

FINLAND – CIVIC ORIENTATION TEXTBOOK



Contents

Foreword	3
1. FINLAND AND THE FINNISH CULTURE.....	4
Geography and Climate of Finland.....	4
Population of Finland	6
What are Finns Like?.....	8
Outline of the History of Finland.....	9
Finnish Culture: Calendar, Celebrations and Traditions.....	16
Discussion Questions.....	23
2. FINNISH SOCIETY	24
Sections of Finnish Society	24
Development of the Welfare State in Finland	25
Administrative System of Finland	29
Finnish Business and Economic System	32
Discussion Questions.....	33
3. MOVING TO FINLAND AND LIVING IN FINLAND	34
Residence Permits and Finnish Citizenship.....	34
Practical Matters when Moving to Finland.....	36
Basics of Living.....	39
Integration into Your New Home Country	45
Discussion Questions.....	47
4. FAMILY LIFE AND CHILDREN	48
The Finnish Family Then and Now	48
Marriage and Common-law Relationship.....	51
Many Kinds of Families	55
Child Care and Services for Families with Children	56
Support for Families with Problems	61
Other Health and Social Services	63
When a Family Moves to Finland	66
Discussion Questions.....	66
5. EDUCATION	67
Development of the Finnish Education System.....	67
The Finnish Education System Today	69
Financing Your Studies	80
Discussion Questions.....	81
6. WORK AND SUBSISTENCE IN FINLAND	82
Labour Market.....	82
Employment	92
Salary and Taxation	98
If You Become Unemployed	99
Entrepreneurship and Self-employment	102
Discussion Questions.....	104

7. HEALTH AND AGEING IN FINLAND	105
Health and Illness	105
Health Services in Finland.....	107
Health and Well-being of the Elderly	110
Types of Pensions	111
Care Services for the Elderly	112
Death and Burial	114
Inheritance	116
Discussion Questions.....	117
8. LAWS AND JUSTICE IN FINLAND	118
Legal System of Finland.....	118
Equal and Equitable Society	120
Rights and Obligations of Individuals	123
Crimes	125
Legal Proceedings and Legal Aid.....	127
Discussion Questions.....	129
9. POLITICS AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN FINLAND.....	130
What is Democracy?.....	130
Development of Democracy in Finland.....	133
Elections in Finland.....	136
Political Parties of Finland	139
Civic Participation	142
Discussion Questions.....	144

Foreword

This book is meant for adults who have recently moved to Finland. Its purpose is to explain how the Finnish society works and to tell the story of Finland.

This textbook describes the following aspects of Finnish society:

- functioning and structure
- values, laws and democratic principles
- rights and obligations in terms of an individual
- everyday practices

A person has a better chance of integration when he or she gains a good understanding of how the new society works. Lessons on society have been given to newcomers mainly in Finnish as part of their integration training. However, in the early stages of immigration, newcomers' Finnish language skills are still insufficient to take in knowledge about the Finnish society. Due to this, it would be important to provide teaching in everyone's own mother tongue. Knowledge gained in one's mother tongue in the early stages of immigration reduces the risk of misunderstandings and guarantees that nobody is left without important information.

In addition, the civic education for immigrants has been lacking nationally consistent set of learning materials. Some municipalities have also organized civic education for immigrants in the participants' own mother tongue, but these efforts have often been temporary and the content, scope and target group of the lessons have varied. To guarantee successful integration, civic education should be separated from language instruction to form a nationally consistent civic orientation module taught in the participants' native languages.

The Finnish Refugee Council has provided civic knowledge to those with a refugee background on VertaisKoto courses where lectures have been given by various experts. These lectures have included interpretation and discussion. However, the Finnish Refugee Council has noticed a need for a more extensive course that is more consistent both educationally and nationally. This led the Council to develop the Civic Orientation course, for which this learning material was produced. When developing the course, inspiration was drawn especially from Sweden's national *Samhällsorientering* course and its textbook *Om Sverige*.

The Civic Orientation course is based on teaching in the participants' own mother tongues, giving room for group discussion and reflection. Each course is taught by a Civic Orientation Instructor who speaks the same language as the course participants. This learning material is designed to serve as a handbook for the course instructor, but it may also be freely used by others. The aim of the Civic Orientation course is to give the course participants keys for understanding the Finnish society and to improve their chances of becoming full members of society as quickly as possible.

The book has been edited by the Institute of Adult Education in Helsinki. A special thank you for their excellent work go to the production team composed of Project Coordinator Lilli Rasilainen in addition to Mira Larduet, Marjaana Markkanen and Ulla Tarkka. We also wish to send our warmest thanks to Sweden, especially to the County Administrative Board of Västra Götaland and the city of Gothenburg who have been a great help in the development of this Civic Orientation book.

The Civic Orientation textbook has been produced as part of the Kotikunta project (2016–2018) of the Finnish Refugee Council. The project was funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund of the EU. We are very grateful to the European Union and the Ministry of the Interior for supporting our work.

1. FINLAND AND THE FINNISH CULTURE

Geography and Climate of Finland

Population of Finland

What are Finns Like?

Outline of the History of Finland

Finnish Culture: Calendar, Celebrations and Traditions

Finland is a country located in northern Europe where the state provides a wide range of services to its citizens. These services are financed by collecting various taxes, and their aim is to support citizens' welfare. Taxation is also a way of trying to even out income differences between people. Finland is a parliamentary democracy and one of the freest, most stable and safest countries in the world today. This has not always been the case, however. Finland has been an independent state for 100 years. During this time, the country has developed rapidly on a number of counts. Over the course of one hundred years, what was once a poor country has become a modern democracy with free press, equal working life and a highly educated population.

Geography and Climate of Finland

Finland is located in northern Europe and is considered one of the Nordic countries, along with Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland. Finland shares a long border with Russia in the east. Its neighbouring country to the north is Norway. In the west, Finland and Sweden share a long land border and are also separated by the Gulf of Bothnia to the south of the city of Tornio. The closest southern neighbour is Estonia.

Territorially Finland is the eighth largest country in Europe (338 500 km²). In 2010, 77 percent of the land area was forest land, 9 percent was agricultural land and only just over 4 percent was built-up areas. Finland therefore has many forests and a huge number of lakes. Finland also has numerous islands. One of the island regions is Åland, located to the southwest of Finland. Åland is autonomous, but is still a part of Finland.

Climate and Seasons

Finland has four distinct seasons. Winter is cold and snowy. Winter in Lapland lasts for half a year, whereas in southern Finland it lasts for a third of the year. Winter temperatures can fall to up to 30 degrees below zero (Celsius). In winter, the sun does not rise at all to the north of the Arctic Circle in Lapland. This is known as *kaamos*, or polar night. In the northern areas of Finland, the polar night lasts for anywhere between a few days to up to 50 days.

Spring is the shortest season of the year. It only lasts for one and a half to two months. Nature undergoes great changes during springtime. The snow melts, as do the lakes and seas that froze in the winter, and the growing season begins. In Finland, plants only have one growing season, which lasts from spring to autumn.

Summer is a warm season that lasts climatically for about two months in the north and about four months in the south. Summer is usually thought to include June, July and August. In the summer in Lapland, the sun shines round the clock. This phenomenon is known as the midnight sun or the nightless night. Summer in Finland may occasionally be hot with temperatures rising over +25 degrees (Celsius). Sometimes it may also be cool and rainy in the summer. It rains evenly throughout

the year in Finland and there are no particular rainy seasons. However, it rains the most in July and August.

Autumn lasts for about two and a half months. It is the time for gathering the harvest from the fields and picking berries and mushrooms in the forests. In autumn, the weather gets colder and nature prepares for its winter rest.

Nature in Finland

Finland is a sparsely populated country with many forests and lakes as well as unspoilt nature. Finns appreciate nature and enjoy getting out into nature. Many people enjoy hobbies in nature, such as fishing, cross-country cycling, ice swimming or hiking. The forest is never a long way away, not even in the capital city. In addition, cities have many parks and other green areas where you can spend time. Keeping nature and the environment clean and free from trash is important to Finns. Littering is considered careless and impolite and you can also be fined for it.

Finland has so-called everyman's rights (*jokamiehenoikeudet*). They give everyone the right to travel in nature regardless of who owns the land in question. This usually means that you may roam in nature, pick berries and mushrooms and go fishing. However, you are not allowed to harm nature or the plants and animals or leave any litter in nature. You may also camp out in nature, meaning that you may pitch a tent and spend one or two nights there at a time, without disturbing the landowner. Camping out on beaches and in parks is usually not allowed.

Nature Conservation

Almost all wild animals in Finland are protected species by law, meaning that they may not be shot or hunted. Their nests may not be damaged and the animals may not be disturbed in any other way. Wild game, such as moose and hares, and some forest and water birds may only be hunted during a certain time of year. There are also many nature reserves in Finland, which are protected areas. Their purpose is to make sure that the number of plant and animal species in nature remains as high as possible. Visitors are free to roam in some of the nature reserves.

Nature is protected to preserve plant and animal species and to protect biodiversity from the effects of human behaviour. Biodiversity means that the variation of animals, plants and living organisms is as high as possible in nature. Human behaviour can cause the natural environment to change and become destroyed, polluted, littered and eutrophic, so that species disappear. The Environmental Protection Act tries to prevent the pollution of nature and the environment and limit environmental damage.

In Finland, nature is protected by the Finnish law, EU legislation, state authorities and various non-governmental organizations. The Ministry of the Environment was established in Finland already back in 1983. Among other tasks, it supervises the sustainable use of natural resources and the preservation of biodiversity.

Both wild animals as well as farm animals and pets must be treated ethically and appropriately in Finland. The Animal Welfare Act promotes the welfare and good treatment of animals in Finland. The Act determines, among other things, how animals should be cared for, raised and slaughtered and in what conditions animals may not be kept. The authorities supervise the keepers of farm animals such as cows, pigs and chickens. Dogs and cats are the most common pets in Finland. They are kept as pets both in the cities and in the countryside.

Population of Finland

The population of Finland is about 5.5 million. Finland is a sparsely populated country compared to many other European countries. Most Finns live near the coastline in the southern and southwestern parts of Finland. Lapland is the least populated area.

Today, 70% of Finns live in or near cities. The largest cities are Helsinki, Espoo, Tampere, Vantaa and Oulu. Altogether just over 1.5 million people live in these cities. The capital region, meaning Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa, is home to over one million people.

In 2015, about 55 000 children were born in Finland. Back in the 1940s, the number of births per year was more than twice as many. The so-called baby boomers were born between the years 1945–1949. The war had just ended, and people were very optimistic about the future. As a result, many children were born and families were larger than they are today.

Similarly to other industrialized countries, the population of Finland is ageing. Population ageing means that people live to a greater age and less children are born than before. According to the population forecast, up to 26 percent of the population will be 65 years or older in the year 2030, whereas in 2010, this population group represented 17.5 percent of the population. An increasingly smaller working-age population will be caring for the ever-growing aged population. Today, 1.7 children per woman are born in Finland, whereas in 1950 the number was 3.5.

Finland has Two Official Languages

Finland has two official languages, Finnish and Swedish. About 89 percent of Finns speak Finnish as their mother tongue. About 5 percent of the population of Finland is Swedish-speaking. The status of Swedish as the second official language is a result of Finland being a part of the kingdom of Sweden for many centuries. Many of the customs and laws related to the religion and culture of Finland as well as its administration and legislation date back to this era.

Other languages spoken in Finland include Russian, the Sami languages, Estonian and Arabic. Russian and Estonian are commonly spoken in Finland, because many people from both of these neighbouring countries have immigrated to Finland. The number of Arabic speakers is also growing. The Sami languages are minority languages spoken in Lapland. The other minority languages of Finland are Finnish Romani and Finnish Sign Language.

Minorities in Finland

There are cultural, linguistic and religious minorities in Finland. The cultural minorities in Finland are the Sami, the Finnish Kale or Romani people and the Ingrian Finns. Linguistic minorities include the Swedish-speaking Finns and those using sign language, and religious minorities include the Tatars and the Jews. Immigrants from different countries are also minorities. All minorities have the right to their own language and culture in Finland. This right is protected by law in Finland.

Foreigners in Finland

In 2016, 6.5% of the inhabitants of Finland had a foreign background. Having a foreign background means that both of the person's parents were born abroad. In numbers, this is about 340 000 people. As late as the year 1990, there were only about 37 000 people with a foreign background in Finland. In 2016, the eight most common foreign nationalities in Finland were, in descending order: Estonian, Russian, Iraqi, Chinese, Swedish, Thai, Somali and Afghan.

For a long time, there was very little immigration to Finland. Finland used to be a poor country, and Finnish people emigrated elsewhere in the hope of finding a job and a better life. In the 19th century,

Finns emigrated mainly to North America. Large numbers of Finns have also moved to Russia at different times. The Finnish society changed rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s. More and more people moved from the countryside to cities to work. There were not enough jobs for everyone in Finland, so many emigrated to work abroad. Back in those decades, up to tens of thousands of Finns moved to Sweden every year to work.

Refugees and other immigrants started to come to Finland later than to the other Nordic countries. Many moved to Sweden, Denmark and Norway to work in the 1950s–1970s, and refugees also started to arrive in these countries already back in the 1960s. In the 1970s, Finland only received about 200 refugees who had escaped the Chilean coup d'état. Several thousands of refugees came to Finland from Vietnam in the 1980s. In the early years of immigration to Finland, very few people immigrated to Finland to work.

Global events gradually began to bring more immigrants to Finland as well. The Somali Civil War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union at the turn of the 1980s and the 1990s brought a large number of immigrants to Finland. The Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s brought refugees to Finland from the Balkans. Finland has also taken in refugees from Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Eritrea, Russia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ukraine. In recent years, most asylum seekers in Finland have come from Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Syria and Iran.

Today, people immigrate to Finland also for reasons besides war, such as family, work or studies. In 2016, 25% of the residence permits involved the registration of the right of residence of EU citizens or their family members. Of all the residence permits, 75% were permits for non-EU-citizens, and 21% of them were related to family ties, 16% to studying, 15% to work and 5% to other grounds. In addition, 18% of the residence permits were granted on the basis of international protection. This figure includes those who were granted a residence permit through the asylum process and the quota refugees taken in by Finland. Every year, Finland receives a certain number of refugees as quota refugees. The Parliament decides on the number of quota refugees each year. A total of 749 quota refugees were accepted in 2016.

Religion and Religiousness in Finland

Three quarters of Finns are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The Church follows Protestant Christianity according to the Lutheran doctrine and was named after the German reformer Martin Luther and the Gospel (Evangel). The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland has the right to collect a tax from its members and has influence over the existence of certain religious holidays and the religious instruction provided in schools.

The second largest church in Finland is the Orthodox Church whose members make up about one percent of the population. There are also an estimated 70 000 Muslims in Finland. It is somewhat difficult to give an exact figure, because far from all Muslims are members of a religious community.

Finland has a Freedom of Religion Act, which means that everyone has the freedom to belong to a religious community and to practise their religion. The Act also includes the freedom to be irreligious. In 2015, about 24 percent of the population of Finland did not belong to any religious denomination.

Religion and the Christian Church have had an important role in the formation of the Finnish culture and people's values and rules of behaviour. One could say that the Finnish society has largely been built on Christian, Evangelical Lutheran values. These include, for example, the notion of hard work and honesty and views on what is valued or considered important in life. Many Finnish celebrations and their customs are also closely linked to religion. This can be seen in, for instance, weddings, christenings and funerals.

Nevertheless, Finland today is considered a fairly secularized, worldly country. In a secular state, the governmental practices and institutions must function separately from all religions and religious views and be neutral in relation to them. Politicians and government officials in Finland may not justify their decisions using arguments based on religion.

Secularism is also a view whereby people's actions and deeds should be based on knowledge instead of religious views. Religious views and using them to justify actions have become less important in people's minds in Finland over the last 50 years. When faced with a choice, it is common in Finland to base ethical arguments on human rights, science or pragmatic thinking instead of religious doctrines.

Although religiousness rarely comes up in the everyday thoughts of Finns and many Finns who are members of the Church only go to church on family occasions, many Finns have an outlook on life that involves some form of spirituality. This may not necessarily be tied to any particular church or religious group.

What are Finns Like?

Various important events in the history of Finland have contributed to what Finns are like today. Key eras in history are the periods when Finland was a part of the kingdom of Sweden and later a part of the Russian Empire. During these periods, the ruling powers would sometimes treat the Finns with justice and fairness and other times more cruelly. The 20th century wars also had a major impact on people.

World War I took place in the years 1914–1918. During the war, Finland gained independence from Russia in 1917. However, the newly independent Finland was very divided as to how the new state should be governed and developed. As a result, a civil war broke out in Finland in early 1918, immediately after the declaration of independence. In the war, Finns fought and killed each other. As a result of the Finnish Civil War, the population of Finland remained divided into two groups of people who were distrustful of each other for a long time.

During World War II in 1939–1945, Finland fought two wars against the Soviet Union and one against Germany. These wars were very significant to Finns. On the one hand, the wars against a common enemy united the divided nation and, on the other hand, the outcome of the wars was that Finland remained an independent state and was not occupied. The generations who experienced the wars were united by their common struggles on behalf of their country and the experiences of hard times of poverty as well as traumatic wartime events, fear and death.

After the wars, Finns were influenced by e.g. the transformation of the nation from an agricultural country to the industrialized service society that it is today, where the majority of people live in or near cities. Many moved to live far away from their relatives.

At the same time, Finland became a welfare state, which means that the state guarantees all its citizens an adequate livelihood and basic services, such as health care, children's day care and education. There was no longer a need to ask other members of the family for financial or child care help, because the state provided this support. Finland became an individualized society where, in principle, everyone looks only after him or herself and his or her children and where people trust the government to provide assistance and services to them.

Economic booms and recessions have also affected Finns. During periods of economic prosperity, the formerly poor Finns have become wealthier and spent more money on things like homes, cars and travel. There have also been more jobs available. Then again, during periods of recession, many have lost their jobs or property.

Trust in the Government and the Authorities

Finns are united by their trust in the government and the authorities. Finns usually trust the decisions made by authorities, the judicial system and officials and believe that they are treated equally and fairly in administrative processes.

The Finnish society has been built democratically, meaning that all population groups have been able to influence how Finland was and is developed. That is why, so far, it has been quite natural for Finns to feel a sense of ownership towards their country, its officials and its services and to trust them.

Effects of the Climate on Finns

The northern location of the country and the cold climate have affected the life of Finns and the Finnish culture in many ways. Winters are cold and dark, and people are more tired and tend to stay indoors. They meet friends and family at home or in restaurants and bars.

In the summer, it is warm and light. It feels good to spend time outdoors, and the warm weather and sunshine make people happier and more social. Throughout history, the cold climate has shaped the Finnish character and behaviour and made the life of Finns a constant struggle against the natural elements. Men and women have joined forces to cope in the northern climate.

Finnish Customs

In Finland, as in many other countries in northern Europe, punctuality is considered important. Everyone is expected to come to agreed appointments and meetings on time. Appointments always begin at exactly the time that has been given. Being late is considered impolite.

People from elsewhere often see Finns as silent and calm. Many Finns feel that strong expressions of emotion are private matters and behave in a restrained way outside their home. When dealing with the authorities, customers are also expected to state their case calmly.

When you see a doctor or visit an authority in Finland or go to a department store, you will often find a queue number system. Everyone coming to the queue takes a queue ticket from a machine and will be served in numerical order. Even if number tickets are not used, Finns wait for their turn in the order in which they arrived in the queue. Overtaking others in a queue is considered very impolite.

For Finns, politeness also means that everyone is left in peace and you do not interfere with other people's business. This may seem cold or indifferent. But a Finn will make a good friend once you get to know each other over time.

Finnish people do not usually come very close, but are used to giving others their own space, for example on a bus stop, in a bus or when having a conversation between two people. Giving space also means that, during a dialogue, you let the other person finish what they are saying and do not interrupt. Interrupting and talking over others is considered impolite.

When greeting another person, you look them in the eye and often shake hands, but hugs have also become more common in recent years between friends and acquaintances. In a conversation, a Finn usually goes straight to the point and does not spend time on pleasantries or small talk.

Outline of the History of Finland

Finland has been an independent state for only one hundred years (in 2017). Despite this, Finland and the people living in the region have a long history, during which Finland has gradually evolved into a Western secular democracy.

Prehistory of Finland

The first people settled in the area that is now Finland after the ice age about 10 000 years ago. An ice age, or glacial period, is a period of time when huge parts of the Earth were under thick ice sheets. Near the end of the ice age, the ice sheets began to melt. Plants started to grow again and human settlements began to spread.

This period of time is known as the prehistoric period. It means the time from which there are no written records. We know fairly little about how people lived back then. Our knowledge comes from, for example, archaeological digs. They have revealed objects, such as tools and weapons, made and used by people in the prehistoric period. People in those times were hunters, fishermen and gatherers.

Over time, people moved to Finland from various directions: from the south, east and west. So the population of Finland is originally a mix of various groups of people that came from other places. In the prehistoric period, Finland did not have a single, unified population, but people lived in small, separate groups, or tribes, each with its own customs. Sometimes the tribes would wage war on each other. They also traded goods with other tribes living close by.

Middle Ages

The period from about 1100 to 1500 AD is known as the Middle Ages in Finland. In the Middle Ages, the Swedes conquered areas in western Finland, and Finland became part of the Swedish realm. Finland remained a part of Sweden for more than 600 years, during which time Sweden and Russia fought over Finland in several wars. Western and southern Finland was governed by Sweden and the Catholic Church, whereas in the eastern parts of Finland, the Novgorod Republic and the Orthodox Church located in Russian territory had power over people.

Several castles were built in medieval Finland as a defence against the Russians. These include, for instance, the Häme Castle and the Vyborg Castle. The very first cities in Finland, such as Turku and Porvoo, were also founded in the Middle Ages.

Before the arrival of Christianity, a pagan religion was practised in Finland. The religion was polytheistic, meaning that there were multiple gods. People also worshipped the dead and many creatures of nature, such as the bear. Communities had seers or wise men who would heal the sick and guarantee a good harvest. There were sacred places in the forests and bogs where sacrifices were made to gods and e.g. food was taken to forest spirits.

Modern Age

The period known as the Modern Age began roughly at the turn of the 15th and 16th century. The period of transition between the Middle Ages and the Modern Age is also known as the Renaissance. At that time, many events took place in Europe that had a wide-ranging impact on the development of many European countries, including Sweden and Finland.

The printing press was invented in Germany in the late 15th century. Books allowed new ideas and ideologies to spread quickly from one country to the next. At the same time, various European countries sent out ships to sail even further to distant, unknown lands to seek riches and new territories. These expeditions widened the Europeans' view of the world and gave European countries more political power.

Artists and architects admired the Classical period, which can be seen especially in the art and buildings from this era. New knowledge provided by science and research was also highly valued.

The Reformation of the Catholic Church and its Effects in Finland

An important event in the Catholic Church was the Reformation, which started in Germany. The Reformation was started by the German priest Martin Luther who strongly criticised the Catholic Church. The Popes of the Church were very powerful and some of them gathered a large fortune for themselves from money that was meant for the Church. Also, they themselves did not live according to the doctrines of the Church. As a result of the Reformation, new denominations, including Lutheranism, were formed.

The Reformation spread from Germany also to Sweden where Catholicism was replaced by Lutheran Protestant Christianity. Consequently, the Church lost some of its power and the state gained more power. The Church had to give up property and pay taxes to the state. The Reformation also had an effect on church services. Priests in churches in Finland began to preach in Finnish, as opposed to Latin. Commoners could now understand what the priests were saying.

The Reformation had a major effect on the development of the Finnish language. Mikael Agricola, Bishop of the Church of Finland, wrote the first primer in Finnish and formed the basis for literary Finnish. Agricola also translated the New Testament into Finnish.

Sweden as a Great Power and Wars

Sweden ruled over an even larger part of the territory of Finland in the 16th and 17th centuries. Sweden fought several wars to become a great power and conquered even more territory, including the Baltic area and eastern Finland. These wars required a lot of money and men. Finns had to pay heavy taxes to the Swedish state. Finns were forced to take part in the wars fought by the Swedes also by sending men and boys to the Swedish army.

In the 18th century, Sweden lost its position as a great power. Sweden lost the territory of Finland to Russia in 1809 when the last war between the two nations ended in Russian victory.

Age of Enlightenment

The so-called Age of Enlightenment began in the 18th century. This was a time when the importance of rationality and knowledge was emphasized. Some of the main goals were reforming society to make it more democratic, i.e. give the rule to people, in addition to human rights and establishing a constitutional state, meaning a state governed by law.

In order to ensure the rights of citizens, the French philosopher Charles-Louis de Montesquieu proposed a tripartite separation of power: power would be divided into legislative, executive and judicial power, and these would be kept separate from each other. The aim of this was to prevent the concentration and abuse of power. The tripartite system of power is still an essential element of the form of government in Western democracies. It is also used in Finland.

Period Under Russian Rule

When Finland came under Russian rule (in 1809), Emperor Alexander I of Russia joined eastern Finland, which had previously been a part of Russia, and western Finland, which had belonged to Sweden. Finland was granted autonomy, which meant that Finns could decide on many things themselves. The Evangelical Lutheran religion was also maintained, and the taxes collected from the Finns were spent in Finland. No Russian laws were adopted in Finland, but the country was allowed to keep the laws from its time under Swedish rule. However, the Emperor of Russia was still a powerful autocrat in Finland.

During the roughly one hundred years (1809–1917) when Finland was an autonomous part of Russia, great changes took place in Europe. These changes gradually gave rise to the entire modern world.

The most important changes were industrialization and economic liberalism, which meant a less-regulated economy and more international trade.

Industrialization had the effect that goods began to be mass-produced, which required a lot of workforce. The population grew strongly thanks to the peacetime and the more advanced agricultural production. The population of Finland also grew from about one million to over three million between the beginning of the 19th century and World War I (1914–1918).

Large numbers of people moved to cities and abroad to find jobs. The industrialized society was a class society where wealth, or property, determined a person's status. The lowest class was the destitute working class. A social status based only on property was a new concept and also made it possible to move more flexibly from one class to another if you gained more property.

Before then, an individual's status had depended on the estate that he or she had been born in. Estates were centuries-old social classes based on a social division of labour, each with its own economic and political privileges. In Finland and the other Nordic countries, the estates were the nobility, the clergy, the bourgeoisie and the peasants. The nobility was of noble birth and owned large land areas, whereas the bourgeoisie consisted of townspeople who were merchants or artisans. Peasants had their own farms. The majority of the people were poor, did not own anything and did not belong to any estate. The differences between the estates began to diminish in the 19th century, but the gap between those who belonged to an estate and the poor commoners who did not remained wide.

Period of Nationalism

The 19th century was also the century of nationalism, or national awakening. European nations had traditionally been formed of many different peoples. Now, people began to think that every nation has its own common language, religion and history and that every nation should also have its own independent state. As a result of nationalism, many European states experienced uprisings and disturbances in the 19th century. Other ideologies contributing to the revolts were liberalism and socialism.

The atmosphere in Finland remained calm long into the 19th century. Finns were content, because there were no more wars and society was developing. Helsinki was made the new capital city in 1812. Turku was too far away from St. Petersburg and too close to Sweden. Roads, railways and factories were built in Finland.

Industrialization did not properly take off in Finland until the 1880s with the industrialization of the paper industry. However, the industrialization process in Finland was fast, and by the end of the period of autonomy, Finland was industrially more advanced than Russia. Finland exported mainly forestry products, such as wood and pulp.

Nationalistic ideas first emerged under Russian rule among the Swedish-speaking educated classes in Finland. These classes became interested in the Finnish language and culture and wanted to portray the Finns as a people with a common history and culture. The Russian administration supported the national awakening and the improvement of the status of Finnish language. The administration thought that the awakening national spirit would distance the Finns from Sweden and Swedishness and bring them closer to Russia. Finnish-language schools began to be established in cities in the 1860s.

The nationalists argued over the status of the Finnish and Swedish languages in Finland. Some wanted to maintain the status of the Swedish language in Finland, whereas others wanted Finnish to be the only language spoken in Finland. The language strife gave rise to the first political parties in Finland in the 1860s. As a result of the dispute, Finnish did not become the second official language of Finland until the early 20th century.

Finland Gains Independence

Finland became independent near the end 1917. The independence process was part of the events of World War I. Russia fared poorly in the World War and experienced two revolutions in 1917 after which it started to develop into a communist nation. Finland declared independence in the middle of these major social upheavals.

Independent Finland and Wars

Already towards the end of the 19th century, Finland was strongly divided into two groups, the workers and the bourgeoisie. The majority of the people were destitute workers. Despite their numbers, they had hardly any political influence over their position in society. In 1917, both the workers and the bourgeoisie assembled their own armed forces. A month after gaining independence, a civil war broke out in Finland.

The divided people fought against each other. The food shortage and unemployment caused by World War I also contributed to the outbreak of war. The Finnish Civil War broke out in January 1918 and ended in the April of the same year in the victory of the government forces, i.e. the bourgeoisie. About 37 000 Finns died during the war, some in battle, some in prison camps and in executions. Many of the deceased were workers.

After the war, the nation remained bitterly torn in two. The war was publicly portrayed only from the perspective of the winners. This meant giving the impression that during the war, the bourgeoisie Whites drove out the thousands of Russian soldiers who were still residing in Finland at the time and put a stop to the workers', or the Reds' revolution. However, the Reds felt that the war had been a class struggle where the poor fought against the rich to gain equal social status.

New laws were passed in the 1920s to try to improve the living conditions of the poor. Among others, the 8-hour workday, compulsory education for all children and progressive income taxation were introduced. Progressive tax means that those with a high income have a higher tax rate than low-income taxpayers. Society became more stable.

Rise of the Extreme Right and World War II

The severe global economic depression in the 1930s changed the direction of development. The extreme right gained a foothold in many European countries when it promised to lift Europe out of depression. As the depression ended, living conditions improved greatly, but by the start of World War II in 1939, many European states were dictatorships led by the extreme right.

Finland, however, remained a democracy. The division between different sections of the public began to dissolve with the improvement of welfare. One of the essential factors uniting people was also the fact that the Social Democratic Party of Finland, which represented the working population, i.e. the Reds who had lost the war, was included in the Finnish government in the late 1930s to build the country's future together with representatives from other parties.

In 1939, the Soviet Union demanded cessions of territory from Finland. When Finland refused, the Soviet Union attacked. This resulted in the 105-day Winter War where workers and the bourgeoisie fought side by side against Soviet forces.

At first, the Finns defended the country persistently, but eventually the superior military strength and numbers of the Soviets forced the Finns to retreat and make peace. In the peace treaty, Finland had to cede many areas to the Soviet Union, and the people living in these areas were forced to leave their homes. They were relocated elsewhere in the Finnish territory.

The Finns wanted regain control over the lost areas. However, Finland was in a difficult position between two enemies, Germany and the Soviet Union. In the end, Finland entered into alliance with Germany. A new war against the Soviet Union broke out in summer 1941. Finland received support from German troops as it attacked the Soviet Union and conquered the territories lost in the Winter War. This war is known as the Continuation War.

The war started off well for Finland and it conquered more territory. But eventually the successful war efforts of Germany, Finland's ally, come to a stop in Europe. Germany had conquered much of Europe during World War II, but its large offensive against the Soviet Union failed and Germany was forced to retreat.

The Soviet Union attacked Finland, and a peace treaty was signed in autumn 1944. Finland had to cede more areas to the Soviet Union, pay substantial war reparations and expel the German troops in the country. The Lapland War was fought against the German troops. During the war, the Germans burned down large areas in Lapland as they were leaving Finland.

Reconstruction and Building a Welfare State

Following World War II, Europe was divided into two spheres of power. Eastern European states were communist and under the influence of the Soviet Union. Western European states established close relations with the United States through e.g. the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO. Although Finland declared itself neutral, along with the other Nordic countries, it was still considered to be at least somewhat under the influence of the Soviet Union.

Finland learned to live in peaceful co-existence with its neighbouring Soviet Union. Still, Finland was often cautious of what the Soviet Union would think of Finnish politics and international relations. The last war reparations were paid to the Soviet Union in the early years of the 1950s. The war reparations were paid by sending e.g. ships, locomotives and wood products made in Finland to the Soviet Union.

The improvement and increase of services provided by society continued after the wars in all Nordic countries. It was possible to develop and provide a wide range of services, because the Finnish economy was growing rapidly. Building a welfare state, i.e. gradually transforming Finland into a country with a well-organized social security system, was also politically feasible, because Finns were united by the experience of the recent wars and the harsh living conditions. People were committed to societal development.

Various social reforms that improved the life of citizens were implemented in the 1940s and 1950s. The system of maternity and child health clinics (*neuvolat*) was established in Finland to support families with children. Parents began to receive a monthly payment, the child benefit (*lapsilisä*). A free school meal was served to children.

A pension system was gradually set up and expanded, and a national pension (*kansaneläke*), disability pension (*sairauseläke*), earnings-related pension (*työeläke*) and health insurance (*sairausvakuutus*) were introduced. The fact that services were available to all citizens gave people more trust in democratic decision-making and society and its institutions.

Finland from the 1960s to the 1990s Depression

Finland began to transform from a largely agricultural country to an industrial and service society in the 1960s. There was less work to be done in the countryside as agriculture became mechanized and the need for labour decreased. People began to move to cities in even greater numbers. Cities provided jobs not only in the industry and service sector, but also in commerce and transportation.

Women's employment increased dramatically. Once women were also able to work outside the home, the skills and knowledge of all working-age people could be put to use. This benefited the national economy.

But there were still not enough jobs and homes for everyone, and many moved abroad to find work. More than 400 000 Finns emigrated to Sweden in the 1960s and 1970s. Some returned later when the employment situation in Finland improved, but some stayed in Sweden. In fact, Finns were the largest group of immigrants in Sweden after World War II, i.e. the 1940s. It was not until 2017 that the number of Syrians overtook the number of Finns as the largest immigrant group in Sweden.

Finland Becomes More Affluent

The Finnish society continued to develop from the 1970s to the 1990s. Finland became just as affluent and prosperous as the other Nordic countries, despite the fact that in the 1950s, the gap between Finland and, say, Sweden was wide. Back then, Finland was poorer and more undeveloped than its neighbours. It had just endured several wars and the payment of war reparations.

Finns gradually became consumers in the 1990s. The level of education improved at enormous speed. Finns could finally afford to buy something other than the bare necessities: more new clothes, furniture, trips abroad and cars.

The economy grew strongly during the economic boom of the 1980s. It became easier to take out foreign loans, and businesses took out cheap loans from abroad. Households were also granted loans by banks more easily. Due to the loans, there was more money in circulation than before and house prices, for example, increased dramatically.

Economic Depression Period

During the economic boom, the economy overheated, meaning that the supply of goods and services could no longer keep up with the demand. Prices rose and rose and finally came crashing down. The value of the Finnish currency, markka, was too high, and the foreign currency loans taken out from abroad turned out to be costly to their payers.

This resulted in the early 1990s depression, which was particularly deep in Finland. The unemployment rate rose to almost 20 percent at its worst, banks and businesses went bankrupt and the services provided by the welfare state to citizens had to be cut. Finns became more divided into well-off and low-income people.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 also affected the depression, because a significant share of the Finnish export business consisted of Eastern trade with the Soviet Union. Finland was forced to take out a large debt to cope with the depression.

Finland Today

The industrial and service society was transformed into the information society in the 1990s. Information and communication technology developed, the use of the internet spread and mobile phones became an important Finnish export for a long time. Finnish businesses became internationalized and moved some of their operations abroad.

Finland joined the European Union in 1995. In 2000, Tarja Halonen was elected President of Finland. She was the first female President of Finland. The common currency euro was introduced in Finland in 2002, and Finland gave up the Finnish markka.

Many of the laws that are in place in Finland today are passed by the EU. The security policy of Finland is also largely shaped in cooperation with other EU countries. Finland has some defence policy cooperation with the NATO military alliance, although Finland is not a member of NATO.

A new economic recession hit the world in 2008. It stemmed from the collapse of real estate prices in the United States. The collapse was followed by a mortgage crisis. The recession had a strong effect on Finland as well. Unemployment increased and exports decreased heavily in Finland. In the years following the recession, the situation in Finland has improved little by little.

Hundred-year-old Finland and Future Challenges

Independent Finland turned one hundred years in 2017. Over the course of these one hundred years, Finland has undergone big changes. A poor, predominantly agricultural country first developed into an industrial and service society and then into a post-industrial information society. During this time, the standard of living in Finland has improved in a truly significant way. Various reforms led to a society with more welfare, affluence and equality. Compared to the other Nordic countries, this process started later in Finland, but moved forward faster.

Finland today is one of the most developed countries in the world on a number of counts. Finnish schoolchildren have performed well in international comparisons, which measure how well children have obtained various skills and knowledge in school. On an international scale, people in Finland are doing well and receive a good education and health care.

The future challenges of Finland include, for instance, maintaining welfare in an unstable and changing world. In the current period of globalization, the economic and political changes in the rest of the world will affect the situation in Finland to an even greater extent. Globalization means that societal development all around the world is more and more dependent on the situation and events in other parts of the world.

The population of Finland is ageing rapidly and growing slowly. One of the key questions is how to guarantee a good education and social and health services to everyone when the number of working-age people and taxpayers is decreasing while even more people need elderly services. We also need to find a way to provide jobs for everyone when e.g. the automation and digitalization of work and the spreading self-service culture are reducing the number of jobs.

Finnish Culture: Calendar, Celebrations and Traditions

Many of the Finnish celebrations and traditions are based on religion. Some of the traditions have a Christian background, whereas others stem from the time when Finns practised nature worship. Today, many Finns see the traditions and celebrations above all as free time that can be spent with family, relatives or friends.

Finland has many flag days, which are marked in the calendar. They are special occasions when the Finnish flag is raised on flagpoles for an entire day. The calendar and the news will tell you what the occasion is and whether the day is also a national holiday with no work or school.

January

New Year (uusivuosi, 1 January)

New Year's Day on the first day of January is a holiday. Most people have the day off from work. New Year's Eve, marking the start of a new year, is celebrated the previous evening. It is customary to start the year by making light-hearted predictions for the upcoming year. Many also make New Year's resolutions, meaning that they promise to, for instance, exercise more or eat healthier in the upcoming year. At midnight on New Year, people go outside to shoot off fireworks.

Epiphany (loppiainen, 6 January)

The sixth day of January is Epiphany. It is a day of remembering the Magi, or Three Wise Men from the Bible, who came to greet baby Jesus. Epiphany marks the end of Christmastime. There are no special traditions related to Epiphany, but it is a day off from work and school for most people.

February

Winter holiday (talviloma)

In February, Finnish schools have what is known as a winter holiday (*talviloma*) or skiing holiday (*hiihtoloma*). Children have one week off from school. The so-called skiing holiday has been held in Finnish schools since the 1930s. The original purpose of the holiday was that children would get exercise and have an entire week to enjoy skiing. Nowadays, cross-country skiing is less common as a hobby, but many go downhill skiing, for example. The winter holiday takes place in different weeks in different parts of Finland, starting from mid-February.

Runeberg Day (Runebergin päivä, 5 February)

Runeberg Day is celebrated on the fifth day of February. It is a day of celebrating the national poet of Finland, Johan Ludvig Runeberg, who wrote the lyrics to the Finnish national anthem, Our Land, or “Maamme” in Finnish. He also had a major influence on Finnish literature and culture. On Runeberg Day, it is customary to eat pastries known as Runeberg torte (*runebergintorttu*), originally created by the poet's wife, author Fredrika Runeberg.

Valentine's Day (ystävänäpäivä, 14 February)

Valentine's Day was originally an international holiday known as Saint Valentine's Day, a celebration of romantic love. In Finland, Valentine's Day has been celebrated since the 1980s and, as its Finnish name *ystävänäpäivä* (literally “Friend's Day”) implies, it is a day of celebrating friendship. People send postcards and messages to their friends or give them small gifts.

Shrovetide (laskiainen)

February is also the time of celebrating Shrovetide. The Finnish word *laskiainen* originally referred to settling down to a time of fasting, or Lent, which begins seven weeks before Easter. Today, very few people in Finland fast before Easter, but Shrovetide is celebrated by sliding downhill on a plastic toboggan (*pulkka*) with the whole family and eating pea soup and Shrove buns (*laskiaispulla*). A Shrove bun is a sweet bun filled with cream and jam or almond paste, and it was originally a Swedish pastry. People began to eat Shrove buns in Finland in the 1950s. Shrovetide is celebrated in Finland on two separate days, on Shrove Sunday (*laskiaissunnuntai*) and on the following Tuesday, Shrove Tuesday (*laskiaistiistai*).

March and April

International Women's Day (kansainvälinen naistenpäivä, 8 March)

International Women's Day is held on the eighth day of March. On that day, many organizations and other parties in society organize discussions and other events dealing with the status of women in the Finnish society and around the world. In Finland, Women's Day is a regular working day.

Minna Canth Day (Minna Canthin päivä, 19 March)

Minna Canth Day, which is also the Day of Equality, is celebrated in March. Minna Canth was a Finnish author and social activist. She advanced the status of women in Finland by e.g. working on behalf of improving girls' opportunities to get an education.

Easter (pääsiäinen)

Easter is celebrated in March or April. It is the most important Christian holiday along with Christmas. Easter commemorates the death and resurrection of Jesus. Easter is an important church festival especially for members of the Orthodox Church in Finland. The period of fasting ends on Easter, and the tradition of having a feast at the end of the fast is still common in Finland. Easter foods in Finland include roast mutton and dyed boiled eggs as well as the desserts *mämmi*, a kind of pudding made from rye flour and malt, and *pasha*, a sweet custard made from quark.

Before Christianity and Easter, Finns would celebrate the beginning of spring. The Easter celebration is similar to this even today. On Easter, homes are decorated with narcissuses, Easter grass (*rairuoho*) and birch and willow twigs. They are all symbols marking the end of winter and the arrival of spring. Easter grass is fresh grass that is grown from seed on small dishes. Yellow Easter chick decorations are placed in the grass.

Children have the day off from school on Good Friday, which is before Easter Sunday, and on Easter Monday, which comes after Easter Sunday. These days are also days off from work.

A week before Easter Sunday, on Palm Sunday, young children dress up as Easter witches and go from door to door in the neighbourhood, wishing everyone a happy Easter and good luck for the upcoming year. Good luck is wished as part of a tradition known as *virpominen*, where children give the neighbours willow twigs decorated with colourful feathers. In return, the children hope to receive a chocolate egg or candy.

May

May Day (vappu, 30 April and 1 May)

The last day of April is May Day Eve and the first day of May is May Day. May Day is a carnival-style festival celebrating workers, secondary school graduates (*ylioppilas*) and the arrival of spring, and 1 May is also a day off from school and work. May Day celebrations last for two days and begin on May Day Eve, 30 April.

Some people gather together on workers' May Day marches, which are demonstrations on behalf of labour rights. Many go to city parks for a picnic. May Day customs include drinking the May Day drink *sima*, a low-alcohol mead, eating May Day pastries, such as funnel cakes (*tippaleipä*) and doughnuts (*munkki*), and celebrating spring and the day off. May Day is also known for the May Day markets, where balloons, May Day masks and other carnival accessories are sold. Many want to dress up in costumes, and secondary school graduates wear their student caps.

