

Life in Finland



Welcome to Turku and Finland!

This manual is made
a short introduction to
Finnish culture and
society. We hope
You will enjoy it.





Foreword

Everybody who lives in Finland has the right and obligation to live according to Finnish laws and various kinds of rules. The constitution of Finland guarantees everybody the following rights, among others: freedom of speech, thought and religion, as well as the right to forbid all kind of discrimination and unfair treatment of people. On the other hand, freedoms and rights also bring along obligations. Everybody must have the right and obligation to participate in developing the society and in decision-making. Everybody has the right to resort to health care or social security, when needed. Likewise, everybody has the obligation to participate in financing social services by paying taxes.

This manual is a short introduction to Finnish customs, society and working life. It is intended to make it easier for immigrants to get to know Finnish culture and adapt to it. The manual may also be useful for employees working with immigrants in terms of advice and as educational material on society.

Many of the issues handled in the guide may appear self-evident. Nevertheless, there may be great differences between cultures and procedures in countries with different kinds of social structures. Ignorance of the contents of laws does not exempt people from responsibility; therefore, it is important to know about the rules guiding Finnish society and life.

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Moving to Finland

Right of admittance and the immigrant status

Immigration refers to anyone who has moved to Finland for whatever reason. The causes of immigration vary greatly. Some have left their home country voluntarily because of love, family or work. Others have been forced to leave their home country due to political or religious reasons, or they have fled for their lives from war.

Alien refers to anyone who is not a Finnish citizen. The right to enter the country and work here is primarily determined by the nationality of the immigrant and/or country of residence as well as the reason for moving to Finland. Residence permits are either temporary or permanent. Issues related to immigration and

residence permits are processed by **the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri)**. Migri handles:

- residence permits for aliens entering Finland
 - study
 - work (employees and entrepreneurs)
 - remigration
 - family reunification
 - asylum seekers
- assigns alien's passports and refugee travel documents
- processes citizenship applications
- maintains the registrations of EU citizens and their family members

Finland is part of the Schengen area. The countries in the area have agreed on freedom of movement for

their citizens within the area, which usually means that foreigners living in the area permanently are also entitled to freedom of movement. Schengen states have also agreed on which nationals are required to have a visa to enter the area. Almost all African and Asian countries, among others, are countries whose nationals need a visa to enter the area.

Once a foreigner has lived permanently in Finland for a long enough period of time, they have the opportunity to apply for Finnish citizenship or dual nationality. Residence period, language proficiency and other requirements as well as instructions on applying for citizenship can be found on the Migri website.

- **INFO: Visa required for entry to Finland and other travel documents:** <https://bitly.fi/formin>



The population register system and identity number

Basic information on people living in Finland is entered into the population register system. This information includes name, date of birth, nationality, family relations and place of domicile. The information is used for organising elections, taxation, health care, judicial administration and statistics, among other things.

The identity number is a means of identification that individualises a person. It remains unchanged throughout a person's life. The identity number is needed for dealing with the authorities and when opening a bank

account, for example. Anyone born in Finland receives their identity number automatically and Finnish citizens born outside of Finland are issued a number based on their birth certificate.

A foreigner moving to Finland may receive an identity number when they have been registered in the population register upon their own request.

A person may ask to be registered by visiting Maistraatti, a local registry office, in person, or in some cases by visiting the tax office.

Registering may only be completed if the residence permit is granted and all the requirements for the registration are fulfilled.

Foreigner's identity card

Every foreign citizen, who has a residence permit and home municipality can apply a Foreigner's identity card.

If the applicant does not already have a passport or identity card, the identity of applicant will be proven by the fingerprint comparison. The card validity period is earmarked for a residence permit validity.

The ID card can apply for either electronically or in person at the police station.

- **INFO:** www.maistraatti.fi/en/
<http://vrk.fi/en/frontpage>
www.poliisi.fi/licences

Moving to Finland and working in Finland are governed by numerous laws, of which the following are the most important:

- Aliens Act (2004)
- Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (2010)
- Act on receiving asylum seekers (2011)
- Legislation on the Register of Aliens and the register on aliens working

Valid laws and regulations:
www.finlex.fi



Housing



INFO

- www.suomi.fi/suomifi/suomi/palvelut_aiheittain/asuminen_ja_rakentaminen/asunnon_hankinta/asumismuodot/index.html

There are several different forms of housing in Finland. You can live in an owner-occupied flat, rent as a primary tenant or subtenant, live in a right of residence apartment or a partially owned flat. If you have a small income, you may receive housing benefits regardless of the form of housing.

General information

Anyone living in a block of flats or a terraced house, however, must comply with the rules set by the housing company. Housing companies usually provide written rules that all residents must follow. Special attention should be paid to

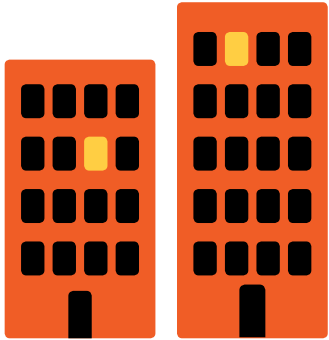
- silence (usually from 10 p.m. to 7 a.m.). If you want to throw a party at your house, you should inform the neighbours in advance, by posting a notice on the notice board, for example
- Smoking may be prohibited in some buildings.
- Parking Cars usually have designated parking places.
- The use of shared facilities (laundry rooms,

saunas, storage areas, barbeque shelters, etc.)

The general principle is that everyone cleans after themselves in shared areas.

- You should not make noise or litter in the stairwell. You must not keep your personal belongings in the stairwell, but either in your own flat or in storage.
- Some renovations inside the flat may require permission from the housing company. You must always submit a written notice of any renovations when the renovation may affect structures that are the responsibility of the housing company or neighbouring flats. These include bathroom renovations, for example. The notice is usually submitted to the property manager.

Shhh...
Silence
22-07.



If a resident disturbs to other residents, the housing company will be notified, and the company will investigate the matter and issue a written warning to the resident, if necessary. If the disturbances continue despite the warning, the resident may be evicted. This pertains to both tenants and residents of owner-occupied flats.

Some housing companies have made **electricity contracts** covering all the flats, while other housing companies require you to make your own contract. Electricity contracts may be made with various companies, which means that you should compare prices. The electricity company invoices for electricity consumption every month or every two months or based on an annual estimate.

You do not need to make a separate **water supply contract**. Water is charged based on the number of people living in the flat or on consumption, depending on the housing company. The water fee may be included in the rent or maintenance charge, or it may be invoiced separately.

You should conserve clean water and energy. Small things may save several euros in the electricity

and water bills, as well as help the environment.

- Have leaking taps and toilets fixed. Leaky taps should be reported to the landlord, the caretaker or the property manager.
- Do not run the taps unnecessarily.
- Turn the power off when you are not using electrical appliances.
- Turn off the lights when you leave the room for a longer period of time. Conventional light bulbs can be replaced with energy-saving bulbs.

You should clean the drains regularly. If the drain is blocked, you may try to open them with a suitable substance. If they are not cleared, notify the caretaker, the maintenance company or the property manager. You must not flush any foreign objects or substances (e.g. diapers, grease, oils) as they may clog the toilet. Melted grease and oil must be placed in the trash or compost bin, if the housing company provides them.

Fires are usually caused by negligence, smoking in bed or an old television. Every habitant carries the responsibility that there are enough fire alarm/smoke detectors in apartment (1 per each 60 sm). Everyone should comply with fire safety instructions, including:

- only use approved electrical appliances and comply with their user manuals.
- leave electrical repairs to a skilled electrician.
- do not cover heaters or other electrical devices
- be careful when putting something to dry in the Sauna – do not put anything near kiuas -heater. The stones come very hot.
- do not leave candles unattended.
- learn how to put out different kinds of fires – water is not always the best choice.

Take out the trash. Waste must be sorted into their specified containers. At least glass, metal, paper, cardboard and waste that can be burned should be sorted. Some housing companies also have a compost for organic waste. Many cities also have recycling points that collect waste plastic and clothes separately. Hazardous waste, such as batteries, accumulators, medicine and various toxic chemicals, may not be mixed with ordinary waste, but they must be collected in specified locations, (e.g. recycling centres and recycling points at supermarkets). Expired medicine should be returned to the pharmacy.

Clean and undamaged clothes may be donated to charity or put in a recycling bin for clothes. Old, undamaged furniture and appliances can be taken to recycling centres, where you can also buy affordable furniture, appliances and clothes.

Take out and sort the trash!
• www.lsjh.fi/wp-content/uploads/Lajitteluohjeet-01-2016-eng.pdf



Leasing

Flats may be rented from private persons, companies, foundations, municipalities or the state. Information on flats for rent can be found online, in newspapers and in real estate agencies. Many cities also have student housing for students as well as assisted living flats for the elderly or disabled.

Usually, a written lease is drafted for the rental of a flat. This agreement defines the amount of rent, grounds for rent increases, duration of the lease, the tenant and the means of payment. Leases are made for either a fixed term or for the time being.

The terms of the lease may include a deposit in the amount of 1-3 months' rent, which is returned after the lease ends if the tenant has fulfilled their responsibilities. Additionally, the tenant usually pays for the electricity and water. Tenants must pay their rent on time and abide by the rules set by the housing company. The owner of the flat is in charge of the flat's condition, repairs and maintenance.

A fixed-term lease ends automatically on the date specified in the lease. A lease contract valid for the time being ends when the contract is terminated or cancelled. The period of notice starts at the beginning of the month following the notice of termination. The period of notice for the tenant is always one month, whereas the landlord's period of notice depends on the duration of the lease, but is at least three months. The landlord needs sufficient grounds for terminating the contract, which include the need to take the flat into their own, a relative's or employee's use or selling the flat, for example.

If the tenant fails to pay rent or causes disturbances regardless of receiving written warnings, the landlord

is entitled to cancel the lease. If a lease is cancelled, a written notice with grounds for the cancellation must be provided. The lease ends immediately when the other party has received the notice or later at a time specified in the notice.

Leases are governed by the Act on Residential Leases, which regulates the cancellation of leases and the tenant's right to assign the flat to the use of other people and subletting (the primary tenant leases part of the flat to a subtenant). If you want to accommodate other people in your flat, you should discuss this with your landlord and agree on any terms. A new resident moving into the flat must be entered into the register of occupants (notice to the property manager). The register of occupants specifies who lives in the flat officially.

- **INFO:** www.vuokralaiset.fi/in-english/finnish-tenants-vuokralaiset-ry/

Other forms of housing

You can also buy a flat. There are many things to determine and take care of when buying a home, and you should familiarise yourself with them carefully before making any decisions. The condition of a flat should be investigated and you should find out whether the housing company is planning any major renovations. In addition to the sales price of the flat, the owner of the flat must pay a monthly maintenance charge to cover the maintenance fee for the building and its external areas, shared water costs, etc., as well as any debt servicing the housing company may need. The housing company is comprised of shareholders, and the company is primarily responsible for any repairs to the building.

There are also right of residence apartments and

The share of the flat owned is usually 10 per cent.

The resident pays a financing contribution in addition to the maintenance charge, and this contribution is used to pay off the flat-specific loan.

partially owned flats on offer. In partially owned flats, the resident pays for a portion of the flat's price and makes a lease agreement. The share of the flat owned is usually 10 per cent. During their residency, the resident pays a financing contribution in addition to the maintenance charge, and this contribution is used to pay off the flat-specific loan. Ten or twenty years after the flat has been completed, the resident must pay the remaining share, after which the flat is owned by them completely. The redemption price for the flat depends on how much of the debt has been paid off during the residency.

When purchasing a right of residence flat, the resident pays a right of residence fee (15% of the flat's purchasing price). Right of residence flats cannot be redeemed. If the resident wants to forgo the flat, the company redeems the flat after the period of notice and pays the right of residence fee back to the resident. In addition to the right of residence fee, the resident must pay a monthly maintenance charge.

Pets

Keeping pets in the flat is usually allowed, but the owner should make sure that they do not cause any disturbances. Please note that farmed animals, such as cows, sheep and chickens, do not belong in blocks of flats or urban areas. There are other rules governing the keeping of pets, as well:

- Pets may not be kept free outside the home, but they should always be kept on a leash outside. Dog faeces must be collected or moved to a place where they are not hazardous.
- Cats may only be kept free in the owner's yard or garden.

Animal rights are also regulated by law, and treating animals poorly may result in penalties. Poor treatment of pets or farmed animals may be reported to animal welfare counsellors who also conduct inspections. Several animal welfare associations that often maintain animal shelters operate in Finland. If your pet runs away or is lost, you should contact the animal shelter in your area. You may also take any found animals to these shelters.

- **INFO:** www.petguidefinland.com/

Moving – remember these:

Submit a notice of removal. The notice of removal must be submitted within one week from moving. The notice must always be submitted when moving from a permanent residence to another permanent residence or when the duration of a temporary residence at another address is more than three months. The notice of removal may be made over the telephone or by submitting an electronic notice of removal form. A paper



notice of removal form may be completed at the local register offices or the post office. When submitting a notice of removal, the information is updated both in the population register and the post office at the same time. The population register system forwards the new address information automatically to the authorities, such as congregations, the Finnish Transport Safety Agency, the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (KELA) and the tax administration. Additionally, many pension institutions, banks, insurance companies and businesses receive new address information directly from the population register system.

Notice to the housing company (usually the property manager; the contact details are usually posted on the building's notice board) must also be informed when moving out and moving in

A new electricity contract can be made over the telephone at the same time while cancelling the previous contract

If you have home insurance, check whether it is sufficient for the new apartment

If you are a recipient of housing benefits, notify KELA of your move as soon as possible

If you are a recipient of income support or other benefits that depend on the amount of rent, report your rent as soon as possible (you usually need to present a copy of the new lease, an extract from the register of occupants and/or other similar certificates).



Electronic notice of removal:
www.posti.fi/muuttoilmoitus/

Finance & insurance



Nice to know!

Parsimony

Finns have always deemed it desirable to live in an economical manner and being financially independent. Money is borrowed from friends and relatives only when absolutely necessary.

Management of finances

It is relatively expensive to live in Finland, which is why you should plan your finances carefully:

- Set aside sufficient funds for the necessary cost of living (rent, food, medication, etc.)
- Check that you truly can afford to make any purchases in instalments.
- If you have to borrow money, determine the actual annual interest carefully – high interest rates usually make mobile loans and instant loans very expensive.
- Bank loans usually require guarantors unless you own immovable property as collateral. Loan payments are usually charged monthly directly from your account.

Pay your bills on time. If you have not paid your invoice on time, you will receive a request for payment. Even the first request for payment may include interest and collection charges. The longer you leave an invoice unpaid, the larger the interest will be.

Unpaid invoices may have serious consequences:

- Unpaid rent may lead to eviction and loss of the ability to rent again, unpaid electricity invoices may lead to the electricity being cut off, unpaid telephone invoices may result in the mobile phone plan being cut off.
- Any items bought as hire purchases are the property of the seller until the entire amount has been paid. The seller has the right to repossess the item if one or more part payments have been neglected.
- Unpaid invoices may lead to loss of credit status, i.e. a bad credit record. An individual bad credit record entry remains in the credit status from two

to five years depending on the type of entry. A bad credit record is like a mark of shame; it may be impossible to obtain a bank loan or a credit card. Finding rented accommodation or a new job may also prove difficult due to a bad credit record.

