Finland's Public Sector Data Registers
– a national asset

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FINLAND'S PUBLIC SECTOR DATA REGISTERS – A NATIONAL ASSET

Good governance is a driver for Finland's success internationally. Establishing a robust and up-to-date data resource is fundamentally important, as we are in transition towards a digital society. In Finland, a number of national base registers, maintained by the Population Register Centre and local register offices, National Land Survey of Finland, National Board of Patents and Registration of Finland, the Tax Administration and Statistics Finland, form the core of our public sector data management infrastructure. These registers enable the delivery of high-quality, cost-effective and secure services and place us well ahead of the competition.

In terms of data provision, the registers form a highly valuable national resource and asset that should be carefully managed and continually developed. This guide provides an overview of Finland's data registers and the services they underpin, illustrated through ten success stories.

From register to resource

Finnish public sector base registers are used to record data on entities defined as "basic units of society". Each record includes information their basic properties as well as any links with other units. Each unit is assigned its own unique identifier. The Advisory Committee on Information Management in Public Administration (JUHTA) has defined the units as follows: 1) individuals or natural persons, 2) businesses, other organisations and foundations 3) buildings and 4) dwellings/premises.

The base registers are used to record the status of each basic unit or data subject and details of any events, which have led to an alteration in the status. These form the history of the unit. The basic registers also contain spatial information, as all basic units can be localised in a building or within a cadastral parcel. The location of a building is identified through coordinates, which reference the approximate centre of the building. The Land Information System records the exact location of cadastral parcels using boundary coordinates.

The Finnish base registers are generally taken to comprise the Population Information System (VTJ), the Land Information System (KTJ) and a number of business information systems.

The Population Information System contains basic information about Finnish nationals and non-nationals permanently resident in Finland. The system also records information on buildings, dwellings and building and construction projects. The system is managed by the Population Register Centre and local register offices.

The Land Information System contains real estate and boundary data. The real estate section of the record details the unit's total surface area as well as all applicable rights and liabilities. The Land Information System is jointly maintained by the National Land Survey of Finland and local authorities.

The Land Information System legal record provides information on ownership and any mortgage liabilities and restrictions. This data in the Title and Mortgage Register is maintained by the District Survey Offices.

The business information systems contain basic information on all businesses and other organisations in Finland. They comprise the Trade Register, Register of Foundations and Register of Associations maintained by the National Board of Patents and Registration; the Finnish Business Information System jointly maintained by the Tax Administration and the National Board of Patents and Registration and the Register of Enterprises and Establishments maintained by Statistics Finland.

Finland's base registers – key features

Typically, the legal status of the base registers is established through special legislation and the data they contain can be characterised as comprehensive, accurate and complete. Furthermore, the data is versatile and suitable for a number of uses. Data protection arrangements are robust. As a system, the base registers cover all core areas of public administration in Finland.

In quality terms, the registers are both comprehensive and accurate. The term comprehensive is used to denote the fact that all units within the scope of the register are entered in the register and

The Population Information System contains basic information about Finnish nationals and non-nationals permanently resident in Finland.

have been issued with a unique identifier. To ensure reliability, responsibility for the register is delegated to at last one named public authority. The data contained in the register is provided by the data subject, their representative or a relevant public authority. Procedures are in place for amending incorrect data.

A further key requirement is that the data must be versatile and lend itself to a variety of uses. Data contained in the registers is collected once only and thereafter made available to other users. Access to the data in the base registers is never restricted to a single governmental organisation. Strict regulations are in place to govern the collection and disclosure of data and are designed to ensure that the principles of data protection are observed at all times.

Legislation

Current Finnish legislation does not provide a legal definition for base registers. Instead, specific provisions are in place to establish their legal status. Base registers are also contained within the scope of general legislation on registers. In addition, the disclosure of data held in the base registers is governed by the Finnish constitution as well as a number of EU directives.

Comprehensive

Finland's base registers are comprehensive both in terms of their geographic scope and data content. All base registers are national in scope although the administrative responsibility for maintaining the registers in some cases is delegated to the local level. In terms of the content, the details on and interconnections between the registered units are captured as exhaustively as practicable. This allows the "basic units of society" to be identified and individualised.

Unique identifiers

In the base registers, the "basic units of society" are identified through the means of a unique identifier. Examples of these identifiers include the personal identity code, property identifier, building code, apartment identifier and Business ID.

