

**THE CONSTITUTION OF FINLAND**  
**11 June 1999**  
**(731/1999)**

**Chapter 1 - Fundamental provisions**

***Section 1 - The Constitution***

Finland is a sovereign republic.

The constitution of Finland is established in this constitutional act. The constitution shall guarantee the inviolability of human dignity and the freedom and rights of the individual and promote justice in society.

Finland participates in international co-operation for the protection of peace and human rights and for the development of society.

***Section 2 - Democracy and the rule of law***

The powers of the State in Finland are vested in the people, who are represented by the Parliament.

Democracy entails the right of the individual to participate in and influence the development of society and his or her living conditions.

The exercise of public powers shall be based on an Act. In all public activity, the law shall be strictly observed.

***Section 3 - Parliamentarism and the separation of powers***

The legislative powers are exercised by the Parliament, which shall also decide on State finances.

The governmental powers are exercised by the President of the Republic and the Government, the members of which shall have the confidence of the Parliament.

The judicial powers are exercised by independent courts of law, with the Supreme Court and the Supreme Administrative Court as the highest instances.

#### ***Section 4 - The Territory of Finland***

The territory of Finland is indivisible. The national borders can not be altered without the consent of the Parliament.

#### ***Section 5 - Finnish citizenship***

A child acquires Finnish citizenship at birth and through the citizenship of its parents, as provided in more detail by an Act. Citizenship may also be granted upon notification or application, subject to the criteria determined by an Act.

No one can be divested of or released from his or her Finnish citizenship except on grounds determined by an Act and only if he or she is in possession of or will be granted the citizenship of another State.

### **Chapter 2 - Basic rights and liberties**

#### ***Section 6 - Equality***

Everyone is equal before the law.

No one shall, without an acceptable reason, be treated differently from other persons on the ground of sex, age, origin, language, religion, conviction, opinion, health, disability or other reason that concerns his or her person.

Children shall be treated equally and as individuals and they shall be allowed to influence matters pertaining to themselves to a degree corresponding to their level of development.

Equality of the sexes is promoted in societal activity and working life, especially in the determination of pay and the other terms of employment, as provided in more detail by an Act.

***Section 7 - The right to life, personal liberty and integrity***

Everyone has the right to life, personal liberty, integrity and security.

No one shall be sentenced to death, tortured or otherwise treated in a manner violating human dignity.

The personal integrity of the individual shall not be violated, nor shall anyone be deprived of liberty arbitrarily or without a reason prescribed by an Act. A penalty involving deprivation of liberty may be imposed only by a court of law. The lawfulness of other cases of deprivation of liberty may be submitted for review by a court of law. The rights of individuals deprived of their liberty shall be guaranteed by an Act.

***Section 8 - The principle of legality in criminal cases***

No one shall be found guilty of a criminal offence or be sentenced to a punishment on the basis of a deed, which has not been determined punishable by an Act at the time of its commission. The penalty imposed for an offence shall not be more severe than that provided by an Act at the time of commission of the offence.

***Section 9 - Freedom of movement***

Finnish citizens and foreigners legally resident in Finland have the right to freely move within the country and to choose their place of residence.

Everyone has the right to leave the country. Limitations on this right may be provided by an Act, if they are

necessary for the purpose of safeguarding legal proceedings or for the enforcement of penalties or for the fulfillment of the duty of national defence.

Finnish citizens shall not be prevented from entering Finland or deported or extradited or transferred from Finland to another country against their will.

The right of foreigners to enter Finland and to remain in the country is regulated by an Act. A foreigner shall not be deported, extradited or returned to another country, if in consequence he or she is in danger of a death sentence, torture or other treatment violating human dignity.

### ***Section 10 - The right to privacy***

Everyone's private life, honour and the sanctity of the home are guaranteed. More detailed provisions on the protection of personal data are laid down by an Act.

The secrecy of correspondence, telephony and other confidential communications is inviolable.

Measures encroaching on the sanctity of the home, and which are necessary for the purpose of guaranteeing basic rights and liberties or for the investigation of crime, may be laid down by an Act. In addition, provisions concerning limitations of the secrecy of communications which are necessary in the investigation of crimes that jeopardise the security of the individual or society or the sanctity of the home, at trials and security checks, as well as during the deprivation of liberty may be laid down by an Act.

### ***Section 11 - Freedom of religion and conscience***

Everyone has the freedom of religion and conscience. Freedom of religion and conscience entails the right to profess and practice a religion, the right to express one's convictions and the right to be a member of or decline to be a member of a religious community. No one is under the

obligation, against his or her conscience, to participate in the practice of a religion.

### ***Section 12 - Freedom of expression and right of access to information***

Everyone has the freedom of expression. Freedom of expression entails the right to express, disseminate and receive information, opinions and other communications without prior prevention by anyone. More detailed provisions on the exercise of the freedom of expression are laid down by an Act. Provisions on restrictions relating to pictorial programmes that are necessary for the protection of children may be laid down by an Act.

