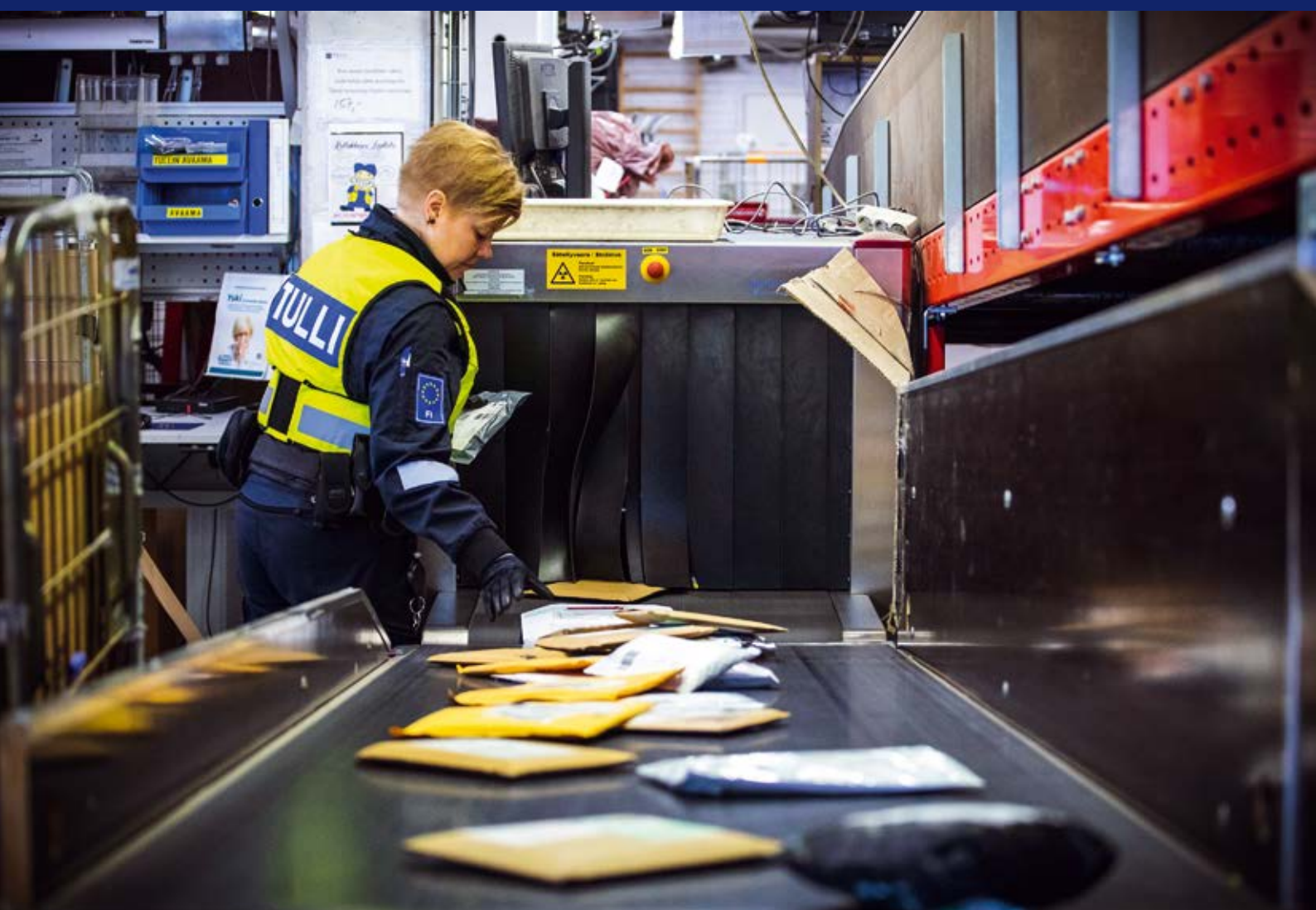


Finnish Customs Enforcement 2020



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Oh, what a year...

We are looking back on a year that we will certainly remember for the rest of our lives. Many things turned round 90 or even 180 degrees last year. However, many things also remained unchanged – or even became stronger. Anyway, last year brought so many new changes to our operating environment and not all of them can be hidden in the desk drawer. Because of the coronavirus? No! Coronavirus is not such a phenomenon that responding to it would prompt change and even a desire for change. However, the pandemic is a significant catalyst, and will continue to be so in the near future.

Despite the coronavirus pandemic, Finnish Customs again achieved good results in the enforcement sector in 2020. Even though business preconditions changed abruptly and radically in Finland and the EU, traffic flows changed their logistics routes and passenger volumes collapsed, the productivity and impact of customs enforcement did not drop, but instead remained at the previous high level. The pandemic and resulting changes in the operating environment, with restrictions and new forms of official cooperation, brought along completely new elements and phenomena, such as COVID sniffer dogs and nicotine pouches. Last year was also characterised by successes in discovering and shutting down large illegal online marketplaces. Successful customs enforcement during such an exceptional year is a good indication of our capabilities at Finnish Customs and our dedication to our work, as well as our incredible ability to adapt to changing conditions. Thank you all!

In the early spring of 2020, our previous operating models and ways of working needed to

be re-considered. When the coronavirus situation worsened, it was necessary to quickly determine how we can carry out our statutory duties, while protecting the health of our employees and customers as well as possible in all situations. For some, the answer was protection in customer service situations and, for others, working from home, if possible. I believe that Finnish Customs has succeeded excellently in this. In both cases, the solution has required significant resources and adaptation from all of us, as we have been forced to change our earlier, fairly conventional, operating methods and models.

The largest change most likely took place in interaction: how can we maintain personal and confidential contact with colleagues and customers behind protective equipment and through videoconferencing systems? The change has been rapid and inevitable – not everyone has been able to adapt in the same way. Only after the new normal has been achieved can we perceive what parts of this change need to be restored and what parts need to be strengthened in the future. The only thing that is certain is that there is no going back – some part of this change will be permanent.

I firmly believe that Finnish society, and Finnish Customs as part of it, has the opportunity, and the necessity, to change so that the authorities can better meet the expectations of citizens and companies. How do we need to change? Should we rethink our former structures and organisations? Change official duties so that some activities are abandoned altogether or that completely new tasks are introduced? Will we break down old silos or build new ones? (Note: a silo can also be regarded positively as an organisation or task requiring special expertise.) Will we re-define what activities belong to the authorities and what activities can be carried out by completely different parties?

So many questions, so few answers... To sum up my thoughts, I believe that, at the end of this decade, we will be working at Finnish Customs that looks quite different and operates differently. Let's do everything we can to make it even better!

On International Women's Day 2021,

Sami Rakshit
Director of the Enforcement Department

Crime overview

Finland is part of a continuously developing international criminal market. Crime is increasingly leaning on virtual environments and new technologies that offer instant and anonymous opportunities independent of national boundaries. The role of online crime prevention has increased at Finnish Customs. Currently, many elements of customs crime use the encrypted Tor network, anonymous instant messaging services, virtual currencies and new innovative payment solutions.

The operating environment of Finnish Customs is challenged by growing online sales and the fragmentation of online sellers, Brexit, the removal of the VAT rate limit and significant increases in digital data. Criminals are exploiting the structures of legitimate business in various ways, including complex customs procedures and extensive logistics chains. Increasingly complex and professional methods are being used in criminal operations.

The coronavirus pandemic reshaped the operating environment

The outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic during the first half of 2020 forced Customs Investigation and criminals to adapt to new circumstances. International organised crime has once again shown its large-scale adaptation and cooperation abilities. Criminals have developed their operations and started to exploit new international supply chains, logistics solutions and COVID-related products in illegal trading and smuggling. Societies in a state of crisis and the fears and uncertainties of citizens have been exploited to seek profits.

The exceptional circumstances caused by the pandemic and, in particular, restrictions imposed on border crossings have affected the operating methods of criminals and the number of offences. When passenger transport was interrupted, the smuggling of banned substances and restricted products in passenger transport came to a halt. Instead, the illegal importing of these substances and products in postal, express courier and cargo services increased. Large quantities of narcotic substances and snus have been uncovered in postal traffic, as well as significant amounts of nicotine products as a new phenomenon. In addition, narcotic substances, snus, cigarettes and alcohol have been smuggled into Finland via commercial channels.

