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Input of Finland to the Rule of Law Report 2021

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Summary

Justice systems: The digitalisation of the judiciary has advanced with the implementation of case management and communication technologies. The project developing a new case management system for the administrative and special courts (HAIPA) was finalised in 2020. The courts have begun using the system, which allows the citizens to file complaints, deliver documents and be served notice of decisions through the system. It also allows a party to the proceedings to check the processing stage of a case. The reports and statistics of the system are still being developed. The project developing a new case management system for the general courts (AIPA) continues. The Ministry of Justice is currently building a reporting tool covering the entire administrative branch. Because of this, HAIPA and AIPA do not have an inbuilt reporting tool. The National Courts Administration has built a temporary solution to serve the courts.

Anti-corruption framework: Drafting of the new Anti-Corruption Strategy and the related Action Plan for 2020–2023 has progressed and the work should be finalised in the coming weeks. A Code of Conduct for civil servants and persons entrusted with top executive functions consolidating existing guidelines is currently being finalized in the Ministry of Finance and foreseen to be published in spring 2021. A Government's proposal on limiting 'revolving doors' as regards Ministers is due to be submitted to the Parliament in spring 2021. A government proposal on extending the restriction periods for the highest civil servants to 12 months will be submitted to the Parliament in 2021. The Ministry of Finance is currently updating the Guide on hospitality, benefits and gifts received by a civil servant. It will be published in spring 2021. A guide on gifts, benefits and hospitality received by Ministers and an order as regards their registration have been given.

Media pluralism: The new provisions of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive have been implemented in the Act on Electronic Communication Services and in the Act on Audiovisual Programmes. New legislation entered into force in January 2021. On the basis of the amended Act on Electronic Communication Services, media service providers shall make publicly accessible information concerning their ownership structure. A government proposal to change the Criminal Code so that the public prosecutors have the right to bring charges for menace based on the target's duties in employment or public commission of trust is currently being considered by the Parliament. To combat (online) hate speech targeted to women, women belonging to minority groups and female journalists, the Government has given a proposal to the Parliament to change the Criminal Code so that gender will be added among the motives that constitute grounds for increasing the punishment of (any) crime. The Ministry of Justice will update the Act on the Openness of Government Activities. A working group whose term extends to June 2023 has been appointed to analyse the scope and the possible problematics of the current legislation. The need for more urgent changes is assessed and if necessary, a government proposal is presented in the course of 2021.

Other institutional issues related to checks and balances: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the state of emergency began on 16 March 2020 and ended on 16 June 2020. During this period, measures were adopted according to section 3, paragraph 5 of the Emergency Powers Act. Due to the worsening COVID-19 situation, a state of emergency was declared on 1 March 2021. On 5 March 2021, the Government proposed measures based on this provision. Municipal elections were scheduled to be held in April 2021. Due to the deteriorating COVID-19 situation, on 6 March 2021, the postponement of the elections to June 2021 received broad support from the parties in the Parliament. The Government will make a proposal to the Parliament, which will decide on the transfer. The Ministry of Justice is preparing a third National Action Plan on Fundamental and Human Rights for 2020-2023. The Government has adopted an Action Plan on Better Regulation. Implementation of the National Democracy Programme has continued. A government proposal reviewing and clarifying the distribution of tasks between the Chancellor of Justice and the Parliamentary Ombudsman will be presented to the Parliament in spring 2021.

I. Justice System

A. Independence

1. Appointment and selection of judges, prosecutors and court presidents

The president of the Supreme Court and the president of the Supreme Administrative Court are appointed to their positions on a permanent basis ([the Courts Act](#) 673/2016, chapter 11, section 1).

Chief judges are appointed for a fixed term of seven years at a time. However, the term of a chief judge may not extend beyond the mandatory age of retirement for judges provided in law. The provisions on the appointment of permanent judges apply to the appointment of a chief judge. If the person to be appointed as a chief judge holds a permanent position as a judge, he or she shall be granted leave of absence from this position for the duration of his or her term as chief judge.

However, if a chief judge had been appointed before the the Courts Act entered into force (1 January 2017), the appointment is permanent.

Appointments in the Supreme Court and the Supreme Administrative Court from 1 January 2020 to 8 March 2021:

- [The Supreme Court](#): a judge (a justice of the Supreme Court) for a fixed term.
- [The Supreme Administrative Court](#): eleven judges (justices of the Supreme Administrative Court) of which seven were appointed for a fixed term. In addition, four expert counsellors on environment and one chief engineering counsellor.

2. Irremovability of judges; including transfers, dismissal and retirement regime of judges, court presidents and prosecutors

Judges

According to the Courts Act (chapter 16, section 1) provisions on the general retirement age for public officials and on the termination of a public service relationship applicable to judges are laid down in section 35 of [the Act on Public Officials in Central Government](#) (750/1994). The resignation of a judge is, upon application, accepted by the court in which the judge serves.

Section 35 of the Act on Public Officials in Central Government contains provisions applicable to judges, on the general age of retirement of public officials and on the termination of public service.

The general age of retirement of public officials is 68 years, if he or she was born in 1957 or before that, 69 years if he or she was born between 1958 and 1961 and 70 if he or she was born in 1962 or later (the Act on Public Officials in Central Government, amendment 1062/2018).

According to the Courts Act (chapter 16, section 2) judges shall resign from their position if they have lost their ability to work due to an illness, impairment or injury.

If a judge who has lost his or her ability to work does not resign on his or her own motion, the court decides on the relieving of the judge from office. The matter shall be considered by the court relieving the judge from office as an urgent judicial matter. The decision to relieve a judge from office is made by:

- 1) The court of appeal that is competent to deal with offences in public office, if the matter concerns a judge of a district court or the Labour Court;
- 2) The Supreme Administrative Court, if the matter concerns a judge of the Supreme Administrative Court, an administrative court, the Market Court or the Insurance Court;

3) The Supreme Court, if the matter concerns a judge of the Supreme Court or a court of appeal.

The court that is competent to decide on suspension from office makes the application for the relieving of a judge from office.

The general age of retirement of public officials and on the termination of public service are applied to the chief judges of the courts as well. Please see also the written input of Finland on 4 May 2020 and the answer to question 2.

Prosecutors

Transfer

The offices of the prosecutors are shared by the Prosecution Authority and are placed in a prosecution district or the Office of the Prosecutor General in order to organise the Prosecution Authority appropriately from the point of view of the organisation of the work. The general provisions of the Act on Public Officials in Central Government apply to the transfer and placement of offices. The placement of offices in the Prosecution Authority in another location does not require the consent of the prosecutor, but such situations are rare and cannot be carried out unilaterally for reasons attributable to the prosecutor. Such a situation could arise, for example, if the unit in which the prosecutor works ceases.

Dismissal

The Prosecutor General is appointed by the President of the Republic. The Prosecutor General can be dismissed by the Government on the proposal of the Ministry of Justice when the Prosecutor General does not anymore enjoy the confidence, which the public has in the National Prosecution Authority. He or she can be removed from office also by the decision of the Supreme Court when sentenced of offence in office. Grounds for dismissal are regulated in the Act on Public Officials in Central Government (section 25) and additional regulations for dismissal are in [the Decree on Public Officials in Central Government](#) (971/1994, section 29).

The State Prosecutor can be dismissed by the Government according to the Act on Public Officials in Central Government or by a court when sentenced of offence in office.

The decision to suspend other prosecutors from office is made by the Prosecutor General according to the Act on Public Officials in Central Government or by a court when sentenced of offence in office.

Retirement

All prosecutors enjoy the same rights as all civil servants according to the State's retirement pension system.

Section 35 of the Act on Public Officials in Central Government contains provisions applicable to prosecutors, on the general age of retirement of public officials and on the termination of public service.

The general age of retirement of public officials is 68 years, if he or she was born in 1957 or before that, 69 years if he or she was born between 1958 and 1961 and 70 if he or she was born in 1962 or later (the Act on Public Officials in Central Government, amendment 1062/2018).

3. Promotion of judges and prosecutors

No significant developments.

4. Allocation of cases in courts

No significant developments.

5. Independence (including composition and nomination of its members), and powers of the body tasked with safeguarding the independence of the judiciary (e.g. Council for the Judiciary)

No significant developments.

6. Accountability of judges and prosecutors, including disciplinary regime and bodies and ethical rules, judicial immunity and criminal liability of judges

A disciplinary case cannot be brought against a judge as a result of the outcome of a court decision. [The Criminal Code](#) is applicable to judges and prosecutors. The Criminal Code, chapter 40 (amendment 604/2002) prescribes offences in office.

According to [the Constitution](#) (section 110), a decision to bring charges against a judge for unlawful conduct in office is made by the Chancellor of Justice or the Parliamentary Ombudsman.

Written warning for judges

According to the Courts Act (chapter 15, section 1), a written warning (referred to in section 24 of the Act on Public Officials in Central Government) may be issued to a judge by the head of the court in which the judge serves. However, a written warning to the chief judge of a district court is issued by the president of the court of appeal, to the president of a court of appeal and to the president of the Labour Court by the president of the Supreme Court, and to the chief judge of an administrative court, the Market Court and the Insurance Court by the president of the Supreme Administrative Court.

A decision to give a written warning in accordance with chapter 15, section 1 of the Courts Act may be appealed against (the Courts Act, chapter 23, section 2). The court of appeal shall consider the matter as an urgent judicial matter.

