AFCLC

EXPEDITIONARY CULTURE

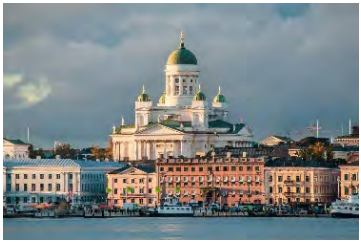
FIELD GUIDE

Finland

U.S. AIR FORCE

About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy or be assigned to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success.



The guide consists of two parts:

Part 1 "Culture General" provides the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment with a focus on the Nordic countries.

Part 2 "Culture Specific" describes unique cultural features of Finnish society. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned location. This section is designed to complement other pre-deployment/-assignment training.

For further information, contact the AFCLC Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil or visit the AFCLC website at https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/.

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ECFG Republic of Finland

PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value – freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic because it represents the premium Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.

Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones, where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to

focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize behaviors and systems into categories – what the Air Force refers to as "cultural domains" – to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains – which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems and others (see chart on next page) – as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the way a culture defines family and kinship, a US military member operating overseas can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

Social Behaviors Across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival,

although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more complex market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

Worldview

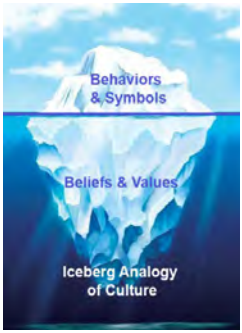
One of our most basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different based on our cultural standards. As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Usually, we assume that those in the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

This collective perspective forms our worldview – how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people who you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system assigns meaning, sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true – regardless of whether there is evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central aspect of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply held beliefs we started developing early in life that have helped shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.



Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).

In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts.

The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.

As you travel through the Nordic countries, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common across the region. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

CULTURAL DOMAINS

1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable, or which occurred prior to written language.

The Nordic countries occupy a vast area in Northern Europe and the far North Atlantic, comprising Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. Also included are the autonomous Faroe Islands, Greenland (both part of Denmark), and Åland (Finland). Until about 12,000 years ago, ice covered the region, preventing human inhabitation. Archaeological evidence suggests the first humans migrated from the Southwest and East to settle the area as early as 11,700 years ago. The inhabitants used stone tools for millennia and primarily lived as nomadic hunter-gatherers, traveling inland and along the coast by foot or boat.

Around 4000 BC, the inhabitants of the southern portion of the region began raising livestock and farming, practices that slowly spread northward and later benefitted from the introduction of metal tools. Archaeological artifacts provide evidence of increasing trade with the British Isles and in the early centuries AD with the Roman Empire.

Around 763 AD, Vikings from Scandinavia (Denmark, Norway, and Sweden) began using their expert seafaring and navigational skills to plunder and found settlements across the region and as distant as present-day Russia and Turkey. In the 10th century, the Vikings established settlements in Greenland. Norse Icelander Leif Erikson was likely the first European to reach the Americas, when he arrived in Newfoundland in present-day Canada, in 1003.

Meanwhile, by the 10th century, kingdoms in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden had emerged, and Christianity began to take hold in the region, which helped unite hitherto separate settlements. In subsequent centuries, the Swedes gradually moved eastward, settling present-day Finland, while the Norwegians took control of the Faroes, Iceland, and Greenland. In 1397, the Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish kingdoms merged to create the Kalmar Union, first led by King Erik of Pomerania. While this Nordic kingdom was cohesive in its initial years, its dominance by Denmark and Sweden and the internal strife between its constituent peoples ultimately led to its dissolution in 1523.

During subsequent centuries, the kingdoms fought violent wars for control of the region, though Sweden was often the victor and became a major European power, controlling much of the territory around the Baltic Sea. In 1809, Sweden lost Finland to Russia, though it gained control of Norway from Denmark in 1814. For the average resident, life in the 19th-century Nordic region was characterized by poverty, and many emigrated to the US. However, by the latter half of the century, industrialization had proliferated, with significant growth in mining, heavy industry, and shipbuilding across the region.

Norway, Finland, and Iceland all gained independence in the first half of the 20th century, though the Finns endured a civil war after declaring independence from Russia in 1917. Adjacent to more populous, powerful countries, the Nordics had to balance competing demands during several tumultuous decades. The Nordics remained neutral during World War I, after which democracy became embedded across the region. During World War II, Nazi Germany occupied Denmark and Norway and traversed Sweden, which remained neutral. The Soviet Union attacked Finland, which fought two brutal wars against its neighbor before demanding that previously allied German troops leave the country in 1944. Meanwhile, Iceland, the Faroes, and Greenland were primarily under British and US control. Although

Iceland had achieved sovereignty in 1918, it became a republic after gaining formal independence from Denmark in 1944.

After the war, the Nordics sought greater regional integration and entered a period of sustained economic development, becoming increasingly globalized while balancing shifting geopolitical affairs. Each country joined the United Nations and Nordic Council, as well as a joint labor market and passport union. With their proximity to the Soviet Union, Finland and Sweden remained neutral, while Denmark, Iceland, and Norway joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO, a political and military alliance among more than 30 nations that promotes its members' security through collective defense). Meanwhile, labor movements and social-democratic political parties gained increased clout, aiding in the creation of welfare states in which governments provided their citizens significant social services, such as quality education and medical care.

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the Nordics became increasingly prosperous, and their citizens experienced some of the world's highest living standards. The countries are generally advocates for democracy, free trade, and human rights, in part because their economies and societies are deeply integrated in the global order. In recent years, the Nordics have experienced more varied coalition governments and sought closer integration with the West, as Sweden and Finland renounced neutrality in the aftermath of Russia's invasions of Ukraine in 2014 and 2022.

2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community. All the Nordic countries are stable, well-run democracies. A single-chamber parliament led by a Prime Minister (PM) is the highest political authority in each country. Denmark, Norway, and Sweden are constitutional monarchies, while Finland and Iceland are republics with directly elected

Presidents. Although the roles of the monarchs in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden are largely ceremonial, the Presidents of Finland and Iceland wield some executive power.

After most elections, political parties typically form coalitions to acquire and maintain power. Over the past several decades, Nordic governments have pursued broadly common principles, such as universal social rights, ensuring general welfare, equal opportunities for men and women, and full employment. According to an international corruption perceptions index, the Nordic countries are some of the world's least corrupt.

The Nordic countries are members of influential global and regional organizations. While each belongs to a distinct array of organizations, they are all members of the UN, European Economic Area, and NATO, after Sweden was admitted in early 2024. While Denmark, Finland, and Sweden are part of the European Union (EU), only Finland uses the euro currency. On the global stage, the Nordic countries tend to promote peace, democracy, and humanitarianism, although all but Iceland have exported weapons to nations in armed conflict.

The Nordics rely on NATO, the US, other European countries, and international support to defend against external, state-level threats. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and other aggressive acts have heightened regional tensions and consequently dominate the Nordics' security environment. In recent years, the Nordics also have experienced isolated terrorist attacks performed by radical Islamist and far right-wing actors, causing increased calls to strengthen the region's security measures.

The region is one of the world's least diverse, as the vast majority of residents are of Nordic descent. The dominant ethnic group in each country accounts for at least 79% of its total population. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, immigration from other European, Asian, and African nations began to change the region's ethnic makeup, particularly in Sweden and Denmark. In

2014, Sweden began accepting thousands of asylum seekers, many of whom had fled the Syrian Civil War. The protected indigenous Sámi peoples of northern Norway, Sweden, Finland, and northwestern Russia are also a notable minority group and account for over 65,000 people in the region.

3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society.

Early residents of the Nordic region practiced indigenous religions, venerating deities, spirits, and gods, who they believed inhabited various realms and the natural world. Norse paganism is perhaps the most well-known early religion, featuring mythical gods, such as ***Thor***, ***Odin***, and others. In the early 9th century, the region was exposed to Christianity through trade and pressure from Germanic peoples to the south. By the late 10th century, Christianity had taken root in the region after the Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish kings converted to the religion.

During the 11th century, many residents practiced both Christianity and pagan beliefs, often worshipping multiple gods. As the ruling classes adopted Roman Catholicism, the religion became entrenched in much of the region until the early 16th century, when the Protestant Reformation swept across Europe. In every Nordic country, the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) became the official state-supported religious institution. Some leaders embraced Lutheranism as a means of capturing property and power from the Roman Catholic Church.

Each national ELC retained its grip on religious power as the official state church during subsequent centuries. In Finland, the ELC gained autonomy from the state in 1869, which increased after independence. While Sweden and Norway demoted the

ELC from official to national church in the early 21st century, the ELC remains the official state church in Denmark and Iceland.

Regardless of its official status, the ELC remains the dominant religion in every Nordic country, with membership as a percentage of the population ranging from about 53% in Sweden to 71% in Denmark. Although the Nordics remain primarily Christian nations, a growing segment of the regional population practices no religion. For example, around 30% of Finns and Swedes do not claim to belong to any religious group. Further, rising levels of non-European immigration in recent years have changed the religious makeup of the region. Today, over 5% of the population in Denmark and 8% in Sweden practice Islam, one of the region's fastest-growing religions.

4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called "fictive kin").

Family life and relationships are fundamental elements of Nordic society. Residents tend to maintain deep connections with immediate and some extended family members. Most households are single-person or nuclear (consisting of one or two parents and their children), of whom families usually choose to have just one or two. Relatives tend to live nearby but are not always present in each other's lives, except for major holidays and life events, and more often help with childcare in Iceland than the other countries.

Urbanization has changed family life in recent years, as city dwellers often marry later, cohabit (live in a long-term, unmarried partnership), or become single parents and have fewer children. Consequently, while the traditional family structure remains more common in rural areas, it is often diverse in urban centers. Most Nordic residents live in cities, and urbanization rates vary between about 84% in Norway and 94% in Iceland as of 2023.

While historically marriage was an arranged union between a man and woman, today residents of any gender choose their own partners. Generally, couples spend several years dating, live together, and sometimes have children before choosing to marry. Divorce carries minimal social stigma and is increasingly prevalent among younger generations. Compared to the US, Denmark, Finland, and Sweden had similar divorce rates, while those in Norway and Iceland were slightly lower as of 2022.

5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles.

The Nordics' historically patriarchal culture privileged men as leaders and providers. Since the mid-19th century, women's status and rights have improved. Today, the Nordic countries are some of the world's most gender equal. Generally, their governments have been global leaders that support gender equality in the public and private realms through extensive laws and guidelines. While a small minority of the region's residents continue to adhere to traditional values – men as breadwinners and heads of household and women as mothers and wives – most inhabitants support equality between the sexes.

Although women hold equal rights under the law, inequalities between the genders remain, particularly regarding economic progress. For example, women earn less than men for similar work, a gap that ranges from around 9% in Iceland to 16% in Finland as of 2022. Moreover, women are underrepresented in managerial roles and take far more parental leave than men, suggesting persistent inequality in household responsibilities.

In the political realm, the Nordic countries have been at the forefront of women's representation. Women were elected to Finland's Parliament in 1907, and in 1980, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir

became the world's first democratically elected female head-of-state as Iceland's President. As of January 2025, women comprise over 44% of each Nordic country's parliament.

Nordic women face relatively high rates of violence by intimate partners, a phenomenon known as the "Nordic paradox" because of the region's otherwise exemplary gender equality. As of 2014, women in Denmark, Finland, and Sweden experienced higher physical and/or sexual violence by intimate partners than the EU average. Further, a recent study reports that Nordic women believe gender-based violence increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, in part due to delays in their ability to receive support services. Abortion is available upon request in every country.

The Nordics have been pioneers for the LGBTQ+ community. In 1989, Denmark became the world's first country to recognize same-sex relationships. Today, same-sex marriage is legal throughout the region. While public opinion in all countries is largely supportive of the LGBTQ+ community, discrimination still occurs among some segments of local populations.

6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally.

While Danish, Faroese, Icelandic, Norwegian, and Swedish are North Germanic languages that are part of the Indo-European language family, Finnish and Sámi are Finno-Ugric languages of the Uralic family, and Greenlandic belongs to the Eskimo-Aleut language family. The common ancestor of the North Germanic languages is Old Norse, which is related to Old English and most similar to present-day Icelandic. Finnish and Sámi evolved from an early language that people between the Ural Mountains and Gulf of Finland spoke millennia ago. Greenlandic originates from an early Intuit language native to northern North America.

As Sweden and Denmark were the dominant regional powers for centuries, Swedish and Danish served as much of the region's languages of administration, education, and religion. Meanwhile, many inhabitants spoke their indigenous languages at home and in informal situations.

Today, the standard varieties of the so-called Continental Scandinavian languages – Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish – are mutually intelligible, while the Insular Nordic languages – Faroese and Icelandic – are not. Studies suggest that Norwegians tend to understand other Scandinavians better than Danes or Swedes. Although Finnish has many loanwords from Swedish due to Sweden's centuries-long domination of Finland, the languages are not mutually intelligible. Finnish is more like, though not mutually intelligible with, Estonian, Karelian, and Livonian. In part due to this linguistic divide and the desire to participate in global trade and affairs, English has become an increasingly common *lingua franca*, or shared language, among residents. At least 70% of each country's residents understand English to some extent, a rate that rises to 92% among its youth.

Generally, the region's residents demonstrate respect, privacy, and candor in their communication practices. Across the region, residents usually share personal information only with family or close friends and are reserved when interacting with strangers. They tend to be direct communicators, prefer limited small talk, and take turns speaking, as they consider interruptions rude. Many residents also refrain from raising their voices in public and avoid boasting, as they value modesty. Nordic residents use limited body language and are often comfortable with extended periods of silence during conversation.

7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health

requirements) or culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

Prior to the 16th century, most formal education in the Nordic countries occurred in religious institutions, where Roman Catholic clergy taught religion and basic literacy. The Church sponsored the region's first universities in Denmark and Sweden in the late 15th century. After the Reformation, national governments gained a larger role in education, though religious institutions remained central to schooling. By the mid-19th century, primary school had become compulsory in Denmark, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, and was common in Finland's urban areas.

In the 20th century, the Nordic countries generally consolidated centralized, student-centric educational systems that supported societal integration in welfare models that were focused on equality and social justice. Basic and secondary education were compulsory and free across all countries, which exhibited some of the world's best educational outcomes.

Today, the Nordic countries invest heavily in education, often at rates higher than in the US. School enrollment is high, and nearly all residents are literate. In a regular global assessment of student performance in reading, math, and science, Finland has achieved some of the world's highest scores, while Iceland ranked slightly above the average of the nearly 80 countries assessed. Though each country has unique obstacles, common challenges to the region's educational systems include recently worsening student performance, shrinking rural populations and isolation, and disparities in educational attainment between majority groups and linguistic and ethnic minorities.

8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In most Western cultures,

people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. Most Nordic residents value punctuality, especially in business settings. They tend to consider being on time as respectful, trustworthy, and efficiency. While the daily rhythm is often highly structured around tight schedules during the week, it typically slows significantly on the weekends, and especially Sundays, when many shops and supermarkets close.

Though dependent on the individual, Nordic residents tend to keep a little more than an arm's length of personal space. Residents typically do not touch during conversation and avoid most public displays of affection. Although traditionally rare, these social mannerisms have become more common in recent years.

The Nordic countries observe various public holidays. Besides the major Christian holidays of Christmas and Easter, residents typically celebrate New Year's Day and historically important dates like independence. In June, many residents also observe Midsummer, which celebrates the summer solstice.

9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill, and style. Nordic countries' art, literature, sport, dance, music, and pastimes reflect their shared and unique histories, northern geographic location, and modern global trends. Since the Viking era, Nordic craftsmen have been recognized for their textiles, ceramics, wooden toys, and other items that often feature bright colors, nature motifs, geometric designs, or mythical symbols.

Apart from some early inscriptions written in the runic alphabet (a set of letters that represent sounds and concepts), Nordic literary traditions began during the Viking era. At that time, residents wrote oral tales, histories, and mythology in Old Norse, particularly in Iceland and Norway. As the region converted to Christianity, literature became primarily religious in nature and

featured Latin instead of local languages. Subsequent influential authors wrote poems and books in various genres, ranging from poetic realism to Romanticism. Many of their works were in local languages, with Swedish and Danish most predominant. Today, Nordic crime fiction, often characterized by social realism, is one of the region's most globally acclaimed literary genres.

Traditional Nordic music and dance typically explore themes like nature and love. Many folk songs use vocals and various fiddles, zithers, the accordion, and other traditional instruments. Common folk or traditional dances are variants of polka, polska, schottische, and waltz, among others. Today, popular musical genres are classical, electronic, indie, metal, alternative and contemporary rock, pop, hip hop, and ***joiks*** (Sámi chants).

While the most popular sports vary by country, football (soccer) is prevalent across the region. Other common sports are handball, swimming, cycling, track and field, and tennis. Winter sports like skiing, ice hockey, and ice skating are also widespread. Further, the Nordics have a rich array of traditional sports. For example, Finland's national sport is ***pesäpallo*** (nest ball), which is similar to baseball, and Iceland's is "trouser-grip" ***glíma***, a form of wrestling in which each opponent grabs the other's harness to trip and throw him.

10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures, and economics. Theories of disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

Cuisine varies across the region based on local products, tastes, and customs, though common staple ingredients are seafood, root vegetables, mushrooms, cabbage, berries, rye bread, oats, cheese, butter, pork, beef, and game, such as elk and reindeer. Traditionally, residents pickled, cured, smoked, or salted many otherwise fresh ingredients to preserve them through the long,

cold winters. Typical flavorings are dill, parsley, horseradish, and caraway. Some common dishes are preserved fish, meatballs, open-faced sandwiches, and hearty stews. In recent years, a culinary movement known as New Nordic Cuisine has combined local, traditional ingredients and recipes with modern techniques, with a focus on purity, freshness, simplicity, and ethics. The Nordic countries consume more coffee per capita than any other region. Popular alcoholic beverages are beer, wine, schnapps, vodka, and aquavit, an herbaceous spirit.

Health in the region has improved in recent decades, as evidenced by rising life expectancies that average at least 81 years and some of the world's lowest infant mortality rates, which have continuously declined. The region's number of physicians per capita has also steadily risen and is generally comparable to the EU average (4.3), though rates range from 4.4 in Denmark, Finland, and Iceland to 7.1 in Sweden as of 2021. The Nordics' healthcare systems are publicly funded, comprehensive, and tend to rank as some of the world's best. As of 2022, healthcare spending as a percent of GDP ranges around 8-11%, well below the US rate of nearly 17%, despite achieving better health outcomes.

Across the region, non-communicable "lifestyle" diseases, like cardiovascular disorder, cancer, diabetes, respiratory and other illnesses, present the most significant healthcare challenges. In addition to unhealthy lifestyles, other healthcare challenges are aging populations and shortages of medical staff, both of which have burdened national medical systems in recent years.

