



INTERNATIONAL  
HOUSE HELSINKI



# NEWCOMER'S GUIDE

MOVING  
LIVING  
WORK & STUDY  
LEISURE TIME





UN KOLOR DISTINTO


# NEWCOMER'S GUIDE

MOVING • LIVING • WORK & STUDY • LEISURE TIME



Newcomer's Guide  
Helsinki City Executive Office  
Text: Kirsi Korhonen and Pamela Spokes  
Illustrator: Kati Närhi  
Design and layout: Fiander Graphics  
Helsinki 2021  
ISBN 978-952-331-973-8 (pdf)

## Tips for reading this document

Use the navigation bar at the top of the page or press  to access the Table of Contents.

# Table of Contents

<b>NEWCOMER'S GUIDE</b>	<b>6</b>
Welcome	7
<b>I) MOVING</b>	<b>14</b>
Applying to the immigration authorities	14
Preparing your documentation	17
Registering your right of residence	18
Additional necessities	20
Personal identity code	20
Taxation	20
Social security coverage and Kela card	21
Pension system	22
Foreigner's identity card	24
Bank account	24
Mobile phone subscription	25
Other possible relocation expenses	26
Document checklist	26
<b>II) LIVING</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Housing</b>	<b>29</b>
Cost of living	29
The real estate market	29
Neighbourhoods in the capital region	30
<b>Education</b>	<b>40</b>
Early childhood education	40
Pre-primary education	44
Comprehensive school (grades 1-9)	44
Upper secondary education (grades 10-12)	45
Vocational education and training	46
Preparatory education	47
<b>Getting around</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Post offices</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Health services and medical care</b>	<b>54</b>
Your Kela card	54
Public healthcare	54
Private healthcare	55
Emergencies	55
Pharmacies	55
Maternity and child health clinics	56
Mental health services	57

<b>III) WORK &amp; STUDY</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Working in the capital region</b>	<b>59</b>
Work-life balance	59
Employment contracts	59
Rights and responsibilities of the employee and employer	60
Layoffs and termination of employment	61
<b>Finding a job</b>	<b>63</b>
How and where to look for job opportunities	63
Employment services	65
Recognition of foreign qualifications in Finland	66
Entrepreneurship	66
Startup community	68
<b>Studying</b>	<b>69</b>
Higher education	70
Adult education	70
Learning Finnish and Swedish	71
<b>Equality and diversity</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>IV) LEISURE TIME</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>Exploring your new home</b>	<b>75</b>
Helsinki highlights	75
Espoo highlights	77
Vantaa highlights	77
Day trips from the capital region	78
Spending time outdoors	79
<b>Sports</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Free-time activities</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Restaurants and shops</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>Media</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>Characteristics of Finnish culture</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>Public holidays and traditions</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>Common phrases</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Helpful resources</b>	<b>97</b>
Information and guidance for international newcomers	97
Newcomer communities	98
Emergencies	99

# NEWCOMER'S GUIDE



# Welcome

Dear reader,

The cities of Helsinki, Vantaa, and Espoo would like to welcome you to your new home. Together we have created this guide to help you settle in and better enjoy your stay. In this guide, you will find information about moving to and living, working, and studying in the capital region. It includes guidance on taking care of official and personal matters and provides contacts to related public services that you might need. You can read this guide from cover to cover, or you can dip in and out, at your convenience. We hope you find it useful.

Sincerely,

The cities of Helsinki, Espoo, and Vantaa







## About Finland, Helsinki, and the capital region

Finland has a population of 5.5 million people, with just over one million residents living in the Helsinki capital region. Finland is officially a bilingual country, where 87.3% of the population speaks Finnish and 5.2% speaks Swedish as their mother tongue. Finns tend to speak English very well.

The capital region consists of four cities: Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa, and Kauniainen.

Helsinki is the capital of Finland. It is located on a southern peninsula on the shore of the Gulf of Finland. With a population of 656,000, Helsinki is the administrative centre of the country. It is where the Parliament of Finland convenes and where most of the government operates. Helsinki is also an important hub of business and culture where 78% of the residents speak Finnish as their native language, 6% speak Swedish, and 16% speak some other language. Helsinki aims to be the most functional city in the world. Not just for everyone living, working or studying in the capital but for visitors as well.

Espoo is Finland's second largest city, with 291,000 residents. Helsinki's neighbour to the west doesn't have one city centre, as it is spread out around five different hubs. Espoo was the first municipality in Finland to adopt English as an official service language. Most Espoo residents speak Finnish while 7% speak Swedish, and roughly 19% speak other foreign languages.

Vantaa is Finland's fourth largest city, with 237,000 inhabitants. Just like other places in the capital region, most people speak Finnish, about 2.4% speak Swedish, and some 20% speak other languages. The Helsinki-Vantaa International Airport is located in Vantaa, making it the first place most people see when arriving in the country.

Kauniainen is the smallest municipality in the metropolitan area, with a population of approximately 9,960. Originally a suburban community of pretty villas and gardens, it became its own city in 1972. 59% of the residents speak Finnish, while 36% speak Swedish and only 5% speak other languages.

## Location and climate

Finland is a Nordic country located in northern Europe. It shares land borders with Norway in the north, Russia in the east and Sweden in the west. Across the Gulf of Finland to the south lies Estonia. The Åland archipelago, midway between Finland and Sweden in the Baltic Sea, is also part of Finland. More than 75% of the land in Finland is covered with trees, accounting for 10% of Europe's total forest cover. Finland is also often called the land of a thousand lakes, but the number of large lakes is in fact closer to 57,000. One of the biggest advantages of living in Finland is the close proximity of nature at every turn.

The capital region is bordered by the sea to the south, which brings a certain character to its weather. Seaside locations provide great views, but they can also be windy and cold on occasion. That said, any location by the water is always considered a prime spot for outdoor activity.

**Spring:** Spring starts off slowly in southern Finland in April or May. Average temperatures range from 3°C to 7°C. Melting snow is a sign that life is returning, although it can make things wet and muddy. Summer is just around the corner! Finland's biggest spring holiday is May Day, or *Vappu*, celebrated on 30 April and 1 May.

**Summer:** In the summer months of June, July and August, Finland enjoys up to 20 hours of daylight and dazzling natural greenery. The average temperature for the summer months is near 18°C, but 30°C days are also possible. The Midsummer holiday in June is an important event, when people gather at summer cottages or outdoor venues to light bonfires and celebrate. July is the most popular holiday month and many people travel to the countryside, returning to the city before school starts in mid-August.

**Autumn:** Autumn is a great time to explore Finland's forests. From September to early November, you can admire the changing colours and falling leaves. Temperatures in the south of Finland can be quite pleasant in September and early October. November is generally considered the worst month of the year as far as weather is concerned, since it is usually quite dark and rainy.

**Winter:** Wintertime arrives in southern Finland with the first snow, usually sometime in December or January. It is rare for much snow to accumulate along the southern coast during the winter months, and temperatures in Helsinki usually range from -7°C to +2°C. However, hitting -25°C is also not unheard of. Temperatures and weather conditions can differ substantially from one year to the next. The winter can be very cold and snowy one year, and rainy and dark the next.

The days get very short in December and January, and it can grow quite dark without snow on the ground. You will need warm winter clothes, so be prepared to buy them after your arrival. These normally include a thick, warm jacket, non-slip boots, gloves or mittens, and a proper winter hat that covers your ears. Although it can be cold outside, buildings are properly heated, so you should never feel cold inside. The snow usually starts melting in March or April.

## **The Finnish welfare state**

The Finnish welfare state aims to create a well-functioning society, so people can enjoy a good life. National and municipal bodies provide services and support for many needs, ranging from childcare benefits and universal education to employment support and care for older people.

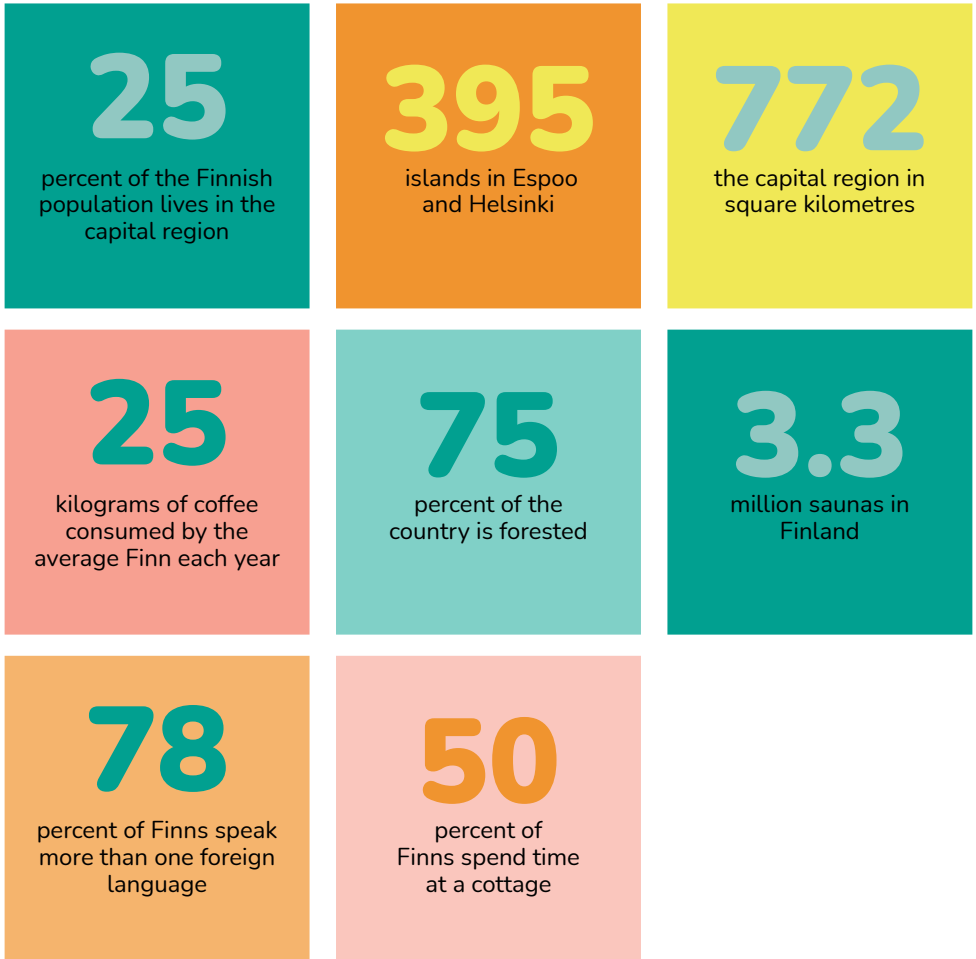
The right to access the benefits system is connected to a person's reason for residing and the length of stay in Finland. If you are a permanent resident, you are entitled to the same benefits as Finnish residents, but if your stay is classified as temporary, this may not be the case. Likewise, if you arrive from another EU country, you might be entitled to only the benefits of that country's social security system. Even if you are not eligible for benefits, you might still be entitled to medical treatment and reimbursements. It is always best to check your eligibility with the relevant authority as soon as possible.

The bedrock of the Finnish welfare state is taxation. Taxes are used to fund the social security system and public services such as health care, schools, higher education, business, innovation, culture and leisure activities, safety and defence measures. Many of the taxes people pay are returned to Finland's residents through these different services and benefits.

Finland's work-life balance is excellent. Finland and its major cities regularly score highly in international studies of happiness levels, stability, social justice, equality, and environmental action. Rankings have declared Finland the second-best country in the world for the well-being of mothers and children, the second-most-just country for children, and the third safest place to spend one's childhood. Finland has also been named the best country in Europe for lifelong learning, with the second-most-skilled workforce. Finland ranks fourth in a global comparison of gender equality, first for business, and third for innovation. All of this and more is reflected in the everyday life and services of the capital region.

Work-life balance means different things to different people. For some, it means having ample time for leisure activities and spending time in nature, while for others, it means a family-friendly working environment that puts reasonable expectations on its workers. The cities of the capital region aim to support residents and visitors with the best services available and a wide range of opportunities for work, play and study.

### Facts and figures



## Languages

Finnish has been said to be one of the most difficult languages in the world to learn. As a Finno-Ugric language, Finnish is not like many other languages and may be more challenging to learn for speakers of Indo-European languages. However, you should make an effort to learn Finnish because it will help you understand local habits and make your experience in Finland more enjoyable.

Close to five million people speak Finnish as a mother tongue and half a million more speak it as a second language. Spoken Finnish is quite different from the written language, as words are often shortened or changed. Find classes near you on the [Finnish Courses](#) website.

Finland is officially a bilingual country. Swedish is the mother tongue of almost 300,000 people in Finland. They are referred to as Swedish-speaking Finns, *finlandssvenskar* (in Swedish), or *suomenruotsalaiset* (in Finnish). Swedish is relatively easy to pick up for those who speak English well because English and Swedish share common language roots.

If a municipality in Finland has a minority of at least 8% or 3,000 speakers of either Finnish or Swedish, it is considered bilingual. This means official signs will be in both languages, with the majority language shown first (city name and street names).

### Links

[City of Helsinki](#)

[City of Espoo](#)

[City of Vantaa](#)

[City of Kauniainen](#)

[Finnish Meteorological Institute](#)

[Learning Finnish](#)

[Learning Swedish](#)

# I) MOVING

There are many things to do and consider when moving to a new country. The process includes many interconnected points and taking care of everything in the right order is important. It will ensure that you have met the legal requirements concerning coming to, residing, and working or studying in Finland.

**You will be required to interact with the following authorities in association with your move:**

- The Finnish Immigration Service (*Maahanmuuttovirasto*) or Migri
- Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland
- The Digital and Population Data Services Agency (*Digi- ja väestötietovirasto*) or DVV
- The Social Insurance Institution of Finland (*Kansaneläkelaitos*) or Kela
- The Finnish Tax Administration (*Verohallinto*) or Vero.

Fortunately, newcomers to the capital region can find all of these authorities under one roof at International House Helsinki (IHH). In many cases, you can take care of all the things you need to do with one visit (with the exception of non-EU immigration issues).

The most important tasks to take care of in association with your relocation to Finland are **applying to the immigration authorities, preparing your documentation, and registering your right of residence**. The other steps are much easier to complete once these three matters are in order.

## Applying to the immigration authorities

**Why?** You must enter the country legally by submitting the proper applications and documents to the Finnish immigration authorities.

