



Innovative Finance Inclusion

Climate Action

How to engage students in environmental activism?

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Abstract

The environmental movement is the largest social movement in Israel, with about 100 different organizations as members. However, it was found that only 10% of the activists are young (under 30)¹. A limited number of organizations operate within the institutions of higher education - among them the Green Course, Fair Trade and Students for Climate.

According to the study carried out in 2011, the main challenge faced by environmental organizations in Israel is fundraising. Other challenges faced by over a quarter of the responding organizations are applying political pressure, recruiting new members and volunteers, and establishing an organizational structure.

In the current case we will learn about a national student organization in Israel which is an umbrella organization for all students that are environmental activists, who act within the framework of environmental organizations or independently.

Similar groups operate in Sweden², Kenya³, the Netherlands⁴ and Uganda⁵. In addition, in August 2020 the international Climate Students Movement⁶ was founded. According to its website, they organization works to mobilize, organize and strengthen student groups, networks and organizations in their work to push higher education institutions to become climate leaders in their societies.

Keywords

Environmental Activism; Student Activists; Environmental Movement; Sustainable Transformation; Environmental Policy

¹ טל, א., ליאון זכות, ש., פרנקל אושרי, ל., גרינשפן, א., עקוב, ש. (2011). התנועה הסביבתית בישראל: מגמות, צרכים ופוטנציאל. The environmental movement in Israel: trends, needs and potential. מוגש לקרן JMG.

² <https://klimatstudenterna.se/>

³ <https://www.facebook.com/ClimateKenya>

⁴ <https://www.studentenvoormorgen.nl/>

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/GreenlyfNetwork>

⁶ <https://climatestudents.com/>



Israeli Students for Climate (ISC)

Israeli Students for Climate (ISC) is a national movement aims to reduce the climate crisis and its consequences. The movement is a subsidiary organization of the National Union of Israeli Students, and as such is a representative body of student activists in various higher education institutes around the country. In addition to initiating national climate actions, ISC provides opportunities for different student groups to collaborate, while advising them and providing them with training and support.

Through the creation of a community of students who are aware of climate change and act accordingly, ISC mission is to increase awareness for the climatic-ecological crisis, and to promote policy changes to reduce the crisis. In order to achieve this mission, ISC works with the Council for Higher Education of Israel, the Israeli Parliament (the Knesset), Israeli government offices, and is collaborating with other NGOs with shared interests.

1.1 ISC's goals

1.1.1 **Awareness of the climate-ecological crisis among students and the general public -**

There are approximately 400,000 students in Israel, including engineers and others enrolled in cultural and athletic institutions. Raising awareness among the student population is necessary to change the public's behavior and habits. Moreover, educating young adults about the issue and providing them with relevant tools at the beginning of their journey of shaping their professional and civic identity, can lead to a more responsible leadership in all sectors.

1.1.2 **Sustainability at the Israeli academia -** Israeli academic institutions are spread all over the country and are a focus of attraction and interest among students and the public. The academia's role in forming our identity as a society is crucial, both in influencing the students who pass through its gates every day and in its ability to be a center of knowledge and influence on the environment at various levels. Academic institutions can serve as a powerful engine to bring the desired change and mediate it in several ways, for example: by placing it at the heart of academic activity in terms of research and study, by dedicating courses and educating about climate crisis, by creating strategic collaborations that promote solutions locally and globally, by mediating the knowledge that exists and being developed to the community, and by using it as an exemplary model for responsible conduct that takes into account the environment.



1.1.3 Legislative changes and government reforms for climate - It is important that the next generation, which is studying and preparing for different careers in multiple fields, will influence the design of Israel's future. Government decisions and legislation affecting the climate crisis directly affect students' and citizens' lives. Therefore, students should translate the knowledge and skills they acquire in their studies into the practice of policy change, while consulting with experts and expertise from academia and with first-class researchers. Two of the roles and goals of the National Union of Students, according to the Students Rights Law, are to act for the well-being of all students and promote and increase student involvement in public affairs, including matters relating to academia, science, society, culture and the economy. Students have the duty to act to change legislation and government reforms that concern their future and their lives.

1.2 ISC's main actions and activities

ISC's work is mainly focused on raising awareness and promoting policy. The activists, most of whom lead local student groups throughout the country, are members of an active WhatsApp group where they share ideas and thoughts. Twice a year the activists meet face-to-face for training and refining goals and methods of action. In addition, planning meetings are being held via Zoom before each national act. Every policy paper, position paper, letter and document related to the national activities are shared with all members so that they can refer to and review the document before it is shared with the relevant parties.

1.2.1 Projects to raise awareness

A multi-year plan to raise the awareness of certain topics among the student public. For example - consequences of the use of plastic, fair trade conditions, textile and fashion industry, meat-based food and more. A team of ISC members put together proposals for different actions suitable to promote each of these issues. The activities include sharing relevant data with the student public and sharing concrete habits and actions that can be taken to reduce harm to the environment. Examples of tools that the environmental student-groups can use to promote the issues are digital campaigns, protests, consumer boycotts, pop-up events, second-hand fairs, collaborations with the municipality or the local authority, etc. The team prepares relevant materials to share with ISC students so that they can lead such activities at a local level on their campuses. Thus, several focal points in the country can collaborate and act together, creating a more significant effect and focus public discourse around each issue.