11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. It details how countries allocate their resources by sector, trade with other countries, give or receive aid, and pay for goods and services within their borders.

In the 19th century, the Nordic countries began to industrialize, followed by a pivot to services in the decades after WWII. The region's economies grew rapidly in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, in part due to surging exports and the increased extraction of raw materials, such as oil, gas, timber, and minerals. Norway has flourished due to its vast oil and gas deposits and has the region's highest GDP per capita.

Today, the region's economies have large public sectors funded by some of the world's highest taxes. They tend to have stable inflation and exchange rates and integrate with other European economies at varying levels. For example, while all the Nordic countries are members of the European Economic Area, meaning they belong to a single market that enables the free movement of people, goods, and services within this zone, Iceland and Norway are not part of the EU customs union.

Denmark has advanced energy, medical, agricultural, shipping, and information technology (IT) subsectors. Forestry, minerals, and IT are Finland's most significant sources of income. Iceland, Åland, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland rely primarily on fishing and fishery products, as well as shipping and tourism. Most of Norway's income is from the extraction of oil and gas, as well as shipping, mineral extraction, tourism, and other subsectors that have made it the region's largest economy. Sweden's economy is nearly the same size as Norway's and the region's most complex. In addition to being home to a diverse array of globally recognized firms, the country exports electronics, machines, vehicles, metals, paper, and various other goods and services.

12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. The Nordic countries have invested in extensive road networks and efficient public transit systems, particularly in urban areas. While nearly all of Denmark's roads are paved, the other countries have vast unpaved roadways, especially in

remote areas. All the countries except Iceland have electrified train networks and capital-city metro systems. Some residents use ferries, which shuttle commuters, service remote islands, and connect the region's major cities and nearby countries. Domestic air travel in Finland, Norway, and Sweden is common to traverse long distances.

The Nordics' energy sources are diverse. Oil provides a large portion of the region's energy supply, except in Iceland, whose shares of geothermal and hydropower are vast. The Nordics have ample hydropower, and Finland and Sweden have large nuclear industries. While Denmark has some oil and gas reserves in the North Sea, as of 2024, Norway is the region's only net energy exporter, given its extensive production of oil and gas.

The Nordics have some of the world's fastest and most reliable Internet connections, and well over 90% of residents are Internet users. Mobile phones are extremely popular, particularly among the younger generations, with at least 111 mobile cellular subscriptions per 100 people in every Nordic country.

Media and press in the region have longstanding traditions of being independent and free. In a 2024 index of media freedom, Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden ranked among the top 5, while Iceland scored 18 of 180 countries assessed, largely due to threats to its media independence from powerful fishing interests. The region features robust and effective legal protective frameworks and generally has high public trust in public and private media broadcasters.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize Nordic society at large, we will focus on specific features of society in Finland.

PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

1. HISTORY AND MYTH

Overview

Situated in northern Europe, Finland's early history is one of foreign subjugation. As a region of Sweden from the 12th-19th centuries, and then an autonomous grand duchy of Russia from 1809, Finland did not gain its independence until 1917. During World War II (WWII), Finland collaborated with Germany against the Soviet Union (USSR). In subsequent decades, Finland developed close ties with the USSR until its collapse and then joined the European Union (EU) in 1995. Today, Finland is an established social democracy that has drawn closer to the EU and other Western allies in response to Russian aggression.

Early History

Ancient antler carvings and bone remains indicate that humans first arrived in the forests of Finland's southern lowlands between 9,000-11,000 years ago. As Ice Age glaciers receded, these early settlers migrated northwards. They relied on roots, berries, elk, seal, and fish from the Baltic Sea (then a freshwater lake) for sustenance. The ancestors of the Sámi peoples (see *Political and Social Relations*) also likely arrived during this period. Around 3300 BC, pottery-producing hunter-gatherers from the Volga region (in present-day northwestern Russia) expanded into Finland. These people spoke an early Finnic language that scholars believe is related to modern Finnish (see *Language and Communication*), and they eventually began to practice basic agriculture. As other groups arrived and proliferated through the 2nd millennium BC, the Sámi withdrew to northern Arctic regions, where some remain today.

By 1500 BC, two unique cultural zones had emerged in Finland. First, frequent contact with Scandinavians (people from present-day Denmark, Norway, and Sweden) and Central Europeans influenced people along the western and southern shores, while second, those in the Northeast remained influenced by people in present-day Russia and the Baltic States – Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Three groups – the western Tavastians (Häme), eastern Karelians, and later the Finns – occupied the region and likely interacted, though this early history is poorly documented.

Foreign Influence and the Arrival of Christianity

During the Viking Age (8th-11th centuries AD), Finland remained politically decentralized. Its tribes sat at the edge of trade routes linking present-day Sweden to Russia but did not participate in Viking expeditions. From this crossroads, they traded furs and sometimes fell victim to Swedish and Danish raids.

In the 12th century, regional powers – Sweden, Denmark, and Novgorod (a powerful principality in northwestern Russia) in particular – vied for control of Finland. Tradition tells of Sweden's first crusade to Finland in the late 1150s. Rather than a sustained effort to replace Finnish paganism with Swedish Catholicism, historians believe that this campaign was a series of raids designed to inhibit Novgorod's expansion efforts. Nevertheless, Swedish missionaries attempted to convert Finns. In 1172, Pope Alexander III (the leader of the Roman Catholic Church) advised Swedish bishops to capture Finnish fortifications and use them to enforce Catholicism (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

Inspired by Novgorod's expansion, Sweden sought to establish a more permanent presence in Finland at the beginning of the 13th century. In 1216, the Pope granted Sweden legal title to the land it controlled in Finland and authorized the Swedes to form a seat for Catholic bishops in Finnish missionary territory. As a result, the Swedes founded Finland's first cathedral in Turku (Åbo in Swedish), the city that would later become the capital.

By the mid-13th century, a substantial Catholic community had developed in Finland. In the East, however, Russian Orthodox missionaries sought to convert the Karelians and deepen their ties to Novgorod. In 1237, Pope Gregory IX called for a crusade to lessen Novgorod's influence. The crusaders, mainly Swedes and Finns, clashed with Novgorodian Prince Alexander Nevsky's army in 1240. Though Nevsky prevailed, conflict over Finland continued until 1323, when the Treaty of Nöteborg established a boundary between Swedish and Novgorodian influence at the Gulf of Finland's eastern edge. As a result, most of present-day southern Finland formally entered the Swedish realm.

Early Swedish Rule

After the Treaty of Nöteborg, Sweden began to administer much of Finland. Swedish monarchs entrusted nobles with managing Finland, governing from castles in Turku, Tavastia, and Karelia. Some governors, like Bo Jonson Grip and Karl Knutsson, earned respect from their Finnish subjects, and ties between Finland and the core of the Swedish realm were strong. Swedish institutions emerged as a means of protecting local interests and settling disputes. In 1362, Swedish King Haakon granted Finns representation in Swedish royal elections, thus recognizing Finland as a formal component of the Kingdom of Sweden.

The Kalmar Union

In 1397, representatives of the Nordic kingdoms (Denmark, Norway, and Sweden) established the Kalmar Union, which united the countries under a single monarch. As part of the Kingdom of Sweden, Finland entered the Union, though it lingered at the periphery, often excluded from royal proceedings. When the Union selected Christian I of Denmark to become King of Sweden in 1457, he reversed the run of Finnish exclusion by holding his election in Turku, rather than Uppsala, Sweden (where Kings of Sweden had historically been elected). The Kalmar Union persisted until 1523, when Swedish noble Gustav Vasa's rebellion against the then-Danish-held monarchy prevailed, establishing the independent Kingdom of Sweden.

Sweden's *Stormaktstid* (Great Power Era)
After championing Swedish independence from the Kalmar Union, Gustav Vasa ascended the throne. His rule was the first in what would become a relatively stable dynasty. Successive Vasa descendants controlled the Kingdom of Sweden until the mid-17th century, overseeing its expansion and eventual rise to the status of a great European power, and heralding a Swedish *Stormaktstid* from around 1611-1721.

Religious Reform and Continued Subjugation: During the Vasa Dynasty, a series of major religious reforms (collectively known as the Swedish Reformation) altered the status of the Roman Catholic Church in Sweden. In 1527, Gustav Vasa, with support from powerful elements of Swedish society, placed the Church under royal control. A protracted period of reform ensued. The result was the establishment of the independent Church of Sweden in 1536 and emergence of Protestantism as the dominant Swedish (and, by extension, Finnish) religion (see *Religion and Spirituality*). In 1546, reformist bishop Mikael Agricola translated the New Testament into Finnish, laying the foundation of standard written Finnish (see *Language and Communication*). In ensuing centuries, the status of the Finnish and Swedish languages in Finland would prove contentious.

At the end of the 16th century, ambitious Swedish kings battled the state of Moscow (which at the end of the 15th century had eclipsed Novgorod to become the dominant power in present-day western Russia) for eastern territory. To help sustain its efforts in this theater, Sweden forced landholding peasants, who held a large portion of the land in Finland at the time, to quarter soldiers. Consequently, many peasants revolted, resulting in a conflict now known as the Club War. The authorities quickly suppressed these uprisings and later offered fiefs (estates) and tax exemptions to Finnish nobles who agreed to fight on their behalf. Although this practice was not widespread, these nobles exploited the peasantry and zealously protected their newly granted privileges, causing divisions in the Finnish countryside.

Despite these difficulties, King Gustav Adolf made reforms in the early 17th century that improved Finland's status in the Kingdom and contributed to the spread of the Swedish language among the elite. Sweden also won control of some Muscovite territory, and the border drawn by the Peace of Stolbovo in 1617 ceded parts of Karelia to Swedish Finland. Finnish conscripts supplied manpower for campaigns into the Catholic Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation when Sweden entered Europe's ongoing Thirty Years War in 1629. Otherwise, Finland remained peripheral through the end of the 17th century.

The Northern Wars

By the early 18th century, years of war in Europe had rendered Sweden weak. Russian ***Tsar*** (King) Peter I (the Great) claimed Swedish territory at the Russian border. After his initial efforts in present-day Estonia and Germany failed, Peter turned his focus to Finland in 1710. In a 3-year conflict, Russia occupied southern Finland, and in 1714, Sweden evacuated Ostrobothnia. Russian occupation lasted until 1721, when the Peace of Uusikaupunki (Treaty of Nystad) ceded southeastern Finland to Russia. This period of conflict is collectively known as the Great Northern War (1700-21).

Swedish Decline and Russian Ascendance

In 1741, Sweden unsuccessfully attacked the Russian Empire in effort to regain territories lost 2 decades earlier. Before her counterattack, Russian Empress Elizabeth offered amnesty to Finns who withheld support for Swedish resistance efforts and implied that Russia might support a Finnish effort to establish an independent state. The 1743 Treaty of Åbo, a peace accord in Turku that ended Russo-Swedish hostilities by ceding an area in southeastern Finland to Russia, did not result in Finnish independence. Nevertheless, Elizabeth's concept of Russian-backed independence became popular among some Finns.

By the late 18th century, Finnish officials, military officers, and intellectuals had grown disillusioned with Swedish ambitions. They believed that Finland had suffered from Sweden's

campaigns with little in return. In 1788, Swedish King Gustav III's effort to seize Finnish border towns from Russia stalled. A group of Finnish officers in Anjala – the Anjala League – conspired against Sweden and sent a letter to Russian Empress Catherine II (the Great) calling for peace. Meanwhile, former Finnish Colonel Göran Magnus Sprengtporten, who was serving Russia, requested Finnish autonomy under Russian protection. These measures yielded little, and by the time hostilities ended in 1790, after Gustav III defeated Catherine's Navy, many of the Anjala contingent had abandoned their cause.

The Autonomous Grand Duchy

In the winter of 1807-08, Russian Emperor Alexander I began a campaign into Finland with Sprengtporten's support. This operation would supposedly uphold Russia's treaty obligation with Napoleonic France, which demanded that Russia pressure Europe's anti-Napoleonic protestors, like Sweden, to surrender. Regardless, Sprengtporten envisioned it as an opportunity to undo Swedish control in Finland. With Swedish ships mired in frozen harbors, the Kingdom's response under Gustav IV Adolf was lackluster. Some local resistance, and eventually a Swedish-Finnish counteroffensive, occurred in Ostrobothnia. Throughout most of the South, however, many Finns complied with the occupying Russians as Swedish forces retired from the frontier.

In 1809, after seizing most of the country, Alexander I decreed that Finland would become an autonomous grand duchy under Russian control, while maintaining its own constitution inherited from Sweden. That March, he convened the four estates of occupied Finland (the nobility, clergy, burghers, and peasants) in Porvoo, a small town in southern Finland. The resulting Diet (assembly) affirmed Alexander's decrees and loyalty to Russia.

Finland emerged, in the words of the Emperor, "amongst the rank of nations" united as a political entity for the first time. The Treaty of Hamina, signed in September 1809, formally ended

Swedish control. In 1812, the Emperor restored to the grand duchy territories lost to Russia in the 18th century and moved the administrative capital from Turku to Helsinki, nearer to the seat of the Russian Empire in St. Petersburg.

Russian Rule

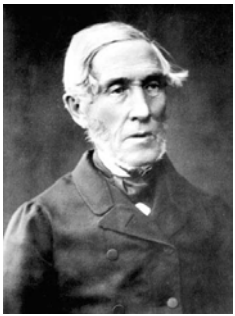
The Russian Empire's control of Finland lasted for over a century. During this era of the autonomous grand duchy, Emperor-appointed Governor-Generals administered Finland. Except for Sprengtporten, who served as the first Governor-General, Russians held the office. The primary governing institution, the Government Council (renamed the Senate in 1816), consisted of 14 Finns appointed by the Emperor. This body, which tended to judicial and economic matters, engaged primarily with its Russian counterpart, the Committee for Finnish Affairs. The Diet, convened by the Emperor at will, formally maintained legislative authority. In practice, however, most legal matters were settled without the Diet, which, after its dissolution in 1809, would not be reconvened until 1863.

Under Russian administration, the Finns maintained some basic liberties. Alexander promised to permit Protestant worship, despite the powerful status of the Orthodox Church in Russian affairs. Finnish support for Russian rule oscillated throughout the 19th century but became particularly strong during the Crimean War between Russia and Britain, France, Sardinia (in present-day Italy), and the Ottoman Empire. As the British destroyed Finnish port towns in 1854, Russian Emperor Nicholas I praised the Finns' resistance and won support among Finland's rural populations, though many in the elite were more hesitant.

Finnish Nationalism, Literature, and Language: At the Turku Academy (which moved to Helsinki and became the Imperial Alexander University in 1828), an enduring academic interest in Finnish history and folk poetry attracted political interests when Finland joined the Russian Empire. A cadre of intellectuals known as Fennomans advocated for the advancement of the

Finnish language as a means of developing a Finnish national identity. In 1831, the Fennomans founded the ***Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura*** (Finnish Literature Society, or SKS), which, despite contentious internal politics, played a crucial role in developing Finnish literature and improving the status of the language (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*).

This progress was briefly interrupted in 1850, when the Senate issued the ***Kieliasetus*** (language ordinance) that banned most Finnish-language publishing. The ordinance initially paralyzed the Finnish-language press, but its effects were short-lived, and it was formally overturned in 1860. Just 3 years later, at the urging of leading Fennoman figure Johan Vilhelm Snellman, Emperor Alexander II issued a decree that would establish Finnish as an official language alongside Swedish after a 20-year transition period (see *Language and Communication*).



Diet Reform: In 1863, Alexander II convened the Diet, ending the decades-long "political night," during which Finns lacked political representation. He promised to extend more power to the estates in the matters of taxation and legislation and implicitly acknowledged the principle of regularly convened Diets, later codified by the 1869 Diet Act. Under the act, the Diet, which remained subordinate to the Emperor-appointed Senate, was to be convened at least once every 5 years, though in practice it met every 3.

Through the late 19th century, Finland retained its autonomy as a Russian grand duchy. An 1878 military service law established a separate process for Finnish conscription into the Russian Imperial Army. Consecutive Governor-Generals sought to preserve Finns' loyalty by expanding their liberties. Emperor Alexander III, who ruled from 1881-94, was especially conscious of Finland's unique status in the empire. He delegated important powers previously reserved for imperial authority to the Senate and established a close relationship with the Finnish estates.

Bobrikov and Russification

In 1898, Emperor Nicholas II appointed Nikolai Ivanovich Bobrikov Governor-General. Bobrikov almost immediately campaigned to reverse the reforms of the previous decades and directly control Finland. The Emperor gave Bobrikov the legal authority to "Russify" Finland in early 1899, with the publication of what became known as the February Manifesto. It revoked Finland's autonomy as a grand duchy by resubordinating the Diet to imperial ministers and the Senate.

The manifesto and Bobrikov's other heavy-handed reforms, like making Russian the official language of administration and the military in 1900, fractured Finnish politics. In response, a powerful contingent of Finnish resistance, the Constitutionalists, emerged. Resistance also found sway among Finland's labor organizers. Even so, many Finns (largely members of the Old Finn political party) championed compliance. However, the 1901 military service law, which disbanded the Finnish Army and forced conscription into the Russian Army, caused the resistance to intensify. A small group of students (the Activists) began plotting to kill top officials in the Bobrikov regime, and in June 1904, activist Eugene Schauman assassinated Bobrikov.

Strike and Parliamentary Reform

In 1905, as unrest gripped Russia, labor elements in Helsinki organized a national strike, seeking to undo the measures of the Bobrikov years. All three components of the resistance – the Constitutionalists, labor, and the Activists – became involved but disagreed on how to achieve reform. The Constitutionalists preferred that the Diet oversee the changes, while labor leaders and the Activists preferred that a new national assembly, elected by all Finns over the age of 21, take control.

While the Emperor agreed to the terms preferred by the Constitutionalists, the strike strengthened the labor movement, which by then had organized into the Social Democratic Party of

Finland (SDP, see *Political and Social Relations*). As a result, in 1906, the Senate passed legislation to replace the Diet with the ***Eduskunta***, a single-chamber parliament elected by all Finns over age 24. In 1907, the SDP won a plurality – 80 of 200 seats – in Finland's first parliamentary election, but the new legislature was short-lived. In 1908, Emperor Nicholas II dissolved the *Eduskunta*, transferring legislative responsibility to a newly formed Finnish ***Duma*** (assembly) staffed by experienced Russian administrators.

Independence

World War I revived the Finnish independence cause. During the war, some 2,000 pro-liberation Finns trained and served with the German ***Jägerbattalion*** (light infantry battalion). The immediate impetus for independence, however, was the 1917 Russian Revolution, which dissolved the Empire. The resultant provisional Russian government granted Finland its pre-Bobrikov autonomy but refused the SDP's requests to readjust the Senate's powers. As the SDP endorsed national self-determination, the reinstated *Eduskunta*'s more extreme socialist elements succeeded in passing a law giving it all power to determine, confirm, and execute laws in Finland.

