

# Workplace Investigations

## Contributing Editors

*Phil Linnard at Slaughter and May*  
*Clare Fletcher at Slaughter and May*

## 01. What legislation, guidance and/or policies govern a workplace investigation?

### Finland

Author: *Anu Waaralinna, Mari Mohsen*  
at Roschier

Mainly, the Occupational Safety and Health Act (738/2002). In addition, the following also have relevance in connection to a workplace investigation: the Employment Contracts Act (55/2001), the Criminal Code (39/1889), the Act on Occupational Safety and Health Enforcement and Cooperation on Occupational Safety and Health at Workplaces (44/2006), the Act on Equality between Women and Men (609/1986) and the Non-discrimination Act (1325/2014). In addition, the employer's own policies must be taken into consideration while conducting a workplace investigation.

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### Netherlands

Author: *Barbara Kloppert, Mirjam Kerkhof, Roel de Jong*  
at De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek

Dutch employment law does not provide for a timeframe within which an internal investigation must be launched. However, it is important for an employer who suspects abuse or irregularities, to start an internal investigation without delay. In essence, that means that as soon as management, or – depending on the specific circumstances – the person who is authorised to decide on disciplinary sanctions against a certain employee, becomes aware of a potential abuse or irregularity, all measures to initiate an internal investigation should be taken promptly. If this is not done, the employer may lose the opportunity to take certain disciplinary actions.

The legal framework relating to an investigation by an employer into the acts and omissions of an employee are determined by, among other things, section 7:611 of the Dutch Civil Code (DCC) that stipulates good employer practices; Section 7:660 DCC (right to give instructions to the employee); the European Convention on Human Rights; the Dutch Constitution; the General Data Processing Regulation; and, if the employer uses a private investigation agency, the Private Security Organisations and Detective Agencies Act and the Privacy Code of Conduct for Private Investigation Agencies.

The legal basis from which the employer derives the authority to investigate can be based on the employer's right to give instructions (section 7:660 DCC). Pursuant to this section, the employer has – to a certain extent – the right to give instructions to the employee “which are intended to promote good order in the undertaking of the employer”. In many cases, an investigation of a work-related incident will aim to promote good order within the company. As such, the investigation is trying to:

- find the truth;
- sanction the perpetrator; and
- prevent repetition.

Instructing an employee to cooperate with an internal investigation falls within the scope of the right to instruct.

Subsequently, the employer must behave as a good employer during the investigation, pursuant to section 7:611 DCC. This is coloured by the classic principles of careful investigation: the principle of justification, the principle of trust, the principle of proportionality, the principle of subsidiarity and the principle of equality. Furthermore, the principle of hearing both sides of the argument applies and there must be a concrete suspicion of wrongdoing.

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## 02. How is a workplace investigation usually commenced?



### Finland

Author: *Anu Waaralinna, Mari Mohsen*  
at Roschier

When the employer becomes aware of possible misconduct, the employer must commence an investigation immediately, in practice within about two weeks. The information may come to the employer's knowledge via, for example, the employer's own observations, from the complainant or their colleagues or an employee representative.

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### Netherlands

Author: *Barbara Kloppert, Mirjam Kerkhof, Roel de Jong*  
at De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek

The workplace investigation can be exercised by an internal (ad hoc) investigation department of the company itself, for example under the direction of the internal audit department or compliance department. This is possible if there is sufficient manpower with the necessary independence, knowledge and experience. Case law, however, shows that courts tend to be more critical of internal investigations than external investigations. For more complex and sensitive investigations, a forensic accountant or lawyer is often involved. The advantage of involving a lawyer is that the investigation and its outcome are covered by privilege. This guarantees the confidentiality of the investigation, also regarding supervisors and investigating authorities. Yet, at the same time, there is increasing debate about the role of lawyers as investigators, given their inherent bias to work in the interests of their client (the employer).

The investigation starts with a plan of approach that must be signed by the contractor. This plan of approach outlines the legal framework of the investigation, such as the scope, the means to be used, how it

will deal with data, the use of experts, how the interviews will be conducted, the way of reporting and confidentiality. Furthermore, there must be a protocol for how the investigator conducts the investigation and that applies to all parties involved.

Gathering information can be done in various ways. For example:

- An inventory can be made of the household effects of a company. In the event of theft, an inventory can be an appropriate means of establishing exactly what has been stolen.
- An investigation of the books: this is an investigation of all documents of the company. These are not private documents of employees, but documents of the company itself. For an investigator, an interview can be a good way to gather more information, for example by interviewing witnesses. In practice, there are almost always several interviews with the suspects, the employer and other people involved.
- Open source research, which often involves researching a person's social media, or public documents relevant to the research. In principle, "open sources" refers to all public documents in the world; nowadays, many public documents are digitised.
- A workplace search, which includes everything present in the workplace: diaries, computer files, e-mails, letters, and even the contents of a wastebasket.
- A digital data investigation: this is a frequently used tool in fraud investigations. Most communication and documents are digital nowadays. It is, therefore, very likely that evidence can be found in digital data. Each of these means of investigation must respect the principles of an internal investigation and comply with the GDPR principles .

