

# Political Youth Organisations: Strengthening the Voice of Youth in Politics

The Finnish Experience



The booklet is based on information given by the political youth and student organisations themselves.

Neither Demo Finland nor the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland is responsible for the validity of this information.

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# Political Youth Organisations: Strengthening the Voice of Youth in Politics

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

## Political youth organisations are significant political actors

Political youth organisations are a significant part of the Finnish political system. They have their own role to play in implementing democracy. They are important youth supports for their mother parties, as well as in getting new members and in recruiting future decision-makers, attending to mutual issues and in training. In addition, they work to oversee the interests of young people,

and both together and separately work to improve youth affairs.

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 decision-making, find out about society and learn to make a difference and run societal affairs. The organisations seek to awaken young people's interest in politics and matters of social development, and to disseminate information about them in a suitable form to young people.

Parties view their own youth organisation as important for the whole party. It is through their youth organisations that parties get new, young members and that they renew their parties politically by making political openings without prejudice. Young people challenge their parties ideologically to renew and develop themselves. Political youth organisations are a necessary critical voice of their mother parties.

The youth organisations ensure that in elections there are young people nominated

for key positions. They help ground young candidates in election matters and campaigning. Without youth organisations there would undoubtedly be fewer young candidates. There would therefore be fewer selected to decision-making positions in different areas. The participation of young people in decision-making is important in order for the representative nature of democracy to be realized concerning young people. Young people are the best authorities on youth affairs.

## The Finnish political system

Finland is a republic, which is headed by the President, who is appointed to office for six-year terms 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 Parliament and the President and issues regulations. The Prime Minister is chosen by inter-party government negotiations, and the Prime Minister appoints about a dozen other ministers to the government. The drawing up of the 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 Parliament, which is chosen by the people. Parliament is a 200-member single chamber elected by proportional representation. Parliamentary elections are held at four-year intervals. A parliamentary majority may change the government by a vote of no-confidence. Parliament enacts legislation and adopts the state budget.

Members of Parliament are selected every four years in direct elections in which every Finnish citizen of 18 or over is entitled to vote. Elections are also held to choose municipal councils 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

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Although political youth organisations compete among parties for members, support, and political power and to realise their objectives, they work well together to improve youth affairs and living conditions, stimulate young people's interest in politics and the increase the representation of young people in decision-making.

They work with other children's and youth organisations under the auspices of Finnish Youth Co-operation – Allianssi. Political youth organisations have, for instance, made joint tours of schools, colleges and the happenings or various organisations to present their political goals and candidates.

Political youth organisations have many common political objectives that they seek to influence. These include the adjustment of financial aid to students, equality and development cooperation, as well as increasing the estimation in which youth politics is held. The organisations also carry out joint projects. For instance, there is a feminist initiated project that involves practically all youth organisations. The aim of the project is to raise the discussion on feminism and feminist goals, and to present



**Representatives from various political youth organisations debating on development issues.**

politicians who have the courage to say that they are feminists and who carry out work on equality.

Political youth organisations consider their joint work to be productive and effective. Was it perhaps an outcome of the unanimity and joint efforts of youth and student organisations, as well as other student unions, is for example that the levels of student aid and student income are finally to be adjusted?



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**A Demo delegation consisting of representatives from various political youth organisations at the first seminar of the youth programme in Nepal.**

According to the organisations, it is especially fruitful when cooperation is carried out on issues about which they already have a common line. It is laborious to have to work out common policy lines.

Political youth organisations also cooperate with various international organisations by themselves and in jointly. The wide breadth of their activity is captured by the Left Youth slogan “We have influence on the streets and in the political structures”.

They try to make youth issues and problems part of the public and decision-making discussion, for instance by different kinds of events, campaigns and positions. Political youth organisations also try to influence their mother parties’ policy goals through their official decision-making structures, as well as through direct contacts with those in positions of influence, from MPs to ministers.



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

All youth organisations also have a political influence internationally. They work with their sister organisations cooperating in Nordic, European and worldwide umbrella associations. Due to Finnish EU membership and the development of globalisation the international work of political youth organisations has become more important, including in the context of domestic politics. They gain new experiences and resources from international work for their own societal activity 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 widely in international questions. The international umbrella associations of youth organisations devise their own policy programmes and stands on current issues. Finnish organisations also have representatives in these associations.



**Political youth organisations have international relations: here are some Green Youth in Warsaw.**

## Young people as voters

Youth voting in national elections has gradually declined from the 75% level of the 1975 elections. Only 53% of people under 30 used their right to vote in the 2003 parliamentary elections.