**What?** Depending on your nationality and length of stay in Finland, you need to apply for either a visa, a residence permit, or EU registration. Applicants should apply for a visa or residence permit from their home country.

Keep in mind that the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) is the only official



source of information on immigration to Finland, not friends or family or someone who has done it before. Every case is different and only Migri can provide answers about specific cases.

**EU citizen:** If you are an EU/EEA citizen and your stay in Finland exceeds 90 days, you must apply in person for EU registration at Migri.

**Non-EU citizen:** If you are a non-EU citizen and plan to visit Finland for **fewer than 90 days**, you may need to apply for a visa. See the [Ministry for Foreign Affairs' visa requirements](#) for more information.

All non-EU citizens planning to work or stay in Finland for **more than 90 days** must apply for a [residence permit](#) from Migri. Normally residence permits are applied for **before** entering the country. In those cases applicants must visit a Finnish mission abroad (embassy or consulate) in person within three months of submitting their application to confirm their identity and present their documentation. This also applies to accompanying family members. Please check the process and requirements from the [Migri](#) website.

**Nordic citizen:** If you are a Nordic citizen and your stay in Finland exceeds six months, you must register in person at the Digital and Population Data Services Agency (DVV) within one month of your arrival.

## How?

- Check the [Migri](#) website to confirm that you meet the requirements.
- Fill in the appropriate application online on the [Enter Finland](#) website, or follow the instructions provided by the Finnish mission.
- Pay the application fee when submitting the application.
- If you applied for a residence permit and are abroad, book an appointment and visit a Finnish mission (embassy or consulate) within three months of submitting your application. If you are already in Finland, [book an appointment online](#) for a visit at a service point of the Finnish Immigration Service.
- If you are abroad, wait for the decision before entering Finland.



# Preparing your documentation

## Why?

Making sure your documentation is in order will help you take care of official immigration matters, register your right of residence, arrange your tax matters, rent an apartment, and much more.

## What?

These are the official documents you will need:

- original birth and marriage certificates and similar certificates
- translations of the above if they are not in Finnish, Swedish, or English
- legalised/notarised copies of the above, if not issued in Finland or certified by a Finnish diplomatic mission.

See the [DVV](#) website and the checklist below for a list of the necessary documents. It is advisable to get a health check before coming to Finland, especially if you come from areas with infectious diseases. It is also recommended that each person has the basic set of vaccinations against tetanus, diphtheria, MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella), and polio, as well as hepatitis A and B.

## How?

- Contact the official who issued your certificates and ask for legalised/notarized copies.
- Contact an authorised/certified translator who can translate the documents into Finnish, Swedish, or English.
- If the translations are done by an authorized translator in Finland, the translation does not need to be certified/notarized.
- Contact your doctor to get a health check if you come from an area with infectious diseases and schedule any recommended vaccinations.



## Registering your right of residence

### Why?

Once you arrive in Finland, you must register at Finland's Digital and Population Data Services Agency (DVV). Registering your right of residence gives you access to local services such as daycares, schools, healthcare services as well as local public transport at a lower cost. Once you have registered your right of residence, you will also be able to open a bank account and apply for social security coverage.

### What?

In addition to receiving a residence permit or EU registration, all newcomers (children too) must register in person at the DVV once they have arrived in the country. Nordic citizens do not require a residence permit or EU registration, but they too must register their move to Finland at the DVV within one month of arrival.



### **To register your right of residence at the DVV, you will need to show:**

- proof of legal entry (for example, your EU registration certificate or residence permit)
- original versions of the required documents
- translations of the above if they are not in Finnish, Swedish, or English
- legalised/notarized versions of the above, if not issued in Finland, and a
- work contract or another document that verifies your length of stay in Finland.

### **How?**

- Visit the DVV service point at International House Helsinki.
- Present the required documents during your visit.
- Fill in the application and leave it with an official for processing.

The personnel at International House Helsinki also provide information on taxation, social security, pensions, pension insurance, employment city services and other aspects of Finnish life. For more information, see the [International House Helsinki](#) website.

## **Additional necessities**

### **Personal identity code**

Your personal identity code (*henkilötunnus*) is probably the most important piece of information that you will receive in Finland. You will get this ID number (an 11-character code that contains your date of birth and other identifiers) from DVV if you have not received it earlier i.e. when you have applied for a residence permit or registration as an EU citizen. You can also get it from the tax authorities at Vero in association with applying for a tax card. However, you are not automatically registered as a resident of a certain locality when you receive a personal identity code without visiting a DVV service point.

### **Taxation**

#### **Why?**

Everyone working in Finland must pay taxes on their income. Finland has a progressive tax system, so the higher your predicted income, the higher your tax percentage. The tax rate of the municipality you live in also affects your income tax level.

#### **What?**

Tax cards are official documents issued by Finnish Tax Administration (*Verohallinto*, or Vero for short) that state your income tax rate. A 'tax card' (*verokortti*) is actually a piece of paper from the tax authorities.

You need a personal identity code to get a tax card in Finland. The Finnish tax year is the calendar year. When applying for a tax card you need to give an estimate of how much you will earn in that calendar year (January to December) so that the tax authorities can assign you a tax percentage.

## How?

You can apply for a tax card or an individual tax number at the Finnish Tax Administration service point at International House Helsinki. They also provide information about taxation in Finland.

**To get a tax card or tax number, you will need to show:**

- a passport or a valid photo ID
- an employment contract.

Make sure your employers can access your tax card, so the proper amount of income tax can be withheld from your salary or wages. You can access a PDF file of your tax card online if you already have a form of strong identification.

Vero sends out pre-completed tax returns each year in the spring to all taxpayers. This pre-completed form calculates your earnings and tax withheld for the calendar year (January to December). It is your responsibility to check the return and enter any deductions, corrections, or extra income. If you have any income from abroad, you should include also that information in the form. If you make any changes, you must send the return back to Vero before the deadline written on the first page. If you declare tax-deductible purchases for the year, you must hold on to your receipts in case the tax authorities ask to see them. If the form is correct, you don't have to do anything.

Vero's website has extensive, easy-to-understand information in English, including guidance on international taxation. A phone service in English is also available. Contact Vero or International House Helsinki with your tax-related questions.

## Social security coverage and Kela card

### Why?

In Finland, the social security system aims to safeguard sufficient economic security in all life situations. The Social Insurance Institution, *Kansaneläkelaitos* or Kela in Finnish, administers social security benefits on a national level.

When you are working in Finland or move to Finland on a permanent basis, you may be entitled to social security coverage. Kela will make a decision on whether you are entitled to coverage. You may also receive benefits from Kela. The Kela card signifies that you are eligible for social security services in Finland. You will be asked to show it in connection with visits to local health stations and dental clinics. In addition, showing a Kela card at a pharmacy will qualify you for

significant discounts on the cost of medicines, as these costs are also state-subsidised. Receiving a Kela card will also make you eligible for several different housing and family benefits. Each of these benefits must be applied for separately, and Kela decides them on a case-by-case basis.

### How?

To confirm your enrolment in the Finnish social security system, visit the Kela service point at International House Helsinki. You can also get information on social security and benefits as well as file and drop off applications there.

**If you are a foreign worker, bring along the following documents:**

- a passport or valid photo ID
- an employment contract.

In other situations, contact Kela for further guidance or check the instructions online for [applying a Kela card](#).

## Pension system

As a resident of Finland, you will also earn a pension for any paid work and entrepreneurial activities that you do here. It is also good to note that pension contributions accrued into the Finnish system stay in the Finnish system, even if the person moves abroad. You can start collecting the pension you have accrued in Finland when you reach retirement age, and this pension can be paid to you anywhere in the world. If you are self-employed, you must take care of your obligatory pension insurance yourself. You can learn more from the [Finnish Centre for Pensions \(Eläketurvakeskus\)](#).

### REMEMBER!

Personnel at [International House Helsinki](#) can answer any of your questions about taxes, pension and social security in Finland. They can even help you to get your tax card and apply for social security coverage on the spot.



## Foreigner's identity card

The Finnish police can issue identity cards to foreign citizens who reside in Finland permanently. The card is not required for any official matters, but it can be handy if you don't want to always have to use your passport to prove your identity. Driving licenses are no longer accepted as valid proof of identity in Finland. You can apply for an identity card at a police station or through the [police's online services](#). Foreigner's identity cards cannot be used as travel documents.

## Bank account

The largest banks in Finland offer services in English. Online banking is by far the most common form of banking in Finland.

Opening a bank account will require you to pay an in-person appointment to the bank of your choice. You will be asked to present documentation, but the requirements vary among the banks, so it is best to contact them in advance and ask for a list of the documentation that you will need.

### When you open the account, ask for:

- bank statements in English (or Finnish or Swedish, if you wish)
- online banking codes to access your account remotely
- instructions for how to use your bank card.

Banks in Finland are usually open Monday–Friday from 9.00 to 16.00, but office hours may vary. They are closed on Saturdays, Sundays, and public holidays. In general, banks encourage customers to use their online banking services or call them on the telephone. You need to make an appointment for a face-to-face meeting.

Note that many banks in Finland no longer deal with cash. If you want to deposit cash, make sure to check first with your bank if it is possible.



Cash points/ATMs (*pankkiautomaatti*, brand names Otto or Nosto) are located throughout the capital region in many convenient locations. They are open 24/7. Only TalletusOtto ATMs accept cash deposits of coins and banknotes. Search for the machines nearest you online.

All major credit cards are accepted in Finland.

## Mobile phone subscription

Compared to many other countries, Finnish mobile phone use is inexpensive and network coverage is reliable. You can choose between two options: a subscription with a telecom company or a prepaid card available at R-Kiosks. You may need to start out with a prepaid SIM card when you first arrive, but once you have registered and received your personal identity code, you can arrange a subscription.

If you don't have a credit history in Finland, you may be asked to make an advance payment on your mobile or broadband subscription. Many mobile phone plans have unlimited data usage (*rajaton*). Many telecoms also offer a discount on a fixed broadband subscription if you have a mobile phone subscription with them. Check that your broadband is not included in your rental payment before purchasing a broadband service. Please contact your telecom of choice for more information.

The country code for Finland when calling from abroad is +358.

## Other possible relocation expenses

- hotel or Airbnb costs upon arrival
- security deposit on your rental property (normally one or two months' rent)
- home insurance
- furnishings
- winter clothes

## Document checklist

- passport
- residence permit
- birth certificates of all family members
- immunization records of all family members
- list of prescription medicines used regularly
- health insurance
- insurance documents
- driving licence & international driving permits
- pet vaccination records
- adoption papers
- medical records
- school records
- marriage certificate
- divorce papers
- child custody papers
- property deeds in your home country
- power of attorney
- living will

## Links

[Finnish Immigration Agency \(Migri\)](#)

[International House Helsinki \(IHH\)](#)

[Social Insurance Institution of Finland \(Kela\)](#)

[Digital and Population Data Services Agency \(DVV\)](#)

[Finnish Tax Administration \(Vero\)](#)

[Finnish Centre for Pensions](#)

[Finnish identity card](#)

[Finnish embassies and missions abroad](#)





# III) LIVING

## Housing

As you start a life outside your home country, the culture around you changes, daily routines often change, and the new environment raises several questions. Below you find answers to some of the everyday questions you might have in association with your relocation to Finland.

### Cost of living

From the perspective of a resident, the capital region operates as a single area. The cost of housing may differ between the three cities, but other costs are the same.

Shops in Finland have a good selection of food, but the northern location influences pricing. Food, goods, and services are about 20% more expensive than the EU average in Finland, while alcohol is roughly 40% higher in price. The good news is that your mobile phone and broadband costs will likely be below the EU average.

See Statistics Finland's [Consumer Price Index](#) for more specific information.

### The real estate market

Much like in the rest of the world, the popularity of the capital region is reflected in housing prices. Housing costs in the metropolitan area can account for anywhere from 25-40% of your net income. The table below shows the range of monthly rental costs in each city in April 2021.

	Espoo	Helsinki	Vantaa
1 bedroom apartment	€800 - 900	€700 - 1,100	€700 - 800
2 bedroom apartment	€1,300 - 1,500	€1,200 - 1,500	€1,100 - 1,800
3 bedroom house	€1,500 - 2,000	€2,000 - 3,000	€1,500 - 2,000

The rental market in the capital region is quite competitive. Small studios or one-bedroom apartments in particular are very popular. Half of the population of Helsinki lives in one-person households. Rental prices are therefore rarely negotiable, unless the property is very expensive. On top of your rent, you may have the following housing-related monthly expenses: €15-25 for water, €15-30 if broadband is included in the rental payment, and €30-200 for electricity (some homes are heated with electricity).

## Neighbourhoods in the capital region

Before you start looking for a place to live, it is nice to get to know the different neighbourhoods. All of the districts in the capital region are safe and well served by frequent public transportation.

### Helsinki neighbourhoods

Explore Helsinki's neighbourhoods and you will find that each of the districts has a slightly different atmosphere. **The city centre** is home to businesses, shops and restaurants, while **central and southern neighbourhoods** are populated by higher-priced apartment buildings. Helsinki's many architectural layers can be seen in the districts of Lautasaari, Ullanlinna, Eira, Kruununhaka, Katajanokka, Kaivopuisto, and Arabianranta.

The **western neighbourhoods** of Helsinki are a more laid-back version of the city centre. West of the railway tracks, you will find the districts of Töölö, Pasila, Munkkiniemi, Haaga, and Pitäjänmäki. Many of these neighbourhoods have great seaside access. The western parts of the city contain many upscale and more affordable residential areas and open green spaces.

Helsinki's **eastern neighbourhoods** are an eclectic mix of apartment buildings and commercial spaces. They are also some of the most culturally diverse areas of the city. Some older, more centrally located districts such as Kallio and Sörnainen are very trendy. This area also includes the old wooden neighbourhoods of Vallila and Käpylä, as well as the districts of Kulosaari, Herttoniemi, Laajasalo, and Vuosaari farther to the east.

In general, the cost of accommodation grows higher as you grow closer to the Helsinki city centre, with lower-priced flats available in the eastern and northern parts of the city. Each area is well served by public transport.