A standardised system of identifiers plays a key role in ensuring the functionality of the Finnish base registers. The standardised identifiers promote internal data integrity and interoperability with other information systems and registers. This allows for the overarching information system to be made up of a series of partial registers or databases. A further benefit is that data can be shared between two or more registers more safely and more efficiently in terms of functionality, technical specification and cost.

Integrity

As with all registers, the base registers must be able to maintain the integrity of the data they contain. In practical terms, this means ensuring that all data remains accurate and up-to-date and protected against unauthorised changes whether intentional or due to hardware or software failure, acts of nature or human error.

Quality

The organisations charged with maintaining a register have direct responsibility for ensuring the quality and reliability of the data they hold. Demand for the data is high. As many significant administrative and judicial decisions are taken on the basis of information derived from the base registers, it is crucial that the quality of the information is of the highest calibre.

>> *The organisations charged with maintaining a register have direct responsibility for ensuring the quality and reliability of the data they hold.*

Regular and extensive use of the data and data access rights granted under data protection legislation to data subjects, including natural persons and businesses, go a long way towards promoting accuracy.

These in themselves are not sufficient, however. All organisations involved in managing the base registers have in place procedures for ensuring the quality of the data they hold. Collection processes, electronic data transfers to the primary register, technical inspections, upgrades and other improvements and the data subject/client's statutory right to complain and have inaccuracies rectified as well as the potential damages payable for any inaccuracies all serve to further promote the quality of the data. The organisations involved also work closely together to share examples of best practice.

Data protection

The Finnish Personal Data Act is based on the European directive on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data (95/46/EC), also known as the personal data directive. The Finnish Personal Data Act sets out principles for data handling procedures, controller obligations and the rights of the data subject. Further provisions relevant to the base registers are set out in special legislation.

The base registers are an important element of Finnish public sector information management. They provide information on individuals, vehicles, property and variety of organisations including businesses. All base registers contain information on natural persons, making it crucially important that all data

Protecting the privacy of all data subjects is integral to good governance and the hallmark of high-quality service provision.

controllers are aware of their responsibilities under data protection legislation. Protecting the privacy of all data subjects is integral to good governance and the hallmark of high-quality service provision. Robust data protection arrangements promote confidence in the handling of personal data and are integral to the service objectives.

Since 1999, Finland's key public sector organisations have cooperated closely on data protection matters. They have also established a constructive relationship with the Data Protection Ombudsman and regularly carry out joint working with the agency. The authorities responsible for the base registers have developed broad expertise in data protection matters, with the authorities most closely involved now considered forerunners in all matters relating to this area. Sophisticated arrangements are in place to ensure that the data is accurate, up-to-date and secure. Complaints to the data ombudsman are rare, reflecting the confidence the data subjects have in the base registers.

Maintaining a high level of data integrity and confidentiality requires continual investment in data protection resources. Particular challenges include dealing with increasing user demand and adapting to changes in the operating environment.

Accessibility and dataservice sharing

Statutory provisions are in place to ensure that the base registers are continually managed and the data remains up-to-date. The powers of the data controllers are laid out in Finnish acts and decrees. In addition, other authorities, individuals, businesses, organisations and other legal entities are under obligation to provide information to the data controllers.

The authorities responsible for the physical and practical register infrastructure are also charged with providing the dataservice, unless these powers are otherwise delegated. The service can also be provided by an external service provider. In the event that the service is outsourced, responsibility for the content and legality of the service still rests with the relevant authority.

The authorities charged with maintaining the base registers are also responsible for promoting accessibility and facilitating dataservice sharing by enhancing the technical interoperability of the systems involved. The objective is to make the services accessible through commonly available applications to maximise their usage across the board. The authorities, including the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, are working closely together to promote interface compatibility.

Future directions

The overarching aim is to remove all duplication from Finland's public electronic information resources and to ensure that all new data is entered into one system only. To this end, all duplication must be eradicated and all databases utilising the base registers must be more closely linked to online interfaces.

Closer cooperation and forward planning are required in the drafting of legislation governing the base registers. Continued efforts are needed to address the issue of interface compatibility but there have also been calls for legislative harmonisation. The aim is to standardise user terms and conditions as well as data access requests and ultimately to develop a "one-stop-shop" via a functional and technical interface.

Availability

Availability is a central issue in the creation of all registers and databases. In the context of Finland's base registers, versatility is also cited as a desirable aim. Availability can be measured either in terms of the actual information contained in the register and services relating to it, or in terms of technical reliability. With regard to the former, functional features such as data access procedures and service and information content are a primary consideration. With regard to the latter, issues such as service response times and maintaining functionality during emergencies and other exceptional circumstances are important.

