

National Profile

Finland





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Welcome to Finland!

We at Maailmanvaihto – ICYE Finland are thrilled to welcome you to this northern country for your volunteer experience! Whether you're curious about the Finnish education system or excited to explore nature and the Northern Lights, we hope you have an unforgettable time in Suomi, Finland!

Volunteering in Finland is an intercultural learning experience. You'll get to join a new community and know cultures and the society in Finland while also gaining a deeper understanding of yourself and your own background. This journey will be filled with new friends and exciting discoveries but also everyday challenges – sometimes, that's where deeper learning happens. Along with warm clothes, bring an open mind and a positive attitude!

This National Profile was created to give you a basic overview of the ICYE program in Finland and a short introduction Finland, a small country with many pleasures that has been ranked as the happiest country in the world seven times in a row (by 2024), and is home to a unique natural environment where the sun does not set for 73 days during the summer.

This booklet is a great starting point to help you imagine what's ahead but, of course, it only includes a couple of pages on a multi-sided country with diverse challenges and positive sides – and all people living in Finland have their unique thoughts on how to improve the society. Thus, we invite you to explore the booklet with keeping in mind that there's plenty more to Finland. And the dark winter days and sunny summer nights are something you just have to experience for yourself!

Reading this guide is one of the first steps in preparing for your volunteer year. In fact, your experience starts now as you read through it! We will arrange your hosting in Finland and support you throughout your stay – you just need to bring your enthusiasm and willingness to learn.

We can't wait to meet you and start this amazing journey together!
Welcome to Finland!



With warm greetings,
Maailmanvaihto – ICYE Finland

Information on Finland

Welcome to Finland! The Republic of Finland is a Nordic country whose border neighbours are Sweden in the West, Norway in the North and Russia in the East, while Estonia lies to the South across the Gulf of Finland.

History

Finland was a province and then a grand duchy under Sweden from the 12th century to the 19th century, until it became an autonomous grand duchy of Russia in 1809. Finland's declaration of independence from Russia in 1917 was followed by a civil war (1918), a war against the Soviet Union (1939–1944), and a period of official neutrality during the Cold War. Finland joined the United Nations in 1955, the OECD in 1969, the European Union in 1995, the eurozone since its beginning (1999) and NATO in 2023.



Finland benefited indirectly from settler colonialism in African and American continents, and practiced settler colonialism and assimilation against Indigenous Sámi peoples in its territory until the 19–20th century. Discrimination and assimilation politics are still present in relation to the Roma people too.¹ However, Finland's centuries-long history as a colonised region has left clear marks in geography, economy, and nature.

Geography, Climate and Biodiversity

Finland covers an area of about 340,000 square kilometres, characterised by forests, lakes (187,000 lakes and ponds) and an extensive archipelago area with numerous islands and islets. 13.3% of land is covered by protected areas, while the EU Biodiversity Strategy target is 30% by 2030.² About 10% of evaluated species and more than half of 73 forest habitat types assessed are classified as threatened. Among the most significant threats to biodiversity are climate change, invasive alien species and the

¹ Keskinen 2021. Kolonialismin ja rasismien historiaa Suomesta käsin.
<https://helda.helsinki.fi/server/api/core/bitstreams/7343c3e4-64ae-468a-88fb-8c95036d94ac/content>

² Biodiversity Information System for Europe – Finland.
<https://biodiversity.europa.eu/countries/finland>

Protected areas under national laws:
<https://biodiversity.europa.eu/data/visualizations/country-profile-maps/cdda>

eutrophication of the Baltic Sea.³ The 41 national parks (of which you can learn more about at <https://www.luontoon.fi/en/articles/national-parks>) around Finland aim to preserve biodiversity, while offering recreation

opportunities.⁴ Finnish climate could be described as of continental nature, with rapid changes in the weather and large regional differences, especially between the north and south, and a lot of variety between the seasons⁵, from the nightless nights of the midsummer to “*kaamos*”, the dark, cold winter months.



The majority of the population (around 5.6 million people) resides in the southern part of the country. Helsinki is the capital, surrounded by the cities of Espoo, Kauniainen and Vantaa, creating a socioeconomically lively metropolitan area. Other major cities include Tampere, Turku, Oulu, Jyväskylä, Kuopio and Lahti.