In Finland, as in several other European countries, consideration has started to be given to dropping the voting age from 18 to 16 for local elections. Supporters of lowering the age of voting reason that youth interest in local municipal affairs and ties to their local area are strongest before young people move from their local municipalities, usually for work or study purposes when they are 18-20. A drop in the voting age, supporters say, would strengthen young people's commitment to democracy. Those who have a more negative attitude to lowering the voting age do not believe that it 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.**



# Innovators for the mother parties

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**Political youth organisations arrange, for example, training seminars independently from their mother parties.**

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 Democrat Students and the Left Students focus on student matters and education policy. Some of the youth organisations receive financial support for their activities. The young members take

part in the decision-making of their mother parties. Political youth organisation activists are involved in policy preparation and background work as assistants to MPs and ministers and as workers in party offices and parliamentary groups.

Many of today's decision-makers, from ministers to MPs, were formerly active in youth politics in their party's youth organisation. Many officials too have a past



**Working in groups is a common training method for Finnish Centre Youth.**

of many years of political youth organisation membership. The organisations are a kind of political college for future decision-makers.

The official position of political youth organisations in their mother parties varies. The members of the Centre, National Coalition and Green parties include those of their youth organisations. Automatic membership of the party can bring with it 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 local level these party youth organisations also are entitled to be represented in party district and municipal organisations.

The youth organisations of the other parties function as separate associations alongside the mother party, whereby it is possible to be a member of just the youth organisation. However, their representation in the party may be as extensive even though their members are not automatically members of the mother party.

The youth organisations find that they are well taken into account by their parties. The ways in which young people are taken into consideration in decision-making, however, vary. For example, the Federation of Green Youth and Students do not have direct rights of representation in the party's structures other than the rights to speak and be present at party management board meetings. The Left Youth, on the other hand, can put motions to the congress Left Alliance even though the organisation is not a party member but an independent organisation that carries out the Left Alliance's youth work. 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' innovative work and in creating policy. 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 happenings and election work. Svensk

Ugdom, for instance, holds regular regional and local events together with its mother party. The 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 its working and parliamentary committees. In this way the voice of young people is heard in the weekly processes of decision-making, and they know about 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 decision-making positions of local party associations.

The young 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 line of the youth organisations is close to that of the mother parties. They have the same basis of principles. In some matters the youth organisations have a different view from their mother party. Young people say they are



**Social Democratic Youth take part in their mother party's election work.**

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more reform-minded, courageous and open-minded. They also bring their expertise on youth matters to party decision-making.

They have managed to get issues adopted by their party. The Social Democratic Youth were involved in the preparation of the Social Democratic electoral programme and stressed the getting rid of unjustified temporary contracts instead of steady employment. The Swedish People's Party introduced at its party congress the initiative of its youth organisation for the reform of the system of parental leave and permitting gay couples to adopt and gain parental rights for their partner's children.

In parliament, Christian Democrat MPs proposed a motion of no-confidence in the

government from a proclamation of the Christian Democrat Youth concerning the budget for development cooperation. The Youth League of the Coalition Party raised 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 have 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 fairly 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 the mother party's election work. They raise youth issues in electoral debates, encourage young people to go to the polls and assist and train young candidates. The support groups of young candidates work hard during electoral campaigns. The youth organisations are separate from the parties, the young members address election themes and their campaigning supports young candidates.



## Involvement of Finnish youth in politics



### Voting in action.

Young Finns are lazier about voting in elections and taking part in party political activity than older generations. The reduction in voting activity by young people does not however mean that young people are not interested in politics of matters concerning society.

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. A large section of young people are hardly at all interested in traditional party politics, though they want to be able to have a direct influence on issues they consider important.

Instead of joining parties young people may try to influence issues, for instance, by taking part in

NGO activities, demonstrations, boycotts of certain products and by signing web petitions and taking part in on-line debates.

Young people have an influence in their local municipality in youth councils, for example, which exist in about 150 municipalities (Finland has 416 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 youth municipal leisure opportunities. In some municipalities, however, youth councils have no real possibilities of influencing matters.

# Effective influence

Young people in Finland involved in political activity exert 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 political and national levels. Nevertheless young people are underrepresented in societal decision-making. Two MPs under 30 years old were elected to Parliament at the 2007 elections.

The table below shows distribution of seats by party following the 2004 municipal elections and the proportion of seats held by people under 31 years of age according to party.