- **Distrain:** If the debtor does not pay an invoice or debt voluntarily, their income and property may be distrained (i.e. a person's property is seized to cover the value of the debt). Usually, distraint affects a person's wages or other income, but an invoice may also be distrained from movable property, such as vehicles, securities, shares in a housing company and bank deposits.

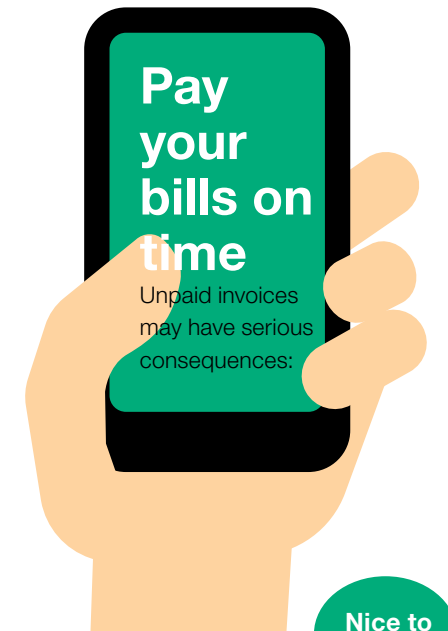
This means that you should take care of any invoices on time, and if that is not possible, ask the payee for more time to pay the amount or agree on a scheme of payment with the payee.

- **INFO:** www.oikeus.fi/ulosotto/fi/index/ulosotto.html

Insurance

Insurance is used to secure the financial situation of an individual and a family or a company in various hardships. Employers must insure their employees by taking out a statutory accident insurance, an employment pension insurance and an unemployment insurance. In addition to this statutory insurance, people may choose to take out voluntary insurance for their home, property, family members or travel and luggage, for example. Vehicle insurance is mandatory. Several insurance companies operate in Finland, and they offer various insurance at different prices. You should shop around for insurance.

- **INFO:** www.suomi.fi



Honesty is the best policy

In all aspects of Finnish life, honesty and reliability are appreciated. Agreements, promises and telling the truth are honoured. If you breach a person's trust, you may never get it back.

Finland



The Finnish way of life

Finnish society and culture experienced great changes in the 20th century, although this development started earlier. Liberalism began to spread through Finland in the 1860s. This led to the church and religion gradually losing significance. Many tasks of the church, such as the social aspect and elementary instruction, were taken over by the state and the municipalities. As early as 1869, the Church Code contained the freedom of religion principle that was verified in the Constitution Act. The diminishing of the significance of the church and religion in general is evident in the secular nature of everyday life; going to church is not as common as it was and resigning from the church has become more common.

The breakthrough of industrialisation has affected the structure of society, attitudes and the Finnish way of life. Finland was a primarily agricultural society until the 1950s. Due to the mechanisation of agriculture and industrialisation, people moved to the cities from the countryside, and Finland became urbanised. The middle class expanded and the general standard of living improved.

The increasing equality in society is also part of the development in the 20th century. Today, the barriers between social classes are blurred and ways of life do not differ greatly between the working class and the middle class in Finland. The differences between the social classes are also alleviated through social actions, e.g. taxation and benefits paid by the state, as

well as the legislation on comprehensive schools that ensures that everyone receives the same level of basic education. The mechanisation of agriculture, improved infrastructure and mass communications have also made the way of life similar in rural areas and cities.

In Finland, the word ‘family’ usually refers to the father, the mother and the children. The most common number of children in a family is two. The family and the home have become some of the most important areas of life. Finns also have lots of pets who are often seen as members of the family.

The separation between working hours and leisure time has been a significant factor for everyday life, as the time needed for making a livelihood has

decreased and the amount of free time has increased steadily. Finns spend their free time on hobbies, studies and travelling, as well as with their family doing chores and watching television. Many Finns spend their summer weekends and vacations at their summer cabin.

The individualistic movement started to spread in Finland in the 1960s. It emphasises an individual as their own master and the free will of a person, but also responsibility for one's own choices. This also contributed to the diminishing of the importance of family relations, which lead to a decrease in the number of children as well as divorces, common-law marriages and living alone becoming more common and an increase in "the single lifestyle," among other things. Today, the tasks that were formerly the responsibility of the family, such as children's education and taking care of the elderly and the sick, have been taken over by society. This has also been the result of women starting to work outside the home more and more.

Equality has also affected the relationships between different age groups and genders. In Finnish society and in Finnish families, there is no clear division between women's and men's work. Parents are no longer strict authority figures for their children. Corporal punishment is forbidden by law and children have the opportunity to stand up to their parents.

Finnish traditions and customs have changed very much due to urbanisation and internationalisation, for example. It may sometimes feel like Finns have no customs at all. Nonetheless, the majority of our festivities are very traditional. Customs vary by region and age, and also because people today have a choice in what kind of traditions and customs they want to uphold.

Meet a Finn

Talking to strangers is not a natural part of Finnish culture. Finns may greet acquaintances and neighbours, but they are usually not invited to one's home. Finns are relatively shy and reserved when dealing with strangers – and getting to know Finns may take some time, but if and when you become friends with a Finn, you will have made a reliable friend.

Finns often only talk when they have something to say. They talk briefly and to the point. You may start discussing a topic directly without the need for lengthy small talk. Finns do not usually engage in small talk. The most common subject of conversation that could be considered small talk is the weather – what the weather is like and what the weather forecast says.

According to studies, Finnish conversations follow a strict division of roles between the speaker and the listener: one speaks and the others listen. If someone wants to say something, they wait until the previous speaker has finished. It is considered rude to interrupt a speaker.

Finns often have a large personal space, which means that Finns consider their privacy to be very important and do not share their personal issues openly. Finns do not usually like it or find it confusing when strangers stand too close to them or touch them. One of the few exceptions to this is shaking hands when greeting or saying goodbye. To foreigners, this may seem cold or arrogant.

It is important to make eye contact during conversations. Finns consider eye contact as a sign of honesty. Looking away from the person you are talking to may be considered dishonest or secretive. Please remember, however, that looking openly at someone on the bus,



**Let's have
a cup of coffee!**
A Finnish way of getting
to know each others.

for example, may make people uncomfortable.

Finns do not really make gestures or facial expressions when talking. Tones of voice, facial expressions, gestures and movement do, however, communicate the atmosphere of the situation. For example, someone who is constantly shifting their weight from one foot to another is communicating a desire to leave. A person who is sighing audibly is probably bored.

Greeting and shaking hands

- When greeting someone, make eye contact, smile and say good morning, good afternoon or good evening.
- Anyone arriving at an event has the obligation to greet the others. In small events, people usually shake hands with everyone.
- Shaking hands should occur when you are greeting someone, introducing yourself or leaving.
- Shaking hands must always happen standing up. Only physical hindrances or advanced age give you the right to remain seated. The older person, the woman or the person with the higher position extends their hand first.



Nice to know!

Introductions

- Introduce yourself when you meet someone new – shake their hand and state your name clearly. In work situations, it is common to also state your occupation, position or the name of the company that you represent.
- The person who knows two people that have never met should introduce them to each other. It is good manners to first introduce the man to the woman and the younger person to the older person.

Address

Finns are quite equal with each other, and there are very few rules about talking to another person. Employees may talk to their supervisors freely and the

way of speaking rarely emphasises a person's position. You should, however, be careful when talking to a woman you do not know. Many may experience flirting and suggestions as harassment.

The Finnish language has two or three ways of addressing another person; first-name basis, last-name basis and talking in the third person. Talking to strangers as if you were on a first-name basis is very common in Finland. More formal addresses are reserved for certain situations. The third option (e.g. "Could the teacher please...") is a little old-fashioned, but it is used when the speaker is unsure whether to say you or use a title. The indirect address is also used: e.g. "How was the weekend?"

Stick to schedules and be punctual.

Finns appreciate punctuality and being late is considered rude. If you are late for a meeting, let the person waiting know. Never be late for a job interview. If you truly cannot make it, remember to cancel well in advance:

- *doctor's appointment: you have to pay for an appointment you did not cancel*
- *meetings with the authorities (e.g. appointments with the employment and social welfare office): remember to make a new appointment. In some cases you may have to prove the reason for your absence with e.g. a doctor's certificate.*

Repeatedly cancelling meetings is considered unreliable behaviour.

Telephone and mobile phone culture

- On weekdays, you may call someone at home from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m.
- On weekends, you should only call after noon, especially on Sundays.
- You may call offices during office hours or at a predetermined appointment.
- Introduce yourself and greet the person at the other end at the beginning of each phone call. When calling for work, also introduce the company you are representing.
- You should always respond as quickly as possible to a request to call back.
- Using a mobile phone is inappropriate at meetings, shows, concerts, cinemas, lectures and during discussions, for example. Using a mobile phone may also be prohibited in some places.
- It is not good manners to send text messages or browse the Internet in class or in a meeting.



Eating and table manners

Good table manners are an important and central part of eating. Being considerate at the table and making polite conversation make eating a pleasant experience. The following are a few customs related to eating:

- When the person preparing the food calls for you to come and eat, you should go to the table quickly.
- You should sit down and get up at the same time as the others.
- You should only take as much food as you can eat.
- Cold starters and desserts are eaten at the same time with everyone else, but you can start eating a warm dish when the people sitting closest to you have received their food.
- It is considered bad manners to talk with your mouth full and lean on the table.
- When you are finished, you should leave the cutlery on your plate in the “five o’clock” position.

General notes on customs:

- Making noise and littering in public places is not considered good manners.
- It is inappropriate to borrow things without permission.
- It is inappropriate to whisper in company.
- Smoking is only allowed in designated areas. When visiting, you should ask the hosts where to smoke.
- Smacking lips and burping are not good manners.
- You should leave your shoes in the hall when entering someone’s home. At parties, you usually change from outside shoes to indoor shoes.
- A polite man should put their female companion first, carry their heavy bags, help them put their coat on and offer them a chair.
- Men should not wear hats indoors.

Holidays in Finland

New Year (31 Dec/1 Jan)

Fireworks may be the most visible New Year’s celebration. Many people celebrate New Year at home in the company of friends, even though restaurants also are filled with partygoers. Cities may arrange New Year’s receptions with not only fireworks but also music and speeches. At the turn of the year, it is customary to open a bottle of champagne at 12 midnight.

New Year entails a lot of old customs and beliefs. The most popular way to predict the coming year is to foretell the future from the shapes taken by melted tin. A piece of tin of the shape of a horseshoe is melted and poured into cold water. The silhouette of the piece “shows” what the year has in store for you: for example, a ship predicts a trip, a flower indicates that you have an admirer, a bird brings you luck. It is also common to make New Year’s resolutions: to mend bad habits, lose weight, quit smoking, etc.

Shrovetide is celebrated 7 weeks before Easter. Shrovetide is the time for winter joys – including feasting and sledging down snowy hills. In bygone times, people used to sledge down a snowy hill and yell: “Long flax,” which aimed to ensure the coming summer’s crop. Traditional food of Shrovetide has traditionally been heavy, since the day is followed by a period of fasting, which ends at Easter. The tradition of fasting is based on Christianity and has left its track in the name of the fest; Laskiainen, the Finnish word for Shrovetide, means lowering down to fasting. However most Finns do not fast any longer. Shrovetide delicacies are pea soup and Shrove buns (filled with cream).

April Fools' Day (1 April)

On that day, people try to fool others, make another person believe something that is impossible or to do something in vain. After a successful joke, one yells: "Aprillia syö silliä, juo kuravettä päälle (April fool!)." On 1 April, you cannot believe everything you read in the paper or hear on the news, because the media have largely adopted the funny nature of the day and play their own jokes.

Easter

The Finnish name of Easter, Pääsiäinen, refers to the end of fasting. Easter is our oldest church festival, celebrated in the memory of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Even though Easter in principle is a church festival, it entails many traditional folk customs.

Easter begins on Palm Sunday. The old tradition of "Easter Witches" originates from Eastern Finland has lately been reborn and spread elsewhere in Finland, mixing with the troll tradition of Western Finland. Nowadays, you can see these little "virpoja," witches, who go from door to door wishing people good health and happiness. In their hands, they have decorated willow twigs, one of which they give to each person they address. If one of these witches comes to your door and jingle, you are expected to thank them with sweets or a few coins.

According to old Finnish tradition, Maundy Thursday is a day for cleaning. At church the day is celebrated with Eucharist. Good Friday is the most important day of the Easter week. The atmosphere on the day is serious and, according to tradition, it is not a proper visiting day.

Many Easter traditions are related to food of which

In the morning of Vappu, people gather at the familiar park to have a morning picnic and listen to music.



the most traditional is mämmi, eastern pudding. People use also a lot of eggs, which are usually painted in joyful colours. Children are given chocolate eggs "that the Easter Bunny brought or Easter Hen laid." A lamb as a Easter meal has become more and more popular in Finland.

At Easter, Finns decorate their homes with birch or willow twigs, rye-grass, Easter birdies, bunnies and witches. Yellow is the colour of Easter: napkins, tablecloths, decorations and Easter flowers are usually yellow; flowers of choice are daffodils and tulips.

Vappu, the 1st of May

The first of May is the festival of spring, graduates and the working classes. The most visible marks are people strolling along the streets wearing their white graduation hats, whisks, serpentine and balloons. May Day delicacies enjoyed at numerous homes include mead (a non-alcoholic beverage), May-day fritters and doughnuts.

On the eve of May Day, the most enthusiastic celebrants are graduates whose traditions date back to the 1800s. From the beginning, their celebration has been speeded up by abundant use of alcohol. Graduates in different localities have different traditions of spending the eve of May Day and May Day. In the morning of the 1st of May, people gather at the familiar park to have a morning picnic and listen to music.

May Day (the 1st of May) is the international Labour Day. The political May Day marches arranged on that day have their roots in the workers' walks that have been arranged also in Finland since the late 1800s.

In 1978, politically dimmed May Day was announced as the day of Finnish labour and an official flag-raising day. But, first and foremost, May Day is a joyous spring carnival.



Ascension Day and Whitsun

Ascension Day commemorates Jesus' leaving the earth and going to heaven. Whitsun ends the Easter holidays. There is an old saying that goes: "If you don't have a sweetheart at Whitsun, you won't have one all summer." Nowadays, there are no particular traditions related to the two days.

Midsummer in Finland is the celebration of the "nightless night" - the day is at its longest and the sun does not set at all in Northern Finland. Many people want to enjoy the summer and nature, and leave the city for the countryside. Some people bring Midsummer birches to their yard; some go to open-air dances and Midsummer sauna. The festival reaches its climax in

the burning of the Midsummer bonfire on Midsummer Eve. Midsummer is also the Finnish Flag Day and flags are raised throughout the night.

The birthday of John was timed around the age-old Finnish midsummer, which is why both Christian and pagan traditions are involved in Midsummer. Midsummer night used to be the time to do magic tricks. Girls placed flowers under pillows, looked into wells or rolled in hay, so that they would learn the identity of their future fiancé. Even nowadays the young may do these magic tricks, even though nobody really believes in them anymore; they are considered as fun. Most often, Finnish Midsummer celebration includes abundant use of alcohol.

Nice to know!

Sisu – guts

"Where there's a will, there's a way"
– Finns appreciate perseverance –
to not give up, but push towards your goal.

Alcohol

Many Finns use a lot of alcohol, and you may even have to give reasons for being sober. Alcohol use may not, however, disturb work or other aspects of life.

The Independence Day of Finland is on 6 December. People celebrate the day by remembering those killed at war by taking wreaths and candles to their graves. Distinguished Finns are rewarded with medals of honour. The President arranges the traditional Independence Day celebration to which notable Finns are invited. Numerous people follow the celebration on TV while burning blue-and-white candles on their windowsills.