The base registers are linked to a number of public and private sector operational data systems via a series of interfaces and provide real time support to a wide range of services. As a result, user expectations are extremely high, both with regard to functional availability and technical reliability. It is therefore essential that the same standards for service are applied across all the base registers.

Data security

Data security is here used to denote the measures taken to safeguard base register data, services, software applications, hardware, databases and communications networks in both normal and exceptional circumstances through administrative, technical and other measures. In other words, data security is not limited to the technical and functional aspects of the service but extends to the handling of personal data, i.e. data protection. Confidentiality, authentication and non-repudiation are further key features of data security. Confidentiality means that only people who are authorised to use the data can access it. Authentication means the process of verifying the identity of users such as persons or systems. Non-repudiation means that it is possible, retrospectively, to verify that an action has taken place. In terms of the base registers, non-repudiation is achieved by storing all user and log data.

Finnish base registers are linked to a variety of international communications networks via multiple interfaces. This leaves them susceptible to viruses, unauthorised login attempts and intentional acts of vandalism and damage. As the registers contain information that under data protection legislation is subject to access restrictions, the data security arrangements must be of the highest calibre. It is therefore essential that the same standards for service are applied across all the base registers.

THE SUCCESS STORIES

Address information – collection methods and practical uses

In 2001, the Population Register Centre and Itella Oyj (formerly the Finnish Post Office) launched a change of address notification service, based on mutually agreed procedures and quality standards. All individuals resident in Finland have a statutory responsibility to notify the authorities of any changes to their address and the new service has made this task considerably easier.

Thanks to the service, a single notification is now sufficient to inform both the authorities and the post office of the address details. The new details are now logged considerably faster than before and the updated information can be made available to other Finnish governmental agencies and other organisation without delay. The agencies to benefit from this service include Finnish local authorities and church administrations, the Finnish Transport Safety Agency (Trafi) vehicle and driving licence register, the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (KELA), the Finnish Tax Administration and the Finnish Defence Forces. In addition, other organisations, such as pension providers, banks, insurance companies, societies, newspapers and other businesses receive updates via the population information system.

Up-to-date address details make life easier in many ways; it guarantees that taxes are levied at the correct municipality and address details for the correct polling station are sent out to all voters at election time.

Annual surveys show that the new joint service has improved the quality of address information held in the register.

From the beginning, members of the public could choose from three different notification methods: a paper form and a telephone and online service. Finland's evolution as an information society is reflected in their relative popularity. Today, more than half of all notifications are made online, with only a third of those moving house using the paper form.

Regular user satisfaction surveys are carried out to measure service quality. The results have always been positive and provide excellent feedback on future development needs. Customers submitting their forms online value the ease and speed of the service. Those using the telephone service enjoy its interactive nature of the service and the form is used primarily out of habit.

The address collection system is complemented by the Population Register Centre's own address service, which makes up-to-date address services available for the whole of Finnish society.

Register - based censuses

The year 1990 marked the first time the Finnish census was drawn entirely from base registers, making Finland only the second country in the world after Denmark to achieve this. The new style of census was possible thanks to Finland's comprehensive and reliable network of administrative registers.

In the population census, Statistics Finland combines data from the Population Information System, the Tax Administration's registers, the Employment Register, the Register of Enterprises and Establishments, the Pensions' Register, a number of student registers, the Ministry of Labour's jobseeker register, the graduate register and the conscript register. All in all, more than 30 registers are used in the process.

250 years of census history

One of the first population censuses in the world, and at the same time also the world's first register-based census, was carried out in Sweden in 1749. The census also extended to the region that is now Finland and the data were drawn from local church registers. This register inventory was used up to the year 1930. The first direct questionnaire census was conducted in 1950 and these were then continued up to the year 1985.

In the 1970 census, a brand new central population register, established in the previous year of 1969, was used to pre-complete personal details on the census forms. The tax register was used to compile data on income. This was the first time that a personal identity code was used to combine data from two stand-alone registers. By the 1980 census, the majority of the information, such as population and demographic data, and data on educational degrees and qualifications, as well as on income were derived from registers.

Significant cost benefits

Finland benefits from a high-quality population information system, which encompasses all residents in the country. As a result, it has become unnecessary to carry out censuses to establish the size of the population, as in many other countries.

