

Gulf Research Center
Knowledge for All

Finland - GCC Relations



1. Key Domestic Developments

Finland is a parliamentary republic with a prime minister, the head of government, and a president, the head of state. In February 2024, H.E. Alexander Stubb, former Prime Minister, was elected President of the Republic of Finland following a closely watched election. Stubb, of the center-right National Coalition Party narrowly won Finland's presidential election, defeating liberal Green Party member Pekka Haavisto, who conceded defeat. His responsibilities include security and foreign policy, including the recently approved NATO member's stance towards Russia. Stubb is known to be a strong supporter of Ukraine and has taken a tough stance towards Russia.

Earlier, in April 2023, Finland held its parliamentary elections, with The National Coalition Party (KOK), led by Prime Minister Petteri Orpo, coming first, taking 48 seats in the 200-member parliament. It took 10 more seats than the previous elections held in 2019. On June 16, Prime Minister Orpo announced a coalition government involving his KOK, The Finns Party (PS), the Swedish People's Party of Finland, and the Christian Democrats (KD). The new government took office on June 20. The elections were held against the backdrop of the conflict in Ukraine. As Finland shares the longest border with Russia of the EU members, the Nordic country's public debt and cost of living have increased due to the Ukraine conflict. As such, the economy, policies to curb deficit spending, and immigration were the main electoral issues in the 2023 elections.

In April–June 2025 the government announced, and parliament approved Finland's withdrawal from the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty (Ottawa Convention), citing intensified security concerns along Finland's eastern border; the decision prompted criticism from humanitarian organizations and human-rights advocates. Parliament also approved the extension of an emergency asylum law, allowing the rejection of certain asylum applications at Finland's Russia border until the end of 2026. Concurrently, the

government formalized a commitment to raise defense spending to at least 3% of GDP by 2029. These measures have sharpened domestic political debate over security policy, human rights obligations, and fiscal priorities.

The Finnish economy has shown signs of a slow recovery in 2025. [The Bank of Finland's latest forecast projects a modest 0.3% GDP growth for the year, with expectations of an acceleration to 1.3% in 2026 and 1.7% in 2027. However, the unemployment rate](#) is expected to remain elevated at 9.4% in 2025 before gradually declining to 8.6% by 2027. Inflation is projected to remain moderate, supporting a gradual recovery in household purchasing power.

Key Finnish Economic and Social Data

- **GDP:** 299.8 billion USD (2024)
- **GDP per capita:** 53,188.62 USD (2024)
- **Annual Growth Rate:** -0.2% annual change (2024)
- **Inflation:** 0.5% (September 2025)
- **Population:** 5.637 million (2024)
- **Unemployment Rate:** 9.3% (August 2025)
- **Credit Rating:** Standard & Poor's credit rating for Finland stands at AA+ with stable outlook. Moody's credit rating for Finland was last set at Aa1 with stable outlook. DBRS' credit rating for Finland was last reported at AA (high) with stable outlook.

2. Finland's Foreign Policy

Finland's foreign and security policy aims to preserve its independence and the core values of society while promoting the well-being and security of its citizens. Its international organizations and partnerships include the EU, the UN, NATO, the Council of Europe, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Finland is also part of the Nordic region, which consists of the five sovereign states: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and



Sweden, and the three autonomous territories connected to these states: the Faroe Islands, Greenland (Denmark), and Åland (Finland). The Nordic Council, established in 1952, acts as the parliamentarians' forum for cooperation, while the Nordic Council of Ministers, established in 1971, acts as the governmental forum. In the Nordic Council of Ministers (NORDEN), the presidency lasts one year and rotates between the five Nordic countries. In 2025, Finland and Åland will hold the Nordic Council of Ministers' presidency, primarily focusing on societal security and resilience, sustainability, competitiveness, and children and young people.

