involved in policy preparation and background work as assistants to MPs and ministers and as employees in party offices and parliamentary groups.

Many of today’s ministers and MPs, were formerly active in youth politics in their party’s youth organisations. Many former
Political youth organisations hold various events – nationally as well as locally.

political youth organisation activists have also become government officials. The organisations are a kind of political college for future policymakers.

The official position of political youth organisations in their mother parties varies. The members of the youth organisations of the Centre, National Coalition and Green parties are automatically members of the mother party. Automatic membership of the party can bring the rights of representation in the party’s decision-making bodies, such as the party congress, delegation, management board, working committee and working groups. At the local level, these political youth organisations are also entitled to be represented in the party’s district and municipal organisations.

The youth organisations of the other parties function as separate associations alongside the mother party, and thus it is possible for an individual to be a member of just the youth organisation and not the mother party. However, the representation of these youth organisations in the party may still be strong even though their members are not automatically members of the mother party.

The youth organisations think that they are well taken into account by their parties. The ways in which young people are taken into consideration in internal party decision-making, however, vary. For example, the Federation of Green Youth and Students have representation in the party congress and council, and the spokespersons have the right to be present and speak in the party committee meetings. Left Youth, on the other hand, can put motions to the Left Alliance congress even though the organisation is independent of the mother party. The True Finns Youth are formally represented on
their party’s governing council. The Christian Democratic Youth are officially represented in the mother party, as one of the three deputy chairpersons of the party is always a young person. The district committees of the youth organisation of the Swedish People’s Party in Finland (called Svensk Ungdom) are entitled to nominate a representative to the meetings of city council groups.

Young people are strongly involved in their parties’ work and in policy-making. For example, the Social Democratic Youth organisation has a representative in all the working groups of the mother party.

Political youth organisations take an active part in the work of their parties in other respects too. They carry out joint events and election work. Svensk Ungdom, for instance, holds regular regional and local events together with its mother party. Youth organisations are particularly active during party congresses, where the main policies of the parties are formed.

Generally, the chairpersons of the youth organisations have the right to take part in the main decision-making bodies of the mother party. They participate in the management board of their party and in meetings of working and parliamentary committees. In this way the voice of young people is heard in the daily process of policymaking, and they are aware of the issues under preparation. These young people have an influence on their parties nationally and locally. They are actively involved in local politics and campaigning work of the branches and districts that comprise them. While the youth organisations have their own local branches and districts, young people are also in positions of power in local party associations.

Youth have political power in their parties. Their voices have sometimes been decisive at party congresses in the selection of officials and in policy formation.

Naturally, the political ideology of the youth organisation is close to that of the mother party. They have a shared ideological basis and principles. In some matters, however, the youth organisations have a different view from their mother party. Young people say that they are more reformist, courageous and open minded. For example, the Federation of Green Youth and Students has called for openness inside
the mother party with the result of opening up all meetings of the party organs to all members. They also bring their expertise on youth matters, and have managed to get issues adopted by their party. The Social Democratic Youth was involved in the preparation of the Social Democratic electoral programme and laid emphasis on the removal of unjustified temporary employment contracts instead of steady employment. The Swedish People’s Party introduced at party congress the initiative of youth organisation for the reform of the parental leave system and permitting gay couples to adopt and gain parental rights for their partner’s children.

In the parliament, Christian Democrat MPs proposed a no-confidence vote for the government from a proclamation of the Christian Democrat Youth concerning the budget for development cooperation. The Youth League of the Coalition Party brought to attention the issue of Finnish EU membership at the end of the 1980s when the Coalition Party was still cautious about supporting the issue.

The Youth League of the Coalition Party has succeeded in getting the issue of voting rights for 16-year-olds in municipal elections as the official party line. The Finnish Centre Youth also got their mother party to support the goal of lowering the voting age.

Political youth organisations are independent and have their own political programmes. They take positions and initiatives independently of their mother parties. When necessary, they can be severe critics of their own parties. The mother parties do not interfere in the policies or activities of their youth organisations, at least not directly.

The political youth organisations play an important role in their mother party’s election work as well. They raise youth issues in electoral debates, encourage young people to vote and assist and train young candidates. The support groups of young candidates work hard during electoral campaigns.
Involvement of Finnish youth in politics

Young Finns vote and take part in party political activity less than older generations. The reduction in voting activity by young people does not, however, mean that young people are not interested in politics or issues under discussion.