Figures for the total number of party seats accessed 20 June 2007 from [http://192.49.229.35/K2004/s/tulos/tulos\\_kokomaa.html](http://192.49.229.35/K2004/s/tulos/tulos_kokomaa.html)

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Party	Number of young municipal council members	Total number of council seats by party	Youth % share of council seats by party
Centre Party	427	4 425	9,65
Finnish Social Democratic Party	138	2 585	5,34
National Coalition Party	130	2 078	6,26
Finnish Left Alliance	51	987	5,17
Green Union	39	314	12,42
Finnish Christian Democrats	18	391	4,60
Swedish People's Party	43	636	6,76
True Finns	*	106	*
Others	*	444	*
<b>Total</b>	*	<b>11 966</b>	*

\* numbers unavailable





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

Political youth organisations influence national politics mainly through the political parties. The organisations nevertheless believe that young people can, if they want, influence local politics significantly. It is not easy, however, because young decision-makers often face patronising attitudes.

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

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 important issues. They arrange training, happenings and conferences, take part in public debates, produce materials about their ideas and values and communicate their aims through such things as the internet. The goal is to gain support and visibility for their ideas.



**Activities of political youth organisations vary according to their ideology: Green Youth at a gay pride demonstration.**

## Youth Act



**Being part of a political youth organisation is also about having fun.**

The purpose of the Youth Act, which was renewed in 2006, is to support the upbringing and independence of young people, promote the active citizenship of young people, strengthen youth socializing and improve the conditions of young people for living and growing.

Active citizenship means the civil activity of young people: recreation, joining in and playing and having fun together. It is also about all the active participation in the running of society. Strengthening the socializing of young people focuses on

improving the life situation and life management 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 also 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

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**The National Congress of the Left Youth is held every second year.**

The main component of political youth organisations is the geographically distributed branches or local associations and the districts that they comprise. A branch can be run, for instance, in a municipal or borough area. Districts often cover a municipal or other larger area. However, the district can be determined

by something other than a geographical basis. For example, one of the 15 Social Democratic Youth districts is the national Swedish language district.

The task of the district is to support the branch activity of its region and operate and have an influence in the region. Branches and districts are registered associations





**Svensk Ungdom feel that an open discussion climate provides the optimal breeding-ground for new political ideas.**

that have statutory meetings at which chairpersons and management boards are selected. The district often has paid workers and its 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 decision-making organ of the youth organisation.

Most organisations hold the congress once a year, though the Federation of Green Youth and Students do so twice a year.

Representation at the conference is based on the regulations of the association. In most

cases congress participants each represent their branches or districts in proportion to numbers of members. Nevertheless, not all political youth organisations have districts, and so representation is based on some other system.

The federal or annual meeting adopts the budget and programme of action 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 democratic principles and their activities must be open to all people aged between 15 and 30 who are interested.

A youth organisation's board is the highest decision-making organ between the federal or annual meetings. The board manages the practical work of the organisation, takes a political stand on matters and acts otherwise as the mouthpiece and representative of the organisation. Board meetings are usually open to members of the organisation. The board selects a working committee from among its members, which may comprise a chairperson, vice-chairperson, a general or federal secretary and perhaps a few board members. The working committee prepares proposals for the board, on the basis of which

it makes decisions. In addition it takes the decisions of the organisation when the board delegates its power to it in order to deal with a particular matter. Organisations also often have working or action groups that focus on special issues. The working groups usually concern such things as international affairs and information.

The chairperson of the 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 in accordance with decisions taken. The chairperson convenes the board, its working committee and leads the discussion at their meetings, and declares the annual meeting open. The chairperson, together with the general secretary, undersigns the regulations of the association. The Federation of Green Youth and Students have two chairpersons, in line with the Green model in the rest of Europe. Other organisations have one.

The general secretary is the operational leader. The general secretary's task is to steer the work and finances of the youth organisation in line with decisions taken, and to provide the chairperson of the annual meeting and the board of the organisation initiatives for the development and funding of activities.

## Youth organisations' financial support

The Finnish Ministry of Education provides financial support for national youth organisations with general assistance. Assisting organisations is an essential part of the implementation of the Youth Act, as such assistance guarantees the operational preconditions of the national organisations.

In order for a youth organisation to receive assistance its activity has to be socially acceptable. A national youth organisation is an association that has at least 1,000 individual members and where two thirds of the total membership is under 29 years old. Exceptions can be made concerning the membership quota if the activity of the organisation can be considered to be national. This is the case, for instance, with the 900-member the Federation of Green Youth and Students. In addition, the membership lists must be up-to-date.