Hearing of charges for offences in office of prosecutors

According to [the Act on the National Prosecution Authority](#) (32/2019), section 27, charges against the Prosecutor General and the Deputy Prosecutor General for offences in office are brought in the Supreme Court. The Chancellor of Justice or the Parliamentary Ombudsman serves as the prosecutor in such a case. Charges against a State Prosecutor, a Chief District Prosecutor, a District Prosecutor and a Junior Prosecutor for offences in office are brought in a court of appeal. Such a case is prosecuted by the Chancellor of Justice or the Parliamentary Ombudsman or by a prosecutor assigned by the Chancellor of Justice or the Parliamentary Ombudsman.

Suspension from office of judges and prosecutors

A civil servant may be suspended from office (the Act on Public Officials in Central Government, section 40, subsection 2, paragraphs 1-3)

- 1) For the period of raising criminal charges and the necessary criminal investigation if they may impact on the civil servant's possibilities to perform his or her duties;
- 2) If the civil servant refuses to undergo the examinations or tests set out in section 19, or if he or she refuses to give information about the state of health according to the provisions of that section;
- 3) If a civil servant suffers from an illness that materially detracts from the performance of his or her duties.

According to the Courts Act (chapter 15, section 2), the decision to suspend a judge from office is made by the court in which the judge serves. However, the decision to suspend the chief judge of a district court from office is made by the appropriate court of appeal, the decision to suspend the president of a court of appeal and the Labour Court is made by the Supreme Court, and the decision to suspend the chief judge of an administrative court, the Market Court and the Insurance Court is made by the Supreme Administrative Court.

There are no separate disciplinary regime or disciplinary bodies for prosecutors. The Act on Public Officials in Central Government is applied for prosecutors as all the civil servants. Please see also Finland's written contributions in 2020.

According to the Act on the National Prosecution Authority and the Act on Public Officials in Central Government, the Prosecutor General oversees the disciplinary measures apart for those that are decided by court under a criminal process relating to offence in office.

Ethical rules for prosecutors

The National Prosecution Authority has its own [ethical rules](#), which are applied in prosecutors' work every day and are part of their training, too.

7. Remuneration / bonuses for judges and prosecutors

No significant developments.

8. Independence / autonomy of the prosecution service

No significant developments.

9. Independence of the Bar (chamber / association of lawyers) and of lawyers

[The Finnish Bar Association](#) is a public corporation provided for in [the Advocates Act](#) (496/1958). The purpose and activities of the Association are defined in the Act. The Association's task is to ensure that its members fulfil their obligations. It also provides guidance and supervision in order to ensure that its members perform the tasks given by their clients with diligence and integrity. The Association is in turn supervised by the Chancellor of Justice to ensure that the Association discharges its statutory duties correctly.

The Bar Association is independent from any governmental authority. In the performance of their commissions, attorneys-at-law are independent of any other actor. They work independently and are only under the supervision of the Finnish Bar Association. As provided in the Advocates Act, the Chancellor of Justice also supervises that the actions of attorneys-at-law comply with the requirements of the code of conduct of the Bar, but the Chancellor of Justice cannot interfere with the actual work of attorneys-at-law or impose any disciplinary sanction.

Besides attorneys-at-law, lawyers can be public legal aid attorneys or licensed legal counsels. A licensed legal counsel is a lawyer who has been granted a permit by the Legal Counsel Board to act as an attorney. More information [here](#).

In addition to attorneys-at-law, the Finnish Bar Association's Disciplinary Board also supervises public legal aid attorneys and licensed legal counsels. The primary task of the Disciplinary Board is to verify, whether the attorney-at-law, public legal aid attorney or licensed legal counsel has followed the Code of Conduct for Attorneys-at-Law (applying to attorneys-at-law and public legal aid attorneys) or the statutory ethical professional obligations corresponding to the Code of Conduct (applying to licensed legal counsels). The Disciplinary

Board can impose disciplinary sanctions for possible infringements. In addition, the Chancellor of Justice supervises the actions of public legal aid attorneys and licensed legal counsels.

10. Significant developments capable of affecting the perception that the general public has of the independence of the judiciary

The well-known website among citizens, 'oikeus.fi' ('justice.fi'), was rebuilt during 2020 and relaunched in 2021. The pages were restructured in a manner that emphasises the independence of the judiciary, and this is also explicitly stated on the new pages. The National Courts Administration was in charge of rebuilding the pages related to courts.

In the establishment of the National Courts Administration, one of the underlying reasons was to ensure the independence of the judiciary.

B. Quality of justice

11. Accessibility of courts (e.g. court fees, legal aid, language)

[A research project](#) was initiated in June 2020 to examine the access to legal aid. Legal aid is provided on application, for free or against a deductible, on the basis of the economic situation of the applicant. The economic situation of the applicant is based on the funds available to him or her per month (available means) and his or her assets. The objective of the research project is to assess, using population-level data, how changes in the financial conditions for access to legal aid would affect the number of persons receiving legal aid. The study also assesses what changes should be made to access to legal aid and whether there is a need to increase the current income limits in order to allow more people access to legal aid and how different economic models would affect the state economy. The final report of the project will be published in August 2021. The project is part of [the Government Programme](#) and is included as a measure for an objective to strengthen the rule of law and well-functioning judicial proceedings and legal protection.

In March 2020, the Ministry of Justice launched a project to examine and assess the possibilities to establish one National Legal Aid and Guardianship Authority. The new national agency would be tasked with ensuring that high-quality legal aid, guardianship and financial and debt counselling services are available in a sufficient and equal manner throughout the country. This project is ongoing. More information on the project can be found [here](#) and the report published in 2020 can be found [here](#). Public consultation on the report ended in January 2021.

There is information available online to the general public on legal aid in both of the national languages (Finnish and Swedish) and [in English](#).

12. Resources of the judiciary (human / financial / material)

The finalisation of HAIPA development project on 31 December 2020 is a significant development. Please see also the answer to question 14.

Since the written input of Finland on 4 May 2020, the number of judges has risen by 61, from 3 214 to 3 275 (from 794 to 809 in administrative courts and from 2 420 to 2 466 in general courts).

The ICT expenditure have risen considerably from 2018 to 2020, even when excluding the case management system projects and other nonrecurring expenses.

The number of first asylum applications has returned to a lower level after a strong growth in 2015-2016, but due to the high number of subsequent applications, more resources are still needed than before 2015, because those receiving a negative decision can re-apply and thus remain as clients of the administrative justice system.

13. Training of justice professionals (including judges, prosecutors, lawyers, court staff)

As noted also in the written input of Finland on 4 May 2020, since 1 January 2020 the National Courts Administration, jointly with the Judicial Training Board, organises training to judges and other court staff. The court staff, the prosecutors, universities and other stakeholders also participate in its planning.

In 2020, the National Courts Administration and the Judicial Training Board initiated a process of forming a new strategy for training, which aims at serving the courts even better.

Training activities aim to provide opportunities to develop skills and competences and to strengthen legal competence and legal knowledge. The training can be divided into three categories: basic, advanced/in-depth and specialisation. The trainings are built around different legal themes and targeted at different categories of personnel, such as judicial staff and other staff as well as managers and supervisors.

In 2020, the National Courts Administration organised approximately 270 training events, and the total number of participants is estimated at 15 000. The trainings were organised as in-person training, remote training, webinars and online learning platforms. In addition, over the past few years, particular efforts have been made to develop the capacity to support the digitalisation of justice. In addition, from 2020 onwards more emphasis will be added on training non-judge court staff, particularly legal secretaries.

The National Courts Administration is also engaged in international cooperation in the field of training. The main international training cooperation partners are the European Judicial Training Network (EJTN), the Nordic Judicial Training Network (SEND) and the Academy of European Law (ERA), but also Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP), the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA) and the European Group for Public Administration (EGPA). International cooperation includes exchange of judges, international trainings and seminars.

International training is aimed at increasing expertise in EU legislation as well as providing opportunities for networking.

In all topics, training in national legislation also addresses the international aspects of cases.

More information can be found [here](#) (in English).

The Ministry of Justice organises extensive and comprehensive training for the personnel of state legal aid offices. The personnel can also participate educational courses that are organised by other instances.

[The Finnish Bar Association](#) provides the advocates with substantial amount of training. An annual quota of supplementary training hours is required of advocates and the fulfilment of this requirement is controlled. At the moment, 18 hours of training annually are required. The same amount of training hours is also the target set for the public legal aid attorneys working at state legal aid offices.

The Office of the Prosecutor General organises training for all prosecutors from the beginning of their career to their specialization. The training program also includes discussions on anti-corruption.

14. Digitalisation (e.g. use of digital technology, particularly electronic communication tools, within the justice system and with court users, including resilience of justice systems in COVID-19 pandemic)

Digitalisation contains three different aspects: equipment and programs, skills and legislation.

As a new organisation, the National Courts Administration has applied EU funding (TSI) for a project 'Drafting an ICT governance strategy to enable National Courts Administration to further sustainably develop digitalisation of the judiciary in Finland'. The outcome of the application is still pending but if approved, it will start in 2021.

As to the equipment and programs, the Government ICT Centre has begun the search for a data secure replacement for Skype for Business. The National Courts Administration, jointly with the Legal Register Centre and the Ministry of Justice will evaluate if the solution offered is also applicable in trials. The National Courts Administration is mapping alternatives suitable for remote trials.

The National Courts Administration has also led the project for acquiring and installing more video conferencing equipment to the courts. This had been planned previously, but the COVID-19 pandemic fast-tracked the project.

The project developing the new case management system for the administrative and special courts (HAIPA) was finalised on 31 December 2020 and the courts have begun using the new system. HAIPA allows for citizens to file complaints, deliver documents to the court and be served notice of the court's decision conveniently and quickly through HAIPA and related services (such as secure authentication). A party to the proceedings can also check from HAIPA if a case is in registration, preparation for hearing, under drafting of the decision, being decided upon or closed. The aim is for the majority of citizens to interact with administrative and special courts through HAIPA and related services in the near future. Currently, citizens can also interact with these courts via traditional means (visit, email and phone).

