

Information on the enforcement of sentences in Finland (30.10.2018) / Criminal Sanctions Agency (RISE)

This information sheet is designed to give you an overview of the Finnish prison system. Each prison has specific characteristics, for example the regime structures or work opportunities may differ. However, this information sheet should give you some background information on the sort of support you can expect if you are Finnish national or permanently living in Finland and looking to be transferred back to Finland.

What happens when you arrive in prison in Finland?

Where will you be placed?

When you return to Finland from abroad, you will usually be taken to Vantaa Prison at first. From Vantaa Prison, you can be transferred to a prison that is closer to your actual home town. The transfer decision is made by an assessment centre. You will be heard before making the decision.

What happens when you get there?

- You will be taken to the reception of the prison. You may be held together with other prisoners while you are waiting for your turn.
- You will be searched in the presence of a witness (arrival check).
- In the arrival check, your identity will be verified and registered, your personal identifying characteristics will be taken, and the goods you bring with you will be inventoried and inspected. Remember to write down all the necessary phone numbers from your mobile phone during the arrival check.
- You will be given a personal prisoner number.
- As part of the arrival check, the staff will take your photograph, which will be attached to your file.
- You may have to change your own clothes to prison clothes during the arrival check.

Who will you meet?

- As part of the induction process, staff will tell you more about prison life and what you need to do. You can also ask about matters that concern you.
- When you arrive in prison, you will be informed of the prison rules as well as your rights and obligations. The prison staff will give you the prison rules and a leaflet called Information for Prisoners. You can also find them on the notice board of your ward.
- Within 72 hours of your arrival, a member of the health care staff will check your health.
- You will be taken to a cell where you will stay for the first few days. There may also be other prisoners, who have just started serving their sentences, in the same cell. You can also ask other prisoners about the everyday life of the prison.
- Depending on what time you arrive, you will meet other staff members and you will be appointed a personal contact person.

What happens to the goods you bring with you?

- You may possess a reasonable amount of private property in prison. In some cases, the possession of articles, substances or your own clothes may be prohibited in the law. If you are not allowed to take a specific piece of property with you in your cell, you can request a written decision, which can be appealed. For example, some prisons have televisions in every cell in which case you cannot bring your own. All electronic equipment that the prisoner wishes to take into the cell will be thoroughly inspected and the prisoner is responsible for the cost of the inspection.

- At the reception, a staff member will make an inventory of all the property you brought with you. Property that you cannot take in your cell will be put in storage and you will get them back when you leave except for anything dangerous or illegal.
- Your friends and family can also send or bring goods to you. You can ask the staff for further instructions.

Can you call from prison?

- You are allowed to call one person to tell that you arrived in prison. Later, you can communicate with those outside prison by telephone at your own expense. You will be explained how to invite family members and friends as well your lawyer or other legal counsel to visit you in prison.

Visits

You can meet your family and friends during the visiting hours of the prison.

Each prisoner has the right to accept visitors under necessary supervision at times reserved for visits as often as it is possible without causing detriment to the order and operation of the prison. A visit may be allowed also at times other than those reserved for visits if it is necessary for the prisoner to be able to maintain outside contacts or for another important reason.

Supervised visits are usually arranged in a large visiting room where the prisoner and the visitor sit on different sides of a table or a long counter.

A prisoner may be granted permission to an unsupervised visit by a close relative, another close person or, if necessary, another person important to the prisoner, if this is justified in order for the prisoner to be able to maintain outside contacts or for another corresponding reason. In addition, it is required that the visit does not endanger the order or security of the prison or the safety of the prisoner or another person, and that it does not harm the operation of the prison.

Usually, the visitors have to leave their personal belongings (including jackets, handbags and phones) in a locker which is normally located at the entrance to the prison. The visitor gets a personal key to the locker. Visitors have to go through a security check, which is similar to those at an airport, before being allowed to enter the visiting room. The security check may be conducted by using, for instance, a metal detector or a trained dog.

In closed prisons, the prisoners may be granted separate visits by their children thus enabling the prisoners to spend time with their children. During the visits by their children, they can, among others, play together. These visits have to be applied for separately.

What are the cells like?

Prisons have different types of wards with different levels of supervision and operation.

The prison staff decides on your placement in a ward and a cell.

You may have to share the cell with other prisoner or prisoners.

The majority of the cells have their own toilets. Showers are either in the cells or in the ward. You can use the shower every day. In most prisons, you also have a possibility to use the sauna. The cells are also equipped with internal phones, which you can use to contact the prison staff.

If you want to contact prison staff working outside your own ward, you need to fill in a general inquiry form. The forms are available in your own ward and they will be sent forward on a daily basis.