Due to changes in passenger and goods transport, the Enforcement Department of Finnish Customs has set its sights on commercial cargo and goods transports during the pandemic. Passenger control resources and activities have been shifted to the control of deliveries sent from online shops and to warehouses and logistics centres. As a result, new cases, operators and routes have been discovered.

The total number of customs offences has decreased for a few years now, already before the coronavirus pandemic. This trend also continued in 2020: Finnish Customs uncovered a total of 6,641 criminal cases, down by 1,000 from the previous year. This downward trend is explained, for example, by the decrease in basic narcotics offences via postal services due to the shutdown of Tor network servers. In addition, lower passenger volumes have reduced the number of regular and summary penal orders resulting from tax fraud.

Impact of crime prevention by Customs: EUR 57 million

The impact of customs crime prevention was high in 2020, totalling EUR 57 million, which is an indication of the successful targeting of activities. This amount consists of EUR 26 million of recovered criminal proceeds, EUR 12 million of taxes evaded in criminal activities, and EUR 19 million of assets not seized during investigated cases.

Criminals are arming themselves increasingly in Europe, and a similar trend has also been seen in Finland. In 2020, Finnish Customs seized a total of 534 firearms, clearly the largest number in five years. Of these firearms, 506 were gas weapons of which over 300 more than in the previous year were seized as a result of enhanced control. Nearly 100 licensed gas weapons and starter pistols that can easily be modified into functioning firearms were seized from passengers arriving from Estonia, Russia and Sweden, and especially from postal deliveries sent from the Czech Republic. This can be explained by the Czech Republic's plans to only enforce the EU firearms directive in 2022, while Finland and the majority of other European countries already ratified it in 2019. Gas weapons have been sold in Finland in the Tor network.

The number of narcotics offences decreased

From the point of view of Finnish Customs, the coronavirus pandemic seems to have a lower impact on the status of narcotic substances and narcotics offences in Finland than what was originally expected. Unlike in other Nordic countries, narcotics have been available in the Finnish market in large quantities, and the use of narcotics has even increased. Due to travel restrictions, narcotics have been increasingly smuggled via postal, courier and cargo services.

In 2020, Finnish Customs uncovered a total of 1,442 narcotics offences, less than in the previous year. Of these, 1,114 were basic narcotics offences that were mainly uncovered in postal services. This quantity was slightly lower than in the previous year. The successful activities of the authorities targeted at marketplaces in the darknet and changes in importing methods reduced the number of small narcotics shipments. In recent years, Finnish Customs, in cooperation with other authorities, has closed Sipulikanava, Silkkitie and Sipulimarket – the largest websites in narcotics trading – seized their servers, and uncovered their transactions and the identities of sellers and buyers. This has shaken trust in narcotics trading in the Tor network and in its anonymity.

Furthermore, the number of aggravated narcotics offences (272) was lower than in the

previous year. The boundary between a basic and an aggravated offence was crossed in several cases of seized amphetamine, marijuana, Subutex and ecstasy. The role of non-Finnish criminals in aggravated narcotics offences has increased to nearly 60 per cent.

Narcotics are mainly imported into Finland from the Baltic countries and Western Europe by air and sea, and particularly across the northern land border from Sweden. Postal and express courier services are especially exploited in narcotics trading in the darknet. Finland is also used as a transit country when smuggling narcotics and precursors from Asia to Europe.

Considerable amounts of many narcotic substances seized

Even though the volume of many individual seized narcotic substances increased in 2020, the total volume of seized narcotics (769 kilograms) was much lower than in the previous year. This can largely be explained by the volume of seized khat (427 kilograms) being nearly 900 kilograms lower than in the year before. Travel restrictions naturally reduced the amount of narcotics smuggled by airline passengers.

Cannabis is the most common narcotic substance used in Finland. Marijuana is clearly the most widely used cannabis product at present.



In 2020, Finnish Customs seized the highest amount of marijuana in ten years (280.4 kilograms), whereas only 0.7 kilograms of hashish were seized. The amount of hashish decreased because it is no longer smuggled by airline passengers. Marijuana is imported through express cargo and commercial goods transports, especially from Spain. Growing cannabis at home has lost its popularity due to its difficulty and associated risks.

According to wastewater surveys conducted by the National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL), more amphetamine was used in 2020 than ever before in Finland. The surveys only revealed small volumes of methamphetamine. The total amount of amphetamine and methamphetamine seized by Finnish Customs (42.4 kilograms) was significantly higher than in the previous year. The amount of methamphetamine was 1.8 kilograms, seized almost completely in conjunction with a single courier case. Amphetamine was mostly imported into Finland by sea from Estonia and Sweden. It was also smuggled across the northern land border from Sweden. Amounts of amphetamine that meet the characteristics of an aggravated offence have also been uncovered in postal services. In most cases, substances originated in the Netherlands or Belgium.

The amount of seized ecstasy (79,450 tablets) was twice the amount seized in the previous year. This increase can partly be explained by a single case of roughly 40,000 tablets. The second highest amount of cocaine in five years (10 kilograms) was seized. Wastewater surveys show that record amounts of cocaine are used especially in the Helsinki region. Cocaine is smuggled into Finland by airline passengers and by lorries. Finnish Customs seized 40 grams of heroin, mainly the same amount as in previous years. Fewer LSD doses (1,700 units) were seized than in recent years.

A total of 236,850 pharmaceuticals were seized, significantly more than the year before. The amount of Subutex, a buprenorphine product, increased considerably: a total of 54,520 tablets, nearly 40,000 more than in the previous year, were seized. Currently, Subutex is the most common cause of substance abuse in Finland, alongside amphetamine, and its popularity is showing no signs of a decrease. France remains the primary country of origin and departure for smuggling Subutex into Finland, while Sweden acts as an interim storage country. Other pharmaceuticals, such as alprazolam and clonazepam, were especially imported via postal services and to a smaller extent by passengers from Estonia and Sweden.

The Customs Laboratory identified fewer new yet-unclassified narcotic substances than in previous years. In 2020, large amounts of GBL, a psychotropic substance banned from the consumer market, were seized (287 litres in total), especially from postal consignments sent from the Netherlands.

Large numbers of pharmaceutical offences and nicotine products

In 2020, Finnish Customs uncovered 238 doping offences, more than in the previous year. There were also significantly more aggravated offences than in recent years. However, the number of seized doping substances decreased clearly from the year before, to 34,680 tablets or ampoules. Doping substances are ordered and imported by individuals and organised crime groups. Nearly 90 per cent of all substances seized in 2020 were seized from postal and courier services, with international mail at Helsinki Airport accounting for the majority. The most common substances were dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA), testosterone and anabolic steroids.

Finland's geographic location and good flight connections make it an ideal transit country for smuggling doping substances and pharmaceuticals. Consignments are transferred between different countries and customs warehouses in the EU until they are removed from the scope of transiting. After this, substances most likely are distributed to illegal markets in the EU.

Finnish consumers continue to order pharmaceuticals from the internet, regardless of warnings. The majority of individual pharmaceutical offences are detected in postal and courier services. In 2020, Finnish Customs seized pharmaceuticals such as erectile dysfunction drugs and melatonin. During the coronavirus pandemic, online sales of pharmaceuticals have increased alongside with the proportion of counterfeits from all products sold.

After travel restrictions were imposed, nicotine products subject to the pharmaceuticals legislation were started to be ordered especially from Sweden to replace snus. As a result, more than twice the number of pharmaceutical offences (1,471) were recorded in 2020 than in previous years. Nicotine products also accounted for a significant part of the total volume of seized pharmaceuticals (370,390 in total). Nicotine products often come in small pouches inside packages resembling snus cans. A total of 242,460 nicotine pouches were seized. Nicotine products do not contain any tobacco, only nicotine added artifi-



cially to the binding agent. Products that contain at most 4 mg of nicotine per pouch are regarded as self-care medicines. Instead, products containing more than 4 mg of nicotine are classified as pharmaceuticals that cannot be brought into Finland without a prescription.