Nevertheless, a series of political blunders soon undermined the socialists' position. A coalition of Finland's non-socialist parties, the Old Finns and New Finns, among others, who had formed the Constitutionalist core, took control under the leadership of longtime resistance leader Pehr Evind Svinhufvud. On December 6, 1917, the *Eduskunta* issued a declaration of independence, which Vladimir Lenin (whose Bolsheviks had seized control of Russia in November) recognized on December 31, giving rise to an independent Finland.

Civil War

Shortly after gaining independence, Finland was gripped by civil war. A group of pro-revolution socialists, known as the Reds, took control of the SDP and moved to seize Helsinki in January 1918. Svinhufvud withdrew to Ostrobothnia, where conservative

elements formed the White Army under the leadership of General Carl Gustav Mannerheim. Mannerheim established an effective fighting force, led by ex-Imperial Russian Army Officers and supported by *Jägerbatallion*-experienced Finns. In a 3-month conflict, the Whites routed the disorganized Reds, first seizing Tampere and then regaining Helsinki with support from German troops. After the war, Mannerheim was designated provisional head-of-state (officially the Regent of Finland). He ratified a new constitution in 1919, which established Finland as a republic and provided for a President elected by the *Eduskunta*. In July of that year, he lost Finland's first presidential election to Kaarlo Ståhlberg, a jurist popular among Finnish socialists, agrarians, and progressives, who had been instrumental in drafting the constitution.

The Interwar Period

Although the SDP remained the largest party in the *Eduskunta* through the first decade of independence, it failed to maintain control of the labor movement. In 1920, the ***Suomen Sosialistinen Työväenpuolue*** (Socialist Workers' Party of Finland, or SSTP) began to rival the SDP, establishing connections to the Finnish Communist Party founded by Finnish exiles in Moscow in 1918. As the SSTP grew, winning seats in parliamentary elections, anti-communist sentiment swelled.

By the late 1920s, anti-communist sentiment had crystallized into the Lapua Movement, which demanded that all communist activities be suppressed. Lapua's generally disorganized supporters violently attacked communist rallies and newspapers. At the Lapua's zenith in mid-1930, Finnish authorities could not prevent anti-communist assaults. In 1932, the movement turned its efforts against the Social Democrats, launching a coup to remove them from government. Svinhufvud, who had won the 1931 presidential election with Lapua support, intervened, urging the rebels to disband, and the movement dissolved shortly thereafter.

The Winter War and the War of Continuation

In 1939, the USSR engaged Finland on the issue of territorial adjustments and military facilities in Karelia, Hanko, and the Gulf of Finland. Talks held in Moscow collapsed when Finnish representatives rejected Soviet demands. Persuaded by reports that Finnish resistance would be insignificant, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin resorted to military action, invading in November 1939. Finnish forces, better equipped for the harsh winter, well-adapted to the terrain, and organized in small, fast-moving units, mounted an effective resistance under Mannerheim, achieving major victories at Raate and Suomussalmi. However, Soviet adjustments and reinforcements left the outnumbered Finns on the defensive, and Finland initiated peace negotiations. The Treaty of Moscow, signed on March 12, 1940, surrendered a large area of southeastern Finland to the USSR and ended the conflict, now known as the Winter War.

As WWII progressed in Europe, Finland deepened its ties with Nazi Germany, allowing German troops to transit its territory in 1941. After Germany attacked the USSR in June 1941, the Soviets launched air assaults on Finland. In the name of national defense, Finland initiated an offensive into Soviet-controlled territory that began the "War of Continuation." Finnish forces seized large areas of eastern Karelia, but progress slowed when they reached the pre-Winter War border. Between 1942-43, the USSR's defeat of Germany created demands for peace in Finland, and in 1944, the *Eduskunta* transferred the Presidency to General Mannerheim in the hopes that he would achieve an armistice with the USSR.

Both sides reached an agreement in September on the condition that Finland recognize the Treaty of Moscow, cede Petsamo (territory in northern Finland), and lease Porkkala (a naval base southwest of Helsinki), which formalized Finland's present-day borders. The armistice also called for the evacuation of German troops, a demand that the Nazis rejected. Pressured by the Soviets to adhere to the terms of the treaty, Finnish forces engaged with Nazi units in minor battles that continued until the last German troops evacuated in April 1945.

The Paasikivi and Kekkonen Years

In 1946, Mannerheim resigned from the Presidency. His successor, Juho Paasikivi of ***Kansallinen Kokoomus*** (National Coalition Party, or Kok, which was established as a center-right party in 1918 – see *Political and Social Relations*), stabilized relations with the USSR and concluded the Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance between the nations in 1948. Paasikivi did not run on the first ballot in the 1956 election, and Agrarian candidate Urho Kekkonen (who was previously Prime Minister, or PM) was elected President. Winning three consecutive elections and granted an extension of his third term, Kekkonen helped navigate Finland through the political intricacies of the Cold War. He continued Paasikivi's strategy of Soviet détente (improved relations) but also established an official policy of neutrality that Finland would retain for decades, dubbed the Paasikivi-Kekkonen line.

During this period, Finland underwent political, social, and economic changes. The Communist Party of Finland became reintegrated into Finnish politics, and Kekkonen implemented policies that promoted the interests of his centrist Agrarian constituency, while seeking extensive transformation. As Finland urbanized (see *Family and Kinship*), he also managed the evolving priorities of his party, which became the Centre Party in 1965. The government laid the groundwork for a welfare state, introducing universal pensions, public healthcare, and unemployment programs (see *Economics and Resources*). It also expanded public education (see *Learning and Knowledge*). Kekkonen sought to involve Finland in Europe's postwar economic integration and began to engage more with Western Europe (despite Finnish communist and Soviet objections), signing a trade agreement with the European Economic Community (EEC, the EU's predecessor) in 1971.

In 1982, Kekkonen, with his health declining, withdrew from the Presidency. PM Mauno Koivisto, a Social Democrat, became

acting President before winning the 1982 presidential election to become the first elected SDP President.

Pivot to the West

After the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, Finland reached a limited agreement with Russia, creating latitude to move closer to Western Europe. In 1992, it applied for membership to the EEC. At the same time, Finland endured an economic depression as trade with Russia plummeted and its currency value declined (see *Economics and Resources*). Economic conditions weighed on politics, and the centrist government lost its majority in the 1995 parliamentary elections. Granted EU membership in 1995, Finland's economy began to recover. The country adopted the euro currency in 1999 and introduced a new constitution that redefined Finnish sovereignty as an EU member in 2000 (see *Political and Social Relations*). That year, Finland elected its first female President, SDP candidate Tarja Halonen (see *Sex and Gender*). By 2002, the markka (Finland's former currency) had been phased out, and much of Finland's trade had shifted to the EU (see *Economics and Resources*).

Many Finns were wary about engaging with Western Europe and the EU, as Finland's relations with Russia remained important, if unstable. When in 2004 the Baltic States joined the US-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO, a political and military alliance among more than 30 nations that promotes its members' security through collective defense), debate about Finnish engagement with NATO and political tensions emerged.

Between 2003-11, the Centre Party and Kok governed Finland, with the SDP maintaining substantial support. In 2011, the Eurosceptic True Finns (today known as the Finns Party), gained popularity, seizing 39 seats in the *Eduskunta* elections. The True Finns' staunch opposition to the EU's bailout of some other member countries during a debt crisis that began in 2009 propelled them to prominence as Finland reeled from the economic fallout (see *Economics and Resources*).

After Russia's 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula, Finland expanded its cooperation with NATO. Consideration of full NATO membership became more serious in 2016, after the Finnish Ministry of Defence fell victim to a suspected Russian cyberattack. When Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Finland ended decades of neutrality and formally became the 31st NATO member state on April 4, 2023, completing Finland's pivot to the West.

Myth Overview

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of unique heritage and identity. Owing to its role in Finland's struggle for national identity, Finnish folklore is well documented. The earliest champions of Finnish literature, notably Mikael Agricola in the 16th century and the SKS in the 19th century, made serious efforts to document Finland's extensive mythology, which lauds the forest and its animal inhabitants as important cosmological actors (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*).


Kalewala

taikka

Wanhoja Karjalan Runoja

Suomen Kansan muinoisista ajoista.

1. Osa.

The *Kalevala*

A founding member of the SKS, Elias Lönnrot, published Finland's national epic, the *Kalevala,* in 1835. An extensive compilation of folk poems belonging to a 2,000-year-old Balto-Finnic oral tradition, the *Kalevala* describes the origin of the world and the trials of a pantheon of folk deities (see *Religion and Spirituality*). It begins with the creation myth of ***Ilmatar***, daughter of the sky, who descends into primordial waters and is impregnated by the wind. In the waters, a seabird lays its eggs on her knee, which later break when she moves. From the broken eggshells form the earth, sun, moon, and stars. *Ilmatar* then gives birth to ***Väinämöinen***, the first man, who swims through the primordial waters until he reaches newly formed land. In a later story, *Väinämöinen* fells a forest, making a clearing and sowing barley for the first time.

2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Official Name
Republic of Finland
Suomen tasavalta (Finnish)
Republiken Finland (Swedish)

Political Borders
Sweden: 339 mi
Norway: 441 mi
Russia: 813 mi
Coastline: 2,760 mi

Capital
Helsinki

Demographics
Finland's population of about 5.6 million is growing at an annual rate of around 0.2%. Some 86% of the population lives in urban areas, with about 1.3 million people residing in Finland's capital and most populous urban area, Helsinki. Generally, the population concentrates along coastal areas and in the South.

Flag
Proposed in 1862 and adopted in 1918, shortly after Finland won independence (see *History and Myth*), the Finnish flag is white with a blue cross that extends to the edges of the flag. The vertical part of the cross is off center toward the hoist side, resembling the style of the Nordic Cross and symbolizing Finland's membership in the community of Nordic nations. The white background represents Finland's winter snows, and the blue cross symbolizes its thousands of lakes.

Geography
Finland is the world's 66th and Europe's 7th largest country. Finland borders Norway to the north, Russia to the east, the Gulf of Finland to the south, Baltic Sea to the southwest, Gulf of Bothnia to the

west, and Sweden to the northwest. Off the southwestern coast at the entrance to the Gulf of Bothnia lie Finland's Åland Islands, an autonomous and demilitarized 6,700-island archipelago. Slightly more than twice the size of the state of Georgia, Finland's total land area is 117,304 sq mi.

Finland is mostly flat with low hills and commonly known as "the land of a thousand lakes." During the Ice Age (see *History and Myth*), glaciation (the process or result of glacier coverage) left Finland dotted with craters and divots that filled with water, forming lakes. Today, Finland has some 56,000 lakes, located mostly in the southern low-lying lake district. In the Southeast is Saimaa, Finland's and one of Europe's largest freshwater lakes (1,700 sq mi). Finland has over 178,000 islands in its lakes and adjoining seas, more than any other country except Sweden and Norway. Fertile coastal lowlands comprise much of the area in the Southwest.

Finland is Europe's most densely forested country. In the North, vast forests, which cover around 73% of the country, comprise the uplands. The extreme Northwest is Finland's mountainous region. The country's highest point is Mount Halti (4,357 ft), near its borders with Norway and Sweden. Salpausselkä is one of Finland's biggest esker formations (ridges of stratified gravel and sand formed during glaciation). The three parallel ridges run across southern Finland in an arc pattern. The Kemi River (343 mi) is Finland's longest and flows into the Gulf of Bothnia.

Climate

Finland has a cold temperate climate that varies by latitude, and winter is the longest of its four seasons. A third of Finland lies north of the Arctic Circle, where winter typically lasts from mid-October until May. This northern Lapland region experiences polar nights and the midnight sun, periods of 24-hour darkness or light. Finland's winter temperatures range between 3-37 °F but drop much lower in the North. Spring and fall last from April-May and September-October, respectively, but are shorter in the North. In the summer, snow on north-facing

mountain slopes rarely melts, but temperatures in the South recently have reached above 90 °F. In the South, warm air from the western waters keeps temperatures warmer. Helsinki has average lows and highs of 24 °F in February and 70 °F in July. Of Finland's total annual precipitation – an average of 27 in – about a third falls as sleet or snow, and the South receives more than the North. The wettest month, August, receives about 3 in.

Natural Hazards

Storms and blizzards are Finland's most common natural disasters. In the Arctic, temperatures can drop below -60 °F. The extreme cold increases the risk of frostbite, and the cold air can make breathing difficult and physical activity more fatiguing.

Environmental Issues

Human practices and related climate change have degraded Finland's natural environment, resulting in waterway pollution, harmful emissions, and habitat deterioration. Water pollution is a major issue in Finland, and while efforts to curb industrial emissions have been successful, pollutants from farm runoff are a pressing problem. Runoff from farms and cities, deforestation, and construction threaten nearly all of Finland's habitats. Although Finland faces environmental challenges, its conservation efforts have been robust. In a 2024 environmental performance index, Finland ranked 4 of 180 countries, higher than nearby Denmark (10), neighboring Sweden (6) and Norway (7), and the US (34).

Government

Finland is a parliamentary republic that divides into 19 ***maakunnat*** (provinces), each governed by a regional council. The provinces subdivide into 70 ***seutukunnat*** (districts), which further divide into over 300 ***kunnat*** (municipalities). A municipal manager, or mayor in larger cities, is the highest political position in the municipalities, residents of which elect a municipal council, local executive, and an auditing committee every 4 years. Local authorities otherwise organize relatively freely. Finland's current constitution, adopted in June 1999, enacted in March 2000, and

last amended in 2012, includes citizens' rights and procedural regulations that govern the Parliament, among other provisions. The constitution also strengthens the role of the Prime Minister (PM) at the expense of the President.

Executive Branch

The current President, Cai-Göran Alexander Stubb, took office in 2024. His victory extended the center-right's control of the Presidency, after Sauli Niinistö held the position from 2012-24. The President is head-of-state, leads the nation's foreign policy, and serves as Supreme Commander of the Finnish Defence Forces. The President is also responsible for appointing cabinet ministers proposed by the PM, Supreme Court Justices, and other heads of ministerial-level departments. An absolute majority popular vote directly elects the President for 6-year terms, with multiple, but only two consecutive terms allowed. If a candidate does not receive a majority in the initial round of voting, a run-off is held.

The current PM, Petteri Orpo, is the head-of-government and took office with 18 members of the ***Valtioneuvosto*** ("Council of State," or cabinet) following the 2023 parliamentary election. The PM represents Finland in European Union (EU, see "Regional Relations" below) decision-making, is responsible for leading the cabinet, and stands in when the President cannot conduct his duties. The cabinet generally defines Finland's political direction by guiding politics and proposing legislation to Parliament.

Legislative Branch

Located in Helsinki, the ***Eduskunta*** (Parliament) is a 200-seat single-chamber legislature. Of the 200, 199 members are representatives of mainland Finland, who are directly elected in single- and multi-seat constituencies by proportional representation vote. The other member represents Åland and is elected directly by simple majority vote. All members serve 4-year terms. The *Eduskunta* controls most legislative powers and submits legislation to the President for confirmation. It also approves treaties and international obligations, agree to the

national budget and taxes, can override presidential vetoes, and plays a substantial role in decision-making on EU matters.

Judicial Branch

The judiciary includes the ***Korkein oikeus*** (Supreme Court) and ***Korkein hallinto-oikeus*** (Supreme Administrative Court), as well as local, municipal, and rural district courts. As the highest court, the *Korkein oikeus* is the highest judicial power in criminal and civil cases, sets precedents, and provides rulings on cases for which parliamentary acts and decrees do not provide clear solutions. The *Korkein hallinto-oikeus* is the administrative court system's highest court and court of last resort in administrative cases. It has the responsibility of giving statements on executive and legislative issues, as requested. The President appoints the Supreme Court President and at least 15 Justices (today Finland has 18), as well as the Supreme Administrative Court President and its 21 judges, all of whom serve until the mandatory retirement age of 68.

Political Climate

Finland's political structure ranks as one of the world's fairest. From 2017-24, Finland has received the highest score in a global freedom index that rates people's access to political and civil rights. While the country has several dominant political parties, its government typically consist of multiparty coalitions, and rival parties can gain power through elections. Finland has universal suffrage for citizens ages 18 and older.

As of 2025, Finland's Parliament is the most right-wing in recent history. The ***Kansallinen Kokoomus*** (National Coalition Party, or Kok) is one of Finland's largest political parties and advocates liberal conservative policies. Its members hold the offices of PM, President, Foreign Minister, and Defence Minister. Kok governs with the right-wing populist Finns Party, Swedish People's Party, and Christian Democrats. PM Orpo and his cabinet have announced structural reforms to boost employment and investment in education, research and development, and clean energy, while making cuts elsewhere. The dominant political

party of the previous government and part of the opposition is one of Finland's oldest and most active parties, ***the Suomen sosialidemokraattinen puolue*** (Social Democratic Party of Finland, or SDP), which promotes a fair working life, effective public services, environmental protection, and guaranteed education and training. The centrist ***Suomen keskusta*** (Centre Party) is another political party that forms part of the current opposition.

In recent years, Finland's often left-leaning political climate has shifted toward the center-right. Some observers suggest the country's political parties and politicians now reject the traditional consensus culture, with voters supporting more right-leaning solutions to the country's most polarizing topics, like the national debt, economy, and immigration. Finland scores highly on stability, freedom, public safety, and social progress. In a 2024 corruption perceptions index, Finland ranked 2 of 180 countries, behind only Denmark.

In addition to fiscal conservatism and immigration controls, the government has sought a more active role in defense, foreign affairs, and EU policy. Although Finland generally maintained neutral foreign and independent defense policies since World War II, Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 largely shifted public opinion. Neutrality initially delayed Finland's accession to the US-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO, a political and military alliance among more than 30 nations that promotes its members' security through collective defense). Nevertheless, Finland rejected its neutrality and became a NATO member in April 2023. Since the start of the war in Ukraine, public support for EU membership has increased. In January 2024, PM Orpo announced Finland's policy priorities for the 2024-29 EU term, highlighting the importance of investing in European security. Finland is active in the EU, and Kok is a staunchly pro-EU party.

Defense

The ***Puolustusvoimat*** (Finnish Defence Forces) are a unified military force consisting of ground, maritime, and air branches,

with a joint strength of 19,850 active-duty troops and 238,000 reserve personnel. Military operations mainly focus on defense against Russia, regional security, cooperation via multilateral defense partnerships, and security resilience. Upon turning 18, all Finnish men are conscription obligated (except for Åland residents), and women may volunteer. Men must complete 5.5-12 months of service in a military branch or the Border Guard, or 8.5-11.5 months of unarmed civil service. After completing their initial conscription obligation, Finns enter the reserves and remain eligible for certain duties until age 50 for enlisted and 60 for non-commissioned and commissioned officers.