Christmas celebration begins already a month before Christmas, on the first Advent Sunday. Around this time, Christmas parties (pikkujoulut) are arranged at home and work. It is customary to serve mulled wine (glögi) and Christmas dishes at these parties. The Swedish-speaking Finns have the tradition of celebrating Lucia Day on 13 December. A Lucia lady, clothed



in white and wearing a crown of candles in her hair, roams with her procession, singing and bringing light into the dark.

The Finnish word for Christmas, “joulu,” is derived from the Swedish “jul.” Christmas traditions have their roots in both Christianity and old Finnish traditions and customs. For most of the Finnish families Christmas is time for peaceful get-together .

The many Christmas traditions go back a long way – shared Christmas dishes, Christmas tree and, of course, Santa Claus. Traditional Christmas dishes consist of Christmas ham, turnip casserole, sweet potato casserole, carrot casserole and Finnish beetroot salad (rosolli). In families with children, the children anxiously wait for Santa Claus to come and wonder what presents Santa will bring them on Christmas eve. Many families also take the traditional Christmas sauna. Usually, a Christmas tree is acquired and the house is decorated with gnomes, straw goats and candles. Red is the colour of Christmas. An important Christmas tradition is giving and receiving presents.

Going to Christmas church has been a solid tradition, but nowadays the situation is a bit different. Fifty years ago, people got up in the grey dawn and went sleighing to church. In today’s Finland, not everybody has the possibility of doing that anymore or the interest in going to church.

Clerical Christmas ends on Epiphany (6 Jan), whereas according to folk tradition, Christmas lasts on 13 January (the name day of Nuutti). According to tradition, Nuutti-goats knocked on doors to drive Christmas away. This custom has almost totally vanished.

Public holidays

The following are holidays that are paid leave and on which stores may have restricted opening hours:

- **1 January:** New Year’s Day
- **6 January:** Twelfth Night
- **1 May:** The First of May
- **6 December:** Independence Day
- **24–26 December:** Christmas

Non-fixed holidays:

- Easter
- Ascension Day is on the Thursday 39 days after Easter Sunday.
- Whit Sunday is on the Sunday 49 days after Easter Sunday.
- Midsummer Eve is on the Friday between 20-26 June and Midsummer Day is on the following day
- Mother’s Day (äitienpäivä) on the second Sunday of May and Father’s Day (isänpäivä) on the second Sunday of November children bring their parents morning coffee in bed, give a card and a present.

Many prominent people or issues are celebrated:

- 5 Feb: National Poet Runeberg’s Day
- 14 Feb: St Valentine’s Day
- 28 Feb: Kalevala, the Finnish National Epic Day
- 8 March: Universal Women’s Day
- 9 April: Mikael Agricola / Finnish Language Day
- 27 April: Veteran’s Day
- 12 May: J.V. Snellman / Finnish Heritage Day
- 4 June: Flag Day of Defence Forces
- 9 June: Åland’s Autonomy Day (official flag-raising day in the Åland Islands)
- 6 July: Eino Leino / Summer and Poetry Day
- 27 July: Sleepyhead Day
- 10 Oct: Aleksis Kivi / The Finnish Literature Day
- 24. Oct: UN Day
- 6 Nov: Finnish Swedish Heritage Day
- Remembrance Day is on the third Sunday of May.
- All Saints’ Day is on the Saturday between 31 October and 6 November.

Traditional minorities

To an outsider, the Finns may appear to be homogeneous, but the Finnish population has always been diverse. The traditional minorities are the Sami (formerly called the Lapp), Swedish-speaking Finns, Jews, Tatars and Roma. The characteristics and backgrounds of these minorities are very different.

The Sami are the original inhabitants of Finland. They have their own language, Sami, which belongs to the Finno-Ugric languages. Often people's ideas about the Sami are affected by romanticised views. What are usually known about their culture are costumes, huts and chants.

The present area of the Sami, Saamenmaa, extends from the northern parts of Norway, Sweden and Finland to the Kola Peninsula in Russia. The number of population is estimated to be 50 000 - 100 000, of which more than 6000 live in Finnish Sami districts in Lapland. The Sami also live in other municipalities in Finland.

Traditionally, the Sami's livelihood and way of life have been connected with the nature: hunting, fishing and, especially, reindeer management, which has been the main source of livelihood for the Sami. Nowadays, service industry and tourism are becoming more and more important. The Sami culture has changed along with the development of technologies related to their livelihood. To an outsider, it may be difficult to draw the line between Finns and Sami, because Sami people may have both Sami and Finnish roots and because their way of life has been influenced by both cultures.

Swedish-speaking population has lived in Finland for at least a thousand years. Most of the Swedish-speaking Finns live along the west and south coast. The only purely Swedish-speaking area in Finland is Ahvenanmaa - the Åland Islands - which is a self-governing territory. More than 5% of the entire population of Finland is speaking Swedish as mother tongue..

The principles of legislation on language are included in the constitution of Finland, which decrees that Finnish and Swedish are the official languages of Finland. The status of Swedish as the second official language and the division of the Swedish-speaking population into two social groups are linked to the history of Finland. On the one hand, Swedish has been the mother tongue of the peasants and fishers on the west coast, and on the other hand, it has been the language of the administrators and elite, since the administrative language was Swedish when Finland was under Sweden's authority.

There are not many differences between the cultures of Swedish-speaking Finns and Finns. Swedish-speaking Finns have some of their own customs and festival days, such as Svenska dagen (Finnish Swedish Heritage Day) on 6 November and Lucia Day on 13 December.



It is estimated that there are around 10 000 **Roma** in Finland. According to linguistic theories, the Roma originate from India. The language is based on Sanskrit, but it has a lot of loanwords from various languages. Based on these languages, one can chart the Roma's migration from India to Europe. The first Roma arrived in Finland in the 1500s via Sweden. In the beginning, attitudes towards the Roma were highly negative.

In 1919, the Roma living in Finland were given Finnish citizenship. The constitutional amendment of 1995 strengthened the status of the Roma as a national minority in Finland and specified their right to develop their own language and culture. The costume of the Finnish Roma women is a clearly visible part of the Romany culture. Even though the men do not actually have a folk costume of their own, even their clothing is dictated by the rules of the Roma tradition. For the main part, the Roma in Finland speak Finnish and/or Swedish. Even though the number of speakers of Romany remains small, it has a big influence on the Roma identity.

Because of the changes in society, the traditional professions of the Roma - such as horsemanship, handicraft and vending - have become less important. The earlier mobile lifestyle of the Roma, the size of their families, their poor financial standing, as well as mutual prejudices between the mainstream population and the Roma have had an effect on the fact that the Roma are not as highly educated as the mainstream population. This has in turn influenced their chances of employment and standard of living. Nevertheless, the situation is currently changing.

The Romany culture focuses on community. Even though extended families have largely turned into nuclear families, family ties are very strong among the Roma. Their culture is dictated by their own traditional rules, such as the complex sets of rules for hygiene and modesty, which guide their behaviour and dressing as well as interaction between the Roma of different ages and sexes. Commitment to the traditions of the Romany culture varies per families and individuals.

The first **Jews** arrived in Finland from Sweden at the end of the 18th century. Permanent Jewish settlement was established in Finland only after the Jewish soldiers of the Russian army and their families were allowed to stay in Finland in the 1800s. In the beginning, Jews were poorly treated: they were expelled and their right to practice their profession was restricted. Jews gained full Finnish citizenship in January 1918, after Finland became independent. At the time of World War II, there were around 2 000 Jews in Finland. As other Finns, the Jews in Finland participated in both the Winter War and the Continuation War. Jews

sided with Nazi Germany, when defending Finland's independence during the Continuation War.

At present there are around 1 100 Jews in Finland. The number has been gradually declining, since the number of births is lower than the number of the dead and since moving to Israel further reduces the number of Jews living in Finland. Furthermore, the majority of marriages are mixed marriages and only the child of a Jewish mother is considered a Jew. Jews are well assimilated into the Finnish society and they have succeeded in combining their religious characteristics with Finnishness. Proficiency in Yiddish among the Finnish Jews is almost non-existent.

The Tatars living in Finland are the oldest Muslim population in the Nordic Countries. This Muslim settlement was established in the early 1900s when Turkish-Tatarian families settled down in Finland. The religion of the Tatars has been considered a Finnish form of Islam, since the Tatars have lived in Finland for many generations and - besides Islam and the Tatarian culture - the Finnish culture has strongly influenced their way of life. The Tatars do not differ from the rest of Finns as far as their outward appearance is concerned and they do not wear religious symbols or clothing in public.

A Russian-language minority has long been living in Finland. Some of them can trace their roots back to the period of autonomy (1809-1917) when around 6 000 Russian workers, merchants and soldiers lived in Finland. As a consequence of the Russian revolution, a large number of refugees from Russia and Eastern



Karelia entered into Finland. At its maximum, the number of refugees amounted to around 33 500 people (in 1922). Some of them used Finland as a pass-through country, whereas some stayed here for good. In the beginning, the Russian emigrants were viewed with suspicion, which is why speakers of Russian avoided using the language in public and translated their last names into Finnish or Swedish. Nevertheless, it was as early as in the late 1800s that speakers of Russian had several primary and secondary schools, some of which functioned in connection with Orthodox churches.

Later immigration

After the early 1900s, not many immigrants arrived in Finland, because of the wars and the social and financial circumstances after the wars. It was more common to leave Finland: hundreds of thousands of people moved abroad, especially Sweden, in search of work and a better standard of living. Emigration continued and only at the turn of the 1980s and



1990s, more people moved into Finland than out of the country: in other words, at that time, the 60-year period of “isolation” came to an end.

Finland has undergone changes in the last few decades. The impacts of world crises started to show in immigration into Finland in the 1970s when Finland offered refuge to 182 Chileans. In 1979, another group of refugees entered the country, as Finland agreed to accept a hundred Vietnamese refugees (so-called boat refugees). The number of quota refugees and asylum seekers remained very low until the crises in the Middle East, Somalia and the Balkans led to a striking rise in the number of refugees and asylum seekers from the

end of the 1980s. Besides crises, the decision to give Ingrian-Finns the right to return to Finland was another factor boosting immigration. Consequently, Ingrian-Finns in large numbers started to return to Finland in the early 1990s. Around 60 percent of immigrants from Russia and Estonia are Ingrian-Finnish returnees.

There are altogether 5.5 million Finnish citizens in Finland (2016). People from all over the world currently reside in Finland. Most of the immigrants come from Russia and Estonia. Currently more than 330 000 persons, who speak some other language than Finnish, Swedish or Same, live in Finland.

Russian
72,436

Estonian
48,087

Somali
17,871

English
17,784

Arabic
16,713

Kurdish
11,271

Chinese
10,722

The largest foreign language groups

Other common languages include Albanian, Persian, Thai, Turkish, Spanish and German.



Finnish history

When the Ice Age ended and the ice cap started to gradually melt, the first inhabitants arrived in the area that is currently Finland approximately 9,000 years ago. They came to Finland from the Volga area in present-day Russia, where the Finno-Ugric peoples are believed to have originated. Later, Baltic, Germanic and Scandinavian people also immigrated to the Finnish area. The current Finnish people are a mix of all these groups.

Archaeological findings have provided us with information on the first inhabitants. According to these findings, people first lived off hunting, sealing and fishing, and later, approx. 4,000 years ago, started farming. The first written references to Finns can be found in literature from antiquity and the Middle Ages, where explorers depict “primitive and barbaric Fennos.”

Around one thousand years ago, Finland started to move from pre-historic times to historic times. During that time, Swedish kings used to carry out crusades in Finland. The first crusade took place around the year 1155. In terms of religion, the crusades brought Christianity to Finland, replacing the Finnish primeval religions. As a result of the crusades, Sweden incorporated Finland as part of itself and the Western Catholic church.

The Protestant Reformation started by the German Martin Luther in the 16th century also resulted in the Reformation spreading to Finland. The Evangelical-Lutheran church assumed the role of the primary religion, and to this day most Finns are members of this church. The most significant change caused by the Reformation was that the churches started to preach in a language the people could understand. This is why the church needed to translate religious texts into Finnish. The task was undertaken by Mikael Agricola, who is considered the father of written Finnish. His first book, which was the first ever book printed in Finnish, *ABC-IRIA* i.e. the alphabet-book, was published in 1543.

Nice to know!

The spirit of the Winter War

The war demanded great efforts from a small nation, which is still widely remembered. Recent history is valued and it still affects many people's attitudes.



agreement made in 1944 were harsh: Finland lost large areas to the Soviet Union in Karelia and Lapland and was forced to pay ample war reparations. In addition, Finland was ordered to drive out its former brothers in arms out of Finland, which led to the Lapland War between Finnish and German forces.

After the war, Finland entered an era of neutrality and sizable rebuilding. Finland had to settle over 400,000 people from the areas surrendered to the Soviet Union, repair the country torn apart by war and pay war reparations under the close scrutiny of the Soviet Union. After the war, the structural change that had already started before the war only accelerated. Rural areas became desolate as thousands of Finns moved into the cities or emigrated to Sweden looking for work. The standard of living and public well-being was on the rise, but it was not until the 1970s that Finland could be considered one of the world's welfare states. Finland joined the European Union in 1995.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, the governmental situation in Finland changed several times. The people alternated between wars and times of peace. There were misfortunes, such as when the country was occupied, plague and other diseases afflicted the people, and when the cold and frost caused crop failures; During the “deadly years” over a quarter of the Finnish population died of hunger and diseases. There were good times, as well: long uninterrupted periods of peace. The people became more educated and literate as schools were established. Living conditions, agriculture, traffic and industry developed through new inventions and technological development.

After Russia invaded the land areas from Sweden (the Finnish War 1808–1809), Finland was attached to Russia as the autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland for roughly one hundred years. During the autonomy, Finland was relatively free to decide on its own domestic policy. However, Russia tightened its grip on Finland and started to Russify Finland towards the end of the 19th century. These times are called the years of oppression.

Finland's independence was preceded by strongisms of nationalism and romantic nationalism in the 19th century. The intelligentsia, which was mostly Swedish-speaking at the time, developed an interest in the Finnish language and folk culture. The following is a typical saying during that time: “We are not Swedish, we do not want to be Russian, let us therefore be Finnish.” J.V. Snellman was an influential advocate of the Finnish language and independence.

The Finnish national epic compiled by Elias Lönnrot, the Kalevala, was first published in 1835. Lönnrot made several field trips into Karelia, where he collected thousands of poems from old folk singers. He com-

piled these poems into a cohesive story, the Kalevala, with characters such as Väinämöinen the seer, Ilmarinen the smith, Lemminkäinen, the Mistress of the North and many more. The Kalevala had a profound impact on the Finns, because it was seen to prove that Finns have their own ancient culture.

Finnish art had its golden age towards the end of the 19th century. The golden age produced many influential people and their works, such as Finnish national poet Johan Ludvig Runeberg and Finland's own fable author Zacharias Topelius, the poet Eino Leino, the painters Albert Edelfelt and Akseli Gallen-Kallela, as well as Jean Sibelius, who composed the Finlandia hymn. The Finnish identity and culture of today is built on their life's work, as well as that of many others.

Finland declared independence on 6 December 1917 and broke away from Russian rule amidst the turmoil of the First World War. Independence proved challenging for Finland, as Finland spiralled into a civil war between the Reds and the Whites in the first year. Russian troops still stationed in Finland and the socialist revolution in Russia added to the trouble. The war ended in the victory of the Whites led by Mannerheim, the Marshal of Finland, in 1918. The civil war and its aftermath left the Finns scarred and divided for a long time.