Economic crime covered by legitimate business

Economic crime investigated by Finnish Customs often involves activities that exploit the structures of legitimate business, invented trading and shell corporations. Criminal activities are carried out, for example, by circulating goods and customs clearance documents, creating fictitious invoicing chains to obtain unfounded tax refunds or exploiting various customs procedures. In the shadow economy, criminals are agile in crossing national boundaries and well-aware of national and international legislation. In 2020, Finnish Customs recorded 110 new economic crime reports, and the investigation of 115 economic crime cases was completed. Finnish Customs investigates VAT carousel fraud in close cooperation with other authorities.

During the coronavirus pandemic, phishing messages related to the crisis, malware and fraud have increased in data networks. Dark trading in healthcare products has become a global business, to which organised criminal groups are also linked. Personal protective equipment, medical products, pharmaceuticals and vaccines sold in online shops have increased the risk of counterfeit products. During the coronavirus pandemic, Finnish Customs has paid special attention to the import and export of medical products and protective equipment, particularly to counterfeit products and compliance with requirements.

The number of environmental and intellectual property offences regarded as economic crime has remained fairly low. Regarding environmental offences during the coronavirus pandemic, international dialogue has revolved around the processing of health material and related illegal activities, China's wildlife markets, the use of threatened plant species to treat the coronavirus disease, and the impact of travel restrictions on the smuggling of animals. In 2020, Finnish Customs only recorded a few nature conservation offences and CITES cases. Cases are primarily uncovered in postal services and passenger traffic, with illegal products being especially discovered in online shopping. Furthermore, only a few cases of food fraud are reported annually to Finnish authorities.

Record volumes of snus seized

Crashed passenger volumes had a significant impact on the smuggling and illegal trading of products subject to high taxes. After all, cigarettes, snus and alcoholic beverages have mainly been smuggled by passengers in recent years. In 2020, Finnish Customs recorded 917 tax fraud cases. Even though the number of cases decreased by roughly one third from the year before, the volume of seized and detained products was considerable as a result of several larger cases. This development was affected by changes in criminals' operating methods and the successful realignment of control activities by Finnish Customs. During the coronavirus pandemic, more cases have been uncovered in postal and express cargo services and in commercial goods transport.

A total of 4.5 million cigarettes were seized and detained in conjunction with criminal cases, being the largest number in five years. This can be explained by a few large smuggling cases, in which nearly 3.5 million cigarettes were found in commercial road transport, hidden in cargo and trailer structures. Smuggled cigarettes are mainly found in cars and lorries arriving from Russia.

Snus is smuggled from Sweden, primarily in cars and vans, as well as in cargo transport. As a result of travel restrictions, snus was especially imported in commercial transports and to a large extent in express cargo services from Sweden, Estonia and Lithuania. In 2020, the number of snus cases and the amount of seized snus increased clearly from the year before. More than 280 snus cases were recorded, and a record amount of snus (7,011 kilograms) was seized. Converted into snus cans of 15 grams, this amount is equal to 467,400 cans. Highly professional international distribution chains have been uncovered in smuggling operations.

In 2020, Finnish Customs seized a total 11,740 litres of alcohol, over 10,000 litres more than in the previous year. Altogether 112 alcohol offences were recorded. In passenger transport, 206 beverage consignments, containing 103,510 litres of alcohol, were reported for imposing taxes. In commercial transport, corresponding figures were 340 and 968,730 respectively. Finnish Customs uncovered large individual loads in ferry traffic. The importing and resale of alcohol have increasingly shifted to online channels. Large quantities of alcoholic beverages are ordered online from Central Europe, for example, for further distribution in Finland.

Illegal importation of alcohol and beverages

Finnish Customs completed a preliminary investigation of a case in which alcoholic and soft beverages were imported from Germany into Finland between 2015 and 2019. No excise duties were paid on the imported alcoholic and soft beverages. According to the Finnish Tax Administration's calculations, some EUR 440,000 of taxes have been evaded. The case is classified as aggravated tax fraud, an aggravated alcohol offence, an alcohol offence, tax fraud and minor tax fraud. During the preliminary investigation, six individuals were suspected of being involved in the criminal operation.

Investigations were initiated at Finnish Customs when the Helsinki Police Department, during its investigations, started to suspect that alcoholic and soft beverages were being imported for commercial purposes. As a result, investigations were transferred to the Economic Crime Investigation Unit of Finnish Customs. On the basis of the evidence obtained during the preliminary investigation by Finnish Customs, it is suspected that one individual ordered large volumes of alcoholic and soft beverages from Germany for delivery to Finland via the internet and further distributed them in Finland. It is also suspected that two representatives of a transport company arranged the importing of the beverages with

this individual and ordered alcoholic beverages from Germany through person in question. Three other individuals are also suspected of having ordered alcoholic and soft beverages from Germany for delivery to Finland through the same individual.

On the basis of the preliminary investigation, there is reason to suspect that the alcoholic and soft beverages were transported from Germany to Finland via road transport as "overloaded" cargo, and no consignment notes were prepared for the transport. There is also evidence that the costs arising from the transport of the beverages were primarily paid in cash, and the client and transport company did not write any receipts.

During the preliminary investigation, a total of 13 witnesses were heard, five in Germany and one in Estonia, on the basis of requests for legal assistance. Finnish and German customs authorities were also engaged in cooperation during the preliminary investigation. When conducting the preliminary investigation, precautionary measures were also targeted at the property of two suspects to trace illicit profits. According to current information, the suspected offences will be processed at Helsinki District Court during February 2021.



Closer cooperation in the prevention of food fraud

Food-related crime is a diverse international phenomenon that is difficult to investigate. In the EU, annual returns in the agricultural sector alone total hundreds of billions of euros which increases the attractiveness of food fraud. Furthermore, sentences issued in food fraud cases are often relatively mild, and the risk of being caught has been fairly low until recent years.

According to the EU's estimates, food fraud cases generate annual costs of roughly EUR 8–12 billion for the EU. Food fraud has an adverse impact on law-abiding traders and also presents risks to the health and safety of citizens.

Based on an analysis conducted in the EU, food fraud typically involves olive oil, milk, honey, saffron, orange juice, wine, vanilla extract and salmonids. In Finland, potential targets also include berries, organic products and food supplements.

Crime may be present in any part of the food production chain. This has an impact on the roles of different authorities and their opportunities to prevent crime. Food fraud may involve the replacement of one ingredient, such as a specific fish species, with another. In addition, low quality may be concealed or incorrect origin, date or organic labels may be used. Products may also include non-permitted ingredients, or they may be counterfeit or diluted. In practice, food fraud cases comprise many types of criminal activity which presents challenges during their investigation and court proceedings.

The coronavirus pandemic has had an impact on food fraud in Finland and the rest of the world. It is suspected to have increased potential food fraud, especially in the online sale of food products.

Fast-paced markets call for proactivity

Finnish Customs plays an important part in preventing food fraud in commercial imports. According to its sampling plan, Finnish Customs supervises the safety of imported non-animal-based food products and certain consumer goods, as well as their compliance with regulations. In addition, Finnish Customs supervises certain "combination foods" that contain processed animal-based ingredients

in addition to plant-based ingredients. The authority of Finnish Customs is based on the Food Act, the Consumer Safety Act, the Act on Cosmetic Products and the Chemicals Act. Monitoring samples are examined in the Customs Laboratory, and results are reported regularly to the Finnish Food Authority and the EU Commission, among others. Finnish Customs also assists other authorities and has taken an active role in international Opon operations of Europol and Interpol, the goal of which is to uncover food fraud.

During the spring of 2021, Finnish Customs and the Finnish Food Authority launched an undertaking as part of the action plan for combating the shadow economy and economic crime. Its goal is to develop cooperation between the organisations in cross-border goods transports and to improve the efficiency of coordination in the prevention of food fraud.

The food industry is a financially significant and global sector in which product cycles and consumer trends develop and change at a fast pace. This is why the food industry is also susceptible to fraud. To correctly target supervisory activities, it is important to monitor the operating environment continuously and proactively. It should however be noted that it may take time before international trends affect Finnish markets. Close cooperation between the authorities is important in the prevention of food fraud. In this, Finland is in a good position and has long traditions.





