

Working life certificate

A working life certificate is a certificate of competence covering major issues related to rules of working life in Finland and Finnish labour legislation.

The objective of the working life certificate system is to make employment easier and to increase awareness, particularly among immigrants and foreign employees, about Finnish society. It becomes easier to lead an active life in Finland when you have more information about the surrounding society. The feeling of mastering one's surroundings is strengthened, and equality of all Finnish employees improves, when both immigrants who work and seek work in Finland and foreign recruits receive information about working life and legislation in a single package compiled to this end.

The working life certificate programme helps companies train their new employees. When a job applicant or employee coming to Finland receives a working life certificate, it is also proof to employers that the certificate-holder is familiar with key issues of labour legislation. Small- and medium-sized businesses can use the certificate to enhance their orientation efforts, which, in turn, can make it easier to recruit new employees.

The working life certificate test is managed by the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, and it is available at the following address:

http://www.mol.fi/mol/fi/02_tyosuhteet_ja_lait/02_ulkom_suomessa/index.jsp

Those participating in the working life certificate test can obtain information about Finnish labour legislation and rules of working life in any way they wish. This material addresses the subject areas of the working life certificate test. Educational institutions arrange tests and offer training related to the subject.

The content of the working life certificate programme has been developed and implemented at Amiedu, in 2008–2009. Amiedu has solid expertise and experience in education of immigrants, which has been utilised in preparation of the content of the certificate programme. The following co-operation partners have taken part in the implementation of this content: the Confederation of Finnish Construction Industries, the Federation of Finnish Enterprises, Espero Care Oy, and Inkerikeskus ry. The content of the working life certificate programme has been implemented as part of a co-ordination project of Amiedu. The project has received funding from the Finnish National Board of Education.

The technical implementation of the working life certificate test has been carried out as part of Amiedu's COFI (Coping with Finns) project, which is related to occupational immigration. The COFI project has been carried out with partial funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) and the TE Centre for Uusimaa. The technical section of the working life certificate test has been implemented by Protaccon Solutions.

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Amiedu 2008, Outi Sjöblom, Anni Piikki, Marketa Pedronova, Anja Tarhala, and Marja Kaikkonen

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Working life certificate, part 1: Rules of working life

Section 1: General information about Finland



Map: © National Land Survey of Finland

Finland became an independent country in 1917. Before that, Finland was a part of Sweden for about 600 years, then a part of Russia from 1809 onward. Under Russian rule, Finland had autonomy and its own administration began to function. After gaining independence, Finland became a republic. Finland is a European constitutional state, and the actions of its public authorities are based on law. Finland is also a democracy: the people elect the president, Parliament, and municipal (i.e., local and regional) decision-makers.

Finland is a member of the European Union (EU). The Finnish currency is the euro.

The European Union has 27 member states in total. Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland are not members of the EU. Finland has 13 representatives in the European Parliament. Finland is a Nordic welfare state: all people who live in the country permanently are entitled to social security. Public social welfare expenditure is financed through taxes and different levies.

The government and municipalities use tax money to provide residents with various kinds of services. These services include, for example, basic and vocational education, basic health care, children's day care, and care for the elderly and the disabled. The government guarantees that people receive basic subsistence when they cannot provide for themselves – when they are old, sick, unemployed, etc.

The Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kela in Finnish) attends to the basic security of Finnish residents in various situations in life. All people who live in Finland, as well as those living abroad who are covered by Finnish social security, are customers of Kela.

Kela has many offices, all over Finland. They provide advice and instructions on social security of foreigners, among other things. This symbol shows you where to find Kela:



Population



Population	
Province of Lapland	184,390
Province of Oulu	467,190
Province of Western Finland	1,874,764
Province of Eastern Finland	573,478
Province of Southern Finland	2,173,509
Åland	27,153
Total:	5,300,484

Map: © National Land Survey of Finland

Finland does not have many residents, only 5.3 million. The majority of them live in the provinces of Southern and Western Finland. The capital of Finland is Helsinki, which has a population of about 560,000.

In 2007, the number of foreign nationals living in Finland was 132,632, or 2.5% of the total population.

Suomessa vakinaisesti asuvat ulkomaalaiset
I Finland varaktigt bosatta utl nningar

Suurimmat ryhm t maittain 31.12.2007
De st rsta grupperna enligt land 31.12.2007

	Yhteens� Totalt	Miehi� M�n	Naisia Kvinnor
Ven�j� / Ryssland	26 205	10 501	15 704
Viro / Estland	19 965	9 159	10 806
Ruotsi / Sverige	8 398	4 785	3 613
Somalia / Somalia	4 831	2 503	2 328
Kiina / Kina	3 886	1 849	2 037
Thaimaa / Thailand	3 465	496	2 969
Saksa / Tyskland	3 290	2 018	1 272
Turkki / Turkiet	3 178	2 261	917
Iso-Britannia / Storbritannien	3 154	2 525	692
Irak / Iraq	3 021	1 769	1 252
Serbia ja Montenegro / Serbien och Montenegro	2 997	1 598	1 399
Iran	2 606	1 459	1 147
Yhdysvallat / F�renta Staterna	2 354	1 425	929
Intia / Indien	2 337	1 471	866
Afganistan	2 196	1 169	1 027
Vietnam	1 984	959	1 025
Bosnia-Hertsegovina / Bosnia-Herzegovine	1 656	846	810
Ukraina	1 626	771	855
Muut / �vriga	5 483	20 919	14 501
Yhteens� Totalt	132 632	68 483	64 149
Ulkomaalaisten osuus v�est�st� on 2.5 %.			
Utl�nningarnas andel �r 2.5 % av befolkningen.			

Source: Pocket Statistics 2008, Population Register Centre

Language

The official languages of Finland are Finnish and Swedish (6% of the population speak Swedish as their native tongue). In some jobs, employees must be able to speak both Finnish and Swedish. Finnish pupils begin to study foreign languages in comprehensive school. On the whole, people speak fairly good English. However, foreign employees need knowledge of Finnish in working life. Employees can handle many jobs with basic language skills. Finns do not expect all foreign employees to speak good Finnish right at the start. If someone finds it difficult to speak Finnish, Finns usually give advice and guidance.

The Finnish language is different from, for example, Indo-European languages (such as English, German, and Swedish). Finnish has very few 'international' words. The structure

Amiedu 2008, Outi Sjoblom, Anni Piikki, Marketa Pedronova, Anja Tarhala, and Marja Kaikkonen

of the language is also different: words such as nouns inflect and change, depending on where they are used in a sentence. In many workplaces, people can start work with knowledge of English. However, foreign employees should still learn to speak Finnish. They will need it in their job. Foreign employees should not be afraid to use the language. When an employee wants to learn Finnish, this means the person values Finland and Finnish culture.

In Finland, the manner of speaking is informal. You can call even strangers by their forenames; there is no need to use surnames or titles. This is why foreign employees do not need to worry about whether they address people formally in the correct way in the workplace. In general, in Finland it is the issues that are important, not so much how you say things.

Working life

In Finland, most professions are so-called service professions, such as in sales or nursing. Finland is a **service society**: the majority of the workforce (i.e., people who work) perform paid work in service professions. In service sectors, the need for labour is increasing because the people are ageing (in other words, the population is getting older on average). Many people will retire in Finland in the near future. Fewer people of working age (between the ages of 20 and 65) are entering the job market than leaving it. The number of people of working age drops by as much as 20,000 each year. Ageing of the population is a big problem: there are not enough employees entering the job market to compensate for the number of people leaving it. The same phenomenon is occurring in other European countries, too.

The construction, nursing, and industrial sectors and industry will face the biggest need for labour between 2000 and 2015. New employees will also be needed in the metal industry, retail trade, transportation, building maintenance, and the nursing sector.

In Finland, women are active participants in working life. Women have the opportunity to take an active role in working life, and they exercise it. For instance, Finland has a good day-care system for children. Most women are employed outside the home. Work done in the home such as caring for children is not considered employment in Finland. Housewife is not an official profession in Finland. People in Finland expect women to study, get an education, and work for a living.

In July–September 2008, the average income of salary-earners with regular working hours was approximately 2,800 euros per month. Men earned 3,110 euros, and women earned 2,520 euros, on average. The average income of employees with a monthly salary was about 2,920 euros, and the estimated monthly income of employees with an hourly salary was 2,370 euros. Finnish employees have an earned income (earnings from work) that is average when compared to other European countries.

Coming to work in Finland

Citizens of countries that are members of the European Union / European Economic Area (EU/EEA) do not need a permit when they begin to work, because freedom of movement is a basic right in the EU. All citizens of EU member states have the right to work in

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another member state. Work is governed by the legislation of the country where the work is performed. Freedom of movement and the right to work also encompasses EU citizens' family members, spouse, and children under the age of 21, if the family moves to another EU/EEA country because of an EU citizen's employment.