However, external threat unified the people during **the Second World War**, and the people united in battle against the Soviet Union as the Winter War erupted in 1939. The Winter War lasted only 105 days, during which Finland heroically defended itself against a superior enemy. In the summer of 1941, after a short truce, Finland was yet again at war with the Soviet Union (Continuation War 1941–1944). The terms of the peace

Finnish life



Birth, registering and naming

The hospital, or the assisting doctor or midwife in a home birth, informs the register office of the new-born child. If the birth is different than above, the mother or the person taking care of the child must inform a health-care professional who then informs the register office.

The Population Register Centre sends registration papers to the child's parents. The parents then choose one, two or three first names for the child and send the registration papers back to the Population Register Centre or to their Evangelical Lutheran or Orthodox Church of Finland congregation. The child must be named within two months of the birth. The child also receives an identity number at birth.

If the parents want, they may organise a religious

ceremony in connection with naming their child. Instead of a christening, those who are not members of any church often organise a name-giving celebration for their child. Most Finns are members of the Evangelical Lutheran church.

Childhood and youth

In Finland, rights specified in the constitution apply to everyone, including children and young people. Additionally, the rights of children are also governed by the Paternity Act and the Act on Child Custody and Right of Access, as well as legislation on child maintenance. In Finland, children have the right to bodily integrity, which means that corporal punishment and circumcising girls are forbidden.

Because both parents work outside the home in most Finnish families, society has organised for children's day care. Day care may be organised by the municipality, the parish, a private day care centre or a family day care unit.

Childhood age limits:

- Compulsory education starts when the child is 7.
- 12-year-olds have the right to be heard in any issues concerning them and the authorities.
- 14-year-olds may work with some restrictions, i.e. they may perform light work that does not damage their health or development or disrupt their education.
- 15-year-olds may sign contracts of employment and work if they have completed their compulsory

Nice to know!

Baptism

In Finland, the first celebration of a child's life is the baptism organised a few months after the birth. Most children are baptised in the Evangelical Lutheran faith. In the baptism, the child is joined to the church. The baptism may be organised in a church, but it is often held at home or in the premises of the church.

A priest performs the baptism. The child must have at least two godparents, who must usually be members of the church and have completed the confirmation class. Additional godparents may include members of other churches or people who are not members of any church, if the baptising priest approves. Usually one of the godparents, the godmother or godfather, holds the child as they are baptised. The ceremony consists of hymns, prayer and the naming, and at the end the priest wets the child's head three times with baptismal water.

During the baptism, the baby is clothed in a long, white gown.

Some coffee and refreshments are usually served after the religious ceremony. Only the nearest relatives and godparents are usually invited to baptisms. The baptised child receives presents. A traditional gift to the baby from a godparent is a silver spoon with the child's name, date, weight and height of birth engraved on it. Other guests may give clothes, toys and money.

education. Criminal responsibility starts. 15-year-olds have the right to get a driving license for a moped and a tractor, and they may drive a motorboat.

- 16-year-olds may get a driving license for a light motorcycle. Compulsory education ends in the year that a person turns 16 years old.
- According to legislation on sexual offences, the age of consent is 16 years, which means that an adult who has sexual contact with someone who is under the age of 16 is committing a crime.
- Sexual relations with a person over the age of 16 but under the age of 18 is also a crime, if the minor is dependent on the adult, e.g. employer and employee or teacher and student, etc.
- 17-year-olds no longer receive child benefits.
- Compulsory military service starts at the beginning of the year that the boy turns 18.

A person becomes an adult at the age of 18.

Many things that have previously been prohibited become allowed on a person's 18th birthday. In fact, 18 years of age is the most important age limit in Finland, because it allows anyone to:

- get a driver's licence for a car, truck or motorcycle. Driving school may be started 6 months prior to the birthday at the earliest.
- get a passport without consent from a parent
- buy mild alcoholic beverages and tobacco and enter restaurants licensed to serve alcohol
- get married and resign from the church without consent from a parent
- gain the right to independent income support, when the right to receive maintenance from parents ends If a person studies at an institute for second-

ary education, the parents' income is considered in determining the amount of student allowance until the person is 20 years old.

- gain the right to vote, i.e. they may vote in national and municipal elections.
- a 20-year-old may buy strong alcoholic beverages
- a 21-year-old may get a driving license for a heavy combination vehicle or a bus.

Nice to know!

Confirmation

In Finland, many 15-year-olds attend confirmation class, where they receive Christian education. Going to confirmation class is a traditional part of normal life for many young people and they take it for granted. Only those who have completed confirmation class may become godparents and be married in a church.

The confirmation class finishes with a confirmation ceremony in the church. The young people participating in the ceremony wear white robes, albs, provided by the congregation. After the ceremony, many families host a confirmation party at their home. Confirmation parties are often celebrated within the extended family. Godparents often give golden cross necklaces as confirmation presents. Other suitable presents include other jewellery, books and money.

Until a few decades ago, confirmation acted as a rite of passage from youth to adulthood. Today, this concept is only referenced in sayings.



Nice to know!

Graduation party

At the graduation ceremony, those students who have completed the Finnish Matriculation Examination place a graduation hat on their head. The hat is made of white velvet, it has a black visor and trimming with a lyre surrounded by a wreath. Only parents and siblings are usually allowed to attend the ceremony at the school. When the ceremony is over, a graduation party is held at home. The party usually has a coffee service with a congratulatory toast. In the evening, the graduates gather for their own celebration. Graduation parties are also organised for students in other institutes.

Compulsory education

All children living in Finland must participate in compulsory education, and they have the right to attend a comprehensive school free of charge. Children usually start school when they have turned 7. Comprehensive education lasts nine years in Finland. Immigrant children usually receive preparatory education for roughly one year before they are transferred to classes for children their own age.

Finns value education, and there are very few lines of trade with no educational requirements. That is why almost all young people continue their studies after comprehensive school either in secondary school or vocational training. Secondary schools and nearly all

vocational schools require students to apply through a centralised application service. Students are selected based on their school grades, but some vocational schools also organise entrance exams. Immigrants may also be selected through a flexible selection process, if they do not have a certificate from the Finnish comprehensive school.

The three-year vocational upper secondary education qualifies students for a certain profession. Immigrants may participate in a year-long pre-vocational programme before applying to vocational training. The general upper secondary school offering all-round education usually takes 2–4 years and ends with

completing the Finnish Matriculation Examination. After this, students may apply to any university and institute of higher education. Vocational three-year studies also qualify students for institutes of higher education.

Worker's institutes or folk high schools are offered in most municipalities in Finland, and they are very popular places to study among adults. Classes at worker's institutes and folk high schools are organised in the students' free time, usually once a week. You can study languages and various practical skills and arts, as well as do sports.

Nice to know!

Name days and birthdays

Children's birthdays are celebrated in nearly all families. The family usually congratulates the birthday boy or girl in the morning and gives them presents. The child may offer their classmates or day care group some ice cream or candy on their birthday. Sometimes the child's parents organise a birthday party at home or somewhere else, and the child invites their friends. The guests and the birthday boy or girl are dressed for the occasion, and the guests bring birthday presents. Birthday parties have plenty of refreshments and a birthday cake with a number of candles corresponding to the child's age. If the birthday boy or girl manages to blow out all the candles at once, it is said to mean that their wishes come true. In addition to enjoyable food, birthday parties also usually have some entertainment, such as games, music and maybe even dancing. The family and godparents usually pay a separate visit to congratulate the child and bring presents.

Adults usually only celebrate round numbers starting from the 50th birthday. There are regional differences to these customs as well as age-specific differences in terms of celebrating name days and birthdays.

Children's name days are usually celebrated in some way at home, the day care or at school; this includes congratulations, songs and small presents. Adults' name days have become a good excuse to demand that the person whose name day it is brings something sweet to the workplace.

Many Finns live together as avopari before getting married.



Dating and relationships

In Finland, dating and relationships are considered a private matter between two individuals, which should not be affected by others' opinions. Both the selection of a partner and what an individual chooses to do with that partner are based on the principle of voluntariness. Unrequited love – propositioning, cat-calling and touching someone without permission, as well as sending inappropriate images and messages – may be deemed sexual harassment, which is illegal.

Everyone has the right to say no to sex. Sex and touching require permission and approval, always. Forcing someone to have sexual relations using violence or threats,

for example, is always a serious offence both in a relationship and outside of it. Sexual intercourse or other sexual contact between an adult and someone under the age of 16 is always a crime.

Relationships are based on reciprocity and partnership – spending time together and doing things together and with mutual friends are considered core components of a relationship in Finland. Partners are equal; decisions are made together, and what is permissible to one should also be permissible to the other. Faithfulness is a valued aspect of a relationship.

Getting married and registering a relationship

If dating leads to a more permanent relationship, you should be aware that the form of the relationship – common law, marriage, registered relationship – may affect the management of property and inheritance, as well as custody and maintenance of children. Same-sex partners in registered relationships are primarily governed by the same legislation as those in a marriage.

People may get married in a church or at the register office. Before the marriage, couples must request a certificate of an investigation of impediments from the register office or the church. The investigation makes sure that the marriage is lawful. Anyone planning to get married must also sign a declaration of no impediment to the planned marriage. Impediments include being married already, as bigamy is forbidden in Finland.

Impediments of a foreigner are investigated when at least one of the people getting married is a Finnish citizen or has a domicile in Finland. Foreign law is only applied if neither person has this kind of connection with Finland. In order to marry a couple in Finland, the marriage must always be lawful in Finland even if the couple is foreign. That is why any foreigners planning to marry must have a certificate of no impediments to the marriage issued by the authorities in their own country.

When the person investigating the impediments has stated that there are no impediments to the marriage, the couple receives a certificate that is valid for four months. If the marriage does not take place within four months, the investigation of impediments must be performed again.

Anyone who is over the age of 18 and is not married or in a registered relationship may enter a marriage. Anyone under the age of 18 may enter a marriage with permission from the Ministry of Justice. Marriage between close relatives is not allowed. Marriage is in fact forbidden in the following situations:

- between a child and their parent, sibling or half-sibling
- between the children of a brother or sister
- between a foster child and a foster parent

Special permission may be applied from the Ministry of Justice in the last two situations.

Register offices and the Evangelical Lutheran, Orthodox and Catholic churches, as well as those registered religious communities that have been granted the right by the Ministry of Justice, have the right to officiate at weddings. Civil marriages are officiated at register offices. Two witnesses must be present in both church and register office ceremonies.

The spouses may choose to use the current last name in the marriage or use a shared last name. A hyphenated last name is also an option, i.e. one of the spouses may use their previous last name in front of the shared last name. The officiant must be informed of the new last names before the ceremony.

Spouses may draft a written prenuptial agreement either before or after the ceremony, with which the spouses may agree on how to divide property in case of a divorce, for example. Two unimpeded people must certify the agreement. A prenuptial agreement is only valid after it has been authorised by the register office. It is recommended that a lawyer be consulted when making a prenuptial agreement. Anyone forming a blended family should determine the legal issues related to the family, such as obligation to provide

INFO:

- <https://oikeus.fi/en/index/esitteet/avioliittolaki.html>
- www.maistraatti.fi/fi/Palvelut/vihkiminen_ja_parisuhteen_rekisterointi/Vihkiminen/



maintenance and inheritance issues.

International marriages entered into in Finland usually comply with Finnish law, because the deciding factor is the person's domicile or place of residence rather than their nationality. In practice this means that foreigners living in Finland permanently are governed by Finnish law in issues related to property, marriage and inheritance. The spouses may in some cases agree on different procedures.

Same-sex couples may register their relationship at the register office. The register office also conducts the investigation of impediments preceding the marriage. Registering a relationship is in principle a similar legal agreement to a marriage. In Finland, the gender-neutral marriage act will come into effect in March 2017, after which same-sex couples may enter a marriage.

Marriage – Spousal rights and responsibilities

The Marriage Act determines the spouses' rights and obligations to each other. It states that spouses are equal. The principle of the law is that spouses should demonstrate mutual trust and act together for the benefit of the family. Both spouses have the right to decide

on their participation in earning an income as well as any social or other operations outside the home.

In principle, spouses must provide maintenance for each other during the marriage. Both spouses must participate in the finances of the family to the best of their ability. If necessary, one spouse can be ordered to provide alimony to the other during the marriage. The amount and payment method of the alimony may be agreed in a contract or by court order. The parents' obligation to provide maintenance to their children is decreed in the legislation on child maintenance.

Entering a marriage does not cause any changes to the spouses' ownership, but both spouses receive marital rights to property of the other spouse if there is no prenuptial agreement. This means that in case of a divorce, the spouses' property is combined and the spouse that owns more has to pay indemnity to the spouse that owns less in order to make the shares equal. Spouses may acquire property that they own together, e.g. by purchasing housing shares together.

During the marriage, each spouse is individually responsible for any debt they accumulate. A divorce does not change this, i.e. spouses are not responsible for any debt accumulated solely by the other in case of a divorce. Spouses may take a loan together, which they are jointly responsible for.

One of the basic rights of everyone is the right to bodily integrity. This also applies to sexual autonomy. Everyone has the right to decide on matters concerning their own body and sexuality. This also applies in marriages, common-law marriages and relationships. Sexual violence, forcing someone to have sex and sexual abuse are always criminal acts, even if the perpetrator is a spouse or someone else close to the victim.

Nice to know!

Engagement parties and weddings

An engagement is an agreement of a coming marriage between a couple. No official documents or witnesses are needed for an engagement, but it is a shared, voluntary decision of both people in the couple. Today, very few people abide by the old engagement traditions – usually couples go and buy their engagement rings on their own with no celebrations. Some couples do, however, want to organise a party, in which case they often receive money or presents that help them make a home together.

Polterabend or the bachelor or bachelorette party is a German tradition adopted in Finland. These parties celebrate the last night as a free man or woman, even though they are usually organised earlier than the night before the wedding. The groom's male friends organise a party for the groom and the bride's friends organise a party for the bride. You may see some of these parties in fancy dress in town, taking the bride or groom to perform various tasks.

The wedding ceremony may be held in the register office, a church or almost any other place. In connection with church weddings, the church announces the marriage with the banns during a service, and many couples go and listen to them. The traditional Finnish wedding is a church wedding.

According to custom, the bride's family sit on the left side from the back of the church and



the groom's family sit on the right, the closest family members sit in the front and friends sit the furthest away from the altar. It is traditional to have the father walk the bride down the aisle to the tune of the wedding march and hand her over to the groom. The ceremony consists of an overture, a wedding speech, questions, the ring prayer, the announcement of the marriage and prayers.

After the ceremony, there is a celebration with food and dance. In addition to eating, the ceremonies in the wedding reception include speeches, cutting the wedding cake, a waltz and throwing the bouquet, and so on. The bride is traditionally dressed in a long, white gown and a veil and the groom is in black tie. The guests should remember that only the bride is allowed to wear white at a wedding.

Presents for the newlyweds may include things for their shared home or money. Many couples draft a list with wedding present options.

Divorce

A marriage is dissolved with a court order. When processing a divorce, the court does not investigate any reasons behind the divorce. A divorce may be granted after a mandatory six-month reconsideration period or when the spouses have been separated for the two preceding years. The divorce is cancelled if a divorce is not demanded within one year of the initial application. Divorce is initiated by submitting a written application to the district court. The application may be submitted by one spouse or both spouses together.

