



Education, growth and sustainability

Parliamentary election programme 2027 of the
National Union of University Students in Finland



What does Finland need now?

University students aim to make use of the education, understanding and competence they have gained from their studies for the good of society and themselves in the future.

The welfare society is under severe pressure, and strong adjustment efforts are being made to adapt its structures to the weakly growing economy. Solutions are required to the major problems shared by us all, such as the decline in educational attainment, unemployment and the mental health crisis. The global climate emergency, biodiversity loss or the erosion of democracy urgently need solutions, as well.

The electoral programme of the National Union of University Students in Finland proposes solutions to *the development of higher education, the challenges faced by international students, working life, student wellbeing and income security* as well as to *global challenges*. These are the most important needs of a university student and a to-do list for the future government that will take over in summer 2027.

The younger generation's faith in the future is at stake. Are we building a Finland and a world that will be better than the one we live in now and worth the efforts of the current generation of students?

Higher education builds a sustainable society and boosts growth

A high level of competence lays the foundation for growth and is a cornerstone of the sustainability of society. A highly educated population engages more actively in society, is crisis-resilient and finds solutions to societal problems. It will be essential to invest in education during the 2027–2031 parliamentary term, as a world with multiple crises requires competence based on higher education.

Higher education must be accessible to everyone in Finland. An end must be put to the segregation of competence, and young people with an immigrant background and graduates from vocational education and training in particular must be more widely engaged in higher education. Free degree education also enables young people to get a high level of education and makes social mobility possible for those with a low socio-economic status.

The educational attainment of our younger age groups has fallen far behind the reference countries, and degree-specific funding has already been declining for a long time. In a comparison of the development of funding in the Nordic countries, Finland is lagging behind.

Finland is a small nation that cannot afford falling further behind in the development of educational attainment. The most important measure for raising educational attainment is sufficient basic funding from central government to higher education institutions. In addition, the higher education indices must be maintained to protect the level of funding against inflation. Now is the time to invest in higher education and turn Finland's direction.

Our objectives

Finland is a model country for a high level of competence and education.

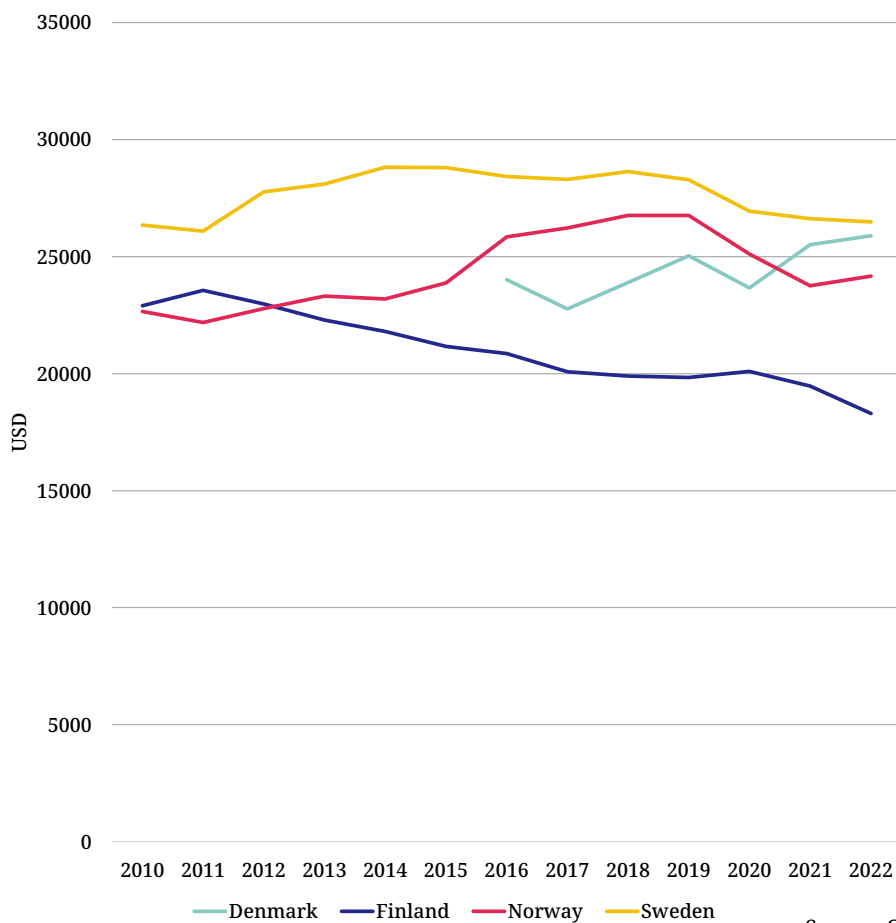
Free and accessible higher education guarantees everyone the opportunity to learn and develop.