Army: As the largest branch, the Army consists of some 13,400 active-duty troops and comprises the following regiments: a special forces, 2 armored maneuver, and 3 combat service support. The Army also has the following battalions and brigades: 11 mechanized maneuver, 11 light maneuver, and a rotary-wing helicopter.

Navy: The Navy comprises about 3,150 active-duty personnel, and the Naval Command headquarters is located in Turku. The Navy's coastal defense consists of an amphibius maneuver and a combat support brigade.

Air Force: Composed of around 3,300 active-duty personnel, the Air Force consists of 3 air commands: Satakunta in the West, Karelia in the East, and Lapland in the North. The Air Force comprises the following squadrons: 2 fighter/ground attack; an intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; and a training. It also includes 2 transport fleets and a training unit.

Gendarmerie & Paramilitary: The Ministry of the Interior oversees the Finnish Border Guard that consists of 4 Border Guard Districts, 2 Coast Guard Districts, and about 2,900 personnel. The Border Guard also includes a maritime patrol squadron.

FINLAND

Air Force Rank Insignia


Lieutenant General


Major General


Brigadier General


Colonel


Lieutenant Colonel


Major


Captain


1st Lieutenant


2nd Lieutenant


Captain


Senior Lieutenant


1st Lieutenant


2nd Lieutenant


Chief Warrant Officer


Senior Warrant Officer


Warrant Officer


Staff Sergeant


Sergeant


Corporal


Lance Corporal


Private

Security Issues

Hybrid Influence Activity: In recent years, Finland has faced what its government calls hybrid influence activities. This type of threat manifests as harmful actions committed without the use of traditional military force, the objective of which the perpetrator aims to conceal. Russia is the main culprit of this activity against Finland.

After years of deteriorating relations, Finland's complex affairs with Russia have worsened since the 2022 invasion of Ukraine (see *History and Myth*). In response to Finland condemning Russia's actions in Ukraine, Russia has used cyber espionage, disinformation campaigns, and other online attacks to threaten Finland's national security. In 2022, a pro-Russia hacker group attacked the *Eduskunta*'s website, an attack that the group repeated on the day that Finland joined NATO in 2023. The same group also hacked the Technical Research Centre of Finland. In late 2023, ***Suojelupoliisi*** (Finnish Security and Intelligence Service, or Supo) claimed Russia was an active perpetrator of intelligence operations targeting Finland. Russia responded that Finland's accession to NATO has forced it to take countermeasures, as it considers the membership a threat to Russian security and national interests.

Russia also has sought to use migrants to overwhelm Finland's asylum system. Of the 1,022 asylum applications that Finland received in 2023, some 913 came in November alone. Russian government vehicles transported migrants to the Finnish border and provided them with bikes to pass through checkpoints or unmanned forested areas, demonstrating how Russia has used migrants as an unconventional means to disrupt Finnish border security. This action led Finland to a historic decision to close all its land border crossings with Russia in late November 2023. The last time Finland's eastern border closed was during the War of Continuation in 1944 (see *History and Myth*).

Terrorism: Supo ranks the threat of terrorism in Finland at level two, or elevated, on a four-point scale. While Finland is generally

peaceful, experts suggest that lone operators and small far-right or radical Islamist ideological groups threaten terrorist attacks. For example, Finnish police arrested a lone operator linked to radical Islamist terrorism after a knife rot killed two people and wounded eight in 2017. Terrorism-linked activities in Finland are generally support measures, like fundraising and online dissemination of ideology and propaganda. Although observers suggest attacks are unlikely in the short-term, Supo has identified individuals who have the desire and capacity to conduct violent attacks. Police surveillance of suspected terror-related acts proved successful in 2021, when they arrested five men for plotting terrorist attacks based on far-right white supremacist ideology.

Foreign Relations

Finland is a member of international organizations like the United Nations (UN), NATO, the World Trade Organization, Arctic Council, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the World Bank. Finland has participated in over 30 of the UN's peacekeeping and crisis management operations since it joined in 1955, and the UN calls Finland a great power in peacekeeping.

Finland historically had played a minor role in international affairs but has been steadily shifting away from its principle of neutrality since the dissolution of the Soviet Union (see *History and Myth*). Finland generally has good relations with most countries and prioritizes global peace and freedom. For example, the Finnish government's response to the 2023-24 Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza called for all parties to respect international humanitarian law. While its government condemned Hamas in support of Israel, Finland supports the protection of civilians and the right of security for all people.

Regional Relations: Finland is a member of renowned political and economic regional organizations, such as the EU, European Economic Area, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and European Organization for Nuclear Research. In recent years, it has become increasingly active in EU affairs.

Finland also keeps close relations with its Nordic neighbors (Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland) and is part of the Nordic Council (an official body for inter-parliamentary cooperation among the Nordic countries). Finland and its Nordic neighbors share a common history dating back millennia (see *History and Myth*). Relations among the Nordic countries are defined by close cooperation and resolution of internal conflict by peaceful means.

The Nordics work together in many policy areas, such as EU legislation, justice, healthy and sustainable food systems, the environment and climate change, and sustainable development. For example, "Our Vision 2030" is a cooperative goal to become the world's most sustainable and integrated region by 2030. The Nordics also took the lead on discussing healthy and sustainable food systems at the 2023 UN climate summit in Dubai.

Relations with the US: Finland is a close defense partner of the US an relies on the US for support against external, state-level threats. The US first recognized Finland's independence from the Russian Empire in 1919 but briefly severed diplomatic ties in 1944, after Finland allied with Nazi Germany (see *History and Myth*). The US reestablished formal relations with Finland within a year, and US-Finland relations have remained stable.

The US regards Finland's recent NATO membership as positive and values the new strength of regional and transatlantic security. In 2016, the US and Finland signed a bilateral Statement of Intent (SOI) on defense cooperation and a trilateral SOI with Sweden in 2018. Other areas of bilateral collaboration are technology and research, promotion of international economic development, and the defense of human rights and peace. The US and Finland also share cultural and educational partnerships, like the Fulbright and US Embassy Outreach programs, which promote educational and diplomatic exchange.

The US economic relationship with the EU is the world's largest and most complex. The US and EU work jointly to pursue initiatives to create new opportunities for transatlantic commerce, from which Finland benefits as an EU member (see *Economics and Resources*). In 2022, the US was one of Finland's primary trading partners – the third largest market for Finnish exports and seventh largest source of imports. The two nations signed a co-financing agreement in May 2023 to provide support for US and Finnish export projects and facilitate collaboration in areas like 5G telecommunications and climate-friendly technology, among others, demonstrating their robust commercial relationship.

Relations with Russia: Although Soviet Russia recognized Finnish independence in 1917 (see *History and Myth*), it took until 1920 to establish formal diplomatic relations by signing a treaty that confirmed the shared border at the time (the current borders would not be established until late 1944 – see *History and Myth*). The two countries shared close economic ties prior to 2022, when Finland imposed sanctions on Russia. In 2022, Russia accounted for about 7% of Finland's imports, of which crude oil is the most important (see *echnology and Material*). Between 1995-2021, Russian exports to Finland increased at an annual rate of about 6%.

Nevertheless, in recent decades, Finland has distanced itself from Russia by aligning with the West, joining the EU and then NATO. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Finland's accession to NATO, Supo stated that Russia considers Finland a hostile country and is prepared to take measures against it. Russia's hostility toward Finland is evident in the Russian media, which reported that President Putin said Russia and Finland will have problems because Finland joined NATO, and that Russia plans to concentrate military units on their shared border. In April 2023, Finnish-Russian relations soured further when Russian authorities unlawfully seized billions of dollars in assets from Finnish energy giant Fortum. This action led the firm to file an

investment arbitration claim against Russia and discontinue all shared operations and business relations. Further, in late 2023, Russia closed Finland's Consulate General in St. Petersburg.

Ethnic Groups

As of 2023, permanent residents of Finland are 85% Finn, 5% Swedish-speaking Finns, and less than 1% Tatar, Sámi, Roma, and other groups. The Sámi are Finland's only group of indigenous peoples. Generally, Finland is an ethnically homogenous country. Finns descend from Balto-Finnic peoples and are most closely related to Estonians, Karelians, and a few other groups in northeastern Europe. Apart from a shared history, speaking languages of the Finno-Ugric language family tie these people together (see *Language and Communication*).

Despite historical occupation and subjugation by Sweden and Russia (see *History and Myth*), as well as other powerful regional influences, Finns today exhibit their unique cultural identity in areas like art, architecture, language, and science. Ethnic Finns have deep-rooted origins in forestry, and a general appreciation of nature influences their daily life and traditions.

Swedish nationals and Swedish-speaking Finns generally reside in Åland or along the coast in Finland's western and southern regions. Swedish is an official language in Finland (see *Language and Communication*), though most Swedish speakers in Finland also speak Finnish. Apart from language, few societal or cultural differences separate the two groups.

The Sámi indigenous group traditionally concentrated in the northernmost part of Finland, known as the Sámi Homeland (***Saamelaisten kotiseutualue*** in Finnish and ***Sámiid ruovttuguovlluthe*** in Northern Sámi). Today, estimates suggest that more than 60% of the approximately 10,000 Sámi residents in Finland now live outside of the Sámi Homeland.

The ethnic composition of immigrants in Finland has shifted over time. For most of its history, Finland's immigrants were Northern Europeans, Russians, Jews, Roma, and Tatars. Immigration from outside Europe was relatively uncommon until the 20th and 21st centuries. In 2023, a record of nearly 73,240 immigrants moved to Finland, particularly from Russia, the Philippines, and Turkey, but also from Sweden, India, and Estonia. Asylum seekers that move to Finland are mainly from the Middle East and Africa. As of 2023, some 14,730 Iraqi refugees reside in Finland. Further, during the war in Ukraine, the Temporary Protection Directive allows Ukrainians temporary asylum in Finland without undergoing the asylum procedure. Some 66,200 Ukrainians (over 1% of Finland's population) sought temporary asylum under the directive as of early 2024. These temporary asylees are not included in Finland's immigration or population statistics.

Social Relations

Prior to the 19th century, Finland had a hierarchal class-based system (see *History and Myth*). Today, Finns typically do not recognize class divisions, though many are conscious of status attached to educational and honorific titles (see *Language and Communication*), as well as political party affiliations. Finnish society tends to divide along rural-urban and rich-poor lines.

Historically, social, economic, and political relations in Finland have been stable, except for during the economic crisis in the 1990s (see *Economics and Resources*). Finnish society divides into small upper and lower classes and a large middle class. In 2023, about 13% of the population was low-income, 70% middle-income, and 2% high-income. Although most Finns are middle-class, their incomes vary widely. Upper-class Finns tend to live in urban areas, and as of 2023, the richest 10% control 23% of the country's total net household wealth. Rural residents, particularly in the North and East, have consistently migrated to larger cities in the South in search of jobs and higher living standards. Finnish society advocates gender equality and has made significant progress in recent decades, even though men still retain certain privileges (see *Sex and Gender*).

Most middle-class Finns have incomes above the poverty line, though some are vulnerable to economic instability. The lower class typically includes informal workers and the unemployed, as well as those who work in positions that provide care, retail, cleaning, and other services. In 2023, about 6.3% of the population experienced financial difficulties, representing a slight increase from 2022 (6.1%) but an overall decline since 2004 (9.5%). Although Finns experiencing homelessness used to live in tent villages and huts in major cities, the government's Housing First policy has virtually eliminated homelessness by providing housing immediately and without preconditions (see *Family and Kinship*).

While ethnic and religious minorities are generally integrated into Finnish society, some face discrimination. Many Islamic communities and organizations in Finland have called on the government to implement a "zero tolerance" policy on racism and hate-speech. The Finnish constitution prohibits religious discrimination (see *Religion and Spirituality*), but with the rise of the number of Finnish Muslims and Muslim immigrants in recent years (see *Religion and Spirituality*), anti-Muslim discrimination also has increased.

Discrimination in Finland typically occurs in settings like health centers, on social media, and in some public venues. A recent rise in racism could be linked to popular right-wing parties that generally oppose immigration, specifically non-white migrants. Russian speakers of diverse ethnic origin also sometimes face discrimination as a reflection of increasingly negative Finnish attitudes toward Russia.

In contrast, public attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees, even those of right-wing parties that traditionally oppose immigration, are largely positive. Finland's welcoming of Ukrainian refugees is most likely due to the broadly shared Finnish opinion that Russia's attack on Ukraine is synonymous with aggression against Europe and Finland's democratic values.

3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Overview

Finland's population is predominantly Christian. According to a 2023 government survey that counts only members of registered congregations, around 64% of residents belong to the Protestant Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) of Finland, 1% the Orthodox Church of Finland, and 34% are non-religious (including those who identify as atheist and agnostic). Less than 2% of the population belong to other Protestant congregations, practice Catholicism, or follow other religions such as Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism.

Finland's constitution (see *Political and Social Relations*) guarantees freedom of worship and prohibits religious discrimination "without an acceptable reason." Nevertheless, both the ELC and the Orthodox Church of Finland hold special privileges, such as the power to levy taxes on members and authorization to register marriages, births, and deaths in accordance with the government.

Early Spiritual Landscape

The territory comprising present-day Finland was first settled by nomadic tribes and clans such as the ancestors of the Sámi peoples (see *History and Myth*), who shared many similar spiritual beliefs. Accounts and ***joiks*** (Sámi chants) describe a rich mythology of spirits and deities, who many early residents believed governed the natural world and various aspects of life.

Finnish paganism held the cyclical nature of life and seasons as sacred. Many early Finns believed that ***Ylinen*** was the land of the gods, ***Keskinen*** the land of the living, and ***Alinen*** the underworld of the dead. Likewise, a ***Tietäjä*** ("one who knows," or shaman) could communicate with the dead and the gods to provide guidance on matters such as the cosmos and hunting.

Because hunting and shelter were essential for survival, early Finns called upon gods such as ***Tapio*** (god of the forest) and his wife ***Mielikki*** (goddess of the forest, hunt, luck, and abundance) for blessings during hunts. They considered ***Ukko*** (god of the sky, thunder, and fertility) the king of the gods, who controlled the weather through a weapon known as the ***Ukonvaaja*** (bolt of Ukko, sometimes portrayed as an axe or hammer).

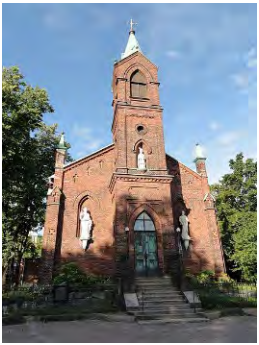
During their spring celebration, ***Vakkajuhlat***, Finns presented *Ukko* with a ***vakka*** (vessel) containing alcohol and sheep meat in exchange for a good harvest. In a related tradition, Finns held a ***peijaiset*** (wake) to honor the animal sacrificed for *Vakkajuhlat*. Early Finns considered ***Otso*** (the bear god) the sacred king of animals. When a bear was slain during a hunt, Finns ate its flesh, buried its bones, and placed the skull in a ***kallohonka*** (venerated pine tree) to ensure the animal's rebirth.

Introduction of Christianity

Finns were exposed to Christianity through trade with present-day Russia, Sweden, and Estonia (see *History and Myth*). Archeological findings of 10th-century Finnish words like ***risti*** (cross), ***pappi*** (priest), and ***raamattu*** (bible) suggest Christian ideas were present in Finland since at least that time. According to legend, in the late 1150s, Henry, an English clergyman designated to be Archbishop of Uppsala, Sweden accompanied King Eric IX of Sweden on a crusade to conquer and evangelize Finland (see *History and Myth*). Henry is said to have died a martyr when a peasant resisting Christianity murdered him on Lake Köyliönjärvi. Today, Henry is Finland's patron saint.

The first form of Christianity widely practiced in Finland was Roman Catholicism. In 1172, Pope Alexander III (the leader of the Roman Catholic Church in Rome, Italy) announced the Swedish crusades and promised to forgive the sins of those who fought the pagans. Under Swedish control, order and religion

helped create a more united Finland, which hitherto comprised distinct tribes (see *History and Myth*). Meanwhile, Novgorod (a Russian city state) held significant sway in eastern Finland, where the Russian Orthodox Church gained prominence.



While some eastern Finns converted to Orthodox Christianity, whose central authority was in present-day Russia, a Catholic bishop based in Turku presided over most Christians in Finland for centuries. Thomas, Finland's first documented bishop, only appears in a letter from early 1229 that granted him permission to seize the land of all non-Christian places of worship. During the 14th century, Finns built churches across present-day Finland, and Catholicism became the region's dominant religion.

The Protestant Reformation

In 1517, Martin Luther began the Protestant Reformation in present-day Germany, criticizing the Catholic Church's teachings and corruption, particularly its allowance of the indulgence system that granted pardons for sins to those who bought certificates. Lutheranism encouraged an individual relationship with God, separate from the control of the Catholic Church, its priests, and pope. In 1523, Gustav Vasa became King of Sweden, which maintained control of Finland, and quickly began implementing radical changes (see *History and Myth*). He embraced Lutheranism for political gain, seeking to diminish the Catholic Church's political and financial power by confiscating all Church property.

Various other events helped further the Reformation's impact in Finland. In 1548, Mikael Agricola published the New Testament in Finnish (see *Language and Communication*), and in 1554, he was elected Finland's first Lutheran Bishop. In 1593, the Synod (assembly of church officials) of Uppsala declared Lutheranism the official religion of Finland.

Throughout the 17th century, during a period known as Lutheran orthodoxy, the role and importance of the absolute monarch, now head of both the Church and state, increased. Church membership and attendance of mass in Sweden and Finland were mandatory. In 1686, the Swedish Church Law required a representative from every parish to conduct a ***husförhör*** (household interview), to assure every parishioner could read the Bible and pass an annual survey on religious knowledge. These strict regulations caused many Orthodox residents to emigrate to Russia.

Religion in the 18th Century

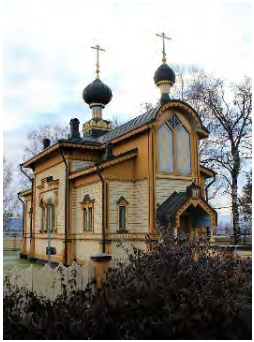
In the 18th century, Pietism, which placed personal faith over the authoritative doctrine of the Church, gained many followers in Finland. During the Northern Wars between Russia and Sweden (see *History and Myth*), the Finnish population was heavily impacted, as many of its churches were burned and pastors killed. By 1743, Sweden and Russia had agreed to the Treaty of Åbo, which granted a strip of southeastern Finland to Russia. Although Russia permitted the region's inhabitants to practice Lutheranism, some Finns living in that area became Orthodox.