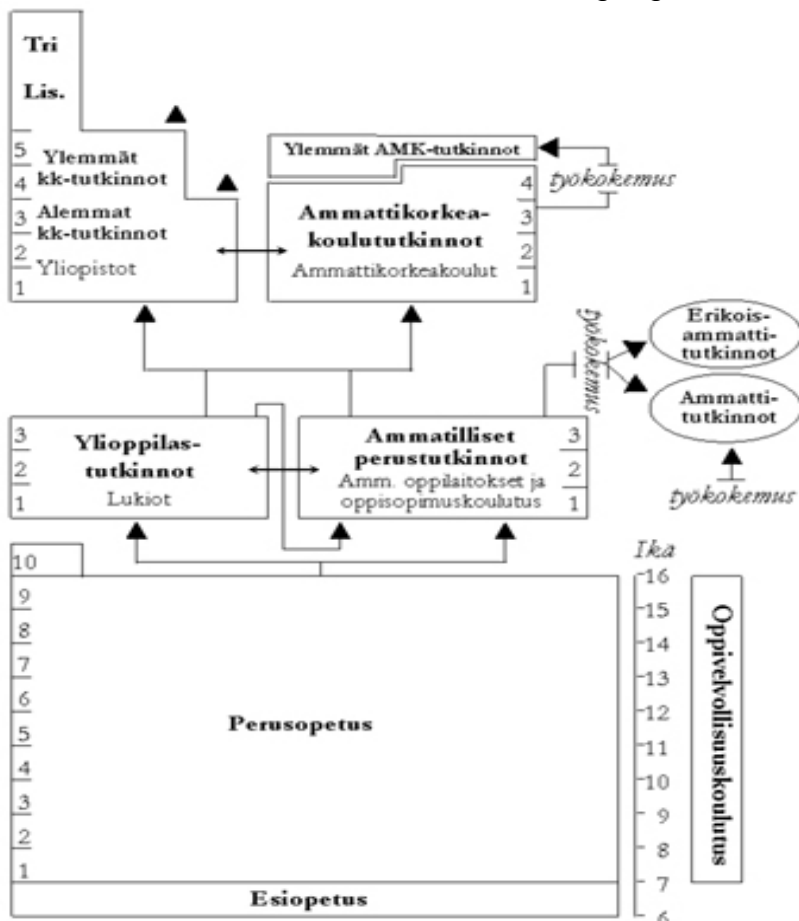
The Finnish Aliens Act specifies the rights and obligations of immigrants. The law also specifies what kinds of opportunities immigrants, who arrive in Finland from various regions and for various reasons, have to live and work here. For information on issues related to residence permits, please visit the Web site of the Finnish Immigration Service at Maahanmuuttovirasto. For further information, please visit www.mol.fi/finnwork.

Section 2: Competence and education

General information

Education is important in Finland; Finns study a lot. Competence is valued in working life. In many workplaces, employees receive additional and further education. You might say that employees in Finland study throughout their working lives. Finland is a country of high technology, where people must be familiar with information technology etc. People who work study so that their knowledge corresponds to the needs of working life. In other words, their professional skills must always be up to date.

When compared with adults in other countries, Finnish adults take part in education actively. They educate themselves because it helps them advance in their work or career. Finns also study a great deal in their leisure time. Finland has many folk colleges and workers' institutes that arrange a wide variety of educational opportunities for adults. Such institutions offer courses in the Finnish language, for example.



The Finnish education system. An immigrant who is a permanent resident of Finland and belongs to an age bracket that falls under compulsory education obligations (between seven and 17 years of age) is entitled to basic education.

Vocational adult education

There are education institutions in Finland that specialise in adult education. Adults can study for a vocational degree or enhance their professional qualifications at these institutions. Through adult education, they can, for example, study for a new profession or seek additional and further education for their current profession.

When people apply for vocational adult education, their existing competence is taken into account. Adult education is structured to correspond to the needs of working life. Studies are flexible. People can choose to study only those subjects they need and those skills they do not yet have. At the beginning of a course, students can provide the educational institution with certificates that can be used to evaluate their competence, such as work and school certificates. Further and additional courses completed during employment are also considered. Then students and teachers together estimate what other knowledge and skills the students need. After the assessment, a study plan is prepared for each student.

The objective is that degrees, studies, and work experience abroad can be a basis for planning and supplementing of education in Finland. Both foreigners and immigrants living in Finland have the same opportunity to study as Finnish people. It is important to assess language skills before someone starts vocational studies. Thus teachers can help the immigrants wishing to study evaluate whether they have the necessary language skills to complete their vocational studies. At many institutions, students can study languages at the same time as they learn a profession.

Competence-based qualification system

Adults often master some profession even if they do not have a vocational education. There are many ways to learn a profession: on the job, through independent studies, or by having a hobby. Previously, students had to go through many years of vocational education if they wanted a diploma. In 1994, a law on competence-based qualifications was passed in Finland: Now adults can pass a competence-based qualification test and show in practice that they have mastered a profession, receiving a diploma for it. The qualification is often obtained in connection with preparatory education. Educational institutions arrange preparatory education for competence-based qualifications or elements of them. Competence-based qualifications are received in connection with this education. Skills tests for the qualification usually last several days and require mastery of many skills. That is why many adult education institutions arrange education that prepares students for competence-based qualifications in various fields.

Immigrants can take competence-based qualification tests just as Finns do. Students must speak good enough Finnish that they can work in Finland. However, the language skills needed in various professions differ. For instance, a salesperson must speak Finnish well, and a secretary must also be able to write good Finnish. A baker does not have to speak Finnish as well as a salesperson does, etc. The ability to speak the language must match the language skills needed in the profession.

Apprenticeship training

It is also possible to study for a profession through apprenticeship training. This includes theoretical studies at an educational institution and studying of issues related to the profession in the workplace. Apprenticeship training involves a fixed-term employment contract between the student and the employer. Apprenticeship training takes place mostly in the workplace, and on-the-job learning is supplemented with so-called theoretical studies at the educational institution. Students are paid a salary during apprenticeship training. During the theoretical studies, they are paid education benefits if the employer does not pay a salary during this time. The amount of theoretical education depends on the objectives of the training and on the student's personal study plan.

Learning in the workplace is controlled and supervised by a trainer selected by the employer. In apprenticeship training, the amount of theory varies from one field of training to the next, but the average is approximately 20 per cent. Apprenticeship training can be arranged for a current employee, a new employee, an unemployed job applicant, or an entrepreneur.

Apprenticeship training is popular in Finland. It is well suited to people of all ages, those changing careers and those in need of further training. Apprenticeship training is a practical way to learn a profession, update one's knowledge, and evolve into an expert in one's field. Apprenticeship training can be discussed in more detail with the employer when work in Finland begins.

Higher education in Finland

Polytechnics and universities provide higher education. At polytechnic level, education is based on the requirements of working life. Universities carry out scientific research, and their education is based on it. A degree that has been obtained abroad does not necessarily transfer automatically to Finland; instead, it may have to be supplemented in Finland. Polytechnics and universities arrange further education for immigrants and foreigners. You can ask educational institutions about the education they offer and about supplementing an existing degree.

Vocational recognition of foreign university degrees

Recognition of degrees refers to a decision about the qualifications a foreign degree gives those who seek a job or a place to study in Finland. On its Web site, the Finnish National Board of Education gives information, in Finnish as well as English, about recognition in Finland of degrees obtained abroad (see www.opi.fi).

The public sector (the national government and municipalities) has requirements for certain educational qualification for those who apply for public offices and positions. In order to comply with the qualification requirements, those who have studied abroad usually need a decision from the Board of Education on recognition of their degree.

Employers in the private sector carry out their own assessments of qualifications granted by a foreign degree, when they select their employees. A recognition decision is not required, but it may be of help.

Vocational education abroad

In Finland, it is a duty of the Board of Education to issue expert statements on foreign vocational degrees. A statement does not grant qualifications for a governmental or municipal office or position. A statement may help those applying for employment or education, because it describes the content and level of education in the home country.

The Board of Education also issues a supplement to a certificate (Certificate Supplement), which describes in more detail the skills and competence acquired at the vocational education. It is especially useful for employers. For additional information about the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, please click here: Cedefopista.

University studies abroad – academic recognition

Academic recognition of studies refers to 1) access to education on the basis of foreign education and 2) crediting of foreign studies toward a degree in Finland. Decisions on crediting are made at universities or other educational institutions. A supplement to a university diploma (Diploma Supplement) helps to assess the qualifications of graduates.

Right of vocational practice

Some professions require employees to have a licence. These professions include some in the health care sector (such as the job of a physician) and seafaring. Regulations differ and depend on whether the person coming to work here is a citizen of an EU/EEA country or not. In Finland, the Board of Education provides further information about those professions that require a right of vocational practice. It also gives advice about how and where people can apply for such a right. Sector-specific public authorities decide who is granted these rights. For example, the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health grants doctors and other health care professionals their right of vocational practice.

Competence of employees coming to Finland from abroad

Employees should have documents on their education from the home country. These are useful if training is arranged for employees in the workplace, for example. In Finland, people usually have prepared a curriculum vitae document, or CV (similar to a résumé). It explains their education, work history, and competence. Foreign employees should write their own CV. They can write it in English and later translate it into Finnish.

CV templates:

in Finnish: suomeksi

in English: englanniksi

When employees must supplement their competence in Finland, this is usually discussed at the recruitment stage. Employees can update their competence in Finland in many ways, so that it corresponds to Finnish working life. Apprenticeship training or a

competence-based qualification can be a good form of education to support competence for those who come to work in Finland from abroad.

In the private sector, the employers determine the value a degree gained abroad has when a person is applying for a job. They assess the qualifications granted by a foreign degree and decide whom they employ. Public offices may have certain qualification requirements that are used to evaluate job applicants, with people selected for the post after the evaluation.

Employees coming to Finland from within Europe

European countries have very different education systems. Employers are not always familiar with education systems in other countries. **Europassi** (or the Europass) is an instrument that job applicants can use to assess what their degree or education is like and how it corresponds to a Finnish degree. The Europass helps an employer understand what competence and skills a job applicant from another European country possesses.

The Europass contains five documents that employees can use to explain what they can do. These documents are used in all EU/EEA countries. The Europass can be used for job or education applications. The main document of the Europass is the Europass Curriculum Vitae. Employees can select other Europass documents to attach to it, if they want. These include the Europass Language Passport, Europass Mobility, and international Diploma and Certificate Supplements. Europass users can fill in the Europass Curriculum Vitae and Europass Language Passport themselves. The EU has passed a resolution on the Europass arrangement, so that Europeans have a common and clear framework for degrees and qualifications.

Section 3: The labour market system

The Finnish labour market system is based on labour legislation and on co-operation and agreements between employers' and employees' associations, also at the local level (in the individual workplaces). Labour legislation creates a framework for employment rules, but practical matters of working life are also largely regulated through collective bargaining agreements (TES). Development of working life is handled in tripartite co-operation, meaning that there are three policymakers involved in negotiations: the employers, salary-earners (i.e., employees), and the government.