**TIP:** Helsinki's 'Housing Advice for Newcomers' is a great source of even more information

## Espoo neighbourhoods

Unlike Helsinki, Espoo does not have one specific city centre. The city actually centres around five separate hub districts by the names of Leppävaara, Matinkylä, Tapiola, Espoon keskus, and Espoonlahti. Espoo is the second largest Finnish city in terms of population, and the largest city in the capital region in terms of geographic size. Just like with Helsinki, the closer you are to the sea, the more expensive the housing.

Many locals call **western Espoo** 'Old Espoo'. It is the largest district in Espoo and is home to Espoon keskus, one of the five hubs mentioned earlier. This district functions as an important administrative centre.

Nature dominates **northern Espoo**. This is where Nuksio National Park is located and where many people go to hike and relax. Housing in northern Espoo mostly consists of detached houses in peaceful districts such as Järvenperä, Niipperi, and Kalajärvi. The other parts of northern Espoo mainly comprise of small villages without a proper central area. None of the five hubs listed earlier is located in northern Espoo.

**Southern Espoo** is the most densely populated part of Espoo. West of Helsinki, along the Länsiväylä highway and underground metro line, you come to the area of Otaniemi, where Aalto University and many big Finnish companies have their headquarters. Next comes Tapiola, which was developed in the 1960s and displays Finnish architectural heritage from that era. Adjacent to Tapiola is Westend, one of Finland's most expensive residential areas with many large houses with sea views. Continuing west, Haukilahti has a great marina and plenty of shoreline. Then you get to the current final destination of the metro line: Matinkylä, with its Iso Omena shopping centre.

## Vantaa neighbourhoods

Vantaa is the fourth largest city in Finland, with over 237,000 inhabitants. There are seven larger districts spread throughout its 240 square kilometres. Centrally located in Vantaa is the Helsinki-Vantaa International Airport. The important administrative centres of Vantaa are the district of Tikkurila in the east and Myyrmäki in the west. The fastest growing areas are Aviapolis and Kivistö, with older neighbourhoods such as Martinlaakso, Korso, and Koivukylä close behind.

Vantaa is built on good connections with both rail and road networks shaping the city's growth. Vantaa has 14 train stations and most of Vantaa's residents

live within one kilometre of these stations. A tram service is also being planned for the near future. This urbanity is balanced by a closeness to nature as almost every resident lives less than 300 metres from the nearest outdoor and recreational areas. Abundant nature is present everywhere, with the outdoor areas of Kuusijärvi and Petikko being popular places to visit.

Vantaa has Finland's largest shopping and entertainment centres as well as a diverse selection of culture and events. Vantaa is also the location of the Finnish Science Centre Heureka and the Finnish Aviation Museum.

## **Renting an apartment or house**

The vast majority of people in Finland's larger cities live in apartment buildings (*kerrostalo*). In Helsinki, this is true for 85% of the population. Other less-common housing options are row/terraced houses (*rivitalo*), semi-detached houses (*paritalo*), and detached/single-family homes (*omakotitalo*).

Two-thirds of Finns own the apartment or house that they live in, while the remaining third pays a monthly rental payment. Most newcomers to the capital region start out by renting. If you are interested in purchasing a property, see the section called Buying a home on the [welcome.helsinki](http://welcome.helsinki.fi) website. The rest of this information will focus on renting.

The floor plan of houses and apartments in Finland is calculated in square metres. If a property for sale is listed with two rooms, it means that it has one bedroom and one living room, in addition to a kitchen and bathroom. Most housing in Finland comes unfurnished. All of the necessary kitchen fixtures (not necessarily dishwashers) are typically included, but you will be expected to supply your own light fixtures and curtains. Some properties have their own washing machines/dryers, while others have access to a shared laundry room.

Some furnished apartments and houses are available in the metropolitan area for a higher price. Sometimes this is a good option, especially if you are staying in Finland for less than a year or wish to rent for a shorter period at first. Furnished apartments come in varying quality, so always check the property in person first.

### **Look for an available property online**

There are two main websites for advertising rental housing in Finland:

- Vuokraovi (in limited English)
- Oikotie (in Finnish only).



These services also allow you to search for furnished housing. Each listing contains basic information on the rental property. If the listing is in Finnish, the list of common housing ad terms on the [welcome.helsinki](https://www.welcome.helsinki.fi) website might prove helpful.

The ad may also announce a viewing date (*esittely*). If so, you can show up at the property at the time advertised to check out the property. If the listing doesn't include a viewing, you can contact the person or company in the ad and ask for a viewing time. You may be told that they only accept applications for the property online, and in this case, you will only be able to view the apartment if it is offered to you.

Do not rent or buy a home without viewing the property first. If you cannot visit the property yourself, you should get someone you trust locally to check it out. It's good to do some sort of background check in advance on the person or company you are renting or buying from as well.

### **View the property before entering into a rental agreement**

1. Once the viewing is booked, be at the property on time.
2. Check the property thoroughly for defects or other problems.
3. Ask the person who arranged the viewing about possible renovations or disruptions, average electricity and water consumption, building rules, and any other questions you may have
4. Tell the person who arranged the viewing immediately if you are interested in the property. Most homes sell very quickly, due to the competitive real estate market.

## Signing a rental agreement

Once you have found a suitable property, you will enter into a rental agreement with the landlord or housing company. Sometimes arrangements can be made to write up the agreement in English. Do not sign an agreement you do not understand. If the rental agreement is in Finnish or Swedish, have someone translate it for you before you sign it.

Property owners typically ask tenants in the capital city area to commit to a rental agreement for at least one year at first, so make sure you are happy with your new home before you sign the agreement.

Property rentals are governed by Finland's [Act on Residential Leases](#). The law regulates matters such as lease duration, rental payments and security deposits, as well as rules about subletting and the rights and responsibilities of property owners and tenants.

### **A rental agreement should include at least the following information:**

- contact information of the landlord and tenant
- condition of the property
- length of the rental agreement
- monthly rental payment amount
- due date and mode of monthly rental payments
- possible future adjustments to the rental payment
- other applicable charges (e.g. water or sauna fees)
- security deposit amount.

## Paying a security deposit

Landlords in Finland require a security deposit before they hand over the keys. The deposit is usually one or two months' rent (three-month maximum by law). This is sent via bank transfer (not cash) to a special bank account (*vuokravakuustili*) that is offered by all banks. The security deposit is returned to you at the end of the lease contract, if the property is in the same or better condition than at the beginning of the lease period and/or there are no rent or payments owed.

## Paying rent

Pay your rent monthly to a specified bank account, along with the other fees (like water) that may be listed in the rental agreement. Rent is usually due at the beginning of the month.

**GOOD TO KNOW!** You may not pay your rental payments in cash. Checks are not used in Finland.

Many rental properties require tenants to commit to a 12-month rental contract at first. Annual rent increases may be stated in the agreement and can be increased under the law in conjunction with the changes in the consumer price index. If you have questions regarding your lease, rent, or other issues related to renting a property, you can contact the Finnish Tenants association (*Vuokralaiset ry*).

## Tasks associated with your move

After you sign the rental agreement, you'll need to complete the following steps in association with moving in:

### 1. Buy home insurance

Most rental agreements in Finland require tenants to take out home insurance on their belongings. Contact a home insurance company (*kotivakuutus*) for more information.

### 2. Buy utilities

#### Electricity

Electricity contracts are two-fold. First, there is the electricity distribution company, which you cannot shop around for. In Espoo, this company is called Caruna Espoo. In Helsinki electricity distribution is done by Helen Electricity Network, and in Vantaa, it is Oomi Energia. Then the second part is the company that you buy electricity from. Some of the bigger electricity companies take care of the contract with the distributor so it is included in the contract you make with them. If you don't choose one of those companies, you will need to make two contracts. Electricity is relatively cheap in Finland and the cost to consumers is based on consumption. You can shop around for a provider online with the keyword *sähkösojimus*, which means 'electricity contract'.

## **Internet and Cable TV**

If broadband and cable services are not included in your rent, there are several internet and cable TV providers in Finland that can sell you a subscription. You may be required to pay a deposit. Search for broadband and cable TV providers online. Subscribing to streaming services is often a completely independent process.

## **Natural gas**

Some properties use natural gas for heating or cooking. Search online for suppliers in the capital region. If you buy a new gas-powered appliance, it is advisable to ask a professional to install it and check the connection.

### **3. Pick up your keys & conduct a walk-through**

Agree with your landlord on when and how you will pick up the keys to the property. This is normally done when the lease is signed. You can also meet to do this at the property.

You should receive more than one set of keys. In most cases, only the landlord can copy the key, so if you need another, let them know. Losing a key can be very costly, so keep good track of them.

It is also advisable to agree on a walk-through day to go through the property with the landlord. If you agree to pick up your keys at the property, you can arrange to do the walk-through at this time. The purpose of the walk-through is to make sure that the tenant and the owner of the property agree on the condition of the property when the rental agreement starts. Take pictures of any defects, marks or issues of concern and check the fire alarms.

### **4. Follow the house rules**

Finland is a rule-abiding nation and there are therefore many rules and obligations associated with shared housing.

## **Smoking in your apartment**

It is common in Finland for housing companies to ban smoking indoors. Some properties also ban smoking on the balcony. Check your rental agreement, as the rules vary from one housing arrangement to another. If you do not follow the smoking bans, you may be held responsible for damages.



## Maintenance

Every apartment building in Finland has a property manager (*isännöitsijä*) and/or a designated property maintenance company (*huoltoyhtiö*). Their contact information is posted near the front door. Contact them to request repairs or report other issues (heating, plumbing, insects, etc.). Make sure you know how to make a notification (usually by email or an online form). The property maintenance company is also responsible for the general upkeep of the property, such as yard work and cleaning.

## Sorting your waste

Residents of Finland tend to take recycling very seriously. Everyone is expected to sort their waste to the best of their ability. This is quite easy in urban areas, as each shared housing arrangement has its own rubbish facility with separate waste bins for paper, cardboard, mixed waste, metal, glass, plastic, and bio-waste. Misuse of recycling bins can result in building fines.

If your housing arrangement does not have such waste bins, you can use one of the capital region's convenient recycling points. Find the one nearest you on the [Helsinki Regional Environmental Services](#) website. This same website also provides useful information on how to sort your waste.

Recycling drinking bottles and cans is also very easy. Every time you buy a beverage in a bottle or can, you pay a small deposit. When you return the empties at the appropriate machine at a shop, this money will be returned to you. You can use the refund against your new purchases or receive it in cash.

## Quiet hours

Housing rules and regulations determine the time when everyone must keep quiet in the building (usually between 22.00 and 7.00). In an apartment building, you can find the housing rules and regulations on the wall at the entrance. During quiet hours, it is forbidden to make loud noises, e.g. to play an instrument or listen to loud music. Normal living noises are allowed.

## Parking

Parking is only allowed in designated parking spaces. Parking on the street must comply with parking signage in that location. Residents of a building might be able to reserve a parking space nearby by contacting the property maintenance company or property manager.

Guest parking is permitted only in designated guest parking spaces (*vieras*). Reserved parking spaces are often numbered and are sometimes equipped with an electric plug for heating your vehicle's engine during the winter. These plugs are not to be used for recharging electric cars. Ask your landlord or the property maintenance company if you have access to charging stations for electric cars.

## **Fire alarm**

The law requires that every household be equipped with fire alarms, one for every 60 square metres of living space. Residents are responsible for replacing the batteries and regularly checking that they are operational.

## **5. Learn how to use the shared areas**

Many apartment buildings in Finland have shared facilities for the residents to use at their convenience. They often include a laundry room and sauna.

### **Laundry**

Shared laundry rooms are usually found in the basement of the building. Residents book a time to use the machines, sometimes at an additional cost. Check the building rules in the rental agreement.

### **Sauna**

Residents can also book a regular time (usually one hour) for private use of the building's sauna facilities. Sometimes this comes at an additional cost, paid monthly with the rent. Sometimes the housing community provides a weekly group turn separately for women and men (*lenkkisauna* or *miesten/naisten saunavuoro*) free of charge.

### **Bike storage**

Outdoor or indoor bike storage facilities are also available to the building's residents. Bikes, prams, strollers and the like may not be stored in the corridors.

## **Terminating a rental contract**

If you have signed a fixed-term rental contract, it cannot be terminated prematurely without a penalty. If you have an open-ended contract (no fixed end date), you can usually terminate the rental agreement with one full month's notice (or as stated in the agreement).

If the landlord wishes to terminate the rental agreement, they must give you six months' notice if you have been a tenant for at least a year, or three months' notice if you have lived in the property for less than one year. The tenant is always responsible for any damage whether on purpose, by accident, or done by a guest. You must return the keys at the end of your tenancy period.

## Links

[Finnish Tenants](#)

[Finnish Competition and Consumer Authority](#)

## Education

Finland's education system is among the most advanced in the world. Children start first grade in the year they turn seven. Before this, they attend early childhood education, which often includes several years of daycare and one year of pre-primary education at the age of six. Basic education (grades 1-9) lasts for nine years.

The capital region has many high-quality public and private daycares and schools that offer education in Finnish and Swedish, with some also offering full or partial instruction in English, Russian, French, German, Chinese, Estonian, and Sámi. A few of the private options require tuition fees. Check your city's website (list at the end of the section) for an explanation of what is available.

### Early childhood education

Early childhood education is for children under school age. In Finland, this means children under the age of seven. Public daycare centres provide early childhood education that is arranged by the municipalities. Daycares providing early childhood education in languages other than Finnish or Swedish in the capital region are private. Both public and private daycares are subsidised by the state, but monthly fees are higher at private facilities.

Families in Finland tend to look after their child at home for at least nine months, as this is the length of statutory parental leave. Many families continue to look after their child at home even after this age, as the state grants one parent or guardian a home care allowance for a longer period. Compulsory education doesn't begin until pre-primary education, in the year the child turns six.



## Public daycares in Finnish and Swedish

Daycare services in Finland are well organized, conveniently located and inexpensive. The cost is progressive, dependent on your circumstances (see below). All children under the age of seven are entitled to early childhood education independent of their family circumstances. All early childhood education programmes follow specific pedagogical goals, but the emphasis is on socialisation and play.

Once you have registered your right of residence in your municipality, you can apply for a place in a public daycare centre for your child. The earliest a child can begin attending a daycare is when they are approximately nine months old.

**There are three kinds of daycares available, all of which are regulated by the municipality:**

- daycare centre (*päiväkoti*) – one facility with larger groups of children
- group family daycare (*ryhmäpäiväkoti*) – one facility with smaller groups, and
- family daycare (*perhepäivähoito*) – one care provider looking after a few children in a home.