New undertakings to combat the shadow economy and economic crime

Finnish Customs, together with other authorities and ministries, has prepared a national strategy and action plan against the shadow economy and economic crime for 2020–2023. Finnish Customs will also participate actively in undertakings to implement the strategy and plan.

Strategy and action plan against the shadow economy and economic crime

The shadow economy and economic crime have been combated in Finland through various undertakings since 1996. A new strategy and action plan that extended previous programmes was approved by the Finnish Government in June 2020. The new strategy and action plan serve to implement the measures listed in the current Government programme to combat the shadow economy.

One of the strategy's goals is to promote fair competition between companies and a fair job market, and to prevent the shadow economy and economic crime. Another goal is to safeguard the operating conditions of the authorities and to develop cooperation between the authorities in combating the shadow economy and economic crime. The action plan to implement the strategy consists of more than 20 undertakings and more than 50 concrete measures that ministries, agencies and stakeholders will cooperate in carrying out.

A steering group for combating the shadow economy, led by Minister of Employment

Tuula Haatainen, is responsible for implementing and revising the strategy, and for monitoring the fulfilment of the action plan. The strategy and action plan can also be revised during their validity if required. The implementation group for combating the shadow economy and economic crime, representing different ministries and authorities, will report the progress of the action plan and also present any changes required in the strategy or action plan to the steering group.

Joint undertakings between Customs, the Tax Administration and the Food Authority

In the new action plan, two undertakings are particularly significant for Finnish Customs. The goal of one of these undertakings is to ensure that the Corporate Audit of Finnish Customs and the Tax Audit Unit of the Finnish Tax Administration have access to the information they need in the increasingly digital operating environment. In the other project, Finnish Customs, together with the Finnish Food Authority, aims to intensify the prevention of food fraud.

The undertaking carried out with the Tax Administration aims to make the process of corporate tax audits smoother. According to the current legislation, the obligation of taxpayers to present and clarify required information during tax audits is largely based on the voluntariness of taxpayers. This has proven problematic because in some

cases, the taxpayer being audited has intentionally impeded the audit by refusing to hand over the data required, for example. The undertaking aims to improve the data access rights required and redefine the sanctions imposed due to any breach of the disclosure obligation. In addition, technical means will be developed for Finnish Customs and the Finnish Tax Administration to process audit data in electronic format.

The goal of the undertaking between Finnish Customs and the Finnish Food Authority is to

promote the prevention of food fraud in cross-border goods transports. The undertaking will describe the processes with which Finnish Customs and the Finnish Food Authority can uncover and investigate food fraud cases. The aim is to develop cooperation and coordination with the Finnish Food Authority, and to improve its efficiency. To this end, cooperation models will be prepared and stabilised as part of the activities of both authorities.

Aggravated tax fraud based on the ship supply procedure

Since 2013, Finnish Customs has investigated an unusual case where the captain of a ship operating regularly in international traffic was suspected of aggravated tax fraud. In 2013 and 2014, the captain acquired more than one million tax-free cigarettes and some 1,200 litres of tax-free strong alcoholic beverages from Germany using the ship supply procedure.

When investigating the case, Finnish Customs acquired information from German ship chandlers by means of international legal assistance. In addition to the quality and quantity of the alcoholic beverages and cigarettes, Finnish Customs discovered that the captain ordered the products from German ship chandlers using the captain's stamp. As the captain paid the German ship chandlers in cash, no invoices for the purchases were sent to the shipping company.

Alcoholic beverages and cigarettes for sale from the ship

During the preliminary investigation and district court proceedings, the captain said that he sold part of the alcoholic beverages and cigarettes to the ship's crew members and handed the rest over to the Russian authorities when the ship made a stop in Russia. The IMO/FAL 3 and IMO/FAL 4 declarations submitted by the ship's captain in accordance with the EU reporting directive regarding the tax-free alcoholic beverages and cigarettes in the ship's hold and held by the crew members did not, however, match the captain's claims. Furthermore, the statements of other

crew members did not support the captain's claims of selling unusually high quantities of alcoholic beverages and cigarettes to crew members or handing them over to the Russian authorities.

The alcoholic beverages and cigarettes acquired by the captain were largely sold to unidentified individuals in Finland. When the ship arrived from Germany, it was moored at a Finnish port before its scheduled time of arrival. Before stevedores started working, the captain drove his vehicle off the ship and carried the goods acquired from Germany for distribution and consumption.

A European Arrest Warrant issued for the captain

A decision on the case was issued at Varsinais-Suomi District Court on 13 March 2020. The investigation and processing of the case took an exceptional amount of time because the captain suspected of the crime resigned from the shipping company and exited Finland after he was invited to the shipping company's head office and found out that he was being investigated. A European Arrest Warrant was issued for the captain, requesting authorities in different EU states to arrest the captain and send him to Finland.

Varsinais-Suomi District Court sentenced the captain to two years of imprisonment and to pay damages of approximately EUR 230,000 for evaded taxes.



Trading narcotics through online channels

Between 2017 and 2020, Finnish Customs was able to close and seize all significant Finnish websites through which narcotics had been ordered in Finland. At the end of 2020, Finnish Customs also closed the Sipulimarket website.

Narcotics were increasingly smuggled into Finland by post in the early 2010s. Customs Investigation was forced to find new ways to combat this phenomenon. At the beginning of 2014, Finnish Customs started to investigate online crime to uncover narcotics trading in the Tor network. Nearly all narcotics delivered to Finland by post had been ordered online.

Silkkitie channel

Finnish websites were also opened for narcotics trading. The Finnish Silkkitie channel was established in 2013, and its name was later changed to Valhalla. Narcotics were traded anonymously on the website using screen names and paid for with bitcoins. The Finnish sales platform was established because Finnish Customs effectively monitored goods ordered from other countries, but not goods delivered by post inside Finland. In addition, buyers were at a smaller risk of being caught, and they were able to purchase narcotics in Finnish. Between 2014 and 2019, Finnish Customs uncovered roughly 30 of the largest sellers in the Silkkitie channel, including "Douppikauppa", "Ekstaasikauppa" and "Hamppukauppa".

As a result of an international operation conducted in March 2019, Finnish Customs seized a Silkkitie server in France. On the basis of information obtained from the server, a joint

investigation together with the Police of Finland was launched, targeted at buyers and sellers in Silkkitie. During the operation, more than 3,000 reports of offences were registered as follows:

- aggravated narcotics offences: 130
- narcotics offences: 2,583
- aggravated doping offences: 69
- doping offences: 195
- aggravated firearms offences: 1
- firearms offences: 25
- smuggling: 44
- pharmaceutical offences: 67

Sipulikanava and Sipulimarket

The Sipulikanava image forum operated in Finland at the same time as the Silkkitie website. It was used for narcotics trading through the Wickr messaging app, while the actual deal was made in person. Finnish Customs and the National Bureau of Investigation closed Sipulikanava on 1 November 2017 and arrested the website administrator. In November 2020, Helsinki Court of Appeal sentenced the website administrator to four years in prison for abetting 18 aggravated narcotics offences and 12 narcotics offences. The judgement is not yet legally binding.

After the Silkkitie and Sipulikanava channels were closed, a new sales platform called Sipulimarket was established in the Tor network. Customs detectives also seized the Sipulimarket server in Poland as a result of an international operation. The investigation of the case is still in progress.

Narcotics use has increased in Finland

During the coronavirus pandemic, the availability of narcotic substances has been high in Finnish markets, and the use of narcotics has increased. Finland is in an unusual situation compared to other Nordic countries, in which the availability of narcotic substances has decreased, and street prices have gone up. In Europe, the low availability of narcotics and their precursors in China, among other countries, has made narcotics trading more challenging. Due to travel restrictions, the smuggling of narcotic substances has become more difficult. According to Europol, several countries have seen a shortage of substances, concentrations have been low, and prices have increased. However, criminals have adapted to the new situation and developed new routes, transportation channels and products for smuggling.

According to wastewater surveys conducted by the National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL), it appears that the restrictions on restaurants, meetings and border crossings have not had any significant impact on the use of narcotic substances in Finland. Despite chronological and regional variation, the use of narcotics has continued to increase during the coronavirus pandemic in line with the long-term trend. Currently, amphetamine and Subutex, a buprenorphine product, are particular causes of substance abuse in Finland.

