



**Maahanmuuttovirasto**  
**Migrationsverket**  
**Finnish Immigration Service**

# Finnish society course



Finnish legislation



**Some parts of Finnish law are different from laws in other countries. This is why it is important that you get to know the most important Finnish laws and rules and have correct information. This material contains information about the following:**

- **Rights and responsibilities**
  - **Finnish criminal law**
- **Where to get help if you are a victim of an offence.**

**It also gives you instructions for taking an electronic test related to this course.**

## **Rights and responsibilities in Finland**

All people are equal in Finland. All those living and staying in Finland have rights but also responsibilities. Everyone is expected to behave well with other people.

Both Finnish people and foreigners who live in Finland have the right to be treated in the same way. All discrimination and harassment for personal reasons is prohibited. No-one may be discriminated against because of their age, origin, nationality, language, religion or belief, opinion, political or trade union activity, family relations, disability, health, sexual orientation or other personal characteristics.

Persons living and staying in Finnish society also have some responsibilities. For example, in Finland you may not:

- violate other people's human dignity by words or actions,
- hurt a child or an adult with your words or acts, by hitting them or sexually,
- abuse other people, or
- threaten or pressure other people.



## Legal protection

Everyone living in Finland has the right to have their matter heard appropriately by a court or some other body of the authorities. Those who are poor have the right to free legal aid.

You can always complain about the authorities' actions if you feel you have been treated wrongly. The courts look at the complaints on the basis of provisions in the laws.

You can complain about the actions of the staff at the reception centre or the reception services either to the Director of the centre or to the Finnish Immigration Service's reception unit: **migri@migri.fi**

## Finnish criminal law is applied to offences committed in Finland.

The punishable acts as well as the form and duration of the punishment are determined in criminal law. The different punishments include a fine, community service and a conditional or unconditional prison sentence. In addition to the punishment, the person who has broken the law can be sentenced to pay damages.

Most offences are subject to public prosecution. This means that the police can investigate them and the prosecutor can bring charges even if the victim did not demand a punishment. If there is violence within a family, for example, the person using violence can be brought to court even if the victim of the violence did not want this to happen.

## Crime does not pay!

Everyone in Finland has the duty to tell the police if they know that someone is planning a serious offence. Neglect (not doing something) and incitement (encouraging a person to do something illegal) can also be an offence.

You have a duty to tell the police about serious offences, for example murders, rapes, assaults, robberies or acts of terrorism. A person inciting someone to do something illegal will be sentenced on the same grounds as the person who actually broke the law.

Offences may affect a person's residence permit application. If you are a foreigner, your residence permit may be refused or cancelled if you are thought to be a risk to public order or safety and security.

## When children or young people break the law

Young people aged under 15 do not have criminal liability in Finland, but they still have to pay compensation for any damage they have caused. For example, if someone hits

another person, steals something or breaks a window, they may have to pay for the damage.

Different Finnish authorities work together to help young people who have broken the law, and the police is also involved in this work. The police always report any offences of persons aged under 18 to the child welfare authorities. This way they can tell other help providers that they are worried about a child's or young person's welfare, and the young person's situation can be looked at. The child welfare authority assesses the child's welfare and finds out if the child or family need particular support or protection in their situation.



# Violence

Violence may be physical, mental or sexual, threats of violence, or maltreatment:

- Examples of **physical violence** are hitting or pushing someone, pulling someone's hair, strangling or kicking someone, or female genital mutilation. Physical violence includes all ways of hurting someone.
- Examples of **mental violence** are using threats, dominating or controlling someone, blackmailing, calling names, isolating a person from others and bad treatment or examining someone's telephone and e-mails. Mental violence does not leave marks, which is why it is sometimes difficult to recognise.
- Examples of **sexual violence** are molesting or touching someone, harassment, rape, forcing someone to have sex or sexual abuse. All sexual acts done against the person's will are sexual violence. Sexual violence may be physical or mental.
- Neglecting a child's basic needs and care is an example of **maltreatment**. When a person who is stronger or has more power uses violence against a child or an older person, for example, this is maltreatment.