Ascension Day (helatorstai) and Pentecost (helluntai)

The day commemorating the Ascension of Jesus into heaven takes place 40 days after Easter in May. According to the Christian tradition, this is when Jesus left the earth to go to heaven. Ascension Day in Finland is a holiday and a day off. People have the day off from work and school. Pentecost is celebrated ten days after Ascension Day. It is also a Christian festival, commemorating the founding of the early Christian Church.

Mother's Day

Mother's Day is celebrated on the second Sunday of May. It is a day of celebrating mothers and grandmothers with gifts, flowers and a Mother's Day lunch. The President of the Republic awards medals to distinguished mothers on Mother's Day.

June

School summer holiday (kesäloma)

The summer holiday of Finnish schoolchildren starts in the beginning of June. The end of the school year is celebrated by having a school spring party (*kevätjuhla*) where children's parents are also invited. "Suvivirsi" (Summer Hymn), a song about the arrival of spring, is often sung at spring parties. The school summer holiday continues until mid-August, so it is about ten weeks long.

Midsummer (juhannus)

Midsummer is celebrated near the end of June. It is a celebration of the height of summer in Finland. It is often spent at a summer cottage close to nature with friends or family. Since so many Finns want to spend Midsummer in the countryside, cities become quiet during this time of year.

Midsummer is celebrated on two days. Midsummer Eve (*juhannusaatto*) is on Friday and it is a day off from work. Midsummer Day (*juhannuspäivä*) is on Saturday. Midsummer traditions include going to the sauna, swimming in the sea or a lake, preparing food outside and enjoying the bright summer night.

Nights in June are bright in Finland: the sun sets late at night and rises in the early hours of the morning, so it is light almost all the time. In Lapland, to the north of the Arctic Circle, the sun does not set at all in the middle of the summer. In the Christian calendar, Midsummer is the birthday of St John the Baptist, but the festival is much older than Christianity. It was originally a celebration of midsummer and light and was held on the longest day of the year.

The Midsummer celebrations involve a *kokko*, a large bonfire on the shore or on a cliff. Burning bonfires is an old tradition, originally related to warding off evil. On Midsummer, small birch trees are placed on both sides of the doorway of a house. It is also customary to perform various playful Midsummer magic rituals, which were used in the olden times to guarantee a good harvest and to find out who you would marry and when.

July and August

Summer holiday from work

The most common summer holiday month among working people in Finland is July. The summer holiday typically lasts for 4–5 weeks. Finns usually spend the holiday at their summer cottage or travel in Finland or abroad. The school summer holiday ends when school starts in mid-August.

September and October

Autumn holiday (syysloma)

There are no special, important festivals in September. The school autumn holiday takes place in the middle of October. It lasts from a few days to a week, depending on the school. Children usually spend the autumn holiday at home or travel with their family.

Halloween

Halloween is celebrated at the end of October. It is a fairly new festival in Finland. Halloween is originally an Irish-American festival, and some children in Finland also dress up in costume and go from door to door asking for candy. Schools also organize Halloween parties for children. Some people put decorated pumpkins with a candle inside them on the windowsill or by the door.

November

All Saints' Day (pyhäinpäivä)

Celebrated in the beginning of November, All Saints' Day is a kind of Finnish version of Halloween. All Saints' Day is, however, a Christian festival when deceased relatives or friends are remembered. Many Finns light candles on the graves of deceased relatives on this day.

Father's Day (isänpäivä)

Father's Day is celebrated on the second Sunday of November. It is similar to Mother's Day in the spring. Fathers are traditionally given flowers and gifts and fathers and grandfathers are visited.

December

Finland's Independence Day (itsenäisyyspäivä, 6 December)

Finland's Independence Day takes place on the sixth day of December. It is a calm, solemn occasion. Finland turned 100 years in 2017. The Presidential Palace hosts a large Independence Day reception, which is broadcast on television. Many enjoy seeing who has been invited to the reception this year, who the invited guests come with and how they are dressed.

Christmas party (pikkujoulut)

In December, many schools, workplaces, student communities and associations organize Christmas parties. Since Christmas in Finland is spent mainly with your immediate family, Christmas parties allow people to celebrate the upcoming Christmas with co-workers, schoolmates and friends from hobby groups.

Christmas parties are casual and non-formal in nature. They are the first occasions of the year where Christmas foods are served, especially rice porridge (*riisipuuro*) and mulled wine (*glögi*). In adults' Christmas parties, guests wear formal clothes, eat well and often drink alcohol. In children's parties at school or a hobby, children eat treats and give out Christmas party gifts. Everyone brings a small gift with them and receives one small gift to take home.

School Christmas party (joulujuhla) and Christmas holiday (joululoma)

The school Christmas holiday begins a few days before Christmas. Schools first throw a Christmas party where children sing and perform. Children receive their Christmas reports for the school term and get to spend a Christmas holiday of about two weeks. This also marks the end of the school's autumn term. The spring term begins after the holiday.

Christmas (joulu) in Finland

In Finland, Christmas Eve (*jouluaatto*) on 24 December is the most important festive day of Christmas. Family members and relatives usually spend the festival together at home with a Christmas tree and Santa Claus (*joulupukki*) bringing Christmas presents for everyone.

Finnish Christmas foods have drawn a lot of inspiration from Swedish Christmas foods. Christmas tables have a baked ham, which is enjoyed with various oven-baked casseroles, such as swede casserole (*lanttulaatikko*) and potato casserole (*perunalaatikko*). A lot of fish is also eaten at Christmas. The desserts include rice porridge, gingerbread cookies and Christmas tarts (*joulutorttu*). During Christmastime, many Finns visit the graves of their deceased relatives to light candles. Some Finns also attend a Christmas service at church.

Christmas Eve is followed by two holidays, which are days off from work: Christmas Day (*joulupäivä*) on 25 December and Boxing Day (*tapaninpäivä*) on 26 December. They are spent

similarly to Christmas Eve, meaning that people spend time with family, relatives or friends and eat Christmas foods.

New Festivals in the Calendar

Other festivals originally introduced by immigrants are also celebrated in present-day Finland, at least in the largest cities. These include, for example, Chinese New Year, Persian or Kurdish New Year Nowruz and the Muslim month of fasting, Ramadan. During Ramadan, Muslims are not allowed to eat or drink during the daytime before sunset. Ramadan ends with the great Eid festival when people get together with friends and relatives to enjoy a feast.

Other Finnish Celebrations

Over the course of a person's life, there are also other important celebrations that are not marked in the calendar and that relatives, family and friends celebrate together.

Christening (ristiäiset) and naming ceremony (nimijuhlat or nimiäiset)

Just under 70 percent of Finnish children are baptised into the Evangelical Lutheran Church. During the baptism, or christening, the child is given a name and becomes a member of the Church.

If a child's parents are not members of the Church, they may arrange a naming ceremony similar to a christening party and invite relatives and family members to celebrate the new family. A christening or naming ceremony can be held at home or in a church or other formal venue, and close relatives and friends are invited to attend.

Two godparents (*kummi*) from among friends or family are named for the child. A godparent was originally meant to act as a kind of spiritual parent for the child and was responsible for the child's Christian upbringing. Nowadays, godchildren are more commonly thought of as special and important people in a godparent's life whose growth the godparent can observe.

Confirmation (rippijuhla, konfirmaatio) and Prometheus party (Prometheus-juhla)

In Finland, children are confirmed in the year that they turn 15. Confirmation is a ceremony that takes place in church where the Christianity and Church membership of a young person is confirmed. Confirmation is preceded by confirmation classes (*rippikoulu*) that include religious instruction and are nowadays usually organized in the form of a summer camp. Many adolescents attend confirmation camp and are confirmed, because the camps are fun, because parents expect young people to attend the confirmation classes and because confirmed children are thrown a party at home where they are given gifts.

Some of the adolescents who do not belong to any religious group go to a Prometheus camp at the same age. It is a non-religious and non-political coming-of-age camp. The purpose of the camp is to encourage adolescents to develop their personal view of life. The camp is followed by a party similar to a confirmation party where the adolescent receives gifts at home.

Graduation party (ylioppilasjuhla) and vocational school graduation (ammattikoulun päättäjäiset)

Once a young person has finished general upper secondary school (*lukio*) and has passed the matriculation examination (*ylioppilaskoe*), he or she will receive a general upper secondary education certificate (*lukion päättötodistus*) and a certificate of matriculation (*ylioppilastodistus*). The certificate allows him or her to apply to study at a university or another higher education institution. Upper secondary school graduation is celebrated both at the school and in the graduate's home. At the school, the graduate receives the certificate and a student's cap. Coffee is served and gifts are

given at home. The guests include relatives and friends. Those graduating from vocational school with a vocational degree also throw a similar celebration.

Wedding (häät)

About half of the Finnish couples who get married are married in church and the other half at a local register office (*maistraatti*). Relatives and friends are typically present during the marriage ceremony. Many organize a wedding reception afterwards, where guests eat, dance and celebrate the bridal couple with various forms of entertainment. The programme often includes speeches, games and performances. Gifts are given to the bridal couple. Weddings are private functions and you may only attend if you have received an invitation. Since weddings often involve serving food and drinks in a restaurant or other formal venue, organizing a wedding can be extremely expensive. Due to this, it is usually not customary to invite everyone you know to a wedding reception. Many couples go on honeymoon after their wedding.

Birthdays (syntymäpäivät)

Especially children's birthdays are celebrated in Finland. Children may invite their friends to a party or celebrate with their family, relatives and godparents. Birthday parties involve games, eating cake and giving presents. Adults may also throw a party in honour of their birthday, especially when they celebrate a round birthday, i.e. when they turn 50, 60 or 70 years old.

Funeral (hautajaiset)

When a person dies, the relatives hold a funeral in a church, a chapel or other formal venue. In addition to family and relatives, funerals are attended by the deceased person's friends and sometimes co-workers as well. After the church ceremony and the burial, the funeral guests gather in a memorial ceremony where they eat and drink coffee while remembering the deceased person. In Finland, a funeral may be held according to the traditions of the deceased person's religion. A funeral may also be non-religious if the deceased person did not belong to any religious community.

Finnish Cuisine and Drinking Culture

Cuisine

Traditional Finnish food tastes mild. Spices are not heavily used. Typical Finnish foods include meat and fish and boiled potatoes. Finnish cuisine is traditionally divided into eastern and western cuisine. The cuisine in western Finland has more similarities with Sweden, whereas the eastern Finland cuisine is similar to Russia.

It is these eastern, Russian foods and cooking techniques that set the Finnish cuisine apart from the other Nordic countries. Common dishes with the Swedes include, for instance, pea soup (*hernekeitto*), oven pancake (*pannukakku*), meatballs (*lihapullat*) and Shrove buns (*laskiaispullat*). Eastern influences in Finnish cuisine can be seen especially in the use of mushrooms and in Easter dishes as well as in Karelian hot pot or stew (*karjalanpaisti*) and Karelian pasties or pies (*karjalanpiirakat*).

The foods served in Finland vary depending on the season. Especially in the old days, the season of the year and the weather determined what foods were available. Vegetables are more expensive in the winter than in the summer, because in the winter, they are imported to Finland from abroad.

An important part of Finnish cuisine are wild game, wild berries and other gifts of nature, such as fish and mushrooms. Wild game, such as moose and birds, are hunted by hunting parties. Hunting requires a permit in Finland. People pick berries and mushrooms in the summer and autumn.

Change in the Finnish Diet

The eating habits of Finns have changed greatly in the last 40 years. Influences from other countries and continents have gradually made their way to Finnish kitchens.

Nowadays, rice and pasta are commonly eaten in addition to potatoes. Many Finns often eat out in restaurants and regularly eat pizza or hamburgers or Chinese, Thai, Japanese or Middle Eastern foods. There are many vegetarians especially among the younger generations of Finns. Also, many Finns follow special diets due to allergies or different lifestyle choices.

Many Finns also consider it important to buy and eat organically or locally produced food. This way, you know where the food is coming from and that it has been produced according to the principles of sustainable development, meaning that the production is as environmentally friendly as possible and preserves natural resources.

People want to know where and how the food that they buy has been produced, because they want to eat healthy. It is also important to them that chicken, cows, pigs and other farmed animals are treated and raised well, while taking the environment into account.

Drinking Culture

Water, milk or sometimes *piimä* (buttermilk) is consumed with meals. *Piimä* is a type of soured milk. Finns drink the most coffee per person in the world. Coffee is drunk in the mornings, during the day and in the evenings, at work and at home, on formal and informal occasions, in cafés and on, for instance, nature hikes.

Alcoholic beverages have been produced and consumed in Finland for a long time. The Finnish climate is too cold for winegrowing, but potatoes and grains grow well. They are used to make strong liquor. Finns also enjoy drinking beer and wine.

Some of the people who drink alcohol in Finland are heavy drinkers. Both men and women drink alcohol. Unlike in many other cultures, being drunk in Finland is not considered disgraceful. Many Finns feel that they are more outgoing and relaxed when they are drunk.

However, alcohol causes many severe health and social problems and deaths every year. Alcohol consumption has decreased in Finland in recent years. Especially young people drink a lot less alcohol today than they did back in the 1980s and 1990s, for example.

Discussion Questions

1. What types of minorities are there in Finland?
2. What links do you see in the history of Finland and your country of departure?
3. What factors have contributed to Finland developing into an equal and stable society?
4. What factors have influenced the birth of Finnish customs and rules of behaviour and the formation of culture?
5. What similarities do you see in the celebrations and festival traditions of Finland and your country of departure?

2. FINNISH SOCIETY

Sections of Finnish Society

Development of the Welfare State in Finland

Administrative System of Finland

Finnish Business and Economic System

The Constitution of Finland states that the state guarantees its citizens sufficient basic health care services and basic security related to necessary subsistence regardless of wealth or place of residence. These services are financed by taxes and their organization and provision is mainly the responsibility of municipalities. In addition to municipalities, private companies and civic organizations may also provide these services.

The welfare state has been built gradually, and systems have also changed over the decades. A welfare system is never complete. It is constantly developed as the society and its members change. The state provides social and health services with the aim of preventing social exclusion and promoting social harmony. The services also support the ability of Finns to cope and function independently in life.

Sections of Finnish Society

The Finnish society can be divided into three sections known as sectors. These sectors represent relatively fixed societal structures and are divided according to the general concept of each sector, how its finances are organized and who operate in the sector.

Private Sector

The private sector means the section of society that is based on private ownership and business activities. It includes all companies from small, private enterprises to large, multinational firms. The purpose of a company is to yield a profit to its owners. It is essential that companies take the needs of paying customers into account and respond to a demand for their products. Companies pay taxes to the state. Government tax revenue is used to finance the services of the second, or the public sector.

Public Sector

The public sector refers to the state and the municipality. The state and the municipality provide services to citizens. Their purpose is not to yield a profit. The services are financed by taxes. The public sector is an important employer in Finland. Those working in, for instance, municipal hospitals, day-care centres, schools and social services centres as well as state universities and universities of applied sciences are employed by the state or a municipality. The public sector produces basic civic services to Finns, such as education, social security and health care, day care and elderly care as well as exercise and cultural services.

Duties are divided between the state and municipalities in Finland so that the municipalities are responsible for basic services, consisting of social services and health care, education and the environment and technical infrastructure. The Social Insurance Institution of Finland, Kela, is a government agency in charge of e.g. the national pensions, child benefits, basic unemployment security, sickness and parental allowance and basic social assistance paid to citizens as well as the rehabilitation of citizens.

Civic Society and its Activities

The third sector, known as the civic society or the voluntary sector, is the sector of society in between the private and the public sector. Many organizations do social or ideological work, meaning that they have social and civic goals. Civic organizations, nature conservation organizations, political parties, sports clubs and charity organizations are all part of the third sector. Some of the people working in the third sector are paid for their work, but many do voluntary work in an organization or association. These organizations do not aim to make a profit.

Similarly to the other Nordic countries, Finland has a widespread tradition of civic activity, and organizational activities are a key element of the Finnish civic society. Civic activity allows people to take part in developing their society and be active in society. Civic activity involves a communal dimension, because it is done for the greater common good. Finland has roughly 100 000 working organizations. Many Finns are members of several organizations. These organizations provide activities and services both for their members and for other citizens.

Services Provided by Organizations, Associations and Businesses

It is characteristic of the Finnish society that municipalities and the state organize social and health services and leisure services to promote the well-being of citizens. Nowadays, businesses and organizations are also involved in providing welfare services. Some of the services are produced in cooperation with the public sector, i.e. a municipality or the state.

The service production of the public sector was decreased as a result of the 1990s economic depression, allowing associations, organizations and businesses to take over some of the welfare services previously provided by the public sector. Their share of the services has, in fact, increased steadily. Organizations and associations provide exercise and cultural services as well as leisure activities in particular, but also education and social and health services. Businesses also provide social and health services, such as occupational health care.

Today, the public sector puts the services produced for municipalities out to tender, meaning that it organizes a bidding competition over who will provide the services required by each municipality most effectively and inexpensively. Many organizations enter these bidding competitions and also have their own, professional service production. Associations, organizations and businesses add to the services of the public sector, but they also increasingly replace them either independently or in cooperation with each other.

Development of the Welfare State in Finland

As late as the end of the 19th century, the poor and sick in Finland were mainly cared for by their own families, the village community, private, wealthy benefactors and, above all, the Church. Responsibility for the poor living in rural areas eventually started to shift from the Church to municipalities. The working poor would receive monetary aid only if they also agreed to work for a farm owner, a municipality or a parish.

With industrialization in the late 19th century, the miserable conditions and poverty among industrial workers became a matter of public debate. At that time, industrial workers received a meagre social security mainly from their employers and gradually civic organizations as well. Factory towns provided housing, day-care facilities and elderly care for workers. These services were managed and owned by the factory owners. A factory affected all aspects of its workers' lives and bound them tightly to their employer.

Role of Organizations as Protectors of Welfare

The first social and health organizations were established in Finland in the late 19th century. They were established to help people who were struggling in the most difficult circumstances. The oldest Finnish social and health organizations include the Finnish Red Cross, The Finnish Association for Mental Health and The Organisation for Respiratory Health. Organizations not only helped people living in difficult conditions, but also served as interest organizations. In other words, they tried to make policy-makers aware of the needs of people and to promote their members' interests in other ways as well.

The civic activity done in organizations was important for the development of democracy in Finland. The first major Finnish popular movements were the temperance movement, the exercise and sports movement, the labour and trade union movements and youth associations. Popular movements and civic activity also helped to unite the Finns as a nation. They educated Finnish people, promoted the national spirit and taught people to deal with matters of common interest. All this was essential when Finland became an independent state in 1917.

Organizations born in the 1920s and 1930s, such as the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare and the Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired, first supported people during the difficult economic depression. After World War II, these organizations participated widely in the reconstruction of society. After the war, more organizations were established, including the Finnish Association of People with Physical Disabilities, the Central Union for Child Welfare and the Cancer Society of Finland.

First Steps of Social Security

The welfare of Finns is based on a wide range of services related to social security and subsistence. The social security system, which means the structure formed by social benefits, i.e. the various forms of aid in the domain of social security, was developed in Finland later than in the other Nordic countries. In 1895, a law concerning occupational accident insurance was enacted. This was the first step forward in the development of Finnish social insurance, but it was also the only form of social insurance in Finland for a long time. The law stated that an employee must be compensated for an accident at work or an occupational disease resulting from work. Finnish social insurance at the time was backward on an international scale, but in the quarrelsome political atmosphere of the time, developing old-age, disability or health insurance was extremely difficult.

Although the Ministry of Social Affairs, which is responsible for social security, was established around the same time as Finland become independent in 1917, it was not until the late 1930s that actual extensive public support systems were set up in Finland. The first National Pensions Act was passed in 1937. The Act provided insured people a national pension, meaning financial aid in case of old age or disability resulting in the inability to work. Kela, the Social Insurance Institution of Finland, was established in the same year. Its task was to pay national pension.

Purpose of Building a Welfare State

The original purpose of building a welfare state in Finland was to reduce poverty and to ensure daily subsistence to all Finns. It was believed that this would stabilize society and its development and diminish support for all kinds of extremist movements. It was also thought that if the income disparities between people would be narrowed in a welfare state, people would be more equal. This would make the Finnish people more united and everyone would be committed to working on behalf of national development. Different sections of the public, such as the rich and the poor and those with opposing political views, would find it easier to live side by side in harmony.

Many Reforms After the War

World War II put a stop to the development of the subsidy systems, but work continued immediately after the war. The long post-war period of economic growth and reconstruction contributed to the development of the welfare state. As a result of the war, there were many orphans, widows and disabled war veterans in Finland who were unable to make a living for themselves. The law needed to be reformed so that these people, among others, would receive basic services. Significant reforms supporting the well-being of families, such as child benefits and home establishment loans, were implemented in the 1940s.

The payment of child benefits started in 1948. A child benefit is a monthly sum paid for each child in a family of children. The family receives the benefit until the child turns 17. The maternity grant (*äitiysavustus*) and the network of maternity and child health clinics (*neuvola*) were also developed in the 1940s. The maternity grant is a package that contains baby care products. Every expecting mother in Finland receives the package. Child health clinics provide health care services for under school-aged children.

Kela also started to pay the first disability and old-age pensions in the 1940s. Once the war reparations to the Soviet Union had been paid in the 1950s, the national pension system, among others, was reformed so that pension insurance premiums were collected as part of the taxes paid to the state. Before then, everyone had had their own personal savings premium account at Kela. A certain share of your salary was paid to the account, and the payments and interest accrued on the account increased the amount of pension.

Finland Becomes a Nordic Welfare State

Finland gradually became a Nordic welfare state in the 1960s and 1970s. Sweden was a model example of a welfare state, and Finland took a lot of inspiration from Sweden. At this time, the state started to assume more responsibility for the welfare of its citizens. Citizens received more income transfers from the state, such as maternity allowance and daily sickness allowance, in addition to reimbursements for pharmaceutical expenses and medical fees. Education and health care were invested in by building new hospitals and schools and by expanding medical training.

Development of Pension Systems

The employee pension scheme was launched in the 1960s. According to the scheme, a person accumulates pension based on his or her years in employment. This pension is larger than the national pension alone. The national pension is financial aid that is paid to all the pensioners who receive very little or no employee pension at all. The Primary Health Care Act entered into force in the early 1970s. According to the Act, all Finns receive free health care at municipal health centres.

Equal Education System and Financial Aid for Students

The welfare state was developed to promote equality. In the 1970s, all children regardless of their social class began to attend free comprehensive school. Those studying in universities, higher education institutions or upper secondary schools began to receive financial aid (*opintotuki*), meaning monetary support to cover the costs of living during studies. Due to the financial aid system, the wealth of a young adult's childhood family was no longer as significant when deciding whether it was economically feasible to get an education and a profession.

Children's Day Care and Working Women

Municipal day care is provided to children in Finland to make it easier for mothers to go to work. This means that municipalities arrange care for 0–6-year-old children in day-care centres or in the

homes of private caretakers. The day-care fee charged from parents is staggered according to the parents' income. A child may be in day care for about 8 hours per day on weekdays.

Economic Growth Enabled the Expansion of Welfare Services

Economic growth was rapid in the 1980s, and the good years made it possible to develop and further expand many social security benefits.

Assistance to families, services for the disabled and income support were developed. In the 1980s, Finland finally reached the standard of living of its neighbouring country Sweden. The development of Finland is often compared to Sweden, because the two countries share a common history and have a similar societal and population structure. The social expenditure of the state of Finland increased ninefold between the years 1950 and 1980, but the state could still afford this.

Early 1990s Depression Cut Subsidies and Divided Finland

Economic growth halted and unemployment rates increased quickly in the early 1990s. Housing prices and loan interest rates rose unbearably high until the housing market collapsed. Many people became deeply indebted, because they had taken out expensive loans for a home or for consumption. State and municipal expenditure increased, and tax revenue decreased.

The national economy was in a difficult situation as there was not enough money to pay for the services prescribed by law. Finland increased its national debt substantially in order to cope. The benefits provided by the state to its citizens still had to be cut, social security was weakened and taxes increased.

As a result of the economic depression, the gaps between Finns in terms of living standards began to widen once more. The depression did not have a major impact on some Finns, but many individuals and families experienced long-term unemployment, social exclusion, bankruptcies and loss of property.

From a Welfare State into a Welfare Society

The depression ended and the Finnish economy recovered by the mid-1990s. However, the cuts made during the depression in state-provided services and benefits remained in force. Services were still developed, but the underlying idea was that citizens had to take more responsibility for their personal welfare than before. They had to be more active and use their initiative to find a job, for instance. For example, many people took out private, voluntary pension insurance policies to guarantee an adequate subsistence when they retire. They no longer relied on public services alone.

People started to talk about a welfare society instead of a welfare state. This meant that the responsibility for welfare fell more on individuals. The state and municipalities also worked alongside other bodies, such as civic organizations, communities and businesses. They contributed to upholding the social security in society, i.e. the health and social services of citizens.

Finland joined the European Union in 1995, which also had an impact on the social and health policy of the country, since the national social and health policy had to be adjusted to match the EU policy.

The services provided by society were reduced, cut and enhanced. This was considered necessary when Finland began to internationalize more strongly and participate in the global economy.

The Welfare Society is Further Developed

Finland has had to plan services and benefits while taking into account not only increased internationalization, but also population ageing and the resulting increase in general government

expenditure. Various reforms have been adopted to try to e.g. make sure that people could continue to work longer before they retire.

The adequacy of social security funding and the efficiency of social and health services have been improved through various reforms in other ways as well. In addition, when promoting health and well-being, the focus has been shifted from dealing with problems to preventing them in advance. As a result, Finland has a comprehensive preventive health care system, including child health clinics and various age-group examinations.

Administrative System of Finland

The administrative system of Finland is divided into the state, regional and local administration. The highest organs of government are the Parliament (*eduskunta*), the President (*presidentti*) and the Government (*valtioneuvosto*) or Cabinet (*hallitus*). In Finland, power is divided into legislative, executive and judicial power. Governmental legislative power is exercised by the Parliament, executive power by the President and Government and judicial power by independent courts. Finland complies with both international agreements and EU legislation as well as its own, national legislation.

Parliament

The Parliament of Finland has 200 Members of Parliament, MPs (*kansanedustaja*). The Parliament is responsible for enacting all legislation in Finland. It also approves the Budget, ratifies international treaties concerning Finland and oversees the Government and the ministries.

Most often it is the Government that proposes a new law, but an individual MP may also introduce legislative proposals. The Parliament discusses the proposed law and, if it passes the law, the President approves the law with his or her signature. Newspapers and other media describe the new law and its purpose and content. This allows citizens to obtain the latest knowledge on laws, which are constantly changing.

The Parliament also exercises economic power by deciding how the taxes collected by the state will be used. The Budget is negotiated every year, and the Parliament oversees its implementation.

The Parliament is also responsible for keeping up to date with what is decided in the European Union and to state the position of Finland in relation to matters discussed in the EU. The laws of Finland and EU regulations must not contradict each other. When laws are enacted, EU regulations and their content must also be taken into consideration in Finland.

Government

The Government consists of the Prime Minister (*pääministeri*) and other ministers. Finland has 12–14 ministers at a time, such as the Minister of the Interior (*sisäministeri*), the Minister for Foreign Affairs (*ulkoministeri*), the Minister of Education and Culture (*opetus- ja kulttuuriministeri*) and the Minister of Justice (*oikeusministeri*).

The Parliament elects a Prime Minister through voting, and the President of the Republic then appoints him or her to the task. Usually the leader of the political party that has received the most votes in the election becomes the Prime Minister. Other ministers are appointed according to the proposal of the Prime Minister. A Government Programme is drafted by the new ministers. It describes the political goals and objectives of the Government during its term of office.

The Government drafts and implements the decisions made by the Parliament. Ministries prepare the matters on which the Government will decide. Ministers govern the work of ministry officials. The

ministries have several agencies and public bodies operating under them. For example, the Finnish Immigration Service (*Maahanmuuttovirasto*) is an agency operating under the Ministry of the Interior, and the employment and business services, known as TE services (*TE-palvelut*), operate under the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment.

The Government is accountable to the Parliament, meaning that the ministers must enjoy the confidence of the Parliament. This means that the Parliament needs to agree that the Government or an individual minister manages the job well and reliably. If there is no confidence, the entire Government may fall or collapse. Usually only the Prime Minister or an individual party leaves the Government, and it continues otherwise unchanged until the next election. If the entire Government falls, a new parliamentary election may need to be organized ahead of schedule.

President

The Finnish law used to grant more power to the President. Since the 1980s, presidential powers have been reduced in Finland and the President's role has been changed. Today, the Prime Minister and the Parliament exercise the most power in Finland. Finland has therefore adopted a similar parliamentary system to many Western European countries where the Prime Minister is the most prominent leader of the country. The role of the President of Finland is now more representational than before.

In Finland, the President's functions include approving the laws enacted by Parliament, appointing the highest officials and leading the foreign policy of Finland in conjunction with the Government. The President is also the commander-in-chief of the Finnish army.

Local and Regional Administration in Finland

In Finland, national policy-making in matters concerning the entire country is done by the President, the Parliament and the Government. One of the most important duties of the state administration is to maintain social harmony and security. This includes, for instance, managing international relations and maintaining an army, police force, border guard and rescue services. The organization of central government is also one of the duties of the state administration. The national central government consists of the ministries and the agencies operating under them.

The ministries, such as the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of the Interior, prepare the matters to be decided by the Government. Each ministry prepares matters within its own sphere of operations. Ministries also direct and oversee the agencies operating under them.

In addition, the state has regional administration, which manages regional matters relating to, for instance, environmental protection, the availability of services, internal security, the labour market, the integration of immigrants and the functioning of transport. The local state administration consists of the police, local register offices, Employment and Economic Development Offices (TE Offices), tax offices and customs. Local register offices manage population bookkeeping. TE Offices pass on vacant jobs and organize job-seeking services for unemployed people.

In addition to regional state administration, Finland has local administration managed independently by municipalities as well as regional administration belonging to regional councils. Both of these administrative levels involve officials and elected politicians in municipal councils or regional assemblies.

Municipalities

Municipal administration is what influences the everyday life of citizens the most. Finland is divided into about 300 municipalities (*kunta*), each self-governing in its area. This means that the municipalities can decide on their own matters and finances. Municipalities also have the right to impose taxes on their residents. In addition to the collected municipal tax, each municipality also receives funding from the state to provide services.

Every person living in Finland is a resident of a municipality. It is the duty of municipalities to provide residents statutory basic services, namely, social and health care, instruction and education and services related to the environment and infrastructure. Each municipality is therefore responsible for, for example, schools, preschools, libraries, exercise services and home help for the elderly. The municipality also plans streets, housing and parks and looks after the water supply, electricity and public sanitation.

Decisions in a municipality are made democratically by a municipal council (*kunnanvaltuusto*), which represents the residents of the municipality. The members of a municipal council are elected in municipal elections. The council then elects members for the municipal executive (*kunnanhallitus*) whose duty is to prepare and execute council decisions.

The municipal council also appoints the committees that decide on the organization of public services in the municipality. These committees include, for example, the education and culture committee, dealing with education and cultural matters, and the social welfare and health committee, which is responsible for social and health services. The committees are responsible for preparing matters for consideration in the municipal council. Their members are either municipal councillors or other local residents appointed by political parties.

Regions

In addition to municipalities, Finland is divided into administrative territories known as regions (*maakunta*). There are currently 18 regions in Finland. Each region has multiple municipalities. The administration of the regions is managed by regional organizations known as regional councils (*maakunnan liitto*). Regional councils are joint municipal authorities formed by the municipalities in the region, i.e. every municipality must be a member of a regional council. Their decision-making is based on municipal democracy.

Regional councils have two statutory functions: regional development and land use planning. The councils therefore develop and oversee the interests of their region. In addition to the functions laid down by law, regional councils also promote regional business and travel as well as regional, national and international cooperation. They develop cultural activities and education and conduct studies concerning the region.

The highest decision-making body of a regional council is the regional assembly (*maakuntavaltuusto*). The assembly consists of the councillors of the municipalities. The councillors have been elected to the position and they represent different political parties. The practical work of the council is governed by the regional board (*maakuntahallitus*) whose members the regional assembly chooses from among its own councillors. The practical regional development and planning activities of a regional council are done by officials supervised by a Regional Mayor (*maakuntajohtaja*).

European Union and Finland

The European Union (EU) is a political and economic union of states aiming to establish common rules and improve trade and living conditions in Europe. The European Union is founded on the

values of a respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and a state ruled by law. EU member states are independent states. However, they agree to comply with the decisions and provisions made in the Union.

When Finland became a member of the EU, part of the political decision-making that used to be done in Finland was transferred to the European Union. EU membership has made it easier to engage in international cooperation with other states in many matters concerning Finland, such as trade.

Decision-making in the European Union is done not only by the European Parliament, whose members are elected in each member state, but also by the Council, which is the supreme authority of the EU. The Council essentially forms the government of the European Union. All the ministers of EU member states are part of the Council. Meetings are attended by the minister who is responsible for the domain that is being discussed. For example, when agricultural matters are discussed, the ministers of agriculture are present. The Council enacts laws together with the European Parliament.

Officials appointed by member states work in the European Commission. The Commission proposes legislation and drafts the EU budget. The Commission also executes the decisions made by the Council.

Finland has representatives in all the key decision-making bodies of the European Union. Finnish politicians are therefore involved in making joint decisions on developing Europe while simultaneously promoting matters that are important to Finns in the Union.

Finnish Business and Economic System

Industrialization took place later in Finland than in most other European countries.

The manufacture of war reparation products in the 1940s and 1950s and the subsequent extensive Eastern trade with the Soviet Union helped Finnish industry to develop rapidly. The largest branches of industry were the forest, wood and paper industry and the metal and engineering industry.

Once the change in the economy and industries had begun, it progressed faster than in many other European countries. Agriculture and forestry were enhanced and mechanized, and less labour was needed in the rural areas. People moved to cities to find jobs.

Within fifty years, employees moved from agriculture and forestry to jobs in the industry and eventually the service sector. Part of the workforce went directly from agricultural professions to services. The service sector grew faster than industry. This change is known as the structural change of Finnish society.

Service industries grew very rapidly after the war when services produced by the welfare society were vigorously developed. Today, just under three percent of Finns work in agriculture and forestry, about 70 percent in services and about 20 percent in industry.

Exports and Foreign Trade

Finland is heavily dependent on exports and trade. Its main exports are forestry products, chemical and metalworking products, metals, machinery and equipment as well as electrical and electronics products.

Information technology, or IT, is also an important industry for Finland. Especially mobile phones and the related software and technology were previously produced in Finland. Today, the IT industry provides jobs especially for those with a university degree in e.g. the server industry, the computer

game industry and software development. The main export destinations of Finland are Germany, Sweden, the United States, the Netherlands and Russia.

Economic System of Finland

The economic system of Finland is based on a free market economy. This means that Finland practises trade with foreign countries. Exports are an essential part of the economy of Finland. However, the economic system of Finland does not represent a pure capitalist market economy, but is a so-called mixed economy. This means that the public authority, i.e. the state, is involved in much of the service production and also supports the production of goods and services in various ways.

The state of Finland owns, for example, the railway network of Finland and various big industrial companies. Companies owned by the state are known as state-owned companies (*valtionyhtiö*). The state also has an alcohol retailing monopoly and a gambling monopoly in Finland. This means that the state owns the stores and business operations of Alko, which sells strong alcoholic beverages, as well as the Veikkaus betting agency, and no-one else is allowed to establish similar enterprises in Finland. However, mild alcoholic beverages are also sold in regular grocery stores and kiosks.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the three sectors of society?
2. How has the Finnish welfare society and its services developed over time?
3. Why do the state and municipalities in Finland provide social security and social services and health care to citizens?
4. Describe your own experiences of being active in organizations or associations.
5. Why has an active civic society been important for the development of democracy?
6. How must the administration of Finland take into consideration the decisions and directives of the European Union?
7. What is the tax revenue collected in Finland spent on?
8. Compare the tax system and service system of Finland with your previous experiences.
9. Compare Finland and your country of departure. Are the main industries or lines of business the same? What about the economic system? What differences and similarities are there?

3. MOVING TO FINLAND AND LIVING IN FINLAND

Residence Permits and Finnish Citizenship

Practical Matters when Moving to Finland

Basics of Living in Finland

Integration into Your New Home Country

Residence Permits and Finnish Citizenship

The permits that you need for immigrating to Finland depend on your country of departure. In Finland, immigration matters are determined by the Aliens Act (*ulkomaalaislaki*). It includes provisions concerning, for instance, applying for asylum, residence permits, family reunification and permits and practices related to work.

When Do You Need a Residence Permit?

Citizens of the other Nordic countries, i.e. Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland, do not need a residence permit when moving to Finland. Citizens of Nordic countries register their right of residence at a local register office if their stay in Finland lasts for more than six months. Citizens of Nordic countries may also work in Finland without a residence permit for an employed person. The local register office uses population registry information e.g. when organizing elections and in taxation, health care, judicial administration and the compilation of statistics.

Similarly, citizens of other EU member states do not need a residence permit when moving to Finland. An EU citizen may freely stay in Finland for three months. If an EU citizen stays in Finland for a longer time, the right of residence has to be registered. This can be done at the nearest office of the Finnish Immigration Service, Migri. Offices can be found in various places around Finland. An EU citizen may also work freely in Finland without any specific work permits.

If you are moving to Finland from outside the Nordic countries or the EU, you need to apply for a residence permit. The permit is applied for in advance from a Finnish mission in your country of departure. When you arrive in Finland, you must have the granted residence permit with you. This does not apply to asylum seekers who arrive in Finland without a residence permit. When you apply for asylum, Finland either grants or denies you a residence permit. Applicants must wait for this decision in Finland.

Grounds for a Residence Permit

A residence permit may be granted on the basis of family ties, studying, employment or humanitarian protection. Residence permits are granted by the Finnish Immigration Service. A residence permit often requires the applicant to have sufficient funds to support him or herself and his or her family in Finland. This secure means of support must be verified when applying for a permit. If you plan to work in Finland, you must prove that the work provides a sufficient income, meaning that the salary is high enough to support you. A refugee does not need to prove that he or she has secure means of support, unless he or she also wishes to bring family members to Finland.

When an asylum seeker arrives in Finland, he or she must immediately submit an application for asylum to the police or the Finnish Border Guard. After registration, the application is passed on to be processed by the Finnish Immigration Service. During the application process, the applicant may live in a reception centre (*vastaanottokeskus*) for refugees. If the applicant receives a positive

decision, he or she is granted a fixed-term residence permit in Finland. In such cases, the reception centre can help with the practicalities.

If a person living in Finland wants to bring a family member to Finland, the family member must apply for a residence permit to Finland. The family member applies for this residence permit from the nearest Finnish mission. A residence permit on the basis of family ties may be granted to the spouse, cohabiting partner or children under the age of 18 of a person living in Finland, or the parents of a child under the age of 18 living in Finland. Usually, the person already living in Finland must be able to support the family members moving to Finland, meaning that he or she must have a sufficient income.

The family member of an EU citizen does not need a residence permit in Finland. If the family member is also an EU citizen and will stay in Finland for more than 3 months, he or she must register his or her right of residence at the Finnish Immigration Service. If the family member is not an EU citizen, he or she must apply for a residence card for the family member of an EU citizen from the Finnish Immigration Service.

If the relative or friend of a foreigner living in Finland wants to visit Finland, he or she may need a visa, depending on the country of departure. A visa is applied for at the nearest Finnish mission, i.e. an embassy. In addition to a visa, the visitor must have a valid travel document, such as a passport. More information about visas can be found on the website of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Finland is part of the Schengen area in Europe. This means that visitors do not need a separate visa to come to Finland, if they already have a residence permit or a valid visa to another Schengen country.

Residence Permit Types

There are different types of residence permits. The permit may be fixed-term or permanent. The first residence permit is always issued for a fixed term, usually one year. There are two types of fixed-term permits, continuous (A) and temporary (B). A continuous permit is granted on the basis of, for instance, family ties, and a temporary permit on the basis of studying. After the first year, a continuous permit may be extended for up to four years at a time, and a temporary permit for one year at a time. You must apply for an extended permit while the previous permit is still valid.

You may receive a permanent residence permit (P) when you have lived in Finland for at least four years with an A permit and the requirements for granting the permit are still met. Committing a crime in Finland may have an effect on getting a residence permit.

Applying for Finnish Citizenship

Once you have lived in Finland for 4–7 years, you may apply for Finnish citizenship. In order to get Finnish citizenship, the applicant must be able to reliably establish his or her identity. He or she must usually also be able to demonstrate satisfactory skills in Finnish or Swedish. Language skills can be demonstrated by a language proficiency certificate in Finnish or Swedish. Language skills can also be demonstrated by completing a certification in Finland, i.e. graduating from comprehensive school, general upper secondary school or vocational school or completing university studies in Finnish or Swedish.

The citizenship application must also state that the applicant is not guilty of any crimes in Finland. The application must also include a statement confirming that the applicant is able to support him or herself here, meaning that he or she receives enough money from e.g. work or subsidies paid by society and that he or she has paid taxes on all the income. The citizenship application is submitted to the Finnish Immigration Service for processing.

A Finnish citizen has various rights and obligations in Finland. A citizen may not, for instance, be denied entry to Finland, be deported or be extradited to another country against his or her will. When abroad, a Finnish citizen will receive assistance from the embassies and consulates of Finland. Only Finnish citizens may be appointed to certain public offices, such as police and judicial posts.

A Finnish citizen may also vote in all the elections organized in Finland. The obligations of a Finnish citizen include national defence. This means that every Finnish citizen is obligated to take part in defending Finland or helping with its national defence. Conscription, or the obligation to take part in military training in the army or in non-military service, only applies to men.

Since Finland is a member of the European Union, Finnish citizens are also EU citizens who have the right to move and work freely in the EU area.

Practical Matters when Moving to Finland

When moving to Finland, you must first visit the local register office to submit a notification of move (*muuttoilmoitus*). The notification is submitted by filling in a form asking for the personal information of the people moving to Finland. Once the notification of move has been submitted, your mail will be immediately forwarded to the right address, your taxes will be paid to the right municipality and dealing with the authorities will be quicker.

Local register offices are state authorities who maintain the Population Information System of Finland, among other duties. This system is a register of people, containing the personal details and address information of everyone residing in Finland. Every time you move to a new home in Finland, you must submit a new notification of move to the local register office so that the information remains up to date.

At the same time, the local register office will also give you a Finnish personal identity code. The personal identity code is a numerical code that consists of a person's date of birth and an individual number. You may also apply for a personal identity code when applying for a residence permit. In Finland, you need a personal identity code when, for instance, buying a telephone subscription or opening a bank account or when verifying your identity at a bank or dealing with the authorities. Extensive, up-to-date information about Finland, moving to Finland and living in Finland can be found e.g. on the website www.infofinland.fi. Information is available on the website in twelve different languages.

Municipality of Residence and Right to Public Social and Health Services

When a person moves permanently to Finland, his or her municipality of residence (*kotikunta*) is registered. The municipality of residence is the municipality where the person lives and whose services he or she has the right to use. In Finland, the municipality provides its residents all the essential basic services, such as dental care, doctors, child day care, elderly services and schools.

Quota refugees arriving in Finland are assigned a municipality. Some of the asylum seekers who are granted a residence permit are also placed in a certain municipality. This means that the state and the municipality have agreed that the municipality in question will provide housing for the refugee, in addition to the essential social services and health care and services related to education and subsistence. The municipality helps the refugee in the early stages of the integration period, usually for the first 3–5 years. The municipality receives funding from the state for this purpose.

