

# ANNUAL REPORT

2023





# RAJAVARTIOLAITOS GRÄNSBEVAKNINGSVÄSENDET FINNISH BORDER GUARD

The Finnish Border Guard is a cooperative, internationally renowned expert in border management and maritime safety and security that increases the safety and security of people, the environment and the State in an efficient manner. This is guaranteed by reliable and professional personnel, a military organisational structure and reliable and advanced technology. The aim of our work is for Finland to have the most secure border and sea areas in Europe.

# Contents

**4** A word from the Chief

**6** Societal impact and performance

**8** Reputation, public image and communications

**10** Border surveillance

**14** Border checks

**16** Crime prevention

**18** Maritime security and search & rescue at sea

**20** Maritime environmental protection

**22** International cooperation

**24** Territorial integrity and defence readiness

**26** Education and training

**28** Technical sector

**30** Legislative work

# A word from the Chief

In late 2023, the Finnish Border Guard encountered severe disturbances in border security, and the situation still prevails. As a result of sustained preparedness, our capacity to manage and prevent instrumentalised migration has been excellent, and we have been able to keep the situation under control. Nevertheless, we need to prepare ourselves for a rapidly worsening situation.

## Border security disturbances

Toward the end of 2023, the Government decided to temporarily close border crossing points along the eastern border and to centralise the processing of applications for international protection to the border crossing points within air and waterborne traffic. The aim of the resolution was to stop the instrumentalised migration taking place at the eastern border. The observations made and information received by the Finnish Border Guard and other authorities indicated clearly that the entry of migrants was based on the actions of a foreign state. The phenomenon also involves international crime. In addition, exceptional incidents have occurred within our sea areas during the past year, where our critical infrastructure has been damaged by an external actor.

In order to manage the abnormal situation, the Finnish Border Guard has drawn on new powers and capacities that have been enacted and developed in recent years. These include, for example, improved capacity for crowd control and better tools for maintaining situational awareness. Assistance provided by other security authorities has been indispensable. The European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex,

has also supported the activities at the eastern border through the provision of international personnel and vehicles in the jointly planned and trained manner. We can state that the resources used for the development of preparedness, capacity and competence have been appropriately allocated.

At the same time, it is obvious that more effective measures will be necessary if the abnormal situation continues and becomes more difficult. Several projects are underway through which we can further improve our capacity to respond to instrumentalised migration, enhance our intelligence and advance our possibilities to utilise human resources, including conscripts and reservists. Equally important for us is to ensure that the resources and appropriations needed by the Finnish Border Guard for its activities are in balance with the prevailing security situation.



## Maintaining security on a broad scale

Throughout the year, the Finnish Border Guard used its overall resources in a flexible manner, allocating them in accordance with the current situation and demand. This operational concept became familiar to us during the corona years. In addition to the situation management, we have continued to handle our basic statutory tasks as usual.



At sea, we were able to assist all those in distress, with an average response time of 26 minutes. This result can be considered excellent. Fortunately, no large-scale maritime accidents occurred, although there were several potentially hazardous near miss incidents. Dozens of cases involving minor environmental damage were observed.

The number of new pre-trial investigations exceeded the previous year's number by about 30%. Particular growth was seen in the facilitation of illegal entry into the country, which is explained by both the situation at the eastern border and the secondary movements of migrants in the European Union.

Safeguarding of territorial integrity is inherent in all our activities. Competence in military national defence was further developed, both among our staff members and among conscripts and reservists, although exercises have already, in the preceding years, been at a high level in terms of quality and quantity.

At Helsinki-Vantaa Airport, border crossing traffic was strongly on the rise, and at the airports in Lapland, another record high year was seen. The forecast is that this trend will continue.

The Finnish Border Guard has several strategic capacity projects underway concurrently. Within the OPV 2025 project, the construction of the first new offshore patrol vessel started, on schedule, in late 2023. A pilot of the eastern border barrier fence was completed in late summer. The prevailing situation has proven the necessity of the barrier fence and, therefore, its construction will be accelerated. The renewal of the technical surveillance system for land and sea borders proceeded to its final phase, during which our primary operational information system will be upgraded. The project will significantly improve our situational awareness and data management. The ongoing MVX project for the procurement of new surveillance aircraft will proceed to the contract phase by summer 2024. The project was slightly delayed as a result

of the schedule of the legislative project concerning radio technical border surveillance and the additional time needed for the evaluation of radio technical surveillance systems.

In addition to the materiel projects, there are several legislative projects in progress, which aim at safeguarding us sufficient personnel and powers to operate within the changed security environment.

### **Success calls for competent and motivated personnel**

During this exceptional year, the personnel of the Finnish Border Guard have, once again, shown their professional skills, reliability and ability to cooperate. I dare say that the Finnish Border Guard has never before had better trained, equipped and committed personnel. In all circumstances, they answer to the questions of citizens and the media, provide situational information and do their part to contribute in a valuable way to the sense of security among people in Finland.

Thanks to the entire personnel, the Finnish Border Guard has, in recent years, excelled in surveys that measure the reputation of and trust in authorities. Citizens experience that the Finnish Border Guard is working in their best interests. Reputation and trust must, however, be earned again every day. This is a challenge that will encourage us to keep moving forward. Security is not accomplished by individuals alone, but rather, it calls for teamwork within the Finnish Border Guard and collaboration with all our partners.

I wish to extend my warmest thanks to the personnel of the Finnish Border Guard for their excellent work for the security of our homeland.

**Pasi Kostamovaara**  
Lieutenant General  
Chief of the Finnish Border Guard

# Societal impact and performance

The societal impact goals of the Finnish Border Guard include border security and maritime security, as well as territorial integrity and military national defence. Operations are carried out cost-effectively on land, at sea and in the air under all natural conditions and in any abnormal situations and emergencies.



### Improved cost-effectiveness and productivity

The exceptional situation in terms of border and maritime security continued into the year 2023 with major impacts on the activities and performance of the Finnish Border Guard. Within the border control activities, the measurable output reduced due to the restrictions on the entry of Russian nationals, which started in 2022 and continued in 2023, as well as the closing of border crossing stations in late 2023. At the same time, the measurable output was higher than planned within the areas of border surveillance as well as territorial integrity and military national defence as a result of the increased patrolling, advanced technical surveillance systems and increased training.

Despite the rise in the appropriations spent on activities in 2023, the cost-effectiveness and economic efficiency of the Finnish Border Guard improved from the previous year because the rise in the measurable output was greater than



the rise in their overall production costs. Productivity also improved from the previous year since a relatively higher level of measurable output was achieved with the increased number of personnel. The qualitative indicators reflecting the impact of the Finnish Border Guard's activities on society and its members lowered moderately as a result of the exceptional situation.



# Reputation, public image and communications

Reliable, professional and cooperative. These values have successfully guided the activities and communications of the Finnish Border Guard, as shown by recent surveys.

## Citizens' trust is the foundation for activities

In 2023, the Finnish Border Guard's communications focused on the progress of strategic projects, the Balticconnector incident at the Baltic Sea and the eastern border security. Smooth collaboration between authorities in connection with the Balticconnector investigation and the related active communications made the Finnish Border Guard's maritime security functions better known among the public at large. In the autumn, a multi-authority exercise for the management of large-scale illegal migration was arranged in order to test, for example, the plan for communications coordination. The exercise

increased awareness about preparing for hybrid threats on land and at sea. Toward the end of the year, exercising turned into real action in response to the instrumentalised illegal migration over the eastern border.