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### **03. Can an employee be suspended during a workplace investigation? Are there any conditions on suspension (eg, pay, duration)?**

#### Finland

Author: *Anu Waaralinna, Mari Mohsen*  
at Roschier

There is no legislation on temporary suspension in the event of a workplace investigation or similar. In some situations, the employer may relieve the employee from their working obligation with pay for a short period.

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#### Netherlands

Author: *Barbara Kloppert, Mirjam Kerkhof, Roel de Jong*  
at De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek

Suspension is usually a disciplinary measure. The employer may, for example, suspend an employee if it is necessary that the employee doesn't work during the investigation into their actions or omissions. Suspension has no specific legal basis in Dutch law, but several conditions can be derived from case law or collective labour agreements.

Overriding interest

The measure may only be taken if the employee's presence at work would cause considerable harm to the

employer's business or if, due to other compelling reasons that do not outweigh the employee's interests, the employer cannot reasonably be expected to tolerate the employee's continued presence at work. If there is a well-founded fear that the employee will (among other things) frustrate the investigation into their actions, the employer may proceed to suspend the employee.

#### Procedural rules

The principle of acting in line with good employment practice (section 7:611 DCC) plays an essential role in the question of the admissibility of the suspension. The principle of due care leads, among other things, to a duty of investigation for the employer and means the employer must enable the employee to respond adequately to any accusations.

#### Contractual arrangements

Many collective agreements or staff handbooks contain regulations on suspension and deactivation. The regulation may concern the grounds, the duration or the procedure to be followed. The latter includes rules on hearing both sides of the argument, the right to assistance, how the decision must be communicated to the person concerned, and the possibility of "internal appeal" and rehabilitation. Under good employment practice, the employer must proceed swiftly with the investigation and allow the employee to respond to the results. If the employee hinders the investigation in any way, it can be a reason to continue the suspension during the investigation.

#### Pay

In 2003, the Supreme Court ruled that suspension is a cause for non-performance of work that must reasonably be borne by the employer according to section 7:628 DCC. The employee has a right to be paid in nearly all circumstances, with limited exceptions (eg, if the employee is in detention and the employer suspended the employee in response to that).

#### Duration

The duration of the suspension during a workplace investigation is not legally pre-determined. However, the suspension of an employee must be a temporary measure. The relevant collective agreement often stipulates how long the suspension may last.

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## **04. Who should conduct a workplace investigation, are there minimum qualifications or criteria that need to be met?**



### Finland

Author: *Anu Waaralinna, Mari Mohsen*  
at Roschier

The employer must conduct the investigation, but the actual work can be done either by the employer's personnel or by an external investigator, for example, a law firm. Either way, there are no formal criteria for the persons executing the investigation; however, impartiality is required from the person conducting the investigation

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### Netherlands

Author: *Barbara Kloppert, Mirjam Kerkhof, Roel de Jong*  
at De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek

Workplace investigations, if they are to be of value, must be conducted by an expert, professional and independent party. To safeguard the independence of the investigation, it is crucial that neither the contractor nor any other third party can influence how the investigation is to be conducted or how the outcome should be reported. The investigation must be conducted according to the protocol drawn up at the start and the investigator must not be involved in the follow-up to the outcome.

There is an ongoing discussion of whether lawyers can conduct an objective and independent investigation, due to the bias inherent to their profession. On the other hand, investigation bureaus or committees are also not necessarily independent, as they are not regulated and not subject to disciplinary law.

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## **05. Can the employee under investigation bring legal action to stop the investigation?**

### Finland

Author: *Anu Waaralinna, Mari Mohsen*  
at Roschier

The employee does not have a legal right to stop the investigation. The employer must fulfil its obligation to investigate the alleged misconduct.

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### Netherlands

Author: *Barbara Kloppert, Mirjam Kerkhof, Roel de Jong*  
at De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek

Usually there is some kind of regulation in place as a result of which the employee is obliged to cooperate with the investigation. Nonetheless, there are examples whereby the employee refuses to cooperate. Especially in workplace investigations it will be hard to be able to conduct an investigation in such a situation.

There are, however, no possibilities for an employee to bring legal action in order or with the result to stop the investigation.

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## **06. Can co-workers be compelled to act as witnesses? What legal protections do employees have when acting as witnesses in an investigation?**

### Finland

Author: *Anu Waaralinna, Mari Mohsen*  
at Roschier

There is no legislation on a witness's role in investigations. However, the legislation on occupational safety requires that employees must report any irregularities they observe. Depending on the situation, participating in the investigation may also be part of the person's work duties, role or position, in which case the employer may require the employee to contribute to clarifying the situation. However, there is no formal obligation to act as a witness, and there is no legislation regarding the protection of witnesses. If a witness wishes, they may have, for example, an employee representative as a support person during the hearing.

