



Finland

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Finland, officially known as the Republic of Finland, is a Nordic country situated in Northern Europe, bordered by Sweden, Norway, and Russia. It has a population of approximately 5.3 million. Helsinki, the country's capital and largest city, is the center of Finnish gay and lesbian life.

Finland is a democratic, parliamentary republic, with a fully developed welfare system. It is generally perceived as liberal and egalitarian. It was the first country in Europe to give women the right to vote in 1906. It elected its first female president in 2000.

Finland ranked eleventh (out of 177 countries) on the 2007/2008 United Nations Human Development Report, based on life expectancy, adult literacy rate, education, and Gross Domestic Product.

According to the 2007 World Democracy Audit, Finland is the freest nation in the world in terms of civil liberties, freedom of the press, and basic political and human rights.

Like other Nordic countries, Finland is liberal in regards to gay rights, though it has been slower than its neighbors to assure glbtq equality. Finnish gay men and lesbians now have the same legal status as heterosexuals, with the exception of adoption rights.

Languages and History

The first language of most Finns is Finnish, one of the few official languages of the European Union that is not of Indo-European origin. The second official language, Swedish, is spoken as a first language by a small minority. Reflecting the country's complex history and its geographical location, Russian is also widely spoken in the country.

The Finnish language may have arrived as early as 8,900 B.C.E., long before the Norse language. However, in the thirteenth century Sweden established rule over Finland and Swedish became the dominant language of the upper classes; Finnish then became chiefly a language for the peasantry, clergy, and local courts.

During the Reformation Finns gradually converted to Lutheranism. In the sixteenth century, the first works written in Finnish were published.

During the eighteenth century, as a result of wars between Sweden and Russia, Russian forces occupied Finland twice.

In 1809, Russia absorbed Finland into its empire as an autonomous Grand Duchy. During the Russian era, which lasted until 1917, the Finnish language became predominant, both as a way to lessen cultural ties with Sweden and as a means to assert Finnish nationalism.



Oras Tynkkynen, one of the the first openly gay parliamentarians in Finland, addresses global warming in 2007. Image created by Markus Koljonen. Image appears under the GNU Free Documentation License 1.2 or above.

In 1906, the Grand Duchy of Finland adopted universal suffrage. However, the relationship between the Grand Duchy and the Russian Empire deteriorated when the Russian government attempted to restrict Finnish autonomy.

On December 6, 1917, soon after the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, Finland declared its independence from Russia.

Soon after independence, Finland experienced a brief but bitter civil war in which the opposing factions were supported by Germany and Russia. In 1919, after the triumph of the pro-German faction, Finland became a presidential republic.

During World War II, Finland fought both the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. The Winter War of 1939-1940 ensued after the Soviet Union attacked Finland as a result of Stalin's rapprochement with Hitler. The Continuation War of 1941-1944 occurred after Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union. In the Lapland War of 1944-1945, Finland forced the Germans out of Finland.

During the Cold War, Finland attempted to remain neutral while establishing strong trade ties with the Soviet Union. Against great odds, the country managed to maintain a democratic government and a market economy despite its proximity to the Soviet Union.

After the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, Finland sought membership in the European Union, which was granted in 1995.

GLBTQ Rights in Finland

In 1971, homosexuality was decriminalized in Finland and in 1999 the country's criminal code was revised, changing the age of consent to 16 for engaging in both heterosexual and homosexual sex.

Finland was the last of the Nordic countries to adopt a registered partnership act. A proposal for registered partnership legislation was first introduced in Finland in 1993, but did not pass. Revised, but equally unsuccessful, versions of the bill were next introduced in 1996 and 1999. Precedents for this act had already been set in neighboring Nordic countries: Denmark officially recognized same-sex civil unions in 1989, and Norway and Sweden followed suit in 1993.

On September 28, 2001, following heated debate and vehement opposition by conservative Christian groups, the Finnish Parliament finally passed the 1999 version of the Registered Partnership Act with a few minor revisions. The act took effect on March 8, 2002.

To be able to register, both partners must have been residents of Finland for the two years prior to registration.

The Finnish act is similar to the registered partnership acts of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden both in its scope and its limitations and exceptions. There is no right to adopt children, either each other's children or unrelated children, and no right to a church wedding. The legislation permits joint custody of children, however, and grants immigration rights to a foreign partner.

Finland's Ministry of Justice prepared a proposal for legislation in November 2007 allowing adoption of a spouse's children by a same-sex partner within a registered partnership in order to strengthen the legal status of the child within the family. The reform remains under consideration. The government, however,

has expressed no plans to propose external adoption for same-sex couples.

The Finnish Act on Child Custody, however, allows the custody of a child to persons other than biological parents, and Finnish courts have on numerous occasions granted joint custody of a child to same-sex couples. Furthermore, in October 2001, Finland's Supreme Court made a landmark ruling to award custody of two children to their deceased mother's female partner rather than their biological father.

