

FEANTSA QUESTIONNAIRE 2011

Finland

1. Organisation and funding of homeless services

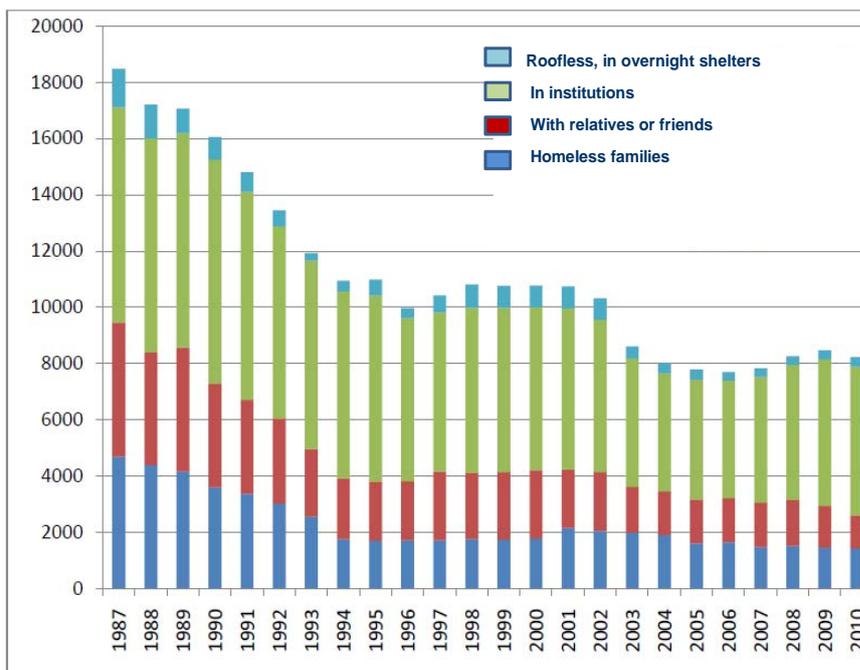
1.1 Legislation & policy

The Finnish social protection system is based on the Nordic Welfare state model including the basic principles of universal services and adequate social protection. The state's responsibility to promote welfare, health and security is rooted in the Constitution. This enshrines the right of everyone to income and to care, if they are unable to manage adequately.

Local authorities (municipalities) are responsible for arranging welfare services. Besides the Social Welfare Act also some other legislation covers also a part of homeless people such as the law on the services for people with disabilities. Social security is residence based: the benefits are the same for all people living permanently in Finland, also for all homeless people. So there is not a special homeless sector. The service provision differs in different parts of the country as does also the demand: most homeless people in Finland live in the largest cities, especially in Helsinki and the capital region.

The most important policy concerning homeless people has recently been **the government programme to reduce long-term homelessness in 2008-2011**. Homelessness has been decreasing in Finland during many years thanks to the continuous efforts to end it.

Homeless people in Finland in 1987-2010 (Ara, the Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland):



There have, however, been a great number of long-term homeless people who have not been able to manage independently in present housing solutions or have ended up homeless repeatedly. Their multiple needs have not been met in the service system and they have not been able to benefit from the staircase-model housing services.

The programme to reduce long-term homelessness launched in 2008 took therefore a new approach, the Housing First model. Key points of the programme are:

- State funding (investment aid for special groups and interest subsidy loans) for constructing and renovating housing.
- Funding for hiring support personnel granted by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health Care.
- Conversion of traditional shelters into supported rented accommodation units.
- Prevention of homelessness by increasing housing advice services.¹

At the moment there are several building and renovation projects going on and also a great transformation process happening in the entire service system. That is why it is impossible to give comprehensive answers to all the questions in this questionnaire. Time will tell how the quality targets of services are reached. The quantitative target for the program period was to halve long-term homelessness and produce 1250 new homes. So far it is clear that by the end of 2011 at least 1088 new dwellings will be available, and in 2012 the target will be exceeded: a total of 1697 new dwellings or supported housing units will become available.

