Finland has one police authority. Police officers may be women or men. Police officers on duty may be in uniform or in plain clothes. However, police officers always carry an official badge that identifies them as police officers.

There are 11 police departments and two special police units, the National Bureau of Investigation and the Finnish Security Intelligence Service. Police officers are trained by the Police University College.

**TASKS OF THE POLICE**

- upholding social order and the judicial system,
- maintaining public order and safety,
- preventing and investigating crime, and referring offences to a prosecutor for consideration of charges

**GENERAL OPERATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF THE POLICE**

- Appropriate, impartial and conciliatory.
- The police must primarily carry out their duties through advice, requests and orders.
- Actions taken by the police must be justified and must not cause any greater disruption than is necessary.
- The police must treat all people neutrally and fairly.
- The police must explain the justifications for their actions to their customers.

The powers of the police are defined in several Acts in Finnish legislation. The police never act arbitrarily. All police actions have a basis in Finnish law.
“The police have the right to stop a vehicle and to check whether the driver is fit to drive and to inspect the required documents.”
THE POLICE HAVE THE RIGHT

– to establish the identity of individuals,
– to stop a vehicle and to check whether the driver is fit to drive and to inspect the required documents,
– to protect domestic peace and to enter areas protected under domestic peace,
– to remove a person from a particular location,
– to investigate whether a foreign national has the right to reside in the country,
– to isolate a location or an area for the purpose of maintaining public order and safety,
– to apprehend an individual (if less forceful means are not effective).

THE POLICE HAVE THE RIGHT TO USE FORCE AS NECESSARY

– to overcome resistance,
– to remove a person from a particular location,
– to apprehend a person,
– to prevent the escape of a person who is in custody,
– to remove an obstacle,
– to prevent a dangerous act or event.
APPREHENSION, CUSTODY, IMPRISONMENT

The police have the right to apprehend a person for instance for the following reasons

– a suspect in an offence for the purpose of investigating the offence
– a person may be apprehended for no more than 24 hours
The police may take a suspect in an offence into custody if
– the minimum punishment for the offence is two years of imprisonment
– or if there is reason to believe that the suspect in the offence will
  – escape or otherwise evade the criminal investigation,
  – hinder the investigation of the offence, or
  – continue his/her criminal activities.

A person may be held in custody for no more than 96 hours. Within that time, the police must either demand that the suspect be imprisoned or release the suspect.

Imprisonment is always decided by a court. The police may demand from a court that a suspect be imprisoned. In an imprisonment hearing, the suspect is entitled to legal counsel.

THE POLICE HAVE THE RIGHT TO SEARCH A PERSON

– when they apprehend a person,
– for the purpose of finding a document needed to identify the person,
– to ensure the safety of persons attending a trial, a public event or other similar event.

FINES IMPOSED BY THE POLICE

The police are entitled to impose a fine on a suspect in an offence in certain situations defined by law.

These situations include:
– refusal to obey or comply with a police officer,
– minor traffic accidents (a fine may be imposed on the person who caused the accident),
– shoplifting,
– minor assault,
– traffic offences such as speeding.
Fines are imposed on the basis of the offender’s income and property.

Fines are not paid in cash to the police. Fines are paid into a government bank account designated by the police. A person who has been fined may appeal to a prosecutor.

“The police will not tolerate any racist phenomena or racist actions.”
OBLIGATION TO COMPLY WITH ORDERS GIVEN BY THE POLICE, AND POLICE INVOLIABILITY

Offences committed against the police and other authorities carry more severe penalties than the same offences otherwise would.

A police officer on duty must never be disturbed or unnecessarily approached
– by touching,
– by shouting, or
– in any other way that disrupts the performing of the police officer’s duties.

The authorities must be allowed to work in peace.

When police officers are carrying out a task, they may give orders to persons at the scene. The police may order people to leave the scene, to remain in a particular location or to not interfere with the performing of the police task.

If you do not obey an order given by the police, you may be:
– fined and possibly sentenced to imprisonment (3 months),
– removed from the scene by force, or
– apprehended.

If you resist the police with violence or threat of violence, you will be:
– sentenced to imprisonment (4 months to 4 years).

If you resist the police with minor violence or threat of minor violence, you will be:
– fined, and
– possibly sentenced to imprisonment.

If you attempt to prevent the police from carrying out their tasks, you will be:
– fined, and
– possibly apprehended.

“The authorities must be allowed to work in peace.”
FINNISH PEOPLE TRUST THE POLICE

Finnish police officers cannot be bribed. The police are uncorrupted and act fairly and justly. Even attempting to bribe a police officer or any other public authority is a punishable offence under Finnish law.

National studies show that about 90% of Finnish people trust the police.

SECURITY IN FINLAND

Finland is a safe country. It is safe to live in Finland. The police help ensure this safety.

The police ensure the safety of everyone, including asylum seekers and other immigrants.
  – The police safeguard the organising of the arrival of asylum seekers in accordance with legislation and in a controlled manner.
  – The police ensure appropriate and fair treatment of asylum seekers from the very beginning of the process.