Employees are organised via trade unions, while employers have various employer associations. Trade unions are managed as central organisations of trade unions, and employers' associations are organised as employers' confederations.

The labour market system in Finland

Central organisations of trade unions	CENTRALISED AGREEMENTS	Employers' confederation
Trade unions	TES COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENT FOR CIVIL SERVANTS	Employers' associations
Employees' representative / shop steward	LOCAL AGREEMENTS	Employer
Employee	EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT	Employer

Trade unions and employers' associations negotiate a collective bargaining agreement (TES), and the employee and employer together conclude an employment contract when employment begins. The benefits agreed on in the collective bargaining agreement are always the minimum required. Lower levels cannot be set in the employment contract.

Labour legislation and collective bargaining agreements specify the rights and obligations of employees. Legislation and the collective bargaining agreement determine, for example, minimum wages, working hours, holidays, sick pay, and terms of dismissal.

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The agreements must be mutually uniform. In Finland, terms of employment are determined on the basis of many statutes, which have been organised in a hierarchy (a statute at a higher level overrides a lower one). For example, an employee's salary cannot be lower than agreed in the collective bargaining agreement. Terms of employment are agreed on in the employment contract, but the minimum terms are determined by law and according to the collective bargaining agreement. In an employment contract, the employer and employee can agree on better terms than those given in the collective bargaining agreement. The salary, for example, can be higher than what the collective bargaining agreement requires.

When an employers' association and a trade union agree on terms of employment in certain sectors, the result is a collective bargaining agreement (TES). The public sector (municipalities or other government as the employer) has its own collective agreement. Agreements are made for a fixed term, usually one year or two years, or even longer. Collective bargaining agreements for the private sector (TES) and for civil servants (VES) are binding for the trade unions and employers' associations that have concluded them, and for their members. A collective bargaining agreement for the private sector can also be generally binding. In such cases, even employers who are not members of an employers' association must observe the agreement in dealing with their employees. Finland has about 200 collective bargaining agreements for the private sector.

The collective bargaining agreement specifies the rights and obligations of employees and employers, such as salaries, working hours, holidays, industrial peace (no strikes against the agreement can be held during the agreement period), and local agreements. Likewise, for municipalities and other government employers, collective agreements for civil servants (VES) specify the rights and obligations of employees and employers.

In the workplace, the trade union and employees who belong to it are represented by a shop steward. The shop steward is elected by the employees. Employees can ask the shop steward or the trade union for their sector, for example, what the collective bargaining agreement for their specific field is like. Job applications and employment contracts may read: 'salary according to TES'. Employees should find out how high salaries in their field are in Finland. It is important for employees to be familiar with the collective bargaining agreement, because Finland does not have a law on minimum wages, for example. Instead, salaries are agreed on in the collective bargaining agreements.

Not all workplaces have a shop steward. Some have a 'delegate': a representative, elected by the employees, who corresponds to a shop steward. On the basis of the Employment Contracts Act, the employees can elect a delegate when the workplace does not have a shop steward under the agreement between the employee organisation and the employer. The position of the delegate is based on legislation, not on agreements between labour market organisations.

Foreign employees or employers can join the association for their sector, if they want. The associations aim to guarantee the benefits of their members and safeguard their rights. Employee associations try to improve their members' livelihood (salary) and employment security. Correspondingly, employer associations look after the interests of those employers and companies that belong to the association.

Trade unions are independent of political parties. People who are employed by unions or belong to them can support different parties and policies. In contrast, both employee and employer associations try to influence political decision-makers and labour market politics so that things go according to their wishes.

Employees can join trade unions either by contacting the shop steward for the workplace or by directly contacting their sector's trade union. Employees and employer who belong to associations pay the association a membership fee. The fees are about 1–2% of the salary, and they are tax-deductible. Members receive various benefits and services when they belong to trade unions. The union's membership fee often includes the membership fee for an unemployment fund. Finland has a voluntary unemployment fund system through which employed people insure themselves against unemployment. However, trade unions and unemployment funds are two separate systems.

Unemployment funds

While working, an employee pays the unemployment fund a membership fee. If employment ends and the employee becomes unemployed, he or she can apply for earnings-related benefits. The earnings-related unemployment allowance is an allowance (in the form of financial support) that is determined according to income. Certain conditions must be met before payment of the earnings-related allowance. To receive such an allowance; an employee must have belonged to the unemployment fund for a certain period of time etc. The earnings-related allowance is calculated on the basis of the salary before the employee became unemployed. The allowance is available for approximately two years.

Unemployment funds pay other benefits, as well, such as financial aid related to education. Information on these is available from Kela and the unemployment funds.

In Finland, both salary-earners and entrepreneurs can belong to an unemployment fund. An entrepreneur is considered to be unemployed after he or she has closed down the business operations or sold his or her share of the business. Entrepreneurship can end with the sale, dissolution, bankruptcy, or liquidation of a company, or because of a divorce. An entrepreneur is also deemed unemployed if business operations have, as a general rule, been interrupted for at least four months. An entrepreneur's earnings-related unemployment security is based on voluntary unemployment insurance. If the entrepreneur has paid a membership fee to an unemployment fund intended for entrepreneurs, he or she can apply for a daily allowance etc. after business operations have ended.

Section 4: Employment contracts

When an employer hires an employee, the employer usually signs a written employment contract with the employee. Employment contracts describe duties, salary, and other benefits and terms related to employment. A contract can also be oral, meaning that the terms of employment can be agreed on by discussion. If no written employment contract has been made or if the terms of the employment contract are not explained in the written employment contract, the employer must give a written account of the central terms of the work, without a separate request. It is recommended that employment contracts be made in writing. When the issues have been written down, both the employee and employer can check the contract to see what they have agreed on as the benefits and terms of work together. This helps if disputes arise in the work.

In employment relationships that are valid until further notice and those that last more than a month, the employer must give the employee a written account of the central terms of employment. These include the date when employment begins, the duration of a fixed-term contract and the reason it is fixed-term, the employee's duties, the place where the work is to be done, how the salary or other remuneration is determined, the regular working hours, how annual leave is determined, the period of notice or how it is determined, the applicable collective bargaining agreement, etc. If the employer does not give the employee an account of the central terms of the work, a fine is charged for violating this obligation.

Two copies of the contract are made, one for the employee and one for the employer.

As a general rule, at least the following issues are covered in a written employment contract:

1) the parties to the employment contract

Both the employer and the employee sign the employment contract.

2) the date when work begins

The date when employment begins is the date when the employee starts to work.

3) whether the contract involves an employment relationship that is valid until further notice, one that is for a fixed term, or something else, such as on-the-job training

An employment relationship that is valid until further notice is the usual form for an employment contract. In an employment relationship that is valid until further notice, the work continues until the employee resigns or the employer dismisses the employee. In such a case, the employer must have a reason for dismissing the employee. The Employment Contracts Act lists the acceptable reasons. When an employment contract is valid until further notice, the employee has a steady or permanent job.

A contract that is valid until further notice can be terminated by either the employer or the employee. Termination of an employment contract involves a period of notice: an amount

of time (stated in the contract) between notification of termination and the date when the employment contract is no longer binding for the parties that signed it. Either the employer or the employee can cancel an employment contract that is valid until further notice, in which case the employment contract expires immediately, without a period of notice. An employer can terminate an employment contract only for appropriate and weighty reasons. These reasons can be due to the employee or might be related to the company's financial situation or production, or to the reorganisation of the employer's operations. The employment contract can only be terminated for a very weighty reason.

In a **fixed-term employment relationship**, the parties have agreed on when work begins and ends. An employment contract can be made for a fixed term if there is a justifiable reason for this. The reason might be that the job is a temporary post or that work is available only for a short period of time (such as seasonal work). A fixed-term employment contract is valid for the time agreed or as long as it takes to do the work agreed. Generally speaking, atypical work refers to short-term employment contracts that have been made for a fixed term. If an employment contract is for a fixed term, it is binding on both parties for the fixed term agreed. A fixed-term contract can be cancelled only for very weighty reasons.

On-the-job training means work that is part of a student's studies, for example. It is often unpaid work. People in on-the-job training in Finland can be young people or adult students. Some are unemployed job applicants, and others are changing their profession.

4) any probationary period and its duration

The parties can agree that there is a probationary period at the beginning of the employment relationship. During this period, the employee can see whether the job is suitable and the employer can evaluate whether the employee is suitable for the job. During the probationary period, the employment contract can be cancelled by either the employee or the employer without a period of notice. The grounds for cancellation of the employment contract during the probationary period must not be discriminatory or inappropriate. In an employment relationship that is valid until further notice, the probationary period cannot be longer than four months. In a fixed-term employment relationship that lasts under eight months, the probationary period can be no more than half of the duration of the employment contract. The employee gets paid a normal salary for the probationary period.

5) the place where work is done – in which country, region, or locality the work is done

6) duties: what duties the employee has

7) salary and other benefits, and salary payment period (when the salary is paid)

Salary is determined according to a generally binding collective bargaining agreement (TES). If the sector does not have a collective bargaining agreement, the salary can be agreed on specifically in the contract. The employer is not allowed to pay a salary that is

lower than what is stated in the generally binding collective bargaining agreement. Before foreign employees sign an employment contract, they should find out the salary level in their field in Finland. The salary can include various bonuses and benefits. They can be based on age, the competence required, performance, results, etc. Other benefits might include a housing or car benefit, for example; these are agreed on with the employer. Typical salary bonuses in Finland include:

Seniority bonuses: Your salary is influenced by how many years you have worked. If you have worked for a long time, seniority bonuses increase your salary.

Overtime pay: If an employee works beyond normal working hours, the employer pays a bonus for the overtime. For time exceeding regular daily working hours, the additional amount paid for the first two hours is 50% over the basic salary and for hours after that it is 100%. Overtime can be compensated for as extra days off for employees. Overtime is always voluntary for the employee. Overtime must always be agreed on with the employer in advance.