In addition to the citizens' e-service, certain authorities can connect their own case processing systems to HAIPA. The Finnish Immigration Service has connected in 2020 and the Social Security Appeal Board and the Tax Administration will be connecting in 2021. In addition, once the development is completed (most likely in 2021), the part-time experts employed by the administrative courts will receive their own e-service as do authorities.

The deployment of HAIPA required updating the equipment of courtrooms and staff workstations in the administrative and special courts to a level required by electronic case processing. The changes to functions brought by HAIPA required the staff of the courts to be trained in the system's use, which was done by the National Courts Administration.

More information about HAIPA development project can be found [here](#) (in English) and [here](#) (currently in Finnish).

The Ministry of Justice and the Legal Register Centre have participated in the implementation of the e-EDES (E-Evidence Digital Exchange System) portal, which enables secure cross-border digital exchanges between the Member States' judicial authorities.

At the end of 2020, the Ministry of Justice finished a project, which implemented two language technology-based artificial intelligence tools for automatic anonymization and content description of court decisions and other official decisions issued by authorities ('Anoppi' project). With the assistance of the new applications, the electronic availability of documents can be improved, for example for the purposes of decision-making and research. This has potential to increase the publication of judgements. More information can be found [here](#) and [here](#). In addition, HAIPA and AIPA will enable producing judgements in a machine-readable format.

Judgements of the Supreme Courts are already available in machine-readable format as open data in the service data.finlex.fi.

As to the skills, the National Courts Administration has arranged ICT related trainings. For example, under the umbrella of AIPA development project, the National Courts Administration has organised ICT training in webinar format. In addition, the National Courts Administration has organised online training sessions on remote trials. In one session, for example, a judge and a legal secretary shared their experiences and gave tips on organising a large trial with several defendants and another judge shared his experiences in organising a remote preparatory hearing in a civil case. Judges were also offered a video-recorded lecture series by legal psychologist on the scientific evidence regarding witness testimony, the recording of pre-trial investigations and the hearing of persons remotely.

In November 2020, the reports of the Quality Project of the Rovaniemi Court of Appeal district were published. The report of the project's working group III is 'Remote participation and the use of video connection in a trial'. It is a practical guide on how to conduct a trial with remote participants. The guide can be found [here](#) (currently in Finnish, but in translation to English).

The National Courts Administration began a joint research project with the European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control (HEUNI), University of Turku and University of Tampere. The project will be addressed to criminal judges and relate to different aspects of remote participation. The results are expected to be ready in 2021.

The current legislation already allows the wide use of remote connections in trials, although it is always at the discretion of the judge whether he or she will use them in an individual case.

Use of video recordings in taking of evidence

A working group appointed by the Ministry of Justice has proposed a reform regarding the use of video recordings in taking of evidence in its report. The report was published in December 2020. In the system proposed by the working group, all examinations in the district court would be recorded on video. If the case goes to appeal, the general rule would be that the video recording from the district court proceedings would be used in the court of appeal and the Supreme Court instead of hearing the witness again in person.

The reform would strengthen the legal protection. This is because replaying an examination from the district court proceedings would normally give a more accurate impression of the witness's observations since a new examination in the court of appeal or the Supreme Court may take place long after the events in question. Another advantage would be that crime victims and witnesses often would not need to attend court more than once to give their account of the matter.

If approved, the reform could come into force in late 2022 at the earliest. The report is available [here](#) (in Finnish) and more information on the project can be found [here](#). The project is part of the Government Programme and is included as a measure for an objective to strengthen the rule of law and well-functioning judicial proceedings and legal protection.

15. Use of assessment tools and standards (e.g. ICT systems for case management, court statistics and their transparency, monitoring, evaluation, surveys among court users or legal professionals)

HAIPA development project (ICT system in administrative and special courts) has come to an end in December 2020 and the courts are using the new system. The reports and statistics of HAIPA are still being developed. AIPA development project (ICT system in general courts) continues until 2022. Please see also the answer to question 14.

The Ministry of Justice is currently building a reporting tool covering the entire administrative branch (project on information platform for the administrative branch of the Ministry of Justice). The project will continue until the end of 2022. Because of this, the new case management tools for the courts, HAIPA and AIPA, do not have an inbuilt reporting tool. In the meantime, the National Courts Administration has built a temporary solution to serve the courts.

The courts are switching from SAP BusinessObjects to Microsoft Power BI for reporting purposes. The new tool will be built to serve the needs of courts. Central objectives in developing the dashboards and reports are, for example, increasing the usability and comprehensibility of information, producing a more detailed situational picture and combining financial and human resources management data with substance systems (HAIPA, AIPA) data.

Representing the National Courts Administration in the European Network of Councils for the Judiciary (ENCJ), the Appeal Court of Rovaniemi has been drafting a survey for court users. The plan is to conduct this survey in 2021 in selected courts. The National Courts Administration is following the process and will evaluate whether it could be implemented nationally.

16. Geographical distribution and number of courts / jurisdictions (“judicial map”) and their specialisation

District Courts (the Courts Act, chapter 2)

District courts consider civil, criminal and petitionary matters as the court of first instance, unless otherwise provided. District courts also consider other matters assigned to them by law.

There are 20 district courts in Finland. They are Åland District Court, South Karelia District Court, South Ostrobothnia District Court, South Savo District Court, Helsinki District Court, Eastern Uusimaa District Court, Kainuu District Court, Kanta-Häme District Court, Central Finland District Court, Kymenlaakso District Court, Lapland District Court, Western Uusimaa District Court, Oulu District Court, Pirkanmaa District Court, Ostrobothnia District Court, North Karelia District Court, North Savo District Court, Päijät-Häme District Court, Satakunta District Court, and Southwest Finland District Court.

Provisions on the judicial districts of district courts are issued by [Government Decree \(1021/2017\)](#).

If necessary, a district court may have several offices and venues. Provisions on the locations of the district court offices and venues are issued by [Decree of the Ministry of Justice \(1115/2020\)](#). From the beginning of 2021, there are 24 district court offices and 39 venues. The venues in Iisalmi, Varkaus and Pietarsaari were re-established from the beginning of January 2021.

Provisions on the district courts that serve as land courts ([Government Decree 1022/2017](#)), maritime courts ([the Maritime Act 674/1994](#), section 21, paragraph 1) and military courts ([the Military Court Procedure Act 326/1983](#), section 1, paragraph 1) are issued separately.

Courts of appeal (the Courts Act, chapter 3)

Courts of appeal consider appeals and complaints against decisions of district courts, as well as matters concerning extraordinary requests for review and other judicial matters that under the law shall be decided by a court of appeal.

Courts of appeal consider, as the court of first instance, cases concerning offences in public office involving judges, other court officials and prosecutors, which under the law shall be decided by a court of appeal.

Courts of appeal are Helsinki Court of Appeal, Eastern Finland Court of Appeal, Rovaniemi Court of Appeal, Turku Court of Appeal, and Vaasa Court of Appeal.

Provisions on the locations of the courts of appeal are issued by [Government Decree](#) (864/2016).

A court of appeal may also have a permanent venue. At the moment, the Eastern Court of Appeal has a permanent venue in Kouvola. Provisions on the locations of such venues are issued by [Decree of the Ministry of Justice](#) (888/2016).

The judicial district of a court of appeal consists of the judicial districts of one or more district courts, unless otherwise separately provided on the jurisdiction of courts of appeal. Provisions on the judicial districts of the courts of appeal are issued by [Government Decree](#) (864/2016).

Administrative courts (the Courts Act, chapter 4)

Administrative courts consider and decide appeals to the administrative court, matters of administrative litigation and other matters that fall under their jurisdiction under [the Administrative Judicial Procedure Act](#) (808/2019) or another act. Administrative courts are Helsinki Administrative Court, Hämeenlinna Administrative Court, Eastern Finland Administrative Court, Northern Finland Administrative Court, Turku Administrative Court and Vaasa Administrative Court.

Provisions on the Åland Administrative Court are issued separately ([the Act on Åland Administrative Court](#) 547/1994). According to the Courts Act, the administrative court judge of the Åland Administrative Court also serves as a district court judge at the Åland District Court.

The judicial district of an administrative court consists of one or more regions, unless otherwise separately provided on the jurisdiction of administrative courts. Provisions on the judicial districts and locations of the administrative courts are issued by [Government Decree](#) (865/2016).

Special courts: the Market Court, the Labour Court and the Insurance Court (the Courts Act, chapters 5-7)

The Market Court is a special court for competition and oversight matters, procurement matters, intellectual property rights matters, and market law matters. Provisions on the quorum in the Market Court, on the consideration of matters that under the law fall under the Market Court's jurisdiction, and on requesting a review of a decision of the Market Court are laid down in [the Act on the Labour Court](#) (646/1974).

The Insurance Court is a special court for income security matters that under the law fall under its jurisdiction. Provisions on the quorum in the Insurance Court and on the consideration of matters in the Insurance Court are laid down in [the Insurance Court Procedure Act](#) (677/2016).

Please see the information given to the Council of Europe European Commission for the efficiency of justice (CEPEJ) in 2020 [here](#) (in particular, starting from page 79 of the Report).

Please see the map of district court network (**attachment 1**).

C. Efficiency of the justice system

Please see the information given to CEPEJ in 2020 [here](#) (in particular, starting from page 107 of the Report) and [here](#) (in particular, starting from page 35 of the Report).