Sufficient funding will raise the educational attainment of the age group of young adults to the level of OECD reference countries.

During the next parliamentary term, the Government will

- launch work to draw up a long-term funding plan across parliamentary terms to raise tertiary attainment to 60% of the age group of young adults by 2040.
- undertakes to ensure that degree education and applying to it is free of charge. The application fee for international students will be abolished, and a study will be conducted on tuition fees and their impact on the internationalisation of education.
- maintain index increases in the basic funding of higher education institutions.
- reform the funding model of universities to make it less performance-based.
- develop a model for continuous learning in line with the objectives of adult education support to support the individual's education, employment and competence.
- start a pilot project on a model for support for learning in higher education.
- develop the open university as a platform for updating competence and a channel for student selection without degrees being completed in the open university.

Development of central government funding per full-time student in the Nordic countries



The figures are US dollars in 2020, adjusted for purchasing power and inflation.

An open and successful Finland *will be built together with international students*

Finnish society is increasingly having to compete for young builders of the future with the rest of the ageing Europe.

Future success and growth, a sustainable dependency ratio and, ultimately, the carrying capacity of the welfare society may rely more strongly on the current and future international students than we can now understand.

Today, international students often face serious challenges in our country. They are already hard up during their studies, relying mostly on their own savings, loans or support from relatives. Employment is considerably more difficult to find for them than for the mainstream population, and there are no opportunities or support for integration, which a builder of the future that has chosen to come to Finland would need. Incentives for staying in Finland must be increased.

Currently, approximately 50 per cent of international students find employment and stay in Finland permanently, even though the 2035 roadmap for education-based and work-based immigration sets a target of 75 per cent. Finland must strengthen its retention power and be a better place for international students to study and build a future.

Our objectives

It will be easier for international students to stay and find employment in Finland.

The financial position of international students will strengthen.

Did you know this?

Based on the survey *At what Cost? Being an International Student in Finland* (2025), 76 per cent of international university students reported that they rely on financial support from their family. According to the study, tuition fees also have a negative impact on income and wellbeing. In terms of employment, the most common obstacle was the requirement for proficiency in the local languages, as 82 per cent of the respondents reported it was the most significant obstacle to employment. Respondents also felt that the challenges in obtaining a residence permit or citizenship reduced the attractiveness of Finland.

During the next parliamentary term, the Government will

- make it easier to obtain a permanent residence permit and citizenship for immigrants who have graduated from a Finnish higher education institution.
- create a voucher supporting the hiring of international students and learning the national languages alongside work as an incentive for employers.
- open up the possibility to supplement their studies in the national languages free of charge for newly graduated immigrants who have completed higher education in Finland.
- explore the possibility to include international students in a system that secures their subsistence and provides financial incentives for them to complete their degrees and stay in Finland.
- develop a comprehensive grant system that respects the autonomy of higher education institutions so that the negative effects of the increase in tuition fees can be prevented.

Effective social security helps students make progress in their life and in the work of work

Trust in one's abilities and subsistence lays the basis for the student's coping and being able to study and later work full time, regardless of the situation and the student's age.

However, students' income is often uncertain and scarce. At the same time, the poor employment situation weakens the opportunities for additional income. A weak personal financial situation has a direct impact on mental wellbeing, especially among those who cope least well. A predictable and sufficient income in turn lays the basis for students' coping. Working must be possible for those who want to work.

The amounts of student loans have increased dramatically, first as a result of low interest rates and later because of the cuts made to benefits. For many, the loan amounts are already so large that their ability to make big decisions for the future, such as buying a home and starting a family, is limited. For this reason, the indebtedness of students and the increases of the loan amounts must be stopped.

The social security system is still complicated. Transitions from one benefit to another within the system are often difficult, especially between study benefits and basic social security. Study benefits and the new general support must be coordinated by harmonising their level and other features, where applicable.

Did you know this?

The research review conducted in SYL's report *Will I get through this...?* revealed that there is a link between the student loan and stress, anxiety and depression and, more generally, mental health. The loan strains groups in a disadvantaged position, in particular. In the United States, both the student loan and the related stress have been found to cause negative health effects. In addition, links between student loans, mental health and substance abuse have been observed.