Many young people define politics in a new manner, and although they are interested especially in matters close at hand, they do not necessarily think of it as politics. Youth want to be able to have a direct influence on issues they consider important.

Instead of joining political parties, some young people try to make a difference by taking part in NGO activities, demonstrations, boycotts of certain products or by signing web petitions and taking part in online debates.

Young people have an influence in local municipalities, such as in youth councils, which exist in about 70% of Finland’s 336 municipalities. The possibilities for the youth councils to exert an influence vary by municipality. There are youth councils that have significant budgets of their own, in the framework of which they can, for example, develop municipal leisure opportunities for youth. In some municipalities, however, youth councils have no real power.
Effective influence

Young people in Finland involved in politics have an influence in both municipal and national politics. Political youth organisations consider their possibilities to have an influence to be surprisingly good at party, local, and national levels. Nevertheless, young people are underrepresented in politics. Nine MPs under 30 years old were elected to the Parliament in the 2011 elections. The table below shows distribution of seats by party following the 2008 municipal elections and the proportion of seats held by people under 30 years of age according to the party.

Figures for the total number of party seats accessed 13 June 2012 from the statistics Finland website www.stat.fi.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Number of young municipal council members</th>
<th>Total number of council seats by party</th>
<th>Youth % share of council seats by party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Centre Party</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>3518</td>
<td>6.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finnish Social Democratic Party</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>2066</td>
<td>4.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Coalition Party</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>5.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finnish Left Alliance</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>833</td>
<td>4.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Union</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>12.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finnish Christian Democrats</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>4.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish People’s Party</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>9.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>True Finns</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>6.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>650</strong></td>
<td><strong>10 412</strong></td>
<td><strong>6.24</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The issues on which political youth organisations are most active vary with the ideological background of the organisation. The organisations work in many different ways to advance their agenda. They arrange educational and other various events, conferences, take part in public debates, produce materials about their ideas and values and communicate their aims through the Internet and other media. The goal is to gain support and visibility for their ideas.

**Political youth organisations have several ways of making their voices heard.**

Political youth organisations influence national politics mainly through political parties. The organisations nevertheless believe that young people can, if they want, influence local politics significantly. However, it is not easy because young politicians often face patronising attitudes.

The political youth organisations believe that they can influence social development. For example, young people have raised up matters for public debate using various campaigns and they have also been successful in moving matters forward. All the issues on the agendas of the political youth organisations can be considered as youth affairs - from skateboard ramps to security policy.

**Activities of political youth organisations vary according to their ideology: Green Youth at a gay pride demonstration.**
The purpose of the Youth Act, renewed in 2006, is to improve young people’s living conditions and to create favourable conditions for young people’s civic activities and promote equality between generations, genders and Finnish regions, as well as tolerance and cultural diversity.

Active citizenship can be described as young people’s goal-oriented activities in the sphere of civil society. It is also above all active participation in running of society. Strengthening the social involvement of young people focuses on improving the quality of life of young people in danger of social exclusion.

The Youth Act obliges municipalities to involve young people in the preparation of youth issues. The law states that the opportunity must be arranged for young people to take part in dealing with youth work and policy matters locally and regionally. Young people have to be listened to on matters that concern them.

The Youth Act defines a young person as someone under 29 years old.
Democratic and open organisation

Geographically distributed branches or local associations of political youth organisations are a central part of the structure of the organisation. A branch can be run, for instance, in a municipal area. Districts often cover one municipal or other larger area.

However, the district can be determined by something other than a geographical basis. For example, one of the eight Social Democratic Youth local branches is the national Swedish language branch.

The task of a local branch is to support the branch activity of its region and operate and have an influence in the region. Branches and districts are registered associations that have statutory meetings in
The National Congress of Left Youth is held every second year.

which chairpersons and management boards are selected. Local branches normally have employees and their own office, which can be contacted concerning all district matters.

The districts and branches jointly make up the national association. The assembly or annual congress is the highest authority of the youth organisation. Most organisations hold congress once a year, though the Federation of Green Youth and Students do so twice a year.

Representation at the congress is based on internal regulations of the association. In most cases congress participants each represent their branches or districts in proportion to numbers of members. However, not all political youth organisations have districts or local branches, and in those cases representation is based on a different kind of system.