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## Netherlands

Author: *Barbara Kloppert, Mirjam Kerkhof, Roel de Jong*  
at De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek

There is no statutory regime for employee witnesses in internal (workplace) investigations and, hence, no specific statutory regime for legal protection. However, as part of the idea that employees have to act in line with good employment practices (section 7:611 DCC), employees, who potentially acquired knowledge in a work-related context on the subject matter of an investigation, are typically required vis-à-vis their employer to participate in such internal investigations. The required degree of cooperation will depend on the type and nature of the investigation and the matter that is being investigated. The principle of “good employment practices” in turn requires the employer to be guided by proportionality and subsidiarity considerations: which information is relevant to the investigation and what is the least burdensome means of collecting such information?

This may also impact the degree to which an employer can involve employee witnesses in an investigation. Increased prudence should be observed, among other things, if the relevant employee witnesses may themselves become implicated in the investigation or when the employer envisages sharing certain investigative findings with regulatory or criminal authorities, for instance as part of cooperation arrangements in an ongoing investigation. In such cases, the relevant employee should at least be allowed to retain legal counsel before continuing interview procedures.

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## 07. What data protection or other regulations apply when gathering physical evidence?



## Finland

Author: *Anu Waaralinna, Mari Mohsen*  
at Roschier

Generally, the basic principles set out by the GDPR and the Finnish Data Protection Act apply to data processing in connection with investigations, including evidence gathering: there must be a legal basis for processing, personal data may only be processed and stored when and for as long as necessary considering the purposes of processing, etc.

Additionally, if physical evidence concerns the electronic communications (such as emails and online chats) of an employee, gathering evidence is subject to certain restrictions based on Finnish ePrivacy and

employee privacy laws. As a general rule, an employee's electronic communications accounts, including those provided by the employer for work purposes, may not be accessed and electronic communications may not be searched or reviewed by the employer. In practice, the employer may access such electronic correspondence only in limited situations stipulated in the Act on Protection of Privacy in Working Life (759/2004), or by obtaining case-specific consent from the employee, which is typically not possible in internal investigations, particularly concerning the employee suspected of wrongdoing.

However, monitoring data flow strictly between the employee and the employer's information systems (eg, the employee saving data to USB sticks, using printers) is allowed under Finnish legislation, provided that employee emails, chats, etc, are not accessed and monitored. If documentation is unrelated to electronic communications, it also may be reviewed by the employer. Laptops, paper archives and other similar company documentation considered "physical evidence" may be investigated while gathering evidence on the condition that any private documentation, communications, pictures or other content of an employee are not accessed.

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## Netherlands

Author: *Barbara Kloppert, Mirjam Kerkhof, Roel de Jong*  
at De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek

Dutch data protection rules are based on the EU Data Protection Directive. The employer has to notify the Dutch Data Protection Authority when processing personal data as part of an internal investigation. Given that the notification can be accessed publicly, it is recommended that the employer give a sufficiently high-level description of the case. In addition, the description should be sufficiently broad to include the entire investigation, and any future expansions of the scope of the investigation. Often companies make filings for all future internal investigations, without referring to specific matters.

The employer has to notify employees whose personal data is being processed about – among other things – the purposes of the investigation and any other relevant information. According to the Dutch Data Protection Act, this information obligation may only be suspended on restricted grounds, i.e. if the purpose of the investigation is the prevention, detection and prosecution of crimes and postponement is necessary for the interests of the investigation (e.g., because there is a risk of losing evidence, or collusion by individuals coordinating responses before being interviewed)). These exceptions on the duty to inform involved persons must be interpreted very restrictively. As soon as the reason for postponement is no longer applicable (e.g., because the evidence has been secured), the individuals need to be informed.

Dutch data protection law does not require the consent of employees. Consent given by employees, however, also cannot compensate for a lack of legitimate purpose or unnecessary or disproportionate data processing, as the consent given by an employee to its employer is not considered to be voluntary given the inequality of power between them.

Furthermore, internal company policies may contain specific data protection rules.

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## 08. Can the employer search employees' possessions or files as part of an investigation?



## Finland

Author: *Anu Waaralinna, Mari Mohsen*

at Roschier

Only the police can search employees' possessions (assuming that the prerequisites outlined in the legislation are met).

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## Netherlands

Author: *Barbara Kloppert, Mirjam Kerkhof, Roel de Jong*  
at De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek

When conducting an internal investigation (which must have a legitimate purpose), the employer must act in accordance with the principles of proportionality and subsidiarity. In line with these principles, the means of collecting and processing personal data during an internal investigation as well as the data that is searched, collected or processed, should be adequate, relevant and not excessive given the purposes for which the data is being collected or subsequently processed. These principles can be complied with by, for example, using specific search terms when searching electronic data, limiting the investigation's scope (subject matter, period, geographic locations) and, in principle, excluding an employee's private data.