A traditional census, where data are collected direct from the people, costs approx. EUR 10 per person. In Finland, the total cost of such an undertaking would exceed EUR 50 million. It costs around EUR 1 million to draw a register-based census. Thus, the financial benefits of the electronic system are considerable even though a census is now drawn every year. In addition to the cost benefits, regular register-based censuses also generate a high volume of valuable information. In the past, local censuses were carried out every five years but are now drawn annually. The increased frequency of the censuses has also enabled faster production of statistics.

Over two decades now census data have accumulated into a databank that offers a rich source of fresh material for researchers. Possible uses for the data include assessments of whether current employment policies are successful in securing employment for groups such as the unemployed or immigrants, or whether the educational levels of parents influence their children's educational attainments. Most importantly, all these themes can be explored without the need for new data gathering exercises. The key benefit of a register-based census is that it is a trouble-free process for the general public.

Paikkatietoikkuna – The Finnish geoportal

The history of the Finnish geoportal, Paikka-tietoikkuna, dates back to 1984, when the Land Information System (LIS) working group proposed the concept of spatial data to describe all digital spatial information.

A further LIS project, commenced a year later, was used to define the new concept, with working groups appointed to set out presentation formats and electronic transfer arrangements for spatial information as well as establishing classification systems and procedures for information disclosure.

The role of a wider data network for sharing spatial data was recognised and a query language developed to enable the retrieval of spatial data from the producer's database. At this time, a number of central government organisations and local authorities began classifying their spatial data resources. The first spatial information index was published via Telesampo and Infotel, the portals of choice at the time. The GIS expo (paikkatietomarkkinat) was a by-product of the LIS project and went on to become an annual event.

Spatial data sharing was given a boost in the early 1990s with the introduction of the international EDIFACT standard designed to facilitate data transmission between organisations. Store-and-forward data transmission is based on the idea that a description message is transmitted with the data message, carrying the data structure and content. Property information could now be accessed using microcomputer-compatible applications.

A traditional census, where data are collected direct from the people, costs approx. EUR 10 per person.

With the advent of the Internet, the service went online. The National Land Survey of Finland in conjunction with Tieteellinen laskenta Oy published an online map, which initially featured all Finnish-based websites localised using the organisations' physical addresses. This map service was the basis of and is now known as MapSite.

Today, international standards are available to support the development of Finland's national spatial data infrastructure. The European INSPIRE directive is driving this development forward and provides a legislative framework for the implementation of spatial data sharing.

Since 3rd June 2010, the Paikkatietoikkuna geo-portal, a joint undertaking by the National Land Survey of Finland and individual data producers, has made available dozens of map layers produced by more than ten different organisations. The service was recognised with the Excellence Finland Quality Innovation of the Year award in 2010.

After a quarter of a century, the Paikkatietoikkuna portal continues to develop apace. What may have seemed like hype some decades ago is now a well-established global trend. Spatial data has been digitised, new data collected and old data improved.

Soon all relevant spatial information will be at the disposal of the information society as it responds to challenges, which can only be addressed through spatial data.

The spatial data infrastructure offers a solid base from which to pursue sustainable development in a wider context.

From paper to web

Member of the public are often faced with situations where they are required to prove their identity, including family relationships, address and other essential information when dealing with the authorities. Sometimes this is necessary in private matters too.

In the 1980s, and to an extent in the early 1990s, this was done using a population register extract provided by local register offices and the Evangelical Lutheran or Orthodox church administrations. The extract would set out the person´s date and place of birth as well as his or her family relationships, marital status and any children.

The move from a paper-based system to a system where the information is permanently at the disposal of those requiring it, was made possible by the creation of a centralised, nationwide and real time population information system. In the early 1980s, the Ministry of the Interior initiated the construction of a service that would allow identities to be verified without the individual service-users having to provide a variety of paper certificates and other forms of ID and to take them from one office to another, time and again.

A step-by-step approach began to deliver results and, while more than five million population register extracts were still issued each year in the late 1980s, they are now only used to verify familial relationships during the administration of an estate on death. Today, some 500 000 – 600 000 extracts are issued annually. The aim now is to abolish the practice altogether and replace it with an electronic system. This is helped by the wider proliferation of digital archives. Historical church archives have largely been digitised and plans are also in place for the digitisation of all register office data. It is

The service was recognised with the Excellence Finland Quality Innovation of the Year award in 2010.

envisaged that by 2015 all historical information pre-dating the population information system will largely be available electronically and that availability is extended to those dealing with death estates.