17. Length of proceedings

The National Courts Administration maintains statistics on suspended cases, verdicts and decisions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The National Courts Administration maintains statistics on cases suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The statistics include all matters that have been suspended at some stage due to the COVID-19 and are still pending. The number of unresolved cases suspended due to the COVID-19 will be monitored in order to assess when sentences will be passed in such cases that have been suspended for this reason. More information can be found [here](#).

Other – please specify

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II. Anti-corruption framework

A. The institutional framework capacity to fight against corruption (prevention and investigation / prosecution)

18. List of relevant authorities (e.g. national agencies, bodies) in charge of prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of corruption. Please indicate the resources allocated to these (the human, financial, legal, and practical resources as relevant), e.g. in table format.

Prosecution

As described in Finland's written contributions in 2020, there are no specific resources aimed exclusively for handling corruption cases, but severe or complicated crimes related to corruption may form one area of expertise for certain prosecutors. Currently six specialized prosecutors have corruption as their area of expertise. In addition, there are 19 prosecutors specialized in prosecuting offences committed in office (most commonly corruption is conducted when committing offence in office – the one who receives the bribe). In addition, all local prosecutors can prosecute minor corruption cases.

B. Prevention

19. Integrity framework including incompatibility rules (e.g.: revolving doors)

Revolving doors

Section 44a of the Act on Public Officials in Central Government, which came into force on 1 January 2017, states that the authority and the person who will be appointed to an office or as a civil servant may sign a written contract that restricts the civil servant's right to employment or engagement in other activities if the civil servant wishes to give his notice. The restriction period can be agreed to cover a fixed period of a maximum of six months and the authority has the right to consider whether to impose the restriction period. It is proposed that this section be amended so that, instead of six months, a restriction period could be agreed for 12 months after the termination of the civil servant's employment, when the contract is concluded with a person appointed for the post of senior government official or proposed for appointment. The Government's proposal is due to be submitted to the Parliament in 2021.

There is a legislative project under preparation on limiting 'revolving doors' as regards Ministers. The aim is to lay down procedures for preventing and avoiding conflicts of interest when a member of the Government

moves to other position. The matter has been included in the Government's legislative programme and the Government's proposal is due to be submitted to the Parliament in spring 2021.

20. General transparency of public decision-making (including public access to information such as lobbying, asset disclosure rules and transparency of political party financing)

As described in Finland's written contributions in 2020, preparations for a legislation on transparency register are under way. The work is based on the Government Programme. The purpose of the act is to improve the transparency of decision-making and, by doing this, to prevent undue influence and reinforce public confidence. The act will impose a registration obligation on organisations and individuals engaged in lobbying activities. The register will, at first, only concern decision-making at the central government level, but its scope may later be extended to cover local and regional government. The work has continued as planned. Three hearings or discussion events have been held during 2020. The working group's documents are available [here](#). The report including draft legislation for the register is planned to be published in summer 2021. The act on the transparency register is scheduled to enter into force in 2023, and the goal is to introduce an electronic register at the same time.

A parliamentary working group is currently examining the development of electoral, party and party funding legislation. The working group will issue its report in 2021. More information [here](#) (in Finnish).

A Code of Conduct for civil servants and persons entrusted with top executive functions, which consolidates existing guidelines, is currently being finalized in the Ministry of Finance and foreseen to be published during spring 2021.

In autumn 2020, a guide on gifts, benefits and hospitality received by Ministers and an order (VN/23637/2020) as regards their registration were given. Minister may, at his or her discretion, receive a gift of 200 euros or less for his or her personal use. Gifts must be registered in the Government Gift Register. Ordinary gifts or gifts minor in value do not need to be registered. According to the guide, the reference value is less than 50 euros. Please see **attachment 2**.

The Ministry of Finance is also currently updating [the Guide on hospitality, benefits and gifts received by civil servants](#). The updated Guide will be published during spring 2021.

Assets disclosure rules

Asset disclosure is regulated in the Act on Public Officials in Central Government and section 8a applies to senior government officials. Section 8a states that before appointment the person must give an account of his or her business activities, holdings in companies and other property, of duties not related to the office concerned, of part time jobs set out in section 18 and of other relations and commitments that may be relevant for the evaluation, whether the person concerned is qualified for performing the tasks required in that office. Following the recommendations for measures issued by the GRECO to Finland in 2018, an amendment to this section is proposed. The Government's proposal is due to be submitted to the Parliament in 2021. The obligation to state the above-mentioned interests before appointment would also be extended to the Special Advisers to the Ministers. It is also proposed that the section be amended so that the civil servant himself does not have any discretion as to what information is given in the declaration of interests and whether the information provided is relevant in assessing his or her capacity to perform duties.

21. Rules on preventing conflict of interests in the public sector

No significant developments.

22. Measures in place to ensure whistleblower protection and encourage reporting of corruption

The Ministry of Justice has appointed [two working groups](#) in February 2020 to prepare a legislation on whistleblower protection to implement the EU directive nationally. Both working groups will work until 31 May 2021, after which the legislative proposal will be on public consultation and thereafter submitted to the Parliament. The aim is to have the new legislation to enter into force by 17 December 2021.

23. List the sectors with high-risks of corruption in your Member State and list the relevant measures taken / envisaged for preventing corruption and conflict of interest in these sectors (e.g. public procurement, healthcare, other)

The Government adopted a resolution on [the National Strategy and Action Plan for Tackling the Grey Economy and Economic Crime for 2020-2023](#) in June 2020 (please see the Government resolution and its anti-corruption sub-project 1.3 [here](#)). Please see also the answers to questions 19, 20, 21 and 25.

24. Measures taken to address corruption risks in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

Finland is aware of the concerns raised by the GRECO and other international organisations regarding corruption risks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and has taken note of the guidelines issued by the GRECO. Anti-corruption legislation and other measures have been applied as usual during the COVID-19 pandemic. There are no specific measures taken in this regard.

25. Any other relevant measures to prevent corruption in public and private sector

Please see [Finland's 5th round compliance report](#) on preventing corruption and promoting integrity in central governments (top executive functions) and law enforcement agencies for the GRECO and [Finland's Phase 4 second written follow-up report](#) for the OECD.

As described in Finland's written contributions in 2020, the Ministerial Working Group on Internal Security and Strengthening the Rule of Law has decided to launch preparations for an Anti-Corruption Strategy and an Action Plan for 2020–2023. Drafting of the new Anti-Corruption Strategy and the related Action Plan has progressed and the work should be finalised in the coming weeks.

Finland has continued its anti-corruption training efforts. The latest 'Joint Corruption Crimes' Training Seminar for judges, prosecutors and law enforcement officials organised by the Ministry of Justice was held in November 2020. Besides providing additional information on the essential elements of corruption offences, the course deals with the detection of corruption, confiscation of the proceeds of crime, and other related criminal sanctions. A topic particularly focused on during the course is the assessment of intent in corruption offences, especially from the perspective of the criticism presented in the OECD Phase 4 evaluation report.

The Ministry of Justice has initiated a study, where the OECD's criticism and present case law related to bribery will be evaluated and analysed. The aim of the study is to provide additional written material that can be used in future trainings for judges, prosecutors and law enforcement officials, but also to identify possible needs to amend the existing legislation. The study was launched in February 2021 and it is expected to be finalized by the end of 2021.

Finland has developed a detailed guidance document for SMEs, which covers corruption, including foreign bribery. [The Anti-Corruption Guide for SMES](#) is available in both of the national languages (Finnish and Swedish), as well as in English, and was published in May 2020. The objective of the guide is to raise awareness among companies, especially small and medium enterprises, which operate in domestic or in international market, and highlight the risks of corruption and its consequences. The guide also provides companies with practical tools for and concrete examples of dealing with corruption as well as support for establishing their own anti-corruption codes of conduct. The promotion of the guide continues online, including on relevant social media platforms and through stakeholder engagement.

There are also other awareness raising and preventative initiatives finalized or ongoing in Finland that include:

- In June 2020, the Government approved the new National Strategy and Action Plan for Tackling the Grey Economy and Economic Crime for 2020-2023. The new strategy includes a corruption related priority project 1.3 (Enhancing the fight against corruption and abuse through expertise, supervision and openness). The purpose of the project would be to enhance awareness at all levels of society of corruption as a phenomenon, the legal standards for combating and preventing corruption, and the tools used in anti-corruption work. The aim is also to develop ways to identify economic abuses through automation and to increase openness of activities receiving public funding. Please see also [press release](#) (in English).
- A government funded [study on developing corruption indicators](#) in order to better measure and understand the different typologies of corruption in Finland, was finalized In November 2020.
- Preliminary research of the KORPEN project coordinated by the Ministry of Justice and conducted by the Police University College between November 2020 and February 2021. The overall objective for this project is to help create a healthier environment for international business by preventing corruption-related money laundering in the Nordic countries. The aim is to make it easier to identify the connections between bribery and money laundering and to investigate and to convict cases in international business framework, where the laundered funds originate from corruptive actions, bribery in particular.
- Number of different targeted training events related to anti-corruption have been organised during the last year for example for tax officials, civil servants working abroad, law enforcement officials and public sector internal auditors.

The first Finnish Open Government Strategy was launched in December 2020. It covers the whole public sector and it also links open government issues to a broader protection of civil rights. According to the Open Government Vision 2030, 'Open government is a key resource in the Finnish society. Open government builds trust, security and confidence in the future among citizens'. The strategy has four priority areas: 1) Open government reinforces dialogue in society, 2) Open government promotes everyone's right to understand and to be understood, 3) Leadership and competence ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate, and 4) Finland actively promotes open government on the international level. Among the more detailed objectives of the strategy is the goal to enhance the openness-promoting compliance with [the Act on the Openness of Government Activities](#) (621/1999).

C. Repressive measures

26. Criminalisation of corruption and related offences

No significant developments.