The employer is, in principle, allowed to access documents, emails and internet connection history saved on computers that were provided to the employees to perform their duties, provided the requirements of proportionality and subsidiarity are taken into account. In other words, reading the employee's emails or searching electronic devices provided by the employer must serve a legitimate purpose (e.g. tracing suspected irregularities or abuse) and the manner of review or collecting and processing the data contained in such emails should be in accordance with the principles of proportionality and subsidiarity.

The employer can ask the employee to hand over an employee's USB stick for an investigation. Depending on company policies and (individual or collective) employment agreements, an employee is, in principle, not obliged to comply with such a request. A refusal from an employee, when there is a strong indication that this USB stick contains information that is relevant to an investigation into possible irregularities, may be to the disadvantage of an employee, for example in a dismissal case.

The following factors, which derive from the *Bărbulescu* judgment of the European Court of Human Rights, are relevant to the question of whether an employee's e-mail or internet use can be monitored:

- whether the employee has been informed in advance of (the nature of) the possible monitoring of correspondence and other communications by the employer;
- the extent of the monitoring and the seriousness of the intrusion into the employee's privacy;
- whether the employer has put forward legitimate grounds for justifying the monitoring;
- whether a monitoring system using less intrusive methods and measures would have been possible;
- the consequences of the monitoring for the employee; and
- whether the employee has been afforded adequate safeguards, in particular in the case of intrusive forms of monitoring.

These requirements can sometimes create a barrier for employers, as seen in a ruling by the District Court Midden-Nederland (16 December 2021, ECLI:NL:RBMNE:2021:6071) in which the employer had used information obtained from the employee's e-mail as the basis for a request for termination of the employment contract. In the proceedings, the employee argued that his employer did not have the authority to search his e-mail.

According to the District Court, it was unclear whether the employer had complied with the requirements of *Bărbulescu* regarding searching the employee's e-mail. The regulations submitted by the employer only described the processing of data flows within the organisation in general. Therefore, the District Court found that the employer did not have a (sufficient) e-mail and internet protocol and the employee was not properly informed that his employer could monitor him. In addition, according to the District Court, it was unclear what exactly prompted the employer to search the employee's e-mail, as the employer did not provide any insight into the nature and content of the investigation. As a result, the District Court was



unable to determine whether the employer had legitimate grounds to search the employee's e-mail. On this basis, the District Court disregarded the (possibly) illegally obtained evidence and ruled against the employer's termination request.

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## 09. What additional considerations apply when the investigation involves whistleblowing?

### Finland

Author: *Anu Waaralinna, Mari Mohsen*  
at Roschier

In respect of data protection, the processing of personal data in whistleblowing systems is considered by the Finnish Data Protection Ombudsman (DPO) as requiring a data protection impact assessment (DPIA).

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### Netherlands

Author: *Barbara Kloppert, Mirjam Kerkhof, Roel de Jong*  
at De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek

The former Act on the House for Whistleblowers already provided for several preconditions that a whistleblowing procedure must meet. For example, internal reporting lines must be laid down, as well as how the internal report is handled, and an obligation of confidentiality and the opportunity to consult an advisor in confidence must be applied. Employers are obliged to share the whistleblowing policy with employees, including information about the employee's legal protection. The employee who reports a suspicion of wrongdoing in good faith may not be disadvantaged in their legal position because of the report (section 17e/ea Act House of Whistleblowers).

The starting point is that an employee must first report internally, unless this cannot reasonably be expected. If the employee does not report internally first, the House for Whistleblowers does not initiate an investigation. The House for Whistleblowers was established on 1 July 2016 and has two main tasks: advising employees on the steps to take and conducting an investigation in response to a report.

The Act on the Protection of Whistleblowers, which entered into force in 2023, introduced several changes, of which the most relevant are:

- Abolition of mandatory internal reporting: the obligation to report internally first is abolished. Direct external reporting is allowed, such as to the House for Whistleblowers or another competent authority. When reporting externally, the reporter retains his protection. However, reporting internally first remains preferable and will be encouraged by the employer as much as possible.
- Expansion of prohibition on detriment: the prohibition on detriment already included prejudicing the legal position of the reporter, such as suspension, dismissal, demotion, withholding of promotion, reduction of salary or change of work location. It now also includes all forms of disadvantage, such as being blacklisted, refusing to give a reference, bullying, intimidation and exclusion.
- Stricter time limit requirements for internal reporting: the reporter must receive an acknowledgement of receipt of the report within seven days and the reporter must receive information from the employer on the assessment of their report within a reasonable period, not exceeding three months.
- Extension of the circle of protected persons: not just employees, but third parties who are in a working

relationship with the employer are now also protected, such as freelancers, interns, volunteers, suppliers, shareholders, job applicants and involved family members and colleagues.

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## 10. What confidentiality obligations apply during an investigation?