Progress on digitisation is ongoing and continued efforts are required to ensure that data on Finnish citizens can be obtained by those requiring it, for specified and lawful purposes only. Citizens are no longer required to carry paper documents to verify their identity and entitlements. Currently, an EU-wide project is under way to facilitate the provision of data on Finnish citizens to authorities in other EU member states, when information needs to be verified for official purposes.

» *It is envisaged that by 2015 all historical information pre-dating the population information system will largely be available electronically and that availability is extended to those dealing with death estates.*

Finnish pensions – applications made easy

Applying for an earnings-related and a national pension in Finland is easy. The pension providers and the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (KELA) receive much of the required data electronically.

Finland operates a decentralised earnings-related pension system. The system is extensive in scope, covering almost all Finnish nationals in employment.

The majority of Finnish pension contributors come within the scope of the Employees Pensions Act known as TyEL. Contributions from the self-employed are governed by the Self-Employed Pensions Act. Further pension legislation applies to public-sector workers and certain specialist professions. Rural workers are subject to the Farmers' Pensions Act.

The pension providers and the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (KELA) receive much of the required data electronically.

Last provider pays

The last pension provider to receive contributions is responsible for calculating and paying out the pension to the insured. The pension providers jointly agree on a financial settlement, and the provider who received the initial pension application is responsible for paying out on any pension governed by the other acts.

In practice, more than 90 per cent i.e. virtually all Finns of pensionable age have worked within the scope of more than one pension act, making this service a hugely important one. If applications had to be lodged with a number of providers, the applicants would be faced with a far more complex and uncertain task.

As an added benefit, applicants are not themselves required to identify the correct institution to address their application to. Applications can be submitted at the offices of any pension provider, the Finnish Centre for Pensions and Kela. Applications for old-age pensions can be submitted using a secure online service at www.tyoelake.fi, www.kela.fi or through any pension provider website.

The same "last provider" principle has applied to private earnings-based pensions since the schemes were first introduced some 50 years ago. The last institution to receive contributions is responsible for calculating, administering and paying out the pension. From 2004 onwards, this principle has been in use throughout the Finnish pensions system.

» *The last institution to receive contributions is responsible for calculating, administering and paying out the pension.*

Profound impact on pension schemes

As we are likely to see an increase in the free movement of labour in future, this internationally unique system will be of assistance to Finnish pension contributors and ensure their legal protection.

Standardised procedures for calculating and paying pension benefits is also a considerable advantage for pension providers. The "last provider" principle eliminates unnecessary duplication and allows the harmonisation and simplification of the administrative processes involved.

The pensions registers are one of the largest and most significant register entities in Finland. The Finnish Centre for Pensions is ultimately responsible for registering the pension entitlement for all Finnish contributors, whether the pension is accrued through employment or other sources.

It is difficult to calculate how much more expensive and inconvenient the system would be if all pension providers had to calculate and pay out pension entitlements separately for each pensioner. The harmonised practices underpin our decentralised pension system and allow for any faults and defects to be eliminated.

Kela pension system – making efficient use of information

The national pension entitlement and the value of the pension are assessed and calculated on the basis of other pension and benefit income. Due to the nature of pensions and the large number of claimants, Kela has for some time placed great emphasis on developing to the application process and the pension system for widely. In order to maximise the efficiency of the process, extensive information capture has been required from other authorities and organisations to ensure that all relevant information is available at the time of calculating the pension entitlement.

Although the application process remains a statutory requirement, the systems created to facilitate information sharing with the other organisations involved, have made the application and processing of pensions considerably easier. The information to be submitted directly by the applicant is limited. The processing can to a large extent be automated.

All personal information, including name, address and changes of address, family relationships and death notices are available in real time in the population information system. Information on other pensions and benefits is mainly received in electronic format from pensions providers, accident and traffic insurance providers and unemployment funds. In addition, Kela receives electronic information on related third parties such as trustees appointed to manage financial matters on behalf of the pension recipient.

The information may also be needed after a pension has been granted. Personal information relevant to the individual pension entitlement is available in the population information system. Pension and benefit information is used for quality control purposes, including the verification of the level of pension entitlement. The information is also put to good use in ensuring that all those entitled to a Finnish pension have submitted an application and are receiving payments accordingly. Vigilance on part of the old age pensioners themselves is in most cases only needed in confirming their bank details and determining the correct date for the commencement of the pension payments, as not all those entitled to an old age pension claim it at the minimum age. Different procedures naturally apply to disability pensions.