Finland's accession to NATO in 2023 significantly influenced its security policies throughout 2024. The government focused on integrating its defense structures with NATO frameworks, enhancing interoperability, and increasing defense spending. Public support for NATO membership remained high amid heightened regional tensions, particularly concerning Russia's activities near the Finnish border. As a result, the Finnish government has asked parliament to extend until the end of 2026 a law that allows it to reject asylum applications from migrants crossing its closed eastern border with Russia and to send them back. Moreover, Finland announced it will raise national defense spending to at least 3% of GDP by 2029.

Finland assumed the OSCE Chairpersonship for 2025, with Foreign Minister Elina Valtonen serving as Chairperson-in-Office. Finland has emphasized support for Ukraine, protection of OSCE principles, civic space, and resilience, and undertaken an active program of diplomatic visits and initiatives across the OSCE area.

Key Foreign Policy Initiatives

- In September 2025, Finland joined an international declaration endorsing a two-state framework for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while stopping short of formal recognition of a Palestinian state, a

stance that remains contested domestically.

- In July 2024, Finland joined the United States and Canada in establishing the Icebreaker Collaboration Effort (ICE Pact). The ICE Pact recognizes their joint priority of upholding safety and security in the Arctic, including the continued protection of long-standing international rules and norms.
- In December 2023, Finland signed a bilateral Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA) with the United States, which entered into force on September 1, 2024. The agreement will reinforce Finland's security and promote the fulfillment of NATO membership obligations.
- In April 2023, Finland officially joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), marking a significant shift from its historical policy of military non-alignment. This accession doubled NATO's border with Russia and underscored Finland's commitment to collective defense.
- Finland remained a steadfast supporter of Ukraine, providing military aid and humanitarian assistance and advocating for Ukraine's sovereignty within the European Union and international forums.



3. Finland-GCC Fact Sheet

Finland's Trade with the GCC, 2023

Country	Exports	Imports	Total Trade
Saudi Arabia	\$502M	\$34.6M	\$536.6M
United Arab Emirates	\$416M	\$27.7M	\$443.2M
Oman	\$18.8M	\$21.5M	\$40.3M
Qatar	\$43.8M	\$150M	\$193.8M
Kuwait	\$33.3M	\$210k	\$33.51M
Bahrain	\$11.3M	\$3.44M	\$14.74M

Source: The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC)

Establishment of Diplomatic Relationships

- Finland first established diplomatic relations with the GCC states with Kuwait in 1973, followed by the remaining member states in subsequent years. Political and security relations between the two sides today encompass a variety of points of contact both bilaterally and within the context of the EU.

Key Research Centers and Think Tanks

- Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA): fii.fi
- Tampere Peace Research Institute (TAPRI): <https://research.tuni.fi/tapri/>
- Crisis Management Initiative (CMI): <https://cmi.fi/>

Selected Key Regional Experts

- Mohammed Hadi, Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA)
- Toni Alaranta, Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA)
- Timo Stewart, Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA)

- Sinikukka Saari, Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA)
- Tuomo Melasuo, Tampere Peace Research Institute (TAPRI)
- Maruan El-Krekshi, Crisis Management Initiative (CMI)

4. Key Developments in Finland-GCC Relations

In May 2021, Finland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs released its Strategy for Development Cooperation in the Middle East and North Africa (2021–2024). The document emphasizes that the countries of the MENA region are “neighbours and natural partners of high importance,” underlining the region's strategic significance to Europe due to its geographic proximity, historical ties, trade routes, energy resources, and the broader impacts of political volatility, poverty, and conflict. As such, the region's pursuit of peace and stability is considered a shared strategic interest in the GCC-Finland relations.