In the Luottamus&Maine (Reputation&Trust) survey conducted by T-Media, the Finnish Border Guard was ranked, for the third successive year, as the most trusted public-sector organisation, sharing the top position with the Emergency Response Centre Agency. Citizens' evaluations concerning the reputation and reliability of the Finnish Border Guard have been consistently at a high level. The survey respondents also viewed the Finnish Border Guard

Tom Hanén of the Finnish Border Guard and Taito Vainio of the Emergency Response Centre Agency received the awards for the most trusted public-sector organisations. Hanén commented on the survey: "We are very pleased with the outcome of the survey. It indicates that citizens genuinely feel that the Finnish Border Guard is working in their best interests. That is exactly our intention.

We are grateful for the confidence shown to us and endeavour to earn it every day through our work."





as the most successful in terms of its interaction and communications.

The Finnish Border Guard's communications advance the strategic goals as well as the good and responsible governance of the Finnish Border Guard. In 2023, a development project was carried out with the aim to ensure the communications capability for the coming years. The contents and channels of communication were further developed along with continued personnel training to improve the availability and accessibility of services.

To strengthen the public sense of safety and security, communications are provided in a timely manner through multiple channels and in several languages. Based on the results of a usability survey, the Finnish Border Guard has developed its website at Raja.fi in terms of language versions, diversity of contents and user-friendliness. In particular, the extent of the Northern Sámi contents has been improved. Also, the usability of the Rajamedia site has been enhanced on the basis of user experiences. The Finnish Border Guard has actively improved the data protection and privacy, accessibility and mobile use of its online communications.

In 2023, the Finnish Border Guard conducted a questionnaire survey among the residents of border and archipelago regions, border crossers and stakeholder groups. The survey compiled their views regarding the availability and accessibility of the Finnish Border Guard's services, access to information in one's native language as well as the communications of the Finnish Border Guard in general. The overall mean value of the respondents' ratings increased (3.7 in 2023; 3.5 in 2022).

The greatest rise was seen in the ratings concerning the perceived sufficiency of guidance and information in one's native language, including Finnish, Swedish and Sámi (3.91 in 2023; 3.68 in 2022).



# Border surveillance

The purpose of border surveillance is to maintain security and public order at land and sea borders. Situational awareness obtained through surveillance facilitates the efficient use of resources. Any situations that threaten border security are managed on land and at sea under all circumstances. At the internal borders of the Schengen area, preparedness is maintained to temporarily reinstitute border checks. Border surveillance is carried out by means of stationary and mobile technical systems and patrolling. Patrols equipped with night vision devices are able to move in demanding conditions both on land and at sea, and they possess the command, control and operational capabilities required for multi-sectoral operations involving public authorities and national defence. Border guard dogs play an important role in border surveillance. Surveillance aircraft and unmanned aerial systems (UAS) are also utilised for border surveillance.





### Intensified surveillance on the eastern border

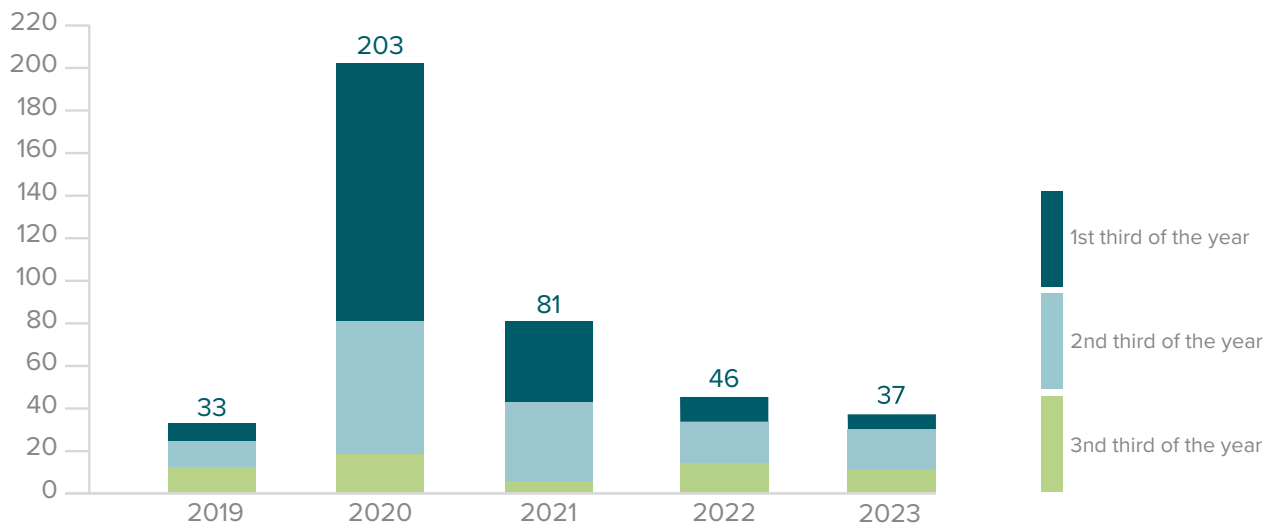
The situation along the land and sea borders remained stable during the first half of the year. In late summer 2023, the Finnish Border Guard intensified border surveillance in response to the instrumentalised illegal migration over the eastern border. This meant, for example, increasing the volume of technical surveillance and patrolling as well as equipping the patrols with more versatile vehicles and devices than usual. To control the situation, temporary barrier systems were built on the eastern border. The Finnish Border Guard received assistance from other authorities and Frontex. The situation remained under control.

During 2023, within the pilot phase of the eastern border barrier fence project, barrier fences were constructed in Imatra and Salla as well as in the training area of the Border and Coast Guard Academy in Immola. The pilot phase has

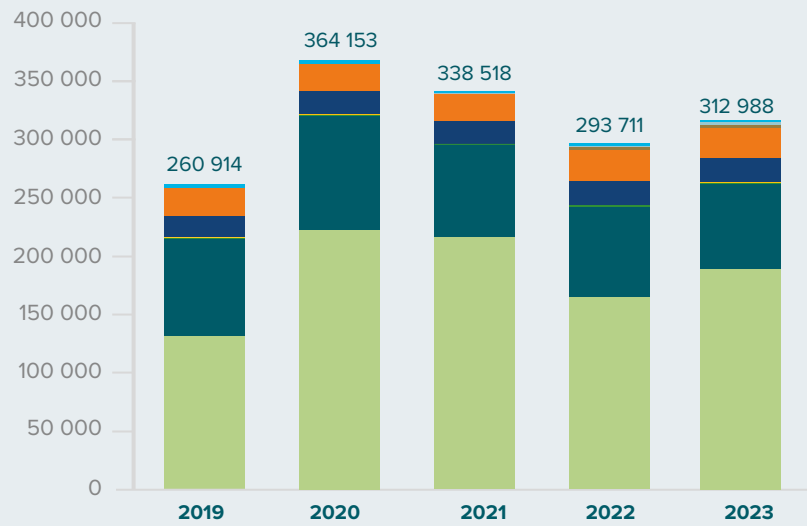
provided experience on both the construction of the barrier fence and the applicable tactics. The construction of the barrier fence will continue in spring 2024.