Our objectives

The increase in the loans of graduating students will stop.

Employment among recent graduates will improve.

Student benefits will be harmonised with other social security.

During the next parliamentary term, the Government will

- tie all monetary benefits of students to the national pension index.
- increase the amount of student financial aid, raising the student's benefits towards the level of basic social security and reducing the need to rely on the student loan.
- carry out the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health's experiment on transferring students to the scope general support, while keeping the income-related nature of student financial aid.
- in the social security reform, introduce one individualised housing allowance that is tied to an index and takes into account the regional differences in housing costs.
- support the transition of graduating students to working life by creating incentives for employers to offer traineeships, theses and initial-level positions.

Students who feel well *provide Finland with a strong future*

Students' study ability guarantees smooth graduation, a rise in the level of education, and the production of competence needed in working life. Investing in wellbeing during studies supports the success of students and all of Finland. In future, students' social security and healthcare services must be able to better prevent different wellbeing risks involved in the daily work of students.

In the turmoil of the health and social services system, the functional parts of the system must be maintained. The FSHS is the best partner for the health of students and future experts of the world of work. Its productive work, which is appreciated by students, requires sufficient funding and the development of a more suitable range of services. This supports study ability and smooth graduation.

The therapy guarantee was deficient from the outset, and the majority of students are not covered by it. Expanding it would be truly beneficial for students' mental health in the future.

Our objectives

The position of the FSHS as a partner in student wellbeing will be stronger.

The differences in students' well-being will be reduced and mental health services developed.

During the next parliamentary term, the Government will

- add free contraception to the range of the services offered by the FSHS and bring back the services of dermatologists and gynaecologists.
- find out how the FSHS and wellbeing services counties could improve the treatment of substance abuse problems and addictions.
- extend the therapy guarantee to cover everyone under the age of 29 and all higher education students.
- extend the FSHS's services to all outgoing and incoming exchange students.
- make rehabilitation psychotherapy for persons under the age of 29 and higher education students as well as the psychotherapist training free of charge.
- change the benefit system so that it identifies and covers students who are temporarily unable to study.
- set binding staffing levels (at least one psychologist and one social worker per 2,000 students) for the student welfare services of higher education institutions.

Crisis resilience *is created through education, democracy and climate action*

Education is our best protection against disinformation and our best tool in solving global problems. Finland must build a safer and more sustainable future by investing in competence and fairness both in Finland and globally. Inclusive education is the most effective way to reduce radicalisation and build societies in which everyone has an opportunity for a better tomorrow.

Deeply rooted inequalities are visible all over the world. People living in the middle of conflicts and climate change are most affected by them. Long-term work is needed to combat the climate and environmental crisis and to promote education, equality and peace. The world must be built in a sustainable way for the present and future generations.

Finland must be a pioneer in the fight against climate change. The transition to carbon negativity and, more widely, to ecological, social, economic and cultural sustainability must be globally fair. All policies must be based on human rights and support sustainable development and reduction of inequalities in a cross-cutting and consistent manner.

Our objectives

Inclusive education and the opportunity to continue studying in crisis areas are increasingly at the centre of Finland's development policy.

Finland commits to implementing an ambitious climate policy.

Did you know this?

According to an opinion poll (2025) conducted by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs

- 81% of Finns consider eradicating poverty and reducing inequality in the world important,
- 77% consider humanitarian aid to be important,
- 53% would increase development cooperation funding and
- 64% are against cuts to development funding.

During the next parliamentary term, the Government will

- increase development cooperation funding closer to 0.7% of gross national income.
- return the support for NGOs' communication and global education projects.
- secure study opportunities for students coming to Finland from crisis areas.
- ensure that the 2035 carbon neutrality target will be achieved and create preconditions for the transition to carbon negativity.
- in natural resource policy, take into account the right of young people to a viable environment and strengthen carbon sinks and biodiversity.
- strengthen democracy education and media literacy across the education system.



SUOMEN YLIOPIPPILASKUNTIEN LIITTO

FINLANDS STUDENTKÅRERS FÖRBUND

NATIONAL UNION OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN FINLAND

SYL, the National Union of University Students in Finland, is a student organisation which represents approximately 150,000 students in Finland. All student unions in Finnish universities are members of SYL. A student union is a public corporation which is governed by the Universities Act.

More information: syl.fi