You must apply for a municipal daycare place at least four months before you want your child to start attending. While the city is responsible for providing a daycare place to everyone who needs it; they are not always able to arrange placement in a location most convenient for you. If you need daycare services on short notice, your child may be placed at a daycare centre that is farther away from your home or workplace.

## Daycare fees

Monthly daycare fees (*varhaiskasvatusmaksu*) in the metropolitan area are determined by your family's income and size. Discounts are extended to siblings. The fee is also determined by how many hours a week your child attends. Low-income families may not have to pay anything. The maximum monthly payment for public daycare services in 2021 is €288.

Public daycare fees are set by the municipality in question. The website of the Social Insurance Institution Kela has more information on the [private daycare allowance](#), a benefit allocated to help families with the extra cost of private daycare.

## **Public and private daycares in other languages**

A few public daycare centres in the capital region offer language-enriched programmes. Check if there is a suitable option for you on the city websites listed at the end of the section.

Private daycares are supervised by the municipality in the same way as public daycares. Many of the private daycares in the capital region are language-based. If you want to choose this option for your child, you may want to investigate where these specific centres are located and make this a consideration when looking for a place to live.

The costs of private daycare vary. If Kela grants you the private daycare allowance mentioned above, a private option may not necessarily cost much more than a public option.

### **For further information:**

[Helsinki general daycare information](#)

[Helsinki daycare and education guidance for international families](#)

[Helsinki private language-oriented daycares](#)

[Espoo general daycare guidance](#)

[Vantaa general daycare guidance](#)

## **Round-the-clock and evening daycare**

Capital region cities support residents who do shift work or work irregular hours by providing evening daycare centres and round-the-clock daycare centres. Contact your municipality's early childhood education services directly to learn more.

[Helsinki round-the-clock and evening daycare centres](#)

## Daycare holidays

As a rule, daycare centres in the capital region are closed on national holidays, but stay open during school breaks in February and October. In the summer, it is not unusual for daycare centres to shut down for the whole month of July. If your child attends a municipal daycare centre, one dedicated daycare centre in the extended area is usually kept open for families without a July holiday.

## Playgrounds and clubs

Each city also offers a network of open daycare centres (*avoimet päiväkodit*), public parks with playground activities (*asukaspuisto/leikkipuisto*), and clubs (*kerho*). All three services are sometimes provided in the same location, for example, some public playgrounds also function as open daycare centres and host club activities. They each have their own schedule and services, so it is good to contact your local playground directly for more information.

Open daycare centres provide preschool children with indoor and outdoor guided and/or self-directed activities in groups. Children must attend these activities together with a parent or other adult. There is no need to pre-register as all children are welcome to attend.

Clubs offer an alternative to full-time or part-time early childhood education for families with a stay-home parent or guardian. Children between the ages of two and five who are not enrolled in daycare can attend these clubs without their parent or guardian and participate in guided activities with other preschool children. Club activities are organised two or three times a week for a few hours at a time. The main goal of the clubs is to teach children important social skills. In addition to the city, local parishes and other groups may also offer clubs in your area, so ask around for more information if you are interested in this option.

It is sometimes possible to rent an indoor space at your local playground for a children's birthday party or event. Check online for details or talk to the playground staff.

### **For further information:**

[Helsinki public playgrounds and clubs](#)

[Espoo public playgrounds and clubs](#)

[Vantaa public playgrounds and open daycare centres](#)

## Pre-primary education

Finland provides a free half-day of pre-primary education (*esikoulu* or more familiarly, *eskari* in Finnish) to all children turning six in that year. Pre-primary education has been made compulsory, as it prepares children to begin comprehensive school at age seven. Some municipalities are currently participating in a two-year trial to extend pre-primary education to five-year-old children as well. Pre-primary education takes place in one of three places: the daycare centre that your child may already be attending, another local daycare centre, or a local primary school.

In Helsinki, the city proactively contacts families to offer a placement for their child that they can accept or reject with a text message. In Espoo and Vantaa, families must submit an application listing their top three requests sometime in January or February. City officials then make a placement decision.

If your child needs care for the rest of the afternoon, after four hours of *eskari* are finished for the day, this care is subject to a fee. In public daycare centres, the fees are only for the afternoon hours needed, but in private daycare, this may not be the case. Pre-primary education in the capital region adheres to the same holiday schedule as the area's comprehensive schools.

### For further information:

[Helsinki pre-primary education](#)

[Helsinki public language-based pre-primary schools](#)

[Espoo pre-primary education](#)

[Vantaa pre-primary education](#)

## Comprehensive school (grades 1-9)

### Primary schools (grades 1-6) and lower secondary schools (grades 7-9)

All children who are permanent residents of Finland are required to attend basic education. Comprehensive school consists of six years in primary school (*alakoulu*) followed by three years in lower secondary school (*yläkoulu*).

It is the responsibility of a child's parents or guardians to register the child for school. If your child will be attending a public school teaching in Finnish or Swedish, your city will assign your child to a local public school (*lähikoulu*) automatically. If you choose to enrol your child in an international, private or otherwise specialised school, you will need to check the school's website for enrolment instructions.

#### **For further information:**

[Helsinki comprehensive education enrolment](#)

[Helsinki comprehensive education in other languages](#)

[Espoo comprehensive education](#)

[Espoo International School](#)

[Vantaa comprehensive education](#)

[Vantaa comprehensive education in English](#)

## **Upper secondary education (grades 10-12)**

The compulsory school age was recently raised to 18 in Finland, which means that all young people between the ages of 16 and 18 must attend what is known as upper secondary education. There are two study pathways to choose from. Students decide while they are still in grade 9 if they will continue on to a general upper secondary school (*lukio*) or vocational education and training (*ammattikoulu*). General upper secondary school students take the matriculation examination at the end of their studies, which prepares them to continue in higher education. Vocational education and training students have more practically oriented training that prepares them for a professional qualification.

### **General upper secondary schools**

Some general upper secondary schools in the capital region have special emphases that focus on music, physical education, or natural sciences, for example. Competition to be accepted into these schools can be tough. Some schools in the region teach in English and others are part of the International Baccalaureate system. Check your city's website for more information.

**For further information:**

[Helsinki upper secondary schools](#)

[Espoo upper secondary schools](#)

[Vantaa upper secondary schools](#)

**Vocational education and training**

You can apply for vocational education and training in Finland after you have completed comprehensive school. Read more about the application process on the [InfoFinland](#) website.



@ Jussi Hellisten / Helsinki Marketing

## School terms and holidays

School term dates and holidays can be found on the city websites. Although school holidays can be staggered by a week or so depending on where you live in Finland, the cities in the capital region maintain the same annual holiday dates. Swedish-language schools, however, often have different term and holiday dates.

### For further information:

[Helsinki school term dates](#)

[Espoo school term dates](#)

[Vantaa school term dates](#)

## Preparatory education

Sometimes when children start education in Finland, especially if they will be entering local institutions, they need to attend preparatory education. If you plan to settle in Finland, preparatory education and support to learn Finnish is offered at all levels of pre-primary, primary and secondary education.

### For further information:

[Helsinki preparatory pre-primary education](#)

[Helsinki preparatory education general](#)

[Helsinki preparatory education for vocational school](#)

[Helsinki preparatory education for upper secondary school](#)

[Espoo preparatory pre-primary education](#)

[Espoo preparatory upper secondary school](#)

[Vantaa preparatory education general](#)



## Getting around

### Public transportation

The capital region's public transport system is extremely efficient and well organised. In the Helsinki area, this consists of bus, tram, an underground metro system, commuter railway routes, city bikes and ferry services. The region's public transport company Helsinki Region Transport (HSL) operates in the cities of Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa, Kauniainen, Kerava, Kirkkonummi, Sipoo, Siuntio, and Tuusula. The region is divided into four travel zones, A, B, C, and D, spreading out from the centre of Helsinki.

The easiest way to use HSL transport is to use the free HSL app. After you have set up your account, you can use the app to buy single-use tickets, day tickets that are good for 1-13 days, or a season ticket. A season ticket is the least expensive choice if you use public transport regularly. If you have a season ticket for a certain zone, you can expand its validity area by buying a single zone



extension ticket for required out-of-zone journeys. HSL also provides a handy online Journey Planner service that calculates the quickest route for you in real time. You can customize the Journey Planner in the app to provide default entries, such as your home and work address.

Alternatively, you can buy a physical travel card for a small initial fee at a HSL service point. You can top up your card with time (minimum two weeks) or monetary value. There are two types of cards: a personal card that can be used only by the named owner or a multi-user card, which can be used by family members or family visitors. Single tickets are also available from ticket machines. You can transfer from one vehicle to another within the time validity of the ticket. Find more information on the HSL website.

## Driving

Finns drive on the right and overtake on the left. Vehicles must use headlights at all times and seatbelts are mandatory for passengers in the front and back. People caught driving under the influence of intoxicants (a blood alcohol content of more than 0.05%) face hefty penalties.

Police strictly enforce all traffic laws and regularly conduct random roadside breathalyser tests. Drivers must use a hands-free device if they speak on the phone while driving. Children under 135 cm of height must use a child safety seat when travelling in a car.

Most minor traffic offenses in Finland are subject to set penalty fees, but more serious offenses are punishable by hefty fines tied to the driver's total income.

It is a good idea to learn the traffic signs and traffic rules before you drive in Finland for the first time.

## Driving licence

Most people who have permanently relocated to Finland from another country can easily exchange their driving licence from their home country for a Finnish one, although there are exceptions. Licence holders from countries that have joined the Road Traffic Convention (Geneva 1949 or Vienna 1968) may drive in Finland on their own national driving licence for one year from the date of entry into the country. It is recommended that you obtain an International Driver's License from your home country before you leave to make it easier to drive with

your own license. After six months, you are eligible for a Finnish driver's licence. To exchange your own country's driver's license for a Finnish one, go to [Ajovarma's](#) website to book an appointment. The [Ajokortti-Info](#) website explains the process in more detail. If you do not have a driving licence from your home country, you must attend a Finnish driving school.

## Driving school

If you do not already have a driving license, you must complete of a course at a Finnish driving school. The course includes theory lessons and behind-the-wheel instruction, and the cost tends to exceed €1,000. The most common type of driving licence in Finland is a Class B car licence.

## Parking

Parking is only allowed in designated areas in the capital region. Check traffic signs to see if parking fees apply. You can pay the parking fees online with one of the many [parking apps](#) in use in the Helsinki area, or you can pay at a ticket machine. Most of the ticket machines require a debit or credit card for payment; only a few take cash or coins any longer. Place the voucher you receive from the machine on your dashboard, where it is visible to ticket inspectors.

Some parking areas allow free parking for a limited time, if you use a parking disc. You can buy a plastic parking disc at your local shop. Turn the dial on the disc to show the time you arrived and place it on the dashboard.

## Electric cars

There are places set aside for charging electric cars in most shopping malls, business parks, and parking garages. Check the [Latauskartta](#) website to locate the charging posts in the capital region.

## Car rental and car sharing

Owning and operating a car in Finland can be very costly, so if you do not need a car very often, renting a car or using a car share service can be a better option.

### Make sure to ask the following questions when renting a vehicle:

- What kind of insurance is included in the rental agreement? What is the cost of additional coverage?

- What is the deductible (*omavastuu*)?
- How many kilometres are included?
- When must I return it?
- What is the number to call if I have trouble with the car?
- What do I do with the key if the office is closed when I return the car?
- If there are any restrictions on driving to another country?

## Car purchase

If you wish to buy a used vehicle such as a car or a motorcycle, check the instructions from the [Finnish Transport and Communications Agency \(Traficom\)](#) first. Always make sure that the seller is the rightful owner of the car and that the car has been [commissioned](#) i.e. approved for use in traffic. You will also need to complete the [change of ownership](#).

## Car import

The process related to importing a car depends on whether or not you move to Finland from within the EU/EEA. The [Finnish Customs](#) website has helpful instructions.

Before you start using your car in Finland, submit a [declaration](#) of use on your car to the tax authorities. If it has valid registration from a county within the EU/EEA, you can start using your car immediately. All motor vehicles in Finland must be registered. Use Traficom's online services to [register your car](#), or visit an insurance company or inspection station that offers registration services.

## Car insurance

All vehicles on the road must have [valid motor vehicle liability insurance](#). This insurance covers personal injuries and damages to another party's property, but not your car or other property. Additional insurance called *kaskovakuutus* covers damages to your car. Several [insurance companies](#) in Finland offer motor vehicle insurance. If you buy a car from a car dealership, they can also insure the vehicle for you.

## Winter tyres and winter driving

Icy roads are a part of winter in Finland and driving is hazardous without the appropriate tyres. Winter tyres (either studded or non-studded) are a legal requirement from 1 December to the end of February or when weather conditions require it. Studded tyres may only be used between 1 November to 31 March.

## Cycling

Finns love to cycle and the capital region has over 3,000 kilometres of cycling paths. Cycling is popular year-round; many regular bikers put winter tyres on their bikes when the weather begins to get icy and snowy. Traffic rules for cyclists can be found on the [Finnish Cyclists' Federation](#) website.

Wearing a helmet is recommended when cycling in Finland. Finnish law also requires that every bicycle be equipped with two functioning lights, a white headlight and a red rear light. These lights can be on the bike, helmet, or cyclist.

Helsinki Region Transport (HSL) operates a shared [city bike](#) service from April to October each year. Residents who are using the service in Helsinki and Espoo pay just €35 for the right to use over 3,500 bikes spread all over the region for 30-60 minutes at a time throughout the entire season. Residents using the service in Vantaa pay €30 to have access to over 1,000 bikes and 100 stations in Vantaa.

## Walking

In Finland, when crossing at a light, it is customary to wait until the 'green man' gives you permission to cross, even when there is no traffic. Finnish residents are aware that they need to be a good example to children in this regard. The law states that motorists must give way to pedestrians at crosswalks.

## Moving about in the winter

Finland gets very dark in the wintertime, and so pedestrians are required to use reflectors while moving near or on roads. Reflectors help drivers to see pedestrians, so they are a life-saving accessory. The streets and sidewalks also grow very slippery in the winter, so make sure your winter shoes have a good tread. Some people use ice grips over their shoes to help stay upright.