³ Convention on Biological Diversity – Finland – Country Profile.

<https://www.cbd.int/countries/profile?country=fi>

⁴ Luontoon.fi – National Parks.

<https://www.luontoon.fi/en/activities/hiking-and-outdoor-recreation/map?filter=national-parks>

⁵ Finnish Meteorological Institute – Climate elements.

<https://en.ilmatieteenlaitos.fi/climate-elements>

Political System, economy, and culture

Finland is a parliamentary democracy with a welfare state. It ranks high in press freedom⁶, transparency,⁷ and education. The country's multiparty system fosters coalition governments, and the president, elected for six years, handles foreign policy. Finland elected its first female president in 2000 and the first female prime minister in 2003. The Sámi Parliament advocates for indigenous rights.⁸

Finland has developed from a largely forest & farm economy until the 1950s to a modern industrial economy with top research and high technology innovations. ITC, cleantech, and bioeconomy play roles. In the 21st century, the key features of Finland's modern welfare state are a high standard of education, equality promotion, and national social security system, although currently challenged by an ageing population and the fluctuations of an export-driven economy.

It is by law prohibited to discriminate on the basis of gender, gender identity, and gender expression, and the law obliges to promote gender equality. The legislation ensures equal pay for equal work, and there are ongoing efforts to improve the pay gap further.

In Finland, comprehensive education normally starts during the year when the child turns seven. Preschool education, comprehensive education, and upper secondary education is free of charge. Higher education is for the most part free of charge.⁹ Finland's education system includes a focus on providing support for students with special needs.

The two official languages are Finnish, the language of the majority, and Swedish. Besides Finnish and Swedish, there are other languages whose users' rights are laid down in law, such as three Sámi languages.¹⁰ The Sámi have struggled to maintain their cultural identity but have gained stronger legal protections in recent years. Languages in spoken Finland also include Russian, Estonian, and Arabic, for example.

When it comes to cuisine, one might mention, for example, freshly harvested new potatoes as one seasonal treat during the summer time. Summer time seasonal treats are also fresh berries, some of which can be ripen also in the autumn.

⁶ Reporters Without Borders –the World Press Freedom Index 2024. <https://rsf.org/en/index>

⁷ Transparency International – Corruption Perceptions Index. <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2024>

⁸ Sámi Cultural Centre Sajos – The Sámi Parliament. <https://www.sajos.fi/en/sajos/saamelaiskarajat/>

⁹ InfoFinland – The Finnish Education System. <https://www.infofinland.fi/education/the-finnish-education-system>

¹⁰ Institute for the languages of Finland – Languages of Finland and language policy. <https://en.kotus.fi/on-language/languages-of-finland-and-language-policy/>

Finally, did you know that It's been estimated that there are over three million saunas in Finland! So, if you are curious about relaxing in a room heated with the sauna stoves, Finland offers plenty of opportunities for that!



Volunteers on a nature walk.

Maailmanvaihto – ICYE Finland

Maailmanvaihto – ICYE Finland is a non-profit organization that has been promoting international volunteer exchange since 1958. *Maailmanvaihto* means "world exchange" in Finnish. Every year, we welcome around 30–40 volunteers from different countries to Finland, where they contribute to various host organizations. Volunteers join us through three programs: International Cultural Youth Exchange (ICYE), European Solidarity Corps, and Internationaler Jugendfreiwilligendienst (IJFD).

We also send around 30 volunteers from Finland abroad every year to destinations in Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America, and Oceania. Our mission is to create meaningful intercultural experiences that foster personal growth, social development, and global understanding. We stand for equality, intercultural learning, and global responsibility.

You can find our homepage at <https://maailmanvaihto.fi/en>, and we warmly invite you to follow us on [TikTok](#), [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

Volunteering & Community

Volunteers play a huge role in our activities! Many of our events, like the On-Arrival and Mid-Term Camps, are organized by Finnish volunteers who are often returnees from ICYE or European Solidarity Corps programs or simply people passionate about cultural exchange.