The number of unauthorised border crossings declined from the previous year, at both land and sea borders. There was no significant change in the overall number of territorial violations. The volume of patrolling increased significantly because of the intensified border surveillance along the land border between Finland and Russia. A notable growth was seen in helicopter and UAS patrolling. The volume of mobile technical surveillance increased significantly on the Russian land border. The extent of mutual assistance provided to other authorities dropped to a slightly lower level than in normal years as a result of the end of mutual assistance to manage the pandemic and the initiation of enhanced border surveillance.

### Illegal border crossings | (persons, aircraft, vessels)



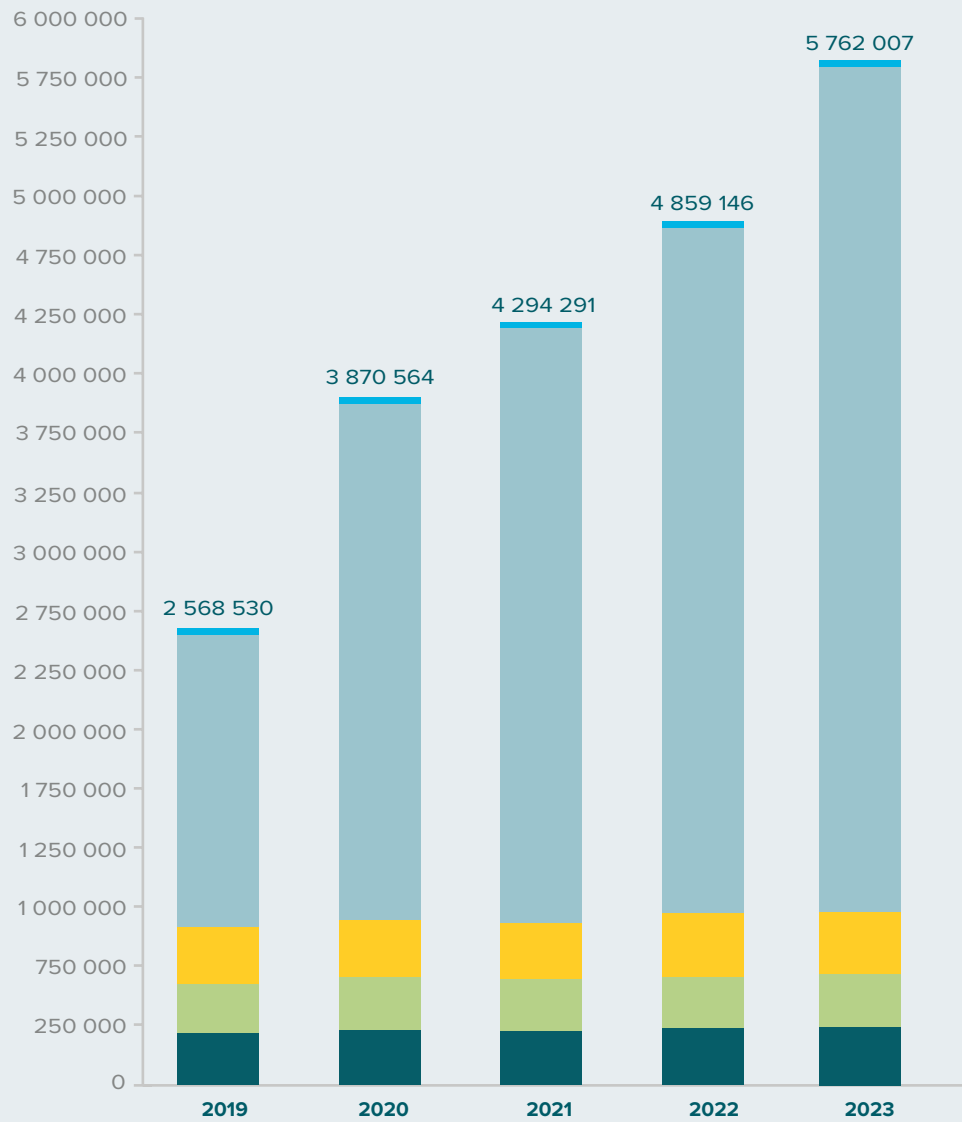
## Patrolling (hrs)



3 131	933	1 880	1 842	1 413	Joint patrols
302	335	423	1 347	2 550	UAS patrolling*
			2 137	3 587	Foreigner control**
23 372	23 726	23 624	26 737	25 687	Boat, hydrocopter and hovercraft
18 097	18 255	18 461	20 099	20 305	Patrol vessel
594	618	624	598	565	Aeroplane
806	631	448	723	1 436	Helicopter
83 225	96 988	77 865	77 139	71 592	On foot, motorcycle, snowmobile, car (etc.); dog
131 386	222 667	215 192	163 089	185 853	On foot, motorcycle, snowmobile, car (etc.)

\*) UAS = Unmanned Aerial System  
 \*\*) New surveillance target

## Technical control (hrs)



32 441	33 341	31 918	39 055	41 173	Other technical surveillance
1 643 914	2 905 759	3 348 902	3 856 010	4 748 805	Mobile surveillance system
322 240	322 127	318 715	356 972	346 622	Fixed surveillance system
275 764	298 347	288 550	288 802	296 829	Radar surveillance
294 171	310 990	306 206	318 307	328 578	Optical surveillance

# Border checks

The Finnish Border Guard conducts border checks on border crossing traffic at the external borders of the Schengen area. Border checks refer to checks performed for the purpose of ensuring that persons, including their means of transport and the objects in their possession, may legally enter or leave the country in compliance with the Schengen Border Code and national legislation. Border checks are carried out at the border crossing points or, if there are grounds for doing so, on a vehicle used for public transportation or in some other place. All persons crossing the external borders of the Schengen area are subject to border checks. No border checks are conducted on the internal border traffic, except when internal border control is temporarily reintroduced.

## Biggest growth at Helsinki-Vantaa Airport and at airports in Lapland

Approximately 5.4 million persons were subject to border checks in external border traffic. The number of border checks in air traffic increased moderately from the previous year. At Helsinki-Vantaa Airport, some 3.5 million border checks were conducted. About 33% of the external border checks at Helsinki-Vantaa were carried out with the support of the automated border check system. Growth was also seen at airports in Lapland, where the number of external border checks in seasonal traffic was record high at some 0.3 million. At ports, the number of external border checks remained very low. In waterborne traffic, a total of some 10,000 border checks were conducted in the external border traffic. The Finnish Border Guard contributed to the piloting of the DTC (Digital Travel Credential), led by the EU Commission, to prevent border checks from being congested.

To support the security arrangements during a top meeting held in Helsinki in July 2023, and to implement the necessary measures to ensure public order and internal safety during the visit, internal border control was reintroduced for the period of 8-15 July 2023. Internal border control concerned selected targets identified on the basis of threat and risk assessments.