When the marriage is dissolved, the spouses must agree on at least the maintenance and visiting rights of the child, support payments to the spouse and the child, as well as the division of property and the end of their shared life. These matters can be agreed without court proceedings by signing a contract that must be verified by the municipality's social welfare officer. The verified contract is just as binding as a court order.

If the spouses cannot agree on these matters, they can be given to the district court to decide. When sentencing a divorce, the court may obligate one spouse to pay support payments to the other spouse either periodically or as a non-recurring payment.

The division of the property of the spouses based on the divorce is in principle a division of the property in half. However, this is only the principal rule from which the spouses may deviate. The deviation may be based on a prenuptial agreement between the spouses or a willingness to make reasonable changes to the division of property.

Having a child

Having a child changes the family and the relationship. Already during pregnancy, the expecting mother and the family receive advice and support from prenatal and maternity clinics that monitor the progression of the pregnancy. Prenatal clinics operate as part of health care centres and refer women to examinations and care elsewhere when needed. Before starting school, small children visit these clinics regularly to have health examinations and vaccinations.

The parents' duties towards their children are regulated in legislation on children. The most important pieces of legislation are the Paternity Act and the Act on Child Custody and Right of Access, as well as the legislation on child maintenance.

The paternity of a child born in wedlock does not need to be verified. The paternity of children born out of wedlock, e.g. in a common-law marriage, can be verified by recognising the child at the register office, or based on a court order. Verifying paternity without recognition by the father can only be carried out when sufficient proof of the man's biological paternity has been obtained through a paternity test.

In Finland, the father is always liable to provide maintenance to their child, even if he is not in a relationship with the mother. If the man denies his paternity, he can be ordered to take a paternity test to verify paternity. If the man is found to be the child's father, the court will order him to pay child support based on the man's property and income.

The maternity package, or äitiyspakkaus, is a maternity benefit given to pregnant mothers or adoptive mothers living in Finland. The maternity package provided by KELA contains children's clothes, a

INFO

www.kela.fi/web/en/families

sleeping bag and other useful items.

Pregnant mothers covered by the Finnish social security system can go on maternity leave and receive a maternity allowance from KELA. The allowance is usually determined based on the mother's income. Fathers may apply for paternity allowance for the time after the child is born. Once the maternity allowance period has ended, either parent can go on family leave and apply for parenthood allowance. The parental allowance period ends when the child is approximately 9 months old. If either of the parents wants to stay home and care for the child after this, they have the opportunity to apply for a home care subsidy that is available until the child turns three. All allowances are granted by KELA. Child benefit is paid for a child living in Finland until the child turns 17.

Unwanted pregnancy

Sometimes families do not want any children or any more children. There are several methods of contraception available; some can be bought freely and others require prescriptions or procedures ordered by a doctor. If an unwanted pregnancy has already started, there is the option of an abortion or a termination, which is legal in Finland provided it is performed appropriately. Public health nurses, for example, provide advice on contraception and terminations. Abortions can be performed on referral from a doctor or permission from the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health, Valvira. A termination can be performed before the 12th week of pregnancy upon a doctor's decision. Terminations performed later than this require permission from Valvira, which can only be given based on weighty reasons, such as the mother's young age or if the mother's life is at risk.



Death and burial

Death causes grief, but it also requires plenty of practical organisation. In cases of death, the bereaved and next of kin are provided with help and support by health care professionals, the church and organisations.

Each deceased person must have a death certificate before they are buried. When someone dies in a hospital or a care facility, a notification of the death is forwarded to the population register and other authorities. If a death occurs outside of a hospital, it must be notified to the police, who will then determine the cause of death and notify the other authorities. A post-mortem is often carried out to determine the cause of death. KELA, the bank, the post office and the insurance company should also be notified of the death of a relative.

Cemeteries maintained by congregations are general cemeteries that also offer burial places to people who are not members of the church. Some municipalities offer separate cemeteries to non-Christians. If the bereaved prefer, the deceased may be cremated, in which case the ashes in the urn may either be buried or kept. Parishes and private funeral directors offer assistance in organising the funeral.

Parishes organise Christian burials. Members of other faiths or people who do not belong to any church may plan their ceremony how they wish.

Matters of inheritance

The administration of the personal estate and the distribution of the estate of a deceased person are usually governed by the legislation of the country where the deceased lived at the time of death. When the administration of the personal estate or the distribution of the estate is carried out in Finland, Finnish law is applied most of the time. The legislation of the country of the deceased's nationality may be applied when the deceased had lived in Finland for less than five years prior to their death, or if the deceased has ordered in their will that another country's legislation shall be applied.

An estate inventory must be performed after death, in which all assets and debts of the deceased and their widow or widower are listed. Parties to the estate or other people with the task of managing the estate must ensure that the estate inventory is performed within three months of the death. Two trustees execute the estate inventory, draft an estate inventory deed and value the property. Legal aid offices provide practical assistance with estate inventories.

If the deceased has not made a will, the inheritance is regulated by the Code of Inheritance. The primary heirs are the children, then older siblings and their children. The Code of Inheritance has special provisions to protect the widow or widower. The widow or widower has the right to keep the estate undivided, unless a direct heir demands the division and there are no other

provisions in the will. If a person dies without heirs, the state inherits their estate.

Inheritance tax is determined by the estate inventory deed that is delivered to the tax administration within one month of the estate inventory. Inheritance taxation is progressive, which means that the bigger the value of the inheritance is, the larger the tax. The taxes are divided into three brackets based on family relations. The lightest taxation applies to the next of kin, such as the spouse and the children, as well as the parents. The second tax bracket applies to siblings and their children. The third tax bracket applies to other heirs.

INFO:

- *Information on benefits and pensions received after a death in the family:*
<http://www.kela.fi/in/internet/suomi.nsf/Docs/180701142218EH?OpenDocument>

- *Burial and cremation*
<http://evl.fi/>

- *The estate inventory and division of the estate:*
<http://pro-seremoniat.fi/hautajaiset/>

- *The estate inventory and division of the estate:*
[www.vero.fi/fi-FI/Henkiloasiakkaat/Perinto/Perunkirjoitus_ja_perukirja\(12851\)](http://www.vero.fi/fi-FI/Henkiloasiakkaat/Perinto/Perunkirjoitus_ja_perukirja(12851))

Nice to know!

Funerals

Death is rarely mentioned in Finnish culture. Deaths are usually announced by placing an obituary in the newspaper before or after the funeral. If the obituary is published before the funeral, it can be used as an invitation. If the obituary says "siunaus toimitetaan hiljaisuudessa" (a quiet burial), it means that only the next of kin will attend.

Close friends may express their condolences by visiting the house of the bereaved and bringing flowers. Other acquaintances usually express their condolences by sending a letter or a remembrance card. The house or housing company of the deceased hangs the flag at half-mast as a sign of the death.

The funeral is usually held two or three weeks after the death. The ceremony may be held in a church or at the open grave. A priest usually performs the ceremony. The ceremony includes hymns, prayer and placing flowers at the coffin. The coffin is carried to the grave in a funeral procession. When the coffin is lowered into the grave, the male guests take their hats off.

Flowers and wreaths are placed on the coffin. First the next of kin place their flowers on the coffin, followed by other relatives and friends. The mourners then stand quietly for a while and read texts written on ribbons or cards. After this, the mourners stand next to the coffin for a while, give a bow to the bereaved and return to their seats.

Traditionally, people wear black for funerals. A funeral reception is held after the burial. At the reception, relatives and friends remember the deceased together and people sing hymns or listen to music and read any messages that have arrived.

Finnish nature

– public rights of access and responsibilities

Nice to know!

Forest and nature in general.

Many Finns find forest calming and spiritual. It is said that a forest is a Finn's church. Clean nature is regarded as highly important and littering is subject to punishment.

Finns value their clean nature and like spending time there. In Finland, public rights of access guarantee anyone the right to enjoy nature and its offerings on certain conditions. Public rights of access are a generally accepted custom and they are based on several laws. These rights and limitations also pertain to foreigners.

Everyone has the right to

- walk, ski or bike in nature, but not on anyone's private yard or in fields that may be damaged by the access – you may also camp relatively freely, as long as you keep a suitable distance from any dwellings.
- swim and boat in the waters, as long as you keep a suitable distance from any dwellings or a sauna
- pick flowers, berries and mushrooms, as long as you keep a suitable distance from any dwellings. There are some plants that are so rare that they are protected, which means that you must not pick them. A list of protected plants can be found in the Nature Conservation Decree.
- angle and ice fish. Other methods of fishing require permission from the water owner, as well as a fishing card from anyone between 18 and 64 years of age.

Like all rights, public rights of access also bring responsibilities:

- You must not disturb domestic peace by camping too close to dwellings or making noise.
- You must not litter. You must place all trash in trash containers.
- Making a fire or igniting some other open flame is always forbidden without permission from the landowner.
- If a warning against forest and grass fires has been issued, you should not make any kind of fire whatsoever in the woods. When a forest fire warning has been issued, you must be especially careful when smoking in the woods.
- You must not disturb any animals or bird nests and nestlings.
- You must not cut down or damage growing trees or take dry or fallen trees, twigs, moss, etc. from someone else's land.
- You may not drive a motor vehicle in the woods without permission from the landowner.

INFO

- *public rights of access*
www.luontoon.fi/jokamiehenoikeudet

Please note!

There are several nature reserves in Finland with stricter rules for protecting nature.

Fishing (with the exception of angling and ice fishing) and hunting are forbidden without permission from the land or water owner and permits issued by the authorities.

Finnish society & government



Finland is a republic run by an elected president. Section 2 of the Constitution Act of Finland states that governmental power lies with the Finnish people represented by the parliament.

Finland is run by the president, who is elected by direct popular vote every six years. The most important policy-making body is the government, consisting of ministers in various fields. The prime minister calls the government to meetings. Each minister is in charge of the ministry in their own field. These ministries prepare issues related to their field and execute any decisions made by the president or the parliament.

A unicameral parliament was established in 1906, which is also the year that Finland implemented full suffrage. This meant that Finland became the second state in the world to give everyone, including women, the right to vote. Every four years, 200 members of parliament are elected in a general election. The time period between the elections is called a term, and during the term parliament is in attendance of a parliamentary session four times. Parliament decrees laws, decides on taxes and the state budget, and monitors the actions of the government and its subordinates. The parliament approves international treaties and participates in the national preparations of matters decided by the European Union.

In cities and municipalities, decision-making is the

responsibility of city and municipal councils, city and municipal executive boards and committees in various fields.

Finland is a democratic state, which means that the people decide their leader among the candidates put forth by various parties. The largest parties in Finland are Kokoomus (the National Coalition Party), Keskusta (the Centre Party of Finland), SDP (the Social Democratic Party of Finland) and Perussuomalaiset (the Finns Party). Additionally, there are several smaller parties, such as Kristillisdemokraatit (the Christian Democrats), Ruotsalainen kansanpuolue (the Swedish People's Party of Finland), Vasemmistoliitto (the Left Alliance) and Vihreät (the Greens).

The age limit for voting in national and municipal elections is 18. Only Finnish citizens may vote in governmental elections, i.e. general and presidential elections, whereas citizens of other countries residing permanently in the municipality may vote in municipal elections.

Rights

Finnish society and its operations are governed by the constitution and other legislation. The constitution is the basis for all legislative work in Finland. It contains the regulations on the state constitution, the relationships between the highest organs of government and the fundamental rights of the individual. The fundamental rights protected by the constitution apply to anyone residing in Finland lawfully.

Nice to know!

Women's right to vote

Finland was the first European country and the third country in the world to allow women to vote in national elections.

All citizens have freedom of opinion, assembly and speech. Freedom of religion ensures that everyone has the right to practice their religion as well as the right to choose not to practice any religion. Everyone has the right to choose their place of residence and move freely within the country.

Finland has two official languages, Finnish and Swedish. The constitution also determines the rights of those speaking minority languages, such as the Sami and Roma people.

According to the Finnish constitution, everyone is equal in the eyes of the law. No one must be treated differently based on their gender, age, origin, language, religion, conviction, opinion, health, disability or any other personal trait without a weighty reason. The requirement of equal treatment applies to all operations of the authorities and entrepreneurs.

The constitution also protects the home and privacy. Privacy protection covers privacy of correspondence and messages. The task of the state and the municipality of residence is to protect life and human dignity when the individual is unable to do it themselves.



All children between the ages of 7 and 16 must complete compulsory education.

Responsibilities

All Finns and anyone living in Finland must comply with Finnish law and participate in maintaining the services provided by society by paying taxes. In addition to this:

- All children between the ages of 7 and 16 must complete compulsory education.
- Parents must ensure that their children have food, shelter and safety.
- Everyone has the duty to render aid if someone needs help after an accident, for example.
- The national defence obligation applies to all Finnish men between the ages of 18 and 60.

Foreigners have the same responsibilities as Finns, except for the national defence obligation.

In addition to the law, cities and housing companies have their own rules, and there are hundreds of written and unwritten rules in the rest of society that Finns expect and hope to be followed by all residents in Finland. These laws and rules are described in nearly every chapter of this guidebook.

Additional information on the constitution and legislative work can be found in the FINLEX data bank along with up-to-date laws and regulations, free of charge: www.finlex.fi

National defence obligation

Finland has a general compulsion for national military defence, which means that every male Finnish citizen is obliged to participate in defending Finland or assisting others who do. The obligation to participate in national defence applies to all male Finnish citizens, which means that it also applies to those Finnish citizens born abroad. Finns who were born abroad must complete their conscription if they receive Finnish citizenship under the age of 30. If they have been in the military in their country of origin, they may seek exemption from military service in Finland.

The defence forces organise conscriptions in each military county in Finland every year from September

Nice to know!

The military oath

is a legally binding promise that each conscript makes at the beginning of their service, usually at the end of the recruit phase (approximately seven weeks into the service).

In the military oath ceremony, the conscript recites the oath in front of the commander of their regiment. The ceremony is usually held in the garrison, and the festivities often include a parade, a religious service, a material presentation and lunch. The families of the conscripts are welcome at the event. After the oath, the conscripts are assigned to the military rank associated with their fighting arm.

to November. The conscription applies to male Finnish citizens that turn 18 that year. Additionally, those who have been ordered to be re-inspected as well as those under 30, who have not participated in the previous conscriptions or who have not been inspected separately, must participate in the conscription. Women do not have the obligation to participate in national defence, but they may volunteer. Military service lasts for 180–362 days depending on whether the person participates in the general service or officer training, as well. An exemption from participating in armed national defence may be granted based on conviction, which means that the person will most probably complete their service as a non-military service. In non-military service, men usually work for the state or a municipali-

ty, e.g. in a hospital, a day care centre or a school.

Compulsory military service starts at the beginning of the year that the boy turns 18 and ends at the end of the year that the man turns 60. Throughout this time, a man is either in active duty, the reserve or the home reserve. Finns traditionally value their ability to defend the country and their military forces – according to an old saying, "the army makes men out of boys."

• **INFO:** <http://puolustusvoimat.fi/asevelvollisuus>

Taxation

In order to maintain social services and security as well as to cover public expenses, Finland collects both direct and indirect taxes. Indirect taxes, value-added taxes, are paid for all purchases and services. Additional taxes, such as real estate tax and vehicle tax, based on ownership are also collected. Nearly all personal income is taxed in Finland. Taxes are paid for social benefits, pensions, wages and any employee benefits, as well as income from capital. In general, taxpayers in Finland pay progressive state tax as well as municipal tax and possibly church tax.