Amphetamine and cocaine use has increased

Amphetamine has a strong foothold across Finland. Wastewater surveys conducted by THL in the autumn of 2020 show that volumes of amphetamine have reached new heights in various parts of Finland during the coronavirus pandemic. Wastewater surveys have been conducted since 2013, and they indicate that the volume of amphetamine was higher than ever in 2020. Cocaine volumes were also high, especially in the Helsinki region, although its increasing use has slightly evened out in the last few years. Regarding other narcotic substances, ecstasy is used in every part of Finland, and its volumes have not changed significantly. Instead, methamphetamine use is currently very low. The most common new narcotic substance causing substance abuse is alpha-PVP, which has only been detected in and around the

Helsinki region during recent surveys. The use of newer substances shows more chronological and regional variation than the use of more conventional narcotics.

Online narcotics trade is changing shape

After the coronavirus pandemic interrupted the smuggling of narcotic substances in passenger transport, narcotics have been increasingly imported by postal, express courier and cargo services. As restrictions have been lifted, more cases have again been detected in passenger transport. The popularity of and sales volumes in international marketplaces in the darknet have increased considerably during the exceptional circumstances. In addition to narcotic substances, these marketplaces have sold health products and protective equipment.

The effective responses of the authorities to marketplaces in the darknet have affected the status of narcotic substances in online channels. In December 2020, Finnish Customs seized the server of Sipulimarket, a website for narcotics trading, including its content. Significant volumes of narcotics and other illicit goods were sold through Sipulimarket. It was the only Finnish sales platform for narcotic substances in the Tor network after Silkkitie was closed in the spring of 2019. Torilauta, a darknet discussion forum specialising in the sale of narcotics, closed its website in November 2020 as announced beforehand by its administrator.

Online narcotics trade in Finland follows international trends. Whenever the authorities have responded to large marketplaces, sellers have transferred their operations to social media channels, closed groups and highly encrypted instant messaging apps.

Multi-million drug business on the Silkkitie and Sipulimarket websites

At the beginning of 2020, Finnish Customs started to investigate an extensive series of aggravated narcotics offences, in which narcotics were traded in the Tor network. The criminal activity started to unravel when data was seized from the Silkkitie website which closed on 1 March 2019.

A businessman worked in customer service on the Silkkitie website

During the preliminary investigation, it was discovered that a 34-year-old businessman living in the Helsinki region started narcotics trade on the Silkkitie website in 2014. He operated on the site under his seller profile "Sensitivity" until 2016. The businessman distributed narcotics via postal services and delivered large shipments to outdoor caches. He is also suspected of acting as a customer service employee on the Silkkitie website, assisting the website administrator known as "Kapteeni" (the Captain). For this reason the suspect's role in the criminal operation was more significant than that of a regular seller of narcotics. According to the preliminary investigation,

the businessman organised the delivery of tens of kilograms of various narcotic substances into Finland between 2014 and 2020. These narcotics were then distributed to hundreds of people, mainly in Finland. In addition to Silkkitie, narcotics were traded at lower prices on the Dream Market website, which has closed its operations.

A cash courier caught by German Customs

In 2018, the businessman's drug business grew when a 40-year-old musician started working as his partner. At the time, narcotics were traded on Silkkitie under two new seller profiles: "Express 24/7" and "Vauhtitonttu" (Speed elf). In 2019, sales of narcotics continued on the Sipulimarket website under at least three different seller profiles: "Express 24/7", "Douprikauppa" (Dope trade) and "Burgerking".

During the preliminary investigation, it was discovered that the two men acquired narcotics from the Netherlands, to which funds were transferred on several occasions. The largest single amount used to buy narcotics was approximately



Crystal MDMA.

EUR 100,000. The latest money transfer failed in February 2020 when German Customs seized more than EUR 84,000 in cash from the vehicle of the musician who acted as a cash courier. During interrogations, the suspect stated that the purpose was to buy cocaine, of which more than 2 kilograms could have been obtained with the seized amount. According to the preliminary investigation, narcotics were usually bought in cash or bitcoins from the businessman's Dutch contact, after which they were smuggled into Finland in express cargo.

The smuggled narcotics were kept in rented storage facilities in Helsinki, and they were made ready for sale in apartments rented in other people's names. To reduce the risk of exposure, the seller and buyer communicated with each other using PGP encryption or by routing their messages through apps that support encryption. The computers used for orders and payments were also encrypted. A good indication of how thoroughly the operation was planned is that separate mailers were recruited to send narcotics ordered from different parts of Finland to prevent the mailing operation from being connected to the two masterminds. In addition, the main suspect, together with an IT professional, developed scrambler software for bitcoin payments under the working name of "Karuselli" (Carousel). However, the app was never placed on the market.

Criminal proceeds of a million euros

During the preliminary investigation, it was discovered that at least 20 kilograms of 30–55 per cent amphetamine, 10 kilograms of crystal MDME, thousands of ecstasy tablets, some 500 grams of heroin, hundreds of grams of cocaine, roughly 100 grams of methamphetamine and close to four kilograms of cannabis were delivered to buyers, mainly through the Tor network.

The drug business produced criminal proceeds of approximately a million euros, of which Finnish Customs was able to seize EUR 100,000 in cash. In addition, bitcoins at a value of EUR 12,000 and certain other assets were seized from the suspects as criminal proceeds.

Narcotics seized at a value of EUR 400,000

In the summer of 2020, Finnish Customs seized a large quantity of various narcotics from the apartment of the musician who acted as the main suspect's partner in crime. The largest haul consisted of a total of 18,990 ecstasy tablets. In addition, 280 grams of crystal MDMA and small quantities of other narcotics on sale were seized

from the apartment. The seized narcotics would have yielded more than 20,000 doses, and their total street value would have been roughly EUR 400,000.

Finnish Customs calculated that narcotics were sold a total of 7,715 times at the Silkkitie website in the crimes under investigation. Considerable quantities of narcotics were also distributed via the Sipulimarket and Dream Market websites, but it was not possible to identify the exact figures for the substances and sales. A good indication of the scope of the drug business is that the narcotics that were sold yielded approximately 280,000 doses.

Returns on cannabis plants higher than proceeds estimated in case law

In 2017, the main suspect received a conditional sentence for a previous aggravated narcotics offence, which was investigated by Finnish Customs. During the preliminary investigation, it was discovered that, soon after being released from custody, he not only continued narcotics trading in the Tor network, but also started to grow cannabis professionally. He grew cannabis plants with three other men who were also interrogated as suspects. They had distributed nearly 15 kilograms of marijuana before being apprehended.

In case law, a single cannabis plant is estimated to produce approximately 25 grams of flowers. However, significantly larger quantities of flowers were seized, with a single plant producing approximately 200 grams at best. The selected varieties gave high yields, and the growing conditions were highly optimised. It is not yet known whether the investigations by Finnish Customs cause changes in the estimated production of a single cannabis plant in case law.

Case to be processed by district court in 2021

Finnish Customs investigated the case as aggravated narcotics offences, standard narcotics offences and as a pharmaceutical offence. During the investigation, twelve people were interrogated, five of whom were in custody. In addition to the main suspect, only some of the suspects have a prior history in narcotics offences.

The preliminary investigation records of the criminal operation have been sent to the Prosecutor's Office of Southern Finland for indictment proceedings, and the Helsinki District Court will handle the case. In January 2021, the prosecutor pressed charges against the businessman and the musician, his "right-hand man", seeking long sentences of unconditional imprisonment.

Large-scale international smuggling of narcotics

In 2019 and 2020, the Helsinki Investigation Unit of Finnish Customs investigated an international criminal operation where several different narcotic substances were smuggled into Finland. During preliminary investigations, Finnish Customs uncovered several aggravated and standard narcotics offences related to the importation, distribution and possession of narcotic substances. More than 30 people were suspected of these offences in Finland.

A criminal organisation consisting of citizens of many different countries was behind the criminal activities. Its operations were masterminded from outside Finland. On the basis of the preliminary investigations, a total of 138,000 Subutex tablets, 50,000 ecstasy tablets, 31 kilograms of amphetamines, 12 kilograms of marijuana and 750 grams of cocaine were smuggled into Finland. In addition, roughly 400,000 euros of cash were seized from the organisation.