Extra compensation for shift work: Employees' salary is influenced by whether work is done in the evening, at night, in the morning, or during the normal work day.

The salary can be:

Hourly wages: Wages are paid according to the hours worked. The job of a warehouse worker or a cleaner, for example, can be based on hourly wages.

Monthly salary: The basis for the salary is the period of one month. A monthly salary is paid once a month. The job of a teacher might apply a monthly salary.

Payment for work performed, such as piecework pay, where you get paid when the job is finished. A construction worker might receive piecework pay.

Pay by results: Pay by results is a varying part of the salary that is paid for the result of the work or for actions that have been in accordance with the objectives set. This amount is paid in addition to a fixed salary.

Pay day is usually once or twice a month, generally on the 15th day or the last day of the month. The employer pays the salary into the employee's bank account. When the salary is paid, the employee must receive a pay statement (salary slip or wage slip) that states the components of the salary. When employers talk about salary figures, they mean a gross salary, from which taxes and other levies then are deducted. Employers deduct the taxes from the employees' salary; you do not have to pay the taxes yourself. The salary that remains for the employee is a net salary. Employers in Finland very rarely pay the salary directly in hand; it is almost always paid into a bank account.

8) working hours

The central provisions concerning working hours are in the Working Hours Act. The law stipulates working hours in general terms, but the provisions of the Working Hours Act can be adapted in collective bargaining agreements (TES). Practices related to working hours must always be checked from the collective bargaining agreement applied in the specific workplace.

According to the Working Hours Act, regular working hours are eight hours per day and 40 hours per week.

Part-time work is work that is done fewer hours than the number stated in the collective bargaining agreement (TES) or valid legislation. Generally, part-time work refers to work that is done fewer than 30 hours a week. However, the collective bargaining agreement can specify that part-time work refers to other working hours.

Workplaces can use so-called flexible working hours that are contract-based. Then employees can decide for themselves when the day's work begins and ends. However, employees must work the number of hours (i.e., time per day and week) agreed. Employees can apply the leeway to sometimes work longer and on some days leave earlier. This means that the employee comes to work a little sooner or later and, correspondingly, leaves work a little sooner or later. The amount of flexibility can be no more than three hours.

If the daily working hours are more than six hours, the employee must be given a rest period (lunch break) of at least one hour during the shift. The employee and employer can agree to reduce the daily rest period to 30 minutes.

The basic rule is that from the moment each work shift begins, the employee must be guaranteed an uninterrupted daily rest period of at least 11 hours within the next 24 hours. In intermittent work, the daily rest is at least nine hours. In flexible work, it is at least seven hours.

According to the basic rule, the employee must be guaranteed uninterrupted weekly rest of at least 35 hours once a week. If possible, this must include a Sunday.

Usually work is done five days a week. Working hours in Finland have been arranged such that employees get a minimum of 35 hours of uninterrupted leisure time during the week.

9) annual leave and holiday pay

Annual leave is earned two weekdays per month in employment relationships that have lasted less than a year and 2.5 weekdays per month in employment relationships that have lasted at least a year. Leave days accumulate when an employee has worked on at least 14 days of the month. Employees also accumulate annual leave in part-time work.

For the duration of the holiday, the employee is entitled to the same pay as at work. The employee also receives holiday pay. Payment of the holiday pay is based on the collective bargaining agreement (TES). When an employment relationship ends, the employee is entitled to holiday compensation for the days of leave he or she has not used, or compensation for them, by the end of the employment relationship.

Amiedu 2008, Outi Sjöblom, Anni Piikki, Marketa Pedronova, Anja Tarhala, and Marja Kaikkonen

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Leave days are weekdays, so Saturdays are included in the holiday period. In Finland, employees usually have their summer holiday in May–September, and Christmas and/or winter holiday when it suits their and the workplace's schedule. Employers and employees try to agree together on when the employees go on holiday.

10) sick pay

Employers pay employees **sick pay**. According to the Employment Contracts Act, an employee whose employment relationship has lasted at least one month is entitled to sick pay for nine days following the first day of illness. In employment relationships that have lasted less than one month, employees are entitled to half their salary. If the illness lasts a long time, the employee receives sickness allowance from the Social Insurance Institution of Finland, or Kela. Short sick leave does not reduce the annual leave.

When an employee becomes ill, he or she must report this to the employer immediately. When the employee is ill and cannot go to work, he or she must call the supervisor immediately. The notification must be done in person – the employee's spouse or another relative cannot do it. If the illness lasts less than three days, it is usually not necessary to give the employer a medical certificate for the absence. If an employee is on sick leave for more than three days, the employer must be given a doctor's certificate. Sometimes it is enough to supply a certificate from a public health care nurse or employees' health care nurse (workplace occupational health personnel) instead of a doctor's certificate.

If the employee has a child under 10 years old who becomes ill, the mother or father can stay home and care for the child for 1–4 days. A doctor's certificate is given for this period of time, too. The employer does not have to pay salary for this period, unless something else has been agreed.

11) period of notice

An employment contract that is valid until further notice ends after the period of notice, whether terminated by the employee or the employer. If an employer dismisses an employee, he or she must explain why. The Employment Contracts Act lists the approved reasons. They include grounds related to the company's production and financial situation, and to the employee.

Grounds for dismissing an employee include, for example, that the employee has not done the work assigned, or that he or she has made many serious errors, has been habitually late, or has otherwise violated the employment contract. The case must involve an essential violation of obligations specified in the employment contract or the law.

The period of notice is the time that the employee is obliged to work until work ends. The employee gets paid a normal salary for the period of notice. During a period of notice, the employee has the normal rights and obligations of an employee, including the obligation to work. By a separate act, the employer can release the employee from this obligation. This is done separately in a written statement of the employer in the notification of dismissal.

According to the Employment Contracts Act, an employee's period of notice is 14 days in an employment relationship that has lasted less than five years without interruptions, and it is one month in an employment relationship that has lasted more than five years.

Periods of notice that employers must follow vary between 14 days and six months, on the basis of the duration of the employment relationship. The period of notice observed can also be agreed on specifically in the employment contract.

If the employee or employer does not observe the periods of notice, he or she can be obliged to pay damages.

12) statement of which collective bargaining agreement is applied to the employment contract

Employment contracts include a statement of which collective bargaining agreement (TES) is applied to the employment contract.

Employment contract templates in several languages are available at the following address:

<http://www.tyosuojelu.fi/fi/verkkolomakkeet/101>

Section 5. Forms of work

An employment contract states the terms according to which the employee works for the employer. Employment relationships may differ in several ways: in whether the contract is made with a private employer or the government / a municipality, for how long the employment relationship is valid, how long the daily working hours are, etc.

Employment relationship or service

When an employee works at a private company, he or she begins an employment relationship with the employer. When an employee is employed by the government or a municipality, this is called service. The difference between these for the employee is that service-based work may have certain qualification requirements (such as the ability to speak Finnish and/or Swedish). In an employment relationship, the nature of the work and the employer determine which skills the employee must have and what is expected of the employee or job applicant.

An employment relationship that is valid until further notice (permanent) or a fixed-term employment relationship

An employment relationship can be either valid until further notice (permanent) or for a fixed amount of time. Laws and collective bargaining agreements specify precisely when fixed-term employment relationships can be used.

An employment relationship can be for a fixed term if the reason is, for example:

- a temporary post
- on-the-job training
- a project
- a peak in demand or a seasonal job

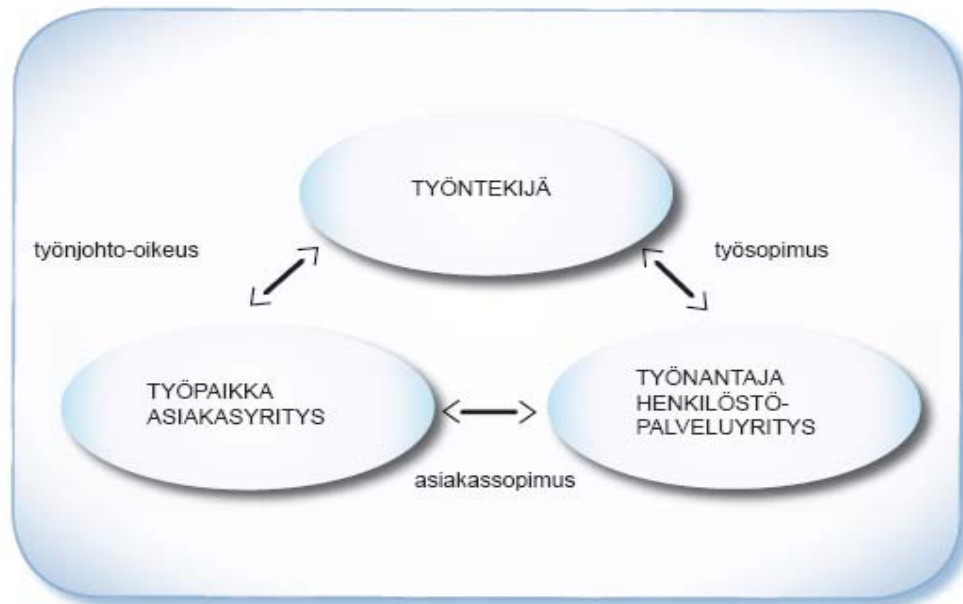
Full-time employment relationship or part-time relationship

An employment relationship can be full-time or part-time. Part-time work refers to work that is done for less than the 'full' working hours (according to the agreements for the sector). Part-time employees must have the same benefits – specified in labour legislation and collective bargaining agreements (TES) – as full-time employees. However, the benefits are in proportion to the hours worked.

Renting of staff (temporary agency work)

Work can also be done for a temporary work agency ('temp work'). An employer can sign an employment contract with a company that hires out staff. In such cases, the salary and the place where work is done may vary.

