

COMMISSION ON ENGLISH PRISONS TODAY

Finland

The Republic of Finland covers approximately 340,000 square kilometres and has a population of 5.3 million people. The capital and largest city is Helsinki. The national languages are Finnish and Swedish. Finland has a highly industrialized economy, specialising in the manufacture of machinery and electronics.

It is a parliamentary democracy, with a Parliament, President, and Prime Minister. Parliament and the President (currently Tarja Halonen, the first female president) are democratically elected and exercise legislative powers. The executive authority lies with the Prime Minister (Matti Vanhanen) and his cabinet, the Council of State, both of which are elected by the Parliament. Finland has been a member of the European Union since 1995, and the country's currency is the euro.



Finnish Criminal Justice System

The Finnish Ministry of Justice is responsible for the drafting of the most important laws, the functioning of the judicial system, and the enforcement of sentences. It is headed by the Minister of Justice (Ms Tuija Brax). The Ministry of Justice has a Department of Judicial Administration, a Law Drafting Department and a Criminal Policy Department, as well as several other separate units.

The Department of Criminal Policy, headed by Director General Jarmo Littunen, is responsible for the strategic planning and direction of criminal policy and the monitoring and assessment of the functionality of the criminal law system. The department further performs tasks in relation to crime prevention, such as developing crime prevention strategies. Other duties include drawing up strategies for the implementation of penalties, probation and after-care, and prison administration, as well as preparing legislation on the implementation of penalties.

The Criminal Sanctions Agency, part of the Department of Criminal Policy, determines the direction, administration, and enforcement of sentences. The Prison Service and the Probation Service are part of the Criminal Sanctions Agency. The Prison Service is in charge of the enforcement of prison sentences and conversion of fines. The Probation Service is in charge of community sanctions: supervision of conditionally sentenced young offenders, community service, juvenile punishment, and supervision of conditionally released prisoners.

There are 16 closed institutions in Finland, 13 of which are remand prisons. There are an additional 13 open prisons in Finland. Prisoners who participate in work or rehabilitative activities and who are assessed to adapt to freer conditions are placed in open institutions. These prisoners are paid wages for their work; from these earnings they pay taxes and for accommodation and food in the prison. All open prisons are intoxicant-free institutions, and each places men and women in separate wards.

Facts and Figures¹

Head of the Ministry of Justice: Tuija Brax

Director General, Department of Criminal Policy: Jarmo Littunen

Director General, the Prison Service: Esa Vesterbacka

Chief Director, the Probation Service: Maija Kukkonen

Number of institutions: 29

Number of closed institutions: 16

Number of open institutions: 13

Average prison population: 3778 (in 2006)

Average population of open institutions: 869 (in 2006)

Expenses/prisoner: 45,870 euro

Income/prisoner: 5, 080 euro

Cost of a prison day: 126 euro

The Probation Service

The Probation Service, part of the Criminal Sanctions Agency, is in charge of community sanctions. Community sanctions include supervision of conditionally sentenced young offenders, community service, juvenile punishment, and supervision of conditionally released prisoners. One of the goals of the Probation Service is to contribute to safety in society and prevent recidivism. Community sanctions are enforced in the sphere of every-day life. Ms Maija Kukkonen is the Chief Director of the Probation Service.

The Prison Service

The Prison Service, part of the Criminal Sanctions Agency, enforces prison sentences and fine conversion sentences passed by the courts and takes care of the enforcement of remand imprisonment. Work by the agency must achieve particular goals, including the following:

- the enforcement of sentence must be organised so that the sentence is only loss of liberty
- punishment shall be enforced so that it does not unnecessarily impede but, if possible, promotes a prisoner's placement in society.
- circumstances in a penal institution must be organised so that they correspond to those prevailing in the rest of society.
- prisoners must be treated justly, respecting their human dignity.

¹ International Centre for Prison Studies World Prison Brief

The Director General of the Prison Service is Mr Esa Vesterbacka, a Doctor of Law who has extensive experience in the Criminal Sanctions Agency and other areas of the Finnish criminal justice system.

National Research Institute of Legal Policy

The National Research Institute of Legal Policy was created in 1974 to continue the functions of the Institute of Criminology, which was established in 1963 by the Finnish Ministry of Justice. The institute conducts impartial research on legal policy, publishes related reports, and follows the development of Finnish and international legal policy research. The institute participates in and promotes national and international co-operation in the field of legal policy research. It also performs special research and information tasks commissioned by the Ministry of Justice. Mr Tapio Lappi-Seppälä, a Doctor of Law, is the Director-General of the National Research Institute of Legal Policy.

Department of Criminal Policy

The Department of Criminal Policy, part of the Ministry of Justice, is responsible for the strategic planning and direction of criminal policy and the monitoring and assessment of the functionality of the criminal justice system. The department further performs tasks in relation to crime prevention, such as developing crime prevention strategies. Other duties include drawing up strategies for the implementation of penalties, probation and after-care, and prison administration, as well as preparing legislation on the implementation of penalties. Mr Jarmo Littunen is the Head of the Department of Criminal Policy.