Those living in Finland may freely move from one locality to another for the sake of work, studies or family reasons, for example. However, if you have been placed in an assigned municipality, you should not usually move to another locality during your integration period. The agreement with the

municipality does not move with you, so you may not necessarily receive integration services that are as personal and extensive as before in your new place of residence. If you move from a smaller to a bigger city, the rent for accommodation is more expensive and it may be difficult to find a suitable home. The public services in bigger cities are also often busier.

Removal Goods

When you move to Finland, you do not usually have to pay duties or value-added tax for your removal goods, such as furniture. If you move to Finland from outside the EU, you have to declare your removal goods to the custom authorities. If you are bringing a car with you, you need to declare it to customs. The car must be registered in Finland and you must pay a car tax (*autovero*) on the vehicle. You cannot use the car in Finland before registering it and paying the tax. The car must also have a valid motor vehicle insurance (*liikennevakuutus*).

Driving Licence

You need a driving licence (*ajokortti*) to drive a car in Finland. You may get a driving licence once you have turned 18 and have passed a driving examination at a driving school. The examination includes theory lessons and practical driving lessons. The price of obtaining a driving licence is about 2 000 euros. If a person moving to Finland already has a driving licence issued in another country, he or she needs to contact Ajovarma to check whether the licence is also valid in Finland. Ajovarma handles driving examination matters in Finland. Driving licences obtained in other Nordic countries and in the EU or EEA are valid as they are in Finland.

Banking Services in Finland

In Finland, your salary and all your benefits, such as child benefits or housing allowance, are paid into a bank account. A newcomer therefore needs to open an account in a Finnish bank as soon as he or she has moved to Finland. You need a passport or some other proof of identity to open a bank account. Different banks offer different services and their prices also vary. It is a good idea to compare banks to see which one suits you best. Cash is used relatively rarely in Finnish stores. Many people use a debit card to pay for their shopping.

In Finland, you are also given online banking codes for your bank account. These codes allow you to pay bills and transfer money online from your bank account for free. The majority of Finns do their personal banking quickly and free of charge via their online bank.

The online banking codes are also important, because they can be used to verify your identity in many e-government services, i.e. public online services. Without online banking codes, it becomes harder and also more expensive to take care of various matters. However, it is often easier for a foreigner to open a bank account than to receive online banking codes.

Non-payment Record

If you do not pay your bills in full in Finland, you may get what is known as a non-payment record (*maksuhäiriömerkintä*). This record has many negative consequences. The bank will reclaim any credit cards that it has granted to you, and it will be difficult to obtain credit or take out a loan. You will need to pay advance payments whenever you buy a phone subscription or insurance. You cannot pay for purchases by instalments (part payment). It may also be difficult to rent a home, because landlords check their tenants' credit information beforehand. A non-payment record remains valid for 2–3 years, after which the record is removed if the overdue payments have been made.

Telephone Subscriptions

In Finland, mobile phones are used not only to make calls, but also to use the internet and various services. You can use a phone to e.g. buy a single ticket to travel by bus, pay for your purchases at a café or use an online bank. A mobile phone can also be used as a means of payment in many shops. A phone can be purchased in a department store, online or in the store of a telephone operator.

When you buy a mobile phone subscription, you will also get a Finnish phone number. To activate a subscription in Finland, you need a Finnish personal identity code and an address in Finland. You can either buy a pre-paid subscription, where you pay for your calls in advance, or a regular subscription. Pre-paid subscriptions are sold by telephone operators and in kiosks.

A customer must be able to prove that his or her credit information is in order before buying a regular telephone subscription. This means that the customer has paid his or her bills on time and has no non-payment records. If the customer cannot prove that his or her credit information is in order, he or she must pay a deposit of a few hundred euros for the subscription. If the person has just moved to Finland and the foreign credit history cannot be verified, the deposit must be paid. The deposit is refunded when the customer cancels the subscription. Another option is to first buy a pre-paid subscription where you do not need to pay a deposit.

Before making an international call, it is a good idea to check how much the call will cost. Various companies provide international dialling codes for making international calls. You should find out which codes allow you to call at the lowest rate. The price of a phone call depends on the country you call. You may also make free internet calls on a computer or a mobile phone using Skype, for example.

Internet Connection

In Finland, it is common that many things are done over the internet. The authorities and companies use electronic transactions, which are self-service in principle. Each customer must personally find the required information on the website of a company or authority, and there may not be a customer service number that you can call to ask for instructions.

If you want an internet connection at home, you need to sign a contract with an internet service provider. There are many service providers, so it is a good idea to compare prices. Sometimes the internet connection is also included in the rent of a dwelling. In this case, you do not need to pay for the internet separately, but you still need to contact a service provider to set up the connection.

The internet can be used for free in many cafés and libraries. Libraries also have computers that you may use if you own a library card. You can get a card for free from a library. Every locality in Finland has its own library where you may borrow books and read books, magazines and newspapers, use computers, study and take part in various events and courses.

Early Steps of Integration and Integration Services

When you move to Finland from another country, you are usually entitled to integration services. These are public services that make it easier for newcomers to settle in the country, learn the language and find a job or a place to study in Finland. Municipalities in Finland have a significant role in the integration of immigrants. Every municipality has an integration programme describing how the services for people moving to the country are organized in that particular municipality.

Municipalities also receive quota refugees and asylum seekers and provide early-stage services to them from housing to social services and health care. Municipalities also provide advisory services to people moving to the country. Immigrants can contact the advisory services when they need

information on, for instance, education, dealing with the authorities or finding a job. In some localities, it is possible to receive advice in the refugee's own mother tongue. The use of an interpreter is also possible when dealing with the authorities. However, you should always find out beforehand whether the authority will pay for the interpreter or whether the customer is expected to pay the interpretation costs him or herself.

Integration services support your integration into Finland, but settling in a new country, learning the language and finding a job or a place to study also require you to be active. Help and advice is given by the authorities and various organizations. Organizations can also help you to make new friends and form social networks as well as find leisure activities and services for people who have immigrated to the country. Organizations also provide easy ways to do volunteer work. Volunteer work can help to improve your language skills and it may also be useful when looking for a job.

Initial Assessment and Integration Plan

The initial assessment (*alkukartoitus*) is an important service for people who have recently moved to the country. It is an interview aiming to assess whether the newcomer needs an integration plan and other services to support his or her integration. During the initial assessment, your education and work experience, language skills, family situation and health are discussed. The assessment is conducted by either a municipality or an Employment and Economic Development Office (TE Office). The initial assessment is used as the basis for preparing an integration plan (*kotoutumissuunnitelma*), if needed. The plan details the services and measures that will help you to improve your language skills or find a job or a place to study, for example.

The integration plan is usually valid for 1–3 years. The plan often includes training or taking part in a work trial. A student is often also entitled to unemployment benefit, i.e. a financial benefit from Kela, for the duration of the measures described in the integration plan, such as integration training.

Integration Training

One of the key services that support integration is integration training (*kotoutumiskoulutus*). It is a course lasting for about one year where the aim is to learn the language and obtain knowledge about society and to eventually find a job or pursue further studies. Before the course, the student's language skills and readiness to study are tested so that he or she can be given training that suits him or her best. In addition to language instruction, the course provides knowledge about the Finnish society and working life and vocational guidance. It also includes an on-the-job training period during which the students work at a Finnish workplace.

Basics of Living

In Finland, you can live in rental home (*vuokra-asunto*), a right-of-occupancy home (*asumisoikeusasunto*) or an owner-occupied home (*omistusasunto*). Renting and buying homes in bigger cities is more expensive than in small localities.

Housing Allowance for Housing Costs

In Finland, you may receive housing allowance (*asumistuki*) for your housing costs, such as the rent or maintenance charge (*vastike*) of a dwelling. Housing allowance is granted if your other income is low. Housing allowance is applied for from Kela, and the amount of allowance depends on the size of the family and its income. Housing allowance does not usually cover all the housing costs, so the occupant still has to pay part of the rent and, for example, electricity and internet subscription fees. Pensioners and students may also receive housing allowance from Kela.

Housing rents have been on the rise for a long time and it may be very difficult to find a rental home at a reasonable price, especially in the Helsinki metropolitan area. It is often easier to find rental accommodation in smaller localities and the rents there are also lower.

Rental Housing

Advertisements for rental homes can be easily found on the internet. Homes are put up for rent by cities and municipalities as well as various private companies that build and rent housing. Private landlords, i.e. private individuals who own property, may also be looking for tenants.

Rental homes owned by a city or a municipality are usually cheaper than homes owned by private individuals or companies. However, the queue for these homes may be long. You can fill in a housing application on the website of a city, a municipality or a company. The application typically needs to be renewed regularly, e.g. every three months or one year.

A person living in a rental home may also have a subtenant (*alivuokralainen*). This means that the tenant sublets part of the home, such as one room, to another occupant. The subtenant concludes a tenancy agreement (*vuokrasopimus*) with the tenant, not the owner of the home. The principal tenant is responsible for the dwelling and the payment of rent to the owner. A housing agreement must always be made, and it is not permitted to live with another person without informing the owner of the dwelling or the landlord of this.

You should always take out home insurance for your home and it is often even required. The insurance will cover e.g. any water damage or damage caused by a fire to the dwelling, the furniture or other items. You can buy a home insurance policy from an insurance company.

Right-of-occupancy Homes

Right-of-occupancy housing (*asumisoikeusasuminen*, *Aso*) is a kind of intermediate form of housing between renting and owning a home. The occupant has the right to live in the dwelling, but it is owned by the construction company. The housing costs of Aso homes may, in some cases, be within the same price range as rental homes. However, there are also Aso companies where living is expensive. A right-of-occupancy dwelling is applied for using a personal queue number.

Basic Information About Rental Homes

A written tenancy agreement for the dwelling is concluded with the landlord. The tenancy agreement may be fixed-term (*määräaikainen*), lasting for one year, for example. It may also be valid until further notice (*toistaiseksi voimassa oleva*), which means that the tenancy agreement will continue until the tenant or the landlord terminates it. If the tenant terminates the agreement, the notice period is one month. If the owner of the dwelling terminates the agreement, the notice period is three to six months, depending on how long the tenancy agreement has been valid.

A tenancy agreement must contain at least the following information:

- personal information and addresses of the owner of the dwelling and the tenant
- address, type, size, condition and equipment of the dwelling
- date when the tenancy agreement enters into force and when it ends
- amount of rent and rent security deposit (*takuuvuokra*) in euros
- when the rent is paid and to which bank account
- what is included in the rent and what the tenant needs to pay extra for (for example, water, electricity or a parking space)
- terms of rent increase, i.e. under what terms the owner of the dwelling may increase the rent once a year

Typically, a rent security deposit must be paid for a dwelling before moving in. This means that the tenant pays the landlord an additional sum of money that equals a couple months' rent in advance. This sum will be paid back when the tenant moves out, provided that the tenant has made all the payments on time and the dwelling has been kept in good condition.

The rent of a Finnish rental home does not include electricity and does not always include the water rate either. These expenses must therefore be paid in addition to rent. The same goes for parking space fees and often laundry room fees and fees for using the housing company's sauna as well.

When you move into a new home, you need to sign an electricity supply contract with an electrical company. Otherwise the electricity will be cut off once the contract of the previous occupant expires. A notice of move must be sent both to the local register office and to the building manager (*isännöitsijä*). The notice must state who are moving into the dwelling.

The normal equipment of a dwelling in Finland includes kitchen cupboards, a stove and a refrigerator and sometimes also a dishwasher and wardrobes. Pre-furnished rental homes are also available, but usually tenants bring their own furniture with them.

Tenants should visit the dwelling with the landlord before moving in and write down any defects or things needing repair in the dwelling. This way, these will not be charged from the tenant when he or she moves out. The tenant must take good care of the dwelling. If the tenant causes damage to the dwelling, he or she needs to pay for the necessary repairs. Tenants may not renovate their dwelling without the landlord's permission.

If defects appear in the dwelling, such as a broken refrigerator, a radiator that does not work or a leaky tap, the tenant needs to contact the building maintenance company (*huoltoyhtiö*). The contact information of the company can be found on the notice board in the stairway. A maintenance person or a specialist will come and repair the defects. The maintenance person is also the one who usually comes to unlock the door if the tenant has forgotten his or her keys at home.

Housing Rules and Regulations and Taking Neighbours into Consideration

Every housing company has rules and regulations that occupants must follow. The purpose of the rules and regulations is to make sure that living in the building is comfortable and safe for all occupants. The rules and regulations state when the front door in a block of flats will be unlocked and at what time you need to be silent in the building. They also provide instructions for using the common facilities of the housing company, such as the laundry room or the sauna.

If a tenant breaks the housing rules and regulations repeatedly and severely, the tenancy agreement may be cancelled and the tenant will have to move out. The infofinland.fi website contains more information about housing in different languages.

You should try to live in your home so that you also take your neighbours into consideration. Especially in the bigger cities in Finland, it is typical that some people do not know their neighbours and do not necessarily greet them at all. Many Finns think of this as a polite way of leaving others in peace. However, it is friendly and polite to greet your neighbours and talk to them when you see them in the yard or in the stairway. It is also safer to live in a building where you know and recognize the other occupants.

If you want to visit a neighbour, it is a good idea to agree on a visit in advance. Finns may be taken aback by a surprise visit. Taking neighbours into consideration also means that everyone does their share in keeping the common areas of the housing company, such as the yard, the stairways, the laundry room and the waste collection points, tidy. There are rules for using the laundry room and other common facilities, and they should be followed.

Sorting and Recycling Household Waste

In many everyday situations in Finland, it is considered important to behave in a way that saves resources and protects the environment and nature. This is why waste produced at home is sorted into separate waste containers. The purpose of sorting waste is to be able to reuse the waste material and thereby save natural resources as well as money.

The waste provides raw materials for making new products, and less waste needs to be taken to landfill sites. Incorrectly sorted waste slows down waste treatment and produces additional costs to society. The easiest way to sort waste is to have separate waste containers in your kitchen for different types of waste.

There is a waste collection point in the yards of housing companies with waste containers for different types of waste.

- Biowaste (*biojäte*): leftover foods and peels, coffee grounds and tea leaves, food that has gone bad, eggshells, waste from cleaning fish, small bones
- Carton (*kartonki*): cardboard food packaging, cardboard boxes, milk and juice cartons
- Paper (*paperi*): newspapers and magazines, advertisement flyers, envelopes, books without their covers
- Glass (*lasi*): glass jars and glass bottles without a deposit
- Metal (*metalli*): cans, aluminium moulds and foil, household items made of metal, small household appliances
- Mixed waste (*sekajäte*): everything that cannot be sorted

Mixed waste is burned to produce energy. The energy provided by waste is used in the form of heat and electricity.

Some waste is hazardous waste (*ongelmajäte*), which may release toxic substances into nature if thrown in with mixed waste. This is why sorting hazardous waste separately is extremely important. Hazardous waste includes fluorescent lamps, accumulators and batteries, medicines, paints and glues and various chemicals. They must be taken to a hazardous waste collection point or a transfer station.

Waste electrical and electronic equipment (*sähkö- ja elektroniikkaromu, SER*), such as old household appliances and computers, is also collected separately. Shops often have collection points where you can take used batteries and energy-saving lamps. Old electrical devices may be taken to a shop that sells electronics, for example, and expired medicines should be taken to a pharmacy. The idea is to reuse as much old material as possible and thereby save natural resources. More information about the locations of waste collection points is available at www.kierratys.info and about recycling in general at www.kierratyskeskus.fi.

The environment and resources can also be preserved by giving away or selling any undamaged, working items that you no longer need. For example, clothes, furniture and working household appliances are recycled in Finland. You may also sell such items yourself at a flea market or an online second-hand marketplace. They can also be donated to a reuse centre or e.g. a second-hand store run by the Red Cross.

Many of the beverage bottles sold in shops have a deposit. When you return such an empty bottle to a shop, you will receive a small deposit in return. The returned bottles are reused.

Saving Energy at Home

Everyone in Finland is expected to protect the environment also by using electricity and energy sparingly at home. The less energy we consume, the less greenhouse gases are produced. These gases accelerate climate change, meaning the rapid rise in global temperature.

Climate change has substantial negative effects on the life and living conditions of people and animals all over the world. Rising global temperatures will make farming more difficult in many areas. Extreme weather conditions will become worse, threatening the life and living environments of people and animals. Infectious diseases will spread, and species will become extinct as habitats change.

In addition to electricity, water should also be used sparingly. This will not only protect the environment, but also help you to save money on electricity and water bills. Electricity can be saved at home by keeping the indoor temperature appropriate, at about 20–22 degrees (Celsius).

Homes should be aired quickly by opening all the windows for a few minutes. The temperatures of the refrigerator and freezer are adjusted appropriately, and if needed, the freezer is defrosted e.g. once a year. A thick layer of ice in the freezer uses up electricity unnecessarily.

Dishes should not be washed under running water, but instead you should plug the sink and fill it with water, then wash and rinse the dishes in the sink and a basin. This saves a lot of water. Shower quickly and turn off the taps when applying soap. Electrical appliances and lights at home should be turned off when they are not needed.

Buildings in Finland are sealed up tightly so that they would be warm in the winter. Tightly built buildings cannot tolerate humidity, which can quickly damage the walls and floors. Due to this, you should use very little water when cleaning the floors and walls and carefully dry all the surfaces afterwards. Dwellings have ventilation valves that allow humid air to flow outside. These valves should be kept open and clean year-round.

Fire Safety

According to the Finnish law, every dwelling must have a smoke detector. You need to buy a detector yourself. They are sold in department stores and supermarkets. A home needs to have one smoke detector for every 60 square metres of living space.

Fire safety instructions:

- Install the smoke detector in the ceiling of your home and check it regularly to make sure that the detector works properly.
- If you wish, you may also get a fire blanket and a portable fire extinguisher to help put out any small, starting fires.
- Do not leave any household appliances running when you leave the house.
- Never leave burning candles unattended in the dwelling.
- Remember that the stove and the electric oven heat up quickly. Make sure that you do not accidentally leave the stove on after cooking. Do not store anything on top of the stove plates.
- Remember to check that the switches in an electric sauna are always switched off and do not store anything on top of the sauna stove.
- As a rule, you should avoid storing anything on top of electric radiators due to a fire hazard.
- If you live in a block of flats and a fire breaks out in your building, call the emergency number 112 immediately.
- In the case of a fire, do not leave your home in a block of flats if there is smoke in the stairway.

- Do not use the lift during a fire.

What to do in an Emergency

The emergency number in Finland is 112. The same number works in all EU countries. You should only call the emergency number when you need urgent assistance in an emergency and when someone's life, health, property or the environment is in danger. Calling the emergency number will alert the police, the fire brigade, an ambulance or a social welfare officer. Calling the emergency number is free of charge.

If the matter is non-urgent, such as a regular case of illness, do not call the emergency number. In such cases, contact a health centre, for example. Do not call the emergency number if you only want to inquire about something related to health care, traffic or electrical or fire safety. Also, remember that the Emergency Response Centre (ERC) does not deal with power failures and traffic jams where nobody is in danger.

When you call the emergency number, listen to the instructions, answer any questions and do not hang up until you are told to do so. It is important that the ERC operator knows exactly where you are calling from. This way, help can be quickly sent to the scene. In Finland, you can download the "112Suomi" application on your mobile phone. This application allows the ERC to see your location when you make the call. The ERC will decide which authority it will dispatch to help you in the situation.

How to call the emergency number 112:

- State your name.
- Describe what has happened.
- Give the exact address and the municipality/city where you need help.
- Answer any questions.
- Follow the instructions provided.
- Do not hang up the call until you are told to do so.

Transport

The biggest cities in Finland have good public transport services and you do not usually need your own car when commuting to work or school. You can buy a monthly ticket to a bus or a commuter train to travel to and from work. Owning a car may be necessary in smaller localities or sparsely populated areas.

In Finland, you can travel almost anywhere by bus, train, airplane or ship, but some of the public transport runs only rarely. Cycling is also a good, environmentally friendly way to get around if the distances are short. Some Finns cycle to work or school also in the winter.

Owning a car and paying for petrol, insurance premiums, taxes and servicing is quite expensive in Finland. A car needs to have winter tyres in the winter and summer tyres in the summer. This means that the tyres need to be changed twice a year, in the spring and autumn. You will usually be assigned a parking space for your car in the parking area or garage of the housing company.

When you drive a car in traffic, you need to remember that the Finnish traffic rules must be strictly obeyed. The police monitors traffic and issues fines if rules are broken. You may not drive a car under the influence of alcohol. The alcohol limit for drunk driving is 0.5 per mille, which is equal to about a couple glasses of wine or 1–2 small bottles of beer.

Integration into Your New Home Country

When you move to a new country, it takes time to get used to the new environment, customs and culture. The culture and customs may be different from your country of departure. The functioning of society and its services and structure may feel strange.

Adjusting to the conditions in the new home country is referred to in Finnish as *kotoutuminen*, integration. This term refers to the process where the newcomer learns the language, finds a job or a place to study or other meaningful things to do and finds his or her place in society.

The goal of the state of Finland is that people moving to Finland from abroad would feel part of the Finnish society and take part in building it. At the same time, these people may also maintain their own language and culture and the ties with their native country.

What is Integration Like?

When you arrive in a new country, some cultural customs and systems will first feel strange and unnatural. The society may be structured differently or the interaction between people, for example, may be different from what you are used to. As an adult, it may be difficult to find yourself in a situation where you are unfamiliar with the local customs and language and cannot understand why things are done a certain way. Trial and error may feel frustrating.

Gradually, you will get used to the new customs and systems and begin to understand where they come from. This makes it easier and more natural to follow them. Eventually, you can reach a point where you have found the right balance between two cultures. Usually, people retain the parts of their old culture that are important to them while also adopting some new ways of thinking and approaches from the new culture.

One of the aspects of integration is that you become sufficiently fluent in the local language. This will allow you to form relationships and to study or work in the new language. In Finland, you can also get by with Swedish and English, but Finnish language skills are still very useful.

Integration also means that the person moving to the country is familiar with the Finnish society and culture, such as the customs, laws and history of the country. He or she has accepted Finland as his or her home country and can also envision a future here. He or she has found a place in society, made new friends and formed social networks. He or she may also be an active citizen in his or her local community or take part in political activities, for example.

Factors Affecting Integration

The reason for moving to a new country is one of the factors affecting how well you adjust and settle to the country. It is different to flee a war or other conflict than to move to another country for work or to find a spouse in another country and move there to be with them.

The language skills and social networks of the newcomer also affect the time it takes to adjust. If you do not know anyone in Finland and cannot speak the local languages or English, it may take more time before you find new friends and acquaintances or a job.

Your financial and social circumstances also play a role. If you have come to the new country as a refugee, you may have lost both your family and your property and home. You have to rebuild your entire life from scratch. This may be hard, especially if you have experienced traumatic events in, for instance, a war or when fleeing your home country.

Your health and family situation also affect integration. A poor state of health or living apart from your family may make it more difficult to build a new life for yourself. If your life situation feels hard, you can get support and help from e.g. a health centre, organizations or a social welfare office.

Globalization and Immigration

Globalization is the global mutual dependence of matters and people, meaning that the social development of states and various parts all over the globe is increasingly dependent on the circumstances and events in other parts.

Social phenomena have had a global dimension before as well. Some examples of this include world trade, the world wars and world religions, meaning religions that have spread widely around the world from a specific area of origin.

The phenomena of mutual dependence and networking are therefore nothing new, but in our time, they have become substantially more widespread than before. Globalization brings people and nations closer together through e.g. politics, administration and trade, but also in terms of matters related to information flow and knowledge production and the environment.

Since the number of immigrants in Finland used to be small, Finns are accustomed to the idea that people's backgrounds, appearance and customs are fairly similar. As the number of people with an immigrant background grows, the population and culture of Finland are becoming more diverse. A culture characteristically changes over time as different people meet and interact with each other. Today, there are more and more different, but equally valuable ways to be a Finn and live in Finland.

Some Finns have found it difficult to accept the changes that result from globalization. Some feel that they have even less influence over the political and economic decisions made in Finland that concern them. It is true that in the period of globalization and the EU, some of the political decision-making has been transferred from the state of Finland to the European Union and other international bodies, further away from ordinary Finnish people.

Effects, Benefits and Drawbacks of Globalization

Globalization has had both positive and negative effects on Finland. Finland has benefitted economically from globalization and free trade in that e.g. the international trade of Finland has increased. This has brought a lot of welfare, freedom of choice and prosperity to Finland. Prosperity, in turn, has provided more social and political stability.

One of the negative effects has been the decline in the number of jobs. Jobs have moved to countries where labour is cheaper than in Finland. Global financial crises have also had a strong impact on the Finnish economy and society.

In the period of globalization, more and more people are constantly moving from one country to another. International human migration is influenced by many factors: the global economy and internationalizing companies, people travelling abroad as tourists or exchange students, population growth, multicultural marriages, various national and international conflicts and wars, climate change and the laws that make free mobility possible.

Globalization and internationalization as well as the increase of international political, economic and social cooperation will inevitably continue.

Since the intention is to distribute the benefits and drawbacks of globalization more evenly between different countries in the world, the UN, or the United Nations, has adopted a Sustainable Development Agenda. Sustainable development means local, regional and global development efforts

where the goal is to ensure living conditions that are as good as possible for current and future generations. This involves reducing poverty and economic inequality and improving global environmental protection.

Discussion Questions

1. How and when can you apply for Finnish citizenship?
2. What are the benefits of using services on the internet, such as an online bank, shopping, dealing with the authorities?
3. How can you find a home in Finland?
4. How do you take your neighbours into consideration when living in a block of flats or a terraced house?
5. What is your opinion of the sorting and recycling of waste in Finland?
6. How do you save energy, electricity and water at home?
7. Why should energy be saved?
8. What factors promote integration into Finland?
9. What are the effects of globalization on the Finnish economy and society?

4. FAMILY LIFE AND CHILDREN

The Finnish Family Then and Now

Marriage and Common-law Relationship

Many Kinds of Families

Child Care and Services for Families with Children

Support for Families with Problems

Other Health and Social Services

When a Family Moves to Finland

The Finnish Family Then and Now

Finland is one of the most gender-equal countries in the world. Men and women in Finland have the same rights and obligations. Equality can be seen in family life in that both parents usually go to work and also take care of family matters together. The Finnish state and municipalities support equality and the well-being of families by providing various benefits and services for families, such as financial support and low-cost early childhood education and care, i.e. day care for children.

Family Size has Become Smaller

A family usually refers to a family with children where at least one child under the age of 18 is living at home. The Finnish family most commonly consists of a mother and a father and their children. There are also many other kinds of families in Finland. Nowadays, grandparents and other relatives are not considered part of the nuclear family, even though they may be close. On average, Finns keep less in touch with their relatives as people from other countries do. However, the relationships with relatives vary greatly between families. Many have a close bond with their parents and siblings throughout life.

Over time, Finnish families have changed a lot. Families used to include more people. Families had many children, and it was common that grandparents and e.g. cousins or adopted children also lived in the same household. Family members typically worked together doing farm work and led a communal way of life. The members of a large family and extended family looked after each other's well-being. Everyone shared a home and meals as well as joys and sorrows. This is typical of a collective, or communal culture. Today, the Finnish culture is individualistic, emphasizing the individual. This means that every person is responsible for him or herself and his or her actions and everyone has the right to make decisions about their own life.

The number of children in families has decreased since the early 20th century. In Finland today, the most common type of family is a mother and a father with one or two children. However, 100 years ago when the majority of Finns lived in the countryside, women gave birth to an average of five children in their lifetime.

From an Agricultural Society to the City

In the countryside, it was easy to take care of a large brood of children, because children could take part in farm work and homes were usually bigger than in cities. One of the main reasons why families changed was urbanization. In the 20th century, many people moved from the countryside to cities to find jobs, and this migration still continues.

Moving to a city inevitably also affects family life. The idea of a communal extended family has all but disappeared due to urbanization, and life has become more individualistic. Urban homes are smaller than homes in the countryside, which is why families are also smaller. Children spend a large part of the day in day care away from home while their parents are at work. Grandparents rarely live in the same home as their grandchildren.

In addition to urbanization, economic relations have affected the cultural change among families. Those who moved to cities found paid work, usually in a factory or the service industry. When people started to get paid for work, they were no longer dependent on their relatives. The state of Finland began to support people by providing social services and financial benefits. Financial and social support used to be the responsibility of the family and relatives, but this responsibility shifted from the family to the state due to urbanization and the development of the welfare state. The idea is that this support will give everyone a chance to get by, even if they do not receive any help from relatives or friends.

Change in the Status of Women and its Effects on the Family

Men and women in Finland have an equal value and status in society and the same rights and obligations. This has not always been the case, but men have controlled the lives of women for centuries. As recently as one hundred years ago, husbands had the right to decide on behalf of their wives whether they could go to work and take part in civic or other activities outside the family.

The women's rights movement was born in Europe and the United States in the 19th century and aimed to promote the equal status of women and men. In Finland, a law was passed in 1864 freeing unmarried women from guardianship, meaning that they could decide on their personal matters themselves. Married women still remained under the guardianship of their husbands.

Back then, women were expected to choose either a career or marriage. Combining family and work was rarely possible. An employer would often dismiss a female employee if she got married. Many women chose to work, and spinsterhood became more common in the early decades of the 20th century.

Laws enacted in the early 20th century gave women some essential economic and political rights. These included the following:

- 1906 right to vote and run in the parliamentary elections
- 1919 right to practise a trade without the husband's consent
- 1922 right to personally conclude employment contracts without a husband
- 1922 Act on Compulsory Education, which guaranteed both girls and boys the right to education
- 1930 Marriage Act, which made a husband and wife equal in marriage

Women's movements and female politicians had long demanded for a reform of the Finnish Marriage Act. When the new Marriage Act entered into force in 1930, women were freed from the guardianship of their husbands. Since then, women in Finland have been legally competent also in marriage. A legally competent woman has the same rights as a man and can decide on her personal matters herself.

Combining Work and Family Life

Many women did not work before the wars, but everything changed when war broke out. During the war years of 1939–1944, men fought at the front while women had to do both the men's and the women's work in factories and on farms. Many women continued to work also after the war.

As late as the 1950s, women were mainly responsible for household management and child care and many did not work outside the home. But due to urbanization, it became common by the 1970s for women to work. Municipalities started to provide day care for children, and female employment became even more common.

Female employment affected the entire family, since the mother was no longer at home with the children all the time. Employment gave women independence and money of their own. As education and employment among women became more common, their possibilities to influence personal and family matters also increased.

Combining work and family life has been possible in Finland already for a long time. Both men and women can decide for themselves how they want to balance work and possible family life.

Family Planning

Family planning means that you can influence the number of children you wish to have by using birth control. The improved status of women can also be seen in the more widespread use of family planning. Contraceptives became widely available in the 1960s, and as a result, families today have less children than before.

Individualistic Culture and Families in Finland

Due to societal changes that took place in the 20th century, the family culture in Finland largely shifted from a communal to an individualistic culture. An individual is no longer dependent on relatives and family, but the society is responsible for taking care of the elderly and helping everyone in need. Everyone may personally choose who they want to be involved with. In an individualistic culture, people are accustomed to the fact that everyone is responsible only for him or herself and his or her children under the age of 18.

Freedom to Make Your Own Decisions

In an individualistic culture, people see themselves primarily as individuals, not as members of a group. This is also the case in Finland. An individual may make and is also expected to make independent decisions about his or her life. According to the Constitution of Finland, everyone has the right to personal liberty.

Everyone in Finland may be whatever they want and live their life however they want, as long as they obey the law. However, cultural norms affect how individuals behave. Cultural norms refer to things that are generally considered right and wrong in people's opinion. In an individualistic culture, an individual has more freedom to decide on personal matters and, as a result, the moral rules of society are not usually as strict as in a communal culture. For example, a divorce is not typically considered a condemnable act.

Choosing a Partner

Individual freedom to make your own decisions is also seen in relationships. In an individualistic culture, both men and women may choose their life partners themselves. Young adults may decide on their lives independently, and they do not need to ask for permission from their parents or other relatives. Many Finns still discuss their choices with relatives, but the privacy of the family and the individual is generally respected.

An individual's right to personal decisions and the ideal of romantic love have changed families. Many have several dating partners over the course of their life. People usually date for a long time before they decide to move in together or get married. A healthy relationship is considered an important foundation for happiness, and happiness is considered an important foundation for family.

Personal Integrity

According to law, everyone has the right to personal integrity. This means, for example, sexual autonomy, meaning that everyone has the right to make decisions about their own body and sexuality. Everyone may choose their partner themselves, but an adult may not have sex with someone under the age of 16. Nobody should be forced to have sex. Sexual matters can be discussed fairly openly in Finland, but usually only with people who are close to you.

Everyone has the right to be in a public space without being sexually harassed. This means that nobody should be touched without his or her unambiguous consent.

In terms of children, personal integrity also means that the corporal (physical) punishment of children is prohibited. According to law, the child's opinion must also be heard when making decisions concerning the child's life. Children therefore have the right to participate in matters concerning them. This supports the development of the child and the building of a positive self-esteem.

Marriage and Common-law Relationship

A marriage (*avioliitto*) is a legal agreement between two people. Not all couples get married even if they are in a steady relationship. The legal status of the relationship determines a person's marital, or civil status (*siviilisääty*). The marital status is recorded in the Finnish Population Information System. The marital status tells whether a person is officially in a relationship or not. A person's marital status can be married, unmarried, divorced, widowed or a partner in a registered partnership.

Marriage

About 2 million people living in Finland are married. This means that they have been joined in marriage. A marriage is a relationship between two people, provided for by law. When two people get married, they become spouses. Spouses have certain rights and obligations. Spouses are equal in marriage, meaning that they have the same rights and obligations.

Marriage Then and Now

The ideal relationship in Western countries these days is a romantic love affair leading to marriage. The romantic idea of marriage has become established in Finland, but this has not always been the case.

For a long time, the main purpose of marriage was to arrange the social and economic relations between communities so that they would be convenient for land ownership, for example. A marriage has also been called *naimakauppa* in Finnish, literally meaning a marital deal. The word stems from a medieval law whereby a marriage was an agreement between two families with the purpose of producing children, heirs to the families. Back then, marriage meant that the wife moved from her family to live with her husband's family. In return, the husband's family had to give the wife's family a dowry, i.e. gifts or money.

Arranged marriages are no longer a part of Finnish culture. A marriage is a voluntary choice, and nobody can be forced to get married. The partners in a relationship can decide for themselves what their roles are as members of the family. Before, it was generally thought that women are responsible for housework and child care, and men must work and provide for the family. Nowadays, every family can decide for themselves how to divide these responsibilities.

Back in the early 1980s, women got married for the first time at the average age of 25. Today, the average age of getting married is 30 years.

Equal Marriage Act

Over time, amendments have been made to the Finnish Marriage Act. Since the amendment in 2017, the Finnish Marriage Act has been equal. This means that same-sex couples can also get married. Before then, couples consisting of two men or two women could only enter into registered partnerships. A registered partnership was an agreement similar to a marriage, but the spouses did not have all the same rights as married couples.

The enactment of the Equal Marriage Act is related to the fact that in recent decades the rights of sexual and gender minorities, as well as other human rights issues, have become a focus of attention in all Western countries. This has not always been the case: homosexuality was a crime in Finland until the year 1971. Discrimination, or unequal treatment based on sexual orientation, has been illegal since 1995.

Getting Married

Legally, anyone can get married provided that he or she does not have any impediments (*este*) to marriage. Before you can get married, an examination of impediments to marriage (*avioliiton esteiden tutkinta*) is carried out. If there are no impediments to marriage, the person receives a certificate of non-impediment (*esteettömyystodistus*).

If a foreigner wishes to get married in Finland, he or she may first be required to present documents from his or her home country. Due to this, you should reserve plenty of time for the examination of impediments.

Impediments to Marriage

Polygamy is prohibited by law in Finland. A person may only be married to one person at a time in Finland. A person who is already married or a partner in a registered partnership may not re-marry unless he or she first divorces his or her previous spouse.

A child may not get married. The minimum age for marriage is 18 years. A special permission for the marriage of a minor may be applied for from the Ministry of Justice. Being a near relative is also an impediment to marriage. You may not get married to your parent, child, sibling or half-sibling, for example.

Engagement

A couple often gets engaged before marriage. An engagement (*kihlaus*) is an informal agreement where the couple agrees to marry later. An engagement is not a legal agreement and does not bind you to anything before the law. An engagement is voluntary, and the law does not require you to be engaged before getting married. An engagement ring is usually worn on the left ring finger as a sign of engagement. A wedding ring, which is a sign of marriage, is also worn on the same finger.

Marriage Ceremony

A marriage ceremony can be either a church wedding (*kirkollinen vihkiminen*) or a civil marriage (*siviilivihkiminen*), meaning a marriage ceremony that does not take place in a church. If the couple chooses to have a church wedding, it is officiated by a person working in a registered religious community who has the right to officiate at weddings, usually a priest of the Lutheran or Orthodox Church. If the couple wants a civil marriage, the ceremony is officiated by an official who has the right to officiate at weddings, such as a notary. A civil marriage ceremony usually takes place at a local register office. Once a couple has been joined in marriage, they are a married couple, meaning that they are spouses.

Changing Your Name

When a couple gets married, the woman often takes the man's last name. The man can also take the woman's last name or both can keep their own last names. It is also possible to choose a hyphenated last name where the spouse's last name is added to your last name.

Rights and Obligations in Marriage

The Marriage Act provides for the rights and obligations of spouses. The Act states that in a marriage, the spouses shall display mutual trust and work together for the good of the family. According to the Act, the spouses in a marriage are obligated to look after each other, their children, their home and the common household. Spouses have a maintenance obligation (*elatusvelvollisuus*) towards each other. For example, if one of the spouses is unemployed or taking care of a child at home, the other spouse needs to buy him or her food and clothes.

According to the Marriage Act, everyone has sexual autonomy also in marriage, as in all relationships. Sexual coercion, or rape, is a crime in marriage just as it is outside of marriage. Intimate partner violence is also a crime in Finland.

In health issues, each spouse has the right to be informed of his or her spouse's health and to decide on treatment, if the spouse in question is unable to do so due to health reasons, for example.

Spouses may have joint property, but each may also own personal property. A spouse may not, for instance, sell the other spouse's property. Also, a large amount of joint property may not be sold without the other spouse's permission. If a married couple takes out a loan together, they are both liable for paying back the loan. But if one spouse takes out a loan by him or herself, he or she is solely liable for its repayment.

Marital Right

The marital right (*avio-oikeus*) is a way of trying to protect the financial position of spouses. The marital right means that in a divorce, the spouses' property is added up and divided equally between them. If a spouse dies, his or her property is divided between the surviving spouse and the children of the deceased spouse. The marital right cannot be overturned by a will.

Marriage Settlement

If the spouses wish to keep their property separate, they may sign a marriage settlement (*avioehtosopimus*). Once the spouses have signed a marriage settlement, the marital right no longer applies to them. The marriage settlement determines how property will be divided in the event that one of the spouses dies or the spouses get divorced. It is very common for married couples to enter into a marriage settlement. If a marriage ends in a divorce, spouses often argue over property. These disputes can be avoided with a marriage settlement.

Common-law Relationship

Not all couples get married. A common-law relationship (*avoliitto*) is a relationship where the couple lives together, but is not married. They are each other's common-law spouses (*avopuoliso*).

A common-law relationship is also known as cohabitation, and no written agreement of such a relationship is made. Common-law spouses do not have the same legal rights and obligations before the law as married spouses. Common-law spouses have no maintenance obligation towards each other and they do not inherit from each other in the event of death. Common-law spouses decide together how they will divide the family's income and expenses.

Common-law Relationship Then and Now

Common-law relationships have become more common in recent decades. In one in three families, the mother and father are unmarried. Before the 1980s, the mother and father were married in almost all families with children. Today, most young couples first establish a common-law relationship, meaning that they live together before getting married. It is also common for common-law spouses to have children. Although common-law relationships are common, most people do get married at some point in their life.

The position of a child is fairly similar regardless of whether the child's parents are married or not. The child may be given either parent's last name and has the right to inherit from his or her parents and to receive survivors' pension (*perhe-eläke*) if a parent dies. Both parents are obligated to provide maintenance for their child even if they are unmarried.

Divorce

Both spouses together or one spouse alone can file for divorce (*avioero*), i.e. a dissolution of the marriage. You do not need the consent of both parties or any special reasons for a divorce. A divorce is filed for in writing at a District Court (*käräjäoikeus*). The court does not investigate the relationship between the spouses or the reasons for filing for divorce.

After filing an application for divorce, a six-month reconsideration period begins. During the reconsideration period, the application for divorce may be withdrawn if you decide not to get divorced. Once the reconsideration period is over, a new application is submitted. After this, the divorce will take effect and the marriage will end. Divorce cases sometimes involve disputes over property or the position of a child. In such cases, the spouses may need help from a lawyer.

Divorce is often caused by a dysfunctional relationship. A couple may end up getting a divorce if they cannot settle their arguments. Other reasons include infidelity and intoxicant abuse or mental health problems, for example. Normally, couples try to resolve their problems by discussing them, and e.g. couples' therapy may also help.

Nowadays, divorce is common in Finland, and people are not forced to remain in an unhappy marriage. A divorce is not considered shameful in Finland. It is also common for people to re-marry. More than half of the couples who get married spend the rest of their lives together.

Position of Children in a Divorce

If a divorcing couple has children, the spouses need to agree on how their matters will be arranged in future. The parents must decide who will be the child's guardian (*huoltaja*). The guardian is responsible for taking care of the child and making decisions concerning the child. In Finland, however, the child must also be heard in matters concerning him or her.

Both parents usually remain the child's guardians also after divorce. They can have joint custody (*yhteishuoltajuus*), meaning that they make decisions concerning the child together, even though they no longer live together after the divorce. The parents need to agree where the child will live. A child can only have one official address, but he or she can still spend an equal amount of time in the other parent's home, if the family agrees on such an arrangement. It is fairly common for children to divide their time equally between both parents. In such cases, it is important that the homes are located fairly close to each other so that the child can attend school from both homes.

Many children from divorced families visit their other parent only on weekends or more seldom. A child has the right to visit both of his or her parents. A child over the age of 12 has the right to decide whether he or she wishes to visit the other parent at all. The municipal social welfare services take

care of the agreements related to the custody and visits of children after divorce together with the parents.

It is also possible for only one parent to be named the official guardian of a child. This may be the case if, for instance, the parents are unable to discuss the child's matters at all or one of the parents lives abroad. This is known as sole custody (*yksinhuoltajuus*).

Parents have a financial obligation towards their children, meaning that they need to make sure that their children have food and clothes. Even if the parents get divorced, both parents remain financially obligated. The parent with whom the child lives receives money from the other parent in the form of maintenance (*elatusapu*) to pay for part of the child's housing, food, clothes and other expenses.

Family Mediation (perheasioiden sovittelu)

The Marriage Act states that disputes and legal matters arising in the family should be settled in negotiations between the parties. These disputes may be related to, for instance, matters of inheritance or the visiting rights of a child. If the disputes cannot be settled, help and support is available from family mediators. Family mediation is a voluntary, confidential social service provided by the municipality. It is free of charge to customers.

Many Kinds of Families

The most common family structure in Finland is a nuclear family, meaning a mother, a father and their children. In addition to a nuclear family, there are many other ways to live as a family in Finland.