A company that needs employees concludes a contract with the company that hires out staff. The company that hires out staff finds a suitable employee for its client company.



Private
employment
agency = A
company that
hires out staff

Source: A great way to working life: Temporary staff – a guide for job applicants. Private Employment Agencies Association and the Ministry of Employment.

In temporary agency work, the company that hires out staff is the employee's employer. The employee has an employment contract with the company that hires out staff, even though working at the client company. The company that hires out staff pays the employee's salary and attends to all other employer obligations, too. The client company instructs and guides the employee in how to do the work.

In temporary agency work, employees do not have to pay any levies, and no fees are deducted from the salary. Renting of staff is the purpose of private employment agencies, whose goal is to make a profit. The client company pays the invoice concerning staff to the company that hires out staff; employees do not and must not incur any costs for the agency work or for finding of a job.

The employment terms for hired-out employees can be determined in two different ways. If the company that hires out staff has a binding collective bargaining agreement (TES), it specifies the terms. If the company that hires out staff does not have a binding collective bargaining agreement, the terms are specified according to the collective bargaining agreement that applies for the client company. In such cases, the working hours, salaries, breaks, salary bonuses (if any), paid sick leave, and other employment benefits of hired-out employees are the same as those for permanent employees. The hired-out employees are then in the same position as the actual employees of the client company as far as the terms of employment are concerned.

Employees who do hired-out work must be paid a salary that is in accordance with the relevant collective bargaining agreement. In accordance with the Annual Holidays Act, annual leave accumulates according to the same stipulations as in a regular employment relationship.



Euroopan unioni
Euroopan sosiaalirahasto

Staff recruited from abroad come primarily through companies that hire out staff. The same regulations and agreements related to temporary agency work apply for both employees who live in Finland and those who come to Finland to work.

Section 6: Rights and obligations of employees and employers

Laws and agreements determine the rights and obligations of employees and employers. Finnish employees are familiar with the organisation of the country's labour market and have a fairly good understanding of the rights and obligations of employers and employees. As a general rule, employers do not tell employees everything about Finnish labour legislation. This does not mean that the employers do not care about their employees. Employers expect and assume that employees will find out the collective bargaining agreement details and other rules of working life for themselves. Employees can get information from their colleagues, the shop steward, or the trade union for their sector. Employers, on the other hand, can ask employers' associations for information.

Under Finnish labour laws, all employees and employers have the same rights and obligations. In Finland, all employees are entitled to equal treatment. Employers must not discriminate against anyone: gender, parentage, ethnic origin, nationality, national origin, religion, age, state of health, disability, political activity, trade union activity, etc. must not have a negative effect on the position of an employee. On the other hand, an employee must not claim without reason that he or she is being discriminated against by the employer. An accusation of discrimination without cause is a serious matter.

According to Finnish labour legislation, rights and obligations can be categorised as follows:

Employee's rights:

- salary in accordance with a collective bargaining agreement in the private sector or for civil servants (TES and VES)
- protection as provided for by laws and agreements
- organisation (politics and trade union activity)
- a healthy and safe work environment

Employee's obligations:

- to do the work carefully
- to follow instructions given by managers
- to avoid participating in operations that compete with the employer (the employee must not do work that harms the position of the employer, whether for another employer or as an independent entrepreneur)
- to maintain business and professional secrets
- to take the employer's interests into account
- not to be intoxicated in the workplace (it may lead to immediate cancellation of the employment relationship – zero tolerance applies for all employees in the workplace)

- in some professions and jobs, to heed a professional secrecy obligation (neglecting this is a serious matter)

Employer's rights:

- to employ the worker
- to manage the work and to give managerial instructions and orders
- to terminate/cancel an employment contract within the limits of the law

Employer's obligations:

- to comply with the relevant laws and agreements
- to treat employees equally
- to attend to occupational safety
- to give employees a written account of the central terms of employment
- to promote a good work atmosphere, employees' performance at work, and professional development

Work certificates

An employee has a statutory right to receive a work certificate from the employer, upon request, when the employment relationship ends. A work certificate is an important document that states the duration of the employment relationship and the duties. Furthermore, an employee can ask the employer to state in this certificate the reason for ending of the employment relationship and/or provide an assessment of the employee's work skills and conduct (what the employee could do and what kind of employee he or she is). Previous work experience is important, for example, when you apply for a place to study or a new job. The employer is obliged to supply a work certificate until 10 years from the end of the employment relationship, but after that only if it doesn't cause unreasonable inconvenience to the employer. If an employee wants to receive an assessment of work skills and conduct in the work certificate, the employer must provide this to the employee, upon the employee's request, until five years after the end of the employment relationship. Under the same principle, an employer must give an employee a work certificate if the employee's work certificate is lost or destroyed (gets wet, is torn, is burnt, etc.). Any employer who does not supply a work certificate on these terms, deliberately or through negligence, is in violation of the Employment Contracts Act. The standard practice in Finland is that the employee requests the work certificate and the employer submits it.

Family leave

When a child is born in a family, the parents are entitled to family leave (some time to stay home and care for the child). When the family leave ends, the employee is entitled to return to the old job or a corresponding job in the same workplace.

There are several types of family leave. The term refers to:

- maternity leave
- paternity leave
- parental leave (can be taken by the mother or the father)
- child-care leave (the employer is not obliged to pay a salary for the duration of child-care leave)

When a family are about to have a child, the employee must report any planned maternal or paternal and child-care leave to the employer in good time. As a general rule, the notification period is two months. The duration of maternal leave is 105 weekdays. Working during maternal leave is permitted if it can be done without endangering the safety of the mother, foetus, or child. However, work must not be done during the maternal leave during the two weeks before the expected date of birth or for two weeks after birth.

After the maternal leave, either the mother or father stays home and takes care of the baby, with parental leave that lasts 158 weekdays. Both parents cannot be on parental leave together. When a child is born, the father can take brief parental leave. It is 18 weekdays. In Finland, fathers often attend childbirth, so many fathers take paternal leave. The father can also take extended paternal leave after the parental leave, if he has used some of the parental leave. This is a way to encourage men to look after children. When the father is on parental leave or extended paternal leave, the mother of the family returns to her job.

According to the Employment Contracts Act, the employer is not under an obligation to pay salary for the duration of the family leave. Salary paid during family leave is based on the provisions of the collective bargaining agreement (TES) for the sector.

After the parental leave, the family can apply for a day-care centre for the child.

In Finland, children usually attend a day-care centre when they are 2–3 years of age. Employers and employees are familiar with family leave, and it is commonly used. The employment contract of a pregnant woman cannot be cancelled, and she must not be discriminated against because of her pregnancy.

The mother can be on child-care leave until the child turns three years old. Kela handles all matters related to family leave. Kela pays compensation for the duration of family leave. The amount depends on the employee's income.

For further information, please follow this link:

<http://www.kela.fi/in/internet/suomi.nsf/NET/110701154349EH?openDocument>

Section 7: Employee insurance

Finland has two pension systems, which supplement each other: the Employee Pensions Act and the Social Insurance Act.

- Employment pensions are earned through salaried work and entrepreneurship
- A national pension guarantees a certain minimum subsistence when a person is retired

National pension is paid to people who live in Finland. National pension is granted and paid by Kela. It guarantees minimum subsistence if the applicant does not receive an employment pension or if it is small. When the employment pension amount increases, the national pension decreases. The amount of pension is also affected by how long a person has lived in Finland. Not all immigrants are entitled to an old-age pension. People who have turned 65 years of age are entitled to a national pension.

Employer's statutory insurance

By law, employers must provide for the following for their employees:

Pension security

The employer arranges pension security for the employees. The amount of employment pension depends on the number of years worked and the amount of salary earned. The longer an employee is employed and the greater his or her income, the larger the employment pension. Payment of employment pension begins when employment ends. Payment of old-age pension begins between 63 and 68 years of age; the start date can be selected. In Finland, pension income is taxable.

A pension guarantees subsistence in old age, but also in the event of disability or the death of the provider of the family. Employment pension legislation enables people to work part-time, for example, with the help of a part-time pension. An elderly employee may take a part-time pension before actual retirement and work fewer than the ordinary working hours. Employers are under no obligation to provide part-time work, but people in Finnish workplaces are familiar with part-time pensions and you can discuss them with the employer.

Employment pension security is funded by employers and employees together. The employer collects the employee's share from the employee's salary and pays this and the employer's share of the insurance premiums to the pension institution. Employment pension insurance is managed by employment insurance companies, pension funds, and pension trusts. In Finland, matters related to pension security are the responsibility of the Finnish Centre for Pensions. The Finnish Centre for Pensions sends information to employees about the pensions they have accumulated, at regular intervals.

Everyone is entitled to employment pension security. If a foreign employee leaves Finland before retirement, the person's pension still accumulates in Finland until retirement age. Pension can be received in any country, regardless of nationality. Public authorities handle the practical matters, but employees should retain all documentation of work done in

Finland. Employees can request an extract from the register of the Finnish Centre for Pensions regarding pensions accumulated. It is important that employees keep work certificates of all employment relationships they have had in Finland. Work certificates can be used to correct information in the registers, if necessary. Employees should monitor their accumulated pensions and correct their own information, if necessary, by contacting the Finnish Centre for Pensions.

Accident insurance

An employer must take out accident insurance for the employees. This must always be done at the beginning of the employment relationship. If there is an accident at work, the employee may be entitled to compensation. The compensation may be payment of medical expenses and lost income via a daily allowance, an employment accident pension, compensation for injury caused by the accident, rehabilitation, or (if the accident leads to death) a family pension payable to family members.

Wage security

If an employer goes bankrupt or cannot pay the employees' salaries, the employees can claim their unpaid salaries in the form of wage security.

The wage security system guarantees payment of employees' receivables (salary) from the employment relationship in case the employer goes bankrupt or is otherwise insolvent. Employees must make an application concerning wage security within three months from the due date of the receivable.