The annual congress approves the budget and makes action plans for the coming year, discharges the previous year’s board of its responsibilities, chooses a new board and sets the policy lines of the organisation. The initiatives of the organisation’s branches and districts are dealt with at the congress, the political programme is adopted, and a political discussion is held. Political youth organisations must be run according to
Members of The Federation of Green Youth and Students voting.

democratic principles and their activities must be open to all people aged between 15 and 30 interested in joining.

A youth organisation’s board implements policy. The board manages the practical work of the organisation, takes a political stand on matters and acts otherwise as the voice and representative of the organisation. Board meetings are usually open to members of the organisation.

The board selects a working committee among its members, which may comprise of a chairperson, vice-chairperson, a branch or district secretary and perhaps a few board members. The working committee prepares proposals for the board for the basis of decision-making. In addition, it makes decisions when the board delegates power to the working committee in order to deal with a particular matter.

In addition to these, many youth organisations also have separate working or action groups that focus on special issues. These groups usually work on thematic issues such as equality or environmental policy. These working groups offer an easy access for members to join the political work of the organisation.

The chairperson of a political youth organisation is the organisation’s most visible representative. The chairperson sees that the work of the organisation follows the spirit of the regulations and programme and is in accordance with the decisions made.

The chairperson convenes the board and working committee, and leads the discussion at their meetings, as well as declares the opening of the annual meeting. The Federation of Green Youth and Students have two chairpersons, in line with the Green model in the rest of Europe. The other organisations have one.

The secretary general is the operational leader of the organisation, whereas the chairperson is more responsible for the work on the political level. The primary objective of the secretary general is to steer the work and finances of the organisation in line with the decisions made, and to provide initiatives to the chairperson of the annual meeting and the board of the organisation for the development and funding of activities.
The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture provides financial support for national political youth organisations. This support is an essential part of the implementation of the Youth Act, as such assistance guarantees the operational basis of these political youth organisations.

In order for a political youth organisation to receive assistance its activities have to be socially acceptable. A national political youth organisation qualifies for support if it has at least one thousand individual members and two thirds of its members are under 29 years old. Exceptions can be made with regards to the membership quota if the activities of the organisation can be considered to have a national spread. In addition, its membership lists must be up to date.

An organisation’s eligibility for assistance is also influenced by the respective organisation’s youth work practices, area of activities and the participation of young people in the running of the organisation. The organisation must operate more widely than just locally or regionally. State assistance for organisations is eventually granted on the basis of results. These are measured based on the quality, extent and expenses of their activities. An organisation must also have sources of funding other than state support.

The political youth organisations have to apply for support. The use of funding is monitored, as it may only be used for the purposes for which it was applied for and granted. A report has to be submitted on the use of the support within a set deadline. If the report is inadequate or faults are found in the use of the monetary assistance, the organisation may have to return part of or all of the funding.

The Ministry of Education and Culture has a separate assessment board, which evaluates the applications. The board is an expert body that serves a four year term.

The political youth organisations which received the largest amounts of such funding in 2012 were the Finnish Centre Youth and the Youth League of the National Coalition Party, each of which received over EUR 650,000, and the Social Democratic Youth, which received a little under EUR 600,000.

Political Youth Organisations also receive assistance from other sources, such as their mother parties and party-related associations, as well as project assistance from various government ministries and other sources. Youth organisations may also receive financial support from a municipality for their local activities.
The reasons for joining a political youth organisation vary. The most usual motive, however, is the desire to change society. An active young person belonging to a party may influence opinions, at least within his or her own circle of friends. Members of political youth organisations are also often active in other civil society organisations.

The political youth organisations ensure that their activities are transparent and that their members receive information. All decisions from official meetings are public. Members are informed on how and by what deadlines current issues are discussed in their mother parties and how they can influence policymaking. Most of the information is available online to ensure an open process.

The best way for members to have influence is to take an active part in the activities of the organisation. Members can also contact the organisation’s board directly if they have initiatives or specific issues they want to influence in society.