Political and diplomatic engagement between Finland and the GCC states has been marked by collaboration on global issues and regional security and stability. In recent years, bilateral visits have increased, reflecting Finland's growing commitment to conflict resolution efforts in the Middle East. However, there remains a need for greater visibility and deeper engagement between Finland and the Gulf. Opportunities for stronger cooperation are emerging, particularly through the EU's Strategic Partnership with the Gulf, the GCC's expanding role in regional and international de-escalation efforts, such as the Jeddah Peace Talks on Ukraine in 2023, and Finland's recent accession to NATO, which further aligns its strategic interests with the region. Another avenue of cooperation is in conflict prevention efforts as part of Finland's general foreign policy. Finland's Ministry for Foreign Affairs, through its Unit for the Middle East and the Gulf, continues to manage bilateral relations and contribute to conflict prevention efforts in the region. For example, the Helsinki Policy Forum, supported by the Finnish



Ministry for Foreign Affairs has been increasing dialogue in challenges and opportunities facing the Gulf-MENA region and Europe since it was established in February 2014.

Given recent developments, the most immediate priority in GCC-Finland relations is addressing the war in Gaza. Among the five Nordic countries, three, Iceland (2011), Sweden (2014), and Norway (2024), have recognized the State of Palestine. Norway's proactive role, exemplified by the joint meeting with Saudi Arabia in Brussels in November 2024, reflects a strong momentum towards recognition and a coordinated strategy for achieving a two-state solution. Finland's recognition of the State of Palestine would be viewed as a crucial step in furthering this shared goal.

Economic relations remain a cornerstone of the GCC-Finland partnership. Finland has been a significant trading partner for the GCC, with steady growth in trade volumes in recent years. In Saudi Arabia, Finland operates through Team Finland, a network coordinated by Business Finland to promote trade and investment opportunities. In November 2022, Saudi Arabia and Finland signed an MoU in Helsinki to establish a Saudi-Finland Business Council. In the United Arab Emirates, Finland has prioritized sustainability as a key area of bilateral cooperation, while in Qatar, relations have expanded to include trade, investment, tourism, education, technology, and renewable energy. A business council is under discussion to further institutionalize these ties. Notably, the aviation partnership between Qatar Airways and Finnair, launched in August 2022, has strengthened connectivity between Finland and the Gulf.

Energy and environmental cooperation constitute another important dimension. Finland's expertise in renewable energy and sustainable technologies positions it as a valuable partner for GCC states pursuing diversification strategies under their national visions. With climate action gaining

momentum across the Gulf, Finland can contribute meaningfully to stabilizing energy markets, expanding cooperation in hydrogen development, enhancing energy efficiency, and promoting renewable energy deployment. Given the broader geopolitical context, particularly the Ukraine crisis, climate diplomacy will play an increasingly vital role in aligning Finland and the GCC on green transition goals and standards.



Finally, education cooperation offers a promising area for enhanced engagement. Finland's world-renowned education system, recognized for its innovation and high performance in international assessments, serves as a model for educational reform efforts in the GCC. Several GCC ministries have already signed agreements with Finland's Ministry of Education and Culture to support the development of educational institutions and programs. As the GCC states continue to modernize and expand their education sectors, Finland's expertise will remain highly sought after.



Bahrain-Finland Relations:

- In October 2024, H.E. Dr. Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani, Bahrain's Minister of Foreign Affairs, met with H.E. Tula Eriola, the Finnish Ambassador to Bahrain. The meeting focused on bilateral relations and their development in various sectors.
- In July 2023, Bahrain and Finland held their third round of political consultations in Bahrain, co-chaired by H.E. Dr. Shaikh Abdulla bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, Political Affairs Undersecretary at Bahrain's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Sofie From-Emmesberger, Director General of the Department for Africa and the Middle East at Finland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. H.E. Dr. Shaikh Abdulla bin Ahmed Al Khalifa lauded the solid Bahrain-Finland relations, noting the steady growth of bilateral ties over the past four decades and the two countries' commitment to bolstering cooperation across political, economic, and cultural fields while supporting global efforts to consolidate security, stability, and peace in the Middle East and globally.

Kuwait-Finland Relations:

- In October 2025, Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister H.E. Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah met with Outi Holopainen, Finland's Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Security Policy on the sidelines of the 29th Joint Ministerial Council Meeting between the GCC and EU and the 2nd High-Level Ministerial Forum on Regional Security and Cooperation between the GCC and the EU, both hosted in Kuwait. The two officials discussed ways to strengthen bilateral relations. They also discussed the latest regional and international developments.