On the basis of the preliminary investigations, the street value of the narcotics smuggled into

Finland would have been more than EUR 7.1 million. To illustrate the magnitude of the substances seized and distributed, they would have yielded at least 937,000 doses of narcotics for street sales.

Organised operations

The criminal organisation was traced during the winter of 2020 when approximately six kilograms of marijuana were seized from an express cargo shipment arrived in Finland. Fairly soon afterwards, it was discovered during the preliminary investigation that apartments had been acquired in Finland for the storage and distribution of narcotic substances. In April 2020, a total of 39,000 ecstasy tablets, 18,000 Subutex tablets and five kilograms of amphetamines were seized from a car and apartment in Helsinki. Later in August 2020, a total of 30,000 Subutex tablets, 11 kilograms of amphetamines, 500 grams of cocaine and 100,000 euros in cash were seized from an



Amphetamine and ecstasy tablets.



100 000 euros in cash seized from an apartment in Vantaa.

apartment in Vantaa. The narcotics and cash were hidden inside the apartment's structures.

The narcotics were smuggled into Finland by exploiting commercial goods transport. The organisation was designed so that every member had a designated role. Certain heavy vehicle drivers were responsible for importing narcotics, while others carried cash to other countries. Different people were in charge of the storage of narcotics and of their distribution. Certain individuals acquired vehicles for the organisation and apartments suitable for the storage of narcotics.

Criminal proceeds, i.e. cash obtained from sales, were carried to the Baltic countries by means of commercial goods transport. In July 2020, some 285,000 euros in cash were seized from a heavy vehicle driver, hidden inside an audio system in the vehicle.

Fines and prison sentences

Finnish Customs investigated the case in close cooperation with other Finnish authorities, including the Helsinki Police Department. Cooperation with international authorities also played a crucial part in the success of the activities.

Some preliminary investigations related to the criminal operation are still in progress. By February 2021, Helsinki District Court has issued sentences, ranging from fines to imprisonment of several years.

Cannabis products kept the Customs Laboratory busy

In 2020, the Customs Laboratory examined some 5,000 samples related to suspected customs offences. The majority of the samples sent to the Laboratory came from Airport Customs, and they were examined for an average of 30 days. Of all samples, 28 % were narcotics, 28 % were pharmaceuticals and 11 % were doping substances. In addition, 9 % of all samples included other substances banned from the consumer market. The most frequently identified substance from samples was cannabis or a cannabis-containing product (463 samples). It was followed by amphetamine (214 samples), MDMA (158 samples), 3-MMC (86 samples) and LSD (83 samples).

Only ten new yet-unclassified narcotic substances were discovered, even though roughly 30 new substances have been found annually during the past five years. In recent years, new narcotic substances have been effectively classified as narcotics in the Narcotics Act. Only 27 of the samples sent for laboratory examinations contained an unclassified narcotic substance.

New CBD products

Cannabis has for long been one of the most commonly used narcotic substances in Europe. It has also been clearly the most common narcotic substance in the Customs Laboratory's examinations for several years. According to a report issued by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), more than half of all criminal activities related to the use and possession of narcotic substances in 2018 involved cannabis. In 2018, a total of 24.7 million EU citizens reported that they have used cannabis.

Until the last few years, cannabis seized by Finnish Customs has mainly been marijuana, i.e. leaves and flowers, or hashish, i.e. plant trichomes. The Laboratory has particularly examined tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), which is the most significant cannabis compound measured by its intoxicating properties. Conventional cannabis products contain several per cent or even dozens of per cent of THC. However, markets for cannabis products are changing. Currently, some



The Customs Laboratory examined a total of 150 samples of CBD products, such as cannabis tea, skin products, snus-like products, electronic cigarette liquids, bandages, capsules, toothpastes, oils and plant flowers.

5 % of samples examined by the Customs Laboratory involve cannabis products that contain less than 0.2 % of THC. In these products, THC has been replaced with cannabidiol (CBD).

Even low concentrations of THC can be detected by sensitive analysis instruments, while it should be considered whether it is still purposeful to examine low concentrations. In some EU states, only cannabis products whose

THC content exceeds a specific threshold are classified as narcotics. No such limit has yet been defined in Finland. The Customs Laboratory is keenly monitoring how the situation progresses. It is not yet known whether the cannabis products that kept the Customs Laboratory busy in 2020 are still classified as narcotics in the future or whether they are pharmaceuticals, food products or possibly products similar to cigarettes.

Smuggling and sale of CBD oil with narcotic content

Finnish Customs has investigated a criminal operation in which cannabidiol (CBD) oil was imported into Finland and sold to consumers, by exploiting a limited liability company. As indicated by the preliminary investigation, some 10,000 bottles containing 10 ml of CBD oil were smuggled into Finland during 2019. In this case, these were classified as narcotic substances, because the oil contained tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). CBD oil was sold to private individuals residing in Finland via telesales.

During the preliminary investigation, it was identified that the CBD oil was acquired from Gibraltar and the Netherlands. The oil was placed in interim storage in Estonia for packaging before it was delivered to Finland. The operation was investigated as a narcotics offence, smuggling, a pharmaceutical offence, an accounting offence, forgery and aggravated money laundering.

A Helsinki-based company sold CBD oil under its trade name

The illegal operation was uncovered by Customs Enforcement in Helsinki in September 2019 when a person suspected of the crime arrived in Finland from Estonia and was inspected by Finnish Customs. During the inspection, several dozen CBD oil bottles packaged in envelopes, including their invoices, were found in the suspect's vehicle. A Helsinki-based company under whose trade name the oil was sold was marked as the sender of the letters and the invoicing party of the CBD oil.

In addition to the individual who imported the CBD oil, two other individuals are suspected of the narcotics offence. On the basis of the preliminary investigation, there is reason to suspect that all the suspects played their part in the procurement and importing of the CBD oil, and its marketing to consumer customers.

Criminal proceeds of EUR 185,000

During the preliminary investigation, assets have been seized from the company's bank account, and the suspect's property worth more than EUR 100,000 has been confiscated for security according to a district court decision. In addition, several hundred CBD oil bottles returned to Posti by customers have been seized. According to the Customs Laboratory's statements, small amounts of THC, classified as a narcotic substance, were discovered in all the examined CBD oil bottles.

During the preliminary investigation, information about the procurement of the CBD oil and the transfer of illicit funds was received from Estonia, the Netherlands and Gibraltar through legal assistance. The investigation was also conducted in cooperation with the Customs Laboratory, the Finnish Medicines Agency (Fimea) and the Finnish Food Authority.

Payments totalling approximately EUR 185,000 paid by customers to the company's bank account for the purchased CBD oil were regarded as criminal proceeds during the preliminary investigation. However, according to the company's invoicing system, customers were charged some EUR 250,000 for the CBD oil. Criminal proceeds were transferred to the bank account of the suspect's company based in Estonia and further to other suspects. Furthermore, criminal proceeds of EUR 20,000 were transferred to the bank account of an individual belonging to the suspect's inner circle. During the preliminary investigation, this was investigated as aggravated money laundering.

The case is currently under indictment proceedings.

Misuse of customs transit

According to the documents of Finnish Customs, thousands of kilograms of pharmaceuticals have been transited to Russia via Finland in recent years. Finnish Customs has investigated cases where there have been attempts to conceal the smuggling of pharmaceuticals and doping substances to the EU by means of customs transit. Substances declared to be delivered to Russia have been imported into the EU from Asia. However, it is suspected that large quantities of these substances have remained in different countries in the EU.

Finland a central transit country

In customs transit, goods are received in the EU from where they are delivered outside the EU either directly, via another EU state or after customs warehousing. During customs transit, goods are under customs supervision. Finland has a central position in customs transits due to Helsinki Airport, among other factors, as good flight connections from Asian countries mean that large volumes of goods are transferred outside the EU via Finland.

According to observations made by Finnish Customs, pharmaceuticals are transited between different countries and between customs warehouses located in different countries until they are removed from the scope of transit. After this, they most likely are distributed to illegal markets in the EU. Customs transits can also be exploited so that goods are declared as removed from the EU, even if they have actually remained in the EU. Customs transit via the EU often follows a specific route, and the customs declaration may include inaccurate information, so that the shipment cannot be determined to contain pharmaceuticals or other restricted or illegal goods.