Documents and recordings in the possession of the authorities are public, unless their publication has for compelling reasons been specifically restricted by an Act. Everyone has the right of access to public documents and recordings.

### ***Section 13 - Freedom of assembly and freedom of association***

Everyone has the right to arrange meetings and demonstrations without a permit, as well as the right to participate in them.

Everyone has the freedom of association. Freedom of association entails the right to form an association without a permit, to be a member or not to be a member of an association and to participate in the activities of an association.

The freedom to form trade unions and to organise in order to look after other interests is likewise guaranteed.

More detailed provisions on the exercise of the freedom of assembly and the freedom of association are laid down by an Act.

### ***Section 14 - Electoral and participatory rights***

Every Finnish citizen who has reached eighteen years of age has the right to vote in national elections and referendums. Specific provisions in this Constitution shall govern the eligibility to stand for office in national elections.

Every Finnish citizen and every foreigner permanently resident in Finland, having attained eighteen years of age, has the right to vote in municipal elections and municipal referendums, as provided by an Act.

Provisions on the right to otherwise participate in municipal government are laid down by an Act.

The public authorities shall promote the opportunities for the individual to participate in societal activity and to influence the decisions that concern him or her.

### ***Section 15 - Protection of property***

The property of everyone is protected.

Provisions on the expropriation of property, for public needs and against full compensation, are laid down by an Act.

### ***Section 16 - Educational rights***

Everyone has the right to basic education free of charge. Provisions on the duty to receive education are laid down by an Act.

The public authorities shall, as provided in more detail by an Act, guarantee for everyone equal opportunity to receive other educational services in accordance with their ability and special needs, as well as the opportunity to develop themselves without being prevented by economic hardship.

The freedom of science, the arts and higher education is guaranteed.

### ***Section 17 - Right to one's language and culture***

The national languages of Finland are Finnish and Swedish.

The right of everyone to use his or her own language, either Finnish or Swedish, before courts of law and other authorities, and to receive official documents in that language, shall be guaranteed by an Act. The public authorities shall provide for the cultural and societal needs of the Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking populations of the country on an equal basis.

The Sami, as an indigenous people, as well as the Roma and other groups, have the right to maintain and develop their own language and culture. Provisions on the right of the Sami to use the Sami language before the authorities are laid down by an Act. The rights of persons using sign language and of persons in need of interpretation or translation aid owing to disability shall be guaranteed by an Act.

### ***Section 18 - The right to work and the freedom to engage in commercial activity***

Everyone has the right, as provided by an Act, to earn his or her livelihood by the employment, occupation or commercial activity of his or her choice. The public authorities shall take responsibility for the protection of the labour force.

The public authorities shall promote employment and work towards guaranteeing for everyone the right to work.

Provisions on the right to receive training that promotes employability are laid down by an Act.

No one shall be dismissed from employment without a lawful reason.

### ***Section 19 - The right to social security***

Those who cannot obtain the means necessary for a life of dignity have the right to receive indispensable subsistence and care.

Everyone shall be guaranteed by an Act the right to basic subsistence in the event of unemployment, illness, and disability and during old age as well as at the birth of a child or the loss of a provider.

The public authorities shall guarantee for everyone, as provided in more detail by an Act, adequate social, health and medical services and promote the health of the population. Moreover, the public authorities shall support families and others responsible for providing for children so that they have the ability to ensure the wellbeing and personal development of the children.

The public authorities shall promote the right of everyone to housing and the opportunity to arrange their own housing.

### ***Section 20 - Responsibility for the environment***

Nature and its biodiversity, the environment and the national heritage are the responsibility of everyone.

The public authorities shall endeavour to guarantee for everyone the right to a healthy environment and for everyone the possibility to influence the decisions that concern their own living environment.

### ***Section 21 - Protection under the law***

Everyone has the right to have his or her case dealt with appropriately and without undue delay by a legally competent court of law or other authority, as well as to have a decision pertaining to his or her rights or obligations reviewed by a court of law or other independent organ for the administration of justice.

Provisions concerning the publicity of proceedings, the right to be heard, the right to receive a reasoned decision and the right of appeal, as well as the other guarantees of a fair trial and good governance shall be laid down by an Act.

***Section 22 - Protection of basic rights and liberties***

The public authorities shall guarantee the observance of basic rights and liberties and human rights.

***Section 23 - Basic rights and liberties in situations of emergency***

Such provisional exceptions to basic rights and liberties that are compatible with Finland's international obligations concerning human rights and that are deemed necessary in the case of an armed attack against Finland or if there exists an emergency that threatens the nation and which according to an Act is so serious that it can be compared with an armed attack may be provided by an Act.