Oman-Finland Relations:

- In January 2025, H.E. Qais Mohammed Al Yousef, Oman's Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion, and H.E. Wille Rydman, Finland's Minister of

Economic Affairs and Employment, met in Muscat to discuss ways to develop bilateral relations with a focus on economic fields and joint investment opportunities. The two ministers emphasized enhancing cooperation in SMEs, innovation, and digital transition and explored options for consolidating investments in IT, mining, education, and entrepreneurship incubators.

- In August 2023, Oman and Finland held their second round of political consultations in Helsinki, co-chaired by H.E. Ambassador Munther bin Mahfouz Al Manthari, Head of the European Department at Oman's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and H.E. Sofie From-Emmesberger, Director General of the Africa and Middle East Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Finland. The meeting addressed the two countries' bilateral ties and prospects for future cooperation.

Qatar-Finland Relations:

- In June 2025, Speaker of the Parliament of Finland Jussi Kristian Halla-aho met with H.E. Ambassador of the State of Qatar to Finland Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Jaber in Helsinki. The two discussed bilateral cooperation between the two countries and ways to enhance them.
- In March 2025, Qatar's Assistant Foreign Minister, H.E. Lolwah bint Rashid Al Khater, met with Finland's Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Security Policy in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, H.E. Kai Sauer, the President of Finnish Qatari Association, H.E. Rita Tainola, and Ambassador of the Republic of Finland to Qatar, H.E. Pekka Voutilainen, to review energy cooperation and discuss regional issues such as the Afghan file and the Russian-Ukrainian crisis.
- In January 2025, Qatar's Minister of State for International Cooperation, H.E. Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser Al Misnad, met with Finland's Minister of Social Security at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, H.E. Sanni Grahn-



Laasonen, to discuss enhancing cooperation, particularly in humanitarian and developmental fields.

- In September 2024, H.E. Assistant Foreign Minister Lolwah bint Rashid Al Khater met with H.E. Ville Skinnari, Finland's Minister for Development Cooperation and Foreign Trade, on the sidelines of the 77th UN General Assembly in New York. The meeting reviewed bilateral relations, emphasizing education, food security, technology, and energy cooperation. Additionally, they discussed Qatar's role in regional and international conflict mediation.
- In September 2024, Qatar's Amir, H.H. Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, made his first official visit to Finland, where he met with H.E. President Alexander Stubb and H.E. Prime Minister Petteri Orpo. The visit marked the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Discussions centered on enhancing investment, energy, education, and international collaboration cooperation. Key regional and international issues were also addressed, particularly the war in Gaza. The Amir also met with H.E. Jussi Halla-aho, Speaker of the Finnish Parliament. On the sidelines of the visit, Qatar and Finland signed three memoranda of understanding in peace, reconciliation, and conflict resolution, as well as agreements on economic, commercial, and technical cooperation and vocational education and training. A letter of intent was also signed between the Qatar Chamber and the Helsinki Chamber of Commerce and Industry.
- In June 2024, Qatar's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, H.E. Dr. Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh Al Khulaifi, met in Helsinki with Finland's Foreign Minister, H.E. Elina Valtonen, to discuss cooperation, with a particular focus on developments in Gaza.

Saudi Arabia-Finland Relations:

- In April 2025, the foreign ministers of both countries discussed on a phone call regional and

international developments as well as topics of shared interest. The two officials also reviewed the bilateral ties between Saudi Arabia and Finland.