## Taxis

In Finland, it is not very common to flag down a taxi on the side of the road. It is better to order one online or by phone, as it will generally arrive at your address to pick you up very quickly. If you pre-order a taxi, you will be charged an extra fee.

Taxis in Finland are expensive. The industry was deregulated in 2018. Since this change, more and more taxi companies have started in the capital region, so check online as the industry and fee structure are continuously changing. Payment can be made with cash or a credit card. Tipping is not necessary.

## Long-distance trains and buses

Timetables are reliable in Finland and railway and coach services usually leave on time. Timetables change with the seasons as well as on public holidays and weekends.

Finland's state railway operator VR is responsible for the capital region's train network. Trains in Finland are very pleasant and enjoyable to use. The [VR](#) website has all of the information you need on routes, timetables, and tickets. Passengers without a valid ticket will be fined €80 plus the price of the ticket.

The long-distance coach network in Finland is one of the densest in Europe and the buses are modern and comfortable. The Matkahuolto network and ExpressBus are among the largest long-distance coach companies in Finland.

## Post offices

Post offices are usually open Monday–Friday from 9.00 to 18.00 or 20.00. These opening hours may vary depending on the location and the time of year (extended hours for Christmas, for example). Stamps are available at post offices, R-Kiosks, bookstores, and in sheets at grocery stores.

### Sending post

Letters without postage stamps can be sent from a post office or service point at a R-Kiosk, gas station, or grocery store. Letters with correct postage can be dropped directly in the yellow mailboxes marked Posti.

Packages must be sent from a post office or service point that offers the [Posti Parcel Locker](#) service.

## Picking up packages

When you receive a package in Finland, you will be sent a notice in the post or by text message. The notice or message will state where to pick up your package and what form of identification to bring along. Some items may require import clearance. In this case, you will be contacted by Finnish Customs (Tulli).

# Health services and medical care

## Your Kela card

A Kela card is a personal health insurance card issued by Finland's Social Insurance Institution (Kela). It is available to permanent residents of Finland who are covered under the National Health Insurance scheme. The card grants you access to low-cost public and private medical care and subsidised prices on prescription medication. You will be required to present your Kela card when you visit a healthcare centre, dental clinic, hospital or lab, and when you pick up medicine at a pharmacy.

You can apply for a Kela card online or submit an application in person at a Kela office.

There are seven main Kela offices in the cities of Espoo, Vantaa, and Helsinki. Check the Customer Service Locator to find the one nearest you. Kela also provides a customer service line in English.

## Public healthcare

Finland has a system of universal healthcare, which means that services such as medical care, oral health, maternity and childcare services, student health care and ambulances services are made available to the public at minimal cost.

You will be assigned to a local public health care centre (*terveysasema*) on the basis of your address. Your local public health care centre should be your first step for all medical care, as it can provide you almost all of the care you need, even in the case of most emergencies. If you wish to see a specialist, you must first receive a referral from a general physician at your local health care centre.

Finland's universal healthcare is largely taxpayer-supported, but there are some nominal user fees for select services. For example, the fee for overnight hospital stays is currently just short of €50 per day. Municipalities cap annual fees for public healthcare services at a certain level, so yearly costs to the consumer can stay reasonable. Check your city's website for the latest fees.

Public healthcare centres are open on weekdays 8.00–16.00. If an acute health problem arises in the evening or on a weekend that requires immediate medical care, call the Medical Helpline at 116 117 and medical professionals will tell you where to go for the care you need.

In addition, each school has a designated public health nurse and doctor, whose contact information and appointment hours are printed on bulletins distributed to pupils' homes. Provision of health care services is based on the number of pupils at each school.

### **For further information:**

[Helsinki health advice](#)

[Espoo health advice](#)

[Vantaa health advice](#)

## **Private healthcare**

Private healthcare options are growing more popular in Finland's capital region due to the shorter wait times. All companies are obligated to provide occupational healthcare to their employees and these services also usually come from the private sector. The most common services people use from the private sector are dentistry, occupational healthcare, and physiotherapy.

## **Emergencies**

In Finland, there is only one emergency number: 112. Call this number only in the event of a life-threatening emergency. In other urgent medical situations, call 116 177.

## **Pharmacies**

Medicine is highly regulated in Finland and medicinal products are only sold at pharmacies (*apteekki*). This includes over-the-counter items such as cold remedies, ibuprofen, and paracetamol. Normal pharmacy hours are 8.00–20.00. It is common for pharmacies to use a number queueing system, so look for the machine issuing the numbers after you enter the store.

**Helsinki:** Yliopiston Apteekki at street address Mannerheimintie 96 is the only pharmacy in the capital region that is open 24/7 year-round.

Yliopiston Apteekki, Mannerheimintie 5, open 07.00-00.00 on weekdays and 08.00-00.00 on weekends

**Espoo:** Jorvin Apteekki at Jorvi Hospital, open 08.00-00.00 on weekdays and 12.00-00.00 on weekends

**Vantaa:** Yliopiston Apteekki, Tammiston Kauppatie 9, open 08.00-22.00 on weekdays, 08.00-21.00 on Saturdays and 10.00-21.00 on Sundays

## Maternity and child health clinics

Families of mothers-to-be who are eligible for public healthcare services are free to use the services of Finland's maternity and child health clinics (*neuvola*). The services of the clinics are without charge to Kela cardholders.

*Neuvola's* medical professionals focus on the health of the mother and child, and give tips about family relationships and parenting. Appointments throughout the pregnancy and the child's preschool years monitor the health and well-being of the entire family. Through the clinic, you will also receive information about the many services that are available for families with children in your area. Most expectant families also receive Finland's famous baby box, with many useful items for a newborn.

### Did you know?

Started in 1937 as an incentive to tackle high infant mortality, the "baby box" is a maternity package that families receive from the Finnish state before the birth of a baby. The state benefits administrator Kela gives out about 40,000 of them each year. Each box contains about 50 items, including baby clothing, blankets, outerwear, and more.



### **For further information:**

[Support for families in Helsinki](#)

[Services for families with children in Espoo](#)

[Services for families with children in Vantaa](#)

## **Mental health services**

As with other kinds of health services, mental health services are provided by the municipality that you live in. Visit your city's website to find out the finer details of what services are available.

The work carried out by municipal social and health services focuses on the prevention of mental health disorders, early diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation. While treatment chiefly utilises outpatient and primary health services, mental health services are also organised under specialised health care services at psychiatric clinics and hospitals.

### **Links**

[InfoFinland - Family](#)

[InfoFinland - Health](#)

[Health centres in Helsinki](#)

[Health centres in Espoo](#)

[Health centres in Vantaa](#)

[MIELI Mental Health Finland - Support and help for foreigners](#)



© Olli Häkämies / Espoon kaupunki

# III) WORK & STUDY

## Working in the capital region

The capital region of Finland plays a pivotal role in the country's economy. In addition to being the gateway to Finland, it produces almost a third of the country's gross national product. The metropolitan area is the country's forerunner in terms of innovation and growth, and home to many of Finland's most successful companies and startups.

About a quarter of all jobs in Finland are located in Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa. In Helsinki, the proportion of people with a foreign background has increased rapidly among the working age population. The largest employers operate in the fields of administration and support services, ICT, and commerce. In Vantaa, main industries include trade, services, construction, manufacturing, transportation and storage.

## Work-life balance

Finnish residents tend to enjoy an excellent work-life balance. People work reasonable hours, family commitments are respected, holiday periods are generous, and the working environment is non-hierarchical and equal. Here, you can expect to see to your workload within normal working hours, experience fair and equal treatment in a nice working community, and have plenty of time left over to enjoy a rich family and social life.

Helsinki was recently named the best city among a field of forty in the 2019 Work-Life Balance Index, and the 2020 best city for families. Perhaps most famously, Finland was ranked number one in the World Happiness Report for the fourth year in a row in 2021.

## Employment contracts

All employment contracts in Finland are regulated by legislation and should be written in a language that both parties understand. However, only the Finnish and Swedish versions are legally binding. The employer and employee can agree on the conditions of an employment contract within the scope of the law. An employment contract can be oral, written, or electronic and it is either valid

indefinitely or for a fixed term. A contract is considered valid indefinitely unless there is a justified reason for a fixed term contract.

**The principal terms and conditions of the work relationship should be included as follows:**

- address of the employer and employee
- start date of work
- end date of work (if fixed term)
- duration of trial period (maximum 6 months)
- location where the work is to be performed
- employee's main duties
- applicable collective agreement
- salary
- salary period
- working hours
- annual holidays and rules for accrual
- notice period.

An employment contract can be drawn up as soon as an employment decision has been made. The employment contract includes important information that is necessary when applying for a residence permit for reasons of employment or an EU registration, for instance.

## **Rights and responsibilities of the employee and employer**

The Finnish labour market system is based on a series of collective agreements that govern the terms and conditions of employment, as well as the rights and responsibilities of both employers and employees.

By law, an **employee** has the right to fair and equal treatment, a healthy and safe working environment and conditions, a fair salary, protections provided by acts

and contracts, and the choice to join a trade union. The employee also has the right to terminate an indefinitely valid employment contract at any point. A fixed-term contract can be cancelled only if either party breaches or neglects duties, in line with the employment contract or the law.

The **employer** has the right to assign tasks, working hours and the methods and location of the work. By law, the employer must also request that employees show proof of their right to live and work in Finland. This usually means proof of a residence permit with a suitable right to work or EU registration. For some professions, for example in health and social services, the employer is also required to check the validity of the employee's qualifications.

The employer is responsible for ensuring that all employees are treated equally, that the working conditions and environment are healthy and safe, that occupational health care and insurances are in order. While prevention of work-related illnesses is mandatory for employers, providing medical care is voluntary. In practice, many employers offer medical care for general incapacitating situations such as the common cold and bodily injuries. Dental care or other specialised care is not necessarily included in occupational health care.

The employer must take care of contributions for health insurance, earnings-related pension, unemployment insurance, occupational accident and disease insurance, and group life insurance. In addition to taxes, the employer will also deduct the employee's contributions for these insurances from the salary. All deductions will be mentioned in the salary payment slip, along with the amount of gross and net salary.

In addition to the normal salary, the employer can also pay the employee different allowances or fringe benefits. These may be a per diem for business trips, a car or phone allowance, and vouchers for meals, cultural activities or exercise. Most fringe benefits are taxable.

The employer is also responsible for upholding fair and ethical standards in recruitment. In case there is concern that an employer is not adhering to their responsibilities or the law, you can notify the Regional State Administrative Agency and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

## **Layoffs and termination of employment**

Sometimes employment may end temporarily or permanently. In some cases, the employer may suspend work and payment of wages without the employment relationship being terminated. This is called a layoff and it principally concerns employees with an indefinite employment contract. The employer may resort to

layoffs for financial or production-related reasons or when the potential for offering work has diminished temporarily.

Layoffs may be full-time or part-time and the employer must inform the employees as soon as the need becomes known. During the layoff, employees are entitled to seek other employment. If the employer's situation improves and work is again available, the employer will notify the employees.

An employment relationship may be terminated, if it expires because of its fixed term, dismissal, cancellation, or it is deemed cancelled. The grounds for termination are stated in the Employment Contracts Act. An indefinitely valid employment contract can be terminated by either the employer or employee giving notice.

The employer is able to terminate an indefinitely valid employment contract only with a proper and weighty reason. The employee does not have to state any specific reason for the termination of employment. Both parties must observe the notice period. A fixed-term contract can be cancelled only if either party commits a breach against or neglects duties based on the employment contract or the law.

### **Job loss and residence status**

Some newcomers' residency status is tied directly to their employment. If you are furloughed or lose your job, contact the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) to check if this has an effect on your right to reside in Finland.

### **Joining a trade union or unemployment fund**

Newcomers to the country are encouraged to join a union or unemployment fund when they start working here. About 60% of workers belong to a trade union in Finland (compared to the OECD average of 16%). Trade unions provide many member benefits, such as training, leisure activities, and support from the union's shop stewards or lawyers during workplace conflicts. Perhaps most importantly, however, a union's unemployment fund makes you eligible for an earnings-related unemployment allowance should you become jobless. Becoming a member of a union costs 1-2% of your income and this fee is tax deductible.

There are also unemployment funds that operate outside of the unions. You can join one of these and become eligible for earnings-related unemployment allowance after a certain amount of time. These funds are cheaper than union memberships, but have few other benefits.

Employed people who are not members of unemployment funds are eligible for basic unemployment allowance if they lose their job. Find more information on the [Kela](#) website.

## Links

[Employee rights advisory phone service \(SAK\)](#)

[InfoFinland - Employee's rights and obligations](#)

# Finding a job

## How and where to look for job opportunities

There are several websites that advertise job opportunities in Finland, including [Jobs in Finland](#) and [Jobs in Helsinki](#) in English, as well as the Finnish-language websites Oikotie, Duunitori, and Monster. The area's employment service also maintains a [TE office job listing](#) in Finnish and Swedish. In addition to this, the European employment services cooperation network [EURES](#) hosts its own job portal, and Finnish startup jobs can be found at a website called The Hub.

As a small country, Finland has a population that is very interconnected via professional and social networks. This means that many job opportunities are never advertised because a co-worker or acquaintance recommends a suitable person. Recruitment professionals estimate that up to 80% of jobs in Finland are 'hidden' in this way.

## Networks

To tap into this hidden job market, jobseekers have to build up their networks. This means you should attend as many job fairs, training workshops, mentoring programmes and recruitment events as possible while looking for work. It also helps to be active on social media channels, LinkedIn in particular. Keep your LinkedIn profile up-to-date and active at all times, as Finnish recruiters commonly search for candidates there.

## CV

A good curriculum vitae (CV for short) and cover letter is very important for any jobseeker. Find out the template and style that is in use in Finland in your profession and try and match it. Many employers use online recruitment tools to fill open positions, but a CV and cover letter that is succinct and persuasive can help you stand out among the applicants.