Health care in prison

The prisoners' health care services organise health care, medical treatment, and medical rehabilitation in accordance with the needs of the prisoner. The prisoners' health care services have hospitals and polyclinics in the different units of the Criminal Sanctions Agency.

If your illness or injury cannot be appropriately treated or examined by the prisoners' healthcare services, you have to be temporarily transferred outside the prison for treatment or examination under necessary supervision.

If you are transferred from abroad and have a medical condition that requires treatment, you should allow your medical records to be forwarded to Finland. If you have been staying in a country or area with a high risk of dangerous infections, you have to tell the nurse right away in the first meeting.

Prison regime

The daily regimes or schedules vary between prisons and wards.

The sentenced prisoners are obliged to work, study, or participate in other activities arranged or approved by the prison. The goal of the activities is to promote the prisoners' abilities to live without crime, improve their working and functioning capacity, and support a life without substances.

Many prisoners get a chance to work during their sentence term. Different prisons may arrange different work activities, such as, handicrafts, woodwork, metalwork, and agriculture. The prisoners are paid for the work. You can also work for the prison in, for instance, the kitchen, laundry, or cleaning.

The prisons arrange versatile education in co-operation with the educational institutions. The prisoners are offered vocational, pre-vocational, and general education. Higher education studies are available in form of distance learning. On certain conditions, the prisoners can also study in educational institutions outside the prison in the daytime. Studying outside the prison on a study permit is possible in open prisons. The educational institutions give the prisoners study certificates, which include no indication of that the studies were completed in prison.

In addition, the prisons arrange courses to help prisoners gain new skills, such as learning to read and write, use computers, develop their problem-solving and anger management skills.

All prisons have gym facilities that you may access depending on the regime. Moreover, some prisons have a sports hall or hobby room.

Where possible, church services and other religious events are arranged in the prison in accordance with the needs of the prisoners. Prisoners are given an opportunity to meet a representative of their own religion. All prisons have premises suitable for the practice of religion. If your religion includes a special diet or a food restriction, you need to contact the prison staff or the prisoners' health care services by a general inquiry form as soon as possible after you arrive in prison.

Sentence plan

You will receive an individual sentence plan that covers the term of sentence, your release, and possible conditional release.

The sentence plan includes information about your placement and activities during the sentence term as well as possible probationary liberty under supervision, conditional release, and permissions of leave. The plan is supplemented with a release plan and a supervision plan well in advance of your probable release.

The sentence plan is drawn up in an assessment centre. More detailed information will be added to the plan in the prison where you are placed.

The plan can include programmes that focus on a specific behaviour, such as anger management or sex offender treatment programmes.

The plan may also state that you need additional support with addressing, for instance, drug or alcohol addiction and need specific treatment for it in prison.

Closed or open prison

Prisoners serve their sentence either in a closed or an open prison. Prisoners, who are deemed to adapt to freer conditions than the conditions in closed prisons, are placed in open prisons. They are required to commit themselves to abstinence from substances. Remand prisoners cannot be placed in an open prison.

In closed prisons, prisoners who want it can be placed in a so-called contract ward where they commit themselves to abstain from substances and undergo necessary tests controlling their abstinence. In the contract wards, the abstinence is supported by, among others, different programmes. All closed prisons have a dog trained to detect narcotics. Even if you do not sign a contract for abstinence from substances, you may be tested. Your test results need to be negative if you apply for a transfer to an open prison, a permission of leave, and a family visit.

Permission of leave

You may, upon application, be granted a permission to leave the prison for a short period of time.

The purpose of the permission of leave is to support the prisoners in maintaining their outside contacts, promote their placement in society, and reduce the harmful effects caused by the loss of liberty. A prisoner can apply for a permission of leave based on the length of the sentence term or for an important or a particularly important reason.

How do you get transferred to another prison?

We understand that one of the reasons why you may want to be transferred back to Finland is to be closer to your family and friends. The Criminal Sanctions Agency recognises the importance these relationships may have on your resettlement and, therefore, tries to make this process as simple as possible for you.

When placing prisoners in a prison, the following are taken into account in accordance with the sentence plan: the prisoners' place of residence, maintenance of contacts with their close relatives or other close people, age, gender, state of health, the number of sentences imposed, earlier criminal history, their own wish, and the possibilities to place them in the activity determined in the sentence plan. When making the placement decision, the possibilities of the prisoners to attend to

matters relating to the enforcement of imprisonment in their own language have to be also taken into account.

In Finland, you can be transferred from one prison to another. It depends on many factors, such as if the transfer promotes the implementation of the sentence plan or is otherwise justifiable and you can be assumed to adapt to the conditions of the other prison. You can also request a transfer yourself.