- In October 2024, Finland and Saudi Arabia signed a memorandum of understanding in Riyadh to deepen cooperation in the energy sector, specifically in renewable energy, stable electricity systems, climate mitigation technologies, and smart city collaborations.
- In October 2024, H.E. Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Cabinet Member, and Climate Envoy Adel Al-Jubeir met with Finland's Under-Secretary of State for International Trade, Jarno Syrjälä, on the sidelines of the Future Investment Initiative conference. They discussed trade, investment, sustainable development, and climate cooperation.
- H.E. Eng. Saleh Al-Jasser, Saudi Minister of Transport and Logistics, made an official visit to Helsinki in May 2024, meeting Finnish officials and business representatives to enhance cooperation in transport, logistics, trade investment, and related technologies.
- In November 2023, the 4th round of the Saudi-Finnish Joint Committee was held in Riyadh, focusing on economic cooperation, trade, and new joint projects in areas like education, logistics, health, agriculture, and electronic games.
- In September 2023, Saudi Foreign Minister H.H. Prince Faisal bin Farhan met with his Finnish counterpart, H.E. Elina Valtonen, on the sidelines of the 78th UN General Assembly in New York to discuss strengthening bilateral relations.
- In November 2022, Saudi Deputy Foreign Minister H.E. Waleed Al-Khuraiji met Finland's Foreign Minister H.E. Pekka Haavisto on the sidelines of the Manama Dialogue in Bahrain, where they reviewed the bilateral relations between the two countries.

- In April 2022, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Economy and Planning, H.E. Faisal Al-Ibrahim, met H.E. Pekka Haavisto, Finland's Minister for Foreign Affairs, during an official visit to discuss ways to deepen the partnership.

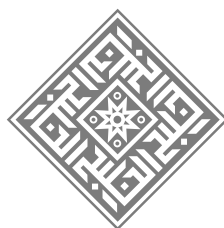
United Arab Emirates-Finland Relations:

- In August 2025, during an official visit to Helsinki, the UAE and Finland signed an MoU to deepen cooperation in meteorology, space weather and polar research, signaling an expansion of scientific and climate-related collaboration.
- In May 2025, a UAE delegation led by H.E. Omran Sharaf, Assistant Foreign Minister for Advanced Science and Technology, visited Helsinki to expand cooperation in critical, emerging, and advanced technologies (AI, health tech, quantum computing, and related fields). Meetings were held with Finnish research institutions, companies, and government interlocutors to explore partnerships and tech collaboration.
- In March 2025, H.H. Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, met in Helsinki with H.E. Elina Valtonen, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Finland. The two sides discussed the current state of bilateral relations between the UAE and Finland. They explored avenues to enhance further cooperation across various sectors aligned with the developmental priorities of both countries. They also deliberated on strengthening collaboration in multiple areas of mutual interest.
- In January 2025, Finland's Prime Minister, H.E. Petteri Orpo, visited the United Arab Emirates, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Finland and the UAE. The Finnish Prime Minister inaugurated the new Finnish Embassy in Abu Dhabi and met with H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President, Prime Minister, and Ruler of Dubai. They discussed new avenues for cooperation between the two countries in key sectors to advance shared development goals. H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum emphasized the UAE's aspirations to enhance collaboration with Finland in areas such as education, healthcare, circular economy, technology, artificial intelligence, renewable energy, space, and telecommunications. The Prime Minister also met with H.E. Sarah Al Amiri, the UAE's Minister of Education, to discuss fostering innovation in education and promoting academic collaboration.
- In November 2023, the UAE and Finland held the second round of the UAE-Finland Joint Committee as part of a broader UAE trade mission to Finland. During the session, both sides reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening bilateral relations and exploring new cooperation opportunities across diverse fields, including trade and investment, food and water security, education, digitalization, AI, space, transportation, and logistics.
- In November 2022, the UAE and Finland held the first Political Consultation Committee co-chaired by Amb Lana Zaki Nusseibeh, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs and UAE Permanent Representative to the United Nations, and H.E. Kai Sauer, Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Security Policy of Finland to discuss areas of mutual interest such as technology, international peace, economic growth, and climate change.

5. Supporting Documents

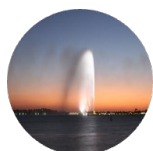
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