Other Finnish authorities make use of benefits information submitted by Kela. This information is also available electronically. Finnish local authorities, for example, use this information to process applications for income support and to determine the level of so-called client fees, which are levied in Finland for healthcare and other services.

Continuous development and sophisticated information sharing arrangements with earnings-based pension providers allow the Finnish pension administration to operate efficiently and cost-effectively.

Registration promotes traffic safety

Vehicles have been licensed in Finland since the country gained independence in 1917. Today, vehicle licensing is administered by the Finnish Transport Safety Agency (Trafi).

Vehicle licensing was first carried out on the eve of WW 1. Local and town regulations required the police to maintain a record of all vehicles operating in their area. In 1922, the responsibility was delegated to the County Administrative Boards, which performed this role until 1966.

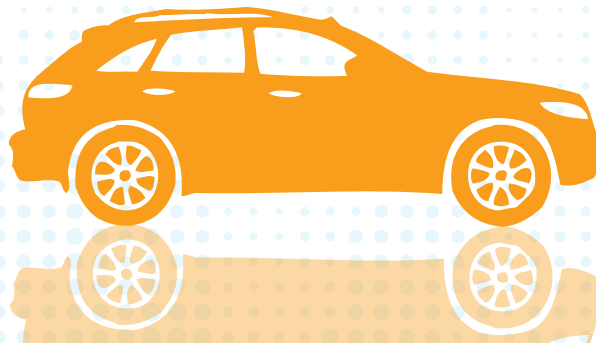*Trafi`s register comprises more than 6.5 million vehicles.*

In the 1950s, the growth in the number of vehicles meant that the existing registers were no longer fit for purpose. However, work on a centralised IT-based register began as late as 1962. The Vehicle Registration Centre (ARK) opened in 1966.

From the end of 1989 onwards, vehicle registration notifications were submitted via MOT providers and post offices. MOT inspection providers processed the notifications immediately, which greatly improved the accuracy of the information contained in the register. The Vehicle Registration Centre merged with other organisations to create a state owened commercial enterprise in 1993 and its functions were transferred to the vehicle administration unit. In 1996, the Finnish Vehicle Administration (AKE) was established as a stand-alone agency, charged with maintaining the vehicle and other road traffic registers. A further merger in 2010, saw AKE brought together under one roof with other transport safety authorities (Finnish Civil Aviation Authority, Finnish Rail Agency and the safety functions of the Finnish Maritime Administration).

Trafi now provides registration services for vehicles, railway rolling stock, ships and aircraft. Registration is one method for ensuring that all vehicles operating within Finland's borders meet all relevant safety requirements.

Europe's largest service network

Vehicle licensing is currently carried out by a total of 1 600 Trafi-approved service providers in Finland, including MOT inspectors, garages and finance and insurance institutions. Trafi contracts the service providers to carry out all licensing activities on its behalf and provides the relevant software. The whole process is extremely convenient as it is carried out at locations where motorists access other services and registration can be completed while renewing a motor insurance subscription, for example. Ultimately, the motorist might not even notice that the service is being offered to them.

The Finnish vehicle licensing network is the largest in Europe and extremely user-friendly. More than 3.5 million licensing-related activities are carried out in Finland every year and the register comprises more than 6.5 million vehicles.

>> *Registration is one method for ensuring that all vehicles operating within Finland's borders meet all relevant safety requirements.*

The future's electric

Trafi is committed to the continued development of its services, particularly its e-services. Currently, motorists can commission and decommission vehicles online and request replacement registration documents. E-services make the everyday more convenient and allow Trafi to offer a consistent and environmentally-friendly service across Finland.

The Business Information System – joint working across organisational boundaries

The Finnish Business Information System (BIS) is a service jointly provided by the National Board of Patents and Registration and the Tax Administration, which allows users to submit information simultaneously to both organisations. This type of joint working between two very different authorities is unique in Finland. The service was created to meet customer needs.

Businesses and other organisations can lodge their details using a single notification form to both authorities, avoiding duplication.

The BIS includes businesses and other organisations entered in the Trade Register, Register for Foundations, VAT Register, Pre-payment Register, Employer Register or the Tax Administration Client Register, as well as all businesses and organisations which have filed a start-up notification but have not yet been entered in the above registers.