A map of all the prisons in Finland is at the end of this guide.

Gradually towards freedom

People serving a prison sentence can be conditionally released when they have served two thirds of their sentence. If you were under 21 years old when you committed the offence, you can be released when you have served half of the sentence. Prisoners, who have not served a prison sentence within three years preceding the current offence, can be conditionally released when they have served half of their sentence or, in the case of a sentence imposed for an offence committed under the age of 21, when they have served one third of their sentence.

Conditionally released prisoners are imposed a probationary period, which can last at most three years. The probationary period can include supervision, which is arranged and implemented by the community sanctions offices of the Criminal Sanctions Agency. If conditionally released prisoners are found guilty of new offences during the probationary period, the court decides whether they also lose their conditional release.

Prisoners can be placed in probationary liberty under supervision outside the prison a maximum of six months before their conditional release. The prisoners are presumed to comply with abstinence from substances and other conditions of the probationary liberty. An implementation plan is prepared for probationary liberty. The compliance with the conditions of the probationary liberty is supervised in various ways.

Preparation for freedom

Besides the placement in an open prison, the prisoners can be given an opportunity to take responsibility and practise for normal life during the prison term by, among others, placing them in a release unit or a ward preparing them for freedom. In the release unit, the main focus is on the intensive preparation for the transition to freedom both with support and independently. Intensive release measures are also carried out in co-operation with other service providers.

Prisoners' rights

The content of a sentence of imprisonment is loss or restriction of liberty. The enforcement of imprisonment must not place any other restrictions on the rights or circumstances of prisoners than those provided by law or those necessary due to the sentence itself.

The prisoners have a right to, among others:

- protection from bullying and racial harassment
- contact a lawyer
- health care and mental health services
- exercise outdoors for at least one hour a day
- use the prison library.

What if there are problems?

At first, you should find someone inside the prison you can tell about your problem. The person can be a staff member or another prisoner.

If you cannot find a solution to your problem, you can write a complaint and send it to, for instance, the Region Centre of your criminal sanctions region or the Central Administration of the Criminal Sanctions Agency.

In addition, the Parliamentary Ombudsman investigates complaints made by prisoners.

A list and contact information of the main authorities supervising the operation of the prisons and the prisoner's health care services can be found either on the notice boards or in a separate folder in the prisons wards.

How can you contact the Criminal Sanctions Agency?

The Criminal Sanctions Agency is responsible for the enforcement of sentences in Finland. It is also the competent authority to decide on prisoner transfers between Finland and EU Member States or the Nordic countries. The Criminal Sanctions Agency operates under the direction of the Ministry of Justice and implements the criminal policy defined by the ministry.

Criminal Sanctions Agency (RISE)

Central Administration

Lintulahdenkatu 5

00530 Helsinki

Finland

Telephone (exchange): +358 29 56 88500

Email: rise.kirjaamo@om.fi

Website: <http://rikosseuraamus.fi>

Questions related to the international transfer of prisoners: kvtp.rise@om.fi

PRISONS AND COMMUNITY SANCTIONS OFFICES

PRISONS

1. Helsinki
2. Hämeenlinna
3. Jokela
4. Juuka
5. Kerava
6. Kestilä
7. Kuopio and Kuopio Release Unit
8. Kylmäkoski
9. Käyrä
10. Laukaa
11. Mikkeli
12. Naarajärvi
13. Oulu and Oulu Release Unit
14. Pelso
15. Pyhäselkä
16. Riihimäki
17. Satakunta (Köyliö and Huittinen)
18. Sukeva
19. Sulkava
20. Suomenlinna
21. Turku
22. Vaasa
23. Vanaja (Vanaja and Ojoinen)
24. Vantaa
25. Vilppula
26. Ylitornio

COMMUNITY SANCTIONS OFFICES

27. Helsinki
28. Häme (Hämeenlinna and Lahti)
29. Joensuu
30. Jyväskylä
31. Kouvola (Kouvola and Lappeenranta)
32. Kuopio (Kuopio, Iisalmi and Kajaani)
33. Mikkeli
34. Oulu (Oulu and Kokkola)
35. Pori
36. Rovaniemi (Rovaniemi, Kemi and Kuusamo)
37. Tampere
38. Turku (Turku and Ahvenanmaa)
39. Uusimaa (Vantaa)
40. Vaasa (Vaasa and Seinäjoki)

- CRIMINAL SANCTIONS REGION OF SOUTHERN FINLAND
- CRIMINAL SANCTIONS REGION OF WESTERN FINLAND
- CRIMINAL SANCTIONS REGION OF EASTERN AND NORTHERN FINLAND
- prisons
- community sanctions offices