### Finland

Author: *Anu Waaralinna, Mari Mohsen*  
at Roschier

Concerning a workplace investigation, there is no specific legislation in force at the moment regarding confidentiality obligations. All normal legal confidentiality obligations (eg, obligations outlined in the Trade Secrets Act (595/2018)), and if using an external investigator, the confidentiality obligations outlined in the agreement between the employer and the external investigator, apply. Attorneys-at-law always have strict confidentiality obligations as per the Advocates Act (496/1958).

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### Netherlands

Author: *Barbara Kloppert, Mirjam Kerkhof, Roel de Jong*  
at De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek

The principle of due care requires employers to act prudently when it comes to sharing the identity of persons involved, such as complainants and implicated persons; and investigative findings, notably when certain employees may be implicated. As a result, such information is usually shared within an employer to designated departments on a need-to-know basis only. Additional safeguards as to the protection of whistleblowers' identities apply since the Whistleblower Directive (see question 9) was implemented in Dutch law. Also, see question 13 for the confidentiality obligations of employees vis-à-vis their employer.

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## 11. What information must the employee under investigation be given about the allegations against them?

### Finland

Author: *Anu Waaralinna, Mari Mohsen*  
at Roschier

The process must be transparent and impartial, and therefore all the information that may influence the conclusions made during the investigation should be shared with the employee.

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## Netherlands

Author: *Barbara Kloppert, Mirjam Kerkhof, Roel de Jong*  
at De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek

An implicated person is typically provided with a summary description of the scope of the investigation and, hence, the allegations against such an employee (if any). This is usually done in the interview invite sent to the relevant interviewee, which also provides an opportunity to prepare for an interview and (if relevant) seek legal advice.

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## **12. Can the identity of the complainant, witnesses or sources of information for the investigation be kept confidential?**

### Finland

Author: *Anu Waaralinna, Mari Mohsen*  
at Roschier

See question 11, there is no protection of anonymity as the process must be transparent to the parties involved.

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## Netherlands

Author: *Barbara Kloppert, Mirjam Kerkhof, Roel de Jong*  
at De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek

Such information can usually be kept confidential in an internal investigation, subject to potential disclosure obligations (see question 25). As indicated in question 10, depending on the nature and subject matter of an investigation, the identity of employees involved and investigative findings shall be shared with an employer on a need-to-know basis only. Specific requirements apply to the protection of the identity of whistleblowers since the Whistleblower Directive was implemented into Dutch law.

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## **13. Can non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) be used to keep the fact and substance of an investigation confidential?**

### Finland

Author: *Anu Waaralinna, Mari Mohsen*

at Roschier

Yes, however, the need for an NDA is assessed always on a case-by-case basis.

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## Netherlands

Author: *Barbara Kloppert, Mirjam Kerkhof, Roel de Jong*  
at De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek

Yes, NDAs can be used for this purpose. However, employers in the Netherlands often rely on general confidentiality obligations that the relevant employee already has to adhere to vis-à-vis their employer, for example in the employment agreement or collective labour agreement, if applicable. It is good practice to reiterate the confidential nature of any interview and its contents, and the existence of the investigation as such, to avoid any alleged confusion as to the confidential nature of investigative procedures later on.

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## 14. When does privilege attach to investigation materials?



## Finland

Author: *Anu Waaralinna, Mari Mohsen*  
at Roschier

The privilege of investigation materials concerns a rather limited amount of cases. In practice, materials may be considered privileged in connection with the litigation process under the Procedural Code (4/1734). For example, communications between a client and an attorney may attract protection against forcible public disclosure.

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## Netherlands

Author: *Barbara Kloppert, Mirjam Kerkhof, Roel de Jong*  
at De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek

If an attorney is engaged to provide legal advice or representation in respect of the (subject matter of the) investigation and as such also conducts (part of) the investigation, work products prepared by such an attorney will typically be subject to the legal privilege. Such work products may include, for example, interview minutes, investigation reports, investigation updates, attorney-client correspondence on the investigation, and legal advice rendered in connection with the (subject matter of the) investigation.

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## 15. Does the employee under investigation have a

# right to be accompanied or have legal representation during the investigation?

## Finland

Author: *Anu Waaralinna, Mari Mohsen*  
at Roschier

The employee under investigation has a right to have a support person present (eg, a lawyer or an employee representative) during the hearings and a right to assistance in preparing written statements.

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## Netherlands

Author: *Barbara Kloppert, Mirjam Kerkhof, Roel de Jong*  
at De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek

All parties involved in the investigation have the right to a fair hearing. How this is embedded in the investigation should be laid down in the protocol drawn up at the start. When the employee, and others involved, receive an invitation for an interview in the context of an investigation, this invitation should include whether or not the employee has the right to bring legal representation to the interview. Given the unequal relationship between employer and employee, this will most likely be the case.

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## 16. If there is a works council or trade union, does it have any right to be informed or involved in the investigation?

### Finland

Author: *Anu Waaralinna, Mari Mohsen*  
at Roschier

A works council or a trade union does not have a role in the investigation.