Members can also make initiatives at the annual congress of their youth organisation. Individual members can also become delegates themselves at the annual congress. To ensure equality, organisations pay the travel expenses of participants to national events, so that everyone has an opportunity to take part. The need to be present physically has decreased
Political youth organisations are also constantly lobbying in order to increase their members’ chances to influence political issues concerning youth. The minutes of the board meetings of the Federation of Green Youth and Students are shared with the organisation and its local associations online. Left Youth’s three person action groups can apply for project assistance from the central organisation for separate projects at the local level.

Promoting an open culture of debate is important for political youth organisations. Individual opinions must be respected and matters discussed despite different viewpoints. Providing information about current issues that the organisation is working on as well as widening the opportunities for discussion within the organisation are an important basis of internal democracy.

The political youth organisations keep their members informed by using email lists, message boards, social media, websites, and by publishing magazines for members. Informing the general public about the work of the organisation is also important in advancing their objectives. Communications work includes also distribution of membership magazines and booklets of the organisation at different events, and organising externally profiled activities. The organisations communicate their aims by keeping in regular contact with different

substantially thanks to technologies such as livestreaming and video chatting. Social media plays an increasing role in the work of the organisations. It is a means of communication but also a platform for political discussion by itself.

Political youth organisations arrange events where youth can network and form “idea mills” to influence the future.
Political youth organisations give information on their work at youth fairs.

actors, such as their own party’s MPs, MEPs, ministers and officials.

Political youth organisations continually seek to increase their membership base. The number of members has an effect on the extent and quality of activities as well as the general status of the organisation. It also influences the amount of financial support from the Ministry of Education and Culture. The majority of members of political youth organisations are students.

Political youth organisations try to attract new members by publishing the results of their work in newspapers and on the Internet, by taking part in fairs and various events, and by arranging membership campaigns.

Many new members join political youth organisations online. Membership fees vary from free membership to annual fees of a few tens of euros. Those who pay membership fees receive, for instance, the organisation’s magazine or newsletter by mail.

In order to influence decision-making in society, one has to understand the world of politics. This is why youth organisations provide training for their members. Members are trained in various conferences, camps, weekend courses and study circles. Courses are also arranged for elected officials and electoral candidates. Several organisations even have paid staff for planning and carrying out training activities.
Observing language rights and conditions in Finland

According to the Constitution, Finland has two equal national languages – Swedish and Finnish. Both are also Finland’s official languages in the European Union. In addition to Finnish and Swedish, the Constitution mentions three other language groups as well: Sámi, Roma and Sign Language users.

Finnish and Swedish have been spoken in Finland for over 900 years. Swedish was the language of administration and law for a long time. After Finland’s independence in 1917, both Finnish and Swedish were confirmed as equal national languages of Finland.

At the end of 2011, 90% of the population spoke Finnish and 5.4% spoke Swedish. 4.5% of the population spoke some other language as their mother tongue. Thousands of Finns are bilingual and the majority of the Swedish speaking people also speak Finnish. Since the beginning of the 1990s the language environment in Finland has diversified rapidly. Finland is gradually changing into a multilingual country, although the immigrant minorities are altogether fairly small. During the last ten years Russian has established its position as the third largest language in Finland, covering over one percent of the population.

The new Language Act which deals with Finland’s national languages came into force in 2004. The law safeguards basic language rights: everyone’s right to use their own language, either Finnish or Swedish, when dealing with state and municipal authorities, in court, Parliament and city councils. Municipal services have to be provided in each national language, if the municipality is bilingual.

It is also possible to study in Swedish at university or technical college. The purpose of the law is to ensure that the Finnish and Swedish speaking population are able to function in society using only their mother tongue.

Finnish is spoken practically everywhere in the country. It is usually considered self-evident that Finnish language speakers use the language and get services in Finnish in all situations. Swedish is spoken in Finland mainly in the capital and coastal areas including the Åland Islands. Swedish is endangered because it is only spoken as a mother tongue by a small minority of the population. The use of Swedish has declined, especially in official and public life. Of the 336 municipalities in Finland, 30 are bilingual. 19 municipalities are purely Swedish speaking.

Sami people are entitled to use the Sami language in official matters in Sami areas, which are in parts of the province of Lapland. There are less than 7,400 Sami people in Finland. The majority of Sami people are Finnish speakers. The Finnish Constitution and the Sami Language Act guarantee the rights of the Sami people to maintain and develop their own language and culture.
Finnish Centre Youth

Finnish Centre Youth is a political youth organisation that has an influence on society according to the political means of its values and programmes, and educates young people in active citizenship. The organisation was established in 1945.