In the late 18th century, scientific and technological growth increased trade, allowing the large peasant population more economic opportunities. With growing affluence came the Enlightenment, which questioned the state of politics and religion. Reason began to replace miracles, revelations, and prophesies by explaining them through science. Consequently, secularization spread in Finland. Nevertheless, between 1772-

1809, the Instrument of Government (a component of Sweden's constitution) strengthened the constitutional status of the ELC.

Religion in the 19th Century

Between 1809-1917, Finland was a grand duchy of the Russian Empire (see *History and Myth*). Finnish Orthodoxy gained official status, as immigrants, many of whom were Russian troops, brought their religion to Finland. Despite Russian rule, Finns upheld the 1772 Instrument of Government, and most remained firmly entrenched in Lutheranism.



In the 19th century, the ELC witnessed the arrival of revivalist (renewed religious passion) movements, the first of which was ***Herännäisyys*** (The Awakening), led by uneducated peasant Paavo Ruotsalainen. *Herännäisyys* emphasized God as the ultimate healer and redeemer and man as insignificant and small. This movement appealed to many poor and oppressed Finns, who felt ignored by the state and ELC. Lars Levi Laestadius, a Swedish preacher of Sámi descent, founded the Laestadian Movement, which granted absolution (release from guilt for one's sins) through confession, which spread to Finland. Revivalist movements strengthened the Lutheran faith in Finland by creating flexibility in doctrine that some scholars believe could otherwise have caused followers to desert the ELC.

In 1869, Finland's Diet (assembly, see *History and Myth*) granted parishes legislative rights to make their own decisions regarding Church matters, officially separating Church and state. As part of this act, the ELC gained its own legislative body, known as the Synod. In 1889, the Dissenter's Act allowed people of non-Lutheran Protestant denominations to practice and Lutherans to leave their faith.

Religion in the 20th Century

Shortly after Finland gained independence from Russia in 1917 (see *History and Myth*), liberal ideas, such as individual religious

freedom, began to spread more widely. This concept particularly appealed to those who belonged to denominations such as Pietism, because they believed in personal faiths and relationships with God. In 1922, the Freedom of Religion Act allowed all non-Christian denominations to practice in Finland and granted civil rights to atheists, though the ELC and state remained closely intertwined.

Following World War II (see *History and Myth*), the Union of Freethinkers, a secular organization, aimed to improve the social and legal standing of non-religious Finns. Throughout the 1960s, many on the radical left opposed the Church, viewing it as an outdated institution that supported laws like the prohibition of public dances. Further, groups like the Union of Freethinkers sought to reduce religions' influence on society. While the ELC and government were separate, the Church retained a special relationship with the state, as a so-called national church of Finland.

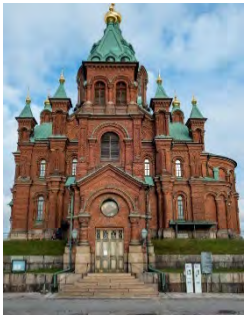
Religion Today

While Finland's constitution grants Finns religious freedom, and society is largely tolerant of other religions, the ELC and the Finnish Orthodox Church remain national churches that hold special privileges. Both churches levy taxes on their members and receive public funding, largely to provide social services such as registering baptisms and deaths. Many Finns participate in Christian rites of passage such as baptism and confirmation (see *Family and Kinship*). Nevertheless, ELC membership has declined drastically in recent years, from about 85% in 2000 to less than 64% today, and many Finns do not attend church service regularly nor actively practice the faith.

Religious education in Finland is compulsory, though parents are free to choose which religion their child studies (see *Learning and Knowledge*). Apart from the ELC and the Orthodox Church, as of 2023, Finland is home to around 140 registered religious communities of which Islam, Catholicism, and

Jehovah's Witnesses have the most members. Over 34% of Finns identify as non-religious, a rate that has steadily increased since the 1990s, largely due to younger generations placing less social and cultural importance on religion.

ELC: Since the 1940s, membership of the ELC has continuously declined, largely due to the country's shift toward secularization. Today, involvement in Church activities such as baptisms (see *Family and Kinship*) varies by region. In 2020, only 40% of babies were baptized in Helsinki, while about 79% were baptized in Oulu. In 2010, thousands of ELC members left the Church after a bishop published a legislator's booklet that made negative comments about LGBTQ+ people and homosexuality (see *Sex and Gender*).



Other Christian Religions: As Finland's other national religion, Orthodox Christianity is the second most common Christian denomination in Finland, with some 60,000 members, who account for slightly over 1% of the population. The Orthodox Church of Finland has been an autonomous archdiocese of the Patriarchate of Constantinople since officially separating from the Russian Orthodox Church in 1923. Since the 1990s, many Orthodox Finns have moved to Helsinki, home to the Uspenski Cathedral, the largest Orthodox church in Europe outside of former Soviet bloc countries.

According to church representatives, Finland is home to some 18,000-20,000 Jehovah's Witnesses. In 2017, the Russian Supreme Court declared Jehovah's Witnesses an "extremist" organization, causing some members to seek refuge in Finland, especially in the northern part of the country. In 2019,

Finland reversed a law that had allowed Jehovah's Witnesses to avoid military service based on their pacifist beliefs. While some observers felt the reversal violated religious freedom, it was upheld.

In 2022, Church officials estimated that about 16,734 registered Catholics live in Finland, though estimates do not account for unregistered Catholics or some immigrants and refugees, many of whom are Catholic (see *Political and Social Relations*). Today, half of Catholics in Finland are foreign-born. In 2023, Father Raimo Goyarrola was appointed Catholic Bishop of Helsinki, a position that had been vacant for almost 4 years.

Other Religions: The Muslim faith is the fastest growing religion in Finland, largely due to immigration, with an estimated growth of 10,000 members between 2012-20. Experts dispute estimates of the number of Muslims in Finland due to a lack of officially registered practitioners, though one non-partisan think tank suggests the total could be about 150,000 or just under 3% of the population. Muslim communities often concentrate in large cities such as Helsinki, Tampere, Turku, and Oulu.

While many Sámi today follow the Lutheran faith, some continue to hold traditional beliefs such as animism, shamanism, and polytheism. Many Sámi peoples who hold these beliefs live in the northern regions of Finnish Lapland (see *Political and Social Relations*), where some consider the prevalent reindeer sacred. Traditionally, the Sámi used reindeer meat and milk for sustenance, hides for clothing, and antlers for tools (see *History and Myth* and *Aesthetics and Recreation*).

Other religious minorities also live in Finland. Estimates of the Jewish population range from 1,500-2,500, many of whom live in Helsinki, Turku, and Tampere. Less than 1% of the population practices Hinduism, Buddhism, and various other faiths.

4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Overview

The family is important in Finnish society, whose members rely on each other for emotional, economic, and social support. Families are typically small and close-knit. Values like gender equality and fairness are central to Finnish family and social life.

Residence

Finland began to urbanize in the 19th century, though rapid movement into cities did not occur until the 1950s. As of 2023, some 86% of Finns live in urban areas, 23% in Helsinki's greater metropolitan area. All Finns have access to electricity, and most homes have safe sanitation services. Many Finns still use the traditional method of heating their homes by burning oil, wood, or other materials. Some residences built since the 1990s are heated by extracting geothermal energy through pumps deep in the ground, known as district heating. Sustainable construction using raw products like wood, instead of chemically treated materials, has helped lower homes' carbon footprints. Due to the country's cold climate (see *Political and Social Relations*), windows often have multiple layers of glazing with small gaps in between them to trap heat. Many residences also have stoves made of ***tulikivi*** (firestone) and brick that conserve energy and distribute heat throughout the homes.

Rural: Many rural residents live in wooden ***maalaistalot*** (country houses) or ***rintamamiestalot*** (front soldier houses), which were built for the families of soldiers who fought in World War II. Many rural houses have a detached sauna with a ***kiuas*** (stove) and ***kiuaskive*** (stones), over which residents pour hot water to produce steam for relaxation (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*). Many Finns have a ***mökki*** (summer cottage), which serves either as a summer or year-round second home, where they can escape from the fast-paced lifestyle of urban areas.

Urban: City dwellers typically reside in ***omakotitaloja*** (detached houses) or apartments. Like rural houses, many urban homes are wooden, though concrete or mixed materials are also common. Many urban homes have saunas, while apartment buildings often have a communal sauna. Apartment buildings are usually three or four floors, and few buildings have more than eight. Studio apartments are popular and often have a ***keittokomero*** (kitchenette) instead of a full-sized kitchen. Rates of homelessness are low in Finland. State-subsidized housing, often one-bedroom apartments, is available for those who qualify. Many urban Finns tend allotment gardens (groups of individual plots of land for plant and vegetable gardens), some of which feature small cabins with electricity and running water, where contributors can rest and store supplies during the growing season from May-October.

Family Structure

Many Finnish families value gender equality, and parents usually share domestic tasks like cooking, cleaning, and financial responsibilities (see *Sex and Gender*). Families tend to consist of parents and one or two children. Due to Finland's low population growth rate (see *Political and Social Relations*), the government has created incentives for citizens to have children, like providing significant time off for new parents (see *Time and Space*). Government subsidies grant young adults financial aid for housing and education and thus starting their own home (see *Learning and Knowledge*). While family is important to Finns, it tends to center around the ***perhe*** (immediate family). Many Finns only see their ***suku*** (extended family) on special occasions like Christmas, birthdays, and weddings.

Children

Historically, Finnish families had two-three children but tend to have fewer today (see *Sex and Gender*). Many Finns keep their children at home the entire 14-month duration of their parental leave (see *Sex and Gender*). Free daycare, which is often 4 hours to a full day and includes a meal, is available to Finnish

children. The government subsidizes full-daycare for children at varying rates, depending on the family's income. Parents expect children to help with household chores and prepare meals, and older children often have jobs outside the home to earn spending money.

Birth: In Finland, the government provides expectant mothers an ***Äitiyspakkaus*** (maternity package), often a box of items such as clothing, hats, and blankets. Mothers may opt for a cash payment instead of *Äitiyspakkaus*, worth about $180 for a single child. Many Finnish infants are christened in a Lutheran ceremony (see *Religion and Spirituality*) within 3 months of birth. Some families consider it bad luck to tell anyone the baby's name beforehand, keeping it a secret until the christening. The parents usually select the child's godparents, who are usually close friends, and announce them at the ceremony.

Rites of Passage

Many Finnish members of the Lutheran Church participate in the Christian rite of confirmation around age 15, which establishes their adult commitment to the faith. They typically prepare for confirmation by attending a week-long Church-run summer camp, where they take part in recreational and parish activities, such as devotionals, Bible study, and worship.

Dating and Courtship: Finns typically begin dating in their mid-teens. They typically value friendship and often socialize in large groups or at parties before one-on-one dating. Traditionally, Finns aim to marry and consider dating a serious matter, engaging in long-term, committed relationships. Today, many Finns increasingly engage in casual dating.

Weddings: Traditionally, Finnish brides spend time in the sauna with close female friends and relatives before their wedding, to purify themselves physically and spiritually. Some brides also go out with their friends dressed in an embarrassing costume and perform silly tasks for money, such as selling kisses or allowing small pieces of their dresses to be cut off for good luck.

Finnish and American wedding traditions are similar, featuring a ceremony followed by speeches from loved ones, a first dance, and cake cutting. The married couple often depart in a car which has exhaust pipes decorated with items such as the groom's shoes, the bride's old doll, or empty cans to symbolize a new beginning together. Some grooms participate in ***morsiamen ryöstö*** (bride robbery), whereby the groomsmen "kidnap" the bride, while the groom must perform tasks such as drawing a sketch of her or writing a love poem, to get her back.

Divorce

Finland has a high divorce rate. As of 2022, it was 2 per 1,000 inhabitants, similar to neighboring Sweden (2.1) and the US (2.4) but higher than Norway (1.8). The government grants divorce to Finns who file a petition through Finland's district courts (see *Political and Social Relations*), and no justification is required.

Death

Finns typically hold a funeral 1-4 weeks following a death. Lutheran funerals are usually held in a chapel. Mourners generally consider the coffin as the deceased's new home and fill it with jewelry and other personal items. The deceased's relatives typically drive to the funeral, forming a procession of cars. Funerals generally consist of a blessing from a priest and reading of farewells by family and loved ones. The closest person to the deceased usually lays the first flowers on the coffin, which men in the deceased's family traditionally carry and lower into the ground. Loved ones often place flowers on the grave after the burial. After the funeral, a reception with coffee and cake is common, and some families hold a dinner or go out to a restaurant to celebrate the deceased's life.

In recent years, non-religious funerals have become more common and usually consist of a friend or family member giving a speech to honor the deceased. Silent funerals, which focus on meditation, have also become more common.

5. SEX AND GENDER

Overview

Traditionally, the Finnish social system was patriarchal, meaning men held most power and authority. Today, Finnish society tends to be committed to gender equality. Women have similar opportunities as men to hold positions of power and authority in politics, but less so in business. In 2024, Finland ranked 2 of 146 countries in a global gender gap report, above its Nordic neighbors Sweden (5) and Norway (3), and well above the US (43).

Gender Roles and Work

Domestic Work: Traditionally, Finish women have been responsible for household chores and childcare, though men increasingly contribute. Today, many parents equally share childcare responsibilities, and in most Finnish families, both parents work (see *Family and Kinship*).

Labor Force: In 2023, some 58% of Finnish women worked outside the home, a lower rate than Sweden and Norway (63% and 62%, respectively), but similar to the US (57%). Men tend to dominate management positions in most industries. In 2023, only 28% of Finnish women held executive positions, the second-lowest rate among the Nordic countries. Instead, women account for most public sector workers (see *Economics and Resources*). As of 2022, female-dominated sectors were health and social services (86% women), other service and hospitality organizations (73%), and education (69%).

Gender and the Law

Finland's Gender Equality Act prohibits discrimination based on gender, gender identity, and gender expression, and sexual harassment in the workplace. Despite this law, discrimination and harassment still occur. Although the law requires equal pay

for all employees performing the same work, women's average earnings are around 85% of men's across all sectors. The government plans to introduce legislation to address the gender pay gap, which is the widest among the Nordic countries.

Finnish law guarantees parental leave and other benefits. The Family Leave Reform introduced new benefits for births effective September 4, 2022. The reform increased parental leave and aims to take better account of diverse families by offering pregnancy and parental leave, rather than traditional maternity and paternity leave. Pregnant women may take ***raskausvapaa*** (pregnancy leave) 30 working days before their estimated due date and receive a ***raskausraha*** (pregnancy allowance) for 40 working days, starting the day that pregnancy leave begins. After birth, both parents can take ***vanhempainvapaa*** (parental leave) for up to 320 working days and divide the days as they deem fit.

Child marriage is uncommon in Finland. In 2019, the Child Custody Act revoked all special exemptions to the minimum age of marriage, which is 18. Prior to the act, less than 0.1% of girls married before age 18.

Gender and Politics

In 1906, Finland became the first country to grant all citizens the right to vote and run for office. Finland elected its first female President and Prime Minister in 2000 and 2003, respectively (see *History and Myth*). Today, Finland considers gender equality a prerequisite for democracy and has made historical strides toward that endeavor. In 2015, the government extended the scope of Finland's major gender equality principle, the 1995 Act, to require authorities, education providers (see *Learning and Knowledge*), and employers to promote gender equality in all relevant activities. The same act decrees that women and men must each comprise at least 40% of municipal executive bodies. As of January 2025, women hold about 46% of seats in Parliament, similar to Norway (44%) and Sweden (45%), but higher than the US (28% – both houses combined).

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

GBV is a notable concern in Finland. A 2021 survey revealed that about 54% of Finnish women experienced some form of violence in their lifetime. The COVID-19 pandemic (see *Sustenance and Health*) intensified violence against LGBTQ+ communities and disabled, migrant, and less-educated women by delaying victims' ability to contact support services. Finland has a low femicide (murder of a woman based on her gender) rate by global standards. However, a recent study showed that relative to other European Union members, Finland had the second highest rate of female victims of intentional homicide by intimate partners in 2018. To combat GBV, Finland established an action plan in 2010 to reduce violence against women. In 2015, the Finnish government became the main funding organization for women's shelters, which have no fees for survivors who use their services.

Sex and Procreation

Between 1960-2024, Finland's birthrate declined from 2.7 births per woman to 1.7, slightly lower than the US rate (1.8). Largely due to the country's mandatory sex education in schools (see *Learning and Knowledge*) and laws preventing child marriage, Finland's adolescent fertility rate was 3 births per 1,000 girls aged 15-19 in 2022, a quarter of the US rate (14). Finland passed its first Abortion Act in 1950. Today, abortion is legal with no restrictions before 12 weeks of pregnancy and up to 20 weeks in some cases involving a sexual offense or if having a child would cause the parent considerable strain.

Homosexuality in Finland

Finland legalized same-sex adoption in 2016 and marriage in 2017. Each June, Helsinki holds the country's largest LGBTQ+ parade. Although the week-long celebration has been an annual event since 2006, pride celebrations in Finland date back to the 1970s. While Finns generally support LGBTQ+ rights, prejudice and discrimination still occur. For example, some conservative priests have refused to hold same-sex marriage ceremonies.

6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Language Overview

Finnish and Swedish are the official (national) languages of Finland and the principal languages of government, business, education, and entertainment. In addition to these official languages, various indigenous and foreign languages are widely spoken. Finnish, Romani, Sámi, and Finland-Swedish sign languages and Karelian are minority indigenous languages protected by law.

Finnish

Suomi (Finnish) belongs to the Finno-Ugric branch of the Uralic language family. It is similar to Estonian, Karelian, and Livonian and a distant relative of Hungarian. Although the first written account of Finnish is from 1450, Swedish rulers (see *History and Myth*) considered the language inferior, so many Finns primarily spoke it in private for centuries. Finnish speakers promoted the language to help preserve their identity throughout Finland's history, though 19th-century nationalist movements helped the cause (see *History and Myth*). Gradually, Finnish became the predominant language in government and education. In 1863, it became an official language with the passing of the Language Act (see *History and Myth*). Today, while nearly all residents speak some Finnish, about 85% (4.8 million) speak it as their first language.

Finnish is a phonetic language, so each letter corresponds to a single sound, which makes pronunciation straightforward. Additionally, stress always falls on a word's first syllable. Finnish uses the same alphabet as English with the addition of "å" (pronounced like the "o" in own), "ä" (like "ai" in hair), and "ö" (like "i" in circus). Finnish features a complex grammatical system with various differences from English, which may make it difficult for English speakers to learn. For example, it does not distinguish gender in pronouns. Finland also has eight regional Finnish dialects that have their own slang and pronunciation.