There was no growth in the eastern border traffic as the war in Ukraine continued. Approximately 1.5 million passengers travelled across the border between Finland and Russia. Vaalimaa was the busiest border crossing point on the eastern border. Eastern border

traffic declined especially because of the restrictions on the entry of Russian nationals that started in September 2022 and continued throughout 2023 to safeguard Finland's international relations. In July 2023, the Government renewed its earlier resolution to restrict, until further notice, any non-necessary travel of Russian nationals to Finland or via Finland to other Schengen area states. At the same time, the restrictions concerning business travellers, property owners and students were tightened.

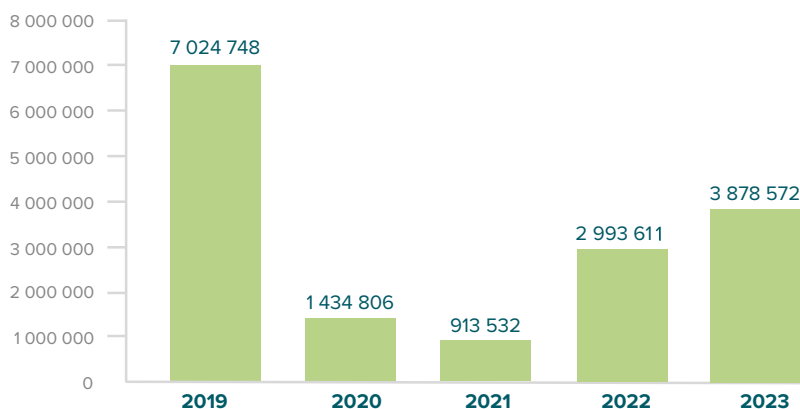
## Border crossing points were closed on the eastern border

Instrumentalised illegal migration on Finland's eastern border grew significantly in late 2023. The severe disturbance affecting border security had a significant impact on the activities of the border crossing points and normal border crossing traffic. During November-December, border crossing points on the eastern border were closed and opened several times in accordance with Government resolutions. At the same time, the applications for international protection were, for the first time, handled in a centralised manner at one or two border crossing points, or only at those border crossing points for air and waterborne traffic that were open. The instrumentalised migration, however, continued without delay and intensely as soon as Finland opened some of its border crossing points, and moved on to those border crossing points to which the applications for international protection were centralised.

The phenomenon did not cease until all border crossing points for road traffic on the eastern border were closed on 15 December 2023. The Vaalimaa border crossing point for rail traffic remained open, but only for the transportation of goods.

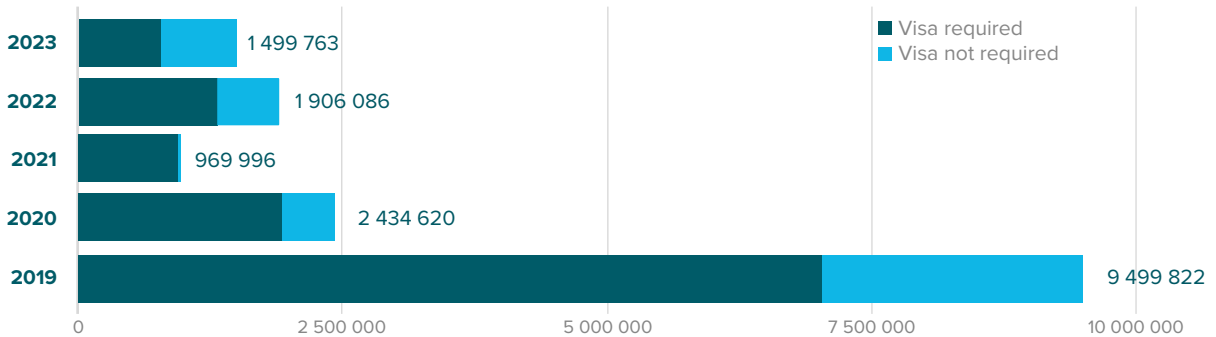
In 2023, the Finnish Border Guard received a total of 1,655 applications for temporary protection (5,085 in 2022) and 1,983 asylum applications (807 in 2022). On the external borders, the Finnish Border Guard turned back or refused entry for 2,168 persons (4,192 in 2022). The number of received asylum applications increased significantly because of the phenomenon of instrumentalised illegal migration, whereas cases of entry refusal or turning back reduced, due to the restrictions concerning the entry to the country.

Border traffic at airports (persons)





Traffic on the Finnish-Russian border (persons)



# Crime prevention

Crime prevention activities focus on the external border of the Schengen area. The Finnish Border Guard seeks to prevent, expose and investigate severe cross-border crimes in collaboration with other law enforcement authorities in Finland (the Police and Customs). It conducts the preliminary investigation into any incidents that fall within its jurisdiction, such as the facilitation of illegal entry and human trafficking, state border offences, forgeries, drunk driving on land or water, or fishing and hunting offences. The Finnish Border Guard contributes actively to maritime environmental protection by leading the monitoring of spills from vessels at sea and by conducting preliminary investigations of maritime environmental crimes.

## Instrumentalised illegal migration

In 2023, the number of cases of illegal entry along the land border from Russia to Finland remained at the same level as in previous years. Altogether 14 cases with 20 persons involved were identified in 2023. All those crossing the border illegally were male and all of them applied for asylum in Finland. Nearly all of the cases were identified within the area of the Southeast Finland Border Guard District, with the exception of one within the North Karelia Border Guard District and one within the Kainuu Border Guard District.

In autumn 2023, Finland became a target for instrumentalised illegal migration. Almost 1,300 asylum seekers crossed the eastern border to Finland at various border crossing points. Criminal investigations have verified that organised crime plays a key role in this phenomenon, by arranging migration through Russia to Finland and other Schengen area states. In relation to this phenomenon, more than 20 investigations were initiated in 2023 into suspected facilitation or aggravated facilitation of illegal migration.

## Criminal activities within internal border traffic

As regards the facilitation of illegal migration via internal border traffic, one of the most important pre-trial investigations conducted by the Finnish Border Guard in 2023 concerned the facilitation of illegal migration of Somalis through the internal border air traffic. Based on the initiated pre-trial investigations, it is suspected that citizens of Somalia have been facilitated through the eastern Mediterranean route to enter Greece or Bulgaria and from there further to Finland on internal border flights with forged ID cards of various Schengen states. The suspicion is that groups of organised crime that operate in Sweden are behind the facilitated migration.

Finland has also been exploited as a transit country for migration from Belo-Russia to Central Europe. Based on observations, two new pre-trial investigations into aggravated facilitation of illegal migration were initiated in 2023. These pre-trial investigations indicate that more than 100 persons have been facilitated to enter the Schengen area, mostly to Germany, via the Baltic States, Finland and Sweden. These persons represent several different nationalities. The pre-trial investigations have likely helped authorities to significantly hinder smuggling operations via this route.





## Criminal investigations

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Facilitation of illegal entry	91	83	91	97	181
Forgery offences	262	144	192	231	202
Territorial violations*	1	0	0	7	6
Border offences	339	619	570	354	1 362
Driving while intoxicated	117	31	25	26	33
Waterway traffic intoxication	171	140	113	88	103
Environmental and natural resources offences	121	142	92	69	66
Human trafficking	0	1	0	1	0
Other offences	4 905	2 073	1 155	1 731	1 565
Total	6 006	3 233	2 238	2 604	3 518

\*) Opened pre-trial investigations

# Maritime security and search & rescue at sea

As the leading maritime rescue authority in Finland, the Finnish Border Guard is responsible for organising maritime search and rescue (SAR) operations within the sea area designated for Finnish maritime rescue operations. It contributes to maritime rescue with in-house resources, manages the planning, development and supervision of maritime rescue, and is responsible for the coordination of tasks with other actors involved.