Source of additional information about Finnish wage security:

http://www.mol.fi/mol/fi/02_tyosuhteet_ja_lait/02_ulkom_suomessa/02_tyosuhde/05_suom_palkkaturva/index.jsp

Group life insurance

Employees are usually covered by group life insurance. Employers who are subject to the stipulations of group life insurance in a generally binding collective bargaining agreement (TES) are obliged by law to take out such insurance. If an employee suffers a handicap from permanent disability, group life insurance pays compensation for it. In cases of death, the compensation is usually paid to family members or an appointed beneficiary.

Employees should ask the employer what kinds of insurance policies he or she has taken out for employees. This is important if, for example, an employee is considering taking out private insurance policies. For instance, when someone wants to buy a home, banks can offer various types of insurance against unemployment and death. The employer may already have taken care of such insurance policies on behalf of the employee. When you find out what insurance policies the employer has taken out, you can avoid obtaining (and paying for) overlapping insurance policies.

Employers can also take out different kinds of voluntary insurance policies for the employees in addition to these statutory insurance policies. Employees can take out voluntary, supplementary insurance. Membership in an unemployment fund, for example, provides security against unemployment.

Section 8: Taxation



In Finland, taxes must be paid for all salaried work. Employers withhold 'advance tax' from the salary (pay-as-you-earn tax). The tax is paid to the government and the municipality. Tax money pays for various services and social security, such as health care, pensions, and schools.

When Finnish people talk about a salary, they speak of a gross salary. The gross salary is specified in the employment contract. This is the salary before withholding of taxes and other obligatory levies, such as employer's social insurance contributions. The salary that remains for the employee is the net salary.

Please see the following link for a sample salary slip:

<http://www.tyorengas.fi/tyorengas/?main=49>

When work begins, the employee must give the employer a tax card. A tax card can be obtained from the local tax office. If the employee does not submit a tax card to the employer, 60 per cent will be deducted from the salary in taxes. In Finland, a so-called progressive taxation model is used in state income taxation. Taxes are paid in accordance with one's income. If a person has little income (for example, the salary is low), the tax percentage is low. If a person has more income, proportionally more taxes must be paid, meaning that taxation is then higher. Pay-as-you-earn taxation includes state income tax and also municipal taxes. When tax is withheld, employment pension, unemployment contribution, and sickness insurance premiums are withheld from the salary. You can take your employment contract to the tax office and calculate the tax percentage according to your income with the help of the officials.

Every taxpayer must submit a tax return that reports all income earned. There are many treaties concerning taxation between various countries. This is why foreign employees should ask the local tax office for advice on taxation.

The tax administration sends every salary-earner a tax proposal in April. Some of the information is already filled in. Such information has been received from employers, banks, insurance companies and Kela, etc. If the tax proposal contains incorrect information or it does not include all of the information that affects income, property owned, or taxation otherwise, it must be corrected by the taxpayer. After that, the taxpayer has to sign the return and deliver it to the tax administration. If all of the information is correct, there is no need to return the tax proposal.

Finnish people keep records of their income, so that they can check the information of the tax authorities. It is easy to check this information when you store all receipts, such as salary or wage slips that you have received from your employer.

If an employee does not pay taxes on work done, it is said that he or she 'moonlights'. Under Finnish law, this is wrong. If an employee does not pay taxes, it also means that the employer does not pay pension insurance premiums or otherwise attend to occupational protection or accident insurance. If there is an accident when an employee is moonlighting and there is no accident insurance, the employee or the family will not receive any compensation. It is also illegal in Finland to pay salary for moonlighting.

A person who moonlights forfeits the legal protection that employees who pay taxes have. No-one can handle possible problems related to payment of salary, for example. Such an employee is also not entitled to earnings-related unemployment or sickness allowance, or to maternity, paternity, or parental allowance. Finnish people know these things, and that is why moonlighting is rather rare. Most Finnish employers always take out insurance and comply with the labour legislation, but, unfortunately, some do not.

If foreign employees are not familiar with Finnish labour legislation, they can be tempted to do non-taxable work. By paying taxes, foreign employees receive the same rights and security as Finnish employees.

Tax calendar:



Section 9: Health and safety at work

Finland has laws that are aimed at guaranteeing a safe work environment. The employer is responsible for ensuring that everyone can do the assigned work safely. New employees must be provided with orientation to the workplace. The employer is responsible for teaching all employees the correct work methods and telling about possible dangers in the workplace.

The employer is responsible for explaining the safety guidelines for the workplace to all employees. By law, employees are also responsible for occupational safety. They must work according to the instructions. If something breaks, it must be reported to the employer; you must not work with broken machines and tools, for example. If the work is obviously dangerous, an employee is allowed to refuse to do it.

If an employee uses machines or chemicals at work, the employer must give precise instructions on how to use them correctly. In some jobs, employees must wear protective equipment, such as a helmet, safety goggles, safety gloves, safety shoes, hearing protectors, or a breathing mask. If the instructions say that an employee must wear a helmet, the employer must give this to the employee and the employee must wear it.

In Finland, people pay a lot of attention to occupational safety. People in Finnish workplaces are used to wearing protective equipment. In sectors where hygiene is important (such as health care and the restaurant business), hygiene regulations are strict. Employees and employers must observe the hygiene regulations to the letter, and neglecting them is a punishable offence.

According to the law, there must be enough people in the workplace who know first aid, and first-aid kits and operating procedures must be available in case of an accident. Employers arrange first-aid training for the staff in the workplace.

Occupational health care

Occupational health care is preventive health care that is based on occupational health legislation. According to the law, employers are responsible for arranging occupational health care. All employers are obliged to arrange it, regardless of the size of the workplace or the number of employees.

The focus in occupational health care is the needs of the company, which are specified by the employer, the employees, and occupational health care personnel. The objective of occupational health care is a healthy and safe work environment, a good work community, prevention of work-related illnesses, and maintenance and promotion of the ability of the employees to work and function well. Employers receive compensation for the occupational health care they arrange for the employees.

When you arrange an employment contract, you can ask the employer about matters related to occupational health care. Different employers have different agreements on which health services are included in occupational health care.

Industrial safety districts

There are eight industrial safety districts in Finland, operating under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. It is the duty of the industrial safety districts to verify that work safety regulations are observed in the workplace. The industrial safety districts are supervisory authorities and experts on working life, and they operate under the ministry and are politically independent. The districts report to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health on occupational development needs. Thus the industrial safety districts play an important role in the development of workplace conditions.

Industrial safety districts monitor:

- harmful stresses caused by work and working conditions
- workplace accidents
- risks related to chemicals
- compliance with the general guidelines for working life

The industrial safety districts advise both employees and employers on matters related to occupational safety and health, and on the terms of employment.

The industrial safety districts carry out inspections in the workplace. A representative of the industrial safety district may check the following: Are safety regulations observed in the workplace? Is there sufficient orientation to the work? Are the working conditions and employment terms of foreign employees in accordance with Finnish laws and agreements?

Sources of information about industrial safety districts:

<http://www.tyosuojelu.fi>

<http://www.tyosuojelu.fi/se/>

<http://www.tyosuojelu.fi/fi/workingfinland-rus>

<http://www.tyosuojelu.fi/fi/workingfinland>

<http://www.tyosuojelu.fi/fi/tootaminesoomes/>

Working life certificate, part 2: Finnish work culture

Section 10: Equality

Equality legislation

Finland has equality legislation that requires the employer to guarantee equality in the workplace and that there is no discrimination. Seemingly neutral measures may intensify inequality between the sexes in politics, working life, education, and family and private life. They can be directed at women and men in different ways. For instance, women are more often on child-care leave than men when the children are small. This is why women do not accumulate employment pension in the same way as men do.

Equality in the family

In families, both women and men take care of any children, do housework, and attend to family matters. Finnish mothers most probably were gainfully employed when their children were small. Boys and girls have seen since their childhood years how their working parents have divided up the housework. Finns have learned a model of equality in the family since they were children. Even though women have a strong position in society and working life, this does not mean that men's position is weak or weaker than women's. Finnish men participate in the everyday life of the family and regard women as equal to men. This also creates expectations as far as women are concerned. Finnish men expect women to take care of matters that are their own or related to the family or their job independently, and to help pay the expenses of the family with their own income. When both parents have their own income, they can take turns paying the bills, for example. In multicultural families where the husband is Finnish and the wife is from a culture where women traditionally do not pay a share of the family's expenses, this can cause problems. In multicultural relationships, roles and expectations can cause disputes. The Finnish concept of equality means the same rights and obligations for men and women.

Equality in working life

Finnish working life is also characterised by gender equality. Equality has many visible manifestations in Finnish working life.

More and more Finnish women are highly educated, and women work almost as much as men do. Finnish women have been gainfully employed outside the home for a long time. Women's employment has become standard practice. Mothers of small children work less outside the home than men of the same age, but women's employment typically follows the development of children: women tend to work more outside the home as any children grow older. Most of the housework is still done by women, but Finnish families are becoming ever more equal and men are doing more and more of the housework.

Management culture

In the workplace, gender equality is apparent from the fact that many managers and supervisors are women. Women's equality is sometimes confusing to foreigners who are

used to having a man as a manager or supervisor. In Finland, however, the opinions of a female supervisor are just as important as those of a male supervisor. There can be a problem in the workplace if a male employee does not follow the instructions of a female supervisor. If an employee does not comply with the instructions or orders of a female supervisor, this is a violation of labour legislation. Equality truly does exist in the workplace. It is standard practice for Finns, and they expect everyone to act accordingly.

The relative equality of managers, supervisors, and other workers also means that there are not many symbols of power in Finnish workplaces. You cannot always tell by people's clothing, or the size of their office and its decoration, who is a manager or a supervisor and who is another type of employee. External symbols of power do not automatically bring trust and respect for managers. They have to earn the trust and respect.