Swedish

Although Swedish is widely spoken and understood in Finland, only about 5% of residents are native speakers, most of whom are ***Suomenruotsalaiset*** / ***Finlandssvenskar*** ("Swedish-speaking Finns" or "Finland Swedes," in Finnish and Swedish, respectively). Generally, Swedish-speaking Finns live in Åland or near the southern and western coasts (see *Political and Social Relations*). Many scholars believe Swedish settlers first brought Swedish to Finland in the 12th century. In later centuries, Swedish was the primary language of government and education and became the region's predominant language in the 18th century. Since the end of Russian rule and Finnish independence in the 20th century (see *History and Myth*), Swedish has become less common.

As part of the Indo-European language family, Swedish is similar to Norwegian and other Scandinavian languages. Modern ***Suomenruotsi*** (Finland-Swedish) has some characteristics that distinguish it from Sweden-Swedish. While Swedish grammar is the same in Sweden and Finland, slang, pronunciation, dialect, and melody can differ. The Swedish alphabet is the same as the Finnish.

Sámi Languages

Today, over 2,200 residents speak one or more of three Sámi languages. Most speak North Sámi, while the rest speak Inari or Skolt. Most speakers live in northern Finland's Sámi homeland (see *Political and Social Relations*). Sámi is known informally as "Lapp" and belongs to the Uralic language family, like Finnish. Most Sámi speakers also speak Finnish or Swedish. The Sámi Language Act, introduced in 1992 and revised in 2004, guarantees the right of the Sámi to maintain and develop their language and use it before public authorities.

Other Languages

Many residents speak other languages like Russian, Estonian, Somali, or Arabic. Finnish Romani, or Finnish Kalo, is an Indo-European language spoken by fewer than 10,000 residents. The

number of Romani, or Roma, who speak the language fluently has fallen in recent years, though it retains cultural significance.

English: Finland's most widely spoken foreign language, English is understood by about 70% of residents. Finns typically learn English at school (see *Learning and Knowledge*). Over 20,000 native English speakers live in Finland.

Communication Overview

Communicating in Finland requires some knowledge of Finnish or Swedish and the ability to interact effectively using language. This notion of competence includes paralanguage (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). These forms of communication ensure statements are interpreted as the speaker intends.

Communication Style

Finns tend to be direct communicators and typically do not engage in small talk. Finns tend to consider interrupting a conversation rude and wait for the speaker to finish before replying. They generally avoid discussing personal matters during conversation and favor using dry, subtle humor and sarcasm. While Finns often have agreeable conversations and expect thoughtful and sincere responses to any topic (see "Conversational Topics" below), they are comfortable with disagreement. Because Finns are so direct, some foreign nationals consider them impolite. For example, Finns may end an exchange with their conversation partner by telling them that they no longer wish to converse. They are typically honest in their statements, even with those whom they do not know well.

Finnish body language tends to be limited. Many Finns consider emotional expression irregular but eye contact important, as it shows respect and attentiveness while listening and honesty and integrity while speaking. Touching is uncommon during conversation. Finns also tend to stand at least an arm's length

from each other (see *Time and Space*), as being too close often makes them uncomfortable.

Greetings

Finns value greetings as a sign of respect and politeness. Standard greetings vary by region, though the most common in any setting is a brief, firm handshake with eye contact. Finns generally greet everyone, even children, with a handshake. Finns sometimes convey special respect with a deep bow, though usually a head nod is sufficient. Family and close friends may ***halata*** (hug). Finns rarely greet each other with a kiss on the cheek, which they often reserve for close friends and family. This custom is even less common in rural areas.

Finnish greetings are accompanied by the phrase ***hei*** ("hello"), ***hyvää huomenta*** ("good morning"), ***hyvää päivää*** ("good day"), or ***hyvää iltaa*** ("good evening"). In Finland, to ask "how are you," is a proper question demanding an answer, so Finns mostly use it among acquaintances, friends, and family. Another common greeting is ***terveisiä*** ("greetings").

Names

Finnish names generally consist of one first and one or two middle names. The Names Act limits given names to three and surnames to one, though hyphenating surnames at birth or as a result of marriage is acceptable. A first name is an individual's personal identity. Many given names are biblical (see *Religion and Spirituality*), and male children often take their grandfather's or father's name. Many parents name their children after relatives, close friends, or names of ancient Finnish or Swedish origin. In 2022, more than half of newly married women in Finland kept their surnames, a practice that is increasingly common among Finns.

Forms of Address

Finns commonly address each other only by first name and reserve formal address for people of high status or highly formal occasions. In professional settings, Finns use titles like ***Tohtori*** (Doctor). They often use titles of respect, such as ***herra*** ("Mr."),

rouva (“Mrs.”), or ***neiti*** (for young/unmarried women) in formal settings or when addressing elders. The President may also award Finnish citizens special honorary titles for their services to society. For example, one of the highest honorary titles is ***valtioneuvos*** (councilor of state).

Conversational Topics

Finns are typically direct and converse about topics they consider meaningful. Finns do not consider long pauses or remaining silent awkward, but rather polite, as they typically prefer not to disturb another person unnecessarily. Common conversational topics are the weather, sports, health, and family. Discussing sports is often the easiest way to make conversation with many Finns (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*). To avoid offending Finns, foreign nationals should not make public displays of affection or arrive unannounced. Finns also consider it impolite for foreign nationals to discuss Finnish politics or compare Finland to other countries, especially Sweden or Russia (see *Political and Social Relations*), as Finns are proud of their national identity and sometimes offended when grouped with neighboring countries. Many Finns appreciate when a foreigner tries to speak Finnish, regardless of proficiency.

Gestures

Although Finns are generally not animated, they use some gestures in conversation to emphasize discussion points. Many gestures are similar to those used in the US and have the same meaning. Some examples are waving hello, winking, and holding up the offensive middle finger. Like in the US, the thumbs-up gesture signals approval, and shaking one’s head is a sign of disapproval. Finns also use a thumbs up to wish somebody “good luck,” similar to crossing fingers in the US.

Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ and click on “Resources” for access to language training and other resources.

Useful Words and Phrases

English	Finnish	Swedish
Hello	Hei	Hej
Nice to meet you	Hauska tavata	Trevligt att träffas
Welcome	Tervetuloa	Välkommen
Yes	Kyllä	Ja
No	Ei	Nej
Thank you	Kiitos	Tack
Please	Kiitos	Snälla / Vänligen
You're welcome	Ei kestä	Varsågod
I'm sorry	Anteeksi	Förlåt
Excuse me	Anteeksi	Ursäkta mig
I don't understand	En ymmärrä	Jag förstår inte
What is your name?	Mikä sun nimi on?	Vad heter du?
My name is…___	Nimeni on…___	Jag heter...___
Where are you from?	Mistä sinä olet kotoisin?	Var kommer du ifrån?
I am from…	Olen kotoisin...	Jag kommer från...
Goodbye	Näkemiin	Adjö / Hej då
Good morning	Hyvää huomenta	God morgon
Good day	Hyvää päivää	God dag
Good evening	Hyvää iltaa	God kväll
How do you say this?	Miten tämä sanotaan?	Hur säger du det här?
What is this / that?	Mita tama / tuo on?	Vad är det där?
Can I have…?	Voinko saada...?	Kan jag få...?
Do you speak English?	Puhutko englantia?	Talar du engelska?
What do you want?	Mitä haluat?	Vad önskar ni?
What time is it?	Paljonko kello on?	Vad ar klockan?
Yesterday	Eilen	Igår
Today	Tänään	Idag
Tomorrow	Huomenna	Imorgon
Where is the doctor?	Missä lääkäri on?	Var är doktorn?
Who?	Kuka?	Vem?
When?	Milloin?	När?
Where?	Missä?	Var / vart?
Which?	Mikä?	Som?
Why?	Miksi?	Varför
Car	Auto	Bil
Plane	Lentokone	Flygplan
Bus	Bussi	Buss
Subway	Metro	Tunnelbana

7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Literacy

Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 100%

Early Education

Before the arrival of formal education that accompanied the introduction and spread of Christianity in Finland (see *History and Myth*), regional inhabitants informally transmitted values, skills, beliefs, and historical knowledge to younger generations. Some indigenous Finns, such as the Sámi peoples (see *Political and Social Relations*), taught their children by demonstrating everyday tasks essential to survival. Sámi fathers typically taught boys hunting, fishing, and woodcarving, while mothers taught girls household skills, weaving, and farming.

In the 12th century, after Sweden began crusades into Finland (see *History and Myth*), Catholicism spread, and the Swedes banned many indigenous practices (see *Religion and Spirituality*). In the 13th century, the Swedes established the ***Katedralskolan i Åbo*** (Turku Cathedral School) to prepare boys as servants of the Catholic Church. Most education in Finland was for nobles and remained under the Catholic Church's supervision until the 16th century, when Lutheranism became the dominant religion (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

In 1543, Lutheran reformist bishop Mikael Agricola published ***Abckiria*** ("ABC book," see *Aesthetics and Recreation*), the first book in the Finnish language. *Abckiria* was a textbook that instructed on the use of numbers and letters, and the Church became responsible for teaching its contents to parishes. In 1640, Sweden founded Finland's first university, the ***Kungliga Akademien i Åbo*** (Royal Academy of Turku), which became the first Finnish teacher training establishment to educate Lutheran

priests. The Church also required Finns to be able to read and write for the Lutheran rite of confirmation (see *Religion and Spirituality*), which significantly increased literacy.

Education in the 19th Century

In 1809, Finland became a grand duchy in the Russian Empire (see *History and Myth*), and Finnish nationalism grew as Russian rule replaced centuries of Swedish control. In 1828, Russia moved the *Kungliga Akademien i Åbo* to the new capital city, Helsinki, where it became the Imperial Alexander University and later the University of Helsinki. The university prepared Swedish-speaking Finnish nobles for civil service in the Russian Empire and provided education in the sciences and humanities.

In 1849, Russia founded a technical school, which would later become the ***Teknillinen korkeakoulu*** (Helsinki University of Technology), to educate Finns in manufacturing and handicrafts.

In 1856, Russian Emperor Alexander II promised to complete a reorganization of Finnish primary schools and allowed Finns to make suggestions. Finnish teacher Uno Cynaeus proposed ***Strodda Tankar*** (Stray Thoughts on the Intended Primary Schools in Finland), which emphasized ***slöjd*** ("handiwork," or manual training – ***käsityö*** in Finnish) for kindergarten-age children. The method emphasized a teacher's demonstration of a task, usually with tools, and a student's reproduction of the task without interference. In 1866, the Finnish government made the *slöjd* system compulsory for all boys in rural schools, and throughout the 1870s, city schools also began using the system. In 1875, the government founded the ***Slöjdlärareseminarium*** (*Slöjd* teacher training school), as teacher training became more important in Finland.

Education in the 20th Century

After winning independence from Russia in 1917 (see *History and Myth*), Finland made general education compulsory for all children ages 7-13 in 1921. The intent was to increase educational equality between rural and city schools, as Finland

remained a primarily agrarian society (see *Economics and Resources*). Finnish students completed 4 years of primary education followed by either ***oppikoulu*** ("learning school," or grammar school) or work-oriented civic schooling. Poor students often could not attend *oppikoulu* due to the high tuition costs, so many entered the workforce following primary school.

After World War II (see *History and Myth*), socio-economic divisions declined as the agrarian population shrank. The middle class expanded, causing many Finns to demand a better and more equal educational system (see *Political and Social Relations*). In the 1950s-60s, Parliament sought to reform education, and a 9-year comprehensive school system gained teachers' support. In 1968, the Basic Education Act replaced the two-tiered system with 9 years of comprehensive education divided into 6 years of primary and 3 years of lower secondary school.

In the 1980s, the Finnish government implemented a centralized curriculum and reformed teacher training, adding curriculum development and student assessment courses. Every teacher was required to earn a master's degree (paid for by the state), elevating the profession's status and creating a more sought-after position in society. Finland granted more autonomy to teachers during the 1990s, providing them rigorous training in preparation to develop their own curricula. By the 21st century, Finnish schools had become among the world's best. Finland ranked in the top five in a global assessment of student performance in reading, math, and science from 2000-09.

Modern Education System

Today, education is free and compulsory for all citizens. Children must participate in a pre-primary educational program, 9 years of ***peruskoulu*** (basic education) starting at age 7, and at least 2 years of upper-secondary school. Government-run public schools dominate the educational system. Some international and foreign-language schools teach in English, Russian, or other

languages and according to the curricula of global educational programs or their home countries. In 2023, about 2% of students attended private or publicly-funded independent schools, lower than in neighboring Norway (5%) and Sweden (16%).

The Ministry of Education and Culture oversees all publicly-funded education by establishing educational priorities and objectives. The Finnish National Agency for Education is responsible for administering educational programs. Municipal authorities are appointed for 6-7-year terms and are responsible for managing schools' staff, budget, and overall student well-being. During early education, students remain with one teacher to establish a relationship and build an individualized curriculum within the framework of the national curriculum. Scholars have praised Finland's educational system for its emphasis on quality and universal learning in and outside the classroom.

In 2022, Finland spent some 5.5% of GDP on education, lower than Sweden (7.1%), but higher than neighboring Russia (3.6%) and the US (5.4%). Despite the country's performance in the 2000s, recent trends indicate a decline in student achievement. In 2019, officials pledged to reverse this trend by increasing educational spending and equity among students. To encourage upper-secondary school enrollment, in 2021, Finland made 2 years of upper-secondary school mandatory, meaning students must remain in school until at least age 18. However, socioeconomic differences among students, especially migrants (see of *Political and Social Relations*), have led teachers to call for other reforms to better integrate non-Finnish students. These calls highlight the country's shortcomings in educational equity and teachers' abilities to work in multicultural settings. In a 2022 assessment of student performance in reading, math, and science, Finland ranked 12 of 81 countries, with similar scores to New Zealand and Poland.

Pre-Primary: Finnish children under age 6 may attend public early education programs for a ***varhaiskasvatusmaksu*** (fee

based on the family's size, income, and duration of care), though some attend fee-based private ***päiväkotis*** (day-care centers). Although children can attend these institutions as early as 9 months old, many Finns keep their children at home for the entire 14-month duration of their parental leave (see *Sex and Gender*).

Some 88% of children between the ages of 3-5 were enrolled in early education programs in 2022.

Pre-primary education is free and compulsory for 6-year-olds. Children whose native language is not Finnish or Swedish learn one of these languages as a foreign language and are allowed to study in their native language with municipal approval. Some 89% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in pre-primary programs in 2022.

Basic Education: *Peruskoulu* begins at age 7 and divides into two cycles: ***alakoulu*** (primary school, grades 1-6) and ***yläkoulu*** (lower secondary school, grades 7-9). Most schools follow the national curriculum, which covers history, geography, arts, math, natural sciences, and physical education. Although instruction is primarily in Finnish, some courses are in English or Swedish, and the government permits education in Sámi or other languages used by local communities. Unbiased religious education is compulsory and consistent with the religion of the child's family until age 15, when children can choose to study a different religious denomination. Some 98% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in basic education in 2022.

Upper-Secondary Education: While youth enroll in ***lukio*** (upper-secondary school), adults may enroll in ***aikuislukio*** (adult upper-secondary school). Students have between 2-4 years to complete *lukio*, though they typically take 3, during which they work with a counselor to create an individual study path. A curriculum of 6-week-long courses varies by subject and prepares students either for vocational studies or university. At the end of their studies, students take five matriculation exams, similar to final exams in the US, in chosen subjects. ***Äidinkieli*** /

modersmål (“mother tongue” in Finnish / Swedish), is the only required subject, which tests students in Finnish, Swedish, Sámi, or sign language. Students whose native language differs can instead take a second-language exam in Finnish or Swedish. As of 2022, some 96% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in secondary education.

Vocational Education: Many Finns choose to study in a vocational education and training program instead of university. The three types of qualifications offered for vocational studies are ***ammatillinen perustutkinto*** (initial qualification), ***ammattitutkinto*** (further qualification), and ***erikoisammattitutkinto*** (specialist qualification). For the initial qualification, which is like an apprenticeship, students learn basic professional skills in a specified industry during a 3-year period. Subsequent qualifications deepen students’ knowledge in their chosen field and prepare them for higher education at a university or polytechnic institution. Students must complete a demonstration of skills for all qualification levels. Vocational schools are especially popular due to their flexibility, which allows students to study and work at the same time.

Post-Secondary Education: Finnish higher education has two sectors: universities and polytechnics. Universities offer ***kandidaatti*** (bachelor’s) and ***maisteri*** (master’s) degrees, which many students complete in 3 and 2 years, respectively.

Oulun yliopisto (University of Oulu) is one of Finland’s largest universities and offers international master’s programs in various languages, which allow students to study abroad. Universities of applied sciences (polytechnics) offer fields of study such as technology, education, and communications. At the end of their studies, students receive an ***ammattikorkeakoulututkinto*** (applied science degree), which usually takes about 4 years to complete. ***Metropolia ammattikorkeakoulu*** (Metropolitan University of Applied Sciences), located in Helsinki, is the largest applied science university in Finland.

8. TIME AND SPACE

Overview

Finns tend to be punctual and value directness and efficiency in the workplace. Generally, they do not participate in small talk and avoid physical touch with others. Silence is common in both professional and informal settings.

Time and Work

Finland's workweek generally runs from Monday-Friday, with most business occurring from 8am-5pm. While hours vary by store size and location, many shops are open weekdays from 9am-6pm or 8pm. On Saturdays, shops often close after 3pm, and many stores remain shut on Sundays. Open-air markets tend to operate from 6:30am-3pm. Many banks are open Monday-Friday from 9:15am-4:15pm. Post office hours vary by location, but service is typically consistent between 9am-6pm on weekdays. Many post offices offer extended and weekend hours, and some have 24-hour service. Government offices generally open Monday-Friday from 8am-4:15pm.

Working Conditions

Finland's Working Hours Act mandates a 40-hour workweek. Finnish law provides workers a range of protections and benefits such as paid leave (usually given as a continuous period during the summer) and severance pay. Finland has three distinct forms of parental leave: maternity and paternity leave, parental leave (totaling 320 weekdays after maternity leave, divided evenly between parents), and extended childcare leave (following the conclusion of parental leave). Finland has no universal minimum wage, though industry-specific collective agreements usually establish sector-wide minimum pay standards. Finland's labor rights are robust and well-enforced, creating generally good labor conditions and flexible working schedules. A 2024 global labor rights index ranked Finland 2 of 145 countries assessed.

Time Zones

Finland adheres to Eastern European Time (EET), which is 2 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time and 7 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST). Finland observes Daylight Saving Time between the end of March and the end of October.

Date Notation: Like the US, Finland uses the Western (Gregorian) calendar. Unlike the US, Finns write the day first, followed by the month and the year.