## The number of tasks declined

The total number of maritime SAR and assistance tasks reduced by about 3% from the year 2022. The decline is explained by, among other things, the varying weather conditions in summer 2023 and the continually high fuel prices. Similar to previous years, human errors in navigation and technical factors were the most common reasons for maritime SAR tasks. The majority of boaters had a good mastery of navigational skills, equipment, seafaring rules as well as the boating culture in general.

The Finnish Border Guard maintained uninterrupted command and operational readiness and monitored the emergency radio traffic for maritime rescue needs. All maritime SAR emergencies were provided assistance as required. Despite the increasing challenges related to the maritime operating environment, the average response time for the first SAR unit to reach the location in maritime emergencies was 26 minutes. Maritime rescue capacity was further developed through fleet and equipment acquisitions, by improving plan-based preparedness and by developing the maritime rescue information system, which was taken into use in 2022. Maritime SAR capabilities were maintained and developed by means of active exercise activities, with representatives of various stakeholders participating. The Finnish Border Guard contributed actively to international

maritime rescue activities and collaborated with neighbouring counties, especially Estonia and Sweden.

## Training in maritime rescue

In order to maintain and develop leadership skills and competence in maritime rescue, the Finnish Border Guard provides training related to maritime rescue. The training is based on the organisation of maritime rescue in Finland as well as the standards of the International Maritime Organization (IMO). In practice, training is provided through courses arranged by the Border and Coast Guard Academy, and some of the courses are open for actors outside of the Finnish Border Guard as well. In 2023, many individuals representing various stakeholders participated in these courses. Moreover, the Finnish Border Guard arranged several international courses, with participants from a number of different countries.

The Finnish Border Guard took part in an unofficial review process, arranged under the leadership of the Ministry of Transport and Communications, which examined compliance with the obligations of IMO in Finland. For the Finnish Border Guard, the review concerned the arrangements of maritime search and rescue as well as the prevention of environmental damages at sea.



## SAR at sea operations

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Maritime SAR assignments	1 433	1 391	1 138	1 108	1 084
Maritime SAR emergency care	50	29	41	46	39
Maritime assistance assignments	107	348	462	373	356
Other maritime SAR assignments	272	132	147	422	410
Persons rescued	4 746	3 723	2 846	2 724	2 288
Prevented accidents	8	7	3	5	5



# Maritime environmental protection

The Baltic Sea has traffic volumes that are among the highest worldwide and the risk of a major vessel oil or chemical accident is constantly present. In case of an accident, the damage caused to the vulnerable ecosystems, the residents of the coastal areas and the business and trade within the Baltic Sea region would be disastrous with long-term consequences. Near miss situations that have occurred in the Baltic Sea have demonstrated the critical need for sufficient capabilities in terms of the prevention of environmental damage. In addition to oil, a range of hazardous chemicals are transported over the Baltic Sea and it is crucial to prepare for the related risks also in ice conditions. Along with the growing volume of maritime traffic, the spectrum of risks also becomes broader.





### Environmental damage prevention

Since spring 2022, the Finnish Border Guard has closely monitored any changes in the maritime traffic within the Gulf of Finland as a result of the sanctions against Russia due to the war in Ukraine. An example of such changes is the fact that Russian oil is being transported with older vessels than before, which has increased the risk of accidents leading to environmental damage within the northern Baltic Sea. During winter 2023–2024, the ice conditions were harder than in recent years, which highlighted the importance of the tanker vessels' capability to navigate in ice. Ice conditions increase the risks, especially in terms of older tankers and crews that are not accustomed to winter navigation.

The value of the Finnish Border Guard's readiness for the prevention of environmental damages increased clearly from the year 2022, which is due to the rise in the volume of exercises related to the prevention of environmental damages. In 2023, there were more cases of oil spills from vessels than in 2022. The Finnish Border Guard was informed of 23 oil spills in Finnish waters. The observed spills occurred mostly in the vicinity of ports or the coastline and were minimal in volume.

The MERT (Marine Environment Response Tool) information system to support the operational command in the prevention of environmental damage was completed. The MERT system is an integral part of the command and exercise activities related to environmental damages. The system is also applied by other authorities and the Finnish Border Guard's collaborative partners, such as the emergency and

rescue services in the coastal regions and other actors under environmental governance.

In 2023, the Finnish Border Guard finalised the specifications of performance requirements for operations related to accidents at sea involving dangerous and harmful substances. The requirements take into account both maritime SAR operations and the prevention of environmental damage.

### Underwater expertise

The Finnish Border Guard maintains continual readiness for underwater operations in order to manage tasks related to border security, maritime search and rescue, as well as the prevention of maritime environmental damage. In addition, the Finnish Border Guard's capabilities for underwater operations can be used in connection with other authorities' tasks in accordance with collaboration agreements and mutual assistance legislation. Divers are also employed in diving tasks that serve the activities of the Finnish Border Guard.

In 2023, the Finnish Border Guard's underwater capacity (offshore patrol vessels, technical equipment, divers) was used, for example, to locate and investigate the leak in the undersea Baltic connector gas pipeline, in ensuring safety and security during state visits and in safeguarding the operational functioning of the Finnish Border Guard's fleet. Moreover, the Finnish Border Guard supported other authorities, such as the Police in investigations related to underwater locations and the Finnish Environment Institute SYKE in the examination of environmentally hazardous wrecks.

# International cooperation

In the changed security environment, the role of international cooperation has become increasingly important for the Finnish Border Guard. The focus is on bilateral cooperation with our key partners and the exerting of influence in the European Union with regard to legislative work. As a result of the cooperation, the Finnish Border Guard is better prepared, with access to an intensified exchange of situational information and the possibility to receive bilateral assistance for border management in the changing border security situation. As a member of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency Frontex, the Finnish Border Guard has continued to participate in the standing corps operations as obligated. Toward the end of the year, standing corps personnel were more extensively engaged to manage disturbances in border security, and the situation will be monitored jointly with Frontex. The Russian war against Ukraine has continued to affect coast guard cooperation within the Baltic Sea and Arctic regions. Nevertheless, attempts have been made to promote various forms of collaboration by intensifying the cooperation.





The Finnish Border Guard hosted, on a monthly basis, officials from the Frontex standing corps in the Border Guard Districts along the eastern border and at the airports of Helsinki-Vantaa and in Lapland. In late 2023, the number of standing corps members hosted at our eastern border was increased significantly as part of an effort to increase the border surveillance resources necessary to control the situation at the eastern border. Efficient access to and use of this additional support was possible since the Finnish Border Guard has in recent years, jointly with Frontex, developed its readiness

### Bilateral and multilateral cooperation

The purpose of bilateral and multilateral cooperation is to maintain security and public order at borders, while also preparing to respond jointly to any challenges related to border security. The Finnish Border Guard has intensified its bilateral cooperation with, in particular, Norway, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, with the aim of advancing active information exchange as well as joint preparedness and bilateral support in case of different disturbances within border security.