An organisation's eligibility for assistance is also influenced by the youth work practices, the area of activities and the participation of young people in the organisation's decision-making. The organisation must operate more widely than just locally or regionally. State assistance for organisations is granted on the basis of results. These are the quality of activity, its extent and economy. An organisation must also have sources of funding other than state support.

Support is applied for in writing. The use of the funding support is monitored, as it may only be used for the purposes for which it was applied for and granted. A report has to be made on the use of each financial aid contribution within a set deadline. If the report is inadequate or faults are proven in the



**The Ministry of Education provides financial support for political youth organisations**

use of the assistance, the organisation may have to return part of or all the funding.

An assessment and assistance board provides the Ministry of Education with proposals on assistance for youth organisations. The board is an expert body with a four-year term.

The political youth organisation receiving the largest amount of such funding in 2006 were the Finnish Centre Youth and the Youth League of the National Coalition Party, each of which received EUR 600,000, and the Social Democratic Youth, which received EUR 500,000.

Political Youth Organisations also received assistance from other quarters, such as the mother parties and associations, as well as project assistance, for example from various government ministries. Youth organisations dependent on municipalities may receive financial support from the municipality for their local activity.



# Members are the starting point of action

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The reasons for joining a political youth organisation vary. The most usual impulse, however, is the desire to influence things in society. An active young person belonging to a party probably influences opinions, at least within his or her circle of friends. Members of political youth organisations are also often active in other organisations.

The organisations ensure that their activities are transparent and that their memberships are able to receive information. All decisions from official meetings are public. Members generally also know how and by what deadlines matters are decided and how they can influence decision-making.

Members can best affect things by taking part actively in the activities of the organisation. They can also be in contact with the organisation's officials in order to get the issue they want dealt with. Members can also make initiatives at the federal or annual congress. Individual members can apply to be a delegate at the federal conference, a member of the board and working committee and sub-committee. To ensure equality organisations pay the travel expenses of participants to national events,



**Visibility, activities and being where the action is are vital for recruiting new members.**

so that everyone has an opportunity to take part.

Organisations have also taken into use their own means of increasing their members' chances to influence matters. The minutes of the board of the Federation of Green Youth and Students are sent to the organisation and its local associations by email. The Left Youth's three person action groups can apply for project assistance from the central organisation if local actors do not want to carry out their proposed projects.



**Political youth organisations arrange events where youth can network and form “idea mills” to influence the future.**

Promoting an open culture of debate is important in organisations. Individual opinions must be respected and matters discussed despite different viewpoints. Providing information about an organisation’s issues and widening the opportunities

for discussion within the organisation are important from the perspective of democracy.

The organisations keep their members informed by email lists, discussion forums and websites and by membership magazines. Members can also request information about particular decisions from the offices of the district of central organisation. Providing external information about an organisation’s issues is also important for advancing objectives, and organisations issue releases to the press. Providing information also includes distributing magazines and booklets at different events and arranging externally profiled activities. The organisations also inform about their aims by keeping in regular contact with different actors, for instance their own party’s MPs, MEPs, ministers and officials.

The organisations seek continually to increase their membership numbers. The number of members has an effect on the extent and quality of activity as well as the authority of the organisation. It also influences the receipt of financial support from the Ministry of Education. The majority of members of political youth organisations are students.

The organisations try to attract new members by informing about their work in newspapers and on the internet, by taking part in fairs and various events and by arranging membership campaigns. Many new



**Political youth organisations give information on their work at youth fairs.**

members join political youth organisations via websites. Membership subscriptions vary from free membership to subscriptions of a few tens of euros. Those who pay membership receive, for instance, the organisation's newsletter by post to their homes.

In order to influence things in society one has to understand how society works. 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 Finland's official languages in the European Union. In addition to Finnish and Swedish, the Constitution mentions three language groups: Sami, Roma and Sign Language users.

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

At the end of 2004, 91.9% of the population spoke Finnish and 5.5% spoke Swedish. 2.6% of the population spoke another language as their mother tongue. Thousands of Finns are also bilingual. 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. In the last 10 years Russian has established its position as the third largest language in Finland, covering for about 0.8% of the population.

The new Language Act dealing with Finland's national languages came into force in 2004. The law safeguards basic language rights: the right of everyone to use their own language, either Finnish or Swedish, in matters 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 and technical college. The purpose of the law is to ensure that the Finnish and Swedish speaking population is able to live life completely using their own language.