Childless Couple

When we talk about families, we often think of families with children. However, it is common for a family to consist of only two adults. Not all couples want children and therefore decide not to have any. Many couples are satisfied with their lives without children and they do not need to explain their choice to anyone else.

Some couples want children, but are unable to have them. Infertility treatments are available for those suffering from involuntary childlessness. The aim of the treatments is to improve the chances of getting pregnant. Couples may also consider adopting a child. An adopted child is biologically someone else's child, but is given new parents through adoption. In Finland, children are usually adopted from abroad.

Single-parent Family

A family consisting of only one adult and a child or children is known as a single-parent or a one-parent family (*yksinhuoltajaperhe*). The single parent is usually either divorced or widowed. Some single parents have had a child on their own, meaning that the family has not had another parent at any time.

The most common reason for being a single parent is a divorce. Usually, the children live with the mother after divorce, which is why the majority of single parents are women. There are also single fathers in Finland.

The children of a single parent usually also spend time with their other parent. The other parent is also obligated to contribute to the child's maintenance, and usually the child has the right to visit the other parent. In some cases, the single parent may be solely responsible for the child.

Combining child care and work may be challenging in single-parent families. This is why the financial situation of a single parent can sometimes be extremely difficult, and taking care of children on one's own may occasionally be mentally stressful. The state of Finland supports single parents so that single-parent families would not be in a weaker position than others. Some of the benefits paid by Kela include a single-parent supplement (*yksinhuoltajakorotus*), which means that the support for single-parent families is slightly higher than for families with two parents.

Blended Family

It is common in Finland that people establish a new common-law relationship or re-marry after getting a divorce. A blended family, also known as a stepfamily or a bonus family (*uusperhe*), means a family where not all the children are from the spouses' current relationship. In a blended family, the mother's husband is the children's stepfather or the father's wife is their stepmother. If the children in the family share only one parent, they are half-siblings. Children in a blended family often have two homes. The children may live with their other parent part of the time.

Blended families have become more common in Finland in recent decades. One in ten children under the age of 18 are now part of a blended family.

Rainbow Family

In Finland, the families of same-sex couples are known as rainbow families (*sateenkaariperhe*). The rainbow is a symbol of sexual and gender minorities. There are various types of rainbow families. For example, two women and their children can form a rainbow family.

The equal rights of sexual minorities and rainbow families have been advocated in Finland for a long time, and the attitudes towards sexual minorities have gradually become more accepting. The Equal Marriage Act, which entered into force in 2017, has improved the legal rights of rainbow families and the children living in these families.

People Living Alone

Over a million people in Finland live alone. Although they live alone, they usually have people who are close to them, such as their parents, adult children, other relatives or close friends. People who are not in a relationship are often called single (*sinkku*).

Child Care and Services for Families with Children

In international comparisons, Finland is one of the best countries in the world for mothers and children. This means that children receive good care, and the risk that mothers will die during pregnancy or childbirth is extremely low. Mothers and children are healthy, because Finland provides good health care for all pregnant women and young children.

The state of Finland has invested in the well-being of children for a long time. Already back in the late 19th century, people became concerned over high infant mortality rates and the fact that weak children grew up to be weak adults. As a result, organizations working on behalf of families with children, such as the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, were established, and services that promote children's health were developed. Organizations emphasized the importance of healthy food and hygiene for the welfare of the nation.

Laws to protect children were enacted. They prohibited children from working hard and ordered children to go to school. Medicine, hygiene and the general awareness about health issues advanced quickly. Infant mortality rates have declined dramatically since the 1940s when the child health clinic

system was set up right after World War II. Nowadays, it is extremely rare in Finland that a child dies at birth or before the age of one.

Parents' Obligations

All children under the age of 18 have a guardian (*huoltaja*). Usually, a child's parents are his or her guardians. In special cases, the guardian can also be another person. Guardians have the right to decide on the child's care, upbringing, place of residence and other important matters. According to the Finnish law, a child's wishes must be heard and he or she must live in a safe environment and have positive, close relationships. Guardians are obligated to look after the child's well-being and all-round development.

When a child turns 18, he or she comes of age (*täysi-ikäinen*) and can personally decide on all matters concerning him or herself. Many young people in Finland become independent early on and move out of their parents' home soon after coming of age. The state of Finland provides financial support for young people who are becoming independent and moving out of their childhood homes. Kela, for instance, pays more financial aid for students and housing allowance to young people who no longer live with their parents.

Having a Child

Today, parents in Finland have their first child at the age of 30, on average. Of course, some parents have children already when they are young, but it is more and more common to have children at an older age. Typically, people living in cities and those with a higher education have children later than others.

Pregnancy

When a woman thinks that she may be pregnant, she can first take a pregnancy test at home. Pregnancy tests are sold in pharmacies. If the test is positive, the woman should contact the maternity clinic in her municipality of residence and schedule an appointment with a public health nurse. The woman's pregnancy will be confirmed at the maternity clinic. The due date (*laskettu aika*) will be estimated in the beginning of the pregnancy. The due date is a prediction of when the baby will be born.

Maternity and Child Health Clinic

The maternity clinic (*äitiysneuvola*) is a health service where the expecting mother and family receive guidance, training and advice. The child health clinic (*lastenneuvola*) is a place for monitoring and examining a child's growth and development and discussing matters concerning the child with the family. Maternity and child health clinics are free of charge, and all families may go there.

In addition to the maternity clinic, most expecting mothers also visit a hospital during pregnancy to see the maternity ward. Today, parents may also attend childbirth education classes provided by the maternity clinic and foetal ultrasound examinations where the development of the foetus is monitored. You can see the image of the foetus on a monitor in a foetal ultrasound examination.

Maternity Package

Kela gives all mothers who are permanently resident in Finland a maternity grant (*äitiysavustus*). The maternity grant, or maternity package (*äitiyspakkaus*), contains items that a baby needs in the first few months, such as baby clothes, a sleeping bag and care products. The items are packed in a box that can also be used as the first cot of the baby. If the mother does not want a maternity package, she may choose a cash maternity grant instead. The maternity grant can be claimed from Kela towards the end of pregnancy.

The maternity grant was first distributed to low-income mothers in the 1930s. The maternity grant encouraged all mothers and babies to seek health care, and infant mortality began to decline. The grant has been available to all mothers since 1949.

Recognition of Paternity

If the parents of a newborn baby are married, the husband is automatically considered the child's father. The situation is different in a common-law relationship. If a child is born into a family where the parents are unmarried, the man needs to recognize paternity (*isyyden tunnustaminen*). This means that he needs to declare that he is the child's father. Paternity can be recognized either during pregnancy at a maternity clinic or by visiting a child welfare officer (*lastenvalvoja*) after the birth of the child. After the recognition of paternity, the father can become the child's other guardian.

Childbirth and a Baby's First Days

In Finland, almost all mothers give birth in a maternity hospital. A midwife (*kättilö*) is a health care professional who helps to deliver the baby. The baby's father is usually also present during childbirth.

Most babies are born vaginally (*alatiesynnytys*). If there are problems associated with vaginal birth, a caesarean section, or C-section (*keisarileikkaus*), may be performed where the baby is delivered through an incision made on the mother's abdomen. Normally, the mother and baby spend a couple of days in hospital after delivery.

Female Genital Mutilation and Childbirth

If the mother's genitals have been mutilated, this may cause complications and more pain during childbirth. Although there are fairly few women giving birth in Finland whose genitalia have been closed, midwives are trained to perform an opening procedure on them, if necessary. This should preferably be done already before going into labour to reduce the pain, but the procedure can also be done in the delivery room. Closing the vaginal opening again after childbirth is prohibited by law.

Genital Mutilation of Girls and Boys

In Finland, the genital mutilation of girls is prohibited. The genital mutilation of girls refers to a procedure where some of the external genitalia are removed or they are damaged in some other way. Sometimes the mutilation procedure involves the full removal of the external genitalia and sewing up the vagina.

Genital mutilation can cause serious health problems, such as severe infections, difficulty urinating and problems passing menstrual flow. There may be problems in sexual intercourse and it may be difficult for the woman to enjoy sex. Mutilation also increases risks during pregnancy and childbirth.

The genital mutilation of girls is classified as a serious assault in Finland and you can be sentenced to several years in jail for it. Finnish citizens or girls residing permanently in Finland may not be mutilated in any other country either.

Anyone working with children has to file a child protection report (*lastensuojeluilmoitus*) concerning mutilation, meaning that they need to report to the social welfare authorities if they suspect that someone is planning to mutilate a girl's genitals. A child protection report is also filed if there is reason to believe that mutilation has already been done.

In some countries, the genitalia of both boys and girls are mutilated. In Finland, the mutilation of boys, i.e. circumcision, is not illegal, but it is not done by the public health services without a medical reason.

Life with a Baby and an Infant

The child health clinic supports the welfare of the mother and the baby. The child health clinic gives e.g. vaccinations to the child to give him or her a lifelong protection against infectious diseases. Municipalities and many organizations support families with children by providing various services. The child health clinic can tell you about these services based on your needs.

A baby needs a lot of care and physical contact. A small baby should be breastfed, if possible. Breastmilk is the healthiest nutrition for a baby. Breastfeeding support is available from the hospital, the child health clinic or, for instance, the Finnish Association for Breastfeeding Support (Imetyksen tuki) at <https://imetys.fi>. Breastfeeding may be difficult at first, but it can be learned, just like any other baby care skill. It is a good idea to talk actively to your child right from when he or she is born, because this fuels the child's development and strengthens the bond between the parent and the child.

Parental Leave and Benefits

After the birth of a child, the parents may take care of the child at home. Kela pays a financial support for this period. This support is not automatic, but must be claimed from Kela. The aim of the financial support is to compensate for the salary that the parents do not receive while they are absent from work.

The benefits for families with children have been developed so that all children could spend time with their parents as babies and that the early stages of a baby's life would go as well as possible in families. A baby's brain develops quickly, so it is important that babies have close relationships with other people.

Most commonly, the mother stays at home with the infant for about 9 months and then returns to work. After this, many fathers stay at home with the child for some time. Many parents also work shorter days when they have a young child at home.

Maternity Leave and Maternity Allowance

The pregnant mother leaves work about one month before the baby is born. This is when the maternity leave (*äitiysloma*) begins, and Kela begins to pay a maternity allowance (*äitiysraha*) for 4 months. You need to inform your employer about your maternity leave well in advance before it begins. Maternity allowance is paid to all mothers who have been covered by the Finnish social security system for at least six months before the due date.

Parental Leave and Parental Allowance

Parental leave (*vanhempainvapaa*) begins immediately after maternity leave and lasts for about six months. Either the mother or the father can take parental leave. Usually, it is the mother who takes parental leave immediately after maternity leave. Parents can also work part-time and take turns looking after the child. If twins are born to a family, the parental leave is longer.

Paternity Leave and Paternity Allowance

The paternity leave (*isyysloma*) is 9 weeks long. Three weeks of it can be taken at the same time with the mother's maternity leave. Fathers often take a short paternity leave immediately after the birth of the child and continue the paternity leave when the mother goes back to work. The rest of the paternity leave can also be taken later, but it needs to be taken before the child turns 2.

Child Care Leave and Child Home Care Allowance

After parental leave, one of the parents may stay at home on unpaid child care leave (*hoitovapaa*) to take care of the child until the child turns 3. During child care leave, you can receive child home care allowance (*kotihoidontuki*), a financial benefit from Kela.

Child Benefit

Kela pays a monthly child benefit (*lapsilisä*) for each child. The purpose of the child benefit is to help the family's financial situation. Child benefit is paid until the end of the month when the child turns 17.

Early Childhood Education and Care, or Child Day Care

Most children go to day care (*päivähoito*) before school age. Day care is early childhood education and care (*varhaiskasvatus*) in a day-care centre (*päiväkoti*), a private or family caretaker (*perhepäivähoitaja*) or a club. A private or family caretaker refers to a trained caretaker who takes care of children in his or her home. You need to apply for a day-care place using a form that can be found on the website of your municipality. The application form can be sent electronically or by mail.

Every child under school age has the right to early childhood education and care, but it is not compulsory. Parents can decide whether their child will attend early childhood education and care. Studies show that taking part in early childhood education and care has positive effects on the development of a child.

Day-care fees depend on the family's income and the number of children. A day-care place can be applied for from the municipality or directly from a private day-care centre. Day care is normally provided between 6.30 am and 5.30 pm, but if the parents' working hours differ from this, they can try to arrange other care times with the day-care facility.

What Happens in Day Care?

You can usually visit the day-care centre and meet the caretakers before your child starts day care. Cooperation between the home and the day-care staff is important, because a good relationship supports the child's development. The parents meet the staff every day when they take their child to day care and pick him or her up from care.

Children in day care are given upbringing, teaching and care. The language skills of these children develop quickly and they learn social skills. Children eat breakfast, lunch and a snack in day care. They also spend time outdoors and rest.

The goal is that children learn to be active and develop a will to learn. Day care is not a place of strict discipline, but it is thought that children's self-control will develop better with gentle guidance. Early childhood education and care focuses on play, exercise, self-expression and spending time with other children.

All children are different, which is why each child is given an individual early childhood education and care plan, often referred to as VASU (*varhaiskasvatussuunnitelma*) in Finnish. In a VASU discussion, the parents and the educator talk about the child. At the same time, the educator writes a plan describing the child's development, growth and learning and how these areas can be supported.

Day care is also provided by day clubs (*päiväkerho*), run by municipalities, organizations and parishes. Municipal playgrounds also organize club activities. These clubs are usually open for a couple of hours a day. The clubs organize supervised playtime, singing, crafts and other activities.

Support for Families with Problems

Support and help are available for families who are experiencing problems. In Finland, society provides services aiming to support the well-being of families and the balanced growth of children.

Family Work and Child Welfare

Parents are responsible for the care and upbringing of their child. However, they have the right to receive help from society, if they need it. Help is provided by the municipal child welfare services (*lastensuojelu*), which serves customers under the social services department of the municipality. The purpose of municipal child welfare services is to protect the rights of children and to support parents in the upbringing of their children.

In Finland, the provision of child welfare services is based on the Child Welfare Act. The objective of child welfare is to guarantee the right of children to a safe growth environment and balanced growth. The Child Welfare Act applies to all children living in Finland. Child welfare authorities are social work and guidance professionals whose work is governed by law.

The family work (*perhetyö*) done in Finland is preventative. This means that the aim is to address any problems early on. There are many services aiming to make the everyday life of families easier and thereby prevent difficulties. For example, families with children can receive parenting and family counselling or professional help with various chores at home, such as cleaning, doing the laundry or grocery shopping.

Sometimes a child or a family can be assigned a personal support person (*tukihenkilö*) or a support family (*tukiperhe*). A support person can help the child with hobbies and homework. A support family is an ordinary family that the child can visit on weekends, for example. In addition to the social services, the well-being of families is also protected and supported by child health clinics, day-care centres and schools.

If parents are unable to take care of their child or the child is at risk in some way, the child welfare services have an obligation to intervene in the family's situation. If your family needs help with a difficult situation in life or if someone is causing serious harm to a child, you should ask for help from the municipal child welfare services yourself.

Child Protection Report

If a family appears to have serious problems that threaten the well-being of a child, someone from outside the family may also file a child protection report, sometimes also known as a child welfare report (*lastensuojeluilmoitus*). A child protection report is submitted to the municipal social services office by phone, in writing or by visiting the office. The staff of day-care centres and schools, for instance, are obligated to file a child protection report if they suspect that a child needs help or the situation requires an intervention. Anyone can file a child protection report with the social welfare authorities and it can also be done anonymously.

When a child protection report is filed concerning a family, the social welfare authorities investigate whether a child or an adolescent needs protection, help or support. Usually, the professionals first discuss the issue with the family. An interpreter may be present during the discussion, if needed. A social worker often also meets with the child without the parents. Based on the discussion, the professionals assess whether the family needs support. They prepare a plan together with the child and the family, describing the areas where help is needed and what kind of help will be provided.

Taking a Child into Care

Taking a child into care (*huostaanotto*) is a last-resort measure in child welfare. It means taking the child away from the parents. This may be done if the child is in danger. Reasons for taking a child into care include, for instance, the parents' severe fatigue, upbringing that is too strict or too lenient, serious financial difficulties, severe long-term illnesses or mental health problems, intoxicant abuse and domestic violence. The municipality will look after a child taken into care, and the child will be placed in a foster family, a children's home or a youth home. Placement outside the home may be short-term, and the child may return home once the situation has calmed down. In some cases, the child is taken permanently into care, away from his or her family.

The Family and Violence

Violence is a crime in Finland. Despite this, violence occurs in some families. Domestic violence and violence in close relationships refer to violence between people in a close relationship or within a family. It means violence against a spouse, a partner, children, relatives or others in a close relationship. Violence in close relationships is often violence against women and children, but sometimes men as well. Violence can be physical, sexual or mental in nature. These forms of violence rarely occur on their own, but different forms of violence typically occur at the same time.

Only a small share of violence that occurs in families is reported to the police. However, if you are a victim of domestic violence or violence in a close relationship, it is important to report it to the police. Violence in a family is often thought of as a private issue and is hushed up. But violence is always a punishable act, even when it occurs inside a family.

Violence Against Children

In Finland, the corporal punishment of children is illegal. Children may not be subdued or punished physically by slapping them or pulling their hair, for instance. This is enacted in the Act on Child Custody and Right of Access, which entered into force in 1984. All violence against children is a crime.

The corporal punishment and abuse of children can cause severe damage, even death. Corporal punishment can leave difficult traumas that damage the child's mental and social development. Children who have been victims of violence may experience strong anger and fear and lose their trust in close adults. These children learn a violent behaviour pattern from an adult, which can cause problems later on in life.

Sexual Abuse

If an adult has sexual intercourse with someone under the age of 16, this is considered sexual abuse even if the young person had consented to the act. Sexual abuse damages the sexual and psychological development of a child. Sexual abuse within a family, i.e. incest, causes severe traumas and problems in the development of a child. The sexual abuse of children is a crime.

Effects of Violence on Children

The use or threat of violence always affects children even when the violence is not aimed directly at them. Violence between parents has direct and indirect consequences on children's mental well-being. The sense of security can be lost already after one violence incident, and this can leave permanent traces on the life of the child.

Children may perceive violence against their mother, for example, as more frightening than violence against themselves. Even if children do not see violence, they can sense its presence and the tension in the family. Children typically blame themselves for their parents' problems. Violence and the fear of violence can cause anxiety, joylessness and sleep problems in children. The physical and mental

health and development of children may be at risk. Children who suffer from violence often have difficulties learning and concentrating in school.

Honour Related Violence

Honour related violence (*kunniaväkivalta*) is violence that usually occurs in your immediate or extended family or community. It is related to defending the honour of the community. Maintaining your honour means that you are respected by others and do not feel ashamed. Honour is a way of trying to uphold the norms and traditions of the immediate or extended family or community. The family or community sees honour as something that belongs to the entire immediate or extended family. When the actions of an individual violate the rules and customs of the community, attempts are made to restore honour with violence or threats of violence.

Examples of honour related violence include pressurizing; restricting; interfering with clothing, dating and hobbies; threatening to send a person back to the home country and other threats; the mutilation of girls' or women's genitalia; forced marriages or preventing someone from getting a divorce.

Honour related violence is a crime according to Finnish law and carries a substantial punishment. Honour related violence mostly occurs in communal cultures and societies or societies where men have substantially more power than women.

Mother and Child Homes and Shelters

Mother and child homes (*ensikoti*) and shelters (*turvakoti*) are safe places where you can go to live for a short time if you cannot go home due to, for instance, violence, threats or fear. Violence is always a crime, even when it occurs within a family.

Shelters are meant for both women and men and their children. The shelters are homelike places where staff are present round the clock. The staff at the shelters helps you to resolve crises, and the services of shelters are free of charge to customers.

A mother and child home is a place where a mother can come with a child if she is experiencing difficulties in life or is all alone. Mother and child homes are intended especially for expecting mothers and those with a small baby. Mother and child homes require a referral from a social services office (*sosiaalitoimisto*), so you should contact the office first.

The contact information of shelters can be found at www.turvakoti.net. Help for immigrant women who have experienced violence is provided by Monika – Multicultural Women's Association and its Shelter Mona. You can call a shelter at any time, even at night.

Other Health and Social Services

The health, well-being and ability to function of each family member affects the family as a whole. Various health care and social services are available in Finland in e.g. situations where a disabled person and his or her family need help or support to cope with everyday life. Help is also available for mental health issues and intoxicant abuse problems.

Services for the Disabled

A disabled person is someone who has long-term difficulties coping with everyday life due to an injury or illness. Municipalities have an obligation to provide services for any disabled people who need them.

Services for the disabled include, for instance, transport services and a personal assistant. Transport services mean transport by taxi to the disabled people who cannot use public transport or cannot otherwise travel independently. A personal assistant helps the disabled person with cooking, shopping, at the workplace or with studying. The municipality of residence pays the assistant's salary. The purpose of services for the disabled is to help disabled people participate in society and to make it easier to live with a disability.

Applying for Services for the Disabled

You usually need a medical certificate from e.g. a health centre to receive services for the disabled. The social services office of your municipality of residence can provide instructions and help you to apply for services. A social worker will find out what services for the disabled each customer is entitled to receive. Municipalities also arrange service housing and supported housing for the disabled. Occupants must pay for the housing services. The aids that a disabled person needs, such as a wheelchair, a hearing aid or a white cane and guide dog for a visually impaired person, are free of charge to the users. Interpretation and rehabilitation are also included in the services for the disabled.

There are disability associations in Finland aiming to improve the position of disabled people in society. These associations can help you to e.g. apply for services. The associations also organize leisure activities and provide peer support. Hilma – The Support Centre for Immigrant Persons with Disabilities also operates in Finland, providing support and activities for disabled immigrants.

Mental Health Services

Mental health is an inseparable part of human health. When your mental health is in order, you are aware of your capabilities and can cope even with the more difficult situations in life, in addition to going to work and participating in communal activities. Anyone can have mental health problems at some point in their life, and help is available in Finland.

Difficult situations in life can negatively affect your mental health, causing symptoms such as long-term sleeplessness, lack of appetite, depression, fatigue and anxiety. Situations where you may need mental health services include problems at the workplace, moving from one country to another, a severe illness, divorce, family problems or the death of a loved one. Your lifestyle also affects how well you cope with challenging times in life or various problems. If the problems continue for a long time or make daily life or dealing with matters difficult, you should seek outside help in the situation.

Tips for maintaining a good mental health:

- Take care of yourself. A healthy lifestyle, meaning a healthy diet, enough rest and sleep and exercise, boosts your well-being and stress management skills in difficult situations in life.
- Spend time with your family and friends. Stay in contact with the people who are important in your life. Meet them, listen to them and discuss life.
- Come up with something new that you would like to learn. Start a new hobby. Learning new things rejuvenates your mind and gives you new experiences.
- Help others. Do voluntary work where you come into contact with new people. Helping others and engaging in social interaction makes life more meaningful.
- Recognize your feelings. Think about why you are feeling like this right now. Do not be too hard on yourself. Remember that feelings are transient and permitted.
- Ask for help, if you need it. Discuss your difficulties with friends and seek help. Help is available from both public health care and online, such as The Finnish Association for Mental Health.

Access to Mental Health Services

In Finland, you can get access to mental health services by contacting your health centre and scheduling an appointment with a public health nurse or a doctor. The doctor can write a referral to a psychiatric outpatient clinic or other mental health services, depending on your needs. The treatment often involves discussions with e.g. a psychologist or a psychotherapist as well as possible medication. You can also personally schedule an appointment with a psychiatrist or a psychologist who has a practice at a private clinic. However, private health care is considerably more expensive than public health care.

If you need urgent treatment, you can call the health centre on duty or the hospital. The emergency units of psychiatric hospitals provide emergency psychiatric care. If a child or adolescent has mental health issues, contact the municipal family counselling clinic (*perheneuvola*), the school psychologist or the school doctor.

Services for Intoxicant Abusers

In Finland, alcohol and drugs are considered intoxicants. The most common drugs are cannabis, heroin, amphetamine, ecstasy, cocaine and khat. All drugs are illegal in Finland, and their possession and sale carry a heavy fine or imprisonment. It is often difficult to stop taking drugs without support.

If intoxicant abuse becomes a problem, the nearest health centre or A-Clinic can help you. The A-Clinic Foundation organizes treatment and rehabilitation services for people suffering from intoxicant abuse and addiction problems and the close relatives of these people. Treatment at the clinic is free of charge and may involve, for instance, meetings with a doctor and a social therapist and group sessions. So-called detoxification (*katkaisuhoido*), meaning the complete withdrawal from intoxicants while in treatment, includes the treatment of withdrawal symptoms, the related medical treatment, conversations and rest.

Alcohol and Drug Abuse in Finland

People in Finland are fairly tolerant of alcohol, unlike drugs. Alcohol consumption among Finns has decreased in recent years, but heavy drinking is still common. Studies show that alcohol is the most common problem intoxicant in Finland, meaning that it causes the most problems to its abusers and their family members.

Drug abuse is a fairly recent phenomenon in Finland. Drug addicts are often marginalized in many ways and have numerous other social and health problems in addition to intoxicant abuse problems. According to an estimate from five years ago, there were about 18 000–30 000 amphetamine and opioid users in Finland. Drug abuse often involves crime, because drugs are expensive and it is difficult to raise the money to buy them through honest means.

Health Counselling Centres for Drug Addicts

Many cities have health counselling centres (*terveysneuvontapiste*) where it is possible to exchange used syringes for new ones and where customers are also given social and health counselling and guidance to gain access to social services. The authorities provide free syringes to drug addicts for hygiene and health reasons. If addicts use dirty syringes, various diseases and illnesses can spread through them. The counselling centres can also help addicts to be admitted to detoxification treatment to withdraw from drugs.

When a Family Moves to Finland

In order for a family to adjust to the new country, it is important that the parents are familiar with the Finnish culture, norms and society. When the parents know how things are usually done in Finland, this understanding supports their well-being and parenting and helps them raise their children here.

When a family moves to Finland, the children should go to school or day care as soon as possible. Children in school or day care will quickly learn Finnish or Swedish and also make friends who are of the same age. While the children are in day care or school, the parents have time to go to work, study and run personal and family errands.

When moving to a new country, the roles in the family may change if e.g. children learn the new language faster than their parents or the mother of the family goes to work for the first time. Some immigrants may have moved to the new country on their own without the familiar safety of their family and relatives around them. All this requires adjustment to big changes both in your mind and in the family, and this may take time.

Every family member goes through the same process when settling into Finland, but everyone does this at his or her own pace. Families often both cherish the customs of their own culture and adjust to the Finnish culture. Children often adjust faster than their parents. As the children constantly embrace new values and customs, this may cause tension in the family. Parents should discuss these issues together. Over time, each family member can find a suitable way to live in Finland.

The relationship of a couple may also encounter unexpected challenges when the whole family is faced with new things. The roles of men and women may be different in Finland than back in the home country. It is common for a family who has immigrated to a new country to experience a wide variety of emotions. It is natural to feel frustrated when things are not done the way you are used to and when your status is different from what it was before. If one spouse is already more fluent in the new language, he or she should try to help and support the other spouse. However, it is important for both to be active and learn the language so that one is not too dependent on the other. This also strengthens the spouses' relationship.

Discussion Questions

1. Families in Finland are often small. A family usually consists of a father, a mother and children. Are families in your home country similar?
2. What are the reasons why the Finnish culture has become individualistic?
3. In Finland, men and women have the same rights and obligations in marriage according to law. Is this the case in your home country as well?
4. What kinds of families and relationships do Finns live in?
5. In Finland, it is easy for a married couple to get a divorce if they want one. What disadvantages do you see in the easiness of getting a divorce? How about benefits?
6. International comparisons show that Finland is one of the best countries in the world for mothers and children. How does this benefit the entire family?
7. What is the role of child welfare in Finland?
8. What are the negative effects of domestic violence?
9. What challenges can be associated with family life in a new country? How can you overcome them?
10. What are the benefits for a child of growing up in two different cultures?

5. EDUCATION

Development of the Finnish Education System

The Finnish Education System Today

Financing Your Studies

Development of the Finnish Education System

In Finland, education is valued and Finns are generally well-educated. There are many different opportunities to study in Finland, and you can also study as an adult. Today, the Finnish education system is considered one of the best in the world, but this has not always been the case. The education system has developed over the course of several decades, and education has gradually become a requirement for gaining access to the labour market and succeeding in life. Women in Finland are also highly educated compared to women in many other countries.

People in Finland strongly believe that learning and education improve your ability to cope in a globalizing world. Education can also help you gain a better status in society. It is thought that Finland will fare better in global competition if it invests in education. Education and certificates are also important in job hunting, because there are very few jobs left in Finland that do not require education in the field in question.

Lifelong Learning

The Finnish education system is based on the idea of lifelong learning (*eliniikäinen oppiminen*). This means that a person learns throughout life, from infancy to old age. Therefore, learning does not end when a person completes some level of education. In addition to educational institutions that belong to the formal education system, learning also occurs in informal environments. These include everyday activities, hobbies and the use of the media and communication technology. Lifelong learning is essential, because society and working life are constantly changing and developing.

Birth of the Education System

Societal changes always happen for a reason. They usually stem from a need or an ideology. Various societal needs and ideologies have also influenced the birth and development of the Finnish education system. The first schools were established in Finland more than 700 years ago under the Catholic Church. Back then, almost all Finns lived in the countryside, and for a long time, only a few upper-class boys had the chance to go to school. They were mainly educated to become priests.

The Reformation began in many European countries in the 16th century. Various new religions, such as Lutheranism, separated from the Catholic Church. Finland also used to be a Catholic country, but became Lutheran due to the Reformation. The Reformation also had the effect of gradually changing attitudes towards education, since the Lutheran Church emphasized the language of the common people and literacy. It was thought that every parishioner should be able to read the Bible in his or her own language.

Role of the Church in Organizing Education

As a result of the Reformation, the Church began to take even more responsibility for organizing education for the common people in the 17th century. This eventually became its obligation. In principle, parents were responsible for making sure that their children learned to read and know the basics of the Christian doctrine. However, the Church helped to achieve this by providing education in various forms. The first university in Finland, the Academy of Åbo, was founded in 1640. It mainly

educated priests and government officials. At the time, Finland was still a part of Sweden, but the cities in the Finnish territory gradually grew and more officials were needed in administration.

In the early 19th century, Finland became an autonomous part of Russia and its position as a country also changed. Despite this, the Church was still responsible for educating the public all the way until the mid-19th century. After that, the Finnish society began to change at increasing speed.

In the late 19th century, factories began to emerge in Finland and people moved from the countryside to cities and urban areas to work in the factories. Many government representatives and educated people gradually began to think that it is important to provide education to more and more people. Knowledge and learning were considered as a way of providing “light and reason” to the people. It was thought that, with the new status of Finland as a country, the national rights of the public should at some point be extended and this would require the wider education of the people. Providing education to the entire nation was also important for the sake of public morale and a higher self-esteem.

Education is Transferred to Municipalities

With industrialization, the school was separated from the Church. Working parents could no longer take care of their children during the day, so there was a need to develop the education system.

Municipalities started to establish folk schools (*kansakoulu*) that were independent of the Church, and these schools eventually spread across the country.

Secondary schools (*oppikoulu*) also provided education alongside folk schools. Many of the secondary schools were private. Most of their pupils were children from wealthy families. It was not until several decades later that the entire population began to receive education, because many people especially in the countryside did not yet understand the importance of education and were sceptical of sending their children to school.

Education for All Finns

In addition to industrialization, nationalism also influenced the development and expansion of the education system. Finns living under Russian rule gradually began to dream of having their own state in the late 19th century. Various sections of society, especially culture, language and the arts, began to promote nationalism, i.e. emphasize the special nature of Finland and Finnishness. It was thought that education could unite the people and that citizens should participate even more actively in common affairs. Thus, the civic society began to develop and Finland started to become more democratic.

Universal and equal suffrage was enacted in Finland in 1906. This meant that all Finnish citizens over the age of 24 had the right to vote in elections. Women were also given the vote and the right to run for office in elections. Development of the school system was increasingly important so that Finns could be educated into responsible citizens and voters.

It was not until the 20th century that the majority of the population began to be in favour of folk school. The act on compulsory education was enacted in 1921 in Finland. This meant that schooling became compulsory for everyone. Folk school expanded to include the entire age group in the 1920s and 1930s.

General upper secondary education (*lukio*) and matriculation examinations (*ylioppilastutkinto*) became more common especially in the 1950s and 1960s. Finland began to pursue social equality and economic development by building a welfare state. This also gave rise to the idea of a national nine-year comprehensive school (*peruskoulu*). The old school system with separate folk and secondary schools was replaced by a national comprehensive school system in the 1970s.

In the last one hundred years, education has been expanded to include the entire population of Finland, and education opportunities have increased dramatically especially since the 1950s. Vocational education, adult education and higher education have increased since the 1960s and spread across the country. The development of the education system enabled economic development and the formation of a more equal society. It was also an important part of building a welfare society. Today, education is increasingly expected to bring economic benefits to society, and education policy emphasizes efficiency and education that meets the individual needs of all people.

The Finnish Education System Today

All children residing permanently in Finland are obligated by law to go to school (*oppivelvollisuus*), meaning that they must receive compulsory schooling. This means that all children must obtain the knowledge and skills determined by law and in the basic education curriculum (*perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelma*).

Compulsory schooling starts in the year the child turns seven and ends at the end of the school year in the year he or she turns 17. It is the guardians' responsibility to make sure that the child completes the compulsory education. The guardian is usually the child's parent or parents. If the guardian does not make sure that the child attends compulsory education, the court may issue a penalty to the guardian.

Pre-primary Education

Before children go to an actual school, most of them take part in early childhood education and care provided by a day-care centre, a private or family caretaker or a club. Pre-primary education (*esiopetus*) begins one year before compulsory education and schooling. All six-year-old children must attend pre-primary education or other similar activities. In colloquial Finnish, pre-primary education is also known as *esikoulu* or *eskari* (preschool). Children who are in day care at the age of five already complete assignments that prepare them for pre-primary education.

Pre-primary education prepares a child for going to school. Its goal is to support the child's development and learning potential and to strengthen his or her social skills and self-esteem. Pre-primary education aims to provide positive learning experiences to children and to facilitate their linguistic development and their readiness to learn new things. In pre-primary education, things are mostly learned through play, imagination and examining things together while taking each child's level of development into consideration. Any difficulties related to a child's development or learning can also be addressed in pre-primary education.

Municipalities are responsible for organizing pre-primary education, and all children must be assigned a place in pre-primary education. Pre-primary education is usually organized in municipal day-care centres or comprehensive schools, but it can also be provided in private day-care centres or schools, for example.

Pre-primary education always begins in August. The child's guardians need to apply for a pre-primary education place for their child normally in the beginning of the year when the child will start pre-primary education. The organizers of pre-primary education will notify guardians well in advance about the application times for pre-primary education places. The activities of a pre-primary group are organized by a teacher who is either a qualified class teacher or a kindergarten teacher. He or she supervises all group activities and assesses the progress of each child together with the child and the guardians.

Pre-primary education is provided according to the national core curriculum. Pre-primary education does not have separate subjects, but various content modules, such as language and interaction,

mathematics, ethics and religion, environmental and natural studies, health, physical and motor development and arts and culture.

A preschool day normally lasts for about four hours and, if the parents go to work, the child can be in regular day care for the rest of the day. Preschool education is free of charge for all children, and a free warm meal is served during the day. All the learning materials are also free of charge. If the child is in day care in addition to preschool during the day, the parents pay the normal day-care fee for half of the day.

Basic Education

In the year a child turns seven, he or she must begin to receive compulsory education and start basic education (*perusopetus*). Most pupils in basic education study in municipal comprehensive schools (*peruskoulu*), but there are also some private schools and state schools in Finland.

Basic education consists of grades 1–9. In colloquial Finnish, grades 1–6 are known as *alakoulu* (“lower school”, equivalent to primary or elementary school) and grades 7–9 as *yläkoulu* (“upper school”, equivalent to secondary school or junior high school). Comprehensive schooling is funded by tax revenue and is free of charge for all families. All textbooks, other learning materials and tools are also free of charge, and pupils receive a free warm meal on school days. Pupils are also entitled to free statutory school health and pupil welfare services, such as the services of a psychologist and a school social worker. These services are provided in or near the school during the school day.

The aim of basic education is to teach all pupils essential knowledge and skills and to support their growth as individuals and members of a democratic society. Teaching promotes inclusion and a sustainable lifestyle and educates pupils to know and respect human rights. The purpose of basic education is to also promote diverse cultural skills and to support pupils as they form a personal cultural identity.

The basic education certificate (*perusopetuksen päättötodistus*) allows pupils to apply for further studies, such as general upper secondary school (*lukio*) or a vocational institution (*ammattioppilaitos*). Teaching in the first six grades of basic education is provided by a class teacher (*luokanopettaja*) who teaches all or almost all subjects. In grades 7–9, almost every subject has a different teacher, a subject teacher (*aineenopettaja*) who specializes in the particular subject. There is also a so-called “*kymppiluokka*” (grade 10), i.e. one extra year of basic education for pupils who want to further develop their study skills and improve their chances of being accepted to further studies.

The Curriculum and Basic Education Subjects

The provision of basic education in Finland is governed by law and the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (*perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet*) drawn up by the Finnish National Agency for Education. This curriculum is implemented throughout Finland. It describes all the matters that are important in terms of education and teaching.

According to the curriculum, the pupil is an active player in the learning process and also gets to participate in the planning of the learning process. The teacher guides learning and provides inspiration and encouraging feedback. The goal is that learning will occur in interaction with other learners and the wider world.

Teaching aims for an investigative and creative approach. This also creates room for new kinds of teaching methods. Skills in information and communication technology, i.e. ICT competence – meaning the use of various technical devices, such as computers, mobile phones and cameras – is important in modern society. ICT competence is also necessary in almost all everyday activities and

working life. Due to this, pupils also learn how to use information and communication technology at school, and the opportunities provided by ICT are used extensively in all subjects.

The basic education curriculum contains compulsory subjects that are taught to all pupils. They are mother tongue and literature, the second national language (Swedish or Finnish), a foreign language, environmental studies, history, social studies, mathematics, chemistry, physics, biology, geography, health education, religion or ethics, music, crafts, physical education, visual arts and home economics.

In addition to the compulsory subjects, there are optional subjects that each pupil may personally choose. The purpose of these subjects is to further deepen the pupil's competence in topics that interest him or her. Optional subjects are available especially in grades 7–9.

Pupils with an immigrant background and bilingual pupils can be given teaching in their own mother tongue as part of basic education. Pupils also have the right to receive teaching in their own religion, if their parents request this and if there are at least three pupils belonging to the same denomination in all the basic education schools of an education provider. Another option for pupils who are not members of the Lutheran or Orthodox Church is to study ethics (*elämäkatsomustieto*). Ethics classes deal with e.g. ethical issues, human rights, various worldviews, cultural identity and the moral growth of an individual.

Guidance Counselling and Special Support

If a pupil is struggling with his or her studies, schools provide additional education or remedial teaching (*tukiopetus*) in different subjects. Sometimes this can be provided in the pupil's mother tongue. In addition to subject teaching, all pupils in basic education have the right to receive guidance counselling (*oppilaanohjaus*). Guidance counselling involves e.g. supporting the pupil with his or her studies, guiding him or her towards further studies and trying to prevent any problems related to studying. Guidance counselling is provided in the form of class instruction and, if necessary, in small groups and individually. Guidance counselling is provided by a guidance counsellor (*opinto-ohjaaja*, or “*opo*”) who is a teacher specialized in guidance.

According to law, pupils in basic education have the right to receive adequate support for their learning and schooling throughout basic education. The need for support may be related to an illness, a disability or learning difficulties, for example. If there is a need for support, the pupil's situation is carefully examined in cooperation with the pupil, his or her guardians, the school and experts.

There are many different forms of support, and their use depends on the pupil's situation. The idea is that the support is flexible and well-planned and can be modified depending on the needs. The sooner the need for support is recognized, the better a child can be helped and the accumulation of problems prevented.

If a decision is made concerning the need for special support, an individual educational plan, or IEP (*henkilökohtainen opetuksen järjestämistä koskeva suunnitelma*, or *HOJKS*) is prepared for the pupil, and teaching is provided according to the plan. The purpose of the plan is to support the individual learning process of the pupil in the long run. It is important that the support continues uninterrupted when the child changes schools or progresses from one level of education to another.

Supporting Adolescent Growth

In Finland, the aim is that children and adolescents are supported as they grow to become independent, well-balanced adults and members of society who take others into consideration. Adolescents need support in this process from their parents and other people. In school, adolescents are supported by teachers, the school nurse, the school psychologist and the school social worker.

In addition, adolescents can receive help and advice in difficult situations from the following places, among others:

- Family counselling clinics (*perheneuvola*) and adolescent outpatient clinics (*nuorten poliklinikka*)
- The Family Federation of Finland (*Väestöliitto*)
- The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare (*Mannerheimin lastensuojeluliitto*)
- Crisis Centre for Youth (*Nuorten kriisipiste*)
- Youth shelters (*nuorten turvatalo*)
- Girls' Houses (*Tyttöjen Talo*)
- Boys' Houses (*Poikien Talo*) and the Help Phone for Boys (*Poikien Puhelin*)

Instruction Preparing for Basic Education

The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education also applies to the education provided to children with an immigrant background. The curriculum aims to also take into consideration the pupil's background and starting level, including his or her mother tongue and culture. Children who have immigrated to Finland are usually placed in a normal basic education grade, based on their age and their skill and knowledge level. However, they can also be given instruction preparing for basic education (*perusopetukseen valmistava opetus*), if necessary.

The aim of this preparatory education is to give the pupil the required skills to go on to basic education and to support the pupil with his or her integration in Finland. Learning the language is an important part of preparatory education. Children have the opportunity to learn Finnish or Swedish according to a special syllabus intended for those with an immigrant background. This syllabus is for pupils whose Finnish or Swedish language skills are not yet good enough to study according to the normal Finnish or Swedish language and literature syllabus.

Pupil Assessment in Basic Education

The learning and progress of pupils is assessed continuously throughout the school year. The goal is to give feedback that is as diverse as possible to both the pupil and the guardians. The assessment process involves comparing the pupil's work, progress and behaviour to the objectives stated in the curriculum.

Tests in various subjects are held during the school year. Their purpose is to see how well each pupil has understood the topics that have been taught. However, assessment is not only based on test results, but is done continuously – this means assessing the pupil's work during lessons and in other learning situations, how well the pupil does his or her homework etc.

The school must give each pupil a report at least once a year at the end of the school year. The report may consist of grades from four (worst) to ten (best), a verbal assessment or both. In addition to reports, the pupil and his or her guardians hear about the pupil's assessment in discussions with the teacher, for example. The pupil's behaviour must also be assessed at least once a year.

If the pupil does not receive a passing grade in a particular subject at the end of a school year, he or she may not be able to progress to the next grade. In that case, the pupil will need to repeat the same grade. Another option is that the pupil needs to complete additional assignments or tests to be able to progress to the next grade. In these cases, the pupil's teachers and the school principal always discuss the options with the pupil's guardians first and then decide what to do.