27. Data on investigation and application of sanctions for corruption offences (including for legal persons and high level and complex corruption cases) and their transparency, including as regards to the implementation of EU funds

Please see data on application of sanctions for corruption and economic crime offences (**attachment 3**).

28. Potential obstacles to investigation and prosecution of high-level and complex corruption cases (e.g. political immunity regulation)

The Ministerial responsibility is regulated in sections 114-116 of the Constitution. Pursuant to section 114 of the Constitution, a charge against a Member of the Government for unlawful conduct in office is heard by the High Court of Impeachment, as provided in more detail by an act. Prior to this, the Parliament in conjunction with the Constitutional Law Committee will assess whether the threshold for bringing charges is met. Under section 114 of the Constitution, the decision to bring a charge is made by the Parliament, after having obtained an opinion from the Constitutional Law Committee concerning the unlawfulness of the actions of the Minister. If a charge is brought before the High Court of Impeachment against a Member of the Government, this charge is prosecuted by the Prosecutor General. Section 115 of the Constitution regulates who may initiate a matter concerning the legal responsibility of a Minister and section 116 of the Constitution prescribes the prerequisites for a higher threshold of a charge against a Member of the Government.

Although the above-mentioned procedure partly differs from the normal criminal procedure, the appropriateness of the actions of Ministers is ensured through different regulations, which promote the investigation and prosecution of high-level and complex corruption cases. For example, Ministers are required to declare their external affiliations to the Parliament and they are politically accountable for their affiliations.

According to section 63, paragraph 2 of the Constitution, a Minister shall, without delay after being appointed, present to the Parliament an account of his or her commercial activities, shareholdings and other significant assets, as well as of any duties outside the official duties of a Minister and of other interests which may be of relevance when his or her performance as a member of the Government is being evaluated. This obligation includes declarations about shareholdings in both domestic and foreign companies. The obligation to declare one's affiliations is considered to decrease the development of situations, which could endanger the trust and the need for ex post intervention.

Under section 32 of the Constitution, a Representative is disqualified from consideration of and decision-making in any matter that concerns him or her personally. However, he or she may participate in the debate on such matters in a plenary session of the Parliament. In addition, a Representative shall be disqualified from the consideration in a Committee of a matter pertaining to the inspection of his or her official duties. Moreover, a Representative acting as a Minister is subject to the conflict of interests' provisions of [the Administrative Procedure Act](#) (434/2003) when he or she participates in the proceedings of an administrative matter in the Government, the presidential session or the Ministry.

The Act on the Openness of Government Activities also pursues to prevent any possible misconduct through the principle of publicity and open access to public documents.

Other – please specify

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III. Media pluralism

A. Media authorities and bodies

29. Independence, enforcement powers and adequacy of resources of media regulatory authorities and bodies

In October 2020, the Government issued [the Government Decree on State Grants for the Promotion of Journalistic Content in 2020](#) (679/2020). The grant (7,5 million euros in total) was of temporary nature and its purpose was to support the content production media that had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim of the grant was to increase versatile journalistic content and its supply as well as to promote and develop journalism at local, regional and national levels. The aid was granted to media companies operating in Finland, whose advertising sales and turnover had significantly decreased due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The grant was distributed to all companies meeting the criteria stated in the Decree. The criteria were, in particular, economic. No content assessment was carried out in the process. The grant was awarded for the payroll costs of persons engaged in journalistic work and for freelancers' fees used for the acquisition of journalistic content. The grant was awarded to 96 media companies by the Finnish Transport and Communications Agency.

A working group appointed by the Ministry of Transport and Communications assisted in the preparation of the temporary government grant to support journalism. The members of the working group represent the media sector and experts in the field. In addition, the working group will assist the Ministry in examining whether a more permanent aid mechanism could be introduced to support journalism in Finland. The term of the group is from 1 July 2020 to 31 March 2021.

In addition to the support (500 000 euros annually) distributed to national minority-language newspapers by the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Arts Promotion Centre Finland, a state agency under the Ministry of Education and Culture, distributes subsidies to cultural magazines (both in paper and in digital format) in order to support cultural diversity and freedom of speech of different cultural and minority groups. The amount of the aid is approximately 900 000 euros annually.

Furthermore, a working group of State Secretaries has been assessing the need to reform postal legislation. The report of the working group was published in August 2020. Following the report, the Ministry of Transport and Communication has prepared a memorandum discussing how [the Postal Act](#) (415/2011) could be changed. The preparations for the Act continue and a government proposal is to be submitted to the Parliament in autumn 2021. State support for newspaper delivery is currently also under preparation at the Ministry.

Audiovisual programmes

The Audiovisual Media Services Directive falls primarily under the competences of the Ministry of Transport and Communications but also of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The new provisions of the directive (EU) 2018/1808 have been implemented in [the Act on Electronic Communication Services](#) (917/2014) and in [the Act on Audiovisual Programmes](#) (710/2011). New legislation entered into force in January 2021.

Provisions concerning the protection of minors in the video sharing platforms have been added to the Act on Audiovisual Programmes. On the basis of the Act, audiovisual programme providers and video sharing platforms may draw up codes of conduct to protect children from harmful content and to promote media education. The National Audiovisual Institute may inspect the codes of conduct to ensure that they comply with the Act.

The Department for Media Education and Audiovisual Media (MEKU) of the National Audiovisual Institute monitors compliance with the Act on Audiovisual Programmes. Besides classifying audiovisual programmes for the purpose of the protection of minors, the National Audiovisual Institute has a statutory duty to promote media education. MEKU is a member of the European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services (ERGA) and in 2021 works actively in the Subgroup 3 'Disinformation' and in the Action Group 3 'Media Literacy'. In 2021, the National Audiovisual Institute will become a full member of the European Platform of Regulatory Authorities (EPRA) and works actively in the EPRA Media and Information Literacy Task Force.

30. Conditions and procedures for the appointment and dismissal of the head / members of the collegiate body of media regulatory authorities and bodies

No significant developments.

31. Existence and functions of media councils or other self-regulatory bodies

No significant developments.

B. Transparency of media ownership and government interference

32. The transparent allocation of state advertising (including any rules regulating the matter); other safeguards against state / political interference

Finland's administrative culture is based on transparency and openness. The right to access to public information is set in the Constitution. Transparency and openness of public administration is regulated by several acts, such as the Act on the Openness of Government Activities, the Administrative Procedure Act and [the Act on Electronic Services and Communication in the Public Sector \(13/2003\)](#). The Act on the Openness of Government Activities provides the core foundation for the transparency of the decision-making in Finland. The main principle is that official documents are in the public domain unless specifically otherwise provided for. In addition to the general publicity of the documents, in general, all decisions in public domain are public, they need to be reasoned and the citizen involved has the right to appeal to the decision.

33. Rules governing transparency of media ownership and public availability of media ownership information

Finland has implemented the amendments to the EU's Audiovisual Media Services Directive mainly in the Act on Electronic Communication Services. On the basis of the Act, media service providers shall make publicly accessible information concerning their ownership structure. The new regulations have entered into force in January 2021.

C. Framework for journalists' protection

34. Rules and practices guaranteeing journalist's independence and safety¹

¹ According to the Commission's 2020 Rule of Law Report, Country Chapter on the rule of law situation in Finland (page 8) new legislation to protect journalists from unlawful threats and targeting has been proposed last year. A reference is made to legislative initiative LA 33/2019 vp, which is a legislative initiative by a Member of the Parliament to introduce separate criminalization for online shaming of public authorities. In general, such legislative initiatives may concern enactment of a new law or amendment or repeal of an existing law. The legislative initiative LA 33/2019 vp is [currently being processed by the Parliament's Legal Affairs Committee](#).

The Criminal Code criminalises the defamation, aggravated defamation (chapter 24, sections 9-10) as well as the dissemination of information violating personal privacy and aggravated dissemination of information violating personal privacy (chapter 24, sections 8-8a). The provisions protect the journalists e.g. in cases of hate speech targeted at them.

On the other hand, the freedom of speech and autonomy of the journalists is protected in the provisions as they allow the discussion of general importance, which does not constitute defamation or does not constitute dissemination of information violating personal privacy, if it may affect the evaluation of that person's activities in the position in question and if it is necessary for purposes of dealing with a matter of importance to society.

Please find Finland's rank on the world press freedom index in 2020 [here](#).

A recently published research ('[External Interference and Its Countermeasures in the Finnish Journalism](#)') demonstrates how external interference manifests and affects journalists in Finland. For this study, external interference is defined as all active or invasive methods external actors use to interfere in the journalistic process or influence journalists to shape editorial content. The research demonstrates that the external interference in journalist work is to be seen in connection of development of journalism and the society at large: the reduction of resources of the editorial work, the increase of media communication, the economic problems of media enterprises and the pressure the public bring on the journalists. The ability of the media houses to face these challenges affects also the autonomy of the journalism and journalists.

As regards the pressures that the public bring on the journalism, the ultimate phenomenon is hate speech targeted at the journalists.

There is a commitment in the Government Programme to work against hate speech, especially online. 'During the government term, the government will take horizontal measures to more effectively address systematic harassment, threats and targeting that pose a threat to the freedom of expression, official activities, research, and media freedom. The Government will ensure sufficient resources and competence for the prevention and detection of the offences mentioned above. Systematic monitoring of the situation in relation to discrimination and hate crime will be promoted both at national and international level.'

The Ministry of Justice has initiated a process (a government proposal) to change the Criminal Code so that the public prosecutors have the right to bring charges for menace based on the target's duties in employment or public commission of trust. In other words, it would not in future be up to the person's willingness to bring the case forward. One of the reasons for the proposal mentioned in the travaux préparatoires is the vulnerable situation of free-lance journalists. The change of the Criminal Code is due to come into force in autumn 2021. The government proposal is currently being considered by the Parliament ([HE 226/2020 vp](#)). More information can be found [here](#).