1.2.2 A five-year plan for sustainability in higher education in Israel

The Council for Higher Education of Israel determines once every five years a multi-year plan which dictates the basic principles that will guide the academic institutions in these years. This program corresponds with national needs, such as innovation in teaching, strengthening the internationality of the Israeli academia and the empowerment of certain academic subjects, such as high-tech and data sciences.

In preparation for the writing of the multi-year plan for the years 2023-2028, the National Union of Israeli Students submitted its proposals, which included, in coordination with ISC, a demand for a significant budget for research, knowledge development and teaching in the field of sustainability. Following the submission of the proposal, the demand was promoted through meetings with the Council of Higher Education and public pressure was applied.

Almost a year later, in September 2022, the Council for Higher Education announced that it will - for the first time - allocate hundreds of millions of shekels for research in the field of the climate crisis and sustainability and define it as a central issue in the next five years⁷. The final budget for the program has not yet been determined, due to the lack of a state budget, but the main points of the program have already been unofficially transferred to the academic institutions so that they can prepare for it. This is an unprecedented achievement since a national emergency has not yet been declared in Israel, in the climatic-ecological context. This statement affects the set of considerations in other government decisions.

1.2.3 Investment diversion of higher education institutes

ISC works on several levels in order to pressure academic institutions to divert investment funds away from polluting companies, together with the Fossil Free Israel. The ISC's team dedicated to this goal conducts research and writes relevant position papers to share with other students in various campuses. In this way, they could promote the matter professionally without investing much resources such as time to prepare relevant background materials. In addition, the cooperation between the activists in multiple institutions leads to public pressure on the institutions as well as competition between them. In 2022, Ben Gurion University was the first to comply with the requirements and pledged to divert its investments, amounting to NIS 3 billion, to responsible investments according to ESG principles⁸.

⁷ <https://www.haaretz.co.il/nature/climate/2022-09-08/ty-article/00000183-1c1a-d5d9-a3bb-5dfa56900000>

⁸ <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001408784>



Another level in which ISC operates is for the addition of a responsible investment mix in the criteria for obtaining approval for Section 46 of the Income Tax Ordinance for non-profit institutions. If this move is successful, associations, including academic institutions, will be required to manage their investments according to responsible principles.

1.2.4 “Green Campus” certificate

The Ministry of Environmental Protection of the State of Israel grants 'Green Campus' certification with the aim of providing tools for environmental awareness and activism among students and faculty members. So far 31 academic institutions have responded to the challenge and successfully passed the certification process.

However, the accreditation has not been updated in recent years and no new institutions have been accredited. Also, no controls were performed on the accredited campuses and the authorizations granted since 2016 were not renewed.

Therefore, ISC in collaboration with NUIS initiated a proposal to update the certification, in accordance with new knowledge gained on the subject and the need arising from the field. This update will make it possible to set a high bar to which the academic institutions can strive in order to lead in the field and provide both tools and inspiration to the entire community at each institution.

The students promote the proposal in front of various parties, including the Ministry of Environmental Protection and leading lecturers in the Israeli academia. Also, this proposal was accepted as one of the initiatives that receives support from the Israeli Climate Forum of the Office of the President of the state of Israel.

1.3 The establishment of ISC

In 2019, an Israeli student named Shir Goldovski, who led a group of students for the climate at Tel Aviv University, wanted to join forces with activists on other campuses. She launched a WhatsApp group and welcomed students who lead environmental groups in other academic institutions to join. The connections opened the door for collaborations. However, the group still had difficulties promoting national policies. In 2021, ISC became a subsidiary organization of the National Union of Israeli Students (NUIS). Since NUIS is the representative organization of students in Israel according to the Student Rights Law, it gives the organization a public status as a policy promoter. In addition, NUIS has two permanent seats of the 21 seats of the Council for Higher Education, which makes NUIS a partner in making decisions



related to academic policy in Israel. Also, NUIS assists ISC by training its members in policy and activism, from the extensive experience it has gained over the years (established in 1934) and within the framework of the various programs managed by it (over 20 programs for students with an average of over 10,000 participants per year).

1.4 Financial and organizational structure

ISC was established without a budget, and upon joining NUIS received a budget sufficient for a National Activity fellow. All other activists are volunteers and are not compensated by NUIS/ISC with a salary or a stipend. Beyond that, ISC collaborates with relevant organizations in exchange for small revenues that are sufficient for its two annual meetings. These collaborations are sometimes sufficient for scholarships for students who will lead a certain action for a limited period of time. In addition, ISC submits applications for grants for the transport of certain operations.

ISC has a team-based organizational structure, having one fellow responsible for the national activity, and a few teams working each on a specific goal. ISC focuses on public participation, dedicating efforts to constantly include and invite more students to participate.