### Links

**The following portals offer information and opportunities for jobseekers:**

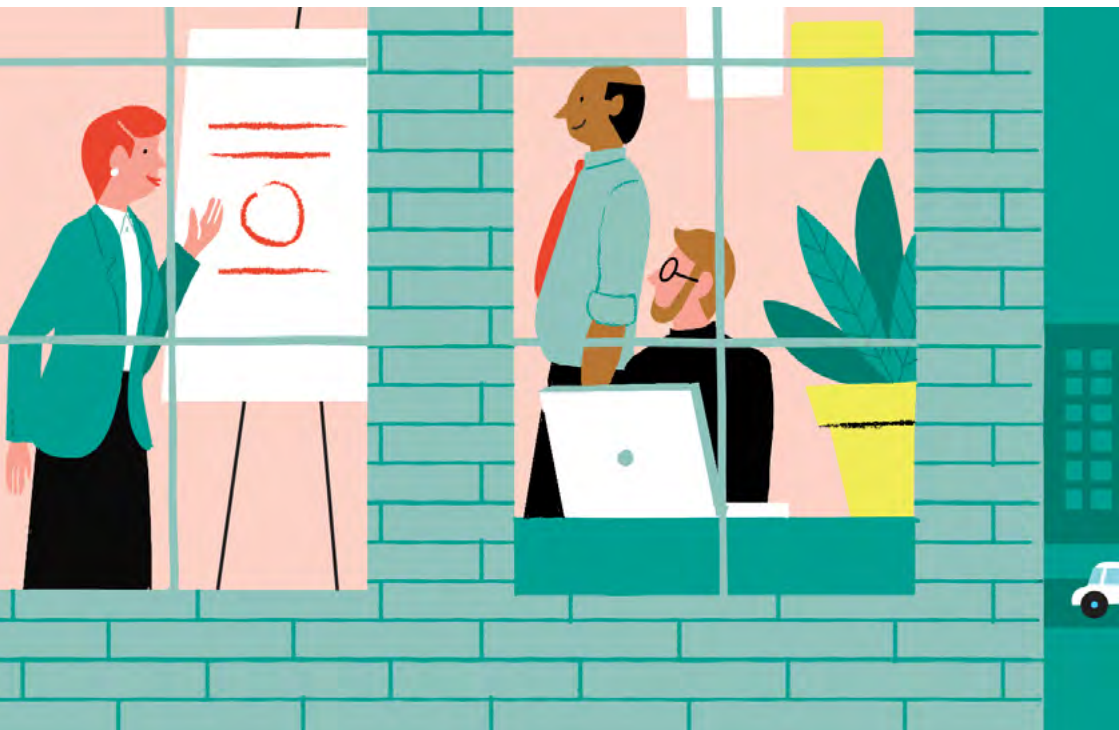
[Find a job in Finland](#)

[How to find work in Helsinki](#)

[Jobs in Helsinki](#)

[Jobs in Espoo](#)

[Jobs in Vantaa.](#)





## Employment services

As a jobseeker in the capital region, you can use Uusimaa TE Office and your city's Employment Services if you need help with your job search, applications for training and education, and unemployment security.

Register as a jobseeker with your regional Employment and Economic Development Office (TE Office) and you might qualify for helpful services that support your integration and employment prospects. The unemployed can take part in career coaching and job search training, attend free Finnish lessons, receive tailored job coaching and talk about their career choices with a psychologist, among other things.

The TE Office representative at International House Helsinki provides general information and advice on TE (employment) services and instructs on the use of online services. It is also possible to register as a jobseeker.



## Links

**The following websites and services offer information and support for jobseekers:**

[TE Services for immigrants](#)

[TE Services at International House Helsinki](#)

[Employment services in Helsinki](#)

[Employment services in Espoo](#)

[Employment services in Vantaa and Kerava](#)

[Information on benefits for unemployed jobseekers.](#)

## Recognition of foreign qualifications in Finland

When searching for a job in Finland, it is also a good idea to check what the equivalent degree or vocational qualification would be here. This will help you explain your education or specialty to potential employers.

If you have a degree or qualifications from a foreign institution, you might need apply for a decision to recognise your qualification in order to be able to work or study in Finland. Some fields, for example construction, health and social services, and teaching, have specific requirements based on Finnish legislation. You can request a decision to become qualified in a regulated profession if you have similar qualifications from abroad. The [Finnish National Agency for Education](#) and [SIMHE Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education in Finland](#) service can answer your questions about the recognition of qualifications. The Finnish National Agency for Education has a complete list of the [regulated professions in Finland](#).

## Entrepreneurship

Would you like to work as a freelancer or private trader, or perhaps start your own limited company? There is great support for entrepreneurship and startups in Finland, especially in the capital region.

The Finnish Enterprise Agency (*Uusyrityskeskus*) is an umbrella organisation of advisory services for budding business owners. Helsinki's business advisory service is called [NewCo Helsinki](#), Espoo's is called [EnterpriseEspoo \(YritysEspoo\)](#), and Vantaa's equivalent is called [Yritysvantaa](#).



The experts at these locations can help you start your business by assisting to write up your business plan, informing you of your statutory obligations as an entrepreneur, and helping you to select the type of company or self-employment that is best for your needs.

### **There are five types of companies in Finland:**

- private (sole) trader: a one-person business (can also include a spouse)
- limited liability company: a one-person business with shareholders to limit personal risk
- cooperative: members pay a cooperative fee
- general partnership: requires at least two owners
- limited partnership: requires at least two owners.

### **There are also four modes of self-employment:**

- freelancer: the ability to work for several different employers
- private trader: see above
- light entrepreneurship: self-employment under an umbrella invoicing company
- limited liability company: see above.

Each type of company and mode of self-employment has its own obligations when it comes to registration and taxation. The [Guide to becoming an entrepreneur in Finland](#) and the enterprise agency ([NewCo Helsinki](#), [EnterpriseEspoo](#) or [YritysVantaa](#)) nearest you can provide more information.

You may be eligible for a [startup grant](#) (*Starttiraha*) depending on your residence status. This grant is meant for companies that have not yet started, however, so you should hold off on registering your company until you have met with an enterprise agency expert and determined if you qualify.

## **Startup community**

A startup is a new company that intends to scale up quickly. Finland's capital region is well known for its nurturing startup [ecosystem](#), which has produced

companies such as the gaming superstars Supercell and Rovio, the virtual reality pioneers Varjo, and the satellite imaging company Icteye. The cities of Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa are currently home to over 500 tech startups.

If you have an idea for a startup, you can explore it with your local enterprise agency. For instance, [NewCo Helsinki](#) has quite a bit of startup experience and offers startup training in English and other languages.

Another feature of an active and healthy startup ecosystem is the number of accelerators and hubs it contains. Below you can find a list of some of the accelerators and hubs in the capital region. Some are general and some concentrate on a certain field, like health or educational technology.

## Links

[NewCo Helsinki](#)

[Business Espoo](#)

[Businessvantaa](#)

[Helsinki Dealroom](#)

[Maria01](#)

[Health Capital Helsinki](#)

[Helsinki Think Company](#)

[Kiuas](#)

[Terkko Health Hub](#)

[xEdu Accelerator](#)

[Xes Helsinki](#)

[EIT Digital](#)

## Studying

Education is highly valued in Finnish society, and the population is very well educated. Over 70% of Finnish residents have completed a degree or qualification after their basic schooling, and four-fifths of these academic degree-holders have at least a master's degree. The capital region boasts the best schools (see the earlier section on Education) and universities in the country.

Finland has two kinds of higher education institutions: universities and universities of applied sciences. Universities in Finland focus on classic academic subjects, while universities of applied sciences focus on practical training towards a vocation. Higher education is free of charge to permanent residents of Finland and EU citizens. For more information, visit the websites of the [Finnish National Agency for Education](#) and [Study in Finland](#).

## Higher education

There are four **universities** in the capital region. Helsinki is the home of the oldest and largest university in Finland. The [University of Helsinki](#) is a wide-ranging cross-disciplinary university that is an international forerunner in research areas such as education, climate change and medicine. Espoo is home to [Aalto University](#), a high-tech university that specialises in technology, arts, and business and gains strength from its many synergies. Next comes the [University of the Arts Helsinki](#), which provides university-level instruction in music, the fine arts, theatre, and dance. This is followed by the [Hanken School of Economics](#), which focuses on the subjects of economics and business administration.

Each university in Finland offers four levels of degrees: bachelor's, master's, licentiate, and doctoral. Most of the instruction is naturally in Finnish or Swedish, but there are several English-language degree programmes on the bachelor's and master's levels in all four universities, and licentiate and doctoral studies can usually be carried out in English in all subjects.

It is also possible to attend individual courses at [open universities](#) and summer schools of the universities. These courses are usually open to anyone, but they are subject to a fee.

The **universities of applied sciences** in the capital region include [Arcada](#), [Diaconia](#), [Haaga-Helia](#), [Humak](#), [Laurea](#), and [Metropolia](#), as well as [Business College Helsinki](#). These universities offer bachelor's and master's degrees and/or vocational qualifications in dozens of professions and fields of study. The universities of applied sciences offer open courses in the same way that universities do.

## Adult education

Finland is a big believer in life-long learning. [Adult education](#) institutions offer hundreds of opportunities to learn new hobbies and skills. The capital region has many organisations offering adult education. You can choose from different [upper secondary schools for adults](#), adult education centres, learning centres, [folk high schools](#), [summer universities](#) and [sports training centres](#). You can view the course selection for many of these centres with the online [Ilmonet](#) service.

### Links

[Adult Education Centre of Helsinki](#)

[Espoo Adult Education Centre](#)

[Vantaa Adult Education Institute](#)

# Learning Finnish and Swedish

## Finnish

There are many reasons to learn some Finnish or Swedish while you are in Finland. It can help to get you settled into your new home and everyday tasks such as trips to the grocery stores will become easier. It will also help you to understand the country's residents better and make you feel at home.

Knowing Finnish will be of benefit in your working life as well. Working life is generally conducted in Finnish or in some cases Swedish, which is Finland's second official language. Swedish-speaking Finns make up 5.5% of the population, with several concentrated Swedish-speaking areas along the coast and the Åland Islands.

Finnish and Swedish courses are easy to find in the capital region, as several different organisations arrange them. You can choose from day or evening courses that take place on-site or online. Find all of the capital region's Finnish and Swedish courses online at [Finnishcourses.fi](http://Finnishcourses.fi).

Adult education centres and open universities also run language courses that are popular in the international community. You can also learn Finnish outside the classroom with self-study, and many user-friendly options are available on the internet.

### The public broadcaster Yle provides the following helpful services:

- [Easy Finnish](#), an online starter course in Finnish
- [Supisuomea](#), a series of videos produced for language study with supporting online material
- [Asiointisuomea](#), Finnish for practical purposes, for more advanced learners
- [Mun Suomi](#), an introduction to Finnish culture and language that was written by newcomers
- [Selkouutiset](#), daily news in easy-to-understand Finnish.

## Swedish

Swedish is also a national language of Finland. Some feel that it is easier to learn than Finnish because it is closely related to English. Adult education centres and universities offer Swedish language instruction, for instance. Knowing Swedish





can be particularly useful if you work or socialize with Swedish-speaking Finns, or live in, do business with or plan to visit the Swedish-speaking areas on the coast and in the archipelago.

**For further information:**

[Finnish and Swedish in Helsinki](#)

[Finnish and Swedish courses in Espoo](#)

[Finnish and Swedish in Vantaa](#)

## Equality and diversity

Finland is a forerunner in equality. Finland was the first European country to give women the right to vote and first in the world to give women full political rights in 1906. Since then, Finland has led gender equality rankings and championed gender equality in many ways. To celebrate its centennial of independence in 2017, Finland established the [International Gender Equality Prize](#) to further this cause internationally.

The capital region is home to the most [internationally diverse communities](#) in Finland. Over half of all foreign nationals living in Finland reside in the Uusimaa province, which is home to the capital region. A quarter of all foreigners live in Helsinki, with Espoo and Vantaa being home to another quarter. Espoo was the first city in Finland to officially adapt [English as a service language](#) in 2018. For its part, Helsinki aims to become a model city of diversity, and Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa have adopted anonymous recruitment to promote diversity in recruitment.

The principle of equality means both the prohibition of discrimination and equality of individuals before the law. Finland's Non-Discrimination Act prohibits discrimination in public and private activities, including education and working life. The [Non-Discrimination Ombudsman](#) promotes equality and prevents and tackles discrimination. The Ombudsman also works towards improving the rights and status of foreign nationals. The [occupational safety and health authorities](#) monitor compliance with the Non-Discrimination Act in individual cases of discrimination in employment. The [Ombudsman for Equality](#) likewise monitors adherence to Finland's Equality Act and provides guidance and information on gender-related issues.



# IV) LEISURE TIME

## Exploring your new home

The capital region is full of activities for residents and visitors alike. You are never far from a lake, a beach, the sea, or a forest in Finland, and there are also plenty of events, museums, galleries, sports and hobbies going on in and around Helsinki, Espoo, and Vantaa at all times.

### Helsinki highlights

Helsinki is a gem for architecture enthusiasts. Alongside the largest concentration of Art Nouveau buildings in Northern Europe, you will also find sleek modernist and functionalist styles. Standout examples of recent wow architecture are the Central Library Oodi, Amos Rex art museum, Helsinki University Library, and Chapel of Silence.

Helsinki's Design District spans the neighbourhoods of Punavuori, Kaartinkaupunki, Kruunuhaka, Kamppi and Ullanlinna in the city centre. Boutique shops there sell gems from Finland's top designers. Helsinki Design Week is the largest design festival in the Nordics. Held annually in September, it highlights the latest and greatest design in fashion, furniture, architecture and urban culture.

Helsinki's many museums have something for everyone: from lush repositories of national art to cutting-edge contemporary art works and quirky private collections. Many of Helsinki's established art galleries operate within a couple of blocks of each other in the city centre of the city and are thus ideal for a casual Sunday stroll.

Helsinki is one of the few capital cities in the world where nature is easy to access. Green areas are everywhere, often just a few steps from your front door. The largest is the ten-kilometre-long Central Park that runs through the heart of the city and offers great trails for biking, walking, running, and cross-country skiing. The Töölö Bay is another great natural space in the city. In addition, there is the magnificent Helsinki shoreline, dotted with 300 islands reachable via bridges, boats or ferries.



©Patrik Fagerström / Espoon kaupunki



©Sakari Mämmänen / Vantaan kaupunki

Going to sauna is an important aspect of Finnish national culture and Helsinki has several public saunas. The outdoor pools and sauna of the Allas Sea Pool can be found near the main harbour, while the public sauna on the sea named Löyly, one of Time Magazine’s “world’s greatest places” is closer to the west harbour. In winter, ice swimming is a popular activity. If you can summon up the courage, you can have a go at winter swimming areas in the districts of Katajanokka, Marjaniemi or Munkkiniemi, to name a few.