The police will not tolerate any racist phenomena or racist actions. The police will intervene in any violence, racist offences or unlawful speech (‘hate speech’), whether targeted at asylum seekers or native Finns.
  – All illegal acts, racism, unlawful speech, violence and threats must be reported to the police as soon as possible.
  – If you feel you have been the victim of a crime, you must report it to the police as soon as possible.
  – The Finnish police can be trusted. The police are fair to everyone and treat asylum seekers neutrally and appropriately.
  – The police evaluate all reports made and decide whether there is reason to suspect that an offence has been committed. If so, the police usually begin a criminal investigation.
  – The police investigate all suspected offences, regardless of the ethnicity, gender, religion or any other characteristic of the victim or the suspect.
HOW DO I REPORT AN OFFENCE?

In order to begin a criminal investigation, the police need a description as accurate as possible about what happened and who were involved. The injured party (victim) and the person(s) suspected of the offence are the ‘parties to the matter’.

Information required in order to report an offence:
– a description of what happened and how,
– the precise time and place of the incident,
– the offender’s name, if the offender was identified,
– a description of the offender (age, height, build, facial features, eye colour, teeth, speech, hands, way of walking, clothing),
– which way the offender fled and how,
– if the offender used a vehicle, the registration number and description of the vehicle (make, colour, model), and
– how dangerous the offender is (armed, state of mind, threats, substance abuse, etc.

The police enter the details of the report into the criminal investigation and official assistance system of the police IT system. The police will not investigate complainant offences unless the injured party demands punishment. Giving false information intentionally is a punishable act.

You may report an offence either online, by visiting your nearest police station or by contacting your nearest police department.

You may use an interpreter in all dealings with the police. The police will find and pay for an interpreter.

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CITIZENS

The Finnish Constitution guarantees equal and fair fundamental rights to all Finnish citizens and to all persons resident in Finland. These include:
Equality

- All persons are equal before the law.
- No one must be treated differently on the basis of gender, age, origin, language, religion, belief, opinion, health, disability or any other personal characteristic unless there are justifiable grounds for doing so.
- Children must be treated equally as individuals, and they must be consulted in matters concerning with them in a manner appropriate to their age and development.
- Gender equality is promoted in working life and in society at large, especially as regards pay and other terms of employment, as specified by law.

Right to life, personal liberty and inviolability

- Everyone has the right to life, personal liberty and inviolability.
- Sexual intercourse must always be by mutual consent. Sexual harassment is punishable by a fine and/or imprisonment. Rape is punishable by imprisonment.
- No one may be sentenced to death or tortured or otherwise treated in a way that violates human dignity.
- Personal inviolability may not be infringed, and a person may not be deprived of liberty arbitrarily and without a justifiable cause specified by law.
- Punishments involving a loss of liberty are imposed by a court. Any other loss of liberty may be unlawful and may be submitted to a court to investigate. The rights of persons held in custody are specified by law.

Freedom of speech

- Everyone has freedom of speech. Freedom of speech includes the right to express, publish and receive information, opinions and any other messages without prior restriction by anyone. However, necessary limitations to protect children may be imposed on audiovisual programmes by law.
- Documents and other records held by the authorities are public by default, unless they have been deemed secret for essential reasons as specified by law. Everyone is entitled to be informed of the contents of any public document or record.
CERTAIN AGE LIMITS IN FINLAND

7 YEARS

Compulsory education begins (but school attendance is not compulsory).

The child may not ride a bicycle on the pavement.
The child’s first or last name can only be changed with the child’s consent.
The child must be consulted in child welfare matters concerning himself/herself.

12 YEARS

In the year of an adolescent’s 14th birthday, the adolescent is allowed to take limited light employment that does not endanger his/her health or development and does not interfere with his/her school attendance.

14 YEARS

Criminal liability begins, but punishments are alleviated. An adolescent of 15 or older may be sentenced to imprisonment.
An adolescent is entitled to work full time, though no more than 9 hours per day or 48 hours per week, if he/she has completed his/her compulsory education.
May enter into and terminate an employment contract.
May be issued a driving licence for a moped, light quadricycle, tractor, all-terrain vehicle and snowmobile.
May join and leave a religious community, with the guardian’s consent.

15 YEARS

Sexual relations are allowed for persons aged 16 and older with their consent (age of consent). No sexual relations of any kind are allowed at any time with persons younger than 16.
May be issued a driving licence for a light motorcycle.

16 YEARS

End of compulsory education.
End of eligibility for child benefit.
Eligible for a student allowance and a study loan.
May begin training for a car driving licence.

17 YEARS

Is a legally competent adult.
May vote and stand as a candidate in all elections.
May marry or register a civil partnership.
May purchase mild alcoholic beverages.
May purchase alcoholic beverages in restaurants.
May purchase tobacco products.
May obtain a passport without the guardian’s permission.
May join or leave a religious community.

18 YEARS

Guardians’ income no longer considered in granting student allowance.
May purchase strong alcoholic beverages.

20 YEARS

End of eligibility for child benefit.
Eligible for a student allowance and a study loan.
May begin training for a car driving licence.

Is a legally competent adult.
May vote and stand as a candidate in all elections.
May marry or register a civil partnership.
May purchase mild alcoholic beverages.
May purchase alcoholic beverages in restaurants.
May purchase tobacco products.
May obtain a passport without the guardian’s permission.
May join or leave a religious community.

Guardians’ income no longer considered in granting student allowance.
May purchase strong alcoholic beverages.