Maailmanvaihto is led by a board of 10–12 volunteers, mostly in their 20s and 30s, many of whom have participated in exchange programs themselves. They work alongside our staff to keep things running smoothly. In 2025, our board will be chaired by Hanna Sainio.

On-arrival training camp activities.



Office Info & Who is Who

Our office is located at the address Oikokatu 3 in Helsinki, just a 10-minute walk from the Central Railway Station. Please, feel free to reach out if you have questions or feedback! Office Hours: Mon–Fri, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.



Helsinki city center view nearby Maailmanvaihto's office.

Our office team includes the following permanent staff members besides which the team usually includes a trainee or a volunteer.



Anni Koskela
Secretary General
outgoing programs, finances,
general coordination



Mari Takalo
Program Coordinator
incoming programs, your
contact person



Minna Räisänen
Communications Officer
media relations and
information, school visits

Our support for your well-being and safety

We look forward to supporting you in this exciting experience! 😊

Orientation and Language Training

At Maailmanvaihto, we organize an On-Arrival Training every August to help new volunteers settle in. This training introduces key topics like cultures and the society in Finland, conflict management, and volunteer work in Finland. Volunteers also receive approximately 30 hours of Finnish language learning through an online course.

The training is a great opportunity to meet fellow volunteers, connect with ICYE Finland staff and co-workers, and start adapting to life in Finland. Attending this training is essential, so please make sure to apply for your residence permit well in advance (at least 3 months before arrival). The On-Arrival Training Camp takes place from 13th August to 19th August 2025, and volunteers should plan to arrive in Finland one or two days before it begins.

Most ICYE volunteers arrive in August, but it is also possible to start in January. However, volunteers arriving in January should note that the On-Arrival Training is only held once a year in August. The January arrivals will join the Mid-term meeting for orientation info in a nutshell.



Mid-Term and Final Evaluation

In January, we hold a Mid-Term Evaluation Camp, giving volunteers the chance to reflect on their experiences so far, discuss challenges, and make the most of their remaining time in Finland.

The Final Evaluation Meeting takes place in May. This is an opportunity to review personal growth, share insights, and prepare for returning home after an unforgettable year in Finland.

Meet Your Buddy!

To make your transition smoother, ICYE Finland tries to match every volunteer with a local Buddy – someone who lives nearby and can help you settle in. Your Buddy is a friend who can show you around, help you find hobbies, and spend time with you. Some Buddies are former ICYE volunteers who understand the challenges of adapting to a new country.

If we can't find a local Buddy, don't worry! We might be able to pair you with an online Buddy from another part of Finland.



Volunteering placements

Most volunteer placements are in education and social work. You might work at a folk high school, helping as a teaching assistant or supporting maintenance work, or in kindergartens, elementary schools, elderly homes, or special education institutes. Check out our Work Profile or visit [icye.org](https://www.icye.org) for more details on long-term volunteer projects in Finland.

Most volunteer placements through Maailmanvaihto are located in small towns and villages in Southern and Central Finland. Since Finland has a low population density, be prepared for a calm and nature-filled environment! The most populated area is around Helsinki, but due to limited accommodation options, we can only offer a few placements in the capital.

Some volunteers will live in small, rural villages, which can feel quite isolated. The distances between houses and towns can be long, but thankfully, internet and mobile networks are widely available. Being proactive and open-minded will help you adapt to the Finnish countryside and appreciate its unique charm.

Public transportation in rural areas is often limited, and getting around can be challenging. There may only be a few daily connections to the nearest town or city. Additionally, transportation in Finland is relatively expensive. But don't worry – your host family or workplace colleagues may be happy to give you a ride to the nearest city center or train/bus station when needed.

Embracing the peaceful countryside lifestyle can be a rewarding experience, offering you a chance to connect with nature and enjoy a different pace of life!

What you need to know before arriving

Medical system

We recommend that you check that your polio, tetanus and diphtheria vaccinations are valid, as they are the vaccinations expected for everyone to have in Finland.

Accommodation

Your accommodation will either be at your volunteer workplace (such as a student dorm or a community home) or with a local host family.