The taxation of foreigners who are permanent residents is similar to normal Finnish taxation, i.e. tax is deducted based on the tax deduction card available from the tax authorities, but the final amount of tax is determined based on the yearly income. The amount of tax withheld in advance (percentage of income) is determined based on the income in the previous year. If there are significant changes to your income during the year, e.g. getting a job after being unemployed or vice versa, you should contact the tax authorities who

are able to amend the amount of tax deducted during the year.

Tax return

The Finnish tax authorities send a pre-completed tax return with an assessment decision to all taxpayers in the spring. Taxpayers must review this information and correct any mistakes and shortcomings. Any tax deductions, such as the deduction for the production of income, pension-income and trade-union fees, are considered when determining the final taxation. Many of these deductions are communicated to the authorities automatically via the employer or the bank, but there are some deductions that you should report yourself in the corrections to the tax assessment. E.g. a long commute, mortgage interest and household employees (tax credit for domestic costs) may be tax deductible.

If a person has made corrections or additions to the tax assessment, the form must be returned to the tax authorities. The changes can be made electronically at: www.vero.fi. If there are no corrections, you do not need to return the form.

Based on the tax return, the Finnish Tax Administration completes the person's final taxation and sends a tax decision, with information on whether the correct amount of advance tax has been paid, to the taxpayer the following autumn (by the end of October). If the person has paid too much tax, they will receive a refund. If the person has paid too little, they receive an invoice to pay the missing amount.

• **INFO:** www.veronmaksajat.fi, www.vero.fi

Work & livelihood

Finland is a welfare state where society strives to look after all of its members. Finland offers good support in case of unemployment. Members of unemployment funds, who have been working for more than 10 months, usually receive an earnings-related per diem allowance from their trade union's unemployment fund, if other terms are met. Other unemployed people receive a so-called basic daily allowance from the state. The income of someone who has retired consists of two parts: the national basic pension and the employee pension based on the number of working years. In addition to this, other benefits paid by society, such as housing benefits, home care subsidies, child allowances and so on, are put in place to ensure that everyone could have a minimum income.

In Finland, work is a value in itself. Work is also a necessity for nearly everyone as a means of getting money. Most men and women work in Finland, because the cost of living and housing is so high that both spouses' wages are needed to support the family.

Employers usually value the ability to speak Finnish, suitable training and work experience, especially if the experience has been accumulated in Finland. Any information on education, training and work experience should be compiled into a CV (curriculum vitae) so that employers can easily get an overview of the applicant. School and work certificates should be kept safe, as they are needed when applying to schools or for work. The authorities may also want to see them. You should go to any job interviews at the agreed time and be

info

- www.suomi.fi
- www.tyosuojelu.fi/web/en/home
- www.te-services.fi/te/en/index.html
- *Employee's representatives, supervisors and trade unions provide further information on occupational legislation and collective agreements: www.sak.fi, www.sttk.fi, www.akava.fi*

dressed smartly. You must bring your original school and work certificates and keep your CV with you. You should also make copies of these documents, in case the employer wants them.

Nice to know!

How to make it in Finnish working life

- *Stick to working hours! Do not be late or leave the workplace without permission.*
 - *Keep to schedules.*
 - *Remember that you must work during working hours.*
 - *Absence from the workplace always requires permission or good grounds.*
 - *You must inform the workplace of any absences.*
 - *You must not be under the influence at work.*
 - *Follow the rules at the workplace.*
- There are two kinds of rules:*

Written and unwritten “house rules”

The most important rules have been written down, and they are usually based on legislation, regulations, safety and collectively agreed issues.

Work communities also have many unwritten rules that may take time to identify and learn. Meetings and advancing issues may have a certain order, workplace dress codes may not be written out, the workplace may have a certain way of addressing others, etc. Unwritten rules may be learned by observing your surroundings or, unfortunately, the hard way by breaking them by accident. You can try to determine these rules by talking with your co-workers.

Permits required for work

Foreigners may be divided into the following subgroups based on their right to work:

- Those foreigners living in Finland permanently who are equal to Finnish citizens in terms of the right to work regardless of their country of origin.
- Those EU/ETA citizens or foreigners living in those countries permanently who may work in Finland with no separate work permit.
- Those foreigners that reside outside EU/ETA countries who need a separate permit to work, unless they permanently live in Finland or in an EU/ETA country.
- Asylum seekers whose right to work depends on the duration of their residency.
- Posted employees whose right to work depends on their country of origin.

Foreigners, or the employer on their behalf, must determine which permits are required for work in Finland and which exceptions are applied to them.

Labour legislation and collective agreements

Working in Finland is strictly controlled through various laws and agreements. Labour legislation is mainly imperative and no exceptions can be made to it by making agreements between the employee and the employer. Work and working conditions are regulated by the following, for example:

the Employment Contracts Act, which stipulates

- The validity of the work contract and cancelling the contract (e.g. notice and grounds for dismissal,

length of the trial period)

- The duties and rights of the employer and the employee
- Right to family leave
- Temporary dismissal
- Liability for damages

the Working Hours Act

- The Working Hours Act specifies the working hours per day and the employee's right to rest and leisure time. According to law, regular working hours is a maximum of 8 hours per 24 hours and a maximum of 40 hours per work week.
- Any work exceeding the maximum working hours is deemed overtime. The amount of overtime is restricted and it must be compensated by paying the employee overtime pay. Additional and overtime work may only be performed if prompted by the employer or upon the employer's permission.
- The Annual Holidays Act
- the Occupational Safety and Health Act,
- the Non-discrimination Act,
- the Act on Equality between Women and Men.
- Work performed by anyone under the age of 18 is governed by legislation on young employees.

The Finnish labour market system is based on legislation governing working life, as well as cooperation and agreements between employer and employee associations and local operators. In Finland, trade unions have freedom of association guaranteed by law and an established position in decision-making. Trade union membership is voluntary in Finland, but the majority of wage earners (over 80%) are members of their trade union. The primary task of trade unions is to represent the employees in negotiations on collective agreements

Nice to know!

Work

The harsh climate and scarce living conditions have for centuries required hard work and uncompromising attitude, which were a MUST for survival. Work and independently making one's living are still greatly valued.

and supervise the interests of their members. Trade unions in various fields are members of larger central organisations. Finnish trade unions are organised into three central organisations; SAK (the Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions), Finnish Confederation of Professionals STTK and the Confederation of Unions for Professional and Managerial Staff in Finland, Akava. Employers also have their own field-specific central organisations, of which employers in industry and commerce have unified under the Confederation of Finnish Industries, EK.

In practice, working life is governed by collective agreements (TES). Collective agreements are agreements on field-specific terms of work made between the employee organisation and the employer's organisation. They cover wages, working hours, vacations and other benefits. Collective agreements are binding, and the working hours, wages and other benefits within are minimum requirements for those committing to the agreement, unless the agreement allows for other kinds of agreements, e.g. local agreements.

The employer and the employees' representative may make local agreements that offer better terms

than the minimum requirements in the collective agreements or that agree on exceptions allowed by the collective agreements. There are roughly 200 national collective agreements, and the agreements of various fields may differ from each other greatly.

A conciliator general hired by the state and part-time district arbitrators are tasked with preventing and arbitrating occupational disagreements. If the trade union and the employer union cannot reach an agreement on the content of the collective bargaining contract, the trade union may issue a strike notice. The conciliator general starts arbitration between the employee and employer unions in order to prevent the strike. If the strike cannot be avoided, the conciliator chairs the negotiations to end the occupational dispute.

The duties and rights of the employer and the employee

Employers are generally bound to further their relationship with the employees as well as the relationships among the employees. The employer is responsible for ensuring the employees' health and safety at work. However, the most essential responsibilities of the employer are related to abiding by occupational legislation and collective agreements, as well as the terms in work contracts. The following are the most important employer responsibilities:

- abiding by laws, collective agreements and work contracts
- paying wages
- ensuring the employees' occupational safety and organising occupational health care
- furthering equality and preventing employee

discrimination

- communicating any regulations pertaining to the workplace

The following are the most important employee responsibilities:

- abiding by laws, collective agreements and work contracts
- performing work tasks
- following the instructions given by the employer in accordance with the supervision rights of the employer
- abiding by working hours
- following safety regulations

Additionally, in Finland both employers and employees must pay statutory wage-related fees, such as the social security contribution, the unemployment insurance contribution and the employment pension contribution. The majority of employees in the private sector are covered by the Employee Pensions Act (TEL). In addition to employment pension contributions, the employer pays a social security contribution, accident insurance payments and an unemployment insurance contribution for each employee. The unemployment insurance contributions and the employment pension contributions contain both the employer's and the employee's share. The employer deducts the employee's share from their wages.

Work contract

The employee and the employer make a work contract together, in which they agree on the terms of employment. Anyone who has completed their compulsory

education and who is over the age of 15 may sign a work contract. In the work contract, the employee commits to performing the tasks assigned to them personally under the supervision and monitoring of the employer in exchange for an agreed wage or some other benefit. According to the Employment Contracts Act, the work contract may be made verbally, in writing or electronically. Work contracts are usually made in writing. The work contract should contain at least the following information:

- name and address of the employer or company
- name of the employee
- the work that is being agreed on
- the start date and possible trial period of the employment
- the duration of the employment, if the contract is a fixed-term contract
- notice
- duration of regular working hours
- wages and conditions of employment
- collective agreement (TES), if applicable

The employment begins when the employee starts performing the task specified in the contract. The employment may start with a trial period, during which the employer and the employee may cancel the employment without notice. The maximum duration of the trial period is six months.

The work contract usually specifies the period of notice. Employers must usually give grounds for cancelling a permanent contract, and these grounds may not be inappropriate or discriminatory. Grounds for cancellations and periods of notice are also specified in the Employment Contracts Act and collective agreements.

Wages and other benefits

Wages are monetary compensation for work. According to the Employment Contracts Act, wages must be paid on the last day of the pay period, unless otherwise agreed. If the time wages are based on a time period shorter than a week (e.g. daily or hourly wages), the wages must be paid at least twice a month and once a month in other cases.

In Finland, wages are usually paid through financial institutions. The wage sum is usually based on the collective agreement that applies to the particular staff group, as well as the pay policy of that particular company. Wages may be paid as time wages (hourly, weekly, monthly), at a contract rate or as a combination of the two. In addition to the wages, the employee may receive benefits (e.g. housing, vehicle and phone, meals). Employees may receive various additional compensations in addition to the basic wage. Overtime and working on Sundays is compensated separately.

Overtime may be overtime per day or week or additional work. Overtime is compensated with a separate compensation, which is 50% or 100% of the wages, depending on the number of overtime hours. The wages paid for additional or overtime work may be agreed to be compensated in vacation time, either partly or fully. The increased compensation for overtime is taken into account when calculating the vacation time corresponding to the overtime. Separate compensation is also usually paid for work performed during evenings and nights.

In connection with every payment of wages, the employer deducts the employee's social security contribution, unemployment insurance contribution, employment pension contribution and tax withheld in

advance, that is determined based on the personal tax percentage of each employee, from the pay. Any employee benefits are also taxable income. If the employee does not present the employer with a tax card, the tax withheld in advance will be withheld to the amount of 60%. It is also common that the employee agrees with the employer to have their trade union or unemployment fund membership fees deducted from the wages and paid directly to the trade union, but the employee may also do this themselves.

Leisure time and vacations

Annual holidays are specified in the Annual Holidays Act. The duration of annual holidays is determined based on full holiday qualifying months. In principle, new employment yields two or two and a half week days of holidays per month (depending on the duration of the employment), which means that usually an employee will accumulate 30 days of annual holidays per year, of which any days exceeding 24 days can be moved over to the winter holiday.

Employees must take their summer holidays during the holiday season (2 May – 30 September) at a time agreed with the employer. Taking some holidays outside the holiday season can be arranged with the employer. Annual holidays are paid holidays.

Sick leave is also usually paid leave. Employees must inform their employer immediately when they fall ill, otherwise staying home may be considered an unauthorised absence. Some employers require employees to provide medical certificates for all sick leave days; sometimes it is enough to provide a medical certificate for any sick leave exceeding three days.

Employees have the right to family leave. Family

leave includes paternity leave, maternity and special maternity leave, and parental leave, as well as unpaid maternity leave. KELA offices provide further information (www.kela.fi). Study and alternation leave only becomes available when the employment has lasted for a long period of time.

Assignments and travel allowances

The work contract may stipulate that the employee is obliged to travel, if necessary. Travel expense reimbursement is determined in the collective agreement and the company's travel compensation regulations.

The employer usually reimburses all necessary travel expenses, which include tickets and baggage fees. Travel time is usually not included in working hours. If work is performed more than 10 kilometres from the actual workplace, the employee may receive a meal allowance, half day allowance or full daily allowance depending on the duration of the trip. The amount of daily allowance is determined based on the decisions on reimbursement of travelling expenses by the Tax Administration. Any meals offered to the employee during the trip may decrease the amount of the allowance. Daily allowances are tax exempt.

If the employee uses their own car during the trip, they are entitled to kilometre allowance if it has been agreed with the employer in advance. Kilometre allowance is not paid for the commute between the home and the workplace.

Social security & health care

KELA takes care of the basic security of anyone living in Finland in various situations in life. In order to be covered by the social security system offered by KELA, you usually need to be living in Finland permanently. Indeed, a foreigner's right to social security is dependent on whether the person moves to Finland permanently. The person's country of origin is also significant, as is their nationality in some rare cases. Anyone coming to Finland for a short period of time or for studies is not deemed to be living in Finland permanently, which means that they are not entitled to social security. Asylum seekers are not covered by KELA services.

The permanence of residence is usually determined based on the purpose of entering the country and the duration of the residence permit.

Moving to Finland is considered permanent when the person is:

- a returnee
- a quota refugee, or a recipient of an asylum or other residence permit (at least one year)
- a family member of someone living in Finland, or
- someone starting a permanent job or at least

a two-year commission in Finland.

Anyone moving to Finland permanently is entitled to complete Finnish social security, if the other requirements are met. Benefits and allowances are based on different laws and they require various durations of residency for foreigners.

Anyone living in Finland permanently is entitled to public health care. Anyone coming from EU/ETA countries also has the right to medically necessary health care in public health care.

This right may be proven by presenting the European Health Insurance Card, which entitles the card holder to the same health care services as Finns, with the same deductibles and procedures. If a person seeks medical help at a doctor or hospital that is not covered by the Finnish deduction system, they must pay for the expenses themselves. Asylum seekers and others who reside in Finland temporarily are only eligible for acute health care.

• **INFO:** Social assistance and benefits can be applied online: www.kela.fi/web/en/e-services
Please note that our online customer service is only available in Finnish and Swedish.



INFO

- www.kela.fi/web/en/pension
- The Finnish Centre for Pensions/information: www.etk.fi/en/

Pension

The pension system secures income for old age, disability or unemployment in old age. Pensions are paid by KELA and employment pension companies. KELA pays national basic pensions and guarantee pensions as well as survivor's pensions for people living in Finland. The primary source for employee pensions is the employment pension paid by employment pension companies.

Employment pension insurance is mandatory in Finland. In accordance with the Employee Pensions Act, employers must insure their foreign employees in Finland in the same way as Finnish employees. Employee pensions are determined in accordance with the Employee Pensions Act (TEL) regardless of

the field or duration of employment.

Both the employer and the employee pay unemployment insurance contributions. The employer must deduct both shares from the employee's wages and pay them to the employment pension company together with their own share. All employment accumulates pension, which means that even short periods of employment and small wages generate pension contributions.