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### Netherlands

Author: *Barbara Kloppert, Mirjam Kerkhof, Roel de Jong*  
at De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek

There is, in principle, no role for the works council in an "isolated or single" internal investigation. When it comes to structural forms of employee monitoring to measure behaviour (such as video surveillance), the proposed decision to implement such a monitoring system in principle requires the prior approval of the works council.

In addition, according to the Act on the Protection of Whistleblowers, an employer who is not obliged to set up a works council needs the consent of more than half of the employees when adopting the internal reporting procedure under the Act, unless the substance of the procedure has already been laid down in a collective bargaining agreement.

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## 17. What other support can employees involved in the investigation be given?

### Finland

Author: *Anu Waaralinna, Mari Mohsen*  
at Roschier

They can request assistance, for example, from an occupational health and safety representative, a shop steward or the occupational healthcare provider.

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### Netherlands

Author: *Barbara Kloppert, Mirjam Kerkhof, Roel de Jong*  
at De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek

The employer can offer employees to be accompanied by another person, or by legal counsel, especially if the outcomes of the investigation could have consequences for their employment.

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## 18. What if unrelated matters are revealed as a result of the investigation?

### Finland

Author: *Anu Waaralinna, Mari Mohsen*  
at Roschier

If they are related to the work or workplace, the employer will handle the emerging matters separately. In internal investigations, the employer is allowed to use any material legally available.

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### Netherlands

Author: *Barbara Kloppert, Mirjam Kerkhof, Roel de Jong*

If the investigation yields unrelated matters, the employer will need to decide whether such matters should be followed up in the same or a separate investigation. If such matters include new allegations against an employee that are already involved in the investigation, the employer should, before interviewing (or at the start of such an interview) inform the implicated employees of the relevant new allegations that are the subject of the investigation.

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## 19. What if the employee under investigation raises a grievance during the investigation?

### Finland

Author: *Anu Waaralinna, Mari Mohsen*  
at Roschier

If the nature of the grievance relates to the employer's obligations to handle such matters in general, the grievance will be investigated either separately or as a part of the ongoing investigation.

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### Netherlands

Author: *Barbara Kloppert, Mirjam Kerkhof, Roel de Jong*  
at De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek

There are a lot of possibilities for grievances that employees can raise during an investigation. A grievance, for instance, could be that a certain person is not interviewed, while the employee wanted this person to be interviewed in order to have a thorough investigation. In such a case the investigator needs to assess this grievance.

There is no general rule how to react to a grievance and there is also no general obligation to respond to a grievance. There needs to be a case by case assessment based on which further action is or isn't needed.

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## 20. What if the employee under investigation goes off sick during the investigation?

### Finland

Author: *Anu Waaralinna, Mari Mohsen*  
at Roschier

As a general rule, sick leave does not prevent an investigation from progressing. Depending on the nature of the sickness, the employee can attend hearings and take part in the procedure. If the sickness prevents the employee from participating, the employer can put the process on hold temporarily.

## Netherlands

Author: *Barbara Kloppert, Mirjam Kerkhof, Roel de Jong*  
at De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek

If the employee under investigation goes off sick during the investigation, they will generally be treated as a regular employee on sick leave, meaning they are entitled to continued salary payment and that both employer and employee have a reintegration obligation. This entails regular consults with the company doctor to determine how recovery progresses and when the employee can return to work. If the employer suspects that the employee is merely calling in sick to delay the investigation and such suspicion is not confirmed by the company doctor, the employer can ask the Employees Insurance Agency (UWV) to give a second opinion. When it is determined that the employee is in fact fit for work, the employer can oblige the employee to return to work and cooperate with the investigation. If the employee fails to comply, the employer can – after due warning – suspend the employee's salary payment.

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## 21. How do you handle a parallel criminal and/or regulatory investigation?

### Finland

Author: *Anu Waaralinna, Mari Mohsen*  
at Roschier

Regardless of a possible criminal investigation, the employer must run its internal workplace investigation without unnecessary delay. A workplace investigation and a criminal investigation are two separate processes and can be ongoing simultaneously, so the criminal process does not require the workplace investigation to be stayed. Thus, parallel investigations are to be considered as two separate matters. The police may only obtain evidence or material from the company or employer if strict requirements for equipment searches are met after a request for investigation has been submitted to the police.

Last updated on 15/09/2022

## Netherlands

Author: *Barbara Kloppert, Mirjam Kerkhof, Roel de Jong*  
at De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek

In case there is a parallel criminal or regulatory investigation usually consultation between the investigators and the authorities takes place. Agreements are then sometimes made about the investigation conducted by / for the employer. In some cases, the authorities will ask to stay the investigation. There is no policy from the government on this topic.

There are situations where the authorities can compel the employer to share evidence. This depends on the exact circumstances of the case. For instance if the employer is the suspect in a criminal case.

It does occur that the authorities are given evidence upon request without the authorities having to order the extradition of evidence.



## 22. What must the employee under investigation be told about the outcome of an investigation?

### Finland

Author: *Anu Waaralinna, Mari Mohsen*  
at Roschier

The employer's conclusions from the investigation.