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. Swedish is endangered because it is only spoken as a mother tongue by a small minority of people. The use of Swedish has declined, especially in official and public life. Of the 416 municipalities in Finland, 62 are bilingual or only Swedish speaking. 19 municipalities are purely Swedish speaking and there are 22 in which Swedish is the language of the majority.

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 nearly 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 Sami to maintain and develop their own language and culture.

## 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 following on from the old personal membership based society. At present it has 900 members in 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 is involved in creating and implementing alternatives. The means vary, from lobbying Parliament to direct civic action. The organisation considers that close cooperation with NGOs is 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, in its opinion, continue. Accelerating climate change is a sign of this. We need radical measures to save the environment.

## 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.

Finnish Centre Youth believes that decision-making on social development must be close to the people that emanate from them. The organisation does not define the tasks of society and the state from the viewpoint of managing capital but rather that people's welfare, humanity, have to be the overriding value of all societal development. The principle of humaneness groups the Finnish Centre Youth's four values: culture, equality, the welfare of nature and communality.

In their activities Finnish Centre Youth 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 things that are important to young people 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 arranges different events, training, campaigns and international activities. It is open to all people between the ages of 15 and 30. The organisation was established in 1945.



## Finnish Christian Democratic Youth



The Christian Democratic Youth is an organisation that has as the background to its activities 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 uniqueness 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 on the side of the weaker members of society.

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## The Left Youth of Finland



The Left Youth of Finland is a red-green youth organisation and NGO that acts for equality, democracy, justice and solidarity. It acts both on the streets and in political structures.

In the opinion of the Left Youth of Finland all people are equally good – if not better. People must have the right to practise their faith or not to practise it, cherish their culture and be of whatever colour. The Left

Youth of Finland believes that in a good society no one needs to be afraid and that everyone has to have the right to study, work and the right to live in a clean environment, no matter the size of their wallet. Good life requires willingness to pay taxes, share our work and consume less – also in a more responsible way.

The Left Youth of Finland work for a stronger democracy and against global capitalism. Without dismantling the current form of global capitalism the environment cannot be saved. People between the ages of 15 and 30 can become members. The Left Youth of Finland does not have a membership fee and all members receive copies of the free magazine *Libero* sent to their homes.

## The Social Democratic Youth in Finland



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

In 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 positions of



others. The best values and deeds come about as cooperation.

There are over 11,000 members of the Social Democratic Youth. National level events include various political conferences, organisational life and campaign training, as well as a variety of recreational weekends. Through the Social Democratic Youth one can be involved in the activities of the IUSY, the world's largest political youth organisation.

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 responsibility.

### **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. Its aim is to muster the strength and ability of the Swedish speaking Finnish youth to be better able to further their affairs in politics.

Svensk Ungdom conducts politics according to the Swedish liberal ideology. Liberalism to Svensk Ungdom means a society in which decisions are made

from a human perspective. The motto of Svensk Ungdom is 'Freedom not forgetting responsibility'. The Svensk Ungdom represents a broad political line and considers variety to be wealth.

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, and can themselves raise issues they consider important and so have an influence on the organisation's policy.

Svensk Ungdom was founded in 1943 and has about 4,500 members. It operates locally, regionally and nationally. It has functioning local associations at local level throughout the Swedish speaking areas in Finland. At regional level, Svensk Ungdom is divided into four districts and a federal board responsible for maintaining national activity.

### **True Finns Youth**



True Finns Youth are a new national and nation-state centred political youth organisation. For True Finns Youth nationalism is above all the defence of democracy from the power of money, the threat of anarchism and against efforts to destroy the Nordic welfare state.

True Finns Youth represent the kind of policies that do not try to put Finns against one another, but where everyone has a

common goal: a more democratic and just society.

The social state and material basic welfare are not, however, ends in themselves, rather just a means to promote and value humanity and humaneness.

In the view of the True Finns Youth politics has to be approached in such a way that it facilitates a feeling of collective responsibility for all. In terms of immigration policy True Finns Youth support the principle of 'When in Rome do as Romans do'. Electioneering on multiculturalism at the expense of Finnish and western culture appears to us to be short-sighted.

## **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 are known for being two steps ahead of 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 each year around Finland: visits to enterprises, political clubs, campaigns, celebrations, mega events, traditional meetings, night schools, sports events, karaoke evenings...