National Holidays

- January 1: New Year's Day
- January 6: Epiphany
- March/April: Good Friday
- March/April: Easter Monday
- May 1: May Day
- May: Ascension Day
- June: ***Juhannus*** (Midsummer–see *Aesthetics and Recreation*)
- November 1: All Saints' Day
- December 6: Independence Day
- December 25: Christmas
- December 26: St. Stephen's Day

Time and Business

Finnish business culture prioritizes punctuality, efficiency, and directness. Finns are generally good timekeepers and consider lateness rude, especially when it disrupts business. Finns waste little time establishing rapport at the outset of meetings, which are often scheduled in advance, confirmed in writing, and guided by structured agendas. Many Finns speak sparingly – usually only to make meaningful contributions – and value silence. Long pauses are common. The Finnish business-first attitude extends to lunch, during which business discussion often continues. Business partners sometimes forge more personal relationships in the sauna, an informal setting that allows for discussion beyond work (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*). Finns take verbal agreements, which can be legally binding, seriously.

Public and Personal Space

As in most societies, personal space in Finland depends on the nature of the relationship. Generally, Finns value their personal space, especially in public settings and among strangers. They maintain a greater distance than Americans in conversation and touch infrequently. Finns rarely engage with strangers, an act they sometimes consider intrusive.

Touch: Finns typically greet with a firm handshake (see *Language and Communication*). They reserve physical affection for family and close friends, who may hug when meeting.

Eye Contact: It is an essential part of greeting and conversing in Finland. Finns maintain eye contact while speaking to demonstrate sincerity, especially when reaching verbal agreements (see *Language and Communication*).

Photographs

Some museums, churches, and military installations limit photography. Foreign nationals should ask permission when photographing Finns (especially children).

Driving

Finland's roads are generally safe and well-maintained. Roads are often icy during the long winter. Vehicles must be equipped with winter tires from November-March, with many drivers opting to use studded tires. Though major highways are lined with elk fences, elk and reindeer crossings are common, especially in Lapland (see *Political and Social Relations*). The use of high beams in rural areas helps avoid collisions with animals. Cycling is common in urban areas, and drivers must yield to bicycle lanes.

Like Americans, Finns drive on the right side of the road. Well-developed public transit systems (see *Technology and Material*), efficient road salting practices, and costly speeding fines help minimize traffic and crashes. In 2022, Finland had 3.5 road fatalities per 100,000 people, higher than the Nordic average (2.4), but much lower than the US (12.8).

9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

Overview

Finnish clothing, arts, and recreation reflect the country's rich history and natural elements.

Dress and Appearance

Traditional: Finns tend to wear traditional clothing only for folk-dance performances, festivals, and similar events. Traditional women's clothing varies by region. It usually features bright colors in the West, while lavishly embroidered dark clothing is more common in the South and Karelia. Generally, women's wear consists of a white linen or cotton blouse, ***röijy*** (short jacket with buttons), ***rekko*** (front covering panel usually adorned with colorful embroidery), and a wool skirt. Traditionally, women's headgear varies by age and marital status. Married women often wear a ***tykkimyssy*** (paper hat embroidered with silk), while girls wear ribbons around their head.

Men's wear typically consists of a linen or cotton blouse, waist coat, ***luukkuhousut*** (trousers that usually have a large panel with buttons rather than zippers), and a ***nappivyö*** (decorative belt that holds knives, cups, and pouches). Finnish men wear a variety of hats, such as the ***varraslakki*** ("skewer," a knitted pointed cap), ***silinteri*** (top hat), and ***kairalakki*** (fur cap).

Today, Sámi peoples (see *Political and Social Relations*) dress in the ***gákti*** (dress or tunic, often with a high collar) as a symbol of cultural pride during ceremonies and while reindeer herding. Although traditional *gákti* materials are reindeer leather and fur, fabrics such as wool, cotton, and silk are common today.

Modern: In urban areas, many residents follow global fashion trends and usually wear basic, casual styles. Men typically wear jeans or pants, shirts, and well-kept shoes. Women often wear jeans or pants with a blouse or t-shirt. While elders tend to dress more formally, younger Finns usually reserve formal clothing for

festive occasions. In business settings, Finns typically prefer conservative styles, such as dark suits or dresses/pantsuits.

Recreation and Leisure

Finns often spend their leisure time with family and friends. Typical summer activities are dancing, hiking, boating, and socializing in the sauna. Likely invented in Finland, the sauna, a Finnish word, is a room or building designed for the communal activity of ritualized bathing. Finns often enter the sauna without clothing and are separated by sex, though some families use the sauna together. While in the sauna, Finns typically pour water over heated stones to release ***löyly*** (steam – see *Family and Kinship*) for relaxation.

During the winter, many Finns spend time doing indoor activities like reading, watching TV, and learning. Finland is home to over 200 government-subsidized adult educational centers, which provide instruction in subjects such as language, art, music, and cooking. Other popular activities are skiing, ice skating, and other winter sports.

Holidays and Festivals: Finns hold a variety of festivals and community celebrations, many reflecting the country's Lutheran beliefs (see *Religion and Spirituality*), pagan traditions, or historical events.

Today, many Finns celebrate ***Juhannus*** (Midsummer), originally known as ***Ukon juhla*** (Ukko's celebration) in tribute of ***Ukko*** (god of the sky, thunder, and fertility – see *Religion and Spirituality*), until it was renamed for St. John after Christianity arrived in Finland (see *History and Myth*). Many Finns believe it is a magical time of good fortune and celebrate by lighting a ***kokko*** (bonfire), singing, drinking, and dancing loudly to keep evil spirits away. During *Juhannus*, Finns often travel to their summer cottages (see *Family and Kinship*) to experience nature and the midnight sun (see *Political and Social Relations*). Due to the holiday's association with the harvest and fertility, Finns often hold confirmations and weddings during *Juhannus* (see *Family and Kinship*).

Finland hosts many festivals annually. ***Helsingin juhlaviikot*** (Helsinki Festival) is a cultural festival held in August. Concerts, art exhibits, dance performances, and plays all take place in the capital city's streets and parks. Usually, the festival's first night is ***Taiteiden yö*** (Night of the Arts), a notable white nights (all-night) festival, where anyone can perform in the streets. Although Helsinki hosts Finland's largest *Taiteiden yö*, other major cities such as Turku and Oulu also participate.

Some national holidays commemorate important dates in Finnish history. On December 6, Finns celebrate Independence Day (see *History and Myth*) with candlelight processions, flag-raising ceremonies, solemn rituals, and other festivities.

Sports

Finns participate in a wide variety of sports such as ice hockey, motorsports, skiing, soccer, cycling, and basketball. Finland has won hundreds of medals at the Summer and Winter Olympics. Finnish athletes consistently excel in international competitions, especially in Formula One (F1) racing, cross-country skiing, track-and-field, figure skating, snowboarding, and wrestling.

Finns refer to several Finnish athletes as ***lentävät suomalaiset*** (Flying Finns) for their remarkable running speeds, though the term now also includes notable F1 drivers. Despite never having hosted a Grand Prix event, Finland has produced multiple F1 champions. Mika Häkkinen was the F1 World Driver's Champion in 1998-99, and Kimi Räikkönen won the title in 2007.

Another *lentävä suomalainen* is Paavo Nurmi, a renowned long-distance runner, who dominated the sport in the 1920s, when he won nine Olympic gold and three silver medals. Other notable Finnish athletes are pole vaulter Wilma Murto and biathlete Kaisa Makarainen, who began her career as a cross-country skier before competing in her first biathlon (a winter sport combining cross-country skiing and rifle shooting) in 2003. She won the Biathlon World Cup three times in the 2010s.

Pesäpallo (“nest ball,” or Finnish baseball), commonly known as ***pesis***, is Finland’s national sport. Though similar to baseball, in *pesäpallo*, the ball is pitched vertically, allowing batters more direction, power, and control when hitting the ball. For the 2024 season, 13 men’s and 12 women’s teams comprise Finland’s professional league, known as Superpesis. At the end of the season, one team is relegated to the Ykköspesis minor league.

Ice Hockey: Ice hockey is Finland’s most popular sport, due in part to its cold temperate climate featuring frozen lakes and ponds that are suitable for ice rinks. Many children and young adults play recreationally. Liiga is Finland’s premier professional league, comprising 15 clubs. The team Tampereen Tappara (Battle Axe of Tampere) has won 19 Finnish championships. In 2023, they also won the Champions Hockey League, a tournament of Europe’s top ice hockey clubs.

Leijonat (The Lions) are the Finnish men’s national team and part of the “Big Six,” a group of the best men’s hockey nations, along with Canada, Czechia, Russia, Sweden, and the US. *Leijonat* won the World Championship in 1995, 2011, 2019, and 2022, and the Olympic gold medal in Beijing, China in 2022. Notable Finnish hockey players often join North America’s National Hockey League (NHL). Jari Kurri won five NHL Stanley Cup championships, while playing for the Edmonton Oilers in the 1980s and early 90s.

Music and Dance

Traditional folk music features a variety of instruments like the ***kantele*** (chordophone), ***jouhikko*** (bowed lyre), and ***säkkipilli*** (bagpipes). Finns traditionally perform ***Runonlaulanta*** (poetry singing, or chants), which usually told stories, myths, or lullabies with themes of love or heroism, though shamans also used them in rituals (see *Religion and Spirituality*). The *Kalevala* (see “Literature” below and *History and Myth*) performed in trochaic tetrameter is one of Finland’s most important forms of *Runonlaulanta*.

Some Finnish music and dances vary by region. Since the 1960s, ***pelimanni*** (fiddler) music, a form of folk music incorporating fiddles, has grown in popularity, especially in the western municipality of Kaustinen. Other instruments such as the accordion, drums, and bass-fiddles also feature in *pelimanni*. The Kaustinen Folk Music Festival is the Nordic region's largest folk music and dance festival. In Ostrobothnia, some residents dance the minuet, a 3/4-time dance in which partners dance and twirl alongside other partners. The foxtrot, fast-paced ***humppa*** (like a foxtrot), and waltz are other common dances.

Finland is also home to ***Tangomarkkinat***, the world's oldest tango festival, held annually in Seinäjoki. Finnish tango (FINtango) emerged in the early 20th century. It is distinguished from Argentine and Uruguayan tango by its slower, simpler body movements, which are similar to the waltz and foxtrot. In the 1950s-60s, FINtango reached its peak in popularity when songs about nature, love, loss, and yearning dominated the radio.

Other Musical Genres: Today, Finns listen to foreign and Finnish musical styles like pop, ***suomirock*** (Finnish rock music), ***Iskelmä*** (dance music), heavy metal, rap, electronic, and jazz. Finland's Hanoi Rocks, a glam rock band, helped make the genre mainstream and gained significant global recognition in the 1980s. Eppu Normaali, a rock band from Tampere, is one of Finland's best-selling musical groups.

Literature

Early Finnish texts were in Latin or Swedish (see *History and Myth*). Local literature developed slowly until 1543, when Lutheran reformer Mikael Agricola published the first book in Finnish. ***Abckiria*** ("ABC book," see *History and Myth*) taught reading and writing. In 1548, he issued the New Testament in Finnish. Both works helped raise literacy among Finns (see *Learning and Knowledge*).

In the 19th century, Finland increasingly developed an independent national culture, renewing interest in Finnish history

and folklore (see *History and Myth*). In 1835, Elias Lönnrot compiled the *Kalevala*, a collection of folk poems, ballads, and songs from Finnish oral traditions. In 1870, Aleksis Kivi published the first Finnish novel, ***Seitsemän Veljestä*** (Seven Brothers), in which seven youths leave society to live in the wilderness only to mature and return to civilization. The plot symbolizes Finland's evolution and struggle under foreign rule (see *History and Myth*). The novel is a source of inspiration for many Finnish ballets, plays, and children's picture books.

During the 20th century, realism dominated literature, which continued to stress the importance of a unique Finnish identity. In 1939, Frans Eemil Sillanpää won the Nobel Prize in Literature for his realistic portrayals of poverty and society through rural landscapes and characters. Between 1959-62, Väinö Linna published ***Täällä Pohjantähden alla*** (Under the North Star), a trilogy that describes the social reality of a Finnish family from 1880 to about 1950. The novel began a trend of accurate retellings of wars and life in Finland, which continues today. ***Sarvijumala*** (the Horned God) by Magdalena Hai tells the story of a Finnish pagan family and won the Finlandia Prize, a Finnish literary award, in 2023.

Folk Arts and Handicrafts

Finland has a rich history of arts and crafts such as ceramics, paintings, embroidery, glassware, and ***ryijy*** (tapestry), which often depict natural design elements like animals, flowers, birds, and plants. Traditional handicrafts use materials such as wood, bone, leather, pewter, and fur. In Finland, carving a ***kuksa*** (cup) from a gnarl in a birch tree is a sacred rite of outdoorsmanship. Likewise, the ***puukko*** (knife) has a steel blade used for hunting, fishing, and carving. Finns typically make the *puukko* handle from birch, though some use reindeer or elk antlers. The northern region of Lapland is known for handmade jewelry, often made of gold and silver. To protect the integrity and authenticity of items that are often appropriated, many Sámi place an official label on genuine Sámi-made items.

10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

Sustenance Overview

Meals are often important social gatherings among family, friends, and business partners. Finnish cuisine reflects the country's geography, traditions, and agriculture as well as global, regional, and indigenous influences.

Dining Customs

Generally, Finns eat three daily meals, and traditionally, ***aamiainen*** (breakfast) is the most important meal of the day. Finns typically eat ***lounas*** (lunch) between 11am-2pm, though the *lounas* break at work is usually less than an hour. ***Päivällinen*** (dinner) is often heavier than lunch and typically served around 5-6pm. Many Finns welcome business conversation over lunch, though they may consider it impolite discussion over dinner (see *Time and Space*). Finns often take multiple coffee breaks throughout the day, usually alongside a small cake or pastry.

When invited to a Finnish home, guests typically bring a small gift of wine, chocolates, or flowers for the host. Guests may also offer to bring a dish ahead of time. Generally, Finns expect guests to remove their shoes upon entering the home and consider it polite for guests to offer to help with the meal preparation and post-meal cleanup. Likewise, many Finns consider it impolite to refuse second servings, though etiquette requires them to consume all the food on their plate to avoid wastefulness. Finns tend to eat nearly all meals with utensils, apart from shrimp and bread, which they typically eat with their hands, and consider it polite to keep both hands above the table.

Traditional Finnish cuisine is largely based on culinary traditions from Karelia in the East and the Bothnian Coast in the West. Many dishes in western Finland feature Swedish-inspired cuisine. Dishes featuring reindeer from the northern Lapland region largely draw on culinary traditions of the indigenous Sámi peoples (see *Political and Social Relations*).

Diet

While varying by region, meals tend to highlight seafood and make ample use of root vegetables. Salmon, herring, perch, beef, and seasonal produce are popular ingredients in many dishes. Traditionally, the long, cold winters (see *Political and Social Relations*) meant fresh foods were not available year-round. Consequently, Finnish cuisine relies heavily on preserved foods. Methods such as smoking, salting, and pickling help preserve food and add flavor and texture to dishes.

Finland is one of the world's largest producers and exporters of oats. Versatile and relatively low cost, oats, rye, and barley feature prominently in Finnish cuisine. Finns eat bread, often served with butter, margarine, or cream cheese, at nearly every meal. Rye bread is a staple in Finland, and the most widely available variety is ***reikäleipä*** (hole bread). Due to Finland's cold climate and short growing season, it relies on imported food products. In the summer and fall, many Finns forage for ***mustikka*** (bilberry, or wild blueberry), ***puolukka*** (lingonberry), and ***vadelma*** (raspberry) in the forests. Influenced by historical trade routes (see *History and Myth*), common flavorings in Finland are white pepper, dill, allspice, mustard seed, parsley, chives, cinnamon, and cloves.

Meals and Popular Dishes

Breakfast in Finland is typically nutritious and filling. The most popular morning meal is porridge, often made with oats and milk or water, and typically consumed with coffee. A rye sandwich with butter, cheese, cold cuts, and vegetables is another common option. ***Karjalanpiirakka*** (Karelian pie, a thin rye crust pastry with rice or potato filling and ***munavoi***, a mixture of butter and chopped hard-boiled egg) is a traditional dish, usually eaten for breakfast or as a snack. Finns eat the classic pie plain or with gourmet toppings like smoked salmon or reindeer.

For lunch, dishes are light but filling. Finns tend to eat salads, soups, or a protein with boiled potatoes, rice, or pasta. Soups

are generally served as entrée-sized portions rather than sides. A popular meal is ***lohikeitto*** (salmon soup, cooked with salmon, potatoes, cream, and fresh dill). ***Karjalanpaisti*** (Karelian hot pot) is a traditional meat stew, typically made with beef, pork, onions, and root vegetables that takes several hours to prepare.

Dinner features similar dishes to lunch. ***Lihapullat*** (meatballs) are another traditional Finnish food, often made with a mixture of beef and pork, served with mashed potatoes and *puolukka* jam. For special occasions like Christmas, a feast of ham, casseroles, and rice pudding is popular. For Midsummer (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*), a barbecue of grilled fish and sausages is a common Finnish tradition.

For dessert, Finns often eat ***uunijuusto*** (oven cheese), made with cow's milk and colostrum (milk produced by the animal right after giving birth), which is typically sweetened, spiced with cinnamon, and topped with berries. Another option is ***munkki*** ("monk," deep-fried donuts made with buttery, leavened dough, usually shaped into rings and rolled in sugar, or prepared with sweet fruit fillings).

Beverages

Finns consume the world's most ***kahvi*** (coffee) per capita. The average Finn drinks at least three cups daily, though more is common. Many Finns take their *kahvi* with milk and sugar. Modern coffee houses have become popular and serve a broader range of coffee drinks. Other warm drinks include tea, and during the Christmas season, ***glögi*** (mulled wine made with spices such as cinnamon, cardamom, bitter orange peel, ginger, and clove. Unlike other European mulled wine, *glögi* is usually non-alcoholic. Finns drink ***maito*** (milk) and sometimes ***piimä*** (cultured milk) with meals. ***Mustikkakeitto*** (blueberry soup) is a thick juice traditionally made from blueberries, though some versions are made with other fruit. The country's most popular alcoholic beverages are ***kalja*** (a type of dark beer with a low alcohol content) and various types of ***viina***, a clear barley

alcohol similar to vodka. Some Finns drink ***sima*** (mead), a traditional slightly alcoholic springtime beverage typically made with fermented raisins and lemon.

Eating Out

Restaurants in cities like Helsinki and Tampere range from upscale establishments specializing in international and local cuisine to inexpensive casual eateries. ***Grillis*** (street stands) sell cheap, quick meals like hamburgers and hot dogs. Cafes and ***kauppahalli*** (market halls) sell fresh produce, meats, bread, pastries, and local delicacies. Many restaurants and cafés declare a service charge on the menu, which they automatically add to the bill, so tipping is typically not expected.