Last updated on 15/09/2022

### Netherlands

Author: *Barbara Kloppert, Mirjam Kerkhof, Roel de Jong*  
at De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek

There are no statutory requirements as to employee feedback in internal investigations. The principle of due care requires an employer to typically confront implicated persons with any allegations that concern them; and provide a draft report on their interviews for feedback, if the investigative findings will form the basis of disciplinary measures. It is good practice to also inform an employee under investigation once the investigation is closed.

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## 23. Should the investigation report be shared in full, or just the findings?

### Finland

Author: *Anu Waaralinna, Mari Mohsen*  
at Roschier

The employee under investigation may only be informed of the conclusions.

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### Netherlands

Author: *Barbara Kloppert, Mirjam Kerkhof, Roel de Jong*  
at De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek

Employers are typically not required to share the investigation report with implicated persons or other employees involved in an investigation. Depending on the nature and subject of the investigation, the

principle of due care may require an employer to share (draft) investigative findings before concluding on such findings.

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## 24. What next steps are available to the employer?

### Finland

Author: *Anu Waaralinna, Mari Mohsen*  
at Roschier

The employer decides whether misconduct has taken place or not. Depending on the case, the employer may recommend a workplace conciliation in which the parties try to find a solution that can be accepted by both sides. The employer may choose to give an oral reprimand or a written warning. If the legal conditions are met, the employer may also terminate the employment agreement.

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### Netherlands

Author: *Barbara Kloppert, Mirjam Kerkhof, Roel de Jong*  
at De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek

A distinction can be made between a non-public reprimand and a public reprimand. A non-public reprimand is a warning from the employer to the employee that certain behaviour by the employee may not be repeated. This is a relatively light measure. The employer can apply this measure to behaviour for which a verbal warning is insufficient or has already been given (more than once). The employer should confirm the reprimand to the employee in writing, so that it forms part of the employee's personnel file. It is important to have an acknowledgement so there is no dispute as to whether the reprimand has reached the employee. Often, the letter will also mention the consequences if the employee continues to behave in this way, so that the employee is aware of them. The employer then has reasonable grounds to apply a more severe disciplinary measure, such as suspension or dismissal, should the behaviour be repeated.

For a public reprimand, the warning is also made known to third parties. This is, therefore, a more severe measure than a non-public reprimand, as the honour and reputation of the employee are affected. A public reprimand must, therefore, be proportionate to the seriousness of the behaviour and will only be possible in the event of a serious offence, for which a non-public warning will not suffice. A public reprimand is also more likely if it is necessary to prevent other employees from engaging in the same behaviour (deterrent effect). Given the impact on the employee, it is important that the employer carefully investigates the facts and allows the employee to tell their side of the story (hearing both sides of the argument). A public reprimand is rarely given.

If the outcome of the investigation is that the employee is culpable, the employer can request that the court dissolves the employment agreement for that reason. The employer will have to show that continuation of the employment agreement is no longer possible. If the court rules that the employee is culpable, the employment agreement will be dissolved, observing the relevant notice period and paying the statutory transition payment. Only if the court rules that the employee has shown serious culpable behaviour, will the notice period not be taken into account and the transition payment will not be due.

If the employee has come into contact with the judicial authorities or is suspected of a criminal offence, but has not been convicted or detained (yet), the employer – when requesting the dissolution of the employment contract – will have to make a plausible case that, based on this suspicion alone, it can no

longer be reasonably expected that the employment contract is upheld. This may be the case in a situation where the offence the employee is suspected of has repercussions on the employer, colleagues or customers and relations of the employer. In this situation, the court will assess whether a less drastic measure than dismissal, such as suspension, is sufficient to the interests of the employer.

If there is still no conviction but the employee is unable to perform his or duties due to being detained, the court reviews a request for dissolution in the same way as above. In this case, if the employee's payment of wages is discontinued, justice may already have been done to the employer's interests.

The final stage involves the conviction and detention of the employee. Although the dissolution of the employment contract under section 7:669 (3) under h DCC – which includes conviction and detention – is the most obvious option, it is still necessary to assess whether termination of the employment contract is reasonable because of the employee's conviction and detention. Although the seriousness of the offence, the duration of the detention and how this reflects on the employer are important factors, the court also takes the age, duration of the employment contract and the position of the employee on the labour market into account.

The most far-reaching dismissal method that can be considered is instant dismissal for an urgent reason (section 7:678 paragraph 1 in conjunction with section 7:677 paragraph 1 DCC). According to the case law of the Dutch Supreme Court, the question of whether there are compelling reasons must be answered based on all the circumstances of the case – to be considered together – including the nature and seriousness of what the employer considers to be compelling reasons, the nature and duration of the employment, how the employee performed their duties and the personal circumstances of the employee, such as age and the consequences for the employee of an instant dismissal.