Several researches have shown that women and particularly women belonging to the minority groups are in an especially vulnerable position when it comes to hate speech (online). In addition, female journalists are often targets of sexist hate speech. The Ministry of Justice has started to prepare a change in the Criminal Code so that gender will be added among the motives that constitute grounds for increasing the punishment of (any) crime as specified in chapter 6, section 5 of the Criminal Code. The government proposal was given to the Parliament on 18 February 2021 ([HE 7/2021 vp](#)). More information can be found [here](#).

The Government appointed a rapporteur to evaluate in general the provisions of the Criminal Code and other relevant legislation to meet the problem of hate campaigns (so called targeting or online shaming). [The report](#) of the rapporteur was published in December 2020. The proposals of the report are being evaluated.

The Ministry of Justice appointed [a working group](#) on 4 March 2020 to assess ways to enhance the effectiveness of restraining orders. The working group is tasked with broadly assessing the range of ways available to improve the effectiveness of restraining orders, reduce the incidence of violations of restraining orders and improve the safety of victims of intimate partner violence in particular. The appointment of the working group is based on the Government Programme entry stating that the legislation concerning a restraining order will be reformed to protect the rights of the victim better. Underlying the decision to appoint the working group are also the recommendations of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), which encourage the Finnish authorities to step up efforts to increase the use of restraining orders by promoting their usefulness and ensuring their vigilant enforcement. The working group will also review the preconditions for imposing a restraining order. The term of the working group extends until 30 June 2021.

35. Law enforcement capacity to ensure journalists' safety and to investigate attacks on journalists

On 20 May 2020, the Ministry of the Interior appointed a working group to prepare three to five concise proposals for measures to combat online shaming more effectively. The working group examined online shaming broadly as an activity targeted at different authorities, decision makers, companies and opinion leaders.

The task of the working group was to examine the extent of online shaming, the position of victims of online shaming and the functioning of the existing legal safeguards, particularly from the perspective of support services for victims and activities of the Police. The working group was not specifically tasked with examining legislation, but issues related to it were raised during the work.

The results and conclusions were compiled in a report (background memorandum), which describes the matters highlighted during the work in more detail. [The report](#) was published on 15 January 2021. In the report, it is mentioned that online shaming is targeted at journalists among others.

The working group proposes the following measures. The means for implementing them are described in the report.

- 1) A research project will be carried out to determine the extent of online shaming and to obtain reliable information on the phenomenon. Obtaining reliable information requires a common definition, which is presented in the report.
- 2) The position of victims of online shaming and the realisation of their rights in police work will be improved.
- 3) Support provided for victims of online shaming will be improved.
- 4) Employers' support for employees in the event of online shaming will be ensured by drawing up guidelines for situations where employees, freelancers or volunteers participating in the employer's activities are subject to online shaming.

Education for the Police regarding the protection on journalists has been prepared, with the Finnish Broadcasting Company, YLE, as a partner. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, education can proceed during 2021.

36. Access to information and public documents

The Ministry of Justice will update the Act on the Openness of Government Activities according to the entries in the Government Programme. The aim of this assessment is a more viable and clear legislation that will promote the transparency of society and meet the requirements of modern society structure. In January 2021, the Ministry of Justice appointed a working group whose term extends to June 2023. The task is to

assess and clarify the possible problematics related to the current legislation and provide solutions to them as well as to analyse whether the scope of the current legislation is up to date and sufficient particularly considering the changes in the structure of administration. In addition to this general task, the working group will also assess whether there is any need for more urgent changes in the legislation and the working group will present a government proposal including these possible urgent changes in the course of 2021. More information can be found [here](#).

Over the past year, the Police's guidelines on the application of the Act on the Openness of Government Activities has been under discussion, also in the media. The criticism has mainly concerned the guidelines on public access to pre-trial investigation reports. [The Parliamentary Ombudsman](#) gave a decision regarding the guidelines in October 2020 and [the Supreme Administrative Court](#) in February 2021. Both have found the guidelines lawful.

37. [Lawsuits and convictions against journalists \(incl. defamation cases\) and safeguards against abuse](#)

Statistics on lawsuits or convictions against different professions are not available.

On September 2020, the Rovaniemi Court of Appeal upheld a decision of the district court in which the district court found journalist guilty of criminal defamation of a city councillor in Oulu. The case is most likely to proceed to the Supreme Court, provided that leave to appeal is granted, considering that it covers several significant issues in relation to the freedom of speech, particularly the freedom of the media.²

The Helsinki Court of Appeal sentenced in 14 July 2020 a person for incitement to defamation and another person for aggravated defamation as they had published in an e-publication's (e-journal) articles, which claimed that a female journalist has e.g. connections with a foreign state's intelligence service (R19/24).

[Other – please specify](#)

The fees charged for public documents are laid down in the Act on the Openness of Government Activities. No fees are charged for the provision of access to a public document when information regarding the document is provided orally, the document is provided for reading and copying at the office of the authority, or an electronic document is sent by e-mail to the person requesting the information. In addition, no fees are charged for provision of access to a document, when providing such access belongs to the duties of the authority to provide advice, to hear persons or to give notices. However, a fee is charged when access is requested to a document, which cannot be specified and found from document registers maintained by the authority by using the document classification to be used in such registers, nor by using the identifying code of the document, or from electronic registers by using their search functions. The amount of such fee shall correspond to the costs of obtaining the information. A fee is also charged for the provision of access in the form of a copy or printout, with said charge corresponding to the amount of costs incurred by the authority in providing such access, unless a lower charge is provided in law or a lower charge is decided on the basis of [the Municipal Act](#) (410/2015).

The Act on the Openness of Government Activities is being currently assessed, and this assessment might include the re-consideration of the rules concerning the fees charged for public documents, if this is considered necessary by the working group.

² Please see also the Commission's 2020 Rule of Law Report, Country Chapter on the rule of law situation in Finland, page 10, footnote 70.

The Government submitted its legislative proposal to the Parliament on 17 December 2020 for amending the Act on the Finnish Broadcasting Company, YLE ([HE 250/2020 vp](#)). The Parliament commenced its legislative procedure in February 2021. According to the proposal, apart from the exceptions laid down in the proposal, the text-based online content published by YLE shall be related to the company's content containing moving images or sound. The aim of the proposal is to specify the role of YLE as a public service media house and to bring the regulation on the company into line with EU state aid rules. The proposed provisions would clarify the current regulation in terms of the operating environment for commercial media. The purpose is also to ensure that YLE can continue providing text content as part of public service broadcasting, as regulated.

YLE would not be able to publish text-based content, if the content was not related to the company's content containing moving images or sound. This would not, however, apply to short text-based news content published by YLE on the basis of cooperation with a national news agency, e.g. the Finnish News Agency, STT, news briefs relating to fast and quickly developing news events, official text-based announcements under law, news content in text form in Saami and Romani languages or addressed to other minority language groups in Finland, or cultural and educational text-based content.

On 22 September 2020, the Supreme Court upheld the decisions of the lower courts to ban the Nordic Resistance Movement (Pohjoismainen vastarintaliike, PVL) in Finland. The association was abolished, as its activities were clearly illegal and violated fundamental and human rights, including inciting hatred towards minority groups as well as inciting violence and advocating for the abolishment of parliamentary democracy and pursuing national-socialist state ideals. The Supreme Court held that the activities of the association did not enjoy the protection of freedom of speech or association, as the activities of the association are by their nature an abuse of those freedoms.

IV. Other institutional issues related to checks and balances

A. The process for preparing and enacting laws

38. Framework, policy and use of impact assessments, stakeholders' / public consultations (particularly consultation of judiciary on judicial reforms), and transparency and quality of the legislative process

The Ministry of Justice is preparing a third National Action Plan on Fundamental and Human Rights for 2020-2023 based on the Government Programme. The aim of this third National Action Plan is to promote the obligation of the public authorities to guarantee the observance of basic rights and liberties and human rights pursuant to section 22 of the Constitution. The third National Action Plan focuses on developing fundamental and human rights indicators, which will be used to monitor the realisation of fundamental and human rights. The purpose is to improve the assessment of fundamental and human rights impacts and support the decision-making in issues related to fundamental and human rights.

The Government Programme includes many references to better regulation in general, and to specific aspects of the legislative process. In particular, the Government has adopted [an Action Plan on Better Regulation](#) in August 2020. The Action Plan includes planned activities in four different fields: 1) Enhancing the systematic planning of legislation and its capacity building within the Government structures, 2) Development of transparency and stakeholder consultations in the legislative process, 3) Development of the impact assessments and developing a systematic approach to ex post evaluations, and 4) Enhancing the benefits of technology and digitalization in the legislative process. The implementation of the Action Plan is ongoing and many of the activities can already be reported.

As a part of the overall development of the impact assessments, the Government has appointed [a Government-wide network of Impact Assessment Experts](#) to increase inter-ministerial support and sharing of information on impact assessments. The Government has also appointed a working group for the renewal of guidelines for the impact assessments to address the current demands on the quality of impact assessments better. In addition, the general training provided to Government law drafters has undergone a reform and the new curriculum will be implemented starting in March 2021. Special emphasis is put on the general requirements of quality legislation, for example ensuring that the legislative proposals comply with the Constitution and the obligations arising from EU legislation and Finland's international obligations.

39. Rules and use of fast-track procedures and emergency procedures (for example, the percentage of decisions adopted through emergency / urgent procedure compared to the total number of adopted decisions)

No significant developments.