Basic Education Schedules and School Meals

The school year begins in mid-August and ends on the first Saturday of June. The year is divided into the autumn term (*syyslukukausi*) and the spring term (*kevätlukukausi*). The autumn term ends with a

Christmas party (*joulujuhla*) that marks the beginning of the Christmas holiday (*joululoma*). The spring term ends with a spring party (*kevätjuhla*), which is a celebration of the start of the summer holiday (*kesäloma*). In addition to these holidays, there are many other holidays during a school year, such as the autumn holiday (*syysloma*) in the autumn and the winter holiday (*talviloma*) in February–March. If an important festival, such as Easter, May Day, Ascension Day or Independence Day, happens to be on a weekday, it is also a day off from school.

The length of a school day varies from grade to grade. School days are shorter in the lower grades than in the higher grades. In grades 1–6, the minimum is 19–25 lessons per week, and in grades 7–9, it is 30 lessons per week. There are breaks (*välitunti*) between classes. One lesson lasts for 45 minutes.

There is a longer lunch break in the middle of the school day when pupils are served a free warm meal in the school cafeteria. School meals have been served in Finnish schools already since 1948. The school meal consists of healthy basic food that follows the official nutritional recommendations concerning the diet that is recommended in Finland to stay healthy. The food provides pupils with enough essential nutrients and energy to last throughout the school day. However, it is important that pupils eat a nutritious breakfast at home before going to school.

If the pupil has a special diet due to ethical, religious or health reasons, the school will try to take this into consideration. The guardians should discuss the special diet with the teacher and the kitchen staff of the school, and the school may also ask to see various documents related to the child's diet, such as a doctor's certificate.

Cooperation Between Home and School

The cooperation between the school and the pupil's guardians is extremely important in Finland, because guardians are always ultimately responsible for their child's upbringing, but the school is responsible for the pupil's education and upbringing during the school day. Without the cooperation of the home and school, schooling cannot succeed.

Each pupil is expected to take responsibility for his or her studying already starting from first grade, and he or she needs support and encouragement at home to do this. It is essential that guardians keep a close eye on their child's studying and make sure that the child does his or her homework, for example.

Cooperation between home and school is organized in many different ways. For instance, schools have parents' evenings (*vanhempainilta*) and open days as well as joint celebrations and trips where the whole family is invited. In matters concerning an individual child, teachers stay in contact with parents using e.g. messages, e-mails and phone calls.

Many schools have an online electronic system that allows teachers and guardians to communicate daily about matters concerning the pupil. Usually, teachers and guardians also meet in person to discuss the pupil's situation. Teachers and parents can decide together on the best way to maintain contact and work in cooperation. When cooperation works well, schooling is also more successful. Any problems are easier to notice and can also be dealt with before they escalate too much.

If the parents are not happy with the actions of the school, they should first speak with the pupil's own teacher and, if necessary, also contact the school principal. You can also contact the municipality or a Regional State Administrative Agency (*aluehallintovirasto*), if you suspect that the school does not abide by the laws and regulations in its activities.

Safety in School

According to the Basic Education Act, all pupils are entitled to a safe learning environment. It is the pupil's duty to behave appropriately with teachers and other pupils. The pupil's travel to and from school should also be as safe as possible. All schools need to have a plan in the case of crises that affect the entire community. In addition, they must have instructions for dealing with various problems, such as the prevention, recognition and addressing of violence, bullying and harassment and intoxicant abuse. All schools have their own rules and regulations to maintain order in the school and to promote the smooth progress of studies and safety and comfort in the school community.

Schools do not tolerate any kind of discrimination, bullying, harassment or violence. Bullying means the long-term physical or mental abuse of a single person by another person or group. The bully is usually in a stronger position compared to the victim of bullying. The bully may, for instance, be bigger, older or more popular, and can take advantage of this position by e.g. intimidating, threatening or hurting the victim. If bullying occurs in school or on the way to or from school, you should immediately contact the teacher and the school principal. The school has an obligation to interfere with bullying.

The aim is to improve safety in school using pedagogical methods. Safety-related themes are part of the school curriculum and these themes are discussed in class in connection with different subjects and at various events. The themes include e.g. growing as an individual, safety and traffic and our responsibility for the environment, well-being and a sustainable future.

Morning and Afternoon Activities and Clubs for Schoolchildren

Municipalities may organize activities for first and second grade pupils in basic education and pupils in special needs education on weekday mornings before the school day begins or in the afternoons after the school day.

The aim of morning and afternoon activities is to support the upbringing efforts of the school and the home and to offer a safe environment for the child's growth and the opportunity to take part in diverse supervised and stimulating activities. Morning and afternoon activities are especially important for children whose parents work long hours. You need to apply for a place for your child in morning and afternoon activities in advance, and municipalities may charge a fee for the activities.

Some schools also organize various clubs after the school day. The clubs aim to provide recreational opportunities especially for children who do not otherwise have a chance to participate in hobbies. Club activities are voluntary for pupils.

Basic Education for Adults

Basic education is also available for adult students in general upper secondary schools for adults (*aikuislukio*) and adult education centres (*kansalaisopisto*). Basic education for adults is intended for those who have not completed comprehensive school as a child. Basic education for adults allows you to complete either the full basic education syllabus or individual courses. Some adults want to study in comprehensive school so that they could then continue their studies in, for instance, general upper secondary school or a vocational institution.

Basic education for adults has its own curriculum where the students' mature age is taken into consideration. Basic education for adults is free of charge for the students, and they may apply for financial support for their studies from Kela.

General Upper Secondary School

After comprehensive school, students may continue their studies in general upper secondary school (*lukio*) or a vocational institution (*ammattillinen oppilaitos*). General upper secondary school does not qualify you to practise a profession, but studying focuses on general knowledge subjects. However, completing general upper secondary school makes you eligible for further studies in a higher education institution. General upper secondary school studies usually last for three years, but they can also be completed slower or faster, depending on the student's wishes. However, studies should not last for more than four years.

Instruction in general upper secondary schools is usually free of charge if the student aims to complete the full general upper secondary school syllabus. Fees may be charged for individual courses, and some general upper secondary schools have special permission to also collect a fee for completing the full syllabus. General upper secondary school students must buy textbooks and other learning materials themselves, but they are entitled to a free meal in the school cafeteria if they are full-time students. General upper secondary school students over the age of 17 may claim financial aid for students (*opintotuki*) from Kela.

Subjects in General Upper Secondary School

The school year in general upper secondary school usually follows the same schedule as in basic education. General upper secondary school is classless, meaning that the subjects are divided into courses and students can plan their timetable themselves. The general upper secondary school syllabus requires the completion of at least 75 courses, but it is possible to study more courses than this. Most of the courses are compulsory, and the rest can be chosen freely by the student.

The following subjects, among others, are studied in general upper secondary school: mother tongue and literature, second national language, foreign languages, mathematics, biology, geography, history, social studies, psychology, philosophy, religion or ethics, physical education, health education, music, visual arts and guidance counselling.

Assessment and the Matriculation Examination

In general upper secondary school, a student's learning outcomes and progress are assessed mainly using numerical grades given for each course. The grade for the full syllabus of each subject is based on these course grades. Once a student has completed the full general upper secondary school syllabus, he or she receives a general upper secondary education certificate (*lukion päättötodistus*).

During general upper secondary school, students also take a matriculation examination (*ylioppilastutkinto*). Passing the matriculation examination or completing a three-year vocational qualification is a requirement for pursuing higher education at a university or a university of applied sciences. The matriculation examination consists of tests that are the same throughout Finland. The matriculation examination is held biannually, in spring and in autumn. It consists of a minimum of four tests, but it can also be taken in more than four subjects. The matriculation examination is assessed using letter grades, which are, from highest to lowest, L, E, M, C, B, A, and I is a failed grade. The student receives a matriculation examination certificate (*ylioppilastutkintotodistus*) once he or she has completed the full general upper secondary school syllabus and passed the matriculation examination.

Vocational Education and Training

Vocational education and training, or VET (*ammattillinen koulutus*) refers to studies where the aim is to learn a particular profession in practice. VET aims to respond to the needs of working life by training professionals in various fields. VET is highly practical, and the share of theoretical, general knowledge studies is quite small.

Vocational studies can be completed in many different ways, and study opportunities are available for both adolescents and adults. Vocational studies are provided by, for example, vocational institutions (*ammattillinen oppilaitos*), vocational adult education centres (*ammattillinen aikuiskoulutuskeskus*) and folk high schools (*kansanopisto*). There are also vocational special education institutions (*ammattillinen erityisoppilaitos*) and vocational special needs education (*ammattillinen erityisopetus*) for students who need regular support for studying and learning due to e.g. learning difficulties, a disability or an illness.

The vocational qualifications are the vocational upper secondary qualification (*ammattillinen perustutkinto*), the further vocational qualification (*ammattitutkinto*) and the specialist vocational qualification (*erikoisammattitutkinto*). They can be completed in the form of vocational upper secondary education and training (*ammattillinen peruskoulutus*) or as a competence-based qualification (*näyttötutkinto*) or apprenticeship training (*oppisopimuskoulutus*). The competence-based qualification is intended mainly for adults, and it means that professional skills and competence are demonstrated in authentic service or production situations in working life. Apprenticeship training, on the other hand, refers to studying at a workplace as an employee.

VET is usually free of charge, but the student must buy the books and often other materials and tools as well. Vocational upper secondary education and training also includes a free meal. Further and specialist vocational qualifications may involve qualification fees, and the education related to these qualifications may also be subject to a fee.

VET is usually applied for online via the studyinfo.fi website or directly on the website of the institution (adult education). Applicants take an entrance exam, which may consist of written tests, interviews, preliminary assignments, practical assignments, psychological tests etc. If the student has not completed basic education in Finland, he or she usually needs to demonstrate sufficient language skills by taking a Finnish or Swedish language test arranged by the institution itself.

Vocational Qualifications

A **vocational upper secondary qualification** (*ammattillinen perustutkinto*) is intended for people who have no previous skills in a particular profession, and completing the qualification requires regular attendance in classes. The goal is to equip students with the knowledge and skills required in a profession and to prepare them for practicing the profession independently. There are more than 50 different vocational upper secondary qualifications in Finland, organized into the following fields:

- Humanities and Education
- Culture
- Social Sciences, Business and Administration
- Natural Sciences
- Technology, Communication and Transport
- Natural Resources and the Environment
- Social Services, Health and Sport
- Tourism, Catering and Domestic Services

Education is based on the requirements for vocational qualifications drawn up by the Finnish National Board of Education. A vocational upper secondary qualification is typically completed in 2–3 years. The majority of the studies are vocational studies where knowledge and skills required in working life in that particular field are learned. Studying is also done at work, and the vocational upper secondary qualifications include a great deal of on-the-job learning (*työssäoppiminen*), or practical training (*työharjoittelu*).

In addition to vocational studies, each qualification includes common vocational units, some of which are compulsory and others are free-choice units that the student can choose him or herself. The

common vocational units consist of mother tongue, foreign languages, mathematics, physics, chemistry, information and communication technology, civic skills, working life competence, entrepreneurship, maintaining work ability, exercise and health education, cultural knowledge, art and culture, ethics, psychology and environmental competence. General upper secondary school and a vocational upper secondary qualification can also be completed at the same time.

A personal study plan (*henkilökohtainen opintosuunnitelma*) is prepared for each student according to his or her needs. Students also receive guidance counselling during their vocational studies and actively take part in planning their studies. Guidance counselling is especially important for students with difficulties in their studies or life management. The purpose of the counselling is to guarantee that studies progress smoothly, to support and promote personal development and to strengthen professional growth. Students in vocational special needs education also have an individual educational plan, IEP (*henkilökohtainen opetuksen järjestämistä koskeva suunnitelma, HOJKS*).

In vocational upper secondary qualifications, the student's level of competence is usually assessed in vocational skills demonstrations at a workplace during on-the-job learning modules. This means that the student demonstrates in practice how well he or she fulfils the vocational competence requirements in the qualification requirements. The student receives a separate certificate for each demonstration, which together form the vocational qualification certificate.

A **further vocational qualification** (*ammattitutkinto*) and a **specialist vocational qualification** (*erikoisammattitutkinto*) are for people who already have some vocational competence in the field in question, obtained at work or in hobbies, for instance, and who want to further develop their competence. These qualifications can be completed with a skills demonstration only, without attending any courses, but institutions also provide courses that prepare students for the qualification. For a further vocational qualification, the person demonstrates the vocational skills required of a professional in a field, and for a specialist vocational qualification, he or she demonstrates skills required in more demanding tasks in a field.

In **apprenticeship training** (*oppisopimuskoulutus*), the student learns a profession at a workplace. The student signs a fixed-term employment contact with an employer, stating that the workplace agrees to train the student in the particular profession during the employment. In addition to learning at the workplace, the studies include theoretical modules at a vocational institution or an adult education centre on a few days a month. A personal study plan is drawn up for each student. The plan is based on the qualification requirements of the Finnish National Board of Education.

The duration of apprenticeship training varies from one to three years, depending on the student's previous education and work experience. The student is assigned a workplace instructor who guides and assesses the student's progress and serves as the contact person for the institution. The student needs to find a suitable workplace him or herself. The student is paid the normal salary for the working days according to the collective agreement.

Finnish Language Support in Vocational Education and Training

In addition to the education options described above, many vocational institutions now offer modules especially designed for students with an immigrant background. These modules give special emphasis to learning the Finnish language. There are many different kinds of modules available in different fields with varying lengths. Some of the modules lead to the attainment of a vocational upper secondary qualification and some to the completion of a qualification unit. Students studying in these modules receive special support for learning professional Finnish.

VALMA education is preparatory education for vocational training (*ammattilliseen koulutukseen valmentava koulutus*). It is intended for individuals who want to develop their study skills for pursuing vocational education and training. These skills include information retrieval skills, study skills and

life management skills and introduction to working life. VALMA education also allows students to learn more Finnish. A personal study plan is drawn up for each student according to his or her needs.

VALMA education lasts for 6–10 months, and after completing it, the student may apply for vocational education and training. VALMA education is usually free of charge and is provided by vocational institutions and adult education centres.

You typically need to apply for VALMA education and other education provided by vocational institutions online via the studyinfo.fi website or directly on the website of the institution. Applicants take an entrance exam, which may be an interview, for instance.

Higher Education Institutions

Higher education institutions in Finland are divided into universities of applied sciences (*ammattikorkeakoulu*) and universities (*yliopisto*). The education provided in universities of applied sciences corresponds to the high vocational skills requirements of working life, and the education in universities is based on high-quality scientific research. Studying in a university of applied sciences is more practical, whereas university studies are more theoretical. Most higher education institutions in Finland are public and are funded mainly by taxes. Students living in Finland do not usually have to pay a separate tuition fee.

Universities of applied sciences and universities can be applied for in the joint application system (*yhteishaku*). The joint application system means that you can apply for multiple different institutions at the same time using a single form on the studyinfo.fi website. Most study programmes can only be applied for in the spring joint application period. There are considerably fewer study programmes available in the autumn joint application period. Some study programmes also have separate applications (*erillishaku*) at a different time from the joint application. Information about separate applications is available on the websites of educational institutions. You can apply to a higher education institution if you have completed general upper secondary school or three-year vocational education and training. A qualification attained abroad is also acceptable if it would also make you eligible to study in a higher education institution in the country where the qualification was attained.

Each study programme has its own admissions criteria for student selections. Students are selected based on their certificates and/or entrance exams. All higher education institutions have an entrance exam. You should carefully prepare for the entrance exam in advance, because many of the study programmes only accept a small number of applicants.

The entrance exam may be written or practical. In addition to entrance exams, some study programmes require applicants to complete preliminary assignments. The language proficiency level required in Finnish higher education is extremely high. Some qualifications can also be completed in English, and in such cases, the student must demonstrate a sufficient command of English.

Universities of Applied Sciences

Universities of applied sciences provide education in the same fields as vocational institutions. Universities of applied sciences work in close cooperation with the working life and aim to educate professionals who fulfil the requirements of working life. Studies in universities of applied sciences last for 3–4.5 years, depending on the scope of the qualification. The studies include practical training and a final thesis or project (*opinnäytetyö*). In the final thesis or project, the student examines one of his or her fields of specialization in more depth and demonstrates his or her ability to apply the obtained knowledge and skills in practice. In some fields, it is also possible to complete a higher university of applied sciences degree (*ylempi ammattikorkeakoulututkinto*) that lasts for 1–1.5 years.

Students can also complete qualifications and additional studies in universities of applied sciences while working at the same time. Some study programmes are designed so that they only include very little contact instruction in school or courses are held only in the evenings. Some courses may also be completed as distance learning online, for example.

Universities

Most universities in Finland are multidisciplinary institutions where you can obtain degrees in many different fields. Some universities focus on education in a particular field, such as art, technology or business.

University students can complete degrees of various levels in 15 different fields, of which the largest fields are the humanities, science and technology. A lower university degree (*alempi korkeakoulututkinto*), i.e. a bachelor's degree (*kandidaatin tutkinto*), is completed first and usually takes about three years. After that, students may continue studying for a master's degree (*maisterin tutkinto*), which usually takes about two years to complete. The majority of Finnish university students also complete a master's degree, because a higher university degree (*ylempi korkeakoulututkinto*) is a requirement in, for instance, public offices and many expert-level jobs. University studies aiming for a degree are free of charge for those residing permanently in Finland.

If you are interested in scientific research, you can apply to pursue a licentiate or a doctoral degree after your master's degree studies.

Open University of Applied Sciences and Open University

All universities of applied sciences also have an open university of applied sciences (*avoim ammattikorkeakoulu*) and all universities have an open university (*avoim yliopisto*). These are programmes where anyone can study without having to take an entrance exam, and both individual courses and larger modules are available. These studies are subject to a fee, and the price depends on the number of credits (*opintopiste*) that will be completed. If you complete a certain number of credits in an open university or an open university of applied sciences, you may apply through a separate application to complete the rest of the degree in a university or a university of applied sciences.

Adult Education and Training

Adults in Finland continuously study more to update the competence they need at work or simply because they enjoy it. Many believe that you can no longer cope in working life unless you continue to study more. Studying is also a hobby for many people. There are numerous study opportunities available.

Adults can study in all the institutions mentioned above, i.e. basic education, general upper secondary school, vocational institutions, universities of applied sciences and universities. Many of these institutions provide study programmes especially designed for adults that may be completed alongside work e.g. in the evenings or as distance studies. There are also many vocational adult education centres in Finland where adults in particular can complete various vocational qualifications.

In addition to these options, there are other education opportunities intended especially for adults, such as liberal adult education and labour policy education organized by the labour administration.

Liberal Adult Education

Liberal adult education (*vapaa sivistystyö*) refers to studies that do not aim for a specific qualification. The content of these studies is not formally defined anywhere, but the education providers can freely plan the content of the courses that they provide. These studies focus on general education or a

particular hobby. Their purpose is to support the all-round development and well-being of individuals. At the same time, they promote democracy, equality and diversity in the Finnish society and thereby benefit society as a whole.

Liberal adult education became more common especially in the first decades of independence in the early 20th century. Back then, its popularity was related to the need of the young, independent nation to fill the gaps and deficits in education and to provide new, current and essential knowledge to adults. Today, almost every locality has a liberal adult education institution. The contact information of these institutions can be found on the website www.kansalaisopistot.fi.

Liberal adult education institutions include adult education centres (*kansalaisopisto* or *työväenopisto*), folk high schools (*kansanopisto*) and summer universities (*kesäyliopisto*). They offer a wide range of different courses in which anyone can enrol. These courses are usually subject to a charge and are held mainly in the evenings and on weekends. The course selection includes e.g. many different languages, exercise and dance, crafts, visual arts, information technology, music, theatre and civic studies.

Some institutions also provide continuing education (*täydennyskoulutus*) for working life needs, open university courses and public lectures. Nowadays, many liberal adult education institutions also organize several Finnish language courses and basic education for adults.

Education Provided by the Labour Administration

The labour administration provides labour policy education (*työvoimakoulutus*) for working-age adults who are unemployed or at risk of becoming unemployed. These study programmes are applied for via the TE Office, which also selects the students for the programmes. This education is free of charge. Typically, students are entitled to unemployment benefit and a compensation for travel and meal expenses for the duration of the education.

Labour policy education is often vocational education and training and, in practice, these studies are typically provided by a vocational institution or an adult education centre. Some study programmes aim for the attainment of a vocational qualification or a qualification unit, but most programmes consist of vocational further education and training or continuing education and training. Their aim is to supplement the student's existing competence. The study programmes last from a few days to several months. Incomplete university or university of applied sciences studies can also be completed in the form of labour policy education.

Students are typically selected on the basis of an interview or an observation period. During the observation period, an instructor assesses the individual's aptitude for the study programme.

Financing Your Studies

In Finland, there are multiple options for financing your studies. You cannot apply for separate financial support for the basic education of children, but support is available for all levels of education that are higher than this. Kela grants financial aid for students (*opintotuki*) for full-time upper secondary studies in general upper secondary school or a vocational institution as well as for higher education and the preparatory education for these studies. Financial aid for students consists of a study grant (*opintoraha*) and a student loan (*opintolaina*). Students are eligible for financial aid only for a certain period of time, and this period depends on the scope of their studies.

The amount of the study grant depends on many things, such as the institution where you are studying, your age and whether you live independently, whether you are married and whether you have children. The maximum amount of financial aid for students is about 250 euros per month.

Student loan is applied for from a bank, but Kela grants a government guarantee for the loan so the student does not need to ask a relative or a friend to guarantee it. The loan must be paid back after completing your studies. The maximum amount of the student loan for those studying in Finland is 400 euros per month.

The eligibility for and amount of the housing supplement (*asumistuki*) depend on many factors, such as family size, the size of the dwelling and the amount of rent. If the forms of support mentioned above are not enough to cover your necessary expenses, you can apply for basic social assistance from Kela. More information about the support provided by Kela can be found at www.kela.fi.

Adult students with a long employment history may be eligible for adult education allowance (*aikuiskoulutustuki*). It is granted by the Employment Fund (*Työllisyysrahasto*). Adult education allowance can be granted to individuals who have at least eight years of employment history and who are taking a study leave from their current job. Allowance can be granted for many types of studies that supplement the individual's competence or lead to the completion of a qualification or a qualification unit. The Employment Fund assesses each case separately to see whether the applicant meets the criteria for the allowance. Those who receive adult education allowance may also apply for a student loan guaranteed by Kela.

An unemployed customer of the TE Office may study in vocational labour policy education while receiving unemployment benefit. This education is applied for via the TE Office. Those receiving unemployment benefit may also study in other study programmes to obtain a qualification, if the TE Office deems that the programme will improve the individual's chances of finding a job.

An individual receiving unemployment benefit may pursue self-motivated education (*omaehtoinen koulutus*) if he or she studies full-time and is at least 25 years old. Those receiving unemployment benefit may study for a maximum of 24 months per study module or 48 months in basic education. Those in labour policy education may receive expense allowance for the days on which they are studying, in addition to unemployment benefit.

The forms of financial support described above only concern people residing permanently in Finland. If someone moves to Finland from abroad only for the purpose of studying here, he or she usually has to pay for the studies and the living expenses him or herself.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the attitude in Finland towards education and studying? What similarities and differences are there with this attitude compared to the one in your home country?
2. What are the underlying values of the Finnish education system? What is your opinion of these values?
3. In your opinion, what kinds of opportunities are there for people with an immigrant background to study in Finland?
4. Would you like to study something in Finland? What and why?
5. What options are available for financing one's studies in Finland?

6. WORK AND SUBSISTENCE IN FINLAND

Labour Market

Employment

Salary and Taxation

If You Become Unemployed

Entrepreneurship and Self-employment

Labour Market

The labour market means the market between employers and employees in which employees look for jobs and employers provide jobs. When an employer offers an employee a job, they sign an employment contract (*työsopimus*) and establish an employment relationship (*työsuhde*). The labour market is an important section of society, and efforts are made to influence its activities by politics and other societal policy-making. The labour market involves a variety of people in different positions and many types of institutions. The labour market is governed by various laws, agreements and economic trends.

The labour market in Finland has evolved and developed over time. Changes in the economic structure have had a major impact on the structure of the labour market. Back in the early 20th century, most Finns worked in agriculture, but industrial jobs gradually became more common. The forest industry, in particular, provided many jobs. Today, the majority of employees work in the service sector.

The Finnish labour market is governed by a culture of democratic negotiations and agreements. Individual people are represented in the labour market by institutions, such as unions. They negotiate and agree on rules and measures concerning the labour market, such as the wage level, working hours, measures to improve the employment rate etc. This system is known as the labour market system (*työmarkkinajärjestelmä*) and it has gradually evolved into its current form.

The Labour Force and Those Not in the Labour Force

From the perspective of the labour market, people are divided into the labour force and those not in the labour force. The labour force consists of both the employed and the unemployed. Unemployed people do not work, but they are at the disposal of the labour market. So, they have registered as unemployed jobseekers (*työtön työnhakija*) with a TE Office and are looking for a job. Conversely, those not in the labour force are not at the disposal of the labour market. They include people who are on sick leave, taking care of children at home, pensioners, students and those performing their military service. The unemployment rate in Finland in 2017 was 10 percent.

Employer Sectors and Fields

People in Finland work for various employers who represent different sectors of society. In terms of the labour market, the private sector consists of businesses, associations and organizations. The public sector consists of the state and municipalities.

The biggest employer in Finland is the private sector, which employs about 72% of the working Finnish population. About 23% of the working population work for municipalities and about 5% for the state.

Occupations are classified into different groups depending on the nature of the work and the places where employees work. These groups are known as professional fields or industries (*ammattiala* or *toimiala*). The fields can be classified according to many different criteria.

Different fields include:

- social welfare and health
- commerce
- services
- transport and traffic
- technology
- culture and communications
- construction
- education
- hotel and catering
- administration

The biggest employers in Finland are the fields of social welfare and health, industry and technology and commerce and services.

Which Fields Have the Most Jobs?

In Finland, some fields have more job openings than others. There is a shortage of employees in some professions, whereas in other professions, there are not enough jobs available for everyone, meaning that there is an oversupply of employees.

In recent decades, Finland has lost jobs where the employees' work contribution has been replaced by new technology. These tasks are typically routine-like in nature and involve a lot of repetition. The number of jobs has decreased the most in industrial and manufacturing work and office work. Correspondingly, the share of expert tasks and service jobs in the labour market has increased.

Currently, the fields most in need of employees are social welfare and health care and construction. There is also a shortage of, for instance, special needs teachers, kindergarten teachers and some professionals in the building trade.

Then again, there is an oversupply of, for example, secretaries, warehouse managers, child care workers, school assistants, some teachers (vocational education and training, secondary school and general upper secondary school), graphic designers, workers in the arts and clothing industry and some employees working in the natural sciences. Information about the outlook for the labour market situation in the near future can be found on the website www.ammattibarometri.fi.

Of the people with a higher education degree, social welfare and health care professionals have the best chances of finding employment. The employment situation in the fields of technology and education is also good. The fourth best employment situation among those with a higher education degree is in the commercial and social field. The least job opportunities are available for graduates with a degree in the humanities and the natural sciences. The choice of field and specialization in a particular field has a big impact on how well a person with a higher education degree finds employment.

Requirements of the Labour Market

Slightly different qualities and competencies are expected and required of employees in each profession. In general, however, it can be said that a good education is valued in the Finnish labour

market. It is one of the factors that most affects your chances of finding a job. The higher educated a person is, the better he or she can find employment.

Those with a higher education degree find employment most easily, but then again, there is also a demand for employees with a basic-level education in low-paid service jobs. However, even a higher education degree does not necessarily guarantee a good, steady job, but having a degree is beginning to be a basic requirement of the labour market. In addition to education, finding a job depends on many other individual qualities, such as activeness, manners, personality, appearance, age and place of residence.

Requirements Resulting from the Change in Working Life

The Finnish working life and the nature of work have changed greatly in recent decades. Before, most people worked full-time in the same job for many years, even their whole career. Nowadays, working life is more unstable and fragmented. Some people work many jobs at the same time under different employers. Various part-time jobs and short-term employment, or intermittent work (*pätkätyöt*) have become more common. This change requires employees to be creative, active and flexible and have good social skills and networks.

It is no longer enough that you train for a particular profession when you are young. You need to update your skills constantly to be able to respond to the ever-changing requirements of the labour market and to compete for jobs.

Diverse competence and the readiness to deal with a wide variety of tasks are valued in the labour market. Employers expect employees to show a strong commitment to the goals of the job and a will to develop their personal competence. It is also important to be able to describe and market your competence effectively.

As a result of technological advancements, a knowledge of information and communication technology is essential in almost every profession. Basic skills are enough in some jobs, but other professions require a command of extremely demanding software and technologies. Being familiar with social media (LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.) is useful in job hunting as well as in work itself.

Labour Market System

The labour market system has been built in Finland over the course of several decades. It consists of organizations supervising the interests of employers and employees, i.e. unions and government representatives. The members of a particular union belong to the same professional field or industry or have a similar education.

Trade Unions and Industry Federations

Employees' and employers' unions are large organizations. Their aim is to protect the interests of their members by influencing society and politics in all matters that concern their members. Unions can effectively promote the interests of their members only if a sufficiently large share of all the employees and employers belong to the union.

Employees, or wage earners, have several trade unions (*ammattiliitto*) that belong to three different central employee organizations. The central organizations are the Central Organization of Finnish Trade Unions SAK, the Finnish Confederation of Professionals STTK and AKAVA, the trade union confederation for highly educated people. Employees in Finland are highly unionized. Currently about 70% of all employees belong to a trade union in their own field. This is one of the highest rates in the world.

Trade unions protect the rights of employees and try to improve their terms of employment. Over the course of their history, they have successfully negotiated many types of benefits for employees. These include the 40-hour week, annual holidays, maternity and family leaves, child benefits, occupational health care and the Occupational Safety and Health Act.

The history of the trade union movement goes back all the way to the end of the 19th century when the civic society began to take shape and associations were first established in Finland. Trade unions were preceded by employees' associations, which focused mainly on educational and recreational activities. The first actual trade unions were established in the final years of the 19th century.

At the turn of the century, the labour movement began to support socialistic values and became radicalized. Up to the 1940s, the influence of the trade union movement was quite weak and the number of members relatively small. But after that, the trade union movement grew stronger and became a significant player in society. Employees' trade unions and employers' representatives began to conclude collective agreements (*työehtosopimus*), which became more common after the mid-1940s.

Today, employers are represented by many different industry federations (*toimialaliitto*). They belong to the following central organizations: Confederation of Finnish Industries EK, Local Government Employers KT, the Office for the Government as Employer VTML and the Church Labour Market Agency.

Tripartite Cooperation

Finland has a free labour market negotiation and agreement system based on the principles of the International Labour Organization (ILO). This means that matters that are important for the labour market and working life are negotiated and agreed upon by the three key parties of the labour market, namely, the trade unions, the employer organizations and the national government.

This is known as the system of tripartite agreement and it dates back to the year 1940. Back then, both employer organizations and the employees' trade union movement acknowledged that unionized labour market activities are part of a democratic society. Tripartite cooperation has involved negotiations over, for instance, employee accident insurance, unemployment security, pension benefits and family leaves.

Labour market agreements are negotiated and established on many different levels. The entire system is based on agreements and conciliation, i.e. cooperation between different parties. The Finnish working life and the rights and obligations of wage earners are governed by the labour legislation and the agreements between labour market organizations.

The drafting and development of labour legislation is done by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment together with employer and employee organizations. The large central organizations of employers and employees negotiate centralized incomes policy agreements and general central organization agreements, which determine the general wage policies, for example.

Sometimes the government is also a party to these agreements. The agreement is known as the comprehensive incomes policy agreement and, in addition to wage matters, it deals with e.g. financial, taxation and social policy measures related to the labour market.

Based on the centralized agreements concluded by the central organizations, the trade unions and employers' associations of each field draw up collective agreements for the field. Collective agreements include more detailed terms of employment for the field in question. The labour market parties do not always even begin to formulate centralized agreements on the level of the central

organizations, but terms of employment can also be directly agreed by the trade unions. Framework agreements affecting the labour market are also concluded at the European Union level.

Labour Legislation

Labour legislation consists of many different laws. These include the following, for example:

- Employment Contracts Act
- Working Hours Act
- Annual Holidays Act
- Non-discrimination Act
- Act on the Protection of Privacy in Working Life
- Collective Agreements Act
- Act on Job Alternation Leave
- Study Leave Act
- Pay Security Act
- legislation concerning personnel participation systems (i.e. business cooperation, administrative representation and the personnel fund)

The underlying purpose of labour legislation is to protect the employee. Terms of employment that are better than what is required in labour laws can be agreed on in collective agreements signed by the employee and employer organizations or in individual employment contracts.

Some clauses in the labour legislation are peremptory, meaning that no exceptions are allowed in any circumstances. Other clauses, on the other hand, allow derogations under a collective agreement. The minimum conditions of the labour legislation apply to all work done in Finland and also to the citizens of foreign countries. Enforcement of the labour legislation is supervised by occupational safety and health authorities (*työsuojeluviranomaiset*) operating under Regional State Administrative Agencies.

For an individual employee, the most important parts of the labour legislation are the Employment Contracts Act, the Working Hours Act and the Annual Holidays Act.

Employment Contracts Act

The Employment Contracts Act is a basic law governing working life and applies to all employment relationships. The form of the employment relationship and the nature of work is irrelevant.

The Employment Contracts Act provides for the following:

- concluding an employment contract
- employers' and employees' obligations
- equality of employees
- determination of the minimum terms of an employment relationship
- employees' right to family leave
- laying off an employee
- termination of an employment contract
- liability for damages
- employment contracts of an international nature
- position of the representatives of employees

Working Hours Act

The Working Hours Act provides for the regular working hours of employees. Most of the clauses in the Working Hours Act are peremptory, but derogations are possible to some of its clauses under

collective agreements or local, establishment-level agreements. The Act also has a list of jobs to which the Working Hours Act does not need to be applied.

In principle, the regular legal working hours in Finland are a maximum of eight hours a day and 40 hours a week. However, the collective agreements of different fields may give permission to divide the working hours differently, within the limits of the Working Hours Act. This means, for instance, that the working hours may occasionally exceed eight hours a day provided that they are less than eight hours on another day.

The Working Hours Act also provides for overtime (*ylityö*). Overtime refers to work done in addition to the regular working hours. A higher wage must always be paid for overtime.

Annual Holidays Act

When an employee works in an employment relationship, he or she accumulates a certain number of days of paid holiday. This holiday is known as the annual holiday or annual leave (*vuosiloma*). The Annual Holidays Act provides for the length of the annual holiday, the holiday pay (*vuosilomapalkka*), the holiday compensation (*lomakorvaus*) and the granting of an annual holiday. The Act applies to both employees in an employment relationship and employees in a public-service relationship who work for the state or a municipality. The period from 1 April to 31 March has been agreed as the holiday credit year (*lomanmääräytymisvuosi*), meaning that the number of days of holiday is calculated from this period. The length of the holiday and the holiday pay depend on the duration of the employment relationship and the number of working hours.

As a rule, when an employee works a full month, he or she earns two days of holiday if the employment relationship has lasted for less than a year. Employees in an employment relationship that has lasted for more than a year earn 2.5 days of holiday each month. Employees receiving monthly or weekly pay are paid their normal wages for the duration of their holiday.

The holiday pay of employees paid by the hour is calculated according to multipliers determined on the basis of the average daily pay and the number of days of holiday. Alternatively, holiday pay is determined by calculating a percentage of the wages paid in the holiday credit year. The holiday pay is 9% of the wages paid in the holiday credit year if the employment relationship has lasted for less than a year, and 11.5% if the employment relationship has lasted for more than a year.

Normally, the holiday pay must be paid before the holiday begins. If the employment relationship ends, days of holiday that have not been taken are paid to the employee in money. The employee has the right to take 24 days of the annual holiday during the summer holiday season, i.e. between 2 May and 30 September. However, the employer and the employee may agree on a different annual holiday time within certain limits prescribed by law.

Collective Agreements

Labour legislation creates a common foundation for the terms of an employment relationship. The terms of employment are set down in more detail in the collective agreements (*työehtosopimus*) of different fields. Collective agreements are concluded by trade unions representing employees and employers' representatives. The purpose of collective agreements is to guarantee the minimum terms of employment for employees and, on the other hand, to guarantee labour market peace.

Collective agreements concern wages and other terms of employment in the field. Terms of employment determine e.g. working hours, breaks and annual holidays. Collective agreements are binding, meaning that they must be followed. It is possible to agree on better terms of employment in an individual employment contract than what is stated in the collective agreements for the field.

An employment contract may not, however, provide worse terms of employment than what is required in the collective agreement.

Collective agreements are almost always concluded for a fixed term of a few years at a time. Collective agreements are public documents and they can be found online on the websites of trade unions, for example. If there is a dispute over how to interpret or follow a collective agreement, the case is dealt with and resolved in the Labour Court (*työtuomioistuin*).

Employers' and Employees' Rights and Obligations

In working life, both the employer and the employee have rights and obligations that are determined by law and in collective agreements. When both parties respect what has been agreed on together, everything at work goes much more smoothly.

The most important rights of an employee are:

- pay in accordance with the collective agreement
- protection provided by acts and contracts
- possibility of professional unionization (e.g. membership in a trade union)
- a safe and healthy working environment

The employer's rights include the right to:

- decide who the employer wants to hire
- supervise and manage work
- give instructions and orders
- terminate the employment relationship under certain conditions

Employees have many obligations, and failure to comply with these obligations may even lead to the termination of an employment relationship. Employees are obligated to:

- perform work well
- follow the employer's instructions and the rules of the workplace (e.g. you cannot come to work intoxicated, you cannot steal or intentionally break the employer's property)
- keep business and trade secrets
- take the employer's interests into account
- decline from activities which compete with the employer

Some occupations, such as jobs in the health care sector, also include a confidentiality obligation (*vaitiolovelvollisuus*). This means that the employee may under no circumstances tell others about anything he or she has heard at work or about documents that he or she has seen at work. Confidentiality must be strictly maintained.

The employer also has many obligations towards employees. The employer must:

- observe the law and contracts
- treat employees equally and equitably
- take care of occupational safety
- provide the key terms of employment to employees in writing
- promote a good working atmosphere and boost employees' work performance and their professional development

Trade Union Membership

Members of a trade union pay a monthly or an annual membership fee. The membership fee may be a fixed annual fee or a small percentage of the member's pay, such as 1.5%. The trade union membership fee is fully tax-deductible. This means that the amount of membership fee is deducted from the amount of taxable income so that the tax rate will be slightly lower.

Trade union membership benefits employees in a number of ways. Trade unions protect the interests of their members and, if you encounter any problems at work, the trade union will provide help and support. In cases of conflict, trade unions offer their members expert legal services. Trade unions also provide support with, for instance, job hunting and unemployment.

Trade unions also offer their members a wide variety of member benefits, such as insurance policies, discounts, holiday destinations, training, career coaching etc. More information about the member benefits provided by trade unions can be found on the website of each trade union.

One of the most important benefits of trade union membership is earnings-related unemployment security (*ansiosidonnainen työttömyysturva*). This means that each member of a trade union is usually also a member of an unemployment fund for that particular field. If you become unemployed, you have the right to receive earnings-related unemployment allowance (*ansiosidonnainen työttömyyspäiväraha*) paid by the unemployment fund for a maximum of 400 days.

The amount of earnings-related unemployment allowance is calculated on the basis of your wages during the time preceding the unemployment. It is normally substantially higher than the basic unemployment allowance (*peruspäiväraha*) paid by Kela. Basic unemployment allowance is paid to unemployed people who do not belong to an unemployment fund. You may receive earnings-related unemployment allowance on the condition that you are registered as an unemployed jobseeker with a TE Office, you have been a member of an unemployment fund for at least 26 weeks and you fulfil the employment condition (*työssäoloehto*). The employment condition means that you have been gainfully employed for at least 26 weeks (with minimum of 18 working hours per week) in the past 28 months.

Shop Steward

In big workplaces, trade union members are represented by a shop steward (*luottamusmies*) elected from among the employees. The shop steward makes sure that the collective agreements and labour laws are followed at the workplace. The shop steward is responsible for helping and supporting the employees and dealing with any problems. The shop steward also makes sure that employees are treated fairly and equally at the workplace.

The position of the shop steward is based on acts and agreements on shop stewards. Not all workplaces have a shop steward. In such cases, the employees may select an employee representative (*luottamusvaltuutettu*) from among themselves or seek support directly from their trade union. The duties and powers of an employee representative are not as extensive as those of a shop steward.

Equity and Equality in Working Life

In Finland, everyone has the right to equitable and equal treatment. All forms of discrimination, i.e. unequal treatment, and harassment are prohibited. This also concerns working life. The Non-discrimination Act and the Act on Equality between Women and Men guarantee these basic rights for all.

Applying the Non-discrimination Act in Working Life

The purpose of the Non-discrimination Act is to guarantee the equitable treatment of all people and to protect them from discrimination. The Non-discrimination Act is applied in working life when hiring employees, during employment and when an employment relationship ends. All employees have the same rights and obligations. The Non-discrimination Act prohibits all discrimination on the basis of e.g. age, nationality or state of health.

Employers have an obligation to e.g. promote the employment of persons with disabilities and their ability to cope at work by making reasonable and necessary adjustments for them. If an employer refuses to make such adjustments, this constitutes discrimination against the disabled person.

Applying the Act on Equality in Working Life

The Act on Equality, on the other hand, guarantees the equal treatment of both genders and prohibits all discrimination based on gender. According to the Act on Equality, it is the employer's obligation to systematically promote equality in all actions. Women and men must be placed equally in various jobs and they must be guaranteed the same opportunities to advance in their careers.

Equity and Equality in Practice

In Finland, equitable treatment and equality are extremely important both in general and in working life. Policy-makers, the authorities and trade unions are constantly working on behalf of their realization in practice. However, an equal society is never fully ready.

One of the grievances related to equality at work is pay. In fields dominated by women, wages are typically lower than in male-dominated fields. Women and men often also pursue different careers depending on their gender, i.e. so-called women's and men's occupations. There is already a significant number of female managers in Finland, although the number of male managers is still higher. Even today, family life has a greater impact on the career of a woman than that of a man. Long family leaves and balancing work and family life often slow down women's careers and wage trends. On the other hand, the share of family leaves taken by fathers is increasing little by little.

If you experience discrimination, harassment or unequal treatment at work or elsewhere, you have the right to apply for compensation from the occupational safety and health authorities (*työsuojeluviranomaiset*) or the authorities supervising equity and equality.

Placement of Foreigners in the Finnish Labour Market

The employment of those moving to Finland is extremely important not only for the subsistence, welfare and integration of the people themselves, but also for society as a whole. If immigrants find employment successfully, they will pay more taxes, which benefits the national economy and helps to fund public services. Immigrants also constitute a fairly large potential workforce, because most of them are quite young.

When a person moves to Finland, finding a job may be challenging at first due to, for instance, insufficient language skills. But the longer a person lives in Finland, the more his or her employment opportunities improve.

Impact of Education and Social Situation on Finding Employment

In Finland, your educational background has a big impact on how easily you find employment. Highly educated people find jobs more easily than those with a low level of education. The place where you have been educated also makes a difference. Finnish employers often value education and work experience obtained in Finland more than that obtained elsewhere.

Language skills are significant when looking for a job. Those with a good command of Finnish find jobs extremely well, whereas those who speak Finnish poorly find it harder to be employed. You can also manage with English in some fields, but there are far less job opportunities available.

The social and economic situation affects the employment of everyone. If the economic situation is poor, there are less vacancies available.