In the prevailing situation, the cooperation of Finnish and Russian border guard authorities has mainly involved, in accordance with the relevant agreements and plans, work to solve operative issues deemed necessary for border security. Tripartite collaboration between the border guard authorities of Finland, Estonia and Russia as well as Finland, Norway and Russia was suspended in 2023.

### Participation in Frontex operations

In 2023, the Finnish Border Guard contributed to Frontex operations in compliance with the obligations set forth by the EU Regulation of the European Border and Coast Guard. Overall, shorter secondments with a maximum duration of 4 months in Frontex operations amounted to a total of 254 operation months. In addition, ten border guards were posted by the Finnish Border Guard to Frontex operations on a longer secondment. The number of operation days continued to increase as a result of the systematic rise of the participation level and due to the increased demand of resources in Frontex operations.

to receive international support. Within this development work, Frontex participated, in autumn 2023, in a large-scale multi-authority exercise concerning illegal immigration, which was led by the Finnish Border Guard.

### Coast guard cooperation

The Finnish Border Guard served as chair of the North Atlantic Coast Guard Forum (NACGF) in 2023. The chairmanship of the Finnish Border Guard culminated in a NACGF summit in October 2023, with over 50 chiefs and experts from the national coast guard authorities as participants. Autonomous and unmanned systems were selected as the theme for the Finnish chairmanship period.

The Baltic Sea Region Border Control Cooperation (BSRBCC) forum carried on its activities in a challenging operating environment, following the pandemic and the Russian attack on Ukraine. Cooperation continued without Russia's participation. The chairmanship period of Poland ended in 2023 with a summit of BSRBCC chiefs at which Finland assumed the leadership of the forum.

The development of the EU's Common Information Sharing Environment (CISE) to improve the exchange of maritime surveillance data continued during 2023. The aim of this initiative is to integrate the national maritime surveillance data systems into a single, shared environment, which facilitates the exchange of surveillance data directly between the IT systems. At the end of the year, the development of CISE proceeded to the phase of the operational exchange of information. The Finnish Border Guard was prepared to begin information exchange via CISE.

# Territorial integrity and defence readiness

The Finnish Border Guard contributes actively to our national defence in close collaboration with the Finnish Defence Forces. Border surveillance on the land and sea borders supports the monitoring of Finland's territorial integrity. The Finnish Border Guard trains conscripts in reconnaissance and guerrilla actions in the Border Jaeger Companies in Onttola (North Karelia Border Guard District) and Ivalo (Lapland Border Guard District). Special Border Jaeger training is provided at the Border and Coast Guard Academy in Imatra.

## The number of training days increased

The Finnish Border Guard monitors Finland's territorial integrity constantly. It has an immediate capability to safeguard territorial integrity and to carry out national defence. In 2023, the Finnish Border Guard continued developing its preparedness in terms of planning, command, operations and readiness to establish military troops. Alliance membership was taken into consideration in the development of the Finnish Border Guard's capabilities for military national defence, in close collaboration with the Defence Forces.

The number of training days for conscripts grew moderately from the previous year. Training days for reservists and personnel were further increased significantly in 2023. Training and exercises were combined to form larger training entities, thus reducing the number of separate exercises and training events. By doing so, it was possible to reduce work related to the preparation, administration and closing of exercises. The productivity and economic efficiency in the area of territorial

integrity and defence readiness was further improved as a result of the continued development of operational capabilities.

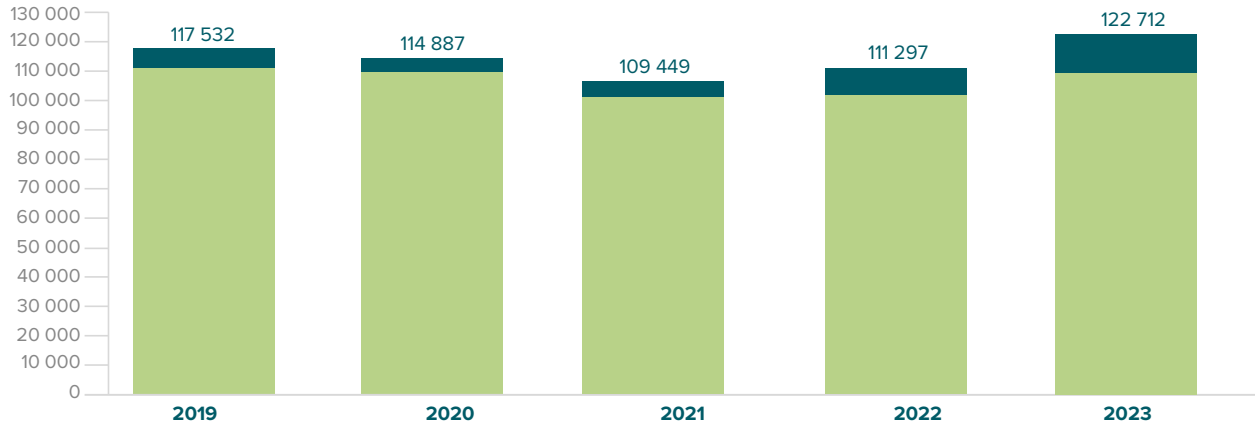
Refresher and voluntary exercises are crucial in terms of training both reservists and personnel to handle their tasks during crises. The training is structured with an upward approach, advancing from individual skills to troop exercises in realistic and relevant operational environments. The feedback from the participants indicates that the training has developed positively in 2023. The reservists in the border troops have, without exception, shown strong motivation and competence in the most demanding circumstances.

The Finnish Border Guard arranges exercises for military national defence, either independently or jointly with the Defence Forces. Exercising together facilitates the efficient development of joint activities in different situations and operations, both in normal and exceptional circumstances. The development of international collaboration will be important in the future as well.