The relationship between a subordinate and a supervisor is based on practical work. Employees and supervisors talk to each other as equals, and differences in people's positions in the work community often cannot be distinguished from their interaction. It is not customary in a Finnish workplace to give a supervisor a gift just for being a supervisor. If the employee and supervisor are friends in their leisure time, giving a gift outside working hours is a different matter. People at different levels in the same workplace can have a natural conversation with each other both at work and during their time off.

In Finnish working life, equality is also apparent in how people call each other by their forenames. You do not have to use a manager or supervisor's surname because of the higher position, but it may be appropriate when you agree on employment and at the beginning. Managers often suggest rather quickly that you start using forenames instead.

Employees are asked for their opinions, which are taken into account when the work is planned. Finnish people are used to expressing their opinions frankly in the workplace. Foreign employees are also expected to express their opinions in conversation. A supervisor is not a bad supervisor for asking an employee's opinion; he or she just runs things democratically in the workplace. Democracy is a powerful value for Finns and is the basis of Finnish society.

In a Finnish workplace, supervisors do not constantly monitor how employees do their jobs. People usually agree on the work in meetings, and then do what they have agreed. A supervisor tells an employee what to do. The supervisor expects the employee to decide on the details of the job. Employees can influence how, and in what order, they complete their tasks. Employees are expected to be active and have initiative, not just wait for orders from a supervisor. Waiting for orders is regarded as a sign of passiveness and a bad work attitude. When an assignment is finished, the employee plans, with a supervisor or other employees, how to do the next assignment. If an employee is not able to complete an assignment, he or she can ask for instructions directly from colleagues or a supervisor. What is important in the workplace is that things get done, not what rank people hold.

In Finnish working life, positions are obtained through education, experience, and personal qualities. Power or positions are not inherited, and favouring, for example, relatives when assignments are handed out is not the practice in Finnish workplaces. The prerequisite for a position is competence. This is why it is not sensible or even appropriate to give gifts or

to pay special attention to a manager. The position of power is not eternal, and it may not even last long. An employee may be appointed as a manager only for the duration of a certain duty (in project work). The employee may manage the project and become an ordinary employee again after the project is finished.

The amount of hierarchy in the workplace is low, and people's positions and roles in the workplace may shift when their duties change. Important characteristics in a Finnish workplace include flexibility, initiative, and the ability to get along with all people in the workplace. It is not important to pay attention to people on the basis of their position. A friendly attitude toward everyone in the workplace is a social norm, and violating it is not acceptable.

Section 11: Modesty, a direct communication style, and silence

In Finland, modesty is an important value. People do not elevate themselves in a group; they do not speak in a loud voice or boast about themselves. It is deemed good conduct in Finland to take other people into consideration. It is bad and deviant behaviour to emphasise yourself. In Finland, diligence and kindness are shown by doing things, not talking about them. The origin of this value is found in religion. The majority of Finns belong to the Protestant Evangelical Lutheran church. One sign of a good life in the Evangelical Lutheran religion is modesty. It is not good to emphasise yourself; it is more important to take others into consideration. The value of modesty has spread from the church to all of Finnish culture. People follow this code of conduct even though many Finns do not even recognise its religious origin.

Finnish people talk directly, without suggestive comments and small talk. Long hinting comments and introductions may irritate people. Straight talk is regarded as the norm, and long speeches and small talk are considered relatively unnecessary in Finnish oral culture. In many countries, such directness is deemed impolite, but not in Finland. People also ask for things directly. If a request is not expressed frankly, Finns may not understand it as a request. People tend to express their own opinions directly, and this also applies to suggestions on how to do something: 'You cannot do it like that. You have to do it like this.' The intention is not to be offensive but to state the matter clearly. Straight talk is normal in working life. For example, if you do not have enough time to finish an assignment, you should tell the supervisor as directly and as soon as possible; usually the assignment is rescheduled.

At meetings, people may first greet each other and then proceed to the matter at hand right away. A supervisor may not ask how the employees are doing or if everything is OK. The supervisor may assume that the others will speak up if not everything is fine. A direct manner of speaking is not unfriendly. People use friendly phrases such as 'Thank you' and 'Please' in their speech. The directness of the Finnish manner of speaking may come as a surprise. If you are offended by it, you should bring it up and not keep wondering about it! 'What do you mean by saying that?' is a good question, if straight talk feels offensive or unfriendly.

When Finns speak, the pauses are long, but the silence is not experienced as a difficult or negative thing. A Finnish proverb says that 'Speech is silver, silence is golden'. Silence is deemed natural, and silent moments are not filled with chatter. Loud talk is regarded as unpleasant. A Finnish supervisor does not necessarily talk to an employee often in the workplace. The supervisor is not angry, just behaving in accordance with Finnish culture. If a foreign employee does not know why people are silent for a long time and cannot understand why, he or she should ask: 'Is everything OK?'. Finns themselves can interpret silence well and may forget that people with other cultural backgrounds may not be able to do it. You can ask about it directly if you think the silence is distressing or puzzling.

Section 12: Punctuality — initiative — dependability

Bus stops have a timetable that indicates the time the bus will arrive at the bus stop. If this says 13.48 (1:48pm), the bus usually arrives at the stop at 1:48pm; if it arrives at the bus stop at 1:50pm, Finns will think the bus is late. It is especially important to observe timetables in Finland. This is an important value in working life. You must come to work punctually at the hour agreed. Coming at 8:00am means precisely 8:00am, not 8:10am. Many workplaces have flexible working hours, and employees can come to work between 7 and 9am and go home between 3 and 5pm, for example. With flexible working hours, however, it is still the employees' responsibility to make sure they work as many hours as agreed. Even with flexible working hours, working hours have to be observed meticulously.

Following timetables does not mean that Finns are inflexible or think it dangerous if you are late every once in a while. This is a question of respecting another person's time – other people have to wait for the person who is late. Other employees may not be able to start their work if they have to wait for someone who is late. In Finland, employees who are late are given a warning. If an employee is still late in spite of warnings, he or she may lose the job. There are, however, unavoidable causes that make being late for work acceptable. One example is being late because of traffic.

The relative lack of hierarchy in the workplace has an influence on the roles of employees. Employees must be able to work very much on their own initiative. In Finnish workplaces, people rarely have strict limits to their duties ('this is not my job'); instead, all employees perform many kinds of duties. If an employee only does his or her own duties, does not help when others are busy, or does not help out with some common duty, he or she is regarded as an unpleasant colleague. Employees tackle their duties while thinking about the objective of the job at hand, 'what must be done today'.

Work culture does not involve mere routine performances. It also includes an idea of 'pulling together'. People are not concerned about who is doing the work; it is important that the work gets done. When a teacher is walking in a corridor of a school, he or she may pick up a piece of rubbish and put it in the bin. There is no need to call a cleaner to handle it. If, on the other hand, there is dirt on the floor that requires cleaning with special tools, the teacher will call the cleaner. It is not so important that the cleaner must remove all of the rubbish from the floors of the school – what is important is that the school is clean.

Doing work on your own initiative clearly involves the concept of trust. In working life, it is paramount that people act worthy of trust. Assignments are decided on in a group, and the members of the group must be able to trust that their colleagues and supervisor will do the things that have been agreed on together. Everybody's work suffers if someone does not pull his or her own weight. It is also a sign of trust that if an employee is not able to do the assignments agreed on, or does not have time to do them, he or she is comfortable asking for help and advice from colleagues or a supervisor.

Section 13: Customer relations

People in Finland value good service. Customer service is crucially important in the workplace, and people are paying more and more attention to it. The culture of customer service in Finland, however, is somewhat different from service cultures in other countries. In Finland, it is practical. It emphasises the Finnish way of speech and an assumption that customers take the initiative. Salespeople in shops do not always ask customers whether they can help, but they will be happy to serve if they are asked for help. The customer service culture in our home country can have a big impact on how we experience customer service in other countries. Customer service employees, like other people in Finland, do not want to be intrusive.

Finns are used to matter-of-fact service, and arrogant or careless service irritates them. If the service in shops is too enthusiastic, it is deemed unpleasant. Finnish people rarely haggle; if the price seems reasonable, they will buy the product. Customers rarely raise their voice, give bad feedback, or show their anger with dramatic gestures. If this does happen, the employees try to remain calm. Corporate custom says that 'the customer is always right', so customer service workers do not start arguing with the customer. Instead, they try to discuss the feedback in an appropriate manner. It is not good practice to send customers from one employee to the next. Instead, you try to answer the customers' questions right away. If the employee does not know the answers to questions, he or she will find them out by asking colleagues, for example.

In public offices, customers are heard and served as well and as quickly as possible. In many places (such as at ticket sales desks at stations and for certain services at banks), service works smoothly with queue numbers. In others, such as health centres, having an appointment speeds things up. There is an effort to serve customers on the 'one-stop' principle, so that customers do not have to run from one service point to the next. This is an attempt to reduce bureaucracy.

Customer service means serving all people, regardless of their gender, age, ethnic background, or clothing, or other matters related to their appearance. Finnish civil servants behave in a businesslike way. The decisions made by civil servants are not always identical; they are based both on legislation and statutes and on the personal situation of the customer. Civil servants have a professional secrecy obligation, meaning that they must not discuss customers' affairs with outsiders. That is why you can discuss your affairs with public authorities in an open and truthful manner. Some customer information may be used by several authorities, such as information related to taxation.

Finland is one of the least corrupt countries in the world. You cannot bribe civil servants in Finland, such as the police, to speed things up. Attempting to bribe someone is regarded as very offensive, and it is a punishable act. For foreign employees, understanding Finnish service culture is a good way of becoming familiar with Finnish work culture.

Section 14: Religion

Finland has freedom of belief, which means that people have the right to practise any religion they want. The majority of Finnish people are Christians and belong to the Protestant Evangelical Lutheran church. In Protestant countries, the church and religion are relatively invisible in everyday life, because religion is regarded as a personal matter. You do not have to belong to the church if you do not want to.