The host families are diverse in structure, varying from individuals living alone to families with children, and with varying political and religious views. Maailmanvaihto – ICYE Finland welcomes as host families all people interested in getting to know a new person and sharing their daily life with them.

Living with a host family means becoming a part of their daily life and an equal member of the host family member, so being open-minded, adaptable, and communicative will help you make the most of the experience.



Transportation and travel

Getting to Finland

When you arrive in Finland, someone from ICYE Finland will be there to meet you at the airport. Please wait at the airport and do not leave on your own! Before you arrive, we'll send you a letter with details about your first few days in Finland and our contact information.

Traveling During Your Stay

During your time in Finland, you'll travel for camps and possibly take trips with friends or on your own. However, keep in mind that your holiday time is limited to four weeks during a one-year program. Also, travel in Finland can be quite expensive – a train trip of just a few hours can cost around 40 €.

Most volunteers take their holidays in the summer months, but all holiday plans must be discussed and approved by your voluntary workplace. You'll earn two days off per month, and how you use them should be agreed upon with your workplace.

If you're planning to take time off for travel, always speak with your workplace first and get approval for any extra days. Traveling during working weeks is not allowed unless pre-approved. Make sure your hosts (both your workplace and host family) know where you are and how to reach you. Always update them on any changes to your plans.

Additionally, if you travel for more than three days or outside Finland, you must inform the ICYE Finland office. If you plan to travel abroad at the end of your program, you'll need official approval from ICYE Finland.

Monetary system

The currency of Finland is euro (€), the common European currency.

Pocket money and living costs

The ICYE volunteers will receive a small monthly allowance of 125 € euros from their host placements. It is good to keep in mind that Finland is quite expensive in comparison to most other countries. In Finland, 125 euros is not much. Therefore, it might be a good idea to have some of your own savings.

Transportation is expensive in Finland and since you will most likely want to visit friends around the country and see different parts of Finland during your free time, having a bit of extra money is advisable!

Please keep in mind that there will be more expenses during your first weeks of stay in Finland than later on. When you arrive in Finland, it might be good to have some euros in cash. It is safer not to carry big amounts of cash with you, though.

Some examples of the price level in Finland, prices approximately:

- Urban area bus ticket (Helsinki) 3,2 €
- Train ticket Helsinki-Tampere, adult one way 25 €
- Youth Hostel, dormitory bed, one night 20 € →
- Chocolate bar 1 €
- Cappuccino (in a café) 4 €
- Pizza 8-14 €
- Stamps (postcards worldwide) 2,75 €
- Jeans 35 € →
- Sweater 30 € →
- Toothpaste 2-4 €
- Shampoo 3-5 €
- Swimming hall, single entry ticket 6-8 €
- Theatre ticket 14-60 €
- Finnish language course 30 € →

Plug type and electricity

In Finland, plug types C and F are used. Finland operates on a 230V supply voltage and 50Hz.

What to bring

Clothing – Be Ready for All Weather!

Finland has four very distinct seasons:

- Spring (April–May)
- Summer (June–August)
- Autumn (September–November)
- Winter (December–March)

Winters are cold and snowy, so you'll need warm clothes like:

- ✓ A hat, gloves, wool scarf, and thermal socks
- ✓ A windproof & waterproof coat
- ✓ Warm boots (good for snow and ice!)

If you don't want to bring all of this with you, you can buy winter gear in Finland – your host family or ICYE team can help. However, new clothing in Finland can be expensive. Many volunteers buy from second-hand shops, which are common and offer good-quality items at lower prices.

During autumn and spring, waterproof and windproof clothing is useful.

Summers are usually warm and sunny, so don't forget:

- ✓ T-shirts, shorts, and light clothing
- ✓ Swimwear (Finland has thousands of lakes!)

Essentials to Bring

- ✓ **Passport** – You'll need it at the airport and for official ID verification (like opening a bank account).
- ✓ ICYE Documents
- ✓ Something from your home country to share (for example sweets, snacks, music, or pictures)
- ✓ Sleeping bag – Useful for camps and travel, such as hiking trips.
- ✓ Medication – If you take medicine, bring enough for your stay or a valid prescription (Finnish pharmacies are strict!).
- ✓ Electronics adapter – Check if you need one for Finnish sockets.
- ✓ Toothbrush, towel, and everyday essentials.