## Training days



Reservists

6 775

4 838

5 140

8 923

13 218

Conscripts

110 757

110 049

101 508

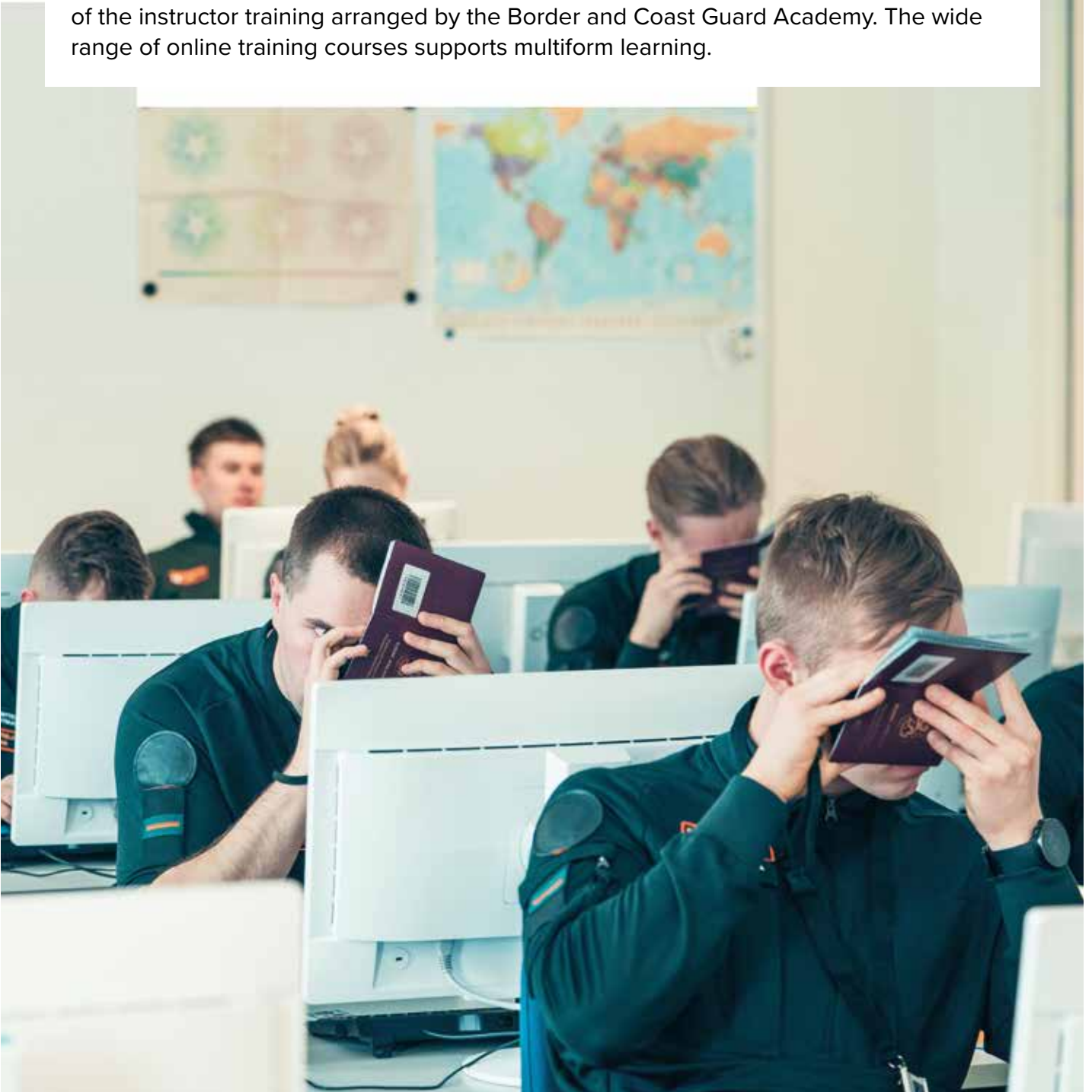
102 374

109 494



# Education and training

The Border and Coast Guard Academy provides students with a basic education that serves as the foundation for their future tasks as border guards and officers. Along with rapidly changing situations, further education and training is continuously required, with broad contents that are adapted as necessary to meet the current needs. Training offered at the units also plays a significant role. The uniformity of training is ensured by means of the instructor training arranged by the Border and Coast Guard Academy. The wide range of online training courses supports multiform learning.



### From practical training to real action

In 2023, a larger than normal basic course of border guards graduated from the Border and Coast Guard Academy. Because of the changed border situation, their final practical training was partly carried out in actual real-life situations. Cadets and officers – future bachelors and masters in military science – also contributed to the Border Guard Districts' efforts to manage the intensified situation.

In the training and exercises related to activities carried out by public authorities, the key areas include not only knowledge of legislation and safety at work but also matters of human rights, equality and non-discrimination as well as responsibility and sustainability.

As the eastern border traffic decreased drastically, the units have had more time available for training, refreshing and exercising. Many of the skills trained during the year were actually needed in practice when the border crossing points along the eastern border were closed.

Online training courses provided an excellent additional element for, among other things, learning about new devices and equipment as well as reviewing previously acquired skills, thus creating a uniform foundation for practical exercises.

### Special troops play a key role

The Special Border Jaeger Company under the Border and Coast Guard Academy provides special troop training of high quality for both conscripts and the staff members of the Finnish Border Guard. During the year, the unit's staff members participated in several refresher training exercises, thereby sharing their professional skills and competence within the Finnish Border Guard. Toward the end of the year, the conscripts serving in the unit successfully supported the personnel of the Southeast Finland Border Guard District in securing the borders in the rapidly evolving situation.



### Accredited provider of maritime training

In 2023, the Finnish Transport and Communications Agency Traficom accredited the Border and Coast Guard Academy as a provider of maritime education and training, and also approved the relevant study programmes. Based on the Act on Transport Services and the regulations of the Finnish National Agency for Education, the assessment for accreditation evaluates compliance with the national requirements and the requirements of the international STCW Convention and Code on the standards of training, certification and watchkeeping for seafarers.

The Border and Coast Guard Academy plays a significant role in terms of building the maritime safety culture within the Finnish Border Guard. With an emphasis on safe practices and good seamanship, the maritime safety culture is reflected in the daily activities of the Border and Coast Guard Academy. During 2023, the Border and Coast Guard Academy arranged a total of 66 weeks of training at sea. Especially in the training of those at the early stages of their career, it is essential to stress the importance of navigation, seamanship and consideration for other traffic at sea. In addition to ensuring a proper maritime safety culture, the training involves risk assessments as required by the occupational health and safety legislation.

### Added value through collaboration

At the national level, collaboration with other authorities is part of everyday work in education and training. The officials of the Finnish Border Guard have increasingly taken part in training provided by other authorities. The main collaborative parties are the Defence Forces, the Police and Customs. Internationally, collaboration in the field of education and training has continued to practically the same extent as before with the Baltic States, Poland and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex. Learning from other countries' experiences of border management at their eastern borders has enriched the training of Finnish border guards. The involvement of the Finnish Border Guard in international border management operations and the practical experiences of those participating are of benefit for the development of education and training.

In 2023, over 100 border guards, of whom 16% were female, graduated from the basic course for border guards. In 2023, the Border and Coast Guard Academy had some 250 students in the basic courses and further education and a total of 1,850 participants in continuing education.

# Technical sector

The Technical Division of the Headquarters of the Finnish Border Guard is responsible for ensuring that the Finnish Border Guard has access to up-to-date and efficient equipment, fleet, facilities and IT and surveillance systems. The Technical Division also provides the relevant maintenance and other basic technical services as necessary. In 2023, the Finnish Border Guard continued the development of its material readiness in response to Finland's rapidly changing security environment. The marked rise in the general cost level was reflected in the implementation of acquisitions and projects.



## Investments in information management and cyber security

The new data and cyber security unit, established in 2023, will complement and strengthen the information management within the Finnish Border Guard. In the coming years, the unit is tasked with developing and implementing solutions that will protect and reinforce the digital infrastructure of the Finnish Border Guard.

The projects for the basic renovation and renewal of the technical border surveillance systems on land and at sea (RAVALU I-II) continued. As part of these projects, the Finnish Border Guard acquired, for example, additional drones for the use of border guard patrols. In 2023, the Finnish Border Guard initiated a project to renew the operational information systems (RAVALU III). The current operational information systems will be gradually replaced by the year 2027.

During 2023, the Finnish Border Guard continued to actively contribute to the preparation of the launch of the EES (Entry Exit System) and ETIAS (European Travel Information and Authorisation System) systems as part of the European Union's Smart Borders initiative.