Foreigners working in Finland accumulate pension contributions exactly the same way as Finns. Employment pension is paid abroad to all countries regardless of the pensioner's nationality.

All pensions must be applied for by using the appropriate forms that are available at KELA, service desks at employment pension companies and the

Finnish Centre for Pensions. The decision on a pension is mailed to the applicant. The decision on a pension is sent and paid by the employment pension company that has had the pensioner as a customer most recently. The decision contains both pensions accumulated from work in the private and public sectors.

The pensions of those living abroad permanently are usually taxed in the same way as of those living in Finland. The tax withheld from the pension in advance is determined by the tax percentage based on the amount of income. Deductions as well as the tax return and taxation are similar to those for anyone living in Finland. Pensions may not be taxed at all in Finland based on tax treaties between Finland and some countries, but only in the country of residence of the pensioner.



Traffic

Distances are long in Finland. Many Finns have a car. In addition to private cars, Finland has a versatile public transport system, i.e. trains, buses and airplanes, as well as the underground and trams in the Capital Region.

Everyone must abide by traffic regulations

Traffic rules are specified in the Road Traffic Act. Finland has right-hand traffic. Anyone moving about among traffic must know the traffic regulations and comply with them, whether on foot, on bicycle, in a motor vehicle or on a boat. Violating traffic regulations and negligence in traffic may result in a fine or some other penalty.

Everyone must pay attention to the safety of themselves and others. Following rules, keeping your vehicle in good condition and using safety equipment, of which some are mandatory, are good ways of

ensuring everyone's safety.

Pedestrians must use sidewalks or pedestrian and bicycle ways, if available. If you must walk on the road, you must primarily use the left side of the road. Pedestrians must use reflectors if they walk outside in the dusk or darkness. Parents should ensure that their children are also wearing reflectors. It is nearly impossible for drivers to see people without reflectors in the dark.

- *Traffic is controlled using traffic signs:*
www.liikennevirasto.fi/tieverkko/liikennemerkit#.V_3pEk-37WM8

The police monitor compliance with traffic regulations in Finland.

Speeding drivers are usually stopped immediately. Speeding usually results in a petty fine or a day-fine. The police also have the right to seize the person's driving license and prohibit them from driving. Felonies may result in a driving ban. The police may also stop uninspected or broken vehicles and remove their license plates.

The court may issue a driving ban of one month to five years for dangerous driving or driving under the influence of alcohol. If the person needs their driving license for their work or for some other good reason, the driving ban may be issued as a conditional ban for a trial period.

All motor vehicles in use must be insured. Vehicle insurance covers both personal injuries and property damage. In addition to the mandatory insurance, you can take out various voluntary traffic insurance policies for your vehicle. Insurance companies provide further information.

• *In terms of traffic safety, the most important regulations and instructions can be found at: www.liikenneturva.fi/en/*

Bikes and motorbikes

Bicycles must have brakes, reflectors at the front, on the side, at the back and on the pedals, as well as light pointing forwards. The cyclist and their passenger must wear a helmet. It protects the head in case of a fall and improves

The cyclist and passenger must wear a helmet.

safety in traffic considerably. Cyclists must abide by traffic regulations for cyclists. Cyclists must use cycling lanes, if available. Only children under the age of 12 may ride on the sidewalk, others must use the road. If you must cycle on the road, you should comply with the same rules as the drivers. People under the age of 15 may not give anyone a ride on their bike. If an adult gives a small child a ride on their bike, the child must wear a helmet and have an appropriate seat and foot protectors. Also remember to use the bike bell in good time when needed and signal with your hand when you are about to turn.

Riding a moped or motorcycle requires separate driving licenses, which have various age and test requirements depending on the size of the motorcycle (see Driving licenses). The driver and passenger of the moped and motorcycle must wear helmets.



Driving

Driving regulations:

- the driver must have a driving license
- the car must have the appropriate paperwork and be registered
- the car must be in driving condition and it must have passed its annual inspection.
- the driver must comply with speed limits and other traffic regulations
- the driver must use a seat belt and children must use age-appropriate safety seats
- If you drink, don't drive – driving under the influence of alcohol and controlled substances is forbidden. The blood alcohol limit for drunken driving is 0.5 per mil and 1.2 per mil for gross drunken driving. Assigning a vehicle to a drunken person is also punishable.
- The driver may not talk on the phone while driving without a suitable hands-free device.
- Smoking inside a vehicle is forbidden if there is a person under the age of 15 on board.

The driver can do a lot for his own safety and that of others on the road.

- The most significant factor in terms of safety is speed, because it affects both stopping distance and impact. Please comply with speed limits.
- Keep a sufficient safety distance to the car in front of you. Remember that the person crashing into the car in front is usually to blame.
- Only overtake other vehicles when you are sure it is safe. Avoid unnecessary overtaking, especially in bad weather and on slippery roads. No over-

taking is marked with a yellow line on the road.

- Be extra careful when the roads are slippery, because you risk losing control of your vehicle. The car's stopping distance is significantly longer on slippery surfaces. Black ice, a thin, invisible layer of moisture frozen on the road surface, is especially dangerous.
- Yield for emergency vehicles (ambulances, fire trucks, police).
- In cities, buses have priority when they leave their stops.

Children in the car

- The safest way for children under three years to travel is in a rear-facing safety seat.
- For older children, the safest place is in a safety seat in the backseat.
- Children need their own safety equipment until they reach a height of 135 cm, i.e. until they are approximately ten years old. When the child is tall enough, they may use seat belts like adults.
- Children must use seat belts or safety equipment in buses.
- Children may not be carried in the lap in cars.

Driver's licenses

Driving a passenger car or van and a motorcycle requires 18 years of age and a driving license. Riding a moped requires 15 years of age. A driving license for a moped is compulsory for those moped drivers born in 1985 or after, anyone older than this does not need a separate driving license. Sixteen-year-olds may get a driving license for a light motorcycle.

Getting a driving license requires a driving licence permit issued by the police, which is available if the applicant lives permanently in Finland or has been studying in Finland for at least six months. In addition, the permit requires that the applicant meet the age and health requirements for a driving licence permit and that they do not have an alcohol or drug abuse problem. In order to get a driving license, you must pass the driving examination. You may learn to drive at a driving school or with an experienced driver who lives in the same household as you and who meets the requirements. In order to get a license, you must pass a theory and practical driving test.

In Finland, driving licenses are issued by the Finnish Transport Safety Agency, Trafi. In practice, permits are issued at Ajovarma service points that accept applications, issue permits and provide instructions on any issues related to driving licenses.

Primarily, you may drive a car with a driving license issued in an EU or ETA country. A foreign driving license may be replaced with a Finnish version on certain conditions. Driving licenses issued in EU or ETA countries may be replaced with Finnish licenses without taking the driving examination. It must be replaced within two years from the license holder settling in Finland permanently and before the license expires. The holder of a driving license issued in any other country must apply for a driving licence permit, prove that they fulfil the requirements for granting the driving licence permit and pass the driving examination to receive a Finnish driving license.

- *The conditions for eligibility for a driving license can be found at: www.trafi.fi*
- Matters related to driving licenses: www.ajovarma.fi*

Purchasing a vehicle, condition, inspection and other regulations

You should draw up a deed of sale. If you want to purchase a car or another vehicle, please check that

- the information of the most recent owner of the car is up-to-date in the Vehicular and Driver Data Register
- the vehicle has been inspected and insured
- the vehicle tax has been paid
- the seller has a certificate or part II (notification part) of the registration certificate
- the serial number of a used car matches with the registration
- the vehicle is in the condition that the seller claims – check the vehicle maintenance record book, if available. Any repairs mentioned by the seller may be entered into the deed.

Registering

You are required to register the vehicle within seven days of the transfer of ownership of the vehicle and purchase mandatory traffic insurance for the vehicle. Trafi is in charge of registering vehicles and maintaining the Vehicular and Driver Data Register. You can register your vehicle at inspection stations or insurance companies.

The owner of the vehicle must submit a registering notification each time when:

- the vehicle is transferred to a new owner
- the vehicle is transferred to a new occupier
- an occupier becomes the owner
- the motor insurer's company changes
- the purpose of use changes
- the vehicle is decommissioned permanently

**Buss and train
will get you
almost anywhere!**



Inspecting the vehicle and vehicle condition

The vehicle's owner, occupier and driver are responsible for ensuring that the vehicle used in traffic has been appropriately inspected and registered and that it is otherwise suitable for traffic.

The periodic inspection, a statutory inspection carried out on the vehicle, checks that:

- the vehicle and its equipment are in the condition required by the regulations
- the vehicle is safe to use in traffic
- the vehicle's emissions are sufficiently low
- the mandatory fees and insurances have been taken care of

A new personal car in private use must be inspected for the first time no later than three years from the date of commissioning. This is followed by an exempt year when you do not need to inspect your car. After this, the car must be inspected annually. The inspection date is marked on the registering certificate of the car. If the vehicle does not pass the periodic inspection in the first go, it must be repaired and brought in for a follow-up inspection within one month to the same inspection office. If this period expires or the vehicle is taken to another inspection office, a complete periodic inspection is carried out again.

Car tyres are one of the most important factors in terms of safety. That is why the following regulations apply to car tyres:

- The minimum tyre tread depth is 1.6 mm for summer tyres and 3.0 mm for winter tyres.
- You may be fined for driving with tyres that are too smooth, as they are very dangerous, especially when it rains.
- The law stipulates that cars must have winter tyres. You must use winter tyres from December to the end of February. Winter tyres may be studded or non-studded.
- Non-studded winter tyres may be used year-round.
- Studded winter tyres may be used from the beginning of November to the end of March or the Monday after Easter. Studded tyres may only be used outside these times if the weather or road conditions require them.

The car should be equipped with at least a warning triangle, a spare tyre and the necessary tools to change a tyre, tow rope and a first aid kit.

Tax liability

Vehicle tax is paid based on the occupancy or ownership period of the car. The occupant of the vehicle is always the taxpayer. If there is no occupant recorded in the vehicle registration, the owner is the taxpayer. If the vehicle has more than one occupant or owner, they are jointly responsible for the tax.

The tax period of the vehicle tax is 12 months starting from the registration of the car. The tax period ends when the car is decommissioned or sold. Any excess tax is returned to the taxpayer. If a vehicle is replaced with a new vehicle, the remaining tax is used towards the tax for the new vehicle.

- **INFO on vehicles:** www.trafi.fi/en

Intoxicants

Tobacco and smoking

The sale and use as well as advertising of tobacco products is controlled through legislation. The goal of the Tobacco Act and the restrictions on smoking is to protect the population from health hazards caused by tobacco smoke and to prevent tobacco use among young people.

Smoking is prohibited by law in e.g.:

- day care centres, schools and educational institutes and their yards
- stores, offices and public spaces
- buses, trains and other public transport
- restaurants and bars, unless they have a separate smoking area.

The Tobacco Act prohibits selling or giving tobacco or tobacco products to anyone under the age of 18. However, possession is not illegal. The penalty for tobacco and tobacco sale offences is a fine.

According to the Tobacco Act, it is forbidden to import or sell snuff or chewing tobacco - The buyer may also be found guilty of a crime and liable for the snuff purchased.

Alcohol

The Alcohol Act controls the possession, consumption and sale of alcohol. The rules and regulations of the city or municipality may also have additional restrictions on consuming alcohol.

Possession of an alcoholic beverage:

- only alcoholic beverages that have been lawfully manufactured and imported may be possessed
- 18-year-olds may possess and consume mild (a maximum of 22%) alcoholic beverages
- 20-year-olds may possess and consume strong alcoholic beverages

Additionally, the Alcohol Act prohibits the consumption of any alcohol brought from outside the restaurant to be consumed inside the restaurant or any other locations where alcohol is sold, in public festive events and on public transport (on trains, buses, etc.). Alcohol may not be sold to underage people or someone who is clearly intoxicated.

You may serve alcohol at private parties held at home. If the party is organised as a private event in a public place, alcohol consumption is allowed, if the organiser of the event has notified the police. The sale of alcohol always requires a temporary or permanent alcohol license.

Any alcohol served must be consumed in the designated alcohol serving area. Retail sale or some other form of transporting alcohol from the sale location is prohibited. Entrance to a place where alcohol is served may be refused from someone who is intoxicated, and the location serving alcohol has the right to remove anyone who causes a disturbance or whose intoxication is clearly detectable from their premises.

Drugs

The production, manufacturing, import, export, distribution, possession and use of controlled substances is forbidden. In Finland, controlled substances or drugs are listed separately in the legislation governing them.

Substances prohibited by law include:

- Cannabis: marijuana, hashish, cannabis oil
- Amphetamine • Ecstasy – Fantasy
- Methamphetamine • Opiates: heroin, morphine, opium • Cocaine / crack • LSD • KHAT
- certain medication • hormonal preparations

Additionally, the cultivation of opium poppies, the coca bush and hemp for the purpose of making intoxicants or intoxicant ingredients is prohibited. Prescription drugs prescribed to a certain person may not be sold or given to anyone else. All crime related to intoxicants must always be reported to the police.

• INFO:

www.thl.fi/en/web/alcohol-tobacco-and-addictions,
www.paihdelinkki.fi/en/info-bank/articles/drugs-medicinal-substances-and-other-intoxicants

Emergencies and problems



Emergency number 112

You can call the emergency number in any kind of emergency, whether you need an ambulance, the fire department, the police or social services. You should only call the emergency number in urgent, actual emergencies when someone's life, health and property, or the environment, is under threat or in danger. In an emergency, it is important to remember the emergency number 112 and dial it as quickly as possible in order to get help soon. The professional duty officers at the emergency services will ask the necessary questions and provide instructions and guidance to the caller.

If you have to call the emergency number, follow these instructions:

1. Make the call yourself, if you can. State your name. Try to remain calm.
2. Describe what has happened.
3. State the exact address and municipality.
4. Answer any questions.
5. Act according to the instructions given.
6. Only hang up when you are given permission. Help the emergency personnel by guiding them. Call again if the situation changes.

Please note!

- If the emergency number is engaged – do not hang up! You will hear a recording telling you to wait for a while. Emergency calls are answered as soon as possible and in the order they are received.
- You do not need to dial an area code.
- Emergency calls are free of charge.

- Making unnecessary emergency calls may result in penalties.

If you are in a traffic accident or arrive at the scene of an accident:

- administer first aid to the injured,
- call an ambulance, the police and/or the fire department if necessary.
- The police must be notified if there has been a serious bodily injury or collision with an elk, a traffic control device has been damaged or the property of a third party has been damaged
- warn other road users:
 - put on the hazard lights
 - place the warning triangle (approx. 150 m from the scene of the accident to warn those approaching the scene)

General danger signal

The general danger signal sounds when the population is in imminent danger. The general danger signal is a continually rising and descending signal or a warning announced by the authorities. The 'all clear' signal is a continuous, even tone. It signals that the danger or threat has passed.

Actions after you hear the general danger signal:

- Go indoors. Stay indoors.
- Close the doors, windows, vents and ventilation devices.
- Turn on the radio and wait for instructions while remaining calm.
- Avoid using the phone in order to not block the lines.
- Do not leave the area without permission from the authorities to avoid putting yourself in danger

If you are the victim of a crime

The police are here to help you with criminal matters. The police uphold order by patrolling, responding to emergency calls, stopping unlawful activities and by giving instructions and guidance. The police also manage lost and found items and issue the majority of permits.