# Domestic violence

When a family member or some other close person hurts another family member (mentally, physically, sexually, financially or by threats of any type of violence), this is domestic violence. Violence in a marriage, for example rape, is also against the law. A person using violence can be taken to court for domestic violence, even if the violence took place in a private place or the victim does not want this to happen.

## Physical punishment

A child has the right to particular protection, and all violence against a child is prohibited. Under the law, a child must be protected against all physical and mental violence, maltreatment and abuse. Punishing a child by pulling their hair or hitting them, for example, or shaking a baby are against the law.

Under the law, children may not be dominated, punished physically or otherwise treated in any way that hurts them. Violence is not accepted in Finland as a method of bringing up children.

## Honour violence

Honour violence means using violence within the family, or



restricting someone's life, to defend the family's honour. Honour violence may be physical or mental, and it may include features of domestic violence.

If a family member is suspected of not following the community's rules of behaviour,

they may be pressured, they may be controlled and their movements may be restricted, they may be isolated in the home, forced into a marriage, threatened, or violence may be used against them. The aim of honour violence is to protect or recover the family's or community's honour or reputation by punishing the person who broke the rules of honour. The reasons for honour violence may include refusing to get married, getting divorced, wearing clothes that the family thinks are unsuitable, or dating a person whom the family does not accept. Just a suspicion of dishonourable behaviour may be a reason for using violence. In addition to those using violence, those encouraging them to do so are also breaking the law.

## Sexual offences

Everyone in Finland has the right to sexual self-determination. This means that everyone has the right to their bodies and bodily integrity. Sexual violence can be any sexual act that is done to a person against their will. The willingness to engage in a sexual act must be expressed verbally, through behaviour or in another way. In Finland, everyone has the right to make decisions about their sexuality and their own body, also when they are married or dating.

The Finnish legislation defines which acts that violate the right to sexual self-determination are offences and prohibited under Finnish laws. They are:

- rape
- sexual assault
- sexual abuse
- sexual harassment
- non-consensual dissemination of a sexual image
- abuse of a person subject to sex trade
- offering payment for a sexual act to a person under the age of 18
- pandering
- rape of a child
- sexual assault of a child
- sexual abuse of a child
- solicitation of a child for sexual purposes
- distribution of an image depicting a child in a sexual manner
- following a performance presenting a child in a sexual manner

## Sexual offences against a child

The protective age limit for sexual interaction in Finland is 16 years. An adult, or a young person significantly older than a 16-year-old, **MAY NOT** have sex with a person who is under 16. This is against the law even if the child had been willing to participate. **The responsibility always belongs to the adult.**

Sexual abuse means persuading or coercing **a child/young person** to participate in sexual activity by someone who is in a higher position or who exploits another person when this person is dependent on them or cannot defend themselves. This may include other sexual activity besides intercourse. For example, sexual abuse, molestation, grooming, and asking for sexual photographs, also online and on the social media, are against the law.



## Female genital mutilation (FGM)

Female genital mutilation is a form of violence against women and girls. The abbreviation FGM is often used for it.

FGM means all procedures carried out for cultural or other reasons which are not related to health and which involve the partial or full removal of a woman's external sex organs, or damaging them in some other way.

FGM in all of its forms is against the law in Finland. A person who breaks this law may be sent to prison for up to 10 years. Encouraging someone to perform FGM and planning it are also against the law. Planning the FGM of a girl is the same as planning serious physical violence against a child, and the authorities have the duty to tell the police and child welfare authorities about it.



## Trafficking in human beings

Trafficking in human beings is about controlling and abusing another person. This may take place by misleading or pressuring someone, or exploiting them when they depend on others or are not safe. Human trafficking is an offence which violates a person's human dignity and integrity. Trafficking is an offence under the Finnish criminal law.

Human trafficking or other similar exploitation may include

- labour exploitation
- forced prostitution
- forcing a person to participate in criminal activity or begging
- pressuring or forcing someone into a marriage
- trade in human organs and tissues.