Finland does not have a state church system. Yet the church does participate in some duties that are society's responsibility; church parishes attend to funerals and population registers, for example. The church and parishes have a position that is governed by public law. The Evangelical Lutheran and Orthodox churches have the right to collect church tax from their members. Parishes have partial exemption from taxes.

Even though religion is not very visible in everyday life in Finland, it has over the years shaped many customs that are still observed in Finnish culture today. One important manifestation of the influence of religion on working life is employees' holidays and days off. Holidays and days off often are centred on religious holidays or special days of the year. If employees want to take a holiday at different times than on official holidays, for example, they must discuss it with the employer. It may be difficult for employees to have time off outside these Finnish 'bank holidays' and special days, because many workplaces are closed on holidays. If you must work on an official holiday, you will receive a bonus.

Religious customs or rituals are not part of work life in Finland. Some work communities may have arranged a place of prayer, if the employees have indicated that they want one. Usually, however, there are no such practices in the workplace. If an employee wants to have a prayer moment, for example, in the middle of the day, it must be observed during normal breaks that have been agreed on for the workplace.

External symbols of a religious nature are allowed in Finland, but the dress code for the workplace must be observed. The reason is occupational safety and hygiene regulations related to the work duties. Long scarves or hemlines can be occupational hazards in some workplaces. By law, employees must follow the employer's instructions with regard to clothing. In some workplaces, only the work clothes required for the employee's duties are allowed.

Section 15: Everyday life in the workplace

Even though shaking hands is a very common form of greeting in Finland, the morning in the workplace begins just by wishing others 'good morning'. Work begins immediately, and colleagues do not necessarily ask how everyone is doing; someone may ask something in passing. Workplaces have a lot of 'company customs', unwritten rules that a new employee may not detect right away. It takes a few weeks to start noticing how people tend to act in the workplace.

Breaks bring a rhythm to the workday. The employment contract often says when to take a break during the day and for how long. In some professions, breaks are obligatory – a tired employee can make serious mistakes on the job. Often there is a short coffee break in the morning, a lunch break in the middle of the day, and another coffee break in the afternoon. The duration of the lunch break varies from one workplace to another, so you should check with your supervisor. Lunches are arranged in many different ways in the workplace: some places have their own dining room where you can buy warm food at low prices. In other workplaces, employees bring their own food from home and eat it in a location designated by the employer. For some workplaces, you can buy luncheon vouchers that you can use for lunch at a restaurant near the workplace.

Smoking in the workplace is prohibited. In Finland, the law forbids smoking indoors, so in the workplace a smoker should make sure to know where the smoking area is located. Often it is near the front door and indicated with signs.

In the workplace, you must not attend to your own affairs, call your friends, or leave to run your own errands. You must always do these things outside working hours. If you cannot, for example, get an appointment with a doctor or a dentist outside working hours for some reason, you must discuss the planned absence with your supervisor and agree on how you will compensate for the time required by the appointment. When it is break time, you can make important phone calls etc. The number of working hours agreed on in the employment contract is binding, and you must work the hours agreed. You can apply for leave without pay, if you must be absent from the workplace.

Although the employees already have the education required in the profession when they start working, many employers provide their employees with further training during paid working hours. Sometimes the training can last a day or two, such as learning how to use a new machine or work method. At other times, the training may be for the long term and may be held during either working hours or leisure time. Employers can share the training expenses, if this has been agreed on and the training develops the competence needed by the employees. Employers appreciate it when employees show willingness to improve in their profession and learn new skills.

Workplaces arrange a variety of refreshment days and parties in order to promote workplace well-being. For many workplaces, these events have become a tradition, and they are very different from one company to the next. On refreshment days, employees often leave the workplace and go fishing or swimming, get some exercise, or visit the sauna. The idea is to break the routines and everyday life in the workplace, so that people feel better on the job. A Christmas party is one important common event arranged by the

employer, where you can spend time with your colleagues in a relaxed manner. Christmas parties are held in November–December, sometimes in the workplace and sometimes as, for example, a night at a restaurant. The party includes dining together, and sometimes some activities such as dancing, music, and other kinds of fun.

People normally do not give gifts in the workplace, but a Christmas party or a special day for an employee (a birthday, a wedding, or retirement) can be an event where colleagues and the employer celebrate the person with a present or a bouquet of flowers.

Leave is often arranged for around holidays or concurrently with school leave. This way, parents and children can spend more time together. In Finland, the summer vacation season begins at the start of May. The number of leave days depends on the number of years worked and when the employment relationship began. In some workplaces, the work is seasonal, so how much work there is to be done depends on the season. In such cases, it can be difficult to go on holiday during the normal vacation season. In some sectors, preparation for holidays (such as Christmas) can begin as early as May–June.

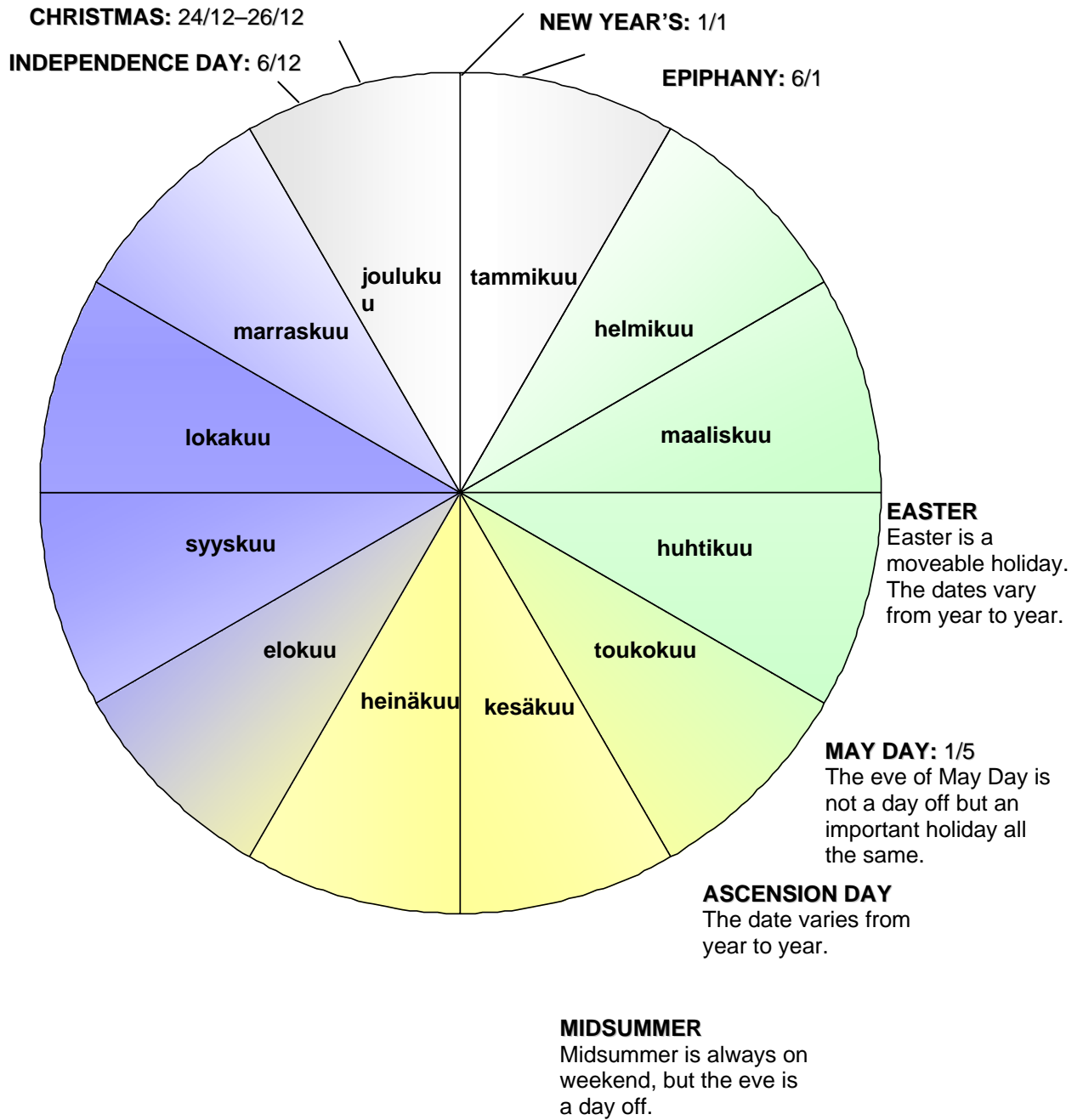
Matters concerning the workplace are reported on through agreed channels. Important information about mutual affairs can be found by means of a bulletin board, e-mail, a closed-circuit television channel, or an employee's mailbox. Supervisors do not tell every employee the date for the next workplace meeting etc.; employees are expected to monitor such information in the agreed way.

Meetings are recurrent and workplace-specific. For instance, there might be a meeting once a month. Matters related to the workplace are discussed at the meetings, and participation is important. Upcoming events and changes in the workplace are reported at meetings, and employees can influence matters, propose changes, and develop their own work by taking part. Democracy in the workplace is practised through meetings.

In particular, employees who work in customer service should not wear heavy make-up and lots of perfume, because these are regarded as negative in Finnish culture. Strong odours can cause health problems for customers or colleagues if they suffer from asthma or an allergy. Finnish people wear rather subdued clothes, and women do not wear heavy make-up, strong perfumes, or large jewellery items during working hours. In their leisure time, people dress any way they want, but wearing revealing clothes etc. during working hours is not appropriate.

Employers can offer employees various types of leisure activities in the workplace. There may be exercise and sports clubs where employees can keep fit. Some workplaces may have a choir or an orchestra, an art club, or some other hobby-based club. The overall well-being of employees is important for the employer, too.

ANNUAL HOLIDAYS, days off from work



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