40. Regime for constitutional review of laws

No significant developments.

41. COVID-19: provide update on significant developments with regard to emergency regimes in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

judicial review (including constitutional review) of emergency regimes and measures in the context of COVID-19 pandemic

oversight by Parliament of emergency regimes and measures in the context of COVID-19 pandemic measures taken to ensure the continued activity of Parliament (including possible best practices)

The emergency powers are based on the Emergency Powers Act and on section 23 of the Constitution (fundamental rights and liberties in situations of emergency). If the Government, jointly with the President of the Republic, declare the state of emergency, it should specify which emergency conditions laid down in section 3 of the Emergency Powers Act exist as the powers vary depending on the specific emergency condition in question. The use of Emergency Powers Act is strictly scrutinized by the Parliament and every degree given on the basis of this legislation must be immediately submitted to the Parliament, which decides whether to apply the degree or repeal the degree in full or in part.

The state of emergency began on 16 March 2020 and ended on 16 June 2020. During this period, the Government adopted measures according to section 3, paragraph 5 of the Emergency Powers Act (a very widespread infectious disease corresponding to an extremely serious catastrophe as for its effects), which authorizes only a limited set of powers under the part II of the Emergency Powers Act. The Government invoked emergency powers regarding the re-organisation of health and social sector (sections 86-88, 93, 94, 95.2 and 96-103), the re-organisation of teaching and education (section 109) and the imposition of restrictions on movement (section 118).

Due to the worsening COVID-19 situation in Finland, the Government, in cooperation with the President of the Republic, declared on 1 March 2021 that the country is in a state of emergency as referred to in section 3, paragraph 5 of the Emergency Powers Act. The state of emergency entered into force immediately. On 5 March 2021, the Government submitted a proposal to the Parliament on introducing powers laid down in the Emergency Powers Act. The powers to be adopted through the Decrees are related to directing the operations of healthcare and social welfare units (section 86) and compliance with the time limits for non-

urgent care (section 88). The Government would also adopt powers related to emergency communications (section 106) and decisions on which authority has power in cases of ambiguity (107).

The Government has not imposed any general curfew inside Finland. Because of much higher level of reported COVID-19 cases in Southern Finland than elsewhere in the country, the Government restricted movement from one region of Southern Finland to other regions in spring 2020 for three weeks. The restriction on movement from and to Region of Uusimaa began on 28 March 2020 and was originally supposed to be in force until 19 April 2020. However, this restriction was already terminated on 15 April as the Government considered that the restriction on movement did not meet anymore the necessity requirement under the Emergency Powers Act.

In addition to the Emergency Powers Act, section 23 of the Constitution regulates provisional exceptions to basic rights and liberties and thus enables wider exceptions to these rights that would be possible under ordinary legislation. These provisional exceptions to basic rights must be necessary in the case of an armed attack against Finland or in the event of other situations of emergency provided by an Act, and these provisional exceptions must be compatible with Finland's international human rights obligations. During the state of emergencies described above, the Government has enacted acts under section 23 of the Constitution to impose restrictions on the freedom to conduct a business in the restaurant industry.

All of the emergency powers invoked under the Emergency Powers Act and restrictions to basic rights and liberties based on section 23 of the Constitution have been scrutinized and controlled by the Chancellor of Justice and by the Parliament, notably the Constitutional Committee of the Parliament. Decrees adopted by the Government under the Emergency Powers Act must be submitted to the Parliament, which can approve or reject them. Legislative proposals presented by the Government based on section 23 of the Constitution must be submitted to the Parliament for adoption. Government Decrees based on the same provision shall without delay be submitted to the Parliament for consideration. The Parliament may decide on the validity of the Decrees.

After the state of emergency declared on 16 March 2020, the focus shifted from the nationwide restrictions to more targeted regional restrictions, which are decided by regional and local authorities. These restrictions are based on ordinary legislation, especially the Communicable Diseases Act, but also other relevant legislation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the ordinary legislation has been developed so that there would be no need to resort to the emergency powers if the situation can be dealt with ordinary legislation, and, therefore, the restrictions to fundamental and human rights are limited only to those actions, which are considered necessary and proportional. These decisions of administrative authorities are subjected to appeal and their actions are overseen by the supreme overseers of legality, the Parliamentary Ombudsman and the Chancellor of Justice.

In 2020, in total of 13 Decrees were issued during the exceptional circumstances to establish and continue the powers of the Emergency Preparedness Act, 10 related Implementing Decrees and their extension Decrees and three related Repeal Decrees. The implementing regulations concerned temporary restrictions on the obligation to organise early childhood education and training, derogations from the provisions of the Annual Holidays Act, the Working Time Act and the Employment Contracts Act, and derogations from the deadlines for non-urgent care.

In other respects, 2020 was also characterised by regulatory needs arising from the prevention of the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 253 government bills were submitted, 86 of them related to the management of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, 12 government proposals related to the State budget were submitted (draft amending budgets for 2020, draft budget for 2021 and their supplements).

The development of normal legislation and the temporary derogations have responded to the problems caused by the acute crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and created conditions for the functioning of society in the event of a pandemic. The legislative amendments have related to the following entities:

- Labour market and social security;
- Operating conditions for enterprises (subsidies, financing);
- Public finances (state and municipalities);
- Restriction of business freedom (restaurant industry, possibility to close private premises);
- Epidemic management ('Koronavilkku' mobile application, the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kela) compensations for testing);
- Pharmaceutical services;
- Basic education, vocational and higher education;
- Securing the availability of seasonal labour;
- Transport.

In addition, temporary changes have been made to different administrative processing times and other deadlines in the administrative branches of the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the Ministry of Transport and Communications.

As a rule, the laws related to the COVID-19 pandemic are laid down on a fixed-term basis. The laws have typically been in force until the end of June or December. As the epidemic persists, the validity of the fixed-term acts has been extended or reissued. Preparations for the continuation of several fixed-term provisions have been launched at the beginning of 2021.

Information on the Emergency Powers Act and other legislation and decisions concerning the COVID-19 pandemic can be found on the websites of [the Government](#) and [the Parliament](#).

Finland has also reported on the introduction of the Emergency Powers Act and on restrictive measures in the following periodic reports on the implementation of the core human rights treaties:

- 7th periodic report on the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, submitted on 2 April 2020, considered by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on 17-19 February 2021; the Committee's concluding observations forthcoming on 5 March 2021.
- 7th periodic report on the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, submitted on 2 April 2020, to be considered by the Human Rights Committee on 2-3 March 2021; the Committee's concluding observations due at the end of March 2021.
- 1st periodic report on the implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, submitted on 18 June 2020; the report is waiting to be reviewed by the Committee on the Rights of the Child.
- 8th periodic report on the implementation of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, submitted on 3 December 2020; the report is waiting to be reviewed by the Committee against Torture.
- 8th periodic report on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, submitted on 22 December 2020; the report is waiting to be reviewed by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

In addition, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs has responded to the inquiries from the United Nations and Council of Europe human rights mechanisms relating to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Other notifications under EU law relating to national COVID-19 measures were dealt with by the competent ministries (e.g. notification procedures concerning technical regulations for certain COVID-19 related actions and the procedures concerning the reintroduction of internal border controls).

Courts

In addition, as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic the National Courts Administration has published [a guide for the courts on using remote connections at a trial](#). The intention was to lower the threshold for using remote connections and offer experience-based advice on how to resolve practical difficulties. The guide covers a comprehensive range of issues to be considered when making use of remote connections in a trial. Although not a technical manual, it also touches upon certain technical aspects of using remote connections, such as the equipment available in the courts. The guide explicitly notes that it was drawn up only for the current exceptional situation, and was not intended to change existing policies, instructions, or recommendations.

Since March 2020, the National Court Administration started hosting weekly remote/virtual meetings for the management of the courts (number of participants around 70-90). These virtual meetings, which collected the management of the courts in one meeting, had two important outcomes:

- 1) The management of the courts could share their experiences related to the COVID-19 pandemic and successes with their colleagues. The various experts at the National Court Administration could also participate in the meetings, offering their advice (such as human resources and communication, for example).
- 2) These meetings were an opportunity for the National Court Administration to be informed by the courts on what kind of information and assistance they need. This was particularly important in times of crisis, which demand swift actions.

The National Court Administration has supported the courts in various ways, e.g.:

- Provided a memorandum of Crisis Communications to the Courts on 1 April 2020.
- Participated in the meetings of the management of the courts and gave ideas and suggestions on communication.
- Issued concise and practical guidance to the courts on crisis communication.
- Drafted various templates for communication and press releases.
- Offered the courts the possibility to use the information channels at the National Court Administration's disposal.
- The justice related website 'oikeus.fi' has a constantly updated compilation of all the press releases/communications from the courts, and a reminder to check the courts own webpage for further instructions.

Prosecutors

A plan for precaution and adjustment measures for the COVID-19 pandemic has been drafted and distributed for the use of prosecution services. It includes measures for protection at work, instructions for quarantine and health care, preparation for actions in case of epidemic spreading extensively among the officials, instructions for working, supervision and co-operation in exceptional circumstances, arrangements for the process of prosecution, instructions for meetings, official journeys and recreational services as well as for arranging staff training and communication. The executive board of the prosecution services assesses the situation on a regular basis.