Finnish Centre Youth believes that social development must be decided on by the people. The organisation does not define the tasks of a society and the state from the viewpoint of managing capital but rather that people’s welfare, humanity, have to be the overriding values of all societal development. The principle of humaneness brings together the Finnish Centre Youth’s four values: culture, equality, the welfare of nature, and communality.

In their activities the Finnish Centre Youth members learn the skills of participation and exerting an influence, and get to use them in their own neighbourhoods and in society as a whole. In the Finnish Centre Youth young people influence issues that are important to them through representative democracy, by working in civil society and through concrete actions and choices.

The Finnish Centre Youth is active throughout Finland and has about 17,000 members. The organisation organises different events, training, campaigns, and international activities. It is open to everyone between the ages of 15 and 30.

Federation of Green Youth and Students

The Federation of Green Youth and Students is the national Green youth organisation. The organisation was established in 2003. At present it has 900 members and 15 local associations.

Poverty, environmental destruction, and gender inequality are not ‘natural’ phenomena, rather political choices. It is always possible to decide otherwise, the organisation states. The organisation is involved in creating and implementing alternatives. The means vary, from lobbying the Parliament to direct civic action. The organisation considers close cooperation with NGOs to be especially important.

The environment, democracy, human rights, and social justice are the four pillars of the Green movement on which the organisation is based. The present environmentally destructive way of life cannot continue. Accelerating climate change is a sign of this. We need radical measures to save the environment.
**Finnish Christian Democratic Youth**

The Christian Democratic Youth is an organisation that bases its activities on the equal human dignity of every person. All policies start from this point. Although the policies of the youth organisation are not based on the Bible, the Christian concept of the unique value of people and life is nevertheless important.

In the political field the Christian Democrats and the Christian Democratic Youth are located on the centre-right. It is, however, a feature of the policy of the youth organisation to stand up for the weaker members of society.

**Svensk Ungdom – the youth organisation of the Swedish People’s Party in Finland**

Svensk Ungdom is the youth organisation of the Swedish People’s Party in Finland. The organisation’s primary focus is to unite the strength and ability of the Swedish speaking Finnish Youth to increase its influence on the political plane. Svensk Ungdom is, first and foremost, a liberal organisation and has a strong belief in individualism. It is the individual that should have the right to make its own decisions, without the government’s excessive meddling and setting of boundaries. Government decisions that are made, however, should be considered from a human perspective.

Svensk Ungdom represents a broad political line and considers diversity as an advantage. The organisation is made up of its members, who in turn shape its policy. Members do not have to support all the views of the organisation, but can raise issues they consider important and thus influence the organisation’s politics.

Svensk Ungdom was founded in 1943 and has about 4,000 members. It operates locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. It has functioning local associations at the local level throughout the Swedish speaking areas in Finland. At a regional level, Svensk Ungdom is divided into four districts and a federal board responsible for maintaining national activities.

**Left Youth of Finland**

Left Youth of Finland is a left-green and feminist civic and youth organisation that is politically active for equality, a stronger democracy, solidarity and environmental justice against global capitalism.

Left Youth acts both on the streets and in political structures. In the opinion of Left
Youth of Finland society should guarantee everyone a secure livelihood, home, education, clean environment and autonomy regardless of the size of their wallet. A good life requires willingness to pay taxes, share our work and consume less in a more responsible way. The environment cannot be saved without dismantling global capitalism.

People between the ages of 15 and 30 can become members. Left Youth of Finland does not have a membership fee and all members receive the Libero magazine sent to their homes. Get involved by attending an event, campaign, demonstration, camp or a meeting. Activities of Left Youth of Finland are member-driven: organised by members, for members.

The Social Democratic Youth in Finland

The Social Democratic Youth, founded in 1906, is a political youth organization whose members combine a desire to make the world a more just place for all.

The social democratic aim is a society of freedom, equality and just solidarity in which each works according to his/her ability for the welfare of him/herself and for all. The environment and every person should be cared for. Justice comes about from the balance of rights and responsibilities.

In the organisation’s events one gets to debate opinions, accept divergent viewpoints and seek negotiated compromises. The Social Democratic Youth believe that the art of debate and openness to new ideas are important virtues in life, as we must know how to put ourselves in the position of others. The best values and deeds come about as cooperation.