Identification and Recognition of Prior Learning

The identification of prior learning means that the previous competence acquired by a person in another country is assessed in relation to a Finnish occupation or qualification. This competence may have been acquired either formally, such as through education, or informally, such as in everyday life, in one's free time or at work.

If it is possible to reliably verify that the student's prior learning corresponds to the vocational skills requirements of a vocational qualification unit, the prior learning can be recognized. This means that the qualification unit is approved as completed either in part or in full. Many institutions, such as TE Offices and educational institutions, try to identify and, if possible, recognize the prior learning of immigrants.

If the person holds a qualification certificate from his or her home country, attempts can be made to equate it with a corresponding Finnish qualification. Many occupations in Finland have high requirements. Because of this, it is important to compare the scope and contents of qualifications attained in different countries. The recognition of a foreign qualification is applied for from the Finnish National Agency for Education or the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health, Valvira. It may be easier to gain access to working life or pursue further studies if you hold a qualification recognized in Finland. Instructions for applying for the recognition of a qualification can be found on the websites of the Finnish National Agency for Education and Valvira.

Regulated and Unregulated Fields

Many professions and jobs in Finland require specific training. In the private sector, the employer can usually decide on the requirements of a job, but the requirements of state and municipal offices are stricter and only a person holding a certain qualification can be hired to work in these positions.

Some professions require the person to fulfil professional competence requirements (*ammattipätevyysvaatimukset*) determined by law. These requirements may be related to education and/or work experience or the passing of a particular test. Such occupations are known as regulated professions (*säännelty ammatti*). Compliance with the related requirements is supervised by the competent authority in each field.

All health care and social services professions are heavily regulated in Finland. In addition to a specific qualification, working in these professions requires a right to practise the profession (*ammattinharjoittamisoikeus*), which is granted by the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health, Valvira. Teaching professions are also regulated, but practising them only requires a specific qualification and you do not need to apply for the right to practise the profession.

Other regulated professions include advocate, auditor, driving instructor, driving examiner and security guard as well as ecclesiastical posts and professions in the fire and rescue services. A list of the regulated professions and the competent authorities can be found on the website of the Finnish National Agency for Education. If you have completed your qualification abroad, you need a decision issued by the competent authority in order to be qualified to practise any of these professions in Finland.

Proficiency Certificates

Some professions and jobs require you to obtain various proficiency certificates (*osaamistodistus*). For example, employees handling unpacked foods need to complete a hygiene passport (*hygieniapassi*) and those working in restaurants that sell alcohol must have an alcohol passport (*anniskelupassi*). Many jobs in construction and industry require employees to hold an occupational safety card (*työturvallisuuskortti*) and those doing or supervising hot work, i.e. work that requires the use of flames or sources of heat, need a hot work licence (*tulityökortti*). Obtaining a proficiency certificate requires you to pass a test that usually lasts for a few hours or one day, but before taking the test, you need to study the required materials independently at home.

Employment

Looking for and finding a job requires the jobseeker to be extremely active. TE Offices provide services to jobseekers, but the primary responsibility for finding a job falls on the jobseeker him or herself. At times, the employment situation can be difficult, and dozens of people often apply for the same vacancy. Due to this, the job-hunting process may require a lot of work and can sometimes last a long time. However, you should stay positive when looking for a job and take advantage of every possible idea.

Looking for a Job

The traditional way to search for vacant jobs is to browse the job advertisements published in newspapers and online. Job advertisements can be found online on multiple websites. For example, the *te-palvelut.fi* website of the TE Offices publishes vacancies across Finland. Typically, you can look for jobs on websites using various search criteria, meaning that you can limit your search to a particular locality or professional field.

You can also look for jobs directly on company websites. Almost all big companies have a section entitled “vacancies” or “jobs” (“*työpaikat*”) on their website where you can see all the vacant jobs available in the company.

Normally, you can also submit an open application (*avoin hakemus*) on the company website. This means that candidates submit their personal information to the company and, if there is a job opening at some point, the company may contact a suitable candidate who has submitted an open application.

Hidden Jobs and How to Find Them

The problem with responding to job advertisements found in newspapers and online is that usually dozens or even hundreds of applicants apply for the same job, so the competition over the job is fierce.

However, not all vacancies are advertised anywhere. According to multiple estimates by experts, up to about 80% of vacancies are so-called hidden jobs (*piilotyöpaikka*), which are not advertised publicly. Instead, companies try to fill these vacancies in other ways. One of the reasons for this is that a company does not always have the time and resources to organize a laborious recruitment process, which may involve handling dozens or even hundreds of job applications.

Jobseekers should therefore actively search for hidden jobs. The role of contact networks is important in this. You should talk to as many friends and acquaintances as possible about your job hunting, because it may be that someone has heard about a vacancy through his or her personal contacts. The role of contacts is quite significant when looking for a job in Finland. When a company wishes to hire a new employee, it often first consults its own contact networks and its employees to find a suitable candidate.

You should consciously grow your contact network, meaning that you should not hesitate to contact people that you do not know. Recruitment fairs, for example, are great places to get to know different companies and form useful contacts.

Hidden jobs should also be searched for by directly contacting the recruitment teams of companies and organizations and offering them your competence. You need to be able to clearly describe your competence, and it is essential to consider what in your competence might be of interest to employers. Instead of sending an e-mail, it is better to call or try to set up a meeting with a recruitment officer.

You should definitely take advantage of the social media in job hunting. You can ask about vacancies and market yourself as a good employee on Facebook or Twitter, for example.

Today, both jobseekers and the recruitment officers of companies use the LinkedIn service, which is intended for forming networks in working life. It is a good idea to set up personal LinkedIn profile that is as detailed as possible and attracts the interest of recruitment officers. The recruitment officers of many big companies browse LinkedIn profiles as they look for suitable employees. You can also grow your personal contact network and contact the recruitment officers of companies via LinkedIn.

Applying for a Job

When you apply for a job in Finland, you need to write a curriculum vitae (*ansioluettelo*) and a job application (*työhakemus*). They are sent to the employer.

Curriculum Vitae

A curriculum vitae, or CV, contains basic information about the job applicant, such as his or her education, work experience, language skills, IT skills and hobbies. You can also include a reference (*suosittelija*) in your CV, such as a previous supervisor or colleague who can say something positive about you. A good CV is quite short, no more than two pages long. It should have a clear layout that is easy to read.

In Finland, education and job experience are the most crucial factors in job search. It is also a good idea to describe e.g. your hobbies and voluntary work as well, because they can also provide skills that are useful in working life. The contact information of the job applicant must be stated clearly. You can also include a photograph in your CV, if you wish. Good CV templates can be found online.

Job Application

The other important document when applying for a job is a job application. It is a so-called marketing letter with which the job applicant tries to stand out from other applicants. A good job application is clear, short and to the point. It is also personal enough for the recruitment officer to notice it. A job application should be no longer than one page long.

In the application, it is important to state why you are applying for the job in question and to describe your competence. It is also essential to state how you meet the requirements of the job and what you are like as an employee. It is important to only mention things that are relevant for the job in question. The aim of the application is to arouse the recruitment officer's interest so that he or she wants to invite you to an interview.

Job Interview

The employer will invite some of the applicants to a job interview (*työhaastattelu*) based on their job application and CV. If you are invited to an interview, it is important to prepare carefully by, for instance, rehearsing possible interview questions beforehand. During the interview, you need to be able to clearly describe e.g.

- yourself
- your competence
- your strengths and weaknesses
- your motives for applying for the job in question
- your future plans

Before the interview, it is important to consider how you, personally, fulfil the requirements of the vacant position. Thinking about your personal competence and possible gaps in your competence before the interview will make it easier to answer questions.

You should also do a background search on the workplace where you will be interviewed. If the job applicant is familiar with what the company does, it is easier for him or her to describe how he or she could benefit the company. Interviewed job applicants are often requested to ask something from the interviewer. So, it is a good idea to come up with a few questions beforehand that are related to the job that you are applying for or the company activities.

It is vital to make a good first impression on the interviewer in the interview situation. You should dress neatly for the interview, but not too formally. In Finland, people usually dress quite casually at work.

Bring all your testimonials of service (*työtodistus*) and educational certificates with you and do not be late. Try to speak clearly and truthfully. If you are asked about your weaknesses or negative qualities during the interview, try to turn them into personal learning goals.

Employment Contract

Before an employee can start a new job, he or she needs to sign an employment contract (*työsopimus*) with the employer. An employment contract is usually made in writing, but a verbal employment contract is also valid according to law. However, the employer must always provide the conditions of work in writing to the employee upon request. It is recommended that the employment contract is made in writing, because this will ensure that both parties remember the agreed terms and conditions and can refer back to the contents of the contract if a problem occurs.

An employment contract should comply with the law and collective agreements, and the terms of employment under the contract cannot be worse than what is required by law and in the collective agreements. Two identical copies of the employment contract are always made, one for the employee and one for the employer. Both parties sign the employment contract. The employment contract must determine at least the following:

- the time when work begins
- the place of work
- the type and duration of the employment relationship
- working hours
- duties
- possible probationary or trial period (*koeaika*) (no more than 4 months)
- the pay and pay period
- the applicable collective agreement
- the annual holiday and how it is determined
- the period of notice and how it is determined

Types of Employment Relationships

Today, people in Finland work in a wide variety of different employment relationships. The type of employment relationship is stated in the employment contract and it affects the duration of the employment and the working hours, among other things. An employment contract can be valid indefinitely (*toistaiseksi voimassa oleva*), also known as permanent (*vakituinen*), or it can be fixed-term (*määräaikainen*), also known as temporary.

Indefinite and Fixed-term Employment

An employment contract that is valid indefinitely means that the employment relationship is permanent. The employer or employee may terminate the contract, if necessary, but they must observe the period of notice. The employer must have a valid reason for dismissing an employee, such as the poor financial situation of the company or the fact that the employee has not fulfilled his or her obligations. The employee may resign without giving a reason. If the employee resigns, he or she is not typically paid unemployment benefit until after a certain period of time.

A fixed-term contract ends on the date that has been agreed upon. If the employment contract is fixed-term, there must be a good reason for it, such as working as a substitute or seasonal work. This reason must be stated in the employment contract. A fixed-term employment contract may not usually be terminated.

Full-time and Part-time Work

Work may be full-time (*kokoaikainen*) or part-time (*osa-aikainen*). Full-time work usually means working five days a week so that the working hours are 37.5–40 hours a week. According to law, regular working hours can be eight hours a day and 40 hours a week maximum.

Full-time work usually involves monthly pay, and the number of working hours and the pay do not vary from month to month. Depending on the occupation, full-time work may be daytime work (*päivätyö*), evening work (*iltatyö*), night work (*yötyö*) or shift work (*vuorotyö*). In part-time jobs, there are fewer weekly working hours than in full-time jobs. The weekly working hours can also vary. In these cases, employees are usually paid by the hour, so the monthly pay depends on the number of working hours in a given month.

On-demand Work

So-called on-demand work (*keikkatyö*) has recently become more common in Finland. It means that a person has brief, fixed-term employment relationships of a few days in different places. On-demand work is flexible, because the employee can personally decide when he or she wants to accept work. However, on-demand work does not provide a steady income, because there may not be enough work available all the time.

In some professions, the work is generally on-demand work. For instance, guides, interpreters, musicians and journalists do a lot of on-demand work. The catering business and commerce also provides on-demand work.

All employees must be treated equally regardless of the type of employment relationship. Fixed-term and part-time employees may not have worse terms of employment than permanent or full-time employees. However, some of the benefits of an employment relationship, such as occupational health care or lunch benefits, may be proportioned to the number of working hours.

Rules of Working Life

There are many kinds of rules in working life and they can also vary depending on the workplace. Many things, however, are provided for in the labour legislation and in collective agreements. All employers must follow these rules.

Sick Leaves (sairauspoissaolo)

You may never be absent from work without a reasonable cause. You must always notify the employer of your absence. If an employee falls ill, he or she must immediately notify the employer by calling or according to the customs of the workplace. Every workplace has its own rules about how many days you may be absent from work without a doctor's certificate. If an employee's child under the age of 10 falls ill, the employee has the right to take care of the child at home for four working days and receive pay for this period.

If an employee has been working for at least a month, the employer must pay him or her a normal salary for the first ten days of sick leave. If the sick leave continues after this, Kela will pay sickness allowance (*sairauspäiväraha*) to the employee. The collective agreement may also state that the employer must pay normal sick leave salary for longer than ten days. In this case, Kela will reimburse some of the costs of the sick leave salary to the employer.

Breaks in a Working Day

Employees take breaks in a working day. The number and length of the breaks depends on the duration of the working day. The collective agreement of each field also provides for breaks. During a working day that lasts for more than six hours, employees are entitled to a break of at least half an hour. If an employee works for eight hours, he or she typically has one longer meal break and two short coffee breaks.

A half-hour meal break is not usually included in the paid working hours, and you may leave the workplace during it. Coffee breaks, on the other hand, are included in the working hours and must be spent at the workplace. Employees may not take care of their personal business during working hours. For instance, the use of a personal phone is often restricted during working hours, but employees may use their phones during breaks to take care of personal business. If the employer pays for a company phone and subscription for an employee, they are meant only for taking care of work-related matters. You should use your own phone to make personal calls.

Occupational Safety and Health

The employer must take care of the safety of employees and their mental and physical well-being at the workplace. This is known as occupational safety and health (*työsuojelu*). Everyone has the right to feel well at the workplace. The employer must make sure that work is carried out in safe conditions and that all possible illnesses are prevented. Occupational safety and health authorities supervise occupational safety and health and make sure that workplaces follow the legal occupational safety instructions.

Employers are obligated to provide a thorough orientation to new employees, i.e. teach them the right working methods and go through matters related to occupational safety. Each workplace needs to have clear instructions in case of accidents, and all employees should know what to do in these situations. Employees need to follow the employer's instructions and work safely. You may refuse a task that is too dangerous.

According to law, an employer needs to have occupational accident insurance and occupational disease insurance for all employees. It covers the costs of accidents that occur at work or the costs of an occupational disease to the employee. In most cases, the employer is also obligated to take out a

group life insurance policy. If an employee dies during or outside working hours, this insurance will grant an indemnity to the employee's family.

Occupational Health Care

According to law, the employer is obligated to organize occupational health care (*työterveyshuolto*) for employees. Occupational health care refers to the cooperation between the employee and the employer and nurses, doctors, psychologists, physical therapists and other occupational health care professionals. The aim of this cooperation is to promote the prevention of work-related diseases and accidents, the health and safety of work and the working environment, the activities of the work community and the health of the employees and their ability to work and function.

Occupational health care is usually preventive health care, but it often also includes medical services. It includes, for instance, the services of a nurse, an occupational health physician and an occupational health psychologist. Occupational health care must be provided to all employees regardless of the type of employment relationship, but the scope of the services may vary on the basis of e.g. the number of working hours. Occupational health care can be provided either at a local health centre or a private clinic. The services are intended only for employees, not their family members.

Finnish Working Culture

The Finnish working culture reflects the characteristics of the individualistic and democratic culture that generally prevails in Finland. This means, among other things, that an individual's personal competence and performance are important, not his or her family background, for instance. Favouring your relatives in recruitment is not accepted in Finland.

The individualistic culture can also be seen in how work and free time are kept separate. Working hours are for working, and free time is the employee's own time. Work starts and ends at a certain time, and not a lot of time is generally spent with colleagues outside working hours. Celebrations at the workplace are an exception, such as Christmas parties and recreational days, where the aim is to improve the team spirit of the workplace.

Finnish workplaces typically have a low level of hierarchy, meaning that the supervisor hardly stands out from other workers and often does similar tasks as the others. The supervisor often dresses in the same way as everyone else and can be addressed by his or her first name. The supervisor does not hold unquestionable authority over employees, but usually allows them to plan their own work and express ideas. In this way, democracy can be seen in everyday interaction at the workplace.

The supervisor also expects employees to do things on their own initiative and take care of agreed tasks conscientiously. So, the supervisor does not constantly watch over the employees as they work, but trusts them. The differences in wages between supervisors and other employees are fairly small.

Punctuality, diligence, conscientiousness and initiative are valued in Finnish working life. If an employee is often late for work or does not follow the agreed schedules, he or she will be considered unreliable and this may even be a reason to terminate the employment relationship.

During working hours, people try to work hard and do their job as well as possible. Once a task is done, employees will start another task on their own initiative, and when they notice that something needs to be done, they do it. They do not wait until the supervisor tells them to do it. If an employee does not know what to do, he or she can ask the supervisor or a colleague for help.

Cooperation with colleagues at work is important, and teamwork is common at the workplace. Typically, everyone helps each other and does all sorts of tasks flexibly when needed. People trust each other and rely on everyone to take care of the agreed tasks.

Modesty is appreciated in Finland, and people do not usually talk a lot about themselves. What a person does is more important than what a person says. If a person, for instance, says that he or she is hard-working, but does not do the agreed tasks, others will no longer trust him or her.

People in Finland are quite outspoken and say what they think. Finns usually go straight to the point and do not first chit-chat about this and that. Silences and long breaks in a conversation are also part of the Finnish conversational culture. If a person does not talk a lot, this does not mean that he or she is angry or that something is wrong. Negative issues are also openly discussed at work. So, do not be offended if e.g. your supervisor or a colleague says that you have done something poorly. Everyone makes mistakes sometimes, and it is perfectly normal in working life.

Salary and Taxation

There is no general minimum wage in Finland that would apply to all professions. The minimum wage of each field is determined in the collective agreement of the field. The wage may be either a time-related monthly pay (*kuukausipalkka*) or hourly pay (*tuntipalkka*) or a performance-related contract rate (*urakkapalkka*), also known as piecework pay, which is paid for a specific project or job performance.

If an employee works in the evenings, weekends or holidays, he or she is paid bonuses in addition to the normal wages. The amount of the bonuses depends on the profession and the collective agreement in the field. All fields must pay double pay on Sundays. If an employee works overtime in addition to his or her normal working hours, overtime pay must be paid.

The salary is usually paid once a month on the day stated in the employment contract, but there may also be more paydays. Salary may not be paid late and it is always paid to the employee's account. Taxes, i.e. withholding tax (*ennakonpidätys*), pension contribution (*eläkemaksu*) and unemployment insurance contribution (*työttömyysvakuutusmaksu*), are automatically deducted from the salary. The employer must give an employee a salary slip (*palkkalaskelma*) showing all the taxes and other contributions deducted from the salary.

Wages and Progressive Taxation

Everyone in Finland has to pay taxes. The national welfare and extensive public services are funded by the common tax revenue. Income tax (*tulovero*) is paid on your earned income. Earned income includes, for instance, your salary, unemployment allowance, pension and financial aid for students. The employer or the payer of the benefits, such as Kela, will deduct the taxes automatically and remit them to the Tax Administration. There are many other taxes besides income tax. Value added tax (*arvonlisävero*) is paid on products and services, car owners pay car tax (*autovero*), inheritance tax (*perintövero*) is paid on inheritance, owners of real estate pay real estate tax (*kiinteistövero*) etc.

In Finland, the taxation of earned income is progressive. This means that the more you earn, the higher your tax rate (*veroprosentti*) is, i.e. the more taxes you have to pay. So, if you have a high salary, your tax rate will also be high, and if you have a low salary, your tax rate will be low.

Tax Card

In January every year, the Tax Administration sends everyone a tax card (*verokortti*) at their home address. The tax card shows the person's tax rate. If you are employed, you need to give your tax card to your employer so that the employer can see how much tax needs to be withheld from your salary. If you do not give your tax card to the employer, 60% of your salary will be withheld as tax. The correct tax rate stated on the card is most likely much lower than this. The tax rate is calculated on the basis of your income in the previous year.

If your income has changed and the rate on the tax card is wrong, you can request a new tax card from the tax office online, by phone or by visiting a local tax office. You need an estimate of your total income in the ongoing year to receive a new tax card.

Tax Return

A pre-completed tax return (*veroilmoitus*) is sent to your home address in April every year. It shows all your income in the previous year. The tax return needs to be checked and any mistakes should be corrected. If you correct your tax return, the Tax Administration will send you a new tax decision (*verotuspäätös*) in September–October.

If too much tax has been withheld from your income in the previous year, the Tax Administration will pay you tax refund (*veronpalautus*) in December. Correspondingly, if your tax rate has been too low in the previous year, you need to pay the missing taxes as back tax (*jäännösvero*). Due to this, it is a good idea to check that your tax rate is at the right level.

Fringe Benefits and Their Taxation

Sometimes the employer will provide employees other benefits of monetary value in addition to salary. If the employer pays for and gives the employee an item or service, this is known as a fringe benefit (*luontoisetu*). Typical fringe benefits include a phone benefit, a meal benefit, a housing benefit, a car benefit and an employer-subsidized commuter ticket.

Fringe benefits also count as taxable income, meaning that you need to pay taxes on them. In principle, fringe benefits are taxed in the same way as normal salary. Every year, the Tax Administration determines the taxable value of each fringe benefit. This is the monetary value of the fringe benefit in euros, and it affects your tax rate. More information about the taxation of fringe benefits and the taxable value of each fringe benefit can be found on the Tax Administration website www.vero.fi.

Undeclared Work

Undeclared work (*pimeä työ*) is work that is done without a tax card and where no taxes are paid on the salary. The services provided by society need tax revenue to work. If taxes are not paid, the welfare and stability of society are at risk. In addition, undeclared work does not accumulate any pension, and the employee is not typically covered by accident insurance. If someone wants to pay your salary directly to you instead of a bank account, the work is probably undeclared. Undeclared work is a crime in Finland. Both the worker and the employer may be given a heavy penalty for undeclared work.

A person doing undeclared work is in an extremely weak position compared to employees in a lawful employment relationship. If the person has a dispute with the employer concerning e.g. the payment of salary, nobody can help him or her, or if an accident occurs at the workplace, the insurance does not grant any compensation to the employee.

Those doing undeclared work are also not paid any earnings-related benefits, such as unemployment allowance, maternity or paternity allowance or parental allowance. Likewise, they do not accumulate any pension in case of old age or disability. Undeclared work is never worth it.

If You Become Unemployed

Anyone can lose their job at some point in their career. If this happens, you can receive support from various authorities and trade unions. If you lose your job, you must first register as an unemployed

jobseeker with an Employment and Economic Development Office, or TE Office. You can register already before your first day of unemployment either online or by personally visiting a TE Office.

The TE Office examines the jobseeker's registration to decide whether he or she is entitled to unemployment benefit. The Office will send a statement to Kela or alternatively to an unemployment fund if the jobseeker is a member of a trade union. The Office will ask you for more information if there is something unclear in your registration. The TE Office must always be informed of any changes in the jobseeker's situation, such as finding a job or a place to study or a change of address or phone number.

The TE Office uses the unemployment registration to assess what support the person needs. If necessary, the jobseeker will be invited to a personal interview. During the interview, the parties discuss various measures that could make it easier to find a job and how business should be conducted with the Office in future.

Unemployment Benefit

An unemployed jobseeker is normally entitled to unemployment benefit (*työttömyysetuus*). This means unemployment allowance (*työttömyyspäiväraha*). Unemployment benefit can only be paid for the time when the individual's job hunting is valid. This means that the individual must be at the disposal of the labour market and be looking for a job. Benefit is not paid for the first seven days of unemployment. Unemployment benefit is also taxable. Unemployment benefit must be claimed from an unemployment fund or from Kela using a separate application. More information about applying for unemployment allowance is available from the unemployment fund of your trade union and from Kela.

Earnings-related Unemployment Allowance is Paid by the Unemployment Fund

The unemployment fund pays earnings-related unemployment allowance (*ansiosidonnainen päiväraha*) as an unemployment benefit to a person who is a member of the fund and who has been employed for a sufficiently long time during the membership. The unemployment fund is a community that pays its members earnings-related unemployment allowance according to law. When you join an unemployment fund, you, in a way, take out a personal insurance policy in case of unemployment. A monthly membership fee is paid to the fund and, if you lose your job, the fund will support you during unemployment. Earnings-related unemployment allowance is funded by both tax revenue and by mandatory unemployment security payments collected from employers and employees. It is higher than Kela's basic unemployment allowance and labour market subsidy.

Basic Unemployment Allowance and Labour Market Subsidy are Granted by Kela

Kela grants and pays unemployment benefit to people who are not members of an unemployment fund. Basic unemployment allowance (*peruspäiväraha*) may be granted to unemployed people who have been gainfully employed for at least about six months during the 28 months preceding the unemployment. They have had to have worked at least 18 hours a week. If the applicant does not meet the employment condition (*työssäoloehto*), i.e. he or she has not yet worked long enough or has already received basic unemployment allowance for the maximum period of time, he or she may be granted labour market subsidy (*työmarkkinatuki*).

The aim of unemployment security is to guarantee a reasonable financial subsistence for all unemployed people. In practice, the level of the assistance is fairly low and living only on unemployment allowance is difficult. In addition to unemployment security, an unemployed person often receives housing allowance or social assistance.

Social Assistance from Kela or a Social Services Office

Social assistance (*toimeentulotuki*) is the last-resort financial assistance provided by society to protect your subsistence. It is only granted if your personal income and other benefits, such as basic unemployment allowance, pension or housing allowance, are not enough to cover your necessary expenses. Necessary expenses are expenses related to food, clothes, health care and housing, for example.

Social assistance consists of basic social assistance (*perustoimeentulotuki*), supplementary social assistance (*täydentävä tuki*) and preventive social assistance (*ehkäisevä tuki*). When the amount of social assistance is calculated, all the customer's necessary expenses and all income are taken into account. Other forms of assistance, such as housing allowance, lower the amount of social assistance.

Basic social assistance is granted by Kela and it is usually granted for one month at a time. This means that you need to renew your application for social assistance every month. This is because social assistance is intended to be only a temporary aid in a difficult financial situation.

Supplementary or preventive social assistance is claimed from the municipal social services office. Supplementary social assistance can be granted for special additional expenses, such as expenses related to long-term illnesses or children's hobby expenses.

The purpose of preventive social assistance, on the other hand, is to prevent marginalization and to promote a person's ability to cope independently in society.

It can be granted if the financial situation of a person deteriorates suddenly due to, for instance, over-indebtedness. Social assistance is funded by tax revenue.

TE Services for Jobseekers

TE Offices inform jobseekers of vacancies and pass on suitable job offers to individuals. However, TE Offices cannot directly offer anyone a job, but they provide various services aiming to promote employment. Although the personal activeness of the jobseeker is the most important thing in job hunting, you should also contact a TE Office if you feel that you need guidance or advice in matters related to finding employment.

The services provided by the TE Office to the unemployed include, for instance, guidance provided by a work coach (*työhönvalmentaja*). The coach can help jobseekers highlight their personal competence and strengths in the labour market.

Another service provided by the TE Office to promote employment is the work trial (*työkokeilu*). A work trial resembles practical training and it aims to form an idea of a person's competence. A work trial allows the jobseeker to demonstrate his or her competence and motivation to the employer. During a work trial, the person trying out the job is paid the normal unemployment benefit. Sometimes a work trial can lead to an actual job or a pay subsidy job (*palkkatukityö*).

Pay subsidy is a form of financial support paid by the state that aims to advance the employment of unemployed jobseekers. The employee is in a normal employment relationship with the employer, and pay subsidy is paid to the employer to cover the wage costs of the employee. The possibility to receive pay subsidy can be requested from the TE Office. The amount and duration of pay subsidy depend on the case. Pay subsidy can also be granted for apprenticeship training (*oppisopimuskoulutus*) if the trained person is unemployed.

TE Offices and municipalities work together to provide long-term unemployed people various services, such as rehabilitative work activities (*kuntouttava työtoiminta*). More information about the

services of TE Offices in different languages can be found e.g. on the website <https://www.infofinland.fi/en/living-in-finland/work-and-enterprise/where-to-find-work>.

Labour Market Training

You can also ask for support from the TE Office when you are considering training or a career change. One of the most important services provided by the TE Office is vocational labour market training (*ammattillinen työvoimakoulutus*). Labour market training allows you to improve your competence and your chances of finding a job. Training is organized in many different fields. Labour market training is applied for through the TE Office.

In addition to labour market training, the TE Office can also grant support for self-motivated education found by the jobseeker him or herself if this education improves the person's employment prospects and a suitable training option is unavailable in the labour market training programme of the Office. Labour market training not provided by the TE Office must always be separately agreed on with the TE Office.

Entrepreneurship and Self-employment

One way of finding a job is to start your own business or practise a trade independently as an entrepreneur without a permanent place of business. For example, interpreters, journalists, musicians, accountants and graphic designers can work as private entrepreneurs, or self-employed persons (*itsenäinen ammatinharjoittaja*). The starting point for all entrepreneurship is a good business idea (*liikeidea*), and usually you also need a sufficient amount of money. Entrepreneurship always involves a financial risk. If a business has no customers, it has no income. Those working as full-time entrepreneurs and people who are self-employed are not entitled to unemployment benefit.

Starting a Business

Starting a business requires professional skill and knowledge about the Finnish society, including taxation and bookkeeping. If you are planning to start a business, you should first formulate a preliminary business plan (*liiketoimintasuunnitelma*), i.e. calculate whether the business can be profitable. A business plan is based on a good business idea.

Help with formulating a business plan and in all matters relating to starting a business is available from the enterprise agencies (*uusyrittäjäkeskus*) of different cities. They also organize training for aspiring entrepreneurs. TE Offices also provide services to entrepreneurs.

When you start a business, you always need to register with the Trade Register (*kaupparekisteri*) and the Tax Administration (*verohallinto*). Only then can the business be given a business ID (*yrittäjä- ja yhteisötunnus*, or *Y-tunnus*). This is an identification number under which the business can be found in various registers.

Financing and Bookkeeping

You often also need money to start a business, especially if you need to rent commercial premises and buy equipment for the business. Banks can grant a loan for business activities. The state-owned specialized financing company Finnvera can also help to finance the business by granting a loan or guaranteeing a loan granted by a bank.

You can also apply for a start-up grant (*starttiraha*) from the TE Office for the first stages of setting up your business. The start-up grant is meant for the entrepreneur's personal costs of living, not for business activities. A start-up grant can be granted for a maximum of 12 months.

One of the obligations of an entrepreneur is to organize bookkeeping. Bookkeeping lists the income and expenses of the business. The entrepreneur can take care of bookkeeping him or herself or hire an accounting firm to do it. Bookkeeping must be done correctly and in accordance with the law and it must not contain any mistakes.

Permits and Insurances

Business activities in certain fields require a permit from the authorities. The permit requirement concerns e.g. restaurants, kiosks, travel agencies, social services and health care, the transport of passengers and goods and housing agencies. According to law, entrepreneurs must insure themselves under the self-employed persons' pension insurance (*yrittäjän eläkevakuutus, YEL*) or the farmers' pension insurance (*maatalousyrittäjän eläkevakuutus, MYEL*). If the business hires employees, it also needs to take out employees' pension insurance (*työntekijöiden eläkevakuutus, TyEL*) and accident insurance. More information about the permits and insurances of a business and other matters relating to starting a business can be found on the website yrityssuomi.fi.

Company Forms

There are many different company forms (*yritysmuoto*) in Finland, and new entrepreneurs need to choose the most suitable form for them and their business activities. The number of founders is a crucial factor when choosing the company form.

The different company forms are:

- Private entrepreneur or self-employed person (*yksityinen elinkeinonharjoittaja*) (proprietorship, *toiminimi*)
- General partnership or limited partnership (*avoin yhtiö* or *kommandiittiyhtiö*)
- Limited company (*osakeyhtiö*)
- Cooperative association (*osuuskunta*)

Proprietorship

A private entrepreneur, or a proprietorship, is the simplest company form. Proprietorships are typically small, one-person businesses, such as translators or hairdressers. The entrepreneur is personally liable for business activities, including company debt. Establishing a proprietorship is quick and easy

Partnership

The second company form is a partnership, and there are two types of partnership: general partnership and limited partnership. It takes at least two people to establish a general partnership. A limited partnership, on the other hand, requires at least one accountable and one sleeping partner, typically an investor. The partners are usually personally liable for all business activities and debt, but in a limited partnership, the sleeping partner is liable only to the extent of the amount that he or she has invested. The company result is divided among the partners in the agreed proportions.

Limited Company

Limited company (*osakeyhtiö*, or *Oy*) is an extremely common company form. It can be established by one or more people or a community. A limited company is owned by its shareholders. Establishing a limited company requires a minimum share capital of 2 500 euros, which is divided into shares. The power of decision, liabilities and profit are divided according to the number of shares each shareholder owns. So, the personal risk of each shareholder depends on how much he or she has invested in the company. A limited company has a shareholders' meeting and a board, which makes its management structure quite heavy. Big companies are almost always limited companies, but a small business can also be a limited company.

Cooperative Association

A cooperative association can be established by one or more people. The members own the cooperative, and decisions are made democratically. Each member of the cooperative has one vote in the cooperative association's meetings. The liability of members for the debts of the cooperative is limited to the amount they have invested. Normally, a cooperative does not aim to make as much profit as possible, but to provide services to its members. If profit is generated, it can be distributed according to how the members have used the services of the cooperative or how much they have invested in the cooperative. The distribution criteria can also be described in the cooperative by-laws.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think about the Finnish labour market? What similarities and differences do you see between Finland and your home country?
2. What are important values in Finnish working life?
3. What is your opinion of trade union membership?
4. What are the best ways to look for a job in Finland?
5. What kind of competence do you have that could be useful in Finnish working life?
6. What do you think about paying taxes? What happens if taxes are not paid?
7. What can you do if your employer does not pay your wages on time or treats you inappropriately?
8. What are the consequences of doing undeclared work?
9. How can you be active during a period of unemployment to make it easier to find a job?
10. What should you know and take into consideration if you want to start a business in Finland?

7. HEALTH AND AGEING IN FINLAND

Health and Illness

Health Services in Finland

Health and Well-being of the Elderly

Pensions

Care Services for the Elderly

Death and Burial

Inheritance

Health is the opposite of illness, so a healthy person is someone without any illnesses. However, health also means that the person feels well. The person is able to cope with and get through various stages in life and considers his or her quality of life to be good. A healthy person can do the things he or she wants in life, such as study, engage in hobbies, work or take part in social life.

If a person becomes severely ill or disabled, he or she often has to give up some of the things that are important to him or her. However, a person can feel healthy and well even with e.g. a long-term illness, as long as it is treated and does not prevent him or her from leading a good life.

Health and Illness

Your health is affected by your genotype and lifestyle. Staying healthy does not simply mean avoiding illnesses, but also adopting a healthy lifestyle and taking care of yourself in various ways. In Finland, it is generally thought that each person is responsible for his or her own health and maintaining it.

Tips for maintaining good health:

- Do not work too much. The length of a normal working day is usually eight hours. If you work overtime, make sure that you also have enough time to rest between working days.
- Get enough rest and sleep after work or other stressful activities. Proper sleep gives you strength for the next working day. An adult needs 6–10 hours of sleep per night. If you feel tired all the time, it will be difficult to concentrate on getting things done or doing your work and you may be feeling low.
- Eat a healthy diet. Eat plenty of vegetables, fruit and whole-grain foods. Dairy products and meat should be eaten in moderation. Eat fish a couple times a week. Avoid excessive use of salt, sugar and fat. Drink plenty of water.
- Exercise regularly in diverse ways. Exercise helps you to relax and improves the quality of sleep and stress management. It also gives you an energy boost in your everyday life.
- Dress according to the weather. Dress warmly enough in the winter to stay healthier. If you do not have enough clothes on, you can get sick.
- Give up smoking. Smoking causes cancer and various lung and respiratory disorders. Smoking weakens your physical performance and prevents e.g. wounds from healing as quickly. The physical endurance of smokers is poorer and they recover more slowly after exercise.

In Finland, you can easily find more information on ways to promote personal health from, for instance, the internet, libraries, a doctor and various health organizations. Municipalities and

organizations, in addition to private companies, offer numerous health-related care services, physical exercise activities, advice on well-being and nutrition and various cultural services.

Participating in diverse activities promotes well-being and health. Municipalities have numerous exercise venues, such as public swimming pools, gyms, beaches, sports fields and skiing tracks. In addition, municipal and private adult education centres (*kansalaisopisto*) organize a wide variety of courses and instruction related to exercise and culture. Municipalities also organize a wide range of cultural events, performances, courses, concerts and exhibitions both on their own and in cooperation with various cultural bodies and the art scene, in addition to maintaining libraries, museums and art collections.

Why Does a Person Fall Ill?

An illness is a disturbance in the way the human body works. An ill body does not work normally, and the illness interferes with the person's work or other areas of life. Many illnesses have a number of different causes. The symptoms of an illness depend on the individual, and it is not always easy to determine the nature or cause of an illness.

In Finland, the general understanding of why a person falls ill has changed considerably over time. People used to believe that someone may have cursed another person by asking evil spirits or gods to harm the other person or make him or her ill. They tried to cure the illness by removing the curse. This removal was done through some kind of ritual, for example.

The Old Testament in the Bible contains the idea that a person falls ill because God is punishing him or her for evil deeds. The person can be healed through repentance and prayer. People prayed to God for a miracle that would remove the illness from the person.

Today, illnesses in Finland are examined and treated according to a scientific worldview. According to this view, life is controlled by physiological and biochemical processes. Humans are living organisms made up of organs, cells and molecules.

External or internal damage to the body causes illnesses. This damage may be caused by, for example, your genotype, lifestyle, the environment and injuries or accidents. Doctors repair the damage using various treatments, such as surgical operations or medication.

Health in the Welfare Society

Health is linked to many areas in life and is affected by multiple factors. It is easier to stay healthy if you have access to good health services. These services help people to follow a healthy lifestyle and make it possible to discover illnesses already at an early stage.

Adequate nutrition and subsistence as well as reasonable living conditions and good social relations also promote health. A society that is peaceful, socially just and democratic helps people to stay healthy. Education and the possibility to work or engage in other useful activities in society also improves individual well-being and health.

Health Promotion Among Finns

The Finnish welfare society plays an important role in promoting and protecting the health of Finns. The main goal of the Finnish health policy is to promote people's health everywhere in Finland. People living all over Finland should be as healthy as possible. This health policy is implemented by e.g. enacting laws related to health promotion, such as the Tobacco Act, which restricts smoking in public areas.

Research and statistical data is also constantly collected on the health and illnesses of Finns. This data can be used to plan and implement various health policy programmes, such as programmes related to cardiovascular diseases or cancers. The health of those living in Finland is also monitored in screenings. A screening (*seulonta*) is a test intended for a certain population group where the aim is to detect a potential illness as early as possible.

Many organizations also take part in public health work and the implementation of health policy decisions in Finland. These organizations have a significant role in providing services that support and promote health. In addition, they e.g. regularly organize extensive campaigns and events to support a healthy lifestyle.

Health Services in Finland

Public health services are provided in municipal health centres and schools. They include, for instance, doctor's and nurse's appointments, dental care, maternity and child health clinics and school health care. School health care includes dental care, regular health and medical examinations of pupils and individual health education. Some of these services are free and some are subject to a customer fee. However, the services are usually inexpensive, because they are funded by tax revenue.

Right to Health Services

You have a right to use public social and health services in Finland if you are residing permanently in the country. Those residing permanently in the country have a municipality of residence (*kotikunta*) in Finland. The municipality of residence is the locality or city where a person lives and where he or she is officially residing.

According to law, the municipality of residence is responsible for providing public health services to its residents. The municipality must also monitor the development of its residents' health and the factors affecting it and make sure that health aspects are taken into consideration in all municipal activities.

When a person who has moved to Finland gains access to Finnish social security, he or she will receive a Finnish health insurance card, or Kela card (*Kela-kortti*) by mail. You must always show your Kela card when you use public or private health services or visit a pharmacy. It allows you to get reimbursement for many health services and medicines. This means that Kela pays a certain share of the costs on behalf of the customer.

Health Care for Students

A person who has come to Finland to study is usually considered to only reside temporarily in the country. This is why foreign students are not covered by the Finnish social security system or public health services. In the case of an illness, the student can see a private doctor, and he or she needs to have private health insurance to obtain a residence permit. If the studies last for more than two years, the student can be considered to be a permanent resident in Finland. In such cases, the student is also entitled to public health services. Health services to the students of universities and other higher education institutions are provided by the Finnish Student Health Services FSHS (*Ylioppilaiden terveydenhoitosäätiö YTHS*), which has health centres in various cities.

Visiting a Health Centre Physician or Public Health Nurse

When you fall ill, you need to contact the nearest health centre (*terveysasema* or *terveyskeskus*) to book an appointment with a general practitioner (*yleislääkäri*) or a public health nurse (*terveydenhoitaja*). Health centres are usually open from Monday to Friday between 8 am and 4 pm. It is a good idea to call the appointment booking number first thing in the morning as soon as the

health centre opens. If your condition requires urgent treatment, you can be given an appointment at short notice. If your case is not urgent, you may have to wait longer for a doctor's appointment.

When you book an appointment, you will be told when you will be seen. When you call to book an appointment, you need to state why you need to see a doctor or a nurse. The person confirming your appointment will assess over the phone whether you need to see a doctor or a public health nurse. In Finland, many illnesses are treated by public health nurses and you may not need a doctor's appointment at all. You can often get a nurse's appointment sooner than a doctor's appointment. The public health nurse will refer the patient to a doctor if it turns out that a doctor is needed after all.

Even if your condition requires a specialist (*erikoislääkäri*), you first need to book an appointment with a general practitioner. The general practitioner will assess your condition and write a referral to a specialist, if necessary. Specialists usually see patients in hospitals or outpatient clinics.

Emergency Departments Help in Urgent Cases of Illness

If you fall ill in the evening or during the weekend when health centres are already closed, you need to go to an emergency department (*päivystys*). You should go to an emergency department when the illness needs immediate treatment and you cannot wait until the next working day to seek treatment. You may need to wait for a long time especially in the emergency departments of big cities, and patients are not treated in the order of arrival, but in the order of urgency. This means that those with complaints or injuries that require treatment most urgently are examined first by a doctor. The doctor will decide on the order.

Emergency departments typically operate in a hospital, and if you live in a small locality you may even need to travel to a neighbouring city to find the nearest emergency department. Emergency departments for children and adolescents may be in a different place than emergency departments for adults. More information about how the emergency services are organized in your municipality of residence is available at your local health centre or the website of the municipality.

Private Health Services

In Finland, you can also go to a private clinic to seek treatment for any illness. The private clinics of various localities have both general practitioners and specialists, and the contact information for these clinics can be found online. You can often book an appointment with a private doctor sooner than with public health services. However, private health services are much more expensive. Some private doctors also make house calls, but their price can be high. If you are covered by the Finnish social security system, the Kela card will reimburse a small part of the costs of seeing a private doctor.

Dental Care

Oral health is an important part of overall human health. Bacteria related to oral infections can spread throughout your body and cause various illnesses. Problems with occlusion can also affect your health in many ways. Finnish public dental care includes both preventive care to maintain oral health as well as reactive care, meaning the treatment of conditions that already exist.

Public Dental Care

You can also see a dentist (*hammaslääkäri*) or a dental hygienist (*suuhygienisti*) at a public health centre. Some municipalities may have a separate dental clinic (*hammashoitola*). The queue for municipal dental care is often long. If your case is not urgent, you will get a dentist's appointment within six months. A dental hygienist performs preventive oral and dental care and dental check-ups, whereas a dentist provides fillings, corrects malocclusions and treats other damage and problems relating to teeth.