Several suspected offences

In recent years, Finnish Customs has conducted several preliminary investigations due to suspicions of the illegal importing and warehousing of large quantities of pharmaceuticals and doping substances in Finland or elsewhere in the EU. There is reason to suspect that customs transit has been exploited illegally and in breach of regulations in these cases. During these investigations, pharmaceuticals have often been found to be counterfeit medicines.

In the suspected criminal cases, no customs warehouse had the pharmaceutical wholesaler licence as is required in the Medicines Act. According to the Medicines Act, the wholesale of pharmaceuticals requires a licence granted by the Finnish Medicines Agency Fimea.

In the cases investigated by Finnish Customs, the transport chain from the country of origin to the receiving country was unclear, and actual information on consignments may not have been available. The transport chain for pharmaceuticals is governed by detailed regulations and, due to licence procedures, lawful operators are supervised by the authorities. The transport chain for pharmaceuticals may consist of several modes of transport and several transport routes in the territories of different countries. The short-term storage of consignments in a cargo terminal or a similar location is possible for reasons of logistics to transfer the consignment from one mode of transport to the next. In all of the investigated cases, lawful operators in the field of pharmaceuticals were declared as senders and recipients throughout the transport chain. The sender or recipient cannot be changed during the transport chain.

Removing counterfeit medicines from the markets is important

To protect society and safeguard national health in Finland and in the EU, it is important to remove counterfeit medicines from illegal markets and to bring unlawful operators to justice. In addition, the distribution of counterfeit medicines in large quantities is damaging to legal markets and to lawful companies operating in the sector. Finnish Customs will continue to pay special attention to the flow of goods in customs transit.



Nicotine products used increasingly to replace snus

During the coronavirus pandemic, the increased popularity of nicotine products has been one of the most notable new phenomena in customs crime. Packaged in small pre-portioned pouches, nicotine products are classified as pharmaceuticals in Finland. In the pharmaceutical offences registered by Finnish Customs, nicotine pouches have been by far the most common individual seized product during the coronavirus pandemic. Nicotine pouches are used orally, similarly to snus, although they contain no tobacco. Instead, the amount of nicotine added artificially to the binding agent is usually much higher than in snus.

Nicotine products containing at most 4 mg of nicotine per portion are defined as self-care medicines in Finland, whereas products containing more than 4 mg of nicotine are prescription medicines. Regular tobacco-containing snus contains 8–22 mg of nicotine per gram, while the strongest nicotine pouches ordered from outside Finland can contain up to 280 mg of nicotine. Products containing more than 4 mg of nicotine cannot be imported or ordered by post without a valid importing licence such as a prescription. If the limit set for the nicotine content is exceeded, this constitutes illegal importing and is a pharmaceutical offence.

Separate markets for nicotine products

Nicotine products were first ordered to replace the use of snus in Finland when the travel restrictions imposed in March 2020 made it more difficult to import snus. The volume of nicotine pouches seized by Finnish Customs from postal and courier services has since increased considerably. Products have mainly been sent from Sweden and to some extent from Lithuania. Only small volumes, typically 10–20 boxes, have been seized on each occasion. Some nicotine products have also been imported by travellers from Haparanda and by ferry passengers from Estonia. Because nicotine pouches contain no tobacco, the EU Tobacco Products Directive does

not apply to them. Nicotine pouches are sold in more than ten EU states. For example, they can be bought from 200 locations in Tallinn.

The volume of seized nicotine products began to decrease slightly in the autumn of 2020 when the travel restrictions started to be lifted and passenger volumes began to increase. At the end of the year, snus was increasingly imported across the northern border from Sweden, increasing the availability of snus in Finnish markets. However, nicotine pouches are still ordered in high volumes. This indicates that separate markets have been established for nicotine products, and they are no longer only snus replacements. Nicotine pouches are packaged in cans like snus, and they are marketed in social media channels as strong tobacco-free nicotine snus. Marketing is particularly targeted at young people and women.

According to examinations conducted by the Customs Laboratory, nicotine products are available in an array of flavours and strengths. The quality of products has been found to be inconsistent: the nicotine content often differs from the level indicated in the product specification or the information provided on the sales platform. The nicotine content of the products examined by the Customs Laboratory exceeded the limit of 4 mg, meaning that a prescription would have been required to import them. Some products ordered in Finland have even contained more than 50 mg of nicotine, presenting a health risk to the product user.

Snus smuggling and aggravated tax fraud

In 2019, Customs detectives investigated a large snus smuggling operation by a Helsinki-based man and a related aggravated tax fraud. The case was investigated together with the Helsinki Police Department, which investigated an aggravated narcotics offence, of which the man was also suspected.

The preliminary investigation started in July 2019 when a police patrol stopped a car driven by the man in Kerava. The car contained a total of 67 kilograms of snus cans of various brands. In addition to snus, two kilograms of nicotine pouches that would have required a prescription were seized from the car. The police seized the snus and nicotine pouches, and arrested the man for investigating the case. After interrogation, the man was released.

Several smuggling trips

Finnish Customs continued to investigate the case while the man was free. On the basis of the investigation, there was reason to suspect that the man had already started the snus smuggling



Cache of snus in a spare tire space.

operation in the previous year, and that there had been several snus smuggling trips before the July seizure. As the investigation progressed, there were signs that the man was still continuing to smuggle snus.

Finnish Customs conducted targeted surveillance when the man drove to Tornio from Haparanda in August. At the same time, the border was crossed by another car, driven by one of the man's friends. They had driven north together from Helsinki. Both cars were driven from Tornio to Tervola in the southwestern part of Lapland, where they stopped outside a detached house. Outside the house, there was also a van which the men had driven earlier to the location from Southern Finland.

When Customs patrols arrived at the house to search the vehicles, the Helsinki-based man locked himself inside the car he had been driving. He sped off, even though customs officers asked him to step out of the vehicle. A chase of several hours started. While attempting to escape, the man caused a crash. When Customs attempted to stop him, he braked forcefully and drove his car into the forest. He then continued to escape on foot.

After a long search, the man was found and apprehended. His friend was also caught outside the detached house. More than 112 kilograms of snus were seized from the men's cars. During the same day, the Police seized a large amount of different narcotic substances from the men as part of its investigations.

Tax fraud of nearly EUR 340,000

During the preliminary investigation, it was discovered that snus had been imported illegally on 17 occasions, and on the basis of evidence obtained during the investigation, the total amount of snus was suspected to have been 914 kilograms. The man was suspected of evading excise duties of nearly EUR 340,000.

Helsinki District Court sentenced the man for aggravated tax fraud and smuggling on 27 November 2020. The man's friend was sentenced for abetting aggravated tax fraud and smuggling. The owner of the detached house in Tervola was also sentenced for abetting an aggravated tax fraud and smuggling. In addition, several snus buyers were sentenced for unlawful dealing in imported goods.

Gas weapons from Europe by post

In August 2020, Sea Customs in Turku inspected a parcel of an express courier company sent from the Czech Republic. The parcel contained a gas weapon and a 400 ml pepper spray, which was the size of ten regular pepper sprays. According to the Finnish Firearms Act, a gas weapon is classified as a firearm, and the possession and importing of a gas weapon require an official licence. As the recipient of the parcel had no appropriate licence, Finnish Customs started a preliminary investigation of the case as a suspected firearms offence. When the sender was investigated more closely, it was discovered that the Czech online shop had sent dozens of weapon shipments to different parts of Finland during 2020. It was also suspected that similar shipments would continue later.

Large amounts of weapons seized

Between August 2020 and January 2021, Finnish Customs seized nearly 100 gas weapons or so-called starting pistols from postal shipments. The shipments were mainly sent from the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovenia. Firearms had been ordered by individuals living in different parts of Finland who had no appropriate licences for importing firearms. The possession and importing of a starting pistol, i.e. an article intended for firing blanks, require a firearms licence if modifying it into a functioning firearm has not been prevented by certain technical means. The offences were investigated by regional investigation units.