The ways of controlling the victim of trafficking may include

- physical, mental and sexual violence
- social isolation
- threats against the victim's family, misleading
- causing a person to get into debt
- threats related to a person's residence status.



## Where to get help in an emergency

In an urgent emergency, you must act quickly. An emergency is urgent when someone's life or health, property or the environment is at risk.

**In this case, call the emergency number 112.**

- **The emergency number will tell you what to do in the situation.**
- **If you need interpretation, you may have to wait for a while.**
  - **Do not hang up before the operator tells you to do so.**
    - **The call is free.**

## Reporting an offence

If you have been a victim of an offence, you can make a report of the offence to the police. The police have the duty to receive your report of the offence. If necessary, the reception centre staff will help you contact the police.

Key instructions for making a report of an offence:

- Make the report to the police as soon as possible after the offence. This makes it easier for the police to investigate it.
- If you have injuries or you have been the victim of sexual violence, it is important that you see a doctor as soon as possible afterwards.
- You have the right to an interpreter when you are making a report of an offence.

## Do not try and cope alone. Ask for help!

If you have been a victim of an offence, it may be difficult for you to cope alone. Come and talk to a reception centre worker if you experience discrimination or harassment, or have been the victim of an offence. The reception centre can help you by talking about the problem, and you can be referred to additional help if you need it.

Violence hurts everyone who is involved, and the person using violence also needs help! It is possible to stop using violence. The person who is violent must accept responsibility for what they do and the way they behave. Changing them is never the victim's job. The reception centre can provide counselling, support and guidance.

Remember that the workers at the reception centre have

- a duty of confidentiality: they are not allowed to talk to other persons or authorities about the things you tell them.
- a reporting duty: they must report cases related to child welfare, offences and domestic violence to the authorities.

## We will help you!

There are many different authorities and NGOs in Finland that offer help and support. The reception centre workers can tell you more.

- Help for victims of offences: Call 116006 for free or visit **[www.riku.fi](http://www.riku.fi)**
- Help for immigrant women who have experienced violence: Call 080005058 for free or visit **[www.monikanaiset.fi](http://www.monikanaiset.fi)**
- Helpline for women who have experienced violence Nollalinja: Call 080005005 for free or visit **[www.nollalinja.fi](http://www.nollalinja.fi)**
- Support organisation for sexual and gender minorities: **[www.seta.fi](http://www.seta.fi)**
- Support Centre for Immigrant Persons with Disabilities and Long-term Illnesses: **[www.tukikeskushilma.fi](http://www.tukikeskushilma.fi)**
- Helpline for children and young people – Nuortennetti: Call 116111 for free or visit **[www.nuortennetti.fi](http://www.nuortennetti.fi)**
- Information about child welfare in many languages: **[www.lastensuojelu.info](http://www.lastensuojelu.info)**
- Shelters for victims of domestic violence: in many places, there are shelters where women can go alone or with their children if they experience violence or a threat of violence at home.
- Miessakit: different low-threshold peer activities, support and crisis services for men **[www.miessakit.fi/toimintamuodot/](http://www.miessakit.fi/toimintamuodot/)**

## Additional material:

The At Home in Finland project has produced videos on Finnish society. The theme of one of these videos is Honour violence.

You can find this video on Youtube:

<https://www.youtube.com/c/KotonaSuomessa/playlists>

The video can be watched in the following languages: Finnish, Swedish, English, Arabic, Dari, Kurmanji, Somali, Sorani, Thai, Chinese, French, Estonian, Tigrinya and Russian.

The Turva project has produced videos on fundamental rights in Finland and different offences.

You can watch these videos on Youtube on the Finnish Immigration Service's channel.

[https://www.youtube.com/user/Maahanmuuttovirasto/playlists?view=50&sort=dd&shelf\\_id=6](https://www.youtube.com/user/Maahanmuuttovirasto/playlists?view=50&sort=dd&shelf_id=6)

The videos are available in the following languages: Finnish, Arabic, Dari, English, Spanish, Kurdish-Sorani, Persian, French, Somali, Turkish and Russian.



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