The housing first –approach means a great improvement both in the security of the tenure and the access to adequate services. Living in these new homes is based on tenancy agreements and the former homeless people have full legal rights as a tenant. Conventional homeless shelters were planned to be temporary solutions but many people lived there for long periods. The shelters offered little support and had restrictions and rules which made the entry and living there insecure. Very limited staff resources with low professional education had to cope with the most challenging clientele. The conversion program will improve both the premises by converting them into proper homes and the support by providing professionally trained personnel.

Even though all people are in principle entitled to protection it has often been difficult for homeless people to get the services they need. This has been partly due to the lifestyle and partly to the dispersed service system. As 'housing first' does not mean 'housing only' it has been urgent to develop new flexible service concepts for the tenants often with multiple needs. Since the approach is a completely new way of arranging services the developmental work is going on and evaluation is needed to find best solutions in the service provision. There is a developmental network of social workers, NGOs and homeless people coordinated by The Centre of Excellence on Social Welfare in the Metropolitan Area processing various themes such as prevention of homelessness, housing services of ex-convicts and the participation of service users.

The EU peer review on the Finnish program to reduce long-term homelessness in December 2010 paid quite rightly attention to the fact that part of the new housing stock is situated in large

¹ More information about the Finnish program in www.environment.fi and www.feantsa.org

complexes. This has not been completely intentional but has happened through the force of circumstances. Finding location to this kind of projects is challenging (NIMBY) and new homes have been needed quickly to house people from shelters in order to be able to renovate the premises. Apart from individually tailored services it is also important to build **housing pathways** from supported housing to normal housing for those who do not any longer need support or who can live alone by the help of tailored support services. For some homeless people supported housing can be an optimal solution for the rest of their lives. Experiences from other housing projects have proved, however, that given enough time and support people even after most challenging life experiences can recover and move to more independent housing. Also the development of home services is going on. In Helsinki, for example, the city social and health services have established home service teams to help former homeless people who live in scattered housing.

Y-Foundation has a 25-year experience in housing homeless people in dwellings bought from the normal housing stock. Most of these flats are scattered housing in owner-occupied housing blocks. This experience has proved that also **a flexible possibility to return to supported housing** is important. In situations when all means of support are used and a person can no longer manage alone it is a far more humane solution to move to supported housing in a coordinated way than to be evicted and end up in the street. The basic question is not merely a categorical choice between scattered housing or supported housing units. More important is a suitable housing solution and sufficient support services to match various needs and life situations. Pathways to normal housing and the possibility to return to supported housing if necessary are both a part of a flexible housing system.

One essential question in supported housing is **the quality and orientation in the support work**. In a housing unit a person gets not only a home but also a small community where to train life skills. Therefore it is important that the staff supports the community and offers space and opportunities for participation and peer support. In the short run it may be easier and cheaper to let professionals do the daily activities but in the long run it is more effective to support the tenants to take care of their homes and community themselves.

A community can be a safe place to recall skills, take part in decision making and share responsibility. This opportunity for rehabilitation and learning in a community is lacking in scattered housing. It can be a high threshold for a long-term homeless person to break the patterns and isolation of the homeless lifestyle and adapt to a new life situation. The supportive community and help at site can be a necessary step.

At the moment it seems that even though many long-term homeless people get proper accommodation, this does not effectively reduce homelessness. This is due to the low amount of rental housing produced during the recent years. The preparation of a continuation period for the program for 2012-2015 is presently underway.

1.2 Typology and organization of services

Because of the principle of universal benefits there is not a special typology on homeless services. The situation varies also depending on the demand. It is possible to divide services to two main groups: emergency services and housing services.

In Helsinki, where most homeless live, there is a low threshold service center for emergency services offering emergency housing, meals, social and health care etc. A special unit in social services helps the clients to find a suitable housing solution with necessary support.