Municipal emergency booking services (*päivystysajanvaraus*) serve patients who need urgent dental care. You can call their number to get an appointment at short notice. The person confirming the appointment over the phone will assess how urgently you need dental care. If a dental surgeon is needed to treat your teeth, you need to first book an appointment with a regular dentist who will then refer you to special dental care, if needed.

Private Dental Care

You can also seek dental care from a private dentist. Private dental care is more expensive than public care. Kela will reimburse part of the fee of a private dentist if the customer is covered by the Finnish social security system, i.e. if he or she has a Kela card.

Children's Dental Care

The dental care of children under the age of 18 is free of charge at public health centres. Regular dental check-ups are arranged for day-care and school-aged children. The aim of dental care for children and adolescents is to guarantee good oral and dental health from an early age.

Statutory Care Guarantee and the Patient's Right to Good Treatment Within a Reasonable Time

A person covered by the Finnish social security system, i.e. someone residing permanently in Finland, has a legal right to public health care within a certain period of time. This is known as the statutory care guarantee (*hoitotakuu*). According to the guarantee, a person has the right to receive non-urgent treatment within a reasonable time. Urgent treatment is always provided immediately.

According to the guarantee, health centres must answer phone calls or be open to patients on weekdays from 8 am to 4 pm. Patients have the right to an appointment at a health centre within three working days of contacting the health centre. The health centre must begin non-urgent treatment within three months.

Hospitals must assess the need for treatment within three weeks of when a doctor's referral has arrived at the hospital. If a patient needs hospital treatment, this treatment must begin no later than three months from when the treatment has been deemed necessary.

Patient's Rights

The other rights of a patient include the right to good care and to good, dignified treatment when using public health services. This also means that the patient will be asked to give his or her consent before treatment begins. The patient may refuse treatment, if he or she wishes to do so. The patient can also check his or her personal information contained in patient documents and correct the information, if necessary. According to law, all people are entitled to equitable public or private health services in Finland.

Help from the Patient Ombudsman

If you are treated inappropriately or unjustly by the health services, you can contact the patient ombudsman (*potilasasiamies*). The services of the patient ombudsman are free of charge, and he or she can help and advise patients who want to submit an objection or seek compensation for a patient injury.

You can always use an interpreter when you are using health services if you do not speak Finnish or Swedish. In some cases, the authorities can order and pay for an interpreter. This generally applies mainly to situations where immigrants with a refugee background deal with the authorities in cases where the immigrant has lived in Finland for no more than 3–5 years.

Health and Well-being of the Elderly

People in Finland live long. Back in the first half of the 20th century, the average life expectancy in Finland was about 50 years. The life expectancy of girls born in 2016 was about 84 years while for boys it was 78 years. So, people live about 30 years longer now than what they did 100 years ago. The higher standard of living and the development of health care have resulted in people living to an older age and staying healthy longer.

The Elderly in Finland

Before, the elderly in Finland used to live at home with their families, and several generations could live in the same household. Children, parents and grandparents lived together, and the members of the immediate and extended family looked after each other. If an elderly person had no family to take care of him or her, he or she would have to live in an old people's home, an institution for the elderly with modest living conditions.

When women started to work outside the home and family sizes became smaller, taking care of the elderly at home became more difficult. At the same time, the rising standard of living allowed older people to also live an independent life.

In present-day Finland, the elderly, meaning old people, often live alone or with their spouse. This is possible with the help of the National Pensions Act, which entered into force in 1957. The National Pensions Act guarantees a pension to all elderly people even if they have not been working. The pension (*eläke*) is a financial benefit that makes sure that the basic needs of each elderly person are met also after they retire from working life.

The longer life expectancy, the rise in the standard of living and improved health care have changed the population structure in Finland. There are more and more old people in relation to young people. There are fewer working people, and the number of retired people is growing. There will be a greater demand for services for the elderly in the future, but there will be less people to pay for these services.

Maintaining the Health of an Elderly Person

When you reach a mature age, it is important to look after your health. The significance of health grows as you get older. Ageing causes changes in your body. It may be harder to get about, and various illnesses can also change your body.

You can improve your health by leading a healthy lifestyle throughout life. Your ability to function will remain good if you eat a versatile diet, exercise and avoid becoming overweight, smoking and the excessive use of alcohol. You should also lead an active life and meet people. As long as your ability to function is good, you can cope with everyday activities and take care of yourself and your home as an elderly person.

Exercise has many benefits. Exercise strengthens the bones and keeps your muscles in shape. Exercise can also help you to maintain a good balance, keep your joints in shape and allow agile movements. Suitable exercise can also improve heart and lung function and the quality of sleep. Exercise also puts you in a good mood.

The mood of an elderly person is affected by many crises, changes and losses in life. A good everyday life supports the mental well-being of the elderly. As a person gets older, his or her memory often deteriorates and he or she can start to forget things. It is important to enjoy your life and seek sources of joy at every age.

An active life and meeting other people bring joy to everyday life. Municipalities organize various leisure activities for the elderly. Many associations and organizations also organize activities and run clubs. In Finland, many older people do volunteer work, which can put you in a positive mood. Volunteer work can consist of helping families with children or lonely people, for instance.

Pensioner Discounts

In Finland, people over 65 years of age can get a 10–50 percent pensioner discount when they travel by bus, train or ferry. Discounts are also offered on exercise and culture hobbies, such as the entrance fees of public swimming pools or theatre or concert tickets.

Pensioners under the age of 65 can also get pensioner discounts, but they need to prove that they are retired by presenting an earnings-related pension card (*työeläkekortti*) or a card for national pension recipients (*kansaneläkkeensaajan kortti*), for example.

Types of Pensions

When a person no longer goes to work, he or she is retired. Retired people receive a pension, which secures their livelihood after they no longer earn income. In Finland, you can retire at the age of 63–68. You can also retire earlier, if you are ill or cannot take part in working life for some other reason.

Earnings-related Pension and National Pension

There are two parallel pension schemes in Finland: an earnings-related pension scheme (*työeläkejärjestelmä*) and a national pension scheme (*kansaneläkejärjestelmä*). Taxes are paid on pension, similarly to other income. The pension scheme is funded by tax revenue. Everyone who pays taxes contributes to the payment of pensions. A person's pension often consists of several different types of pension, such as earnings-related pension and a partial national pension.

The majority of pensions are earnings-related pensions. The amount of earnings-related pension is based on contributions paid from your salary. The amount of pension depends on the amount of salary and how long the person has been working. The employer takes out pension insurance for every 17–68-year-old employee. Part of the insurance contributions are paid by the employee and part by the employer. You can also get earnings-related pension as an entrepreneur. An entrepreneur needs to pay the pensions insurance contributions him or herself.

The national pension guarantees a minimum income to people who receive very little or no earnings-related pension at all. You cannot receive earnings-related pension if you have not been gainfully employed. You become eligible for national pension once you turn 65 years of age.

Other Pensions

If a person can no longer work due to an illness or disability, he or she can receive disability pension (*työkyvyttömyyseläke*) before the official retirement age. The disability pension may be full-time or part-time. Following the death of a spouse, the surviving spouse and the under 18-year-old children of the deceased person are eligible for survivors' pension (*perhe-eläke*). Survivors' pension is calculated based on the earnings of the deceased guardian of the family.

Private Pension Insurance

You can increase the amount of pension that you will eventually receive by taking out private pension insurance (*yksityinen eläkevakuutus*). This means that you or your employer will pay extra pension contributions every month. When you retire, the pension insurance company will return the paid

pension contributions including any interest. Private pension insurance does not affect the amount of earnings-related pension. The additional pension insurance contributions can be deducted in taxation. Tax deductions decrease the amount of tax to be paid.

Work Done Abroad

All work that you do affects the amount of pension you will get. Work done abroad also affects your pension in Finland. You can apply for pension concerning work done abroad at the same time as you apply for Finnish pension if you have earned income in the EU or the EEA or in a country that has concluded a social security agreement with Finland concerning services and benefits. In terms of other countries, you need to separately apply for pension from them.

Receiving Pension Abroad

Finnish earnings-related pension can also be paid abroad, if the pensioner moves from Finland after retirement. You can also apply for pension from Finland if you retire in another country. Finnish national pension is also sometimes paid abroad. Normally, Kela pays pensions abroad if you are living abroad temporarily for less than one year. However, you should always notify Kela if you are moving abroad.

Survivors' and old-age pension can sometimes be paid to certain countries even when you are living there for more than a year. This applies to the EU and the EEA countries and other countries that have concluded a social security agreement with Finland.

How to Get Pension

You need to always apply for pension by filling in a pension application (*eläkehakemus*). You can apply for pension using a paper form or online. The application is sent to the pension insurance company or to Kela. Each type of pension has its own application form. Pensions earned abroad can be applied for using the same application form as Finnish pensions.

Taxation and Working While on Pension

Taxes are paid on pensions just like on earned income. Pensions from abroad should also be entered on your tax return even if you do not have to pay taxes on them in Finland. Pensioners may also continue to work. Work done while on pension increases the amount of earnings-related pension. Pensioners can work part-time or full-time.

Some types of pension are subject to working restrictions. For example, if you receive disability pension, you may only work up to a certain income limit. Those receiving old-age pension may work as much as they want, and working does not affect their amount of pension.

Care Services for the Elderly

Municipalities have the primary responsibility for taking care of the elderly. Municipal services include housing services and social and health services. Municipalities can produce these services themselves or they can organize services in cooperation with other municipalities. Municipalities sometimes buy services from private companies. Information about the services and care for the elderly in your municipality is available from the municipal social and health services.

A municipal authority will carry out a service needs assessment (*palvelutarpeenkartoitus*) for an elderly person, if necessary. The purpose is to assess what services the elderly person needs. The municipality grants services according to individual needs.

Supported Housing at Home

Home is an important place for everyone. In Finland, the elderly often live at home alone or with their spouse. Most people hope to continue to live at home as they get older. However, ageing often brings various changes with it, and e.g. getting about may become harder. The elderly may suffer from hearing or visual loss and remembering things may be difficult.

It is important that every person can feel safe at home. If living at home is no longer safe, the elderly can be housed in service housing, also known as an assisted living facility (*palvelutalo*). These facilities provide dwellings designed for the elderly where the occupants receive help with daily activities.

The municipality of residence organizes housing services for the elderly. Housing services are individually decided for each person with the aim of finding a solution that best meets the need of that person.

Municipalities support elderly people living at home. If needed, modifications can be made in or near the home if there are obstacles that make living or daily activities difficult. For instance, doorways at home can be widened and thresholds or bath tubs removed. The aim is to support the elderly and make it easier to live at home.

Home Care and Home Nursing

The municipality can also provide home care (*kotihoito*) or home nursing (*kotisairaanhoito*). Home care services help the elderly with activities that they cannot do independently, such as eating, going to the toilet, taking a shower or getting dressed. The municipal social services department provides home care services. If necessary, a nurse can also be sent to an elderly person's home to provide home nursing.

You can get access to home nursing services through your health centre. In addition to municipalities, private service providers organize domestic help (*kotiapu*) and home nursing. The municipality can also give service vouchers (*palveluseteli*) to the elderly. They can be used to buy care services from private service providers. A service purchased with a voucher is another alternative to services provided by the city.

Meal Delivery Service

An elderly person living at home can be supported by ordering a meal delivery service (*ateriapalvelu*). The meal delivery service delivers warm meals to the person's home every day or several times a week.

Security Services

Security services or an emergency phone are intended for people with difficulties coping with everyday life on their own or people with an illness. An emergency phone can be e.g. an emergency wristband with a button that can be pressed to contact the emergency response centre round the clock.

Informal Care (omaishoito)

Sometimes the family of an elderly person wishes to take care of the person at home. When a family member takes care of an elderly person, the municipality can pay support for informal care (*omaishoidon tuki*) to the caregiver. Support for informal care can be paid if help is needed constantly and the care is demanding and requires a strong commitment. An informal carer (*omaishoitaja*) is also entitled to days off.

Day Centres

Municipalities organize activities for the elderly in day centres (*päiväkeskus*). Daytime activities aim to support home care, the coping of the elderly at home and the well-being of informal carers. You can go to a day centre to spend time, meet others and enjoy the exercise, recreational and cultural services of the day centre, such as theatre performances. The municipality organizes transport to the day centre and usually provides a meal during the day.

Service Housing and Institutional Care

When an old person can no longer live at home, the municipality can provide service housing in an assisted living facility (*palvelutalo*) or an institution (*laitos*). Service housing can also be provided by private companies. This option aims to guarantee the elderly person's freedom of choice and the right to continue living in the way he or she wishes. The aim of service housing is to provide a safe and dignified life to the elderly person. The occupant usually pays for service housing him or herself.

Service Housing

People who need help and care round the clock can live in assisted living facilities. All occupants in assisted living facilities have their own apartment or room, and there are also many common rooms. You can furnish and decorate your apartment with your personal belongings. The staff are always present in assisted living facilities to help occupants with their daily activities. There are both municipal and private assisted living facilities in Finland.

Institutional Care

If a person is no longer able to live at home or in an assisted living facility, he or she is moved to institutional care (*laitoshoito*). Institutional care is intended for elderly people who constantly need demanding care that cannot be safely provided anywhere else. These occupants often suffer from various illnesses and need the help of several nurses on a daily basis. Family members can help to care for an elderly person in institutional care, if they wish. The aim of institutional care is to maintain the occupants' ability to function and to improve their quality of life and condition.

Other Services

You can borrow various aids (*apuväline*) from health centres. If you need help getting about, you can borrow, for instance, a walking stick or a rollator (*rollaattori*), which is an aid that helps you walk. Your municipality can also provide advisory services. In addition, the municipality can grant parking permits to the elderly and the disabled as well as various transport services to make it easier to get around. These services are applied for from the municipal social welfare and health services.

Death and Burial

When life comes to an end and a loved one dies, the surviving relatives must take care of many things despite their grief. If a person dies at home, you need to call a doctor or the police. The doctor will pronounce the person dead and decide whether the cause of death is clear or whether the deceased needs an autopsy (*ruumiinavaus*). If the death is sudden or occurs at night or over the weekend, it is usually reported to the police.

Burial Permit

Death is always confirmed by a doctor who grants a burial permit (*hautauslupa*) to the surviving relatives. The doctor will send notice of the death to various authorities: the Local Register Office, Kela, the tax authorities and the Population Register Centre. The Population Register Centre will notify banks and pension and insurance companies of the death.

Death Certificate

The death certificate (*kuolintodistus*) states the cause of death. Sometimes the doctor will not write a certificate until months after the death. A death certificate is not absolutely necessary when dealing with the authorities, but an extract from the Finnish Population Information System (*virkatodistus*), which can be obtained from the Local Register Office, is enough. A death certificate is usually required only when dealing with any insurance matters.

Autopsy

If the underlying cause of death is unclear, an autopsy must be performed to determine the cause. The body may not be buried before determining the cause of death. The autopsy can be medical or forensic.

A doctor is responsible for determining the medical cause of death. A medical autopsy is performed if the death was caused by an illness and determining the cause of death can benefit health care and medical treatment in general. A medical autopsy always requires permission from the surviving relatives.

The police are responsible for determining the forensic cause of death. The police will order a forensic autopsy if the death was not caused by an illness, if it has occurred suddenly or if the cause of death is related to an accident, a crime or suicide. The police do not need the surviving relatives' permission and the relatives cannot refuse the autopsy.

Organ Donation Testament

You can donate your organs and tissues to save the lives of others or to improve health care in general. If you want to donate your organs after death, you can draw up an organ donation testament (*elinluovutustestamentti*). You can do so online by ordering an organ donation card (*elinluovutuskortti*). You should always carry your organ donation card with you.

Surviving relatives cannot forbid organ donation if the deceased has personally wanted to donate his or her organs. According to law, everyone is a potential organ donor provided that he or she has not objected to organ donation during his or her lifetime.

You can also donate your body to medical research. This is done by signing a body donation document (*ruumiinluovutuskirja*) where you agree to donate your body to medical education after death.

Funeral

In Finland, a funeral (*hautajaiset*) is not commonly held until two or three weeks after death. Taking care of practical matters and funeral arrangements takes time, and funeral venues can be busy. However, the deceased (*vainaja*), i.e. the dead person, can be buried sooner if the cause of death has been determined and the doctor has issued a burial permit.

Everyone can arrange the kind of funeral that they want for their loved one. People practising different religions have different funeral traditions. There are many funeral homes (*hautausseura*) operating in Finland. Funeral homes are companies that arrange funerals. You can also arrange the funeral yourself.

Finnish Funeral Customs

Usually the closest friends and relatives of the deceased are invited to a funeral in Finland. The relatives of the deceased often place a death notice, or obituary notice (*kuolinilmoitus*), in a newspaper, stating when and where the funeral will be held.

Most Finns are members of the Lutheran Church. In a Lutheran funeral, a priest blesses the deceased. Relatives and friends lower flowers on the coffin and can say a final farewell, if they wish. If the deceased was not a member of any religious group, he or she can be given a non-religious funeral.

After the blessing or the farewell ceremony, the deceased is taken to a church cemetery and the coffin is lowered in a grave dug into the earth. A memorial service (*muistotilaisuus*) is held after the burial. At the memorial service, guests eat a meal, drink coffee and remember the deceased. It is common in Finland to take photographs at a funeral.

Burial in a Coffin or Cremation

According to the Lutheran tradition, the deceased or his or her relatives can decide what is done with the body after death: will it be buried in a coffin (*arkkuhautaus*) or cremated (*polttohautaus*, or *tuhkaus*). Burial in a coffin is common in Finland, but a person in a coffin may only be buried in a cemetery that has the appropriate license.

Cremation has quickly become more common in recent decades and is the most inexpensive option. After cremation, the ashes are taken to a cemetery to be buried in a burial urn. This urn burial ceremony (*uurnanlaskutilaisuus*) is usually held a couple weeks after the funeral ceremony, and normally only the closest relatives attend the ceremony. The ashes can also be scattered directly on the ground in an urn cemetery (*uurnalehto*), or the relatives may scatter them on their own property or at sea, if they wish. If you want to scatter the ashes on someone else's property, you need to ask for the landowner's permission first. The ashes must be scattered in one place only so they may not be divided and scattered in several different places.

Cemeteries

Most cemeteries in Finland are cemeteries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. However, people belonging to other religious groups may also be buried there. Cemeteries often have separate areas for those practising a different religion and for non-religious people. Some municipalities and cities have separate cemeteries for people professing different religions, such as Jewish, Orthodox and Islamic cemeteries.

Different religious communities and associations for non-religious people also have their own private cemeteries. Information on burial places and practical arrangements in different situations is available from your own religious community.

Death of a Foreigner in Finland

If the relatives want to transport the body to be buried in another country, they can contact the embassy of that country in Finland. The embassies of some countries help relatives to transport the body. The relatives must pay for the transport themselves. Transport requires a burial permit, a body transit permit (*ruumiinkuljetuslupa*) and sometimes a certificate stating that the autopsy has not revealed that the deceased had any infectious diseases. The body must always be transported abroad in a coffin.

Inheritance

When a person dies, he or she often leaves property, such as money or a dwelling. The property of a deceased person is known as their inheritance, or estate (*perintö*). The estate is legally distributed between heirs, typically family members. If the deceased has no heirs and has not drawn up a will, his or her property will go to the state. The will (*testamentti*) is the last will of the deceased, i.e. a document where he or she determines how the property should be divided after his or her death. However, according to law, children always inherit a compulsory legal portion, or reserved portion

(*lakiosa*), even if the deceased has left his or her property to someone else by will. The amount of the reserved portion is half of the disposable portion (*perintöosa*) of the estate.

Estate Inventory

An estate inventory (*perunkirjoitus*) is organized for the distribution of the estate. The estate inventory refers to an event where the deceased person's assets and liabilities are determined. The estate inventory is normally organized by the deceased person's surviving spouse or children. It must be held within three months of the death, and all the heirs of the deceased must be invited.

An inventory of the deceased person's estate (*kuolinpesä*) is prepared during the estate inventory. The inventory of the deceased person's estate is known as an estate inventory deed (*perukirja*). The estate inventory deed can be prepared by an estate administrator (*kuolinpesän hoitaja*) who is typically the deceased person's relative or a lawyer. The deed lists the deceased person's property and debts, information on his or her heirs and the contents of a possible will.

Inheritance Tax

You need to pay inheritance tax on the distributed assets, i.e. the estate, of the deceased if the value of the inherited assets is more than 20 000 euros. There are two inheritance tax categories in Finland. The closer the family relationship between the beneficiary and the deceased, the less tax the beneficiary has to pay. If the estate is left by a distant relative or a person from outside the family, the tax is higher.

Discussion Questions

1. What is your opinion of the Finnish health services?
2. How do you take care of your personal health?
3. What happens when a person grows old?
4. Discuss elderly care and the related services in Finland.
5. What are the benefits of working while on pension?
6. Who pays pensions?
7. How can you personally influence your old age?
8. Compare the funeral customs and practices in different countries.
9. How is an estate divided in Finland?

8. LAWS AND JUSTICE IN FINLAND

Legal System of Finland

Equitable and Equal Society

Rights and Obligations of Individuals in Finland

Crimes

Legal Proceedings and Legal Aid

Laws are the common rules of society. Everyone living in Finland must obey the Finnish law. At the same time, Finland also observes international agreements – such as the UN Declaration of Human Rights, the Refugee Convention and the Convention on the Rights of the Child – as well as the common directives and provisions of the European Union. Various authorities and the police enforce the laws. It is important in Finland to know the laws and to obey them. Laws aim to protect the common values of society and guarantee the equality and rights of all individuals.

Laws are based on social values and norms. Values mean things that we consider important and desirable. Different cultures and religions have different values, but on the other hand, people living in the same culture also have different personal values. Norms are established ideas, rules or guidelines concerning behaviour. Norms help to determine what is acceptable behaviour, what is considered right and wrong and how people should live.

The fundamental values of the Finnish society are the idea of the common good, in addition to freedom, human rights and equity, i.e. the equal value of all people. Everyone should have the opportunity to study, learn a profession and succeed in life. These values form a solid foundation for a good, fair society. The values of the Finnish society are also the common values of Nordic democracy. Nordic values include freedom, equality and obedience to the law.

Legal System of Finland

The legal system of Finland means the way in which justice is administered and enforced in Finland. Finland is a country with a good administration. This means that its society is functional and equal, that people can exercise their rights and fulfil their obligations and that there is little corruption.

Finns are law-abiding people. Obeying the law is generally considered important and honourable in Finland. Breaking the law is condemnable and unaccepted. The majority of Finns feel that laws must be obeyed even if they occasionally go against their personal sense of justice.

In Finland, the state tries to create a more equal society by balancing income inequality through taxation. More equal incomes improve people's trust in society and reduce corruption. In fact, Finland is one of the least corrupt countries in the world.

Principle of the Rule of Law

Finland is a state governed by the rule of law, so it is what is known as a constitutional state (*oikeusvaltio*). In a state governed by the rule of law, public authority is based on legislation. Power has been divided so that it is not concentrated on one body. Legislative power, judicial power and executive power have been separated. The separation of powers aims to guarantee the equitable treatment of people.

In a state governed by the rule of law, both the law and the fundamental rights of people and human rights are respected. Everyone has the right to indispensable subsistence and education. Every citizen also has the right to participate in and influence matters in the country.

A state governed by the rule of law can only exist if international human rights are respected and the principles of legal protection of every citizen are realized. Finland has ratified the UN Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and agreed to safeguard the principles of the Declaration. One of these principles is safety, meaning that citizens can live in peace without having their health or life threatened. People also have the right to the protection of property and the freedom to carry on a trade of their choice. Every person may say what they think, and all people who are of age have political rights.

One of the purposes of a state governed by the rule of law is to protect its weakest inhabitants. Various laws have been enacted to protect the rights of citizens. Their aim is to guarantee the equal and fair treatment of all people.

A state governed by the rule of law is upheld by the judicial system. The judicial system solves crimes and makes sure that citizens can live in peace and feel safe. A crime (*rikos*) is an act that is punishable under the Finnish law. In Finland, everyone who is 15 years of age or older can be held criminally responsible for their actions. This means that they can be prosecuted and sentenced for committing a crime.

Structure of the Legal System

In the Finnish legal system, laws are enacted by Parliament. The police and other authorities are responsible for enforcing the laws. Judicial power is exercised by courts that are independent of politics.

Finland has a three-tier court system: district courts (*käräjäoikeus*), courts of appeal (*hovioikeus*) and the Supreme Court (*korkein oikeus*). Additionally, Finland has an Administrative Court (*hallinto-oikeus*), which deals especially with cases relating to the authorities and their actions. In addition to these, there are also various special courts, such as the Labour Court (*työtuomioistuin*), the Insurance Court (*vakuutus-oikeus*) and the Market Court (*markkinatuomioistuin*).

In Finland, judges assess the reliability of testimonies and evidence in court and deliver judgement in the case at hand. In some other countries, testimonies can be assessed by juries consisting of lay members or the legal system of the country may be based on religion. Court sessions in Finland may also occasionally include lay members (*lautamies*) or lay judges (*maallikkotuomari*) if the court is deciding on a gross or serious criminal case. Lay judges have the right to vote, but they cannot pass judgement on their own.

Finland is a secular country. The state has been separated from the Church, and Finnish laws are not based on religion. Back in the 16th and 17th centuries, European laws were generally based on Biblical texts. A major legal reform took place in Sweden in 1734, when Finland was still a part of Sweden. The reform resulted in the transfer to secular law.

Law Enforcement Authorities

Laws in Finland are enforced by various authorities. The authorities must also obey the law. The actions of authorities can be interfered with if there is reason to suspect that they are not acting lawfully. Every citizen may file a complaint concerning the actions of an authority with the Parliamentary Ombudsman (*oikeusasiamies*) or the Chancellor of Justice (*oikeuskansleri*).

National security is supervised by the rescue services together with the police and the defence forces. The police maintain public safety and order. The police also investigate crimes and try to prevent crime. Police are respected authorities in Finland. Police, other authorities and politicians do not accept bribes. Bribery means giving a gift or some other benefit to a person with the expectation that it will affect the behaviour or actions of the recipient. Bribery is a crime in Finland.

According to the Finnish law, a person must be considered innocent until he or she is proven guilty in a trial. Citizens have an obligation to report any crimes that they witness to the police. You can file a report of an offence (*rikosilmoitus*) at a police station, by phone or online, and you can do so orally or in writing.

The Parliamentary Ombudsman and the Chancellor of Justice of the Council of State

In Finland, the enforcement of justice and the law are supervised by the Chancellor of Justice appointed by the President and the Parliamentary Ombudsman selected by Parliament. The Chancellor of Justice and the Parliamentary Ombudsman supervise the Government, ministries, the President, courts, authorities and other officials to make sure that they obey the law and fulfil their obligations. Their duties are partly the same, but the Parliamentary Ombudsman also supervises the work of lawyers. His or her duty is to ensure that basic and human rights are fulfilled and the principles of good administration are followed.

You can file a complaint (*kantelu*, or *valitus*) with the Chancellor of Justice or the Parliamentary Ombudsman concerning the authorities, public officials or other individuals performing public tasks. The complaint must always be filed in writing. It can be free-form or you can use the form created specifically for this purpose. Forms are available at the offices or on the websites of the Chancellor of Justice and the Parliamentary Ombudsman. You can also file a complaint on the website of the Chancellor of Justice or send an encrypted e-mail to the Parliamentary Ombudsman. The Parliamentary Ombudsman and the Chancellor of Justice will inspect the complaints and initiate investigations of various authorities and institutions. Filing a complaint is free of charge.

Equal and Equitable Society

The Finnish society is founded on the equity (*yhdenvertaisuus*, sometimes also translated as “non-discriminatory” or simply “equality”) and equality (*tasa-arvo*) of its citizens. Each member of society is responsible for creating an equitable and equal society and can contribute to this with his or her behaviour. Various laws also aim to guarantee that these values are realized.

The law is the same for everyone in Finland. This was not the case before. As late as the 19th century, people belonging to the nobility and the clergy, i.e. the higher estates, had different rights from people belonging to the lower estates or people who did not belong to any state. For instance, the nobility did not have to pay taxes, and people belonging to the clergy could not be convicted of crimes the way other citizens could.

Equality in Finland

According to law, women and men are equal in Finland. Equality means that women and men have the same rights and obligations and they must be treated in the same way. In Finland, the share of women and men in working life is almost the same. Cleaning, cooking, child care and other chores in the family are often done together.

Finland is one of the most equal countries in the world. When speaking of equality, we often mean the equal value of women and men as individuals and members of society, but in a broader sense, equality also means the equality of various sexual minorities and disabled people in society. Sexual minorities mean people whose sexual orientation is something other than heterosexual.

Today, people no longer think of equality as only a women's issue, but it is understood that equality benefits everyone – both men and women. Equality promotes female employment, improves the productivity of labour and supports economic growth. Some countries have found that women's involvement in political decision-making also increases the number of investments and reduces corruption.

In addition to international laws, Finland also has national laws that aim to guarantee equality in practice. These laws are the Act on Equality between Women and Men and the Non-discrimination Act.

Act on Equality between Women and Men

Under the Act on Equality between Women and Men (*Laki naisten ja miesten välisestä tasa-arvosta*, often referred to as *tasa-arvolaki*), men and women are equal and nobody should be discriminated against based on gender. The Act on Equality protects equality between genders and tries to improve the position of women, especially in working life. According to the Act, an employee may not, for instance, be dismissed due to pregnancy. When new employees are hired, the choice must be made based on the qualifications of the employee, not the gender.

Under the Act on Equality, discrimination means that women and men are treated differently on the basis of gender, gender identity or gender expression, or for reasons of pregnancy or childbirth, or on the basis of parenthood or family responsibilities or some other reason relating to gender. Gender identity means an individual's own experience of their gender, which can be expressed through behaviour or clothing, for instance.

It is also prohibited to pay men a higher salary than women based on their gender, although this is unfortunately still the case to some extent.

The Act on Equality is one of the laws protecting the equal status of women in society. In Finland, every woman can personally decide on her profession or what she wants to study. A woman can get married or divorced and have children, if she wishes. Nobody else has the right to decide on these things on her behalf. The Act on Equality is applied especially in civic activities and working life.

Non-discrimination Act

Equity (*yhdenvertaisuus*, sometimes also translated as “equality” or “non-discrimination”) means the equal value of all people. Under the Non-discrimination Act (*Yhdenvertaisuuslaki*), everyone in Finland should have equal opportunities to study, work and receive services. According to the Act, the authorities must promote equity in all their actions.

The Non-discrimination Act aims to guarantee justice in society and it prohibits discrimination based on age, origin, nationality, language, religion, belief, opinion, political activity, trade union activity, family relationships, state of health, disability, sexual orientation or other personal characteristics. The sexual orientation of a person refers to which gender the person is sexually and romantically attracted to – e.g. the same gender, the opposite gender or both. Nobody can be put in a worse position than others based on these reasons.

The roots of the Non-discrimination Act lie in the Constitution of Finland, and the purpose of the Act is to promote equity and to improve the chances of those who experience discrimination to interfere with the situation.

Discrimination

According to the Finnish law, all people must be treated equitably. No individual or group should be discriminated against, meaning that they must not be treated worse than others in the same situation. Discrimination is a crime in Finland. The state must protect its inhabitants from discrimination.

However, being treated differently does not always constitute discrimination if the treatment is based on the law or there is an acceptable reason for it. Positive action (*positiivinen erityiskohtelu*) means that a certain individual or group is supported using special measures. Positive action may include, for example, training that promotes the integration of immigrants or providing employment subsidy to young people. The aim is to give everyone equal opportunities to receive education, go to work and take part in civic life.

Racial Discrimination and Hate Crimes

If a group of people is discriminated against or considered worse than others based on its ethnic origin, skin colour, religion, mother tongue or nationality, this constitutes racism. Racist actions are a violation of human dignity and punishable acts. Racism should always be reported to the police. Racist actions or acts are not aimed against the person as an individual, but as a representative of a particular group.

If a person falls victim to a crime because he or she represents e.g. a particular ethnicity, nationality or religious or ethnic group, this is known as a hate crime (*viharikos*). Hate crimes are often motivated by prejudice or hate against a particular group. If a crime is motivated by hate against a particular group of people, the punishment for the crime will be more severe.

Authorities Supervising Equality

Achieving equality is important in Finland, and the violation of human rights is considered a serious issue. Due to this, it is the duty of certain authorities to supervise the achievement of equality and equity, or non-discrimination, in practice.

- **Ombudsman for Equality:** The Ombudsman for Equality (*tasa-arvovaltuutettu*) supervises compliance with the Act on Equality between Women and Men. The Ombudsman for Equality also supervises the status of gender minorities. The Ombudsman for Equality provides help and advice in cases of discrimination based on gender-related matters.
- **Non-Discrimination Ombudsman:** The task of the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman (*yhdenvertaisuusvaltuutettu*) is to promote equity and to prevent discrimination. The Non-Discrimination Ombudsman provides advice and, if necessary, helps to submit a case to court or to the National Non-Discrimination and Equality Tribunal of Finland (*Yhdenvertaisuus- ja tasa-arvolautakunta*) for consideration. You can also contact the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman on behalf of another person or group.
- **Occupational safety and health authorities:** The duty of the occupational safety and health authorities (*työsuojeluviranomainen*) is to maintain and protect the employees' ability to work by improving the working environment and conditions. If you are discriminated against during employment or recruitment, you can contact the occupational safety and health authorities.
- **Trade unions:** Trade unions (*ammattiliitto*) also provide legal advice in matters relating to employment relationships. At the workplace, the trade union is represented by a shop steward (*luottamusmies*). The shop steward makes sure that laws are observed and that employees are treated fairly and equally.
- **Regional State Administrative Agency:** You can file a complaint with the Regional State Administrative Agency (*aluehallintovirasto*) concerning the actions of an authority if an error

or negligence has occurred in the family and social services, health care, a school or some other municipal service.

Rights and Obligations of Individuals

Society is made up of individuals. All people are different, but every person has the same rights in an equal, free society. Every society also has its own obligations that citizens must fulfil. When the rights and obligations of citizens are well-balanced, society functions smoothly and the well-being of people is good.

Constitution of Finland

The most important law in Finland is the Constitution (*perustuslaki*). No other law can be in conflict with it. The current, amended Constitution of Finland entered into force in 2000.

The Constitution describes how the state of Finland works and what are the basic rights and liberties of people living in Finland. The Constitution is given primacy over other acts. This means that if an act is in conflict with the Constitution, the act shall not be applied.

According to the Constitution, Finland is a republic, and the power to decide on national matters is vested in the people. The people elect a Parliament by vote, and the Parliament enacts the laws that are observed in society. Courts supervise observance of the laws. The Parliament of Finland elects the Government, which drafts and implements the decisions made by Parliament.

Finnish laws emphasize human rights and the basic rights and liberties of citizens. The UN Declaration of Human Rights from 1948 has served as the basis for the Constitution of Finland. The Constitution aims to guarantee that human rights are exercised in Finland. All the laws that are in force in Finland can be found at www.finlex.fi.

Basic Rights and Obligations

In addition to the form of government, the Constitution also determines the basic rights and liberties of citizens. These basic rights and liberties belong to all people living and residing in Finland, not just Finnish citizens.

Basic rights and liberties determined by law:

- In Finland, the law is the same for everyone and everyone is equal before the law. No one shall be treated differently on the ground of gender, age, religion, disability or other reason that concerns his or her person.
- Everyone has the right to a safe life and the right to live in peace and be free. No one shall be sentenced to death or tortured or treated in a manner violating human dignity.
- In Finland, everyone has the freedom of expression. People can express their opinions freely.
- People can arrange meetings and demonstrations as well as participate in them.
- Everyone can choose their place of residence and freely move within Finland.
- Everyone has the right to privacy protection. The Constitution protects everyone's private life and everyone has the right to live their life in peace. No one's home can be entered without permission. Other people's letters may not be read and no one's phone calls may be listened to.
- Everyone in Finland has the freedom of religion. Everyone has the right to believe in the way that they want and to be a member of a church or other religious community. No one is forced to be a member of any religious community.

- The national, or official languages of Finland are Finnish and Swedish. Everyone has the right to use Swedish or Finnish when dealing with the authorities anywhere in the country. The Sami languages also have an official status in some Sami regions in northern Finland.
- Everyone has the right to study for free in comprehensive school. Everyone also has the right to education after basic education in accordance with their ability and needs.
- The state should organize jobs for everyone and protect employees.
- In Finland, everyone has the right to subsistence and care. The law guarantees everyone the right to basic subsistence, even if the person is unemployed, ill or elderly. All people have the right to social, health and medical services.
- People have the right to live in a healthy environment and to influence the decisions that concern their own living environment.

Obligations determined by law:

- The most important obligation of everyone living in Finland is to obey the Finnish law.
- Citizens need to pay taxes to the state on income, property and inheritance. Taxes are also paid on services and products.
- All children aged 7–16 need to take part in compulsory education, i.e. they have an obligation to complete the basic education syllabus.
- Parents are obligated to take care of their under-age children.
- Everyone is obligated to help if someone needs help in an accident, for example.
- Everyone has the obligation to testify in court, if they are called to testify.

Rights and Obligations Related to Finnish Citizenship

Finnish citizens, i.e. people who have Finnish citizenship, have some rights and obligations that do not apply to foreign citizens residing permanently in Finland.

- Finnish citizens have the right to obtain a Finnish passport.
- Finns have the right to vote in parliamentary and presidential elections and in EU elections. Foreigners residing permanently in Finland may also vote in municipal elections even if they are not Finnish citizens.
- Finnish citizens also have the rights of EU citizens, and they can freely travel and work in the EU area.
- Finnish citizens are obligated to obey the Finnish law also outside Finland.
- Compulsory military service, or conscription (*asevelvollisuus*), applies to all Finnish men aged 18–60, which means that Finnish men have an obligation to participate in national defence in the form of military service in the army or non-military service. Non-military, or civil service (*siviilipalvelus*) is an option for those who choose not to go to the army. Non-military service consists of a one-month training period and work service that lasts for just under one year. Military service, or army training, lasts for roughly six months to one year. Men with a foreign background who have been granted Finnish citizenship under the age of 30 must also complete their military service. Compulsory military service does not apply to women, but women can apply for voluntary military service, if they wish.

Rights of Children in Finland

Society protects the position of children with various acts and provisions, such as the Child Welfare Act. The parents or guardians of the child have primary responsibility for the child's welfare and development. All adults should protect children together and supervise the interests and rights of children. The future of society lies in children.

The position of children has changed significantly in Finland in the last one hundred years. In the first half of the 20th century, the use of children under the age of 12 as labour was prohibited by law and

the Compulsory School Attendance Act entered into force. The Compulsory School Attendance Act guaranteed the right of every child to attend school.

Rights of Children

Children have the same basic rights as adults. In addition, children have some of their own rights, which are determined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention is enforced in Finland as well. It aims to guarantee the basic rights of every child, meaning health, education, equality and protection. According to the Convention, every child has the right to a good, safe childhood; the right to grow and attend school; the right to engage in play and participate and the right to protection and care. According to the Constitution, children shall be treated equally as individuals and they shall be allowed to influence matters pertaining to themselves.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child monitors the implementation of the rights of children. The Ombudsman for Children (*lapsiasiavaltuutettu*) works as an independent authority under the Ministry of Justice. The duties of the Ombudsman for Children include assessing and promoting the implementation of the UN Convention in Finland.

Crimes

A crime, or offence (*rikos*), means an act which is punishable by law. Negligence, meaning the failure to do something, or inciting someone else to commit a crime can also constitute a crime. Sometimes even attempted crime is considered a crime and can be punished.

In Finland, everyone is obligated to report to the police if they know that someone is planning to commit a crime that could still be prevented. The duty to report concerns serious crimes, such as homicide, rape, assault and robbery. However, the duty to report does not apply to the spouse, children, siblings or parents of the person planning to commit the crime.

Typical crimes in Finland

- **Theft:** Theft, or stealing (*varastaminen, varkaus*), means taking someone else's property without permission. Stealing from a shop, i.e. shoplifting (*myymälävarkaus*), is always reported to the police.
- **Traffic offences:** Traffic rules must be followed. You must have a driving licence to drive a vehicle. You may not drive a car, a motorcycle or a moped while intoxicated, meaning when you are under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- **Criminal damage:** Other people's property should not be damaged or broken. Any damage that has been caused must be compensated, meaning that the offender is liable to pay damages. If the offender does not pay damages caused by him or her, compensation can be taken directly from his or her salary.
- **Crimes related to alcohol, tobacco and drugs:** In Finland, only people over the age of 18 may consume alcohol and tobacco. Buying or selling alcohol to under-age children is a crime, and you can be fined or imprisoned for it. The production, sale, transport, possession and use of all kinds of drugs is prohibited by law, and such crimes are severely punished in Finland.
- **Violent crimes and homicide:** Violence is a crime in Finland. Violence can be physical, sexual or mental (psychological) violence or the threat of violence. Taking another person's life – e.g. murder, homicide or negligent homicide – is a punishable act.

Violence

Violence is a violation of human rights and affects the well-being and health of all those taking part in it. In addition to physical injuries, violence can cause mental problems, such as depression, anxiety and eating and sleeping disorders. Mental violence and a deteriorating quality of life affect life as a

whole. Long-term consequences of violence can include, for instance, suicidal behaviour or the use of alcohol and drugs.

- Physical violence includes hitting, shoving, pulling someone's hair, choking, kicking and restricting movement. Assault (*pahoinpitely*) means violence or attempted violence that is directed against another person. Assault is a crime even when no marks are left on the body of the victim.
- Mental violence includes threatening and blackmailing someone, name-calling, isolating the victim from other people, treating him or her badly or investigating his or her phone and e-mails. Mental violence leaves no visible marks, which is why it is sometimes difficult to recognize.
- Sexual violence includes, for instance, molestation, touching, harassment, rape and sexual coercion. Everyone has the right to decide on their own sexuality and body also in marriage and dating relationships.

All forms of assault are a crime subject to public prosecution in Finland. This means that charges can be pressed against the perpetrator of the act of violence even if the victim of violence does not want to press charges.

Report of an Offence

If you know or suspect that a crime has been committed, you can submit a report of an offence (*rikosilmoitus*) to the police. You can report an offence at any police station, online, to a police patrol and sometimes also by phone. The police are obligated to receive all reports of an offence.

You can also report an offence to the police anonymously by either calling the tip line or by sending an e-mail to the police. This way, the offender cannot find out who has reported the offence to the police.

Where to Get Help

In the case of an urgent situation where you need immediate assistance, call the emergency number. A situation is urgent when someone's life, health, property or the environment is in danger.

It is important for crime victims to seek help. It is difficult to cope with being victim of a crime on your own. Help is available from the following services, for example:

- **Victim Support Finland:** Victim Support Finland (*Rikosuhripäivystys, RIKU*) is a free service for crime victims, their family members and witnesses. Victim Support Finland can provide advice and a support person for the various stages of a criminal procedure. www.riku.fi
- **Shelters:** Several localities have shelters (*turvakoti*) where you can go alone or together with children if you experience violence or threatened violence at home. You can live at the shelter temporarily, and will receive help to deal with the violence. The Federation of Mother and Child Homes and Shelters (*Ensi- ja turvakotien liitto*) and the municipal social services office provide more information on shelters. <https://ensijaturvakotienliitto.fi/>
- **Shelter Mona:** Shelter Mona is a shelter in Helsinki that is intended specifically for immigrant women. The address of the shelter is secret. <https://monikanaiset.fi/apua-vakivaltaan/turvakoti-mona/>
- **Associations:** Many associations help those who have experienced acts of violence or have been threatened with violence. Help is also provided to their family members. These associations include the Crisis Centre Monika (*Kriisikeskus Monika*) of Monika – Multicultural Women's Association Finland and Women's Line (*Naisten linja*).