Despite the legality of same-sex partnerships in Finland, bishops of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church have continued to prohibit the blessing of gay unions in church. However, they do allow those registered in homosexual relationships to perform official church duties.

In 2004, Finland's Equality Act went into force, prohibiting direct and indirect discrimination and harassment based on age, ethnic or national origin, language, religion, beliefs, opinions, health, disability, and sexual orientation. In 2005, revisions to the Equality Act extended protection against discrimination to transgender individuals.

Significant Finnish GLBTQ Cultural Figures

Perhaps the most internationally-renowned Finnish glbtq individual is the iconic artist known as Tom of Finland. Notable for his highly stylized art of explicitly gay, hyper-masculine men, Tom of Finland has had a significant influence on late twentieth-century gay culture.

Born Touko Laaksonen (1920-1991) in the village of Kaarina, Finland, he began drawing at an early age, basing his images on the rugged, muscular farmers, loggers, and laborers he spied on in the countryside. After serving in the Finnish Army during World War II, Laaksonen worked in advertising, while continuing to draw at night. It was during this period, in 1953, that he met Veli, the man with whom he would live for the next 28 years.

In 1956, at the urging of a friend, Laaksonen submitted his drawings of square-jawed, muscular lumberjacks to the American bodybuilding magazine *Physique Pictorial*. Because of the socially conservative times and the strict regulations on erotica, Laaksonen chose to be published under a pseudonym: Tom of Finland.

His work soon came to the attention of the gay community at large, and by the 1970s he was both publishing erotic comic books and infiltrating the mainstream art world.

In 1973 Laaksonen was able to give up his job in advertising and dedicate himself full-time to his art. With his friend Durk Dehner, he founded the Tom of Finland Company in 1979; the Tom of Finland Foundation was formed five years later as a non-profit educational archive to preserve, restore, and exhibit erotic art.

Once asked in an interview if he was not a little embarrassed that all his art showed men having sex, Laaksonen disagreed emphatically: "I work very hard to make sure that the men I draw having sex are proud men having happy sex!"

Laaksonen's longtime companion Veli died in 1981. The artist died from an emphysema-induced stroke on November 7, 1991.

Other significant Finnish glbtq individuals include the writer and activist Aino Malmberg (1865-1933), who was one of the first women students to graduate from the University of Helsinki. She published one novel and two collections of short stories. One of her short stories, the playful and ironically told "Friendship" ("Ystävyttä," 1903), which has recently been rediscovered and reissued in Finland, and translated into English, concerns the relationship between two unmarried female teachers, one of whom is overtly masculine and the other more typically feminine.

Malmberg married young, and gave birth to three children; she divorced her husband in 1909. Later, she moved to New York, where she lived off and on from 1912 to 1918 with Rose Strunsky, a member of the Heterodoxy Club, a radical feminist club in Greenwich Village.

The homosexual painter Magnus Knut Enckell (1870-1925) was one of the leading figures in Finnish art circles. Scholars and critics have often downplayed the homoeroticism and celebration of male beauty in Enckell's work, which have been either ignored or explained in terms of sublimated emotion. His little-known sketches have a strong homoerotic overtone. In an original mixture of classical mythology and the modern avant-garde, Enckell's naked men and boys are openly erotic and sensual.

In 1907, he was asked to paint the altarpiece for the new cathedral in the city of Tampere, the third largest city in Finland. In the middle of the painting, which portrays the Resurrection, two men walk hand in hand--a detail that also has often been ignored.

Finnish poet and translator Kaarlo Teodor Sarkia (1902-1945) is considered a master of meter and rhyme, and one of the most popular poets in Finland before and after World War II. Sarkia published only four collections of poetry, and most of his poems were about unhappy love, longing, loneliness, and death.

Sarkia's first collection of poems, *Kahlittu* (1929), received good reviews but sold poorly. Several of its poems deal with loneliness and the feeling of being rejected. In "Hunchback Speaking" ("Kyttyräselkä puhuu"), Sarkia portrayed himself as a hunchback, longing for love. *Velka elämälle* (1931), Sarkia's second collection, includes the homoerotic poem, "Antinous," about the love between the Roman Emperor Hadrian and the handsome youth Antinoüs.

Sarkia's third collection of poems, *Unen kaivo* (1936), was both a critical and commercial success. His fourth book, *Kohtalon vaaka* (1943), came out in the middle of the Continuation War between Finland and the Soviet Union, and included several pacifist poems. He died in Sysmä of tuberculosis on November 16, 1945 and was buried in Helsinki.

Novelist, painter, illustrator, and comic strip author Tove Marika Jansson (1914-2001) included lesbian themes in her some of her fiction and is the creator of the internationally acclaimed Moomin characters. Her books have been compared to the work of Lewis Carroll and J.R.R. Tolkien. Jansson's companion in life was the graphic artist Tuulikki Pietilä, whose personality is thought to have inspired the character Too-ticky in *Moominland Midwinter* (*Trollvinter*, 1957).