Note: You don't need to bring your own linens – they will be provided by your host family or project.

Important regulations and our policies

Residence permit to Finland

1. European volunteers

If you are a citizen of an EU Member State, Liechtenstein or Switzerland, you do not need a residence permit to stay in Finland, but when you stay in Finland longer than 3 months, you will need to register your right of residence at the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri). The registration fee is 63€ (in Feb 2025). You need to have your passport and volunteering agreement with you when visiting Migri. You can start the registration online at EnterFinland:

<https://enterfinland.fi/eServices/info/europeanpermits> and book an appointment to the nearest Immigration Office service point after your arrival in Finland. More information: <https://migri.fi/en/eu-citizen>

2. Volunteers from Asia, Africa and the Americas

If you are not a citizen of the above-mentioned countries, you will need to apply for A RESIDENCE PERMIT before entering Finland. The fee for the first residence permit is 380€ for an online application and 480€ for paper application (in Feb 2025). Depending on the local currency, exchange rates and service fees, the cost can slightly vary.

The residence permit application should preferably be submitted 2–3 months before the planned date of arrival in Finland, as the application process normally takes at least 1–2 months. You can apply for the Finnish residence permit on the grounds of an international volunteer work program as soon as you have been accepted as a participant of the ICYE volunteer program and you have received the ICYE agreement. It is important to start the process quickly after you have been accepted.

IMPORTANT: You need to initiate the application process and visit the nearest Finnish embassy for identification. Please, be aware that if there is no Finnish embassy in your country, you need to travel abroad to the nearest Finnish embassy. You can find information of Finnish Embassies from the homepage of the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs: <https://um.fi/finland-s-representation-abroad-by-country>

Please, carefully fill in the application form and attach the required attachments. If any information is missing from the application, its processing will be delayed. Please, write the form in English. The

attachments must also be in English. Please, use an authorised translator when having your documents translated.

Please, note that since 2022 it has been possible for ICYE volunteers to apply online for the residence permit on the grounds of “other voluntary work”. Further information: <https://migri.fi/en/other-voluntary-work>

Here is a link to the enterfinland eServices: <https://enterfinland.fi/eServices>

Required attachments:

- Documentation about the exchange programme (= the ICYE volunteer agreement from Maailmanvaihto – ICYE Finland – this is the only document you need from us and can be added in several places, if needed)
- Valid passport (you must present it when you submit the residence permit application)
- Passport photo complying with [the passport photograph quality requirements of the Police of Finland \(pdf, poliisi.fi\)](#)
- Document showing that you are legally staying in the country where you submit the application (if it is not in your home country)
- Form MP_1 (if you already are in Finland and apply for your first residence permit)

Please, make sure that you have all the information needed presented in your application form so that your application will be processed without any delay. If you have any questions concerning the application process or filling in the form, you may contact the closest Finnish Embassy or the Program Coordinator of ICYE Finland, Mari Takalo: hosting@maailmanvaihto.fi

After you have submitted your residence permit application, your application will be examined and the decision will be made at the Finnish Immigration Service in Helsinki, Finland. When the Finnish Immigration Service has decided to grant you the residence permit, you will receive a residence permit card, which will be sent to the embassy, where you have visited to initiate the process. The residence permit will be issued in Finland and delivered to the embassy, from where you can collect it. It takes about 2–3 weeks for the card to arrive at the embassy after the decision has been made. The embassy will contact you when the card has arrived for you to collect it. You are ready to travel to Finland as soon as you have received your residence permit card!

July is the time of Finnish summer holidays and many of the government offices are closed during summer holidays. If you apply for the residence permit only at the end of June or in July, be aware that you might miss the

On-Arrival camp in mid-August. So please, don't leave completing the Residence Permit application for the summer months!