National level events include various political conferences, organizational life and campaign training as well as variety of recreational weekends. Through the Social Democratic Youth one can be involved in the activities of the International Union of Socialist Youth (IUSY), the world’s largest political youth organization.

True Finns Youth

The True Finns Youth is a nationalist, populist, socially conservative and eurosceptic political youth organisation. For True Finns Youth nationalism is above all the defence of Western democratic ideals, respect for unique Finnish national identity and against efforts to destroy the Nordic welfare state. Electioneering on multiculturalism at the expense of Finnish and Western culture seems short-sighted, according to the True Finns Youth.
The True Finns Youth see populism as a political philosophy that is against interests of the elite, corruption, and overt bureaucracy. The True Finns Youth support a free and a functioning market economy and companies which create wealth and well-being for the common man and woman. Material goods are not, however, ends in and of themselves, but rather just a means to promote and value humanity and humaneness.

On the European level The True Finns Youth support independent and sovereign nation-states and is against federalism.

**The Youth League of the National Coalition Party**

The Youth League is an influential political youth organisation. Its active members work as municipal councillors and in the leaderships of students, youth, and citizens organisations. The Youth League is known for being two steps ahead of their mother party, the National Coalition Party, both in terms of activity and thinking.

The Youth League wants to develop freedom in Finland, justice and democracy that emphasises culture, in which its best deeds are its values. The Youth League values include freedom, responsibility, justice, culture, patriotism, and a democratic society.

In the activities of the Youth League political campaigning and fun company, added with a full helping of mad creativity, combine at best (and worst) into a way of life. The Youth League arranges hundreds of events around Finland each year: study visits to enterprises, political clubs, campaigns, celebrations, events, traditional meetings, night schools, sports events, karaoke evenings and so on.

The thousands of Youth League members represent a cross-section of the Finnish society. They include students, masons, police officers, managers, IT experts, and nurses. They all have a common interest in society and in influencing it.
**Demo Finland**

Political Parties of Finland for Democracy, Demo Finland, functions as a co-operative organisation for Finnish parliamentary parties.

It seeks to enhance democracy by carrying out and facilitating collaborative projects between Finnish political parties and political movements in developing countries.

Demo Finland’s activities aim to:
- Support pluralistic multiparty democracy, which includes equal possibilities to participate for all.
- Increase stability, which is a prerequisite for comprehensive and sustainable social development – functioning democracy is the best way to prevent conflicts and to build peace.
- Boost capacity for co-operation and constructive problem-solving by encouraging multilateral inter-party dialogues.

Demo is an organisation by parties for parties. Central to its work are dialogue and training programmes providing opportunities for mutual learning, based on issues identified in co-operation with its partner organisations. Party representatives of various backgrounds contribute their own
expertise and compare their experiences of good practices and problems related to democracy. Demo values cross-party co-operation, seeking to foster mutual understanding and a constructive and inclusive political culture.

Currently Demo’s programmes are focused on promoting gender equality in politics in Ghana, Egypt, Zambia and Tanzania, and strengthening the voice of youth in politics in Nepal and Tunisia.

Demo provides the opportunity for Finnish party activists to gain first hand experience of development and democracy issues. Party representatives play a key role at all stages of the programmes.

Demo’s programme in Nepal gives possibilities for Finnish and Nepalese political youth to exchange views and experiences.
FINLAND IN BRIEF

- A constitutional republic, independent since 1917
- 5.4 million inhabitants, a total area of 338,000 square kilometres and a population density of 15.8 persons per square kilometre
- Life expectancy at birth of 76 years for men and 83 years for women.
- GNP per capita EUR 35 559 (2011)
- Member of the European Union since 1995

Finland is an advanced industrial economy with a high standard of living and a functioning Nordic social welfare system.

One of the priorities on the political agenda has been to ensure that women enjoy equal rights and opportunities. The majority of Finnish women (85%) work outside the home and are active in political life. Of the 200 members of the present Parliament, 85 are women. The President of the Republic is Mr. Sauli Niinistö.

All children receive compulsory basic education between the ages of 7 and 16. More than half of the population have completed post-primary education and 17% between the ages of 25 and 64 have a university degree or an equivalent qualification.