B. Independent authorities

42. Independence, capacity and powers of national human rights institutions ('NHRIs'), of ombudsman institutions if different from NHRIs, of equality bodies if different from NHRIs and of supreme audit institutions

In autumn 2018, the Ministry of Justice set up a working group to review and clarify the distribution of tasks between the Chancellor of Justice and the Parliamentary Ombudsman, who are the supreme overseers of legality. This working group published a report, which was submitted to comments in 2019. On the basis of this report and related comments, a government proposal was submitted to comments at the end of 2020 and this proposal for a new Act will be presented to the Parliament in spring 2021. The aim of this reform is to renew the legislation regarding the distribution of tasks between the Chancellor of Justice and the Parliamentary Ombudsman, so that this legislation would be more in line with the specific tasks of each actor, as regulated in the Constitution and other legislation, and amend the legislation to better answer the tasks deriving from the international treaties as well as the actual fields of specialization.

Supreme audit institutions

According to section 90 of the Constitution

The Parliament supervises State finances and compliance with the State budget. For this purpose, the Parliament shall have an Audit Committee. The Audit Committee shall report any significant supervisory findings to the Parliament.

For the purpose of auditing State finances and compliance with the State budget, there shall be an independent National Audit Office in connection with the Parliament. More detailed provisions on the status and duties of the National Audit Office are laid down by an Act.

The Audit Committee and the National Audit Office have the right to receive information needed for the performance of their duties from public authorities and other entities that are subject to their control.

The principal task of [the Parliament's Audit Committee](#) is to oversee the management of government finances and compliance with the budget. In this task, the Committee concentrates on the general state and management of government finances as well as on issues of which the Parliament ought to be informed. Its tasks also include deliberating various reports on government finances and preparing them to be dealt with at plenary sessions. Tasks of the Audit Committee are defined also in [the Parliament's Rule of Procedure](#).

[The National Audit Office of Finland](#), NAOF, audits the management of central government finances and assets, monitors fiscal policy, and oversees political party and election campaign funding. The NAOF's operations aim to ensure that state funds are used cost-effectively in accordance with the Parliament's decisions and the law. The NAOF also ensures that fiscal policy is on a sustainable basis.

The NAOF's activities cover the entire central government finances, and it has extensive access to information under the Constitution. The NAOF also contributes to ensuring that the principles of the rule of law, democracy and sustainable economy are adhered to in the financial management of the EU, as well as in other international cooperation.

Provision on the status and duties of the NAOF and its right to access data are laid down in section 90 of the Constitution. [The Act on the National Audit Office](#) (676/2000) defines the NAOF's position, duties, authorisations and its right to access data in more detail. More information can be found [here](#).

High-level nominations

As regards state of play of nominations for high-level positions for independent authorities there have been following nominations since 1 January 2020:

- According to [the Act on the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman](#) (1326/2014), section 2, the Ombudsman is appointed for a term of five years. Non-Discrimination Ombudsman Ms Kristina Stenman was appointed as of 1 August 2020.

- According to [the Data Protection Act](#) (1050/2018), section 11, Data Protection Ombudsman and Deputy Data Protection Ombudsman are appointed for a term of five years. Ms Anu Talus was appointed as Data Protection Ombudsman as of 1 November 2020 and Ms Heljä-Tuulia Pihamaa as a Deputy Data Protection Ombudsman as of 22 March 2021.
- Ms Sirpa Rautio was appointed as the Director of the Human Rights Centre for her third term from 1 March 2020. As laid down in [the Parliamentary Ombudsman Act](#) (197/2002), section 19 c, the term of the Director is four years.
- According to the Constitution, section 38, the Deputy-Ombudsman is appointed for a term of four years. Mr Pasi Pölönen has been appointed as a Deputy-Ombudsman for the period 1 October 2017 - 30 September 2021. According to the Parliamentary Ombudsman Act, section 16, a substitute for a Deputy-Ombudsman is chosen for a term in office of not more than four years. Mr Mikko Sarja has been selected to serve as the Substitute for a Deputy-Ombudsman for the period 1 October 2017 – 30 September 2021.
- According to [the Act Governing Parliamentary Officials](#) (1197/2003), section 10, the Auditor General of the National Audit Office of Finland is appointed for a term of six years. The Auditor General for 2016–2021 is Ms Tytti Yli-Viikari.

Important decision/opinions from independent bodies/authorities

- The Chancellor of Justice’s decisions can be found [here](#).
- The Parliamentary Ombudsman’s decisions can be found [here](#).
- The Data protection Ombudsman’s decisions and opinions can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

C. Accessibility and judicial review of administrative decisions

43. Transparency of administrative decisions and sanctions (incl. their publication and rules on collection of related data) and judicial review (incl. scope, suspensive effect)

No significant developments.

44. Implementation by the public administration and State institutions of final court decisions

No significant developments.

D. The enabling framework for civil society

45. Measures regarding the framework for civil society organisations (e.g. access to funding, registration rules, measures capable of affecting the public perception of civil society organisations, etc.)

Please see also the answer to question 38 as regard the Action Plan on Better Regulation.

The third four-year term of the Advisory Board on Civil Society Policy (KANE) ended on 8 February 2021 and preparations for a new Advisory Board will begin during spring 2021. The Advisory Board operates under the auspices of the Ministry of Justice. The tasks of the Advisory Board include, for example, promotion of interaction between public authorities and civil society and improvement of civil society’s operating conditions. At the end of his term of office (2017-2021) the Advisory Board has drawn up recommendations for the development of civil society policy and its objectives in connection with the municipal elections in 2021 ([here](#) in Finnish). In January 2021, the Advisory Board also published [a report](#) where it analysed the results of the Advisory Board’s work in relation to the expectations of those involved in the work, assessed its successes, and made proposals to develop the activities of the Advisory Board during its next term.

[A legislative project](#) is under way at the Ministry of Justice with the aim of facilitating civic society activities. The aim is to reform [the Associations Act](#) (503/1989) and to provide an optional lighter legal form for community civic activity in order to respond to changes in society and civic activity better. Associations and other civic activities play an important role in the functioning and development of the Finnish society. In addition to traditional association activities, there is an increasing number of civic activities in more free-form groups. Public consultation on the working group's [proposals](#) is open until 14 April 2021. The new legislation is planned to enter into force in 2022.

Implementation of [the National Democracy Programme](#) has continued. [The Act on Political Parties](#) (10/1969) has been amended in order to enable registration of a party electronically (online) and collection of statements of support required for the registration of a party electronically. Legislation came into force on 1 January 2021. Work continued to assess the functioning of electoral, party and party funding legislation. The Ministry of Justice has launched a project to strengthen participation of children and young people in decision-making at national level. The project's term of office is 1 March 2021 – 30 April 2023. The Ministry of Education and Culture appointed the steering group for the development of democracy and human rights education for the term of office of 22 June 2020 – 1 June 2023. In a cooperation project between the University of Helsinki, the Ministry of Justice and the Human Rights Centre, democracy and human rights education in teacher education will be developed. The term of office of the project is 1 August 2020 – 31 July 2021.

E. Initiatives to foster a rule of law culture

46. Measures to foster a rule of law culture (e.g. debates in national parliaments on the rule of law, public information campaigns on rule of law issues, etc.)

A communication campaign to support the organisation of municipal elections (in spring 2021) will be launched during spring 2021. The aim of the campaign is to strengthen the trust in the safety of municipal elections, taking into consideration COVID-19 situation, and in election authorities as well as to prevent and, if necessary, combat disinformation related to the elections.

From 1 December 2020 to 30 November 2021, the Ministry of Justice is implementing [the Election Pool project](#), which will support elections and cooperation between authorities. The project is funded by the EU's Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) Programme. The objective of the project is to strengthen cooperation among authorities and cooperation with social media in addressing election interference and improving election preparedness.

A specific funding in State budget is allocated to support democracy and the rule of law in third countries. The aim is to strengthen and expand Finland's support for the promotion of democracy and the rule of law as part of Finland's development policy and development cooperation. With the help of funding, a new rule of law actor will be established to develop Finland's international cooperation on the rule of law and to bring together experts in the field at national and international level.

A reform of the '[oikeus.fi](#)' website has been under way (also [in English](#)). The website contains information about the judicial system and links to the websites of the independent courts, the public legal aid and guardianship districts, the National Prosecution Authority, the National Enforcement Authority Finland, and the Criminal Sanctions Agency. The website also contains links to the websites of other authorities in the administrative branch of the Ministry of Justice. The information in the website has been updated and the structure has been renewed in order to make a clearer division between the Ministry of Justice and the courts (as well as separate agencies). The work on the 'courts' section will continue and the content will be developed. The aim is to improve the availability of information and to better serve different user groups, including citizens looking for information on legal issues.

As part of the Government's analysis, assessment and research activities, a research project '[The Rule of Law, Finland and the European Union](#)' has been launched in 2021. The study is scheduled for completion in spring 2022.

Other – please specify

Municipal elections and COVID-19 situation

Municipal elections were scheduled to be held in April 2021. The parties in the Parliament have been discussing municipal elections and COVID-19 situation and on 6 March 2021 the postponement of the elections to June was supported by eight of the nine parties in the Parliament. The elections are scheduled to be held on 13 June 2021. The transfer is due to the deteriorating COVID-19 situation, which could jeopardize the health security of the April elections. The Government will make a proposal to the Parliament on the preparation of the Ministry of Justice and the Parliament will take the decision on the transfer.

The Ministry of Justice is preparing for the municipal elections in cooperation with the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare. The Ministry of Justice and the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare monitor the development of the COVID-19 pandemic closely and, if necessary, will issue more specific instructions on the election arrangements. The Ministry of Justice has sent instructions to municipalities and different election authorities in February 2021 and organised multiple Q&A videoconferences. Instructions on safe voting will be sent to all eligible voters together with the notice of right to vote (polling card).

ATTACHMENTS

- Att. 1 [Map of district court network](#)
- Att. 2 [Guide on gifts, benefits and hospitality received by Ministers](#)
- Att. 3 [Data on application of sanctions for corruption and economic crime offences](#)