Finland is part of the European free travel zone, the Schengen Area, which means that when you have the residence permit issued by Finland, you also have the right to travel to other Schengen countries without applying for another visa. Schengen countries are Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. However, keep in mind that if you have a journey connecting through a country, such as the UK, which has not implemented the Schengen Agreement, you might need a transit visa. When it comes to UK, you can check whether you need one from the website of the UK Border Agency: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-visas-and-immigration>

Greener together and other ICYE policies

Maailmanvaihto wishes to advance in their activities the ICYE policies (pdf, icye.org):

- [ICYE's Code of Ethical Practise](#)
- [Greener together – ICYE's commitment for a sustainable and regenerative future](#)
- [Care to Engage – ICYE's Policy on Safeguarding Children](#)
- [Safer Together – ICYE's policy addressing sexual violence in international volunteering](#)

At Maailmanvaihto' we wish to create in all our activities together with all the participants safer spaces in which everyone can feel welcome and respected. To advance this, we follow in our activities [Maailmanvaihto's guidelines for safer spaces](#).

Rules for the volunteer to sign

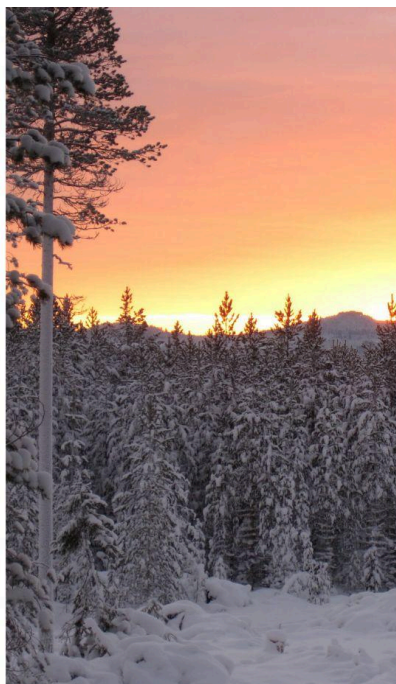
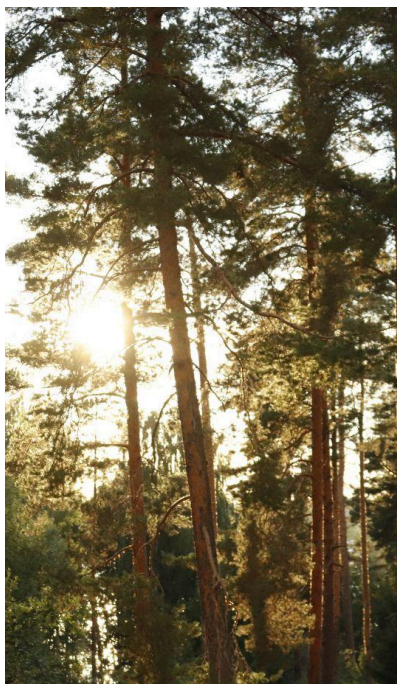
Your sending National ICYE Committee should give you a Tri-Party Agreement, a contract, which ICYE Finland makes with all our ICYE volunteers and their sending organizations. Please read it through carefully and if you agree with the terms, send a signed copy to ICYE Finland. Once we receive the signed copy from you, we will sign it and send you a copy.

ICYE Finland will also send you for you to sign an ICYE volunteering agreement. The agreement is meant to support your residence permit application process.

Insurances

ICYE (and IJFD) volunteers are insured for the period of their stay in Finland with PROTRIP-WORLD-VOLUNTEER insurance. The insurers are Allianz Worldwide Care SA, Generali Versicherung AG and Europ Assistance AG. Your insurance covers normal medical care in the case of an unexpected illness or accident, including dental treatment for the relief of pain up to a limited amount. However, routine check-ups, preventive health-care, and medication without a doctor's prescription are not covered by your insurance. Your personal items (i.e. luggage and property) are not covered.

You will receive more information regarding the insurance from your sending National Committee, who will also give you the Guide for Volunteers, which includes more detailed instructions related to your insurance. If you have any questions related to insurance issues, please contact the insurance company: Dr. Walter GmbH T: info@dr-walter.com or +49 (0) 22 47 91 94 - 0.





ICYE



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(Program Coordinator Mari Takalo)
<https://maailmanvaihto.fi/en>