Poet, playwright, essayist, and novelist Pentti Holappa (b. 1927) has written extensively on same-sex desire. His novel *Portrait of a Friend* (*Ystävän muotokuva*, 1988), for example, includes highly graphic homosexual scenes and openly depicts an incestuous relationship.

Acclaimed as one of the most notable writers in contemporary Finland, the Swedish-speaking novelist Christer Kihlman (b. 1930) is also one of the first Finnish authors to write openly about homosexuality. His semi-autobiographical novel *The Man Who Collapsed* (*Människan som skalv*, 1971) triggered a public discussion of homosexual relationships.

Homosexuality is also a major theme in Kihlman's novels *The Blue Mother* (*Den blå modern*, 1963) and *The Downfall of Gerdt Bladh* (*Gerdt Bladhs undergång*, 1987), one of the first Finnish works to deal with AIDS.

The lesbian writer Pirkko Helena Saisio (b. 1949) began publishing her plays and novels in the late 1980s and early 1990s under pseudonyms since lesbian writings by female authors were typically refused by Finnish publishers. Under the male pseudonym Jukka Larsson, Saisio received positive reviews for her trilogy *The Tormentor* (*Kiusaaja*, 1986), *The Tempter* (*Viettelijä*, 1987), and *The Bearer* (*Kantaja*, 1991),

each inspired by biblical texts.

Her novel *The Concrete Night* (*Betoniyo*, 1981) deals with homophobia and violence. *The Daughter of Cain* (*Kainin tytär*, 1994), is considered to be the first lesbian novel in Finnish. Her play *The Lift* (*Hissi*, 1987) is set in a prison and addresses the theme of lesbian love.

Saisio lives with her partner, Pirjo Honkasalo, a filmmaker, with whom she is raising her biological daughter, and serves as a professor in the Theatre Academy of Finland.

Political Figures

Significant Finnish glbtq political figures include Baron Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim (1867-1951). Long rumored to be bisexual, Mannerheim was an astute politician and military leader, first as a general in the Russian Imperial Army and then as Commander-in-Chief of Finland's Defense Forces.

He received the unique title of Marshal of Finland (*Suomen Marsalkka*) in 1942, the only person to receive such a title, and was later elected as the sixth President of Finland, serving from 1944 to 1946. Although elected to a full six-year term, he left office early due to recurring health problems. In 2004, Mannerheim was voted as the greatest Finnish person of all time in the "Great Finns" ("*Suuret Suomalaiset*") contest.

Married in 1892 to the orphaned daughter of a Russian Major-General, Mannerheim had two daughters. However, his wife later converted to Catholicism and became a Carmelite nun; Mannerheim's marriage ended with an unofficial separation in 1902 and a formal civil divorce in 1919. He never remarried.

Mannerheim died on January 28, 1951 in Lausanne, Switzerland while recuperating from an operation on a perforated ulcer and was buried in Helsinki on February 4 in a state funeral with full military honors.

Pekka Haavisto (b. 1958) is a Finnish politician representing the Green League. He was re-elected to the Finnish Parliament in the election of March 2007 after an absence of 12 years. Haavisto lives in a registered partnership with Antonio Flores, originally from Ecuador.

Oras Tynkkynen (b. 1977), one of the first openly gay parliamentarians in Finland, is a Member of the Parliament of Finland, also representing the Green League. His writings often concentrate on environmental issues, especially climate change.

Finland's GLBTQ Organizations and Pride Events

SETA (*Seksuaalinen Tasavertaisuus*, which stands for "Sexual Equality") is the national Finnish human rights organization in the field of legal equality and social justice for sexual and gender minorities, including lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender people. SETA gathers and provides information on sexual and gender diversity, and provides consultative and support services for gender and sexual minorities not available elsewhere. It was founded in 1974 in Helsinki and has since become a central organization with member associations across Finland.

SETA also publishes *Z Magazine*, the largest glbtq publication in Finland, with a circulation of about 4,000.

Helsinki Pride Week, which is held annually in late June, is Finland's largest glbtq pride event. Helsinki Pride is a major summer event attracting thousands of visitors with exhibitions, workshops, discussion groups, parades, and many other activities and events for the glbtq community. Over 10,000 people took part in the week-long events in 2007, with more than 3,000 people participating in the pride parade.

Vinokino, Finland's Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, is held each year in September, with screenings in four cities: Helsinki, Oulu, Tampere, and Turku. The festival began in 1991 and has become one of the major highlights for the queer community in Finland. The festival aims to promote gay visibility in Finland and bring minority representation to the forefront of public consciousness. In addition to screenings of gay and lesbian-themed films, shorts, and documentaries, there are also a number of supporting events and guest speakers.

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SETA (Seksuaalinen Tasavertaisuus): <http://www.seta.fi>

Z Magazine: <http://www.z-lehti.fi>

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