In 2020, Finnish Customs uncovered one of the largest operations in its history involving the



A seized starting pistol suitable for firing gas cartridges.

importation and distribution of gas weapons. Between April and August 2020, a total of 39 gas weapons was imported into Finland. A young man is suspected of importing gas weapons and mainly distributing them in the Tor network. Many buyers were interested in the construction of the gas weapons and in modifying them. After being modified, the gas weapons could have been used in a similar way to genuine firearms, meaning they would have been hazardous and lethal. During a house search, Finnish Customs seized 12 gas weapons from the suspect. The suspect has admitted his guilt, but has denied that he knew that gas weapons were subject to a licence. The person is suspected of an aggravated firearms offence. The preliminary investigation is still in progress.

Another major operation to import, modify and distribute gas weapons was uncovered in September 2020 when Finnish Customs searched the property of a recipient of a seized shipment of gas weapons. More than ten gas weapons, hundreds of cartridges subject to a licence and a homemade pipe shotgun were seized from the recipient. In addition, a gunsmith's workshop

equipped with a pillar drill was discovered on the property, which was intended for removing technical obstacles from the barrels of gas weapons. A gas weapon was attached to a vice next to the drill. In addition, a few dozen cannabis plants with grow lights and irrigation systems were discovered. The case is being investigated as an aggravated firearms offence and a narcotics offence.

Criminals acquiring increasing numbers of guns in Finland

Previously, criminals have not largely been armed in Finland, but events that took place in 2020 indicate that the situation has changed. It appears that Finnish criminals are increasingly armed with various weapons. This is something security authorities working on criminal operations should consider. In the gas weapon cases uncovered in 2020, gas weapons were typically ordered by a person with a history of narcotic offences and violence. The need of such persons to possess a firearm may be regarded as an alarming trend in Finland.

Targeting customs control during the pandemic

Because passenger traffic volumes decreased in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic, Finnish Customs targeted its supervisory activities especially at commercial traffic, goods transports and online sales. Inspections were conducted on the basis of analyses and profiling. Targets were selected and inspected using sniffer dogs and technical tools, such as X-ray scanning and automated radiation monitoring to an increasing extent. Physical inspections were conducted in accordance with normal operating practices, while focus was also placed on tactical, structural and personal protection. Customs authorities of neighbouring countries were informed of the activities of Finnish Customs to ensure the smooth flow of goods transports. Safety was also addressed in all activities.

Cooperation between the authorities in monitoring face masks

During the outbreak of the pandemic, it was feared that the availability of respirators would

become a problem. It was also known that the manufacturing and distribution of face masks involved misuse.

In spring, Finnish Customs started to monitor personal protective equipment in cooperation with the Finnish Medicines Agency Fimea and Regional State Administrative Agencies. Monitoring requires the input of several different market supervisory authorities because their areas of responsibility have been divided according to the intended use of face masks. Fimea is responsible for masks intended for healthcare, while the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and Regional State Administrative Agencies oversee masks designed for professional use. Moreover, Finnish Customs and the Finnish Safety and Chemicals Agency are responsible for masks intended for the general public. The purpose of face masks is often defined on the basis of the manufacturer's declaration alone, which is why it has been difficult to determine the responsible supervisory authority.



Training a COVID sniffer dog.

Supervisory authorities have held joint meetings to identify the most effective supervisory measures and to identify any risks. The aim of joint measures is to secure the availability of face masks and ensure that face masks fulfil their purpose and are not hazardous.

Training COVID sniffer dogs

The aim was to use sniffer dogs of Finnish Customs in the prevention of the coronavirus pandemic. Sniffer dogs would have detected coronavirus carriers from among incoming passengers to help to forward infected passengers to appropriate healthcare services. An amendment to the Communicable Diseases Act was planned to provide the authorities with powers to use sniffer dogs in official assistance assignments.

Finnish Customs prepared for the amendment in the legislation by starting to train two of its sniffer dogs. Even though training made good progress, it had to be interrupted in December 2020 because the use of sniffer dogs was not

included in the proposed amendment to the Communicable Diseases Act.

Tax supervision targeted at alcohol consignments

When passenger traffic stopped, tax supervision was also targeted at commercial traffic. Finnish Customs especially inspected alcohol consignments ordered from other EU states via online shops. During 2020, a total of 340 alcohol consignments, containing 968,730 litres of alcoholic beverages, were inspected in commercial traffic. Of these, Finnish Customs seized 12 consignments. Inspection findings were reported to the Finnish Tax Authority for imposing taxes. In addition, low passenger traffic volumes were supervised, with 206 alcohol consignments, containing 103,509 litres of alcoholic beverages, being reported for imposing taxes.

Crime statistics

Crime overview	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Offences	9 581	9 409	8 943	7 835	6 641
Suspects of offences					
Foreigners total	3 216	2 902	2 919	2 856	2 121
All suspects	8 950	8 525	8 222	7 520	6 216
Impact of customs crime prevention (EUR million)					
Recovered proceeds of crime	26,70	28,00	30,80	24,50	26,00
Value of goods not seized	197,40	5,03	4,17	21,49	19,58
Evaded taxes	8,12	48,11	8,64	24,20	11,60
Total	232,22	81,14	43,61	70,19	57,18

Narcotic-related offences	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Aggravated narcotics offence	254	271	281	389	272
Narcotic offence	2 810	2 829	2 403	1 527	1 114
Preparation of a narcotics offence	39	39	12	34	35
Illicit consumption of narcotics	84	90	57	70	21
Total	3 187	3 229	2 753	2 020	1 442

Seized drugs	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Amphetamine and methamphetamine (kg)	56,2	58,8	46,3	24,2	42,4
Hashish (kg)	67	675	34	47	0,7
Heroin (kg)	0,3	0,3	0,1	7,3	0,04
Khat (kg)	812	2 304	711	1 313	427
Cocaine (kg)	8,6	3,5	8,2	32,9	10
Marijuana (kg)	25,4	115,2	199,9	255,6	280,4
Total (kg)	1 036	3 175	1 060	1 714	769
LSD (doses)	14 143	4 950	6 039	3 671	1 699
Ecstasy (tablets)	107 000	19 034	187 784	40 935	79 451
Buprenorphine (tablets)	20 994	15 136	33 375	14 868	54 518

Medicine offences	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Medicine offence	144	110	80	117	456
Medicine violation	710	632	633	564	1 015
Total	854	742	713	681	1 471
Seized medicines (tablets)	225 564	265 406	56 009	83 843	370 385

Doping offences	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Aggravated doping offence	35	6	13	9	23
Doping offence	49	37	50	47	46
Petty doping offence	160	186	167	150	169
Total	244	229	230	206	238
Seized doping substances (tablets/ampoules)	28 188	121 301	587 445	298 326	34 678

Seized snus (kg)	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total	3 442	2 390	6 744	4 940	7 011

Seized cigarettes (million pcs)	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total	4,3	3	2,7	2,7	4,5

Alcohol offences	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Alcohol offence	1	3	3	4	16
Alcohol violation	0	0	4	1	1
Petty alcohol offence	606	339	358	321	88
Aggravated alcohol offence	3	1	0	2	7
Total	610	343	365	328	112

Alcohol seizures (litres)	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Neutral spirits	32	6,5	210	0,5	4,4
Others	425	1 051,0	2 320	1 272,0	11 732
Total	457	1 057,5	2 530	1 272,5	11 736

Firearms offences	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Aggravated firearms offence	5	1	2	0	6
Firearms offence	28	22	31	33	103
Petty firearms offence	129	96	143	146	66
Firearms violation	1	1	0	0	0
Total	163	120	176	179	175

Seized weapons	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Gas weapons	187	96	127	187	506
Firearms	31	16	20	45	28
Total	218	112	147	232	534

Tax frauds	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Aggravated tax fraud	109	83	116	149	98
Standard offence	183	181	251	256	231
Petty tax fraud	622	822	927	957	588
Total	914	1 086	1 294	1 362	917

Customs offence investigations

Source: Customs Laboratory

Näytteet (number)	2020
Doping	558
Narcotics	1 423
Pharmaceuticals classified as narcotics	375
Substances banned from the consumer market	464
Pharmaceuticals	1 422
Unclassified narcotic substances	27
Other crime-related samples	116
Negative results	673
Total	5 058

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