Crime is always investigated by the police. You can report any kind of offence to the police. You can file a report at the police station or online. For the report, the police will need an accurate description of what has happened and to whom (the victim and the suspect):

- a description of what has happened and how
- a precise time and location of the crime
- the name of the perpetrator, if known
- a description of the perpetrator (age, height, build,

facial features, eye colour, teeth, speech, hands, movements, clothes)

- which way and how did the perpetrator escape
- if the perpetrator was using a vehicle, vehicle registration number and description
- the dangerousness of the perpetrator (arms, state of mind, threats, substance abuse, etc.)

Providing false information on purpose is a punishable offence.

After receiving the report, the police will initiate a pre-trial investigation during which the police determine if a crime has indeed occurred.

Filing a report of an offence may lead to handling the matter in court as well as punishing the guilty party. Not all reports result in a preliminary investigation. The police notify the prosecutor of the criminal case, and the prosecutor determines whether the case will be processed in court.

The crime may be an offence subject to public prosecution or a complainant offence. Many crimes are offences subject to public prosecution, which means that the prosecutor transfers the matter to the district court upon their own discretion, even if the complainant does not want to press charges.

Complainant offences – such as a breach of domestic peace or defamation – are only investigated by the police if the injured party demands that the suspected offender be punished. If the injured party withdraws the demand for punishment during the pre-trial investigation, the police will close the investigation. However, the public prosecutor is entitled to bring charges even if the injured party does not demand punishment, when this is judged to be in the public interest, e.g. in case of domestic violence.

- **INFO:** www.poliisi.fi

Discrimination

The ban on discrimination in Finland is based on national legislation as well as EU regulations and international human rights treaties that Finland has committed to.

The requirement of equal treatment applies to all operations of the authorities and entrepreneurs. **Discrimination is prohibited based on the following laws:**

- According to the Finnish constitution, everyone is equal in the eyes of the law. No one must be treated differently based on their gender, age, origin, language, religion, conviction, opinion, health, disability or any other personal trait without a weighty reason.
- The Criminal Code of Finland specifies the ban on discrimination as well as the punishments for discrimination
- Act on Equality between Women and Men. The act prohibits discrimination based on gender and mentions sexual harassment at the workplace.
- Labour legislation; such as the Employment Contracts Act and the Occupational Safety and Health Act.
- The Non-discrimination Act applies to many areas of life. It prohibits discrimination in working life (at the workplace, in recruitment and in the operations at the workplace) and education as well as in public services, among other places. It also sets a general duty to promote equality for the authorities.

According to law, unlawful discrimination includes:

- Direct discrimination – e.g. a customer is refused entry to a restaurant or service at a store because they are a member of an ethnic minority.
- Indirect discrimination – e.g. an employer requires that employees have perfect proficiency in Finnish, even though it is not necessary for the work.

- Harassment – e.g. racist jokes told intentionally to hurt someone are considered harassment.
- instructions or orders to discriminate

However, not all inappropriate actions are discrimination prohibited by the Non-discrimination Act. The definition of ethnic discrimination requires that a person has been treated worse than others specifically due to their ethnicity. This means that the prohibition on discrimination does not apply to relationships between two individuals. This kind of hurtful conduct may, however, be punishable as defamation, for example.

The victim of discrimination cannot justify their experience based on a mere claim, but they must provide a concrete report of what happened. Only then can a discrimination case be established, which may lead to a court or some other authority processing the discrimination matter deeming it prohibited discrimination.

The victim of discrimination may ask the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman for advice or help or make a complaint to the ombudsman. The non-discrimination advisory board also operates in the offices of the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman.

Industrial safety authorities monitor discrimination in working life, and you can contact them if you feel you've been discriminated against at work or during recruitment. On a local level, occupational safety and health is monitored by occupational safety and health offices or the local department. If the issue is gender equality, you may also contact the Equality Ombudsman and the Equality Board who monitor compliance with the law.

You may also file a compensatory complaint on discrimination in the district court within one year. The penalties for discrimination offences vary from fines to imprisonment.

- **INFO:** www.syrjinta.fi/en/web/EN/frontpage

Domestic violence

Domestic violence, both physical and emotional as well as restriction of freedom or sexual harassment within the family, is illegal in Finland. Domestic violence is criminal and a violation of human rights. The victims of violence are often women, but men, the elderly and children are also victimised. Corporal punishment of children is also prohibited by law.

Domestic violence damages all of the family members, and it does not solve any problems. Violence should be stopped early on, as it often recurs and becomes more brutal.

If you have been or fear that you may be a victim of domestic violence, please remember:

- Assault is subject to public prosecution even if it happens at home.
- Seek help. Contact the police, social services, victim support, a shelter or some other party that is here to help.
- The perpetrator of the violence can often be helped, as well.
- Do not delay in ensuring your own safety and that of your family's.
- Seek a restraining order, if necessary.

Restraining order

A restraining order means that to protect the life, health, freedom or peace of one person, another person is prohibited from contacting them. Restraining orders are used to prevent serious harassment by ex-spouses or to protect witnesses in a trial. A restraining order can be imposed on people living in the same household, which means that the person prohibited from contacting the other person must stay away from the home.

The restraining order can be sought by anyone who has grounds for feeling threatened or harassed by someone else. Restraining orders are sought orally or in writing either from the police or directly from the district court. Prosecutors, the police and social welfare officers may seek a restraining order on behalf of the threatened person, if they are too afraid to do so.

A temporary restraining order that takes effect immediately may be ordered by a senior police officer or the prosecutor. Ignoring the restraining order is a punishable offence.

- **INFO:** <https://poliisi.fi/rikokset/lahestymiskielto>
<https://oikeus.fi/tuomioistuimet/karajaoikeudet/fi/index/rikosasiat/lahestymiskielto.html>

Refuges and mother-and-child homes

Refuges receive those who have experienced domestic violence or are threatened by domestic violence. Most refuges are open 24 hours a day. You can always call the refuge when you are experiencing violence or are threatened by violence in close relationships.

Mother-and-child homes support families with babies in parenting and coping. Families may contact mother-and-child homes when they are expecting or when the baby is small.

- **INFO:** www.turvakoti.net/site/

Emotional support

If you need someone to talk to at times of acute crises (e.g. experiencing a loss, being a victim of a crime or an accident, difficulties in relationships, difficulties coping with life), there are various organisations that offer emotional support. Public health care and congregations also offer help.

- **INFO:** *Victim support to victims of crime:* www.rikosuhripaivystys.fi

Crime & punishment



Even though the majority of offences that are classified as crimes are nearly identical in different countries, they also have differences, as the legislation of each country determines what is considered an offence and what kind of punishment it warrants.

According to the Criminal Code of Finland, the criminal responsibility of a young person starts at 15, which means that a 15-year-old may be sentenced to a conditional sentence for any crime they may have committed. People younger than this do, however, have liability for damages they may have caused. If an underage person has caused damage on purpose, they may be sentenced to pay full compensation to the

victim, and it may be deducted from their first wages.

Punishments for crime vary from fines to imprisonment. The sentences for various types of crimes vary based on the severity of the crime, premeditation and any mitigating circumstances. In nearly all crime, even the attempt of a crime is criminal.

It is also possible that the defendant is found guilty of a crime, but they are not sentenced. This may be the case for people under the age of 18, for example, if the court is satisfied that they will learn a lesson even without the punishment. Those who are not criminally responsible are never sentenced to a punishment.

Examples of punishable crimes:

- **Traffic violations:** speeding, driving without a seat belt, talking on the mobile phone while driving without a hands-free device
- **Crimes against life and health:** manslaughter, murder and homicide as well as involuntary manslaughter, assault and causing an injury, participating in a fight, causing a danger, abandonment and negligence of rescue actions
- **Sex and vice crimes:** Rape, sexual harassment, sexual abuse of a minor, procurement, public indecency. Procurement and buying sex from victims of procurement or human trafficking is prohibited in Finland.

- **Crime against property:** theft, embezzlement and unauthorised use, vandalism (destroying or damaging others' property)
- **Drug-related crimes and other crime related to controlled substances:** possession and sale of drugs, selling alcohol to a minor and possession of alcohol as a minor, supplying illegal alcohol and tobacco
- **Discrimination and unequal treatment of others**
- **Incitement to hatred.** Publicly spreading statements and bulletins that threaten or defame a certain ethnic or religious group.
- **Infringement of privacy or peace and defamation:** disturbance of domestic peace, disturbance of public peace, wiretapping and illicit viewing
- **Defamation:** Stating or suggesting false information in a manner that may cause damage or suffering to or contempt of the injured party.
- **Neglecting various permit procedures**
- **Fraud:** Gaining wrongful financial benefits to oneself or others by deceiving or exploiting a mistake. This also applies to crimes perpetrated using IT equipment.
- **Forgery:** Forging a document, exhibit or instrument of payment, etc.
- **Corporal punishment of children**

Please note!

- Finnish law prohibits the possession of any kind of firearms or weapons in public. Possession of firearms always requires a permit issued by the authorities.
- Threatening someone verbally or physically may lead to a report of an offence.

- Ignorance of the law does not exempt you from punishment.
- Forcefully resisting the police results in imprisonment.
- Giving false testimony in court always results in imprisonment.
- Hiding or purchasing stolen goods is criminal.
- Aiding and abetting in a crime is also punishable.

Legal proceedings

In principle, everyone is innocent until proven guilty by a court of law in Finland. All courts are independent and only bound by valid legislation. Courts may be divided into general courts and administrative courts. Administrative courts process matters related to the authorities and their decisions may be appealed to the Supreme Administrative Court. In addition, there are special courts such as the Market Court and Labour Court.

General courts include District Courts, Courts of Appeal and the Supreme Court, and they process civil, criminal and petitionary cases. Civil cases are disagreements between individuals and companies, such as compensation for damages and inheritance disputes. Criminal cases include theft, drunk driving and acts of violence. Petitionary cases include divorce and custody issues.

In district courts, the cases are heard by District Judges as well as laymen as Lay Judges in some cases. The cases are handled and resolved either in a session or in chambers, where the decision is based solely on documents. District Court decisions may be appealed to Courts of Appeal. Decisions by Courts of Appeal may be appealed to the Supreme Court, if the

Supreme Court has granted leave to appeal.

In civil matters, the parties are the plaintiff and the defendant. The civil case is initiated when the plaintiff's written summons arrives at the district court office. The application may also be submitted electronically. The plaintiff in the civil case must pay the general fee for court proceedings.

In a criminal case, the parties include the defendant and the victim, i.e. the plaintiff, in addition to the prosecutor. The court starts processing the criminal case when the prosecutor has submitted an application for a summons to the court. The court also hears witnesses. The court may render its decision directly verbally or later in writing.

In the court, a criminal case may end in one of two ways. If the defendant is found innocent, the summons is dismissed. If the court finds the defendant guilty, it sentences the defendant to a lawful punishment. An entry into the criminal record is usually only generated for crimes that warrant a sentence of imprisonment.

Legal aid and lawyers

Courts do not provide instructions in advocacy. That is why there are legal aid offices, lawyer's offices and law offices. People of limited means may receive legal aid, i.e. a legal adviser, for the purpose of managing the legal issue fully or in part paid by the state. Aid is available for all legal issues. Companies and communities may not receive legal aid.

- **INFO: lawyers:** www.asianajaliitto.fi,
legal aid: <https://oikeus.fi/en/index.html>

Coercive measures

The police have the right to use various coercive measures to solve the crime and secure the trial and the implementation of the penalty. These include e.g. apprehension, arrest, recording personal distinguishing marks, confiscation and house search. Other coercive measures used by the police include detention, travel ban and prohibition of transfer, as well as surveillance and remote surveillance (listening to, watching or following the suspect using technical equipment).

- **INFO:** <https://oikeus.fi/tuomioistuimet/karajaoikeudet/en/index.html>

Criminal sanctions

Petty fine is a fixed punishment that is more lenient than a fine. Petty fines are usually issued for traffic violations and negligence of permit procedures, as well as breaches of the peace (e.g. disturbing the peace in public or endangering safety, consuming intoxicants or urinating in public). Littering may also result in a petty fine.

Fine: A person may be sentenced to fines either by a district court order or by the police, which is then verified by the appropriate district prosecutor.

The fine is sentenced in day fines, the monetary value of which depends on the net income, financial standing and number of underage children of the sentenced offender. If fines are left unpaid, they may result in imprisonment, as the district court may convert the day fines into imprisonment, in which case three day fines correspond to imprisonment for one day.

Imprisonment:

- **Unconditional imprisonment** = Imprisonment can be passed for either a fixed term or for life. A prison sentence is at least 14 days and at most 12 years, or when sentencing to a joint punishment, the maximum length is 15 years. If the sentence is more than two years imprisonment, it is always unconditional and must therefore be completed in prison. Convicts who have spent some of their sentence in prison may be eligible for parole.
- **Conditional imprisonment** = A prison sentence not exceeding two years can be passed as conditional, which means that the sentenced offender does not have to go to prison, if they reform and do not commit any more crimes. If the offender commits a crime during their probation, the punishment may be ordered to be completed in prison. Fines are often sentenced in addition to conditional imprisonment. If the conditional imprisonment sentence is more than 12 months, the offender may also be sentenced to community service.
- **Community service** = Instead of an unconditional imprisonment sentence, an offender may be sentenced to community sanctions. In this case, the offender works in community service for the time corresponding to their imprisonment sentence. Offenders may be sentenced up to 200 hours of community service. Even the slightest breach of the service conditions (e.g. being late or drunk) results in the remaining service being converted into unconditional imprisonment.

Offences may also be arbitrated with the help of a trained arbitrator.

Criminal record

The criminal record is a central, national register with information on anyone who has committed a crime. The information in the criminal record is not public, but the information is given e.g. to the police and licensing authorities as well as the court and the prosecutor for the purposes of the trial. Information can also be released for the clarification and assessment of a person's trustworthiness and personal aptitude. An entry in the criminal record may thus prevent you from getting a job or a place in an institution of learning.

An entry is made into the criminal record when a person is sentenced to:

- unconditional or conditional imprisonment
- pay a fine, do community service or is placed under supervision in addition to conditional imprisonment
- juvenile penalty or, instead of juvenile penalty, to pay a fine
- dismissal from office, or
- sentence is waived on grounds of criminal irresponsibility.

Data on sentences imposed abroad on a Finnish national or a foreigner permanently living in Finland are entered into the register. Fine penalties and fines converted to imprisonment are not entered into the criminal record. A fine imposed on a corporate body (company, foundation, etc.) is also entered into the criminal record.

Information on a convicted person having served their sentence or possibly been pardoned is entered

into the register. The data on a person are deleted from the register at different times according to the severity of the punishment; e.g. five years from the date of issue of a legally valid judgment, the data are deleted on a person's conditional imprisonment. The data on unconditional imprisonment sentences of no more than two years are deleted ten years after the sentencing. The data on imprisonment sentences of over five years are only deleted after a person has deceased or turned 90.

Information on an individual penalty cannot be deleted if a person commits new offences before the previous entry in the criminal records has been removed. Their entire record remains intact until the (sentence-specific) expiration date for the most severe punishment has passed.

Deportation

According to the Aliens Act, a foreigner who has committed a crime may be deported if they:

- reside in Finland without the necessary residence permit
- have committed a crime that warrants a prison sentence of more than two years.
- has repeatedly committed crimes
- has proven through their actions to be a danger to the safety of others
- has undertaken or is suspected to undertake actions in Finland that would endanger national security.
- *INFO on criminal sanctions (fines, prison sentences, community service): www.oikeus.fi
www.rikosseuraamus.fi/en/index.html*



www.turku.fi