## Facilities development

The Finnish Border Guard continued, jointly with the Senate Property, the implementation of three major real property projects involving the garrison areas in Ivalo, Onttola and Immola. Within the Ivalo garrison area project, the premises for accommodation and vehicle service were completed, as well as the building for shared use with the Police. In Immola, the basic renovation of the Border and Coast Guard Academy building started. In Onttola, the building for the Soldiers' Home and sports hall was completed. The garrison area projects will continue as planned.

As regards the infrastructure for coast guard activities, the Finnish Border Guard continued developing the bases for the Coast Guard units. In 2023, the Coast Guard station of Tammissaari was relocated to Lappohja. Lappohja also serves as the central base for the Finnish Border Guard's

offshore patrol vessels (OPVs) with the related support functions, while also offering a depot for maritime environmental damage prevention materials.

The implementation of the Eastern Border Barrier Fence project progressed in line with the relevant resolutions. In 2023, the Finnish Border Guard piloted various construction solutions in Imatra (Pelkola) and Immola. The implementation of the second phase of the project began in the first-priority target areas, including the border-crossing points and their surroundings. The construction of the barrier fence will continue until 2026.

## New acquisitions to replace outdated fleet

The project for the acquisition of the two new OPVs for the Finnish Border Guard advanced on schedule. The construction of the first vessel commenced toward the end of 2023. The new OPVs are intended to replace the outdated two Tursas class vessels and the patrol vessel Merikarhu, which has already been removed from operational use. The Finnish Border Guard will take the new OPVs into operational use during the years 2025 and 2026.

The project to replace the outdated Coast Guard boats was completed in 2023. The lifecycle upgrading of PV 08 class patrol boats continued, with the first seven upgraded boats being taken into use in 2023. The Finnish Border Guard received three new hovercraft vessels in 2023. The hydrocopters that are currently in use will be replaced by lightweight hovercraft by the year 2026. In 2023, the Finnish Border Guard continued the harmonisation of AV class boats used as support vessels.

Through the ongoing surveillance aircraft renewal project (MVX), the Finnish Border Guard will replace the two outdated Dornier surveillance aircraft with two new multi-purpose manned aircraft. In 2023, a negotiation round was arranged with the supplier candidates and various aircraft types and surveillance systems were evaluated. The procurement contract will be concluded with the selected supplier in June 2024. The new surveillance aircraft will be taken into operational use during 2026–2027.

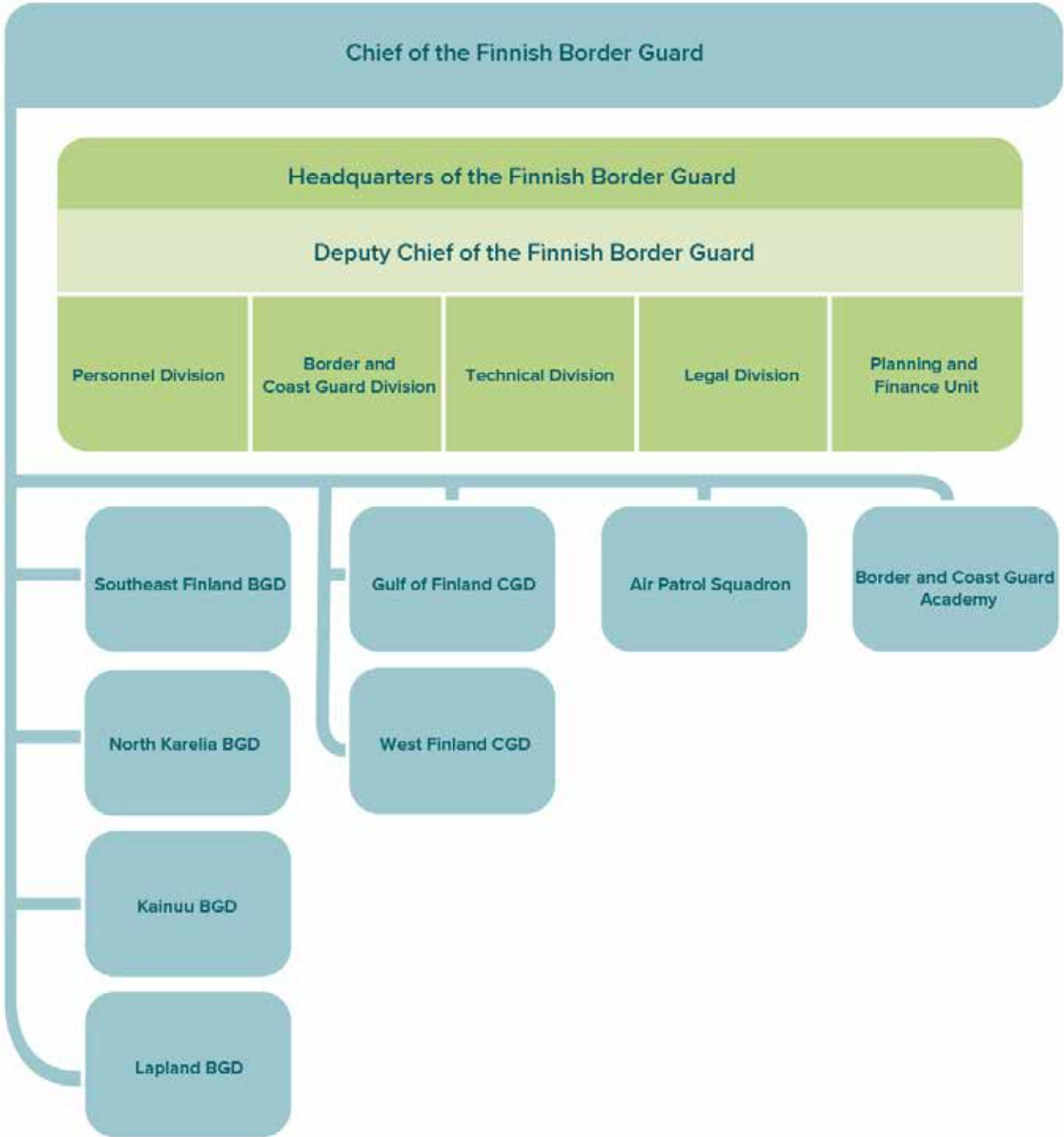
# Legislative work

The Finnish Border Guard Headquarters also serves as the Border Guard Department within the Ministry of the Interior. Its duties include legislative work related to the statutory functions and powers of the Finnish Border Guard.

The functioning of the Border Guard legislation was evaluated in the preliminary survey project that ended in spring 2022, with a special focus on border surveillance, border checks and crime prevention activities carried out by the Finnish Border Guard. Based on the preliminary survey, three legislative projects were set up in 2023. The first amendments to the Act on Crime Prevention by the Finnish Border Guard, which were related to the changes of the Coercive Measures Act, entered into force in November 2023. Revisions are also in preparation as regards the Finnish Border Guard's investigative powers.

Within the legislative project concerning the personnel resources of the Finnish Border Guard, a proposal was prepared for amendments that would allow the Finnish Border Guard to fill certain civil offices without announcing vacancies publicly and also to engage cadets in its activities during any disturbances that fall under the jurisdiction of the Finnish Border Guard. In addition, a proposal was prepared for regulation to enable the Finnish Border Guard to draw more advantage from modern technologies, such as radio technical and other technical surveillance, in its statutory tasks.

# Organisation 2023



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