## Espoo highlights

One of Espoo’s best-known cultural destinations is the WeeGee Exhibition Centre, home to many museums, including the Espoo Museum of Modern Art EMMA. Another popular museum can be found at Tarvaspää, an impressive art studio by the sea designed by the Finnish painter Akseli Gallen-Kallela.

The Espoo Cultural Centre in the garden district of Tapiola is a major hub for performing arts and culture, featuring the internationally renowned Tapiola Sinfonietta Orchestra. The performance hall of Sello puts on concerts and stand-up comedy shows, while Espoo’s Metro Areena hosts first-rate sporting events. Espoo City Theatre presents first-class Finnish theatre that is surtitled in English.

Espoo’s 165 islands form a beautiful mosaic and in the summer, regular Espoo Line cruises transport you out for a visit. Another must-see destination is Espoo’s 40-kilometre Rantaraitti Waterfront walkway, which meanders by the sea all the way from Laajalahti to Kivenlahti. Espoo is full of beaches and harbours for walking, cycling or jogging, enjoying water sports, and partaking of great food and beverages in the many shoreline cafés and restaurants.

Espoo is also home to the only national park in the capital region. Nuuksio National Park is the perfect getaway for a peaceful hike in nature. Shelters with campfire pits provide a great place to stop for a snack. Nuuksio’s lakes, forests, valleys, marshes, and rocks are beyond impressive, and the Finnish Nature Centre Haltia there tells you even more about them.

## Vantaa highlights

Vantaa might be best known for being the site of the Helsinki-Vantaa International Airport, but there is much more to explore in Finland’s fourth largest city.

The story of the entire capital region began in Vantaa, when the Helsingin Pitäjä Parish was founded on the Vantaanjoki River in the late 12th century. The parish is located in the modern-day district of Tikkurila and is a great example of a wonderfully preserved township.

You can learn more about the history of Vantaa at the Vantaa City Museum, located in Tikkurila's old railway station building. Follow that up by getting to know Tikkurila better, with a stroll along the Keravanjoki river to the old factory building Vernissa or a visit to the Science Center Heureka, an interactive museum focused on the wonders of science and technology.

For nature lovers, a visit to Vantaa's Kuusijärvi is a must experience. Kuusijärvi Lake is a popular, all-season outdoor recreational centre with a large sandy beach in the summertime and a beautiful cross-country skiing landscape and ice swimming holes in the winter. The centre offers the only traditional smoke saunas in the entire capital region that are regularly open to the public. Kuusijärvi is also a gateway to the Sipoonkorpi National Park, a welcome green haven for local residents.

## Links

[My Helsinki](#)

[Visit Espoo](#)

[Visit Vantaa](#)

## Day trips from the capital region

**Porvoo** is a well-preserved town 45 minutes east of the Helsinki city centre. Porvoo is famous for its picturesque red wooden warehouses on the riverbank, a striking cathedral, and delightful little shops and artisans' workshops.

**Turku** is almost 800 years old, making it Finland's oldest city. Located 1 hour and 45 minutes from the Helsinki city centre on the southwest coast, Turku is home to the historic Turku Cathedral and Turku Castle, both from the 13th century. A fast and easy railway link connects the city to the capital region.

**Tallinn** is the capital city of Estonia, Finland's neighbouring country to the south. The medieval city of Tallinn is a great day trip destination, with several well-appointed ferries sailing back and forth daily.

**Hanko** is the southernmost spot in Finland, located 140 km west of Helsinki. This idyllic little seaside town is famous for its long sandy beaches and summer festivals.

**Tampere** is the most populous inland city in the Nordics, located 180 kilometres north of Helsinki. Famous as the birthplace of Finnish industry, Tampere continues to be a major economic and cultural hub in Finland. It also boasts one of the last Lenin museums left in the world.

## Spending time outdoors

Finland observes the Nordic principle of every person's rights, which means that everyone is free to roam everywhere, if they leave nature undisturbed. This extends to activities like hiking, biking, camping for short periods in outdoor areas and collecting berries and mushrooms. You may not cause environmental damage, disturb nesting animals, or fish or hunt without the appropriate permits.

## Outdoors with pets

In the capital region, all pets must be kept on a leash when outdoors, except in designated areas such as dog parks. The cities of Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa provide fenced-in dog parks, where dogs can run free and play if they follow the posted rules. There are also some beaches and ski trails that allow dogs. In general, pets are allowed in national parks and wilderness areas as long as they are on a leash. Some nature trails or other sites might have restrictions on this, however, so make sure to enquire before a visit.





© Tuomas Uusheimo / Helsinki Marketing



# Sports

## Organised clubs and exercise

Joining a sports club, guided exercise group or working out regularly is a great way to find friends and make new connections. Finns love to do all kinds of indoor and outdoor sports and exercise, so if there is a particular activity that you like, you will be able to find people to do it with you.

Hundreds of sports clubs in the capital region organise regular practice and competitions for people of all ages. They are all organised independently, however, so you may have to do a bit of investigation to find what you are looking for. Ask your work or study colleagues for suggestions and advice.

In addition to organised sports clubs, each of the cities offer a wide variety of exercise classes, and private gyms also arrange classes. Outdoor gyms sprinkled around the area also make it easy to stay fit year round. Check out the city's information on sports and exercise below to get started.

### Links

[Helsinki sports](#)

[Espoo sports and exercise](#)

[Vantaa leisure activities](#)

## Free-time activities

### Museums

The capital region of Finland is home to over 100 museums, each of which is listed on the [Museot.fi](#) website. Buy a [Museum Card](#) and gain unlimited entrance to more than 300 museums in Finland for an entire year. Some museums offer free entry once a month, while others are closed on Mondays, so check the museum website before you plan a visit.

### Libraries

The capital region has over 70 libraries, including the flagship library [Oodi](#) in Helsinki. Each of these libraries belongs to a larger shared [Helmet](#) network. In

addition to books, almost all of the libraries lend films and music, have a great variety of newspapers and magazines to peruse, and make computers and printers available to customers. Some libraries have language cafes for learning languages, with special ones for newcomers who want to practice their Finnish or Swedish skills.

Library makerspaces in some libraries have things like sewing machines, 3D printers, and laminators available to use. It is also possible to borrow basic household tools, such as power drills and sanders. Check the Helmet website for information on using the library in the metropolitan area.

## Music

The music scene in the capital region of Finland is very diverse, as classical music venues coexist alongside many other live music venues for great gigs.

Popular large venues in **Helsinki** include the Helsinki Music Centre, Finlandia Hall, and Finnish National Opera and Ballet. In **Espoo**, the main venues include the Espoo Cultural Centre, Metro Arena, and Sello Hall, and in **Vantaa**, The Cultural House Martinus hosts many different kinds of events.

Some of the best-known music festivals in Finland's capital region each year include the Helsinki Festival, April Jazz, Weekend, Flow Festival, Tuska, and Tikkurila Festival.

Elsewhere in Finland, there's the Savonlinna Opera Festival, Pori Jazz, and Kaustinen Folk Music Festival, as well as large outdoor music festivals like Ruisrock, Provinssirock and Ilosaarirock.

## Theatres and cinema

Most of the city's theatre offerings are naturally performed in Finnish or Swedish, but the Espoo City Theatre has English subtitles at every performance and Svenska Teatern provides English subtitles at some of its shows. An international theatre group visits the capital area from time to time, so it is worth checking the Helsinki Tourist Office website regularly. The Really Small Theatre Company and the Finn-Brit Players produce small-scale theatre in English.

Films are shown in their original language in Finland, with subtitles in Finnish and Swedish. The capital region has several large cinema complexes, with a few more intimate theatres such as Bio Rex, Cinema Orion, Kino Engel, Kino Regina, Riviera Kallio, and Kino Tapiola. Numerous international film festivals are also organised in Finland each year.



© Jussi Hellsten / Helsinki Marketing

## Competitions

Finns tend to take their sports competitions seriously and turn out by the thousands to watch hockey, football, track and field, and ski teams compete. There are also more quirky competitions, such as the Wife Carrying World Championship, Swamp Soccer World Cup, and Mobile Phone Throwing World Championships. Take a road trip to watch one of these zany competitions and you will learn a lot about the Finnish people.

## Associations

Finland is the promised land of associations. Groups of people who enjoy a particular activity or feel strongly about certain issues band together to share their experiences and promote their shared interests. The Finnish Patent and Registration Office has an Association search function that allows you to look for associations active in your neighbourhood. For example, many associations represent members of the international community.

Many people that are originally from another country also find support in their religious community. At present, about 68% of Finland's population belongs to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, while 1% belongs to the Orthodox Church. There are also active Catholic, Jewish, and Islamic congregations, as well as several smaller religious communities.

## Volunteering

Finnish residents also spend a lot of time volunteering for activity clubs and charities. For many, it is an integral part of their life.

As for free time activities, you can find information either online or at local community centres. The [Volunteer Helsinki](#) website and Vantaa's webpages on [Volunteer activities](#) list several volunteer options, while [Vapaaehtoistyö.fi](#) and a Facebook group called [Volunteer Finland](#) have information on volunteering throughout Finland.

## Children's activities

The cities of Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa offer a wide variety of activities for children: art classes, dance classes, circus school, music groups, swimming lessons, and more. Some great places with classes and activities for kids include [Annantalo Arts Centre](#), [Caisa International Cultural Centre](#), Espoo Museum of Modern Art ([EMMA](#)), and Finnish Science Centre [Heureka](#).

Fun places to visit indoor and outdoor adventure parks, various outdoor museums like the [Glims Farmstead](#), [Pentala Island](#), [Seurasaari Open-Air Museum](#), [Fallkulla Farm](#), and Serena and Flamingo waterparks.

## Links

[Events in Helsinki](#)

[Cultural centres in Helsinki](#)

[Cultural centres and houses in Espoo](#)

[Culture in Vantaa](#)

# Restaurants and shops

## Restaurants, bars, pubs, and cafés

The capital region boasts the best restaurant and entertainment scene in Finland. Restaurants, cafés and bars are plentiful and satisfy all tastes, budgets and moods. Many shopping malls also have good restaurants and cosy cafés and bars. To find a nice or nearby place for a meal, you can search online at [Eat.fi](#). Blogs, local websites, and social media groups are also great places to get tips on new and exciting establishments.

Many restaurants offer lunch menus during the day and separate menus in the evening. Weekend brunches are also popular. Eating out is quite common and many restaurants might be full on the weekends and special days, like Mother's Day and *Vappu*. Booking in advance is recommended.

In particular, Helsinki is packed with restaurants that serve an excellent selection of wines, but in recent years the Finnish capital has also welcomed numerous specialised wine bars and breweries. In the evening a wide range of clubs and bars offers something for everyone in terms of clientele, atmosphere and price. There is a vibrant club culture with DJs, and live music can be enjoyed every night of the week. Nightlife options are mostly focused in the city centres though some residential areas also feature their own scenes. Blogs, local websites, and social media groups are full of tips on legendary, popular, or otherwise interesting establishments.

### For further information:

[Eat and drink in Helsinki](#)

[Eat and drink in Espoo](#)

[Eat and drink in Vantaa](#)

**Tipping** Tips are customary only for hotel and restaurant door attendants and porters. Prices in restaurants include a service charge; a few extra coins may also be left on the table. Hotel bills include a 15% service charge. Taxi drivers, barbers and hairdressers do not expect tips.

## **Shops**

The capital region is full of retail opportunities, with everything from designer boutiques to shopping malls. Shops along the Esplanad Park and the Design District of Helsinki feature many famous products. Sales staff in all areas will most likely be able to serve you in English.

Several shops use a queuing system, where a machine dispenses a piece of paper with a number. This is common in supermarket meat and fish counters, pharmacies, doctor's offices, telecom and public transport service points, and some post offices.

Most shopping centres are open weekdays 10.00–20.00/21.00, Saturdays 10.00–18.00 and Sundays 12–17.00/18.00. These times may change depending on the season. There are three supermarket chains in Finland: Kesko, S Group and Lidl. Kesko's K-Citymarkets and S Group's Prisma stores have the largest selection, including clothes, cookware and some hardware. Larger supermarkets sell new appliances and electronics, as do electronic superstores. Only a few shops in Finland are open 24 hours. All these companies have online stores. There are two major department stores in the capital region: Stockmann and Sokos.

### **The main shopping centres in each city:**

**Helsinki:** Kamppi, Forum, Kluuvi, Kämp Galleria, Itäkeskus, Tripla, Redi, Ruoholahti, Kaari

**Vantaa:** Jumbo, Myyrmanni, Tikkuri, Tammisto, Porttipuisto, Helsinki Outlet

**Espoo:** Ainoa, Sello, Iso Omena, Pikkulaiva

## **International food shops**

International food shops can be found throughout the capital region. It is best to turn to an international social media group if you are looking for a particular product that seems hard to find. For example, the [International English-Speakers Association of Finland IESAF](#) Facebook page has over 12,000 members who will be able to point you in the right direction.

## Furniture

The Helsinki region is home to several designer furniture stores that are often located in city centres. They offer good-quality products from top designers. In Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa, you can find large superstores that sell affordable and ready-to-assemble furniture. Many Finns opt to purchase second-hand furniture as it is both the cheapest and most ecological choice. There are numerous groups on social media centered around buying and selling second-hand furniture.

## Second-hand items

If you are looking for inexpensive items for your home, look no farther than the nearest location of the [Helsinki Metropolitan Area Reuse Centre](#) (*Kierrätyskeskus*). You can also find smaller items such as clothing and cookware at the Fida and UFF charity shops, the Finnish Red Cross' Kontti stores, and local flea markets (*kirpputori*). There are also several groups for selling and buying second-hand items on Facebook.

## Alcohol

The age limit for buying beer and wine in Finland is 18, and for stronger alcohol, it is 20. The state-owned alcohol company Alko has a monopoly on the sale of alcoholic beverages over 5.5% abv. Beverages with a lower alcohol content, such as beers and ciders, are also available in supermarkets. Alko shops close at 18.00 and are closed on Sundays and public holidays.

## Media

### News from Finland in other languages

Several online resources offer news from Finland in other languages besides Finnish and Swedish. The Finnish Broadcasting Company [Yleisradio](#) (Yle) offers excellent news coverage in English ([Yle News](#)), Russian ([Yle Novosti](#)), and Sámi ([Yle Sámi](#)), and also reports on the news in [Easy Finnish](#) and [Finnish sign language](#). Yle News also hosts a popular English-language podcast called [All Points North](#) that discusses current events.