The thousands of Youth League members represent a cross-section of 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's programme in Nepal gives possibilities for Finnish and Nepalese political youth to exchange views and experiences.**

## **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. When working with its partner organisations, Demo Finland particularly emphasises

- empowerment and participation of women, youth and marginalised groups



**Demo youth delegates being interviewed at the World Village Festival.**

- improved openness and transparency of the political system
- development of regional and local activity
- democratisation of national budget allocation and monitoring

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 the 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.

At the moment, Demo is focusing on two, often overlapping, issues in particular – promoting gender equality in politics (Tanzania) and strengthening the voice of youth in politics (Nepal).

Demo provides the opportunity for Finnish party activists to have first hand experience of development and democracy issues. Party representatives play a key role at all stages of the programmes. Demo also organises training seminars on the issues of democracy and development in Finland, often inviting international expert speakers.

#### **Demo Finland**

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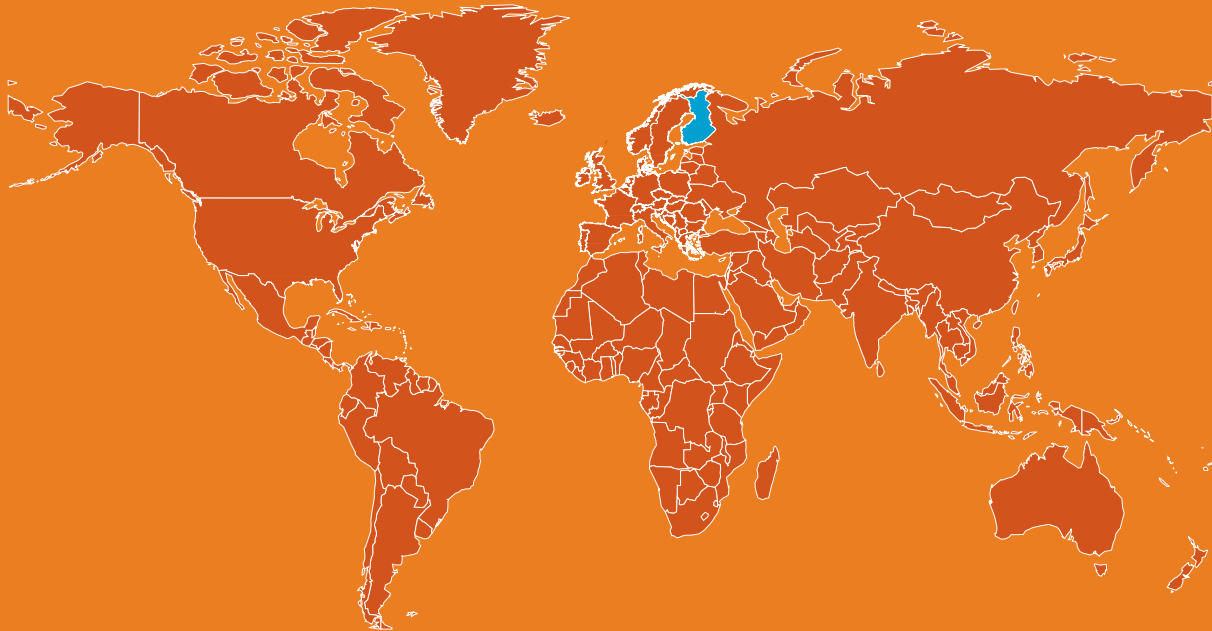
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## FINLAND IN BRIEF

- A constitutional republic, independent since 1917
- 5.3 million inhabitants, a total area of 338,000 square kilometres and a population density of 16 persons per square kilometre
- Life expectancy at birth of 73.7 years for males and 81.0 years for females
- GNP per capita EUR 31 886 (2006)
- Member of the European Union since 1995

Finland is an advanced industrial economy with a high standard of living and a functioning 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, 83 are women. The President of the Republic is Ms. Tarja Halonen, the first woman to hold the office in Finland.

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 13% have a university degree or an equivalent qualification.



Political youth and student organisations are a significant part of the Finnish political system. They have their own role to play in implementing democracy. They provide important support for their mother parties, but at the same time they may challenge their mother parties and make their own policy initiatives. Political youth and student organisations are an ideal breeding ground for future decision-makers in that they provide opportunities for training, debates, joint policy making and advocacy. They serve as schools for democratic participation and advocate the interests of the young.

This booklet, a co-operative publication by Political Parties of Finland for Democracy (Demo Finland) and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, describes the Finnish experience of political youth and student organisations. It sheds light on what they are for, how they are formed and financed, and what means they employ to make their voices heard.

The booklet hopes to serve as a tool for those who might benefit from the experiences of Finnish political youth and student organisations.

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