All businesses and organisations included in the BIS are assigned a Business Identity Code (Business ID), which has replaced all previous identifiers. The Business ID is provided as soon as the start-up notification has been submitted.

The BIS also provides a real time, free-of-charge information service, which allows users to access information on Finnish-registered businesses, organisations and foundations, including contact details and Business IDs. In addition to finding information on individual companies, the BIS service is useful for those in the process of selecting a name for a new business or changing the name of an existing business. Information is available on both current and dissolved businesses.

The BIS service at www.ytj.fi has proved extremely popular with users. In 2010, 17.4 million searches were carried out. Some 11 000 to 13 000 visitors access the service every day.

>> *Businesses and other organisations can lodge their details using a single notification form to both authorities, avoiding duplication.*

The Finnish Election Information System

Voter eligibility

In Finland, elections, including voting and vote counting are carried out efficiently and reliably. In the Finnish elections, the eligibility of voters as well as their electoral districts and the electoral districts of their candidates are determined on the basis of information held in the election information system. Relevant information includes age, nationality, domicile and electoral district.

Finnish municipalities sometimes merge and polling district boundaries can be adjusted on an annual basis. These changes are noted on the file of each person recorded in the population information system. Come election time, no action is required on part of individual voters to ensure their eligibility. However, they are required to ensure that their address details are up-to-date at all times in the population information system.

Before an election, an election information system is compiled primarily on the basis of information held in the population information system, incorporating the electoral roll. The only circumstance under which the right to vote, as confirmed by the electoral roll, can be restricted is when a voter has registered to vote in the European Parliament elections in another member state.

All voters are notified of upcoming elections in writing. The notification confirms voter eligibility and provides information on the correct polling stations, both for the polling date itself and for advance voting purposes. The notification will also contain voting instructions and general electoral information. The notification is also issued to all eligible voters residing abroad. At election time, a polling station map is made available on the internet, which voters can use to check the location of advance voting stations and to confirm the location of the correct polling station for the election day-proper.

Voting

In Finland, voting takes place in the presence of election officials either on polling day or during the week-long advance voting period. All voters will be asked to confirm their identity. During the advance voting period, voters can cast their vote at any polling station, whether in Finland or abroad.

In Finland, elections, including voting and vote counting are carried out efficiently and reliably.

However, on the day of the election itself, all voters must vote at their allocated polling station at their own electoral district. If a voter has accidentally arrived at the wrong polling station, the officials present will be able to confirm the correct location for them on the basis of information held in the electoral roll.

In Finland, great emphasis is placed on the integrity of the voting process. Unlike in many other countries, only voting slips, which have been stamped by the electoral officials after the voter have completed them, can be accepted. In Finland, voters are asked to write the number of their chosen candidate on the voting slip. Advance voting concludes eight days before polling day (a Saturday) for polling stations outwith Finland and on the Tuesday before polling day in Finland.

Votes cast in advance are counted on the day of the election (a Sunday), which means that as soon as the polling stations close at 20.00, the early voting results can be made public. Votes cast on the day of the election are usually counted rapidly and the preliminary election results are usually released by 22.00.

Tax returns made easy

In Finland, submitting a tax return is relatively straightforward, as the majority of the information required is provided by the organisations that withhold tax at source and are responsible for remitting the contributions to the tax administration on behalf of the taxpayer. Employers provide information on salaries, banks submit details of tax deductible loan and mortgage interest payments, while dividend paying enterprises provide details of all dividends paid out. This third party return process means that only a third of all tax payers need to amend their tax returns.

Expanding the scope of information provided by third parties has allowed the tax authority to submit draft proposals on sales proceeds. As a result, amendments to the tax return are only required where a broker is not aware of the date or value of the purchase. Following the changes, 350 000 completed sales proceeds notifications are issued every year of which only 60 000 are amended.

Taxpayers are required to review the pre-completed form and provide any missing details. These include travel expenses between home and work, any rental income as well as the so-called credit for domestic work, i.e. information only taxpayers themselves can provide.

Every year, the Finnish tax administration issues some 5.1 million pre-completed tax returns. Of these, only 1.5 million are returned with amendments. Indeed the Finnish tax system is unique in that, provided that the details in the tax return are accurate and there are no omissions, the taxpayer is not required to respond in any way.

Almost all third party returns are filed online. In 2008, an electronic filing system designed for taxpayers was launched to complement the existing service. All taxpayers can now amend and complete information electronically using their online banking logins. In 2010, almost a third of all tax returns were submitted online.