The newspaper Helsinki Times offers local news in [English](#) and [Chinese](#), with more English-language news about Finland available at [Good News from Finland](#), and [This is Finland](#). [La Rondine](#) reports from Finland in Italian.

## Newspapers

Newspapers can be bought in bookshops or kiosks or read for free at the capital region's many libraries. Helsinki's library network makes several prominent magazines and periodicals available for free online. The top newspapers in Finland are the Finnish-language Helsingin Sanomat and Aamulehti and the Swedish-language Hufvudstadsbladet.

## Radio

The broadcasting service consists of several local commercial radio stations and the Finnish Broadcasting Company (Yle). Yle Mondo radio channel (FM 97.5 MHz) has regular bulletins in English, German and French from international news agencies. Yle Radio 1 (94.0 Mhz) has a daily broadcast of the news from Finland in English from Yle News. There are also several commercial radio stations in other languages. The [Traficom](#) website has a [complete list of radio stations in Finland](#).

## Television and online channels

There are more than two dozen free TV channels available on the antenna and cable network in Finland at present. In addition, a multitude of paid and online channels are available. See the websites of [Digita](#) and Finland's main telecom operators for more information.

# Characteristics of Finnish culture

**Honesty** Finns value honesty. This can be seen in their communications and everyday situations. For instance, a Finn might actually tell you how they are doing when asked 'How are you', rather than giving a generic reply. If you lose your wallet, someone will likely return it intact to a lost-and-found. Finland continually ranks near the top of the international [Corruption Perceptions Index](#).

**Punctuality** Finns like to be on time at work and in their social life. Even between friends, it's considered rude to be late. An exception is the 'academic quarter' (*akateeminen vartti*) in higher education, where lectures and the like begin 15 minutes after the hour.

**Coffee** On average, Finns drink 1,100 cups of coffee per person a year. This makes Finland the biggest per capita coffee consumer in the world. Coffee is available pretty much everywhere and it is an important custom to serve guests coffee during a visit. Cinnamon rolls (*korvapuusti*) and butter eye buns (*voisilmäpulla*) are common accompaniments.





**Cottages** Visiting a lakeside cottage with a sauna is a dream come true for most Finns, so cottage life is an integral part of Finnish culture. The comfort level of Finnish cottages vary from very rustic (no electricity, outhouse) to fully equipped. Most of these cabins have a well for water. When renting a cottage, always check what furniture, equipment, etc. is included in the price.

Larger cities offer small allotment gardens and summer cottages in a few designated areas. Each city has certain areas devoted to small cottages to allow residents to experience the benefits of cottage life without having to travel outside the city. Such areas include Puolarnaari in Espoo, Brunakärr (*Ruskeasu*) and Kivinokka in Helsinki and Viherkumpu in Vantaa.

**Equality** Finland promotes the equal treatment of all people, regardless of their background, gender or identity. Finnish society is not hierarchical as it is expected that everyone is treated with the same respect. This applies in both professional and social contexts. Finns rarely use titles or give people special treatment because of a certain position.

**Food** Finns tend to favour home cooking and basic dishes like casseroles, soups and pies. The capital region's restaurant scene is becoming more international, with a wide range of global cuisine. Local produce, city farming, vegetable or insect proteins and online shopping are some of the growing trends in bigger cities, like the capital region. In the summer and autumn, locals like to go fishing or foraging for berries and mushrooms.

**Friendship** People sometimes say that it is difficult to forge friendships with the Finns. Most Finns prefer not to mix their professional and private lives. Do not be afraid to take the initiative, if you would like to get to know someone better. While many Finnish residents might be reluctant to suggest a meet-up, they will likely be delighted to accept an invitation. Once you become friends with a Finn, you will most likely have a friend for life.

**Heritage** The *Kalevala* is a national epic about the shamanistic hero Väinämöinen and a cast of exciting characters. The tale was collected from folk poetry and after its publication in 1835, it quickly became a symbol of Finnish language and culture. Few things helped form the national identity more.

**Plugged in** Mobile phones and broadband networks work brilliantly in Finland, and as a result, the inhabitants of the birthplace of Nokia are doing something on their phones nonstop. It is polite to put your phone on silent during meetings and classes, as well as in libraries, churches and museums.

**Smoking** Finland has specially designated places for smoking cigarettes, and smoking is not allowed indoors at restaurants, bars and other buildings.

Cigarettes cannot be sold or given to young people under the age of 18.

**Personal space** Finns prefer a lot of personal space, especially when they are among people they don't know. This is why you will see so many locals sitting on their own on public transport, for example. Not being too inquisitive is also seen as being respectful of other people's personal space, so don't be offended if someone keeps their distance or skips the small talk.

**Salmiakki** Finns consume 14 kilograms of sweets per person a year, with chocolate and a special brand of salty liquorice (*salmiakki*) the clear favourites. Sweet liquorice (*lakritsi*) is also popular.

**Sauna** Finland has more saunas (3.2 million) than cars. Sauna also has a special place in many Finnish homes, with regular weekly sessions and an obligatory visit on Midsummer and Christmas Eve. The Finnish sauna was added to [UNESCO's Cultural Heritage list](#) in 2020. If you are lucky enough to be invited to a sauna, read Visit Finland's [10 Sauna Tips for Beginners](#) first.

**Silence** Finns are very comfortable with silence. Long moments can be spent together without saying anything. Interruptions are generally considered rude.

**Sisu** The Finnish word *sisu* describes the grit and tenacity of the Finns, harking back to their hardscrabble past as farmers in an unforgiving climate and underdogs during geopolitical conflicts. Finnish residents are very proud of this attribute and the word has an outsized role in Finnish society.

See [This is Finland's Guide to Finnish customs and manners](#) to learn more.



© KuvaToimisto Kuvio Oy / Helsinki Marketing



# Public holidays and traditions

## Shrovetide (*Laskiainen*)

Shrovetide is celebrated seven weeks before Easter, usually in February. It is traditionally a day for going sledding in the snow, topped off by special crème-filled bun with jam or almond paste.

## Easter (*Pääsiäinen*)

The Easter season in Finland has remnants of pagan tradition mixed in with its religious observations. Bonfires ward off evil spirits and children dressed as Easter witches go from door to door wishing their neighbours good health (*virpominen*) and exchanging colourful willow branches for candy. Traditional foods at this time include malted rye porridge (*mämmi*), lamb, pasha and chocolate eggs. There is a four-day public holiday over the Easter weekend.

## May Day (*Vappu*)

Finland's May Day or *Vappu* holiday on 30 April and 1 May celebrates the arrival of spring. In the capital region, May Day festivities take place in the Helsinki city centre, although Aalto University students host their own festivities in Espoo's district of Otaniemi. On the day before May Day, university students wash and adorn the Havis Amanda statue with a white student cap. On the day itself, labour organisations put on marches and people picnic in Helsinki's Kaivopuisto Park.

### **Midsummer (*Juhannus*)**

Celebrated throughout the Nordic countries in June, Midsummer Eve rings in the Summer Solstice, the longest day of the year. The following day, Midsummer Day, is a public holiday and so many shops and services are closed.

Many Finns like to spend Midsummer at their countryside cottages, leaving towns and cities deserted. Typical Midsummer activities include barbeques, sauna, bonfires (*kokko*) and dancing. Swedish-speaking Finns often celebrate by erecting maypoles. In the capital region, you can enjoy Midsummer festivities at the open-air museum on the island of Seurasaari.

### **Independence Day (*Itsenäisyyspäivä*)**

Finland's Independence Day is on 6 December. It is a public holiday to honour the sacrifices that were made to gain Finnish independence over Russia in 1917. Traditionally on this day, the President of Finland invites guests to the Presidential Palace for a formal ball, which is televised. Many organisations present honorary medals on Independence Day and university students arrange candle processions.

### **Christmas (*Joulu*)**

The most important Christmas celebration takes place on 24 December, Christmas Eve. Traditions in Finland normally include a trip to the sauna to clean up, a visit to the cemetery to place candles on the graves of loved ones, and the preparation of a Christmas dinner, which often includes a Christmas ham and potato, carrot and turnip casseroles.

After dinner *joulupukki*, Santa, will often visit bringing presents to the children. After Christmas Eve, Christmas Day is a time for rest and relaxation and eating leftovers. Most Finns wait until Boxing Day, 26 December, to visit friends and relatives.

## New Year (*Uusivuosi*)

On New Year's Eve, 31 December, Finland celebrates the turn of the year with fireworks, concerts, and general merriment. One custom is the melting of tiny horseshoes and interpreting the molten forms in candlelight, as omens of the coming year. Public firework displays are launched at midnight, and residents are allowed to shoot off small fireworks from 18.00 to 02.00. On any other day, fireworks require a special permit and professional qualifications.



© Jussi Heilsten / Helsinki Marketing

## Common phrases

In English	In Finnish	Pronunciation (with intonation)
Good day	Hyvää päivää	<i>HUU-vaa PIE-vaa</i>
Hello ( <i>informal</i> )	Moi	<i>MOI</i>
	Hei	<i>HAY</i>
	Terve	<i>TEHR-veh</i>
Good morning	Hyvää huomenta	<i>HUU-vaa HOO-oh-mehn-tah</i>
Good evening	Hyvää iltaa	<i>HUU-vaa EEL-tah</i>
Good night	Hyvää yötä	<i>HUU-vaa UU-eu-ta</i>
Goodbye ( <i>informal</i> )	Hei	<i>HAY-hay</i>
	Moi	<i>MOI-moi</i>
Thank you.	Kiitos	<i>KEE-tohss</i>
Yes	Kyllä	<i>KUUL-la</i>
	Joo	<i>yoh</i>
No	Ei	<i>ay</i>
I don't understand.	En ymmärrä.	<i>EN OOM-mar-ra</i>
How are you?	Mitä kuuluu?	<i>MEE-ta KOO-loo?</i>
Fine, thank you.	Kiitos, hyvää	<i>KEE-toss, HUU-vaa</i>
Excuse me ( <i>getting attention and apologising</i> ) or I'm sorry	Anteeksi	<i>AHN-tehk-see</i>
I can't speak Finnish.	En puhu suomea.	<i>EN POO-hoo SOO-oh-meh-ah</i>
Do you speak English?	Puhutko englantia?	<i>POO-hoot-koh EHNG-lahn-tee-ah?</i>
Help!	Apua!	<i>AH-poo-ah!</i>



# Helpful resources

## Information and guidance for international newcomers

International House Helsinki: This service can help you with a multitude of important matters, especially after you arrive in the capital region for the first time.

### IHH's services include:

- general information and guidance
- registration of an EU citizen's right of residence
- registration, personal identity code & change of address
- tax card/number & tax counselling
- social security & benefits
- counselling on employment services & registering as a jobseeker
- pensions & pension insurance
- Employee Rights Advisory Service
- advisory & counselling service for employers
- housing advice
- daycare and education guidance.

Social security information in English: Check the Kela website for the English service phone number.

Tax information in English: Contact the Finnish Tax Administration (Vero) with questions about taxation. You can call Vero's phone service or International House Helsinki.

Interpreters: Customers can request the use of an interpreter when dealing with some Finnish authorities and receiving some municipal services. If the matter in question has been initiated by the authority, they will arrange and pay for the interpretation. Check the listing on the website of the Finnish Association of Interpreters and Translators if you need to arrange for an interpreter at your own expense.

## Newcomer communities

**Startup Refugees:** This organisation helps all migrants to speed up their path to working life. Among other things, the network offers work and education opportunities, professional connections, funding, mentoring, support in skills development, and information services.

**Familia:** Familia specialises in offering counselling and peer activities for intercultural families. They are also dedicated to supporting and developing structures for a more equal, multicultural society.

**Nicehearts:** Nicehearts arranges community-based activities for girls and women of different ages and backgrounds. Their mission is to enable participants to find their own place in society as equal and unique members.

**The Shortcut:** The Shortcut equips individuals with the skills and networks they need to become an entrepreneur or work for a high-growth company or startup. To do this, they offer workshops and training sessions for upskilling, reskilling, and expanding personal networks.

**The Finnish Red Cross:** The Finnish Red Cross has many clubs and activities that promote the integration of migrants in Finland. Contact them to learn about volunteer opportunities and the different clubs that are active in your area.

**Luckan:** Luckan, the Finland-Swedish Information and Cultural Centre in Helsinki, works not only as an information point and meeting place, but also offers the public a wide range of activities in Swedish and other languages. Luckan also offers training programmes associated with finding work in Finland.

**Cultural communities:** There are more than 100 bilateral friendship clubs in Finland. These are clubs that twin with another country to promote the interests of both Finland and the other country.

**Moniheli:** Moniheli is a network of more than 100 multicultural, immigrant and other associations supporting integration in Finland.

**Social media communities:** There are many different Facebook groups for members of Finland's international community. Some are career-focused, some that are culturally or country-focused and others are for newcomers in general.

### **For further information:**

[International English Speakers' Association of Finland \(IESAF\)](#)

[International Working Women of Finland \(IWWOF\)](#)

[International Working Men of Finland \(IWMoF\)](#)

[InterNations](#)

[InfoFinland - Associations](#)

Some embassies may also have clubs for socialising and networking.

### **Emergencies**

Call 112 in the event of a life-threatening emergency. The [Emergency Response Centre Agency](#) will answer the emergency call, evaluate the urgency and forward the call to rescue services, the police, social services, or health authorities, if necessary. You can also download a mobile application called 112 Suomi for calling the emergency services. When you make an emergency call through the app, your location information is automatically relayed to the emergency response centre.

In the case of other urgent medical emergencies, call the Medical Helpline at 116 117.

If you or someone else has eaten or drunk something poisonous or been bitten by a snake, for instance, you can call the Poison Information Centre (*Myrkytystietokeskus*) for advice 24/7 at 09 471 977.

### **Social emergency and crisis services**

[Emergency social services and crisis services in Helsinki](#)

[Western Uusimaa Social and Crisis Emergency Services \(Espoo\)](#)

[Social Emergency and Crisis Center in Vantaa](#)



© Tuomas Huikkonen / Vantaan kaupunki

This guide is part of the implementation of the national Talent Boost programme.