Mere suspicion of a criminal offence will not easily qualify as an urgent reason, as follows from jurisprudence. At the same time, an employer can, instead of criminal suspicion as grounds for dismissal, also base its claim on the behaviour that underlies it. If the behaviour of the employee is already factually established, for example, because the employee has disclosed it to their employer or the employer has established it, the employer does not have to wait for the criminal proceedings before dismissing the employee.

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## **25. Who can (or must) the investigation findings be disclosed to? Does that include regulators/police? Can the interview records be kept private, or are they at risk of disclosure?**

### Finland

Author: *Anu Waaralinna, Mari Mohsen*  
at Roschier

In general, investigation materials, including findings, that includes personal data should only be processed by the personnel of the organisation who are responsible for internal investigations. However, it may in some situations be required by applicable legislation that findings are disclosed to competent authorities for the performance of their duties, such as conducting investigations in connection with malpractice and violations of the law.

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### Netherlands

Author: *Barbara Kloppert, Mirjam Kerkhof, Roel de Jong*  
at De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek

The fundamental right to a fair hearing entails that the investigation findings must be disclosed to the employee under investigation at least once, so that they are given the opportunity to respond to them. Under Dutch administrative or criminal law, there are no general provisions requiring disclosure of investigative findings to regulators or criminal authorities. Certain specific provisions, however, apply, for example, in reportable incidents at financial institutions or certain HSE incidents that need to be disclosed to relevant regulatory authorities. Regulatory and criminal authorities, however, do have broad investigative powers enabling them to order the provision of data from subjects or involved parties in investigations they are conducting. Such information may also comprise investigation findings and underlying documents, such as interview records. If such interview records are subject to legal privilege (see question 14), they are typically not subject to disclosure to the relevant authorities.

Under Dutch civil law, a party that possesses certain records (such as investigation findings and underlying documents) is generally not required to disclose those to other parties for inspection. Parties are, in principle, not required to share information with third parties, other than relevant authorities (see above).

An exception to this rule is section 843a Dutch Code of Civil Procedure. Under section 843a, a party can be required to produce specific exhibits, if:

- the requesting party has a legitimate interest;
- the request concerns specific and well-defined records or information (ie, no fishing expeditions); and
- the documents pertain to a legal relationship (e.g., a contract or alleged tort; the requested party does not need to be a party to the relevant legal relationship).

If these requirements are met, the requestee should, in principle, disclose the requested information, except for specific exceptions. Such exceptions, which can also be relevant in the context of internal (workplace) investigations, could include confidentiality arrangements and privacy protection, to the extent that this would qualify as a compelling interest. To establish such a compelling interest, the relevant interest should outweigh the requesting party's legitimate interest regarding the requested information. This is a balancing act. Documents that are subject to legal privilege are protected against disclosure.

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## 26. How long should the outcome of the investigation remain on the employee's record?

### Finland

Author: *Anu Waaralinna, Mari Mohsen*  
at Roschier

Please see question 7. The outcome of the investigation involving personal data may be retained only for as long as is necessary considering the purposes of the processing. In general, the retention of investigation-related data may be necessary while the investigation is still ongoing and even then the requirements of data minimization and accuracy should be considered. The data concerning the outcome of an investigation should be registered to the employee's record merely to the extent necessary in light of the employment relationship or potential disciplinary measures. In this respect, the applicable retention time depends on labour law-related rights and limitations, considering eg, the applicable periods for filing a suit.

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## Netherlands

Author: *Barbara Kloppert, Mirjam Kerkhof, Roel de Jong*  
at De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek

The outcomes are usually kept in the records until termination of the employment agreement and only deleted when personal records are deleted.

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## 27. What legal exposure could the employer face for errors during the investigation?

### Finland

Author: *Anu Waaralinna, Mari Mohsen*  
at Roschier

There are no regulations regarding the actual investigation process. Therefore, the employer cannot be accused of procedural errors as such. However, once the matter has been adequately investigated, the employer must decide whether or not misconduct has taken place. If the employer considers that misconduct has taken place, the employer must take adequate measures for remedying the situation. Failure to adequately conduct the investigation could result in criminal sanctions being imposed on the employer as an organisation or the employer's representative, or damages.

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## Netherlands

Author: *Barbara Kloppert, Mirjam Kerkhof, Roel de Jong*  
at De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek

The employee can request compensation for violation of the right to a fair hearing or reputational damage. If the employee is suspended during the investigation, the employee can request the court to order the employer to allow them to resume their work and request rehabilitation.

In termination proceedings (or after the termination of the employment agreement by the employer), the employee can claim an equitable compensation from the employer if the employer has shown serious culpable behaviour. Such compensation, if granted, is usually based on loss of income by the employee due to the behaviour of the employer.

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### Contributors

#### Finland

Anu Waaralinna

Mari Mohsen  
*Roschier*



## Netherlands

Barbara Kloppert  
Mirjam Kerkhof  
Roel de Jong  
*De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek*

[www.internationalemploymentlawyer.com](http://www.internationalemploymentlawyer.com)