Health Overview

While the overall heath of Finns has improved in recent years, they face high rates of non-communicable “lifestyle” diseases and other serious health challenges. Between 2000-24, life expectancy at birth increased from about 77 to 82 years, just below neighboring Sweden and Norway (83), but higher than the US (81) and neighboring Russia (72). During the same period, infant mortality (the proportion of infants who die before age 1) decreased from about 4 deaths per 1,000 live births to 2, a figure slightly lower than the European Union (EU) average (3) and US rate (5).

Traditional Medicine

This treatment method consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills that are derived from a native population’s beliefs, experiences, and theories. Traditional Finnish folk medicine relies on practices like herbal treatment, connecting with nature, and hybrid methods that combine modern and folk practices to support physical, emotional, and spiritual healing. Today, some Finns practice folk medicinal traditions, not only in rural and indigenous communities, but across the country. Finns use traditional methods like sauna therapy, massage, cupping, and bone settling. Some Finns add wild medicinal herbs to foods and teas or use them in rituals, like putting nettles in baths or mop

water to remove evil spells (see *Religion and Spirituality*). Some Finnish healthcare providers use traditional practices combined with conventional healthcare.

Healthcare System

Finland's public healthcare system dates to the early 20th century when municipalities (see *Political and Social Relations*) began to fund hospitals. By the late 1960s, every municipality offered some level of health services. In 1972, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health introduced the Primary Health Care Act that created a universal, public healthcare system run by municipalities. In early 2023, the act was updated to establish 21 “wellbeing services counties” that split responsibilities with the municipalities. The objective of this reform is to ensure equal access to quality healthcare services across Finland’s regions. Largely as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the reform also aims to improve the system’s structure and preparedness for future health threats.

Finland’s public healthcare is tax- and social security-funded and accessible to all permanent residents. The national government oversees the highly decentralized public health system but mainly focuses on policymaking, while municipalities retain most responsibility. Certain health services, like maternity and pediatric health clinic visits, are free, while others are accessible at a relatively low cost. Local municipalities determine their fees based on factors like population size, age structure, and financial status. While public hospitals, clinics, and physicians typically provide high-quality care, appointment wait times, especially for specialist and rural care, are often long. Consequently, some Finns use private healthcare and clinics instead.

Most Finns use a mix of public, private, and employer-based healthcare services. The law requires employers to provide free occupation-related health services, like regular health checks for employees in workplaces with certain hazards. Some Finns prefer private healthcare for its shorter wait times and more comfortable facilities. The private healthcare sector is small and

can be notably more expensive than the comprehensive public healthcare system. Nevertheless, making an appointment with a private provider is often more straightforward and less time-consuming. For example, to receive specialized care through the public healthcare system, a patient must first obtain a primary doctor's referral, whereas they can often make specialized care appointments with private providers directly by phone or online.

Pharmaceuticals and dental care account for about half of Finns' out-of-pocket health spending. In 2023, Finland spent about 10% of GDP on healthcare, lower than neighboring Sweden (11%), the EU (11%), and the US (17%). Despite spending less on healthcare, Finland has lower rates of preventable and treatable mortality than the EU average.

Healthcare Challenges

The leading causes of death in Finland are heart and circulatory diseases, which accounted for nearly one-third of total deaths in 2022. Cancer was the second leading cause, followed by memory diseases like Alzheimer's and other dementias. Stroke is another common medical condition. The suicide mortality rate is also a concern in Finland, especially among residents under 25- years-old. Nearly one-third of the 15-24-year-olds who died in 2022 succumbed to suicide. Finland's suicide rate is higher than the EU average, which has led the country to adopt integrated strategies. These include a suicide prevention program and enhanced mental health skills in people's everyday lives, as part of its National Mental Health Strategy 2020-30.

While many experts rank Finland's healthcare system as one of the world's best, in 2022, Finland's life expectancy declined more than at any time in the last 50 years, mainly due to COVID-19 as a contributing factor to other illnesses in residents over age 80. As of late 2024, the Finnish government confirmed some 1.5 million cases of COVID-19, resulting in nearly 11,500 deaths. As of late 2023, about 82% of Finns have received at least one dose and 79% all recommended doses of a COVID-19 vaccine.

11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

Overview

Early Finland's agrarian, subsistence-based economy persisted for millennia. By the 8th century AD, Karelians had begun trading with Scandinavian Vikings, whose trade routes to Central Europe and present-day Russia traversed Finland (see *History and Myth*). Over time, trade routes expanded further, establishing close links between Finland, Novgorod (see *History and Myth*), and present-day Germany, which especially valued the luxury furs trapped in Finnish forests. Around the same time, some Finns became victims of the Viking slave trade.

As Finnish agriculture advanced, especially in the Southwest, a significant land market developed with participation from all sectors of Finnish society. In the early 17th century, land ownership was reorganized as Swedish kings granted tax-exempt fiefs (land held under the feudal system) to Finnish nobles in exchange for their military support in conflicts with Muscovy (see *History and Myth*). In this fiefdom-based agrarian system, the nobles exploited peasant labor, and interclass tensions emerged.

As Europe's seafaring trade proliferated and the major powers developed standing navies, demand for tar, a timber byproduct used to coat ship hulls and rope, increased markedly. Finland quickly became Europe's largest producer of tar, which shipped from the central-western Ostrobothnia region to Stockholm and then distributed to continental Europe. In the late 17th century, the price of sawn timber in Western Europe increased, causing the sawmill industry in southeastern Finland to grow rapidly. It expanded for over a century, with growth facilitated by the proliferation of water-powered mills beginning in the 1830s.

At the same time, industrialization began in earnest. Finland's first modern cotton factories and machine shops emerged in the

1840s. By the 1860s, the country's first rail connections and the removal of strict forestry regulations had increased Finnish timber output further. This trend continued into the early 20th century as railways expanded. Between 1860-1913, the value of Finland's forestry exports increased 25-fold. Finland also adopted the gold standard in 1878, tying its currency, the markka, to gold at a rate of one markka per French franc, which enabled borrowing from Western European banks. Consequently, European credit helped Finland improve its educational and transportation infrastructures (see *Learning and Knowledge* and *Technology and Material*).

The Russian Revolution in 1917 halted Finland-Russia trade (see *History and Myth*), which shattered a Finnish economy heavily reliant on Russian grain for its food supply. However, post-World War I reconstruction efforts helped restore growth as razed European cities rebuilt with Finnish timber. From 1918-22, land reforms granted farmers small landholdings from large estates. From 1920-38, average annual GDP growth was 4.7%, as Finland weathered the 1930s global depression relatively well, given continued demand for pulp and paper. The country also used tariffs to help increase local grain production, and by 1939, Finland produced nearly 90% of the grain it consumed.

World War II crippled Finland's economy (see *History and Myth*). Finnish territory shrank by some 10%, raw materials were depleted, and infrastructure was destroyed. Finland paid huge war settlements to the Soviet Union (USSR), largely through income generated by its machinery and shipbuilding industries, which had grown during the war. However, bilateral trade agreements made with the USSR in 1947 helped restore the economy. In 1948, Finland became part of Western Europe's movement toward trade liberalization, joining the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and Bretton Woods Agreement, which established an international currency exchange regime. In 1950, Finland also joined the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the World Trade Organization's predecessor.

Finland's postwar baby boom exerted pressure on its educational system, prompting reform in the 1950s-60s (see *Learning and Knowledge*). The government spearheaded these efforts as Finland adopted the "Nordic welfare model," which merges free markets and a generous public welfare system. Finland transitioned to universal flat rate basic pensions in 1957; established a public healthcare system in 1972; and continuously expanded national unemployment programs, first initiated in the 1930s, through the 20th century. By the 1980s, Finland's income distribution had become among the world's most equal.

In the 1970s, inflation gripped Finland during successive oil crises, but increased export demand allowed the country to avoid high unemployment. Economic growth through the 1980s outpaced that of most Western European economies, largely due to the development of Finland's electronics manufacturing industry, championed by the Nokia corporation. In 1991, the dissolution of the USSR undercut Finland's largest export market, which along with recession in Western Europe, caused a depression. GDP fell by some 10% between 1991-93. A banking crisis followed, prompting new financial regulations.

Nevertheless, the economy recovered and achieved average annual GDP growth of 3.6% from 1994-2005. Finland's entry into the European Union (EU) in 1995 contributed to this recovery, offering access to an enormous export market. Finnish financial systems became closely linked to the EU's after it adopted the euro in 1999, and trade with Russia rebounded.

Finland's economy was spared from the worst of the global financial crisis of 2007-09, largely due to the banking regulations implemented in the 1990s and adept adjustments to monetary policy by the European Central Bank. Finland was more affected by the 2009-11 eurozone debt crisis in which Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, and Spain defaulted on their debts. In 2009, Finnish GDP shrank by around 8%, and by 2011, Finland had become a net borrower. The economy recovered slowly, mired

by an aging workforce and low population growth (see *Political and Social Relations*). Its eventual return to GDP growth, averaging about 1.8% from 2015-19, was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Finland's government responded promptly though, limiting a decline in GDP to only 2.4% in 2020, and GDP growth had returned to pre-pandemic levels by 2022.

Today, Finland is among the world's richest countries by GDP per capita, though it has the second smallest GDP of the Nordic countries (ahead of only Iceland), totaling some $318 billion in 2023. In the same year, Finland's employment rate was about 78%, lowest among the Nordic countries but higher than the EU average (75%). Its debt-to-GDP ratio is the Nordic region's highest, having increased in recent years to nearly 81% in 2023. While inflation and high energy prices afflicted the Finnish economy in 2023, experts predict moderate improvement in economic conditions in the immediate future.

Services

Comprising just over 61% of GDP and employing some 75% of the labor force in 2023, the services sector is Finland's largest. Among the most significant subsectors are banking, information technology, health and social services, and transport.

Tourism: In 2023, over 12 million tourists visited Finland, and travel and tourism contributed about 7% of GDP. Popular tourist destinations are Helsinki and the Arctic expanses of Lapland.

Banking: Finland's banking subsector is highly concentrated. In 2023, three institutions – Op Group, Nordea Bank Finland, and Municipality Finance – controlled assets worth some 261% of Finnish GDP. In 2018, Nordea relocated to Finland from Sweden, which substantially increased the total value of Finland's banking assets.

Industry

The industrial sector accounts for about 24% of GDP and 22% of employment. Manufacturing dominates Finnish industry. Major subsectors are metals, forestry, and chemicals production.

Metals: In 2023, metal production accounted for some 17% of Finland's exports. Steel, copper, nickel, and zinc account for most production. Finnish products play an important role in global metals markets. In 2023, the US imported 90% of its blister and anode-grade refined copper varieties from Finland.

Forestry: Over 70% of Finland is covered by forest, of which over 49 million acres are suitable for timber production. As of 2023, timber materials such as sawn goods, wood pulp, paperboard, paper, and other products account for nearly 16% of goods exported and amount to $18.2 billion.

Chemicals: Pharmaceuticals, fertilizers, petrochemicals, and rubbers, among other materials, comprise Finland's second-largest category of export product, accounting for some 20% of exports in 2023. That year, Finnish chemical revenues were just under $23.4 billion. Finland has major chemical production clusters in the South (in Porvoo and Turku) and West (Kokkola).

Agriculture

This sector accounts for about 2% of GDP and employs some 4% of Finnish workers. As of 2022, about 7% of Finland's land is arable. Milk, meat, eggs, cereals, and potatoes constitute most production. Family-centric farming, long culturally important in Finland, remains relevant today. As of 2023, 85% of Finland's 43,000 farms were family owned and operated.

Dairy: While dairy is the most significant agricultural subsector, the number of Finnish dairy farms nearly halved to around 4,200 between 2012-23. As a result, production decreased from more than 700 million gallons of milk to 574 million in the same period.

Currency

In 2002, Finland adopted the euro (€ or EUR, see *History and Myth*), which is issued in two coins (1 and 2) and six banknotes (5, 10, 20, 50, 100, and 200). The €500 banknote is no longer issued but remains in circulation. One euro divides into 100

cents issued in six coins (1, 2, 5, 10, 20, and 50). From 2021-23, $1 was worth between €0.82-1.03.

Foreign Trade

Exports, which totaled some $116.7 billion in 2023, consisted of refined petroleum, paper products, stainless steel, sawn wood, and cruise ships sold to the US (11%), Sweden (11%), Germany 11%), the Netherlands (8%), and China (5%). Imports totaled about $126.01 billion and consisted of crude petroleum, cars, refined petroleum, medications, and communications equipment from Germany (13%), Sweden (11%), China (9%), Norway (8%), and the US (5%).

The European Union

Finland joined the EU in 1995 after a 1994 national referendum yielded 57% support for accession. While membership negatively impacted some Finns, who were forced to compete with more efficient EU producers, Finland's EU member status grants economic benefits. These include access to a common export market, stable currency, a secure business environment, and better access to foreign direct investment. In 2023, some 57% of Finnish exports went to the EU. Many Finnish politicians and scholars assert that, in addition to attracting finance to Finland, EU membership yields important symbolic and security outcomes, anchoring the country in a stable European environment and improving its status in relation to Russia (see *Political and Social Relations*). Today, support for EU membership is at an all-time high, with about 64% of Finns viewing Finland's EU status positively.

Foreign Aid

Finland provides significant military aid and official development assistance. Since February 2022 (when Russia invaded Ukraine), Finland has allocated $3.1 billion in aid to Ukraine in the form of defence materiel ($2.1 billion), humanitarian assistance ($229.5 million), refugee assistance ($550 million), and EU mechanisms ($18.9 million). International organizations like the United Nations help Finland distribute aid, mainly to sub-Saharan Africa and South and Central Asia.

12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

Overview

Finland's physical and telecommunications infrastructures are among the world's most advanced. Its media landscape is well-developed and supported by robust press freedoms.

Transportation

Travel by privately owned vehicle (POV) is Finland's most common method of transportation, especially in rural regions lacking train or bus services. With 661 cars per 1,000 people in 2022, Finland has the European Union's third highest POV ownership rate. Buses and ***taksit*** (taxis) operate throughout the country, while ridesharing services are available in major cities like Helsinki, Tampere, Turku, and Oulu. Helsinki has a well-developed public transit system featuring a tram network and light rail line. The capital is home to the world's northernmost metro system, having two lines spanning some 27 mi and serving 30 stations in Helsinki and neighboring Espoo and Vantaa. The 10-line, 344-stop electric tram system is one of the primary means of transport in central Helsinki, while the light rail offers high-speed connections among the city's suburbs. Travel by bicycle and foot are common in many cities, especially Oulu, even during the winter.

Roadways: Finland's roadway network is extensive, covering some 282,000 mi, nearly 77% of which are private and forest (logging) roads (see *Economics and Resources*). About 65% of Finland's 48,000-mi-long highway network is paved and densest in the southern half of the country. In a 2019 global assessment, Finland ranked 19 of 141 countries in road connectivity and 23 in quality of road infrastructure.

Railways: Finland's nearly 3,700-mi-long rail network supports extensive passenger and freight operations. In 2023, travelers made 81 million trips on Finnish railways, around 19% of which were long-distance. Government-owned railway company ***VR-***

Yhtymä Oyj (VR-Group Plc) operates passenger services to 200 stations, though most lines originate in Helsinki, where the Central Station handles about 100,000 daily passengers.

Ports and Waterways: Finland has 4,970 mi of navigable inland and 5,095 mi of coastal waterways. A system of interconnected lakes, rivers, and canals in the southern lake district connects to the Gulf of Finland through the 26-mi-long Saimaa Canal, which passes through Russian territory that Finland leases. Much of Finland's trade passes through its nearly 50 seaports, with most traffic transiting ports in Hamina, Helsinki, Kilpilahti, or Kokkola.

Airways: Half of Finland's 148 airports have paved runways. Helsinki-Vantaa Airport (HEL) is the country's primary air transit hub and busiest airport, handling about 15 million passengers in 2023. It is home to Finland's flag carrier, Finnair, which began operating in 1923 (making it one of the world's oldest continuously operating airlines) and consistently ranks among the world's safest airlines. Finnair and Danish Air Transport jointly own Nordic Regional Airlines, a smaller regional carrier.

Energy

Because Finland produces no fossil fuels, it imports all its oil, natural gas, and coal requirements. In 2023, nuclear power accounted for about 42% of Finland's total energy supply, followed by solid biomass (mostly timber) (14%), oil (3%), coal (2%), natural gas (1%), and other sources. The Finnish economy is energy intensive, largely due to its heavy industrial sector and heating demand due to its cold, Nordic climate. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Finland has sought to phase out energy imports from its eastern neighbor, which supplied about 81% of its crude oil and 75% of its gas imports in 2021.

Media

Finland's media landscape is well-developed. Though its media are free, just a few companies control the highly concentrated newspaper, magazine, and radio sectors. Broadcast television and book publishing are more competitive. Sanoma, Finland's largest media firm, operates in all major sectors. Press freedom

is robust, supported by constitutional guarantees that trace their roots to the world's first censorship ban, adopted in 1766 under Swedish rule (see *History and Myth*). Laws protect the confidentiality of journalists' sources, and politicians have little influence over the media. Consequently, Finland ranked 2 of 180 countries in a 2024 world press freedom index. Nevertheless, Finland has some limits to journalistic expression. In 2023, two reporters were convicted and fined for revealing state secrets.

Print Media: Finland has robust print media that offer daily, weekly, and monthly publications. Sanoma News and Alma Media account for around 53% of daily newspaper circulation, publishing Finland's leading newspapers: *Helsingin Sanomat*, *Aamulehti,* and *Kauppalehti*. Swedish-, English-, and Russian-language newspapers are available across Finland. *Helsinki Times* serves as the primary English-language outlet.

TV and Radio: Finland's over 1,100 radio stations broadcast news, music, and entertainment programs. Its public broadcaster, ***Yleisradio Oy*** (General Radio Ltd., known as *Yle*), dominates Finnish radio with a 51% market share. Its station *Yle Radio Suomi* was the country's most popular in 2023. Though Finnish-language broadcasting is most widespread, programs in Swedish are also common. *Yle* is also a major participant in the television sector. Of Finland's three public and numerous privately owned TV stations, *Yle* TV1 is the most popular.

Telecommunications

In 2023, Finland had about 129 mobile phone and 3 landline subscriptions per 100 inhabitants. Its telecommunications market is among Europe's most advanced, having been one of the first countries to auction for 5G use. In 2023, 5G coverage reached around 98% of populated areas and 90% households.

Internet: In 2023, about 95% of Finns – some 5.2 million people – were regular Internet users. While many Finns access the Internet through mobile devices, around 97% of Finnish households had broadband connections as of 2023.

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