It is the strategic intent of the Tax Administration to create a live system, where the taxpayer can submit information as it arises. This type of service would also allow users to view their previous tax returns.

Register for healthcare professionals promotes transparency and prevents malpractice

In Finland, the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health (Valvira) grants licensing, protected occupational titles and fixed-term practice rights to healthcare professionals. Once a licence has been granted, it is recorded in the Central Register of Health Care Professionals, also known as Terhikki.

In 2010, the register comprised some 380 000 healthcare professionals.

The register is a useful tool in the supervision of the healthcare sector. Terhikki can be used to verify whether someone working as a healthcare professional is in fact appropriately licensed and has not had their license revoked due to unprofessional conduct. The register also contains details of all professional cautions and restricted practice rights. Details of any cautions will remain in the register for a period of ten years.

The public version of the Terhikki register, JulkiTerhikki, is available to all employers, pharmacies and the general public.

In January 2009, the Act on Healthcare Professionals was amended to allow the creation of a public, online information service offering certain carefully limited details of all healthcare professionals. The portal, created by Valvira, was launched in September 2010.

Users can carry out searches using a name or registration number. The JulkiTerhikki will then display details of the subject's professional title (i.e. specialist in general medicine or masseur) and confirm whether any restrictions have been placed on their practice. The year of birth is also displayed as it may assist in identifying the correct person in the event that several people with the same name are listed. JulkiTerhikki does not provide information on any cautions that may have been issued. Although such information is publicly available, it can only be accessed through a direct enquiry to Valvira.

Terhikki can be used to verify whether someone working as a healthcare professional is in fact appropriately licensed and has not had their license revoked due to unprofessional conduct.

JulkiTerhikki has proved popular, attracting some 6 000 to 7 000 visitors per week.

The database is a useful tool; for employers, who can use the service to verify the information supplied by potential job candidates without being limited to contacting Valvira by telephone during office hours. Pharmacy staff also often check the identity of doctors when issuing prescriptions. JulkiTerhikki is also used by patients who wish to verify the professional credentials of the person treating them and to check which specialty their doctor is trained in.

BASE REGISTER WORKING PARTY

In spring 2010, the Advisory Committee on Information Management in the Public Sector (JUHTA) appointed a working party comprising all base register organisations, traffic, healthcare and pension sector stakeholders and information security and data protection experts as well as ministries responsible for the above policy areas. Finland's local authorities are represented by the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities. The base register working party has been appointed for a fixed period lasting until the end of 2012.

The purpose of the working party is to seek new development projects, identify novel applications for data, prepare the ground for innovation and promote existing and successful solutions to Finland's pension, social and healthcare and traffic authorities. A key focus for the working party will be local authority information management.

The working party will be seeking out clearly defined development initiatives that can be highlighted and supported with the objective of delivering improved performance and increase efficiency throughout Finland's public sector administration. Data protection will naturally remain a key consideration.

The working party will be seeking out clearly defined development initiatives that can be highlighted and supported with the objective of delivering improved performance.

The organisations responsible for Finland's base registers will continue to engage in ever closer networking, which in addition to bilateral and clearly defined joint working projects, will be used as a driver for development initiatives designed to benefit the whole of Finland.

The working group comprises the following organisations: Finnish Centre for Pension, Social Insurance Institution of Finland, Finnish Transport Safety Agency (Trafi), Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, National Land Survey of Finland, Ministry of Justice, National Board of Patents and Registration of Finland, National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health (Valvira), Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, National Institute for Health and Welfare, Office of the Data Protection Ombudsman, Statistics Finland, Ministry of Finance, Tax Administration, Finnish Communications Regulatory Authority, Population Register Centre and Ministry of the Environment.

Other forms of co-operation

The authorities charged with maintaining the base registers and other stakeholders are engaged in continuous cooperation across a number of areas. Client and expert meetings and cross-administrational projects are often carried out through bilateral cooperation. The authorities also organise regular meetings with senior management aimed at facilitating closer strategic partnerships between the organisations involved.

Cross-authority cooperation involving a number of government agencies is usually carried out within the context of the base register working party and other advisory boards, appointed by the ministries to ensure joined-up working and maximise information flow. In addition, they cooperate across a number of public sector development projects, designed to enhance productivity and improve service delivery by enhancing IT and service provision.

The authorities also organise regular meetings with senior management aimed at facilitating closer strategic partnerships between the organisations involved.