- **Church and municipality:** You can also seek help from the social services office, health centre, family counselling clinic and the church counselling centre for family matters (*perheasiain neuvottelukeskus*) in your municipality or city.

Legal Proceedings and Legal Aid

In Finland, the judicial system (*oikeuslaitos*) exercises judicial power. It aims to enforce justice and the enacted laws. The Criminal Code (*rikoslaki*) determines which acts are punishable. The basic rights of people include protection under the law (*oikeusturva*). Every citizen has the right to have his or her case dealt with appropriately and without delay by a court of law. It is the duty of the judicial system to provide protection under the law. In Finland, the state supports the implementation of protection under the law by providing legal aid (*oikeusapu*), for example.

Pre-trial Investigation

If the police suspect that a crime has been committed, they start a pre-trial investigation (*esitutkinta*), sometimes referred to as a criminal investigation. During the pre-trial investigation, the police try to find out what has happened in more detail. After the investigation, the police write a pre-trial investigation record (*esitutkintapöytäkirja*), also known as the record of a criminal investigation, and decide whether the record will be sent to a prosecutor. The police may also suggest conciliation, or arbitration (*sovittelu*), between the parties and issue a fine to the perpetrator. Conciliation, or arbitration, means that the matter is settled between the parties without taking the case to court.

Prosecutor

Legal proceedings begin once the police pass on the pre-trial investigation record to a public prosecutor (*yleinen syyttäjä*). The prosecutor considers the case and decides whether the case will be taken to court. Sometimes the prosecutor will decide not to prosecute if the offence is minor or if the matter has already been settled amicably. The prosecutor may also issue a fine to the perpetrator. If the crime is subject to public prosecution, the police will investigate the crime even if the victim of the crime, i.e. the complainant, or injured party (*asianomistaja*), does not demand an investigation. Homicides and assaults, for instance, are crimes that are subject to public prosecution. If the case is a complainant offence (*asianomistajarikos*), the police will investigate the crime only if the complainant so wishes. Complainant offences include e.g. defamation (*kunnianloukkaus*) and the disturbance, or violation of domiciliary peace (*kotirauhan rikkominen*). Sometimes the prosecutor will also propose conciliation.

Court Proceedings

If the prosecutor decides to prosecute, the case will be taken to court (*tuomioistuin*, or *oikeus*). The court resolves disputes between parties and determines what is lawful. The court of first instance is the district court (*käräjäoikeus*), which delivers judgement in the case. The district court proceedings can be oral (a hearing) or written. In an oral trial, both parties can describe the course of events from their own perspective.

Various experts and witnesses can also be heard during a trial. In a court session, both parties have the right to use a counsel (*avustaja*). Sometimes, a witness can also be heard over the phone or via video. If the witness is afraid, he or she can also be heard at a different time than the accused person. This allows the witness to avoid meeting the accused during a court session.

If you are unsatisfied with the district court ruling, you can submit an appeal to the next instance, which is the court of appeal (*hovioikeus*). The court of appeal deals with appeals submitted concerning district court rulings. The court of appeal may change the district court ruling. If the parties concerned are unsatisfied with the ruling of the court of appeal, they can apply for leave to appeal to the Supreme Court (*korkein oikeus*).

The Supreme Court is the last instance and highest court in Finland. The Supreme Court only tries cases that have been granted leave to appeal, and the proceedings are always written. Leave to appeal is rarely granted, and the Supreme Court only tries cases of social significance, such as cases the likes of which have not been tried before and which can eventually serve as precedents for the lower courts.

Witness Protection

If the witness of a crime fears revenge from the person who has committed the crime and, for this reason, does not dare to testify against him or her, the witness can be placed in a witness protection programme (*todistajansuojeluohjelma*). This is resorted to only if the witness cannot be protected in any other way and if the health or life of the witness is at serious risk. In such cases, this risk is countered by giving the witness a temporary fake identity, a new place of residence and other protective measures.

Penalty Practice in Finland

Various authorities, the police, the prosecutor and courts can impose penalties on people found guilty of a crime. In Finland, only the person who has committed the crime is punished, not the family of the offender.

If the offence has not been very serious, the penalty can be a summary penal fee (*rikesakko*), meaning a financial compensation to the state. Other common penalties in Finland are a fine (*sakko*), imprisonment (*vankeusrangaistus*), community service (*yhdyksuntapalvelu*) and a monitoring sentence (*valvontarangaistus*). In the case of an offence in public office (*virkarikos*), the offender may have to renounce office or be given a warning as an additional penalty. The death penalty is not used in Finland. The peacetime death penalty was removed from the Finnish law in 1949.

Criminal Record

All crimes except fines are entered for a fixed term in a person's criminal record (*rikosrekisteri*). The criminal record is a database maintained by the police, which contains information about people who have committed crimes. An entry in the criminal record can prevent you from obtaining a residence permit or getting certain jobs, or at least it makes finding a job more difficult.

Crimes Committed by Children and Adolescents

In Finland, children under the age of 15 are not held criminally responsible for their actions. However, they too are liable for any damage that they cause. If a child under the age of 15 commits a crime, a child protection report (*lastensuojeluilmoitus*) is filed and the case is not taken to court. A child protection report is a notification sent to the social welfare authorities.

If the offender is an adolescent aged 15–17 years of age, he or she can be issued a juvenile penalty (*nuorisorangaistus*). The aim of a juvenile penalty is to prevent repeated offences and social exclusion. A juvenile penalty is not served in an institution. A juvenile penalty can consist of supervised, unpaid work and orientation to work or taking part in various programmes that promote the person's social ability to function.

Legal Aid

In Finland, everyone has the right to obtain legal aid (*oikeusapu*) with any legal issues. Legal aid can constitute a lawyer for a trial or legal counselling. Aid can also be provided for negotiations for a settlement and for preparing various documents, agreements or appeals. The state helps people of limited financial means whose own income is not high enough to pay for legal aid. State-subsidized legal aid can be applied for from a Legal Aid Office (*oikeusaputoimisto*).

A person accused of a crime has the right to a defence attorney. Sometimes the court will assign a defence attorney for the accused of its own initiative if the accused is underage or otherwise unable to defend him or herself. The victim of a crime can be assigned a counsel or a support person for the duration of the trial.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the purpose of laws?
2. Are equity and equality important values in your opinion? Why?
3. What, in your opinion, is the most important right of a citizen?
4. What can you do if you become victim of a crime?
5. What is a good society like?
6. How can laws be enacted and amended in Finland?
7. What customs practised in some other countries or cultures are crimes in Finland?

9. POLITICS AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN FINLAND

What is Democracy?

Development of Democracy in Finland

Elections in Finland

Political Parties of Finland

Civic Participation

What is Democracy?

Finland is a constitutional democratic republic. 'Constitutional' means that Finland has a Constitution that determines the foundations of the legal and social system of the country. It is the supreme law of the country and provides the basis for all other legislation. 'Democratic' refers to the rule of the people, meaning that power is vested in the people and not in a king, for example. A 'republic' is a state in which power is exercised by a parliament and a president elected by citizens in free elections.

Democracy is a system of government where the citizens of the country have the power to decide on what kinds of decisions are made on common issues, who makes these decisions and how the government funds are spent. Democracy is also a way of choosing decision-makers and how decisions are made. Decision-makers are chosen in elections, and decisions are made through negotiations, voting and agreeing to compromise.

The roots of democracy go back to the city-state of Athens in the 4th century BCE. Back then, common issues in Athens were decided in public assemblies. However, only free men over the age of 20 were allowed to take part in decision-making. In modern democracies, the power of decision-making is usually in the hands of all adult citizens regardless of their gender or social status. In Finland, a person who has turned 18 years is considered an adult, or of age (*täysi-ikäinen*).

Democracy Makes States Stable

A democratic system of government promotes the internal peace and stability of a state, because power is transferred peacefully and regularly through elections. Also, democratic states do not start wars as easily as dictatorships, because war always requires the citizens' support for the sake of social harmony. Even if some decision-makers would be in favour of war in certain situations, they must still take the opinion of the people's majority into consideration.

In a global comparison from 2016, Finland was the most stable country in the world. The next best countries in terms of stability were Norway, Switzerland, Denmark and Sweden. Human rights and personal liberty are also ensured the best in democratic and open societies. In terms of the protection of the basic rights of people, Finland and Denmark shared first place in a comparison of countries in 2016.

Other Systems of Government

The opposite of democracy is a dictatorship where one person or a small group of people possesses centralized power. In a dictatorship, the person or group in power does not consider the citizens' opinion in decision-making. A dictator exclusively dictates the practices to be observed in society, and his or her power is unlimited. The democratic rights of citizens can be very limited. There are currently many dictatorships in the world.

Democracy also differs from monarchy, where the head of state and the body exercising supreme authority is a monarch, such as a king or emperor. A monarch has not been elected to the position, but he or she has inherited the power by being born in a royal family. Monarchs are usually lifelong leaders. In some countries in the world, monarchy is absolute, meaning that only the king and the government rule the country and the country has no elected parliament.

Some existing monarchies have shifted to democracy so that the country is ruled by a prime minister and a parliament. The monarch's position is only ceremonial, and he or she has no real power. For example, the king or queen in European monarchies no longer has the power to decide on state affairs.

Direct Democracy

Democracy can be direct or representative. Direct democracy means, for instance, that a public meeting or referendum is held to decide on matters directly on the basis of the opinions of the citizens who take part in the meeting or referendum. The position that gets the most votes wins. So, the opinion of each citizen who takes part in the vote has a direct influence on its outcome.

Direct democracy is difficult to practise on a national scale, because of the large number of people. In a direct democracy, every citizen would have to spend a lot of time making decisions on common issues by taking part in meetings, referendums and various elections. For this reason, many democratic states only decide some things through the means of direct democracy. For example, when Finland wanted to decide whether it should join the European Union or not in 1994, a direct referendum was held.

Representative Democracy

Democratic states often practise representative democracy. It is also practised in Finland. Our country holds elections at regular intervals to allow citizens to elect representatives for themselves. If a representative receives enough votes in an election, he or she is elected and given authority by the people to make decisions concerning common issues. The voters therefore give up some of their power to their elected representative.

Elections are held in Finland to elect, for example, members of the Parliament of Finland, i.e. Members of Parliament or MPs (*kansanedustaja*), and municipal councillors (*kunnanvaltuutettu*) who decide local issues in municipalities. In a representative democracy, representatives elected by the public work full-time or part-time as decision-makers of common issues, and other citizens can focus on their own jobs. However, many Finns keep a close eye on politics.

Each representative can make independent decisions and is under no obligation to obey the will of his or her voters. Voters are still interested in how their elected representative performs his or her job and what political decisions he or she makes. For example, the president, ministers and MPs often have to justify their decisions to citizens both directly and in newspapers, on the television and in other media. Citizens expect decision-makers to have a thorough and diverse understanding of social issues.

The work of political decision-makers is demanding, and they are often expected to become familiar with complex and highly diverse issues within a short period of time. Government funds are limited. Decision-makers need to make decisions that are as equal as possible as to how much money will be spent and on what. Funding is required for e.g. education, security, elderly care, jobs, child care and health promotion. If a politician wants to keep his or her job, i.e. be re-elected in the next election, he or she must also keep the promises given to voters and make decisions that the voters approve.

Free Elections

A democracy has free and fair elections. Votes cannot be bought or sold, and nobody can be forced to vote a certain way. Electoral fraud, or vote rigging (*vaalivilppi*), meaning to influence the election results using dishonest means, is not possible. Obtained votes or election results cannot be forged.

People living in a democracy must have the possibility to choose between different options in an election or in other decision-making processes. There should be at least two options to choose from. According to an international measurement done in 2015, Finland and Denmark have the freest and most reliable elections in the world.

The candidates who receive the most votes are elected in the elections. However, this does not mean that the majority would have the right to oppress or discriminate against the minority, i.e. those who disagree with them, until the next elections are held. In a democratic society, power must be exercised so that human rights are taken into consideration. All people must be treated equitably and according to the basic rights and liberties listed in the Constitution.

Basic Rights of Citizens as the Cornerstones of Democracy

The basic rights and liberties of citizens and protecting them in society are closely linked to practising democracy. Key basic rights relating to democracy are freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and of association, equality before the law and equality in general.

Freedom of expression (*sananvapaus*) means, among other things, that citizens may criticize political decision-makers and the ruling powers if they are not happy with their actions. Active debate is constantly ongoing e.g. in newspapers and on social media, and any citizen can write what he or she thinks about a social issue or a decision-maker. Politicians and other decision-makers can also be contacted directly to tell them about your thoughts. You can criticize politicians without having to fear pressure or threats from anyone.

Discussion or debate is essential in democratic decision-making. Politicians across party lines debate and negotiate with each other and with officials. Above all, however, this debate must include all citizens who are interested in common issues and monitor what is happening in politics and society. Voters give politicians valuable information about the grievances in society and suggestions of ways to fix them.

Following and taking part in the public debate can allow each citizen to feel that he or she is a full member of society and also wants to influence how common issues relating to his or her everyday life are managed here.

Freedom of assembly and freedom of association (*kokoontumis- ja yhdistymisvapaus*) guarantee that citizens can form associations to advocate causes that are important to them. These associations can be political associations or advocacy groups that promote the interests of a certain group of people in society.

In a democratic state, citizens are equal before the law. The authorities and employers must treat people equally. A democratic state is also a state governed by law, meaning that the law is observed in public activity. It is possible to appeal the decisions made by the authorities if you feel that a mistake has occurred in the decision-making process.

Role of the Media in Finnish Society and Politics

The Constitution of Finland guarantees freedom of expression and the free formation of opinion. In addition to individual citizens, this freedom applies to the media, i.e. communications. In fact, Finland

has been in the top three countries in international comparisons when measuring the freedom of press. Journalists in Finland are not subjected to violence or threats by the ruling powers. They may still practise self-censorship, meaning that they voluntarily refer from publishing material that is sensitive to the state.

The media, meaning the television, the radio, newspapers, the internet and other mass media, plays an important role in the implementation of democracy. The media acts as a producer and transmitter of reliable information. The media informs citizens of relevant decisions and social debate. In addition, the media monitors and reviews the actions and statements of politicians and others in power.

At the same time, the media exercises a substantial amount of power when it chooses what issues it will make public and how it will deal with them. This is why the media is sometimes referred to as the Fourth Estate, or the fourth pillar of democracy. The media highlights grievances and malpractice and, if it wishes, can gain a lot of attention for such issues.

Development of Democracy in Finland

The development and consolidation of democracy is generally promoted by the economic development of a state, the distribution of economic resources between citizens, industrialization and the high level of education among citizens.

European Democracy from the Middle Ages to the 19th Century

Finland was part of the Swedish realm for 600 years. During this time, Sweden slowly moved towards a more democratic social system. The development of Sweden and, with it, Finland, was influenced by the same major changes in society in the post-classical era as the development of many other European countries at the time.

Democracy developed in Europe when both the Church and various social classes began to object to the fact that power was unevenly divided in society. Power was concentrated on a few people, and the majority of the population had no power at all. Most people had little influence over the development of society and decision-making.

In the Middle Ages (1100–1500), the Church had a lot of religious, political and economic power in Europe. Autocratic kings and emperors thought that their powers were given to them by God, not the people. The church began to lose power in the 16th century due to the Reformation, and power shifted to kings and the government. During the Reformation, Sweden, and thereby also Finland, moved from Catholicism to Protestantism.

In the 18th century, there was an ever stronger will to make society more democratic. The main aims were democracy, human rights and establishing a state governed by law. The revolution that took place in France in 1789 had a major impact on the development of democracy all over Europe. The French Revolution gave us the idea of liberty, equality and fraternity. All people were equally valuable, and the powers of the ruler came from the people, not from God. Universal suffrage, freedom of expression, freedom of religion and establishing a state governed by law were some of the key ideas from this period.

Socialism was born in 19th century Europe during the Industrial Revolution. Socialism was a counterreaction to the poor status of factory workers and became an influential ideology. Socialists opposed the capitalist economic system where factories and machines are privately-owned. Socialism aimed to establish an economic system where machines and factories would be jointly owned. In addition, equality between citizens and social justice were central elements in socialism. People

wanted universal and equal suffrage also for women. Trade unions and socialist political parties were established around Europe.

Formation of a Class Society in Finland

When Finland became a part of Russia in the early 19th century, it was given autonomy in the Russian Empire. At that time, Finland had what was known as an assembly of the representatives of the estates, or the Diet of Finland (*säätyvaltiopäivät*), which gathered to decide on the matters of Finns. The estates were the nobility, the clergy, the bourgeoisie and the peasants, and they represented only a small group of privileged, well-off citizens. The assembly of the representatives of the estates was a step towards democratic decision-making. It was not, however, democracy in the sense that it is today, where each and every citizen can influence public affairs no matter whether he or she is rich or poor.

Finland began to change in the late 19th century. Industrialization had resulted in an ever-growing working-class population living in poor conditions. There were also many poor people living in the countryside who did not own anything. The majority of the population did not belong to any estate. Nationalism spread, and Finns began to consider themselves a separate people who should have its own nation. They no longer thought of themselves as simply part of a social estate or a smaller village community.

Many schools were established in Finland, and the children of poor people could also attend school. People learned to read and write, received education and began to get organized. Common people learned to discuss politics and set up associations and organizations and they tried to influence public affairs in other ways as well. Political disagreements stemmed from the economic inequality of people, i.e. the fact that some had wealth and others did not. A class society had been born.

The Left-Right Divide in Finnish Politics

As a result of the parliamentary reform of 1906, a progressive system of parliamentary representation was established in autonomous Finland. The first parliamentary elections were held in Finland in 1907, and all Finns over the age 24 were eligible to vote for their own candidates. Finland was the third country in the world and the first in Europe to give women the right to vote. It was also the first country in the world to give all women the right to run in elections. In 1907, a total of 19 women were elected in the Parliament of Finland, making them the first female members of parliament in the world.

Workers, poor peasants and women were able to influence the politics of Finland for the first time. The Social Democratic Party of Finland, SDP, emerged as the clear winner of the elections. The politics of Finland was divided into the Left and the Right, and SDP was a left-wing, or socialist party. The bourgeoisie Right included parties opposing socialism, such as the Agrarian League.

When Finland gained independence from Russia in 1917, the divide between the Left and the Right widened. The socialists wanted to implement extensive social reforms that would improve the conditions of workers and poor peasants as well as develop democracy in municipalities. At that time, only people with money or other property were eligible to vote in municipal elections. The Right opposed the reforms and feared the influence of socialism in Finland.

The situation in society was unstable, and both sides gathered armed forces in Finland, which did not have an army of its own at the time. A bloody Civil War broke out between the Reds and the Whites in January 1918 and ended in April in the victory of the Whites, or the bourgeoisie.

The Declaration of Independence of 1917 stated that Finland would be a republic. The Parliament approved the Constitution of Finland in 1919, after the Civil War. According to the Constitution, Finland became a republic.

Finnish Democracy Becomes Stronger

Following the Civil War, many social reforms took place in Finnish politics, including the enactment of acts on compulsory education and general conscription and an act whereby poor people living in the countryside could obtain farmland for themselves. The purpose of these acts was to bring the Reds and the Whites closer together, i.e. unite the people, and improve the position of the poor. As a result of the reforms, society stabilized and people gained more confidence in their ability to make changes democratically. However, Finns were still strongly divided into workers and the bourgeoisie. Political cooperation was not easy.

The next threat against democracy and social harmony was the rise of the extreme right in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. Supporters of the extreme right were nationalistic. They opposed democracy and wanted the state to have a strong ruler. Right-wing extremists in the 1920s and 1930s also hated communism. The Great Depression hit the world in the 1930s. The Depression caused a shortage of everything, even food. Right-wing extremists promised to lift Europe from the economic depression if people would support them.

Both right-wing and left-wing extremists were active in Finland. Communist activities were prohibited by law in 1930 due to the pressure of the extreme right. As a result, Finnish communists operated in secret. Some of them tried to organize a new workers' revolution.

In 1932, right-wing extremists organized a rebellion where they tried to overthrow the government. They thought that the government sympathized too much with the communists. The rebellion failed, and the activities of the extreme right were prohibited in Finland. The significance of both extremist movements diminished in Finland. Finland remained a democracy, and there was less tension in society.

After the Great Depression, the economy of Finland began to grow and people gradually became more united. Political parties who had represented opposing sides in the Civil War were in the same cabinet for the first time in the late 1930s. Democracy became stronger, and more political reforms were implemented to make the lives of the poor easier.

The peaceful development of society was interrupted when the Soviet Union attacked Finland as part of World War II in 1939. Workers and the bourgeoisie, former enemies, now fought side by side against the Soviet Union. The common enemy and a common purpose, i.e. preserving independence, helped them put their old disagreements aside. During and after the war, the media and war propaganda strongly emphasized the unity of the people of Finland. It was thought that unity would give Finns the strength to endure the war.

Neutral Finland Neighbouring the Soviet Union as a Great Power

The wars were followed by a period of strong growth. Due to the war reparations that Finland had to pay, industry developed and economy boomed. Reconstruction also created numerous new jobs. In addition, there was a strong political will to build Finland into an even better and safer country. All parties accepted the building of a welfare state as their political goal and saw sufficient economic growth as an essential requirement for this process.

Post-war politics was first characterized by cautiousness and a concern that the Soviet Union would occupy the country. The political activities of communists were once again permitted, and a communist revolution was also feared. However, tensions gradually declined as conditions became more stable.

Once relations with the Soviet Union had been established, Finland learned how to act as the neighbouring country of an influential great power. In 1948, Finland signed the Agreement of

Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance, also known as the YYA Treaty (*Ystävyyss-, yhteistyö- ja avunantosopimus*), with the Soviet Union. The YYA Treaty guaranteed economic benefits for Finland, but in practice, Finland had to act and make choices while ensuring that neither its domestic or foreign policy provoked the Soviet Union. Officially, Finland was an independent and neutral country, but in reality, it had to take the interests of the Soviet Union into consideration in its politics.

Finland was criticized internationally for paying too much attention to the opinions of the Soviet Union in its decisions. However, this cautious approach turned out to be worth it both politically and economically. Finland continued to live in peace. It also benefitted economically from Eastern trade, i.e. trade with the Soviet Union.

Finland Becomes a Member of the EU

Finland continued to follow its neutral, cautious policy until the fall of the Soviet Union. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Finland was able to give up this policy. Finland quickly tried to establish closer relations with western Europe and the European community. In 1995, Finland became a member of the European Union and also officially gave up its policy of neutrality.

Today, Finland openly defends the interests and values of Europe in its economy and politics. Russia, which is a part of the former Soviet Union, is still an important trading partner and a neighbour of Finland. Finland adopted the euro, the common currency of the euro area, in 2002. Finland has to take the common policies of the EU into consideration in its own legislation.

Finnish Nationalism and National Unity

Finland is part of the European community and its common foreign and economic policy. However, Finns still have a strong sense of nationalism, meaning that a large share of the people think that Finns are first and foremost an independent nation with its own state.

The idea of a unique, united nation has been an essential concept in Finland since the time of war and remains so today. Unity has been emphasized, whereas internal differences and conflicts have been downplayed. Finns have wanted to see themselves as a homogeneous group of people who form the united population of Finland. They have felt that Finland stands out from other nations due to its history, language and the typical Finnish characteristics, such as the Finnish concept of *sisu* (meaning determination, grit, resilience) and honesty.

The idea of unity has served its purpose in times of war and crises when difficult political and economic decisions have had to be made. But today, people also understand that not all Finns are alike, but there are differences in background, views and lifestyles.

Elections in Finland

The following general national elections are organized in Finland:

- parliamentary elections (*eduskuntavaalit*) every four years
- municipal elections (*kuntavaalit*) every four years
- regional elections (*maakuntavaalit*) every four years
- presidential election (*presidentinvaalit*) every six years
- European Parliamentary elections (*Euroopan parlamentin vaalit*, or *europarlamenttivaalit*) every five years

Also, national or municipal direct referendums can be organized in addition to elections.

Right to Vote in Elections in Finland

- Typically, a Finnish citizen who has reached the age of 18 has the right to vote in elections in Finland.
- Citizens of other countries who live in Finland also have the right to vote in municipal elections and European elections, with certain limitations.
- Citizens of other EU Member States who have enrolled with the voting register in Finland also have the right to vote in the European Parliamentary elections.
- Citizens of all countries who have had a municipality of residence in Finland for at least two years are entitled to vote in municipal elections.

Everyone who has the right to vote is sent a notice of his or her right to vote, also known as a card of information (*ilmoitus äänioikeudesta*), by post before the elections. This card also states the exact time of the elections and the polling stations (*äänestyspaikka*). You can vote in the elections either on the actual election day (*vaalipäivä*) or in advance (*ennakkoäänestys*).

If you decide to vote in advance, you can do so at any general polling station in Finland or abroad. Polling stations are located in public facilities, such as schools, libraries, town halls, post offices and shopping centres. If you are abroad, you can vote at an embassy or a consulate. If you decide to vote on election day, you can only cast your vote at the polling station stated on your card of information. You need to bring an ID with a photograph, such as your passport, to the polling station.

Secrecy of the Ballot

Finland applies the secrecy of the ballot (*vaalisalaisuus*), meaning that you do not have to tell anyone which candidate you vote for. The identity of the voter is verified at the polling station. Everyone votes in a voting booth that others may not enter at the same time and where others cannot see. The number of the candidate is written on the ballot. The ballot is stamped before it is placed in a ballot box, which is a sealed box. Only stamped ballots will be counted. When the votes are counted, nobody can know who has voted for which candidate. The purpose of the secrecy of the ballot is to prevent the buying or selling of votes and the threatening of voters or forcing them to vote for a particular candidate.

Voter Turnout in Finland

Voter turnout describes the share of citizens who cast a ballot in an election. Voting is voluntary. The voter turnout in Finland is not always very high. In the municipal elections in 2017, the national voter turnout was just under 60 percent.

This is because many people do not follow politics and are not interested in social decision-making. They may find it difficult to choose a suitable candidate or they may feel that politicians are detached from their reality. Some may also doubt whether a single vote even matters in an election. But sometimes even one vote can make a difference. If you do not cast a vote and give your opinion of which of the candidates should be elected, you are excluding yourself voluntarily from democratic decision-making.

Parliamentary Elections

Members of Parliament are elected to Parliament for four years at a time. Candidates must be Finnish citizens who are of age and have the right to vote in parliamentary elections. Candidates are typically members of a political party. There are no restrictions as to the number of times the same candidate can be elected to Parliament in consecutive elections.

Voters can only vote for candidates in their own electoral district (*vaalipiiri*) in the parliamentary elections. For instance, voters living in Helsinki can vote for candidates running in the Electoral District of Helsinki etc. The purpose of this arrangement is to ensure that members from different parts of the country will be elected to Parliament.

Municipal Elections

A municipal council (*kunnanvaltuusto*) decides on matters concerning a municipality. The members of municipal councils are elected in municipal elections. Municipal elections are held at the same time throughout the country, but each municipality only elects its own municipal council. This means that you can only vote for candidates in your municipality. The size of the municipal council depends on the population of the municipality in question. The larger the population of a municipality, the more councillors there are in its municipal council.

You are eligible as a candidate in the municipal elections if you are a resident of the municipality and have the right to vote in municipal elections. This also means that you do not have to be a Finnish citizen. Candidates must usually be members of a political party.

Regional Elections

Regional elections are held to elect councillors and deputy councillors to regional assemblies (*maakuntavaltuusto*). There are 18 regional assemblies in Finland. The region (*maakunta*) is a new regional administrative instance. Municipalities in Finland are currently responsible for organizing social and health services. This responsibility will shift to the regions in the upcoming years.

Presidential Election

The President is elected by a direct vote. A presidential election is held in Finland every six years. The same person can be elected President twice in a row, meaning that a person can be President of Finland for no more than 12 years at a time.

There are often two rounds in a presidential election. If one of the candidates receives more than half of the votes in the first round, he or she will be elected President of Finland. Often none of the candidates receive enough votes in the first round. This means that a second round will be held where voters decide which of the two candidates who received the most votes in the first round should win.

The President of the Republic must be a native-born Finnish citizen. Presidential candidates are usually nominated by political parties with at least one Member of Parliament.

European Parliamentary Elections

The European Parliament enacts EU laws together with the Council of Ministers. The EU Council of Ministers represents the governments of the EU Member States. The European Parliament also decides on the EU budget together with the Council. The Parliament is therefore a key legislator of the EU and the body deciding on the budget.

The European Parliamentary elections, or the European elections, are held to elect Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to represent Finland. The EU has 28 Member States, and 751 Members of the European Parliament are elected. Thirteen MEPs are elected from Finland. The candidates represent different political parties, just like in the parliamentary elections. Finland constitutes a single electoral district, meaning that voters everywhere in Finland can vote for the same candidates. You are eligible to stand as a candidate if you are a citizen of Finland or another EU Member State, i.e. if you are entitled to vote in the European elections. Each candidate is nominated by a political party.

Political Parties of Finland

Political parties are associations whose mission is to develop society into the direction desired by the members of the party. Each party must have a party programme (*puolueohjelma*), a document that lists the main principles and goals of the party. The programme also describes how the party wishes to influence society and political decision-making.

Anyone can be a member of a political party in Finland. Membership does not affect your chances of finding a job or your position in society in any other way. One of the main ways of social participation is to be a candidate in an election. Candidates are usually members of a political party.

The Finnish political system is fragmented and there are many parties. Finland therefore has a multi-party system. The support of the parties varies greatly from one election to the next. No single party holds an absolute majority in Parliament, so no party can act alone in politics. The parties must work in cooperation with each other. For this reason, it is important in Finnish politics that politicians are able to negotiate and compromise.

In 2017, there were 16 registered parties in Finland, eight of which had Members of Parliament. The other parties are small parties aiming for a parliamentary seat through elections.

In Finland, the state, i.e. taxpayers, fund party activities. The subsidy granted by the state only covers part of the expenses of the party. The rest comes from membership fees or funds, for example.

According to the Act on Political Parties, each party is allocated subsidy in accordance with the number of parliamentary seats that the party has gained. Large parties who succeed well in elections are therefore allocated more money than small parties. Due to this, old, large parties can uphold their position, and it can be difficult for new parties to gain parliamentary seats at first.

Parties also receive other funding for e.g. elections. Some of the election funding comes from donations from private individuals, companies or organizations. Donations can be accepted for an election campaign, but they must be disclosed. This means that candidates must publicly state the financial sponsors of their election campaigns.

How Do the Views of Parties Differ from Each Other?

Party programmes in present-day Finland are very similar to each other. All parties try to advocate all kinds of positive things for a group of people that is as large as possible in order to gain many voters. But there are still some differences. Religion, however, is not a separating factor between parties, because there are no parties in Finland representing different religious groups.

Traditionally, the most important separating factor between parties has been the left–right spectrum. Left-wing parties have supported socialism, the rights of workers and a strong state that offers its citizens various services and is funded by taxes paid by citizens. The Left has been willing to accept higher taxes, because taxes help to build and uphold an equal society where everyone is looked after.

Right-wing parties, on the other hand, have supported capitalism, free market economy and lower taxes. The Right wants the state to have a smaller role in society and give more responsibility to the individual person. The Right also advocates the interests of private entrepreneurs and companies. Companies play an important part in society in terms of creating economic growth and jobs.

One of the typical features of Finnish politics today is that support for left-wing parties is decreasing. The Left is divided into separate parties, some of which are communist, some socialist and some more moderately social democratic.

Other systems of classification are also possible. Today, many voters also pay attention to whether a candidate speaks on behalf of rural areas or cities, i.e. remote and sparsely populated areas or population centres. Globalization and close international cooperation with e.g. the European Union are often important issues for city dwellers.

From the perspective of rural areas, it is more important to maintain domestic agricultural production and the power of Finland to decide on its own matters. From this point of view, globalization can be seen as a negative thing that takes jobs away from Finland, makes it more difficult to practise agriculture and causes social instability.

Many voters also consider it important to know whether a party sees economic growth as more important than the protection of nature and the environment. Economic growth can destroy the environment but, on the other hand, it can also create wealth and jobs in society.

Conservatism and liberalism also divide opinions. Conservatism is related to traditional values and moderate, or modest social reforms. Liberalism, on the other hand, is related to extensive individual and economic freedom, tolerant values and human rights.

In addition, political parties can have different views on, for instance, whether Finland should remain a bilingual country in the future and whether both Finnish and Swedish should be taught to children in all schools.

Centre Party of Finland (founded in 1906)

The Centre Party of Finland (*Suomen Keskusta*, or *Keskustapuolue*) is the most popular party in the rural areas, and it advocates agrarian issues, such as financial support from the state and the EU to farmers. About half of the supporters of the party are opposed to the EU. Although many Finns now live in cities, many still have strong ties with the countryside. The countryside and nature are also symbolically and ideologically important to Finns.

The Centre Party aims to preserve services and jobs all over Finland. Finland is a sparsely populated country and organizing services in sparsely populated areas is often expensive. However, it is important for the Centre Party that people are on an equal footing with each other regardless of where they live. The party thinks that the state should have an active role in social, economic and regional policy.

In addition, the Centre Party speaks on behalf of entrepreneurs. It wishes to make it easier for companies to employ people. The majority of Finnish companies are small and medium-sized enterprises, and they are important employers in Finland.

National Coalition Party (founded in 1918)

The National Coalition Party (*Kansallinen Kokoomus*) is a right-wing party, which has traditionally been the party of the economic elite and the educated higher class. It has a strong foothold in the capital region, but is also one of the largest parties in Finland as a whole. The fundamental values of the National Coalition Party include freedom, responsibility, equal opportunity and incentive. Incentive means that people are rewarded for their good work or actions.

The interests of entrepreneurs are also important to the National Coalition Party. It wishes to encourage people to take initiative and establish their own companies. Due to this, the party wishes to lower the taxes that companies have to pay, among other things. It wants to reduce the role of the state more than the left-wing parties do. The National Coalition Party supports extensive cooperation with NATO and is pro-EU. In terms of values, some of the party politicians are liberal, whereas some are conservative.

The Social Democratic Party of Finland (founded in 1899)

The Social Democratic Party of Finland (*Suomen Sosiaalidemokraattinen Puolue*), or SDP, has been a big, central government party for decades. In addition to the Centre Party and the National Coalition Party, it is one of the oldest and most important parties in Finland. SDP has traditionally been the party of left-wing industrial workers and paid labourers living in cities. Its ideology is social democracy originating from socialism, and the party is not as leftist as the Left Alliance.

SDP focuses on maintaining the welfare state and making sure that there are enough jobs for everyone. The party wishes to work on behalf of an equal society based on solidarity. It is opposed to an uncontrolled market economy, i.e. capitalism, and conservative values.

The Left Alliance (founded in 1990)

The Left Alliance (*Vasemmistoliitto*) combines social democracy and the ideological heritage of the communists. It is a socialist party, which is also liberal at the same time. The fundamental values of the Left Alliance are equality, democracy, freedom and sustainable development. Voters of the Left Alliance are often labourers and low-wage clerical workers, i.e. office and sales workers.

The Left Alliance believes that the welfare state should be developed and capitalism limited. The rights of workers and the trade union movement are important. Everyone should have the right to work and a means of subsistence. Equality and feminism as well as environmental protection are also essential values for the party.

The Greens in Finland (founded in 1987)

The main concerns of The Greens in Finland (*Vihreät* or *Vihreä liitto*) are environmental protection, combatting climate change and animal rights. The party is ideologically liberal and tolerant, and the voters include, for instance, highly educated people living in cities. The party supports feminism and multiculturalism and advocates the equality of sexual and gender minorities.

The Greens criticize both socialism and capitalism. According to the Greens, neither economic system gives enough consideration for the environment and developing countries. The Greens list work, education, the environment and the prevention of poverty as their most important themes, but some Green politicians also have fairly right-wing views of the economy. The Greens are opposed to nuclear power.

The Finns Party (founded in 1995)

The Finns Party (*Perussuomalaiset*) is a nationalist populist party. Its values are conservative. It is important for the party to promote Finnish work and entrepreneurship and to represent the common people against the elite, i.e. the higher social class. The party is in favour of a strong government that finances the welfare state.

The Finns Party is extremely critical of the EU. It aims to return the authority given to the European Union back to the Member States. The party also takes a negative view of immigration and the bilingualism of Finland. The party strongly emphasizes the Finnish identity. It includes supporters from the extreme right as well as the extreme left.

The Finns Party used to be a small party, but it gained many votes in the last two parliamentary elections and became established as one of the big parties. In 2017, the party was divided in two dissenting groups when its chair was replaced.

Swedish People's Party of Finland (founded in 1906)

The Swedish People's Party of Finland (*Suomen Ruotsalainen Kansanpuolue*), or RKP, has supporters especially among the Swedish-speaking population of Finland. It supports bilingualism and tries to promote and maintain services in Swedish. Since so many Swedish-speaking Finns support RKP, the party has several different wings: a more conservative and a more liberal wing as well as a wing focusing on agrarian issues.

RKP is a liberal party with right-wing views on economic matters and foreign policy. It has a liberal approach towards immigration, multiculturalism and various minorities. Although RKP is a small party, it has still held posts in almost every cabinet of Finland. The party is in favour of the European Union and strong European unity. RKP and the Swedish language also form an important link between Finland and Nordic cooperation and culture.

Christian Democrats in Finland (founded in 1958)

The Christian Democrats in Finland (*Suomen Kristillisdemokraatit*), or KD, wishes to ensure that Christian values are taken into consideration in decision-making. Its politics are based on Christianity. KD represents conservative values and is ideologically somewhere between the Centre Party and the National Coalition Party. KD is in favour of defence cooperation between the Nordic countries, the UN, NATO and the EU.

The Christian Democrats is a small party that is opposed to abortion and considers the family to be an important core of society. The party was opposed to e.g. the Equal Marriage Act, because it considers marriage to be a union between a man and a woman. According to KD, all people should be guaranteed basic subsistence. Solidarity is an important value, and all people should be looked after, including the poor, the sick and the elderly.

Civic Participation

In Finland, anyone can participate in social issues and politics in many different ways. Civic participation, meaning the citizens' own activities on behalf of social issues, has long been practised in Finland. Large popular movements, such as the temperance movement and the labour movement, have played a major role in the development of a democratic society.

Popular movements have allowed ordinary Finns to learn how to manage common issues and be able to influence how the welfare state has been built. Many Finnish politicians have also started their careers in non-governmental organizations or have otherwise been actively involved in civic activities.

Ways of Civic Participation

Voting

The most common way to participate is voting. When you cast your vote in elections, it is more likely that power of decision in common issues will be exercised by people who are in favour of issues that are personally important to you. If you do not vote, you fail to signal how you think common affairs should be managed.

Contacting Politicians

Another way to participate is to directly contact politicians, such as Members of Parliament or ministers. You can tell them what issues should be given special attention in politics or what changes are needed in society.

Participating in Public Debate

A third way to participate is civil dialogue, or public debate. You can publish a letter to the editor, or an opinion piece (*mielipidekirjoitus*), in a newspaper or the social media if you want to encourage dialogue on social grievances, i.e. issues that need improvement. You can keep an issue at the top of people's minds by creating a Facebook group for discussing it and organizing public events, such as demonstrations or discussion events related to the theme.

Petition

Citizens can also prepare a petition (*adressi*), a written declaration where they, for instance, oppose a certain law. Signatures are gathered on the petition from as many citizens as possible who agree with it, and the petition is then handed over to the minister responsible for the matter. This lets the minister know that people want to amend the law and that the amendment has a lot of support. Petitions can include anywhere between a few thousand to more than one hundred thousand names.

Citizens' Initiative (kansalaisaloite)

The Act on Citizens' Initiative entered into force in Finland in 2012. The Act states that any Finnish citizen can submit an initiative for the enactment of an act to the Parliament. Names are gathered on the initiative from citizens who are in favour of the bill. If more than 50 000 signatures are gathered, the initiative for the enactment of an act is submitted to the Parliament for consideration. The citizens' initiative is a tool for direct democracy.

Local Resident's Initiative

A similar direct form of participation in municipal politics is the local resident's initiative (*kuntalaisaloite*). According to law, all the residents of a municipality have the right to submit initiatives on current issues or problems concerning the municipality's activities. A local resident's initiative typically tries to promote the interests of a larger group of people. Municipal decision-makers consider all the submitted initiatives in their meetings.

European Citizens' Initiative

You can also submit a citizens' initiative on the EU level. A European citizens' initiative (*Eurooppalainen kansalaisaloite*) is a request to the European Commission to propose legislation on a matter where the EU is competent. The initiative must have at least one million signatures from at least seven EU Member States. The names must be collected within one year, and the Commission must consider the initiative within three months of its submission. The initiative allows EU citizens to participate directly in developing the legislation of the European Union.

Appeal to the European Court of Human Rights

Another way to participate in matters on the EU level is to lodge an appeal to the European Court of Human Rights concerning your court proceedings. The Court guarantees compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights. You can lodge an appeal if you feel that your treatment in the Finnish court proceedings has been in violation of human rights.

Activities in Non-governmental Organizations

Many Finns influence social issues by being active in organizations. There are many organizations in Finland whose mission is to drive social development forward. Organizations bring together large groups of people who want to bring about a change in some social issue. It is easier and more effective to accomplish changes together.

Citizens can freely participate in organizations and advocate causes that are personally important to them by e.g. influencing the opinions of others. You can be involved in an organization as a regular

member or you can take part in board activities. The activities of organizations in Finland are governed by the Associations Act, which determines how decisions are made in organizations and how the liability for the organization's activities and finances is allocated.

In an organization, you can

- do voluntary work
- do paid work
- be a member of the board of the organization
- engage in advocacy
- take part in public debate
- organize informative or action campaigns
- organize public events
- organize demonstrations
- engage in politics, promote human rights, participate in environmental protection etc.
- Raise funds for the organization, which will then channel the money to those in need. Funds should be raised under a fundraising permit (*keräyslupa*) granted by the police.

There are e.g. political associations, or parties, interest organizations, labour market organizations, pressure organizations, environmental organizations, patient organizations and aid organizations in Finland. It is common in Finland to be a member of many different organizations and to be involved in their activities in various ways.

Participating in the activities of an organization also helps you to learn the rules of the Finnish society and democratic decision-making. Activities in an organization also provide something meaningful to do and may help you find a job. In addition, you get to know other people with the same interests.

Organizations and associations provide help and support in various situations in life and meaningful leisure activities. Here are some examples of Finnish organizations:

- **Support for families:** Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, Familia
- **Support for victims of violence:** Federation of Mother and Child Homes and Shelters, Monika – Multicultural Women's Association, Women's Line, Iraqi Women's Association
- **Sports and exercise associations:** Liikkukaa – Sports for All, Suomen Latu – The Outdoor Association of Finland, Football Association of Finland
- **Art and culture associations:** Live Music Association ELMU, Finnish PEN, Kassandra
- **Organizations providing voluntary work:** Finnish Red Cross, Hope – Yhdessä & yhteisesti, Let's Read Together network, parishes

Discussion Questions

1. What does democracy mean in Finland?
2. Why is it important to vote in elections?
3. What democratic ways could you use to try to make changes happen in Finland?
4. How would you like to influence social issues? What issues would you like to change?
5. What is the role of the media in Finnish democracy?