In arranging housing services for homeless people the city has classified the services by the amount of support available: supported housing, intensively supported housing and service-accommodation.

1.3 Funding

The services by NGOs are funded in different ways. Ordinarily public procurement has been used in purchasing housing services but also grants and agreements on services are common. Public procurement is by no means a working method because there are very limited markets in the field and also a limited number of skilled service providers. This is why it has been necessary to search for other more suitable ways which allow negotiating and joint developmental work.

In the program to reduce long-term homelessness a new approach to arrange services has been experimented. The implementation of the program is based on building partnerships. Since special expertise as well as long-term ethical and professional commitment is required, the normal public tendering process could not be used. Instead the cities of Helsinki and Espoo are now applying the SGEI-principals in buying services. So far it has been a laborious process since there have been many open questions to solve and also specification is needed to rules and practices in the SGEI procedure. The target has been to make long-term contracts (15 years) with the services providers and to avoid competition in areas where it actually does not exist. This enables also cooperation between the services providers in order to develop new functional service concepts for various groups of clients and gives possibilities for mutual learning. This is essential especially in matters concerning quality.

Traditionally one important source of funding for the NGOs has been RAY (Finland's Slot Machine Association).² Because of the rules on public procurement RAY can no more assist the production of services but its funding is important for voluntary work, peer support organizations and developmental projects. RAY has also had an important role in the program to reduce long-term homelessness by funding housing.

EU-funding is not much used, its meaning is not very significant.

2. Policy and legal framework regarding quality in homeless services

2.1 Quality provisions

There are quality recommendations on the services for substance abusers and also quality recommendations on the housing services for people with mental health problems. These both

² RAY was founded in 1938 to raise money through gaming operations to support health and welfare organizations and it has an exclusive right to operate slot machines and casinos in the county. Its profits are divided to welfare organizations. More information: www.ray.fi

cover partly also homeless people, but they are only recommendations, not compulsory quality standards. The Regional State Administrative Agencies monitor the quality in supported service housing units, not in shelters. Local authorities have the responsibility to monitor the services they are buying.

The Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland distributes state funds for construction and monitors the quality in housing. Good quality housing and appropriate room for group activities and staff are an important prerequisite for good quality services. In housing for homeless people many extra requirements must be fulfilled compared to normal housing (safety, room for services etc.). In this respect the quality standards in housing for homeless people are stricter than the general standards in Finland.

2.2. Dimensions of quality

As mentioned before it is the duty of local authorities to arrange services by producing them or buying them from other service providers and so they are also responsible for the quality. The situation and also the demand vary in different municipalities.

For example the city of Helsinki has used following quality criteria in the SGEI procedure in buying services for the long-term homeless people.

- **security of the tenure:** living in supported housing is based on a normal lease.
- **staff resources:** the minimum in supported housing is 0,12 workers / tenant, in intensively supported housing 0,3 / tenant and in service-accommodation 0,4 / tenant. 24 hour service is required except in the supported housing if specially agreed.
- **qualifications (training) of the staff:** The manager of the service provider must have a university degree in social welfare or health, one qualified nurse per team is the minimum and other staff members must have vocational qualification in social and health care.
- **system of quality standards:** Quality is evaluated according to the ability of the service provider to fulfill the duties mentioned in the service agreement and according to how the targets of personal service plans of the clients are reached. The service provider must have a documented quality control system to guarantee the quality and develop it in a systematic way. The service provider must also define its values, policies and system of management in the quality standards.

The quality system must also include a description on how the feedback from the clients is collected, processed and documented. The feedback must be utilized in the development of the services.

Reps of the service provider and the city social services will have a follow-up meeting at least once a year to evaluate how the quality standards are reached and how the

commonly set developmental projects have been realized. The service provider must also report regularly to the social services etc.

- **safety:** For every supported housing unit there must be a written safety plan, which is based on a risk assessment of the activities. The plan must describe safety measures both in the premises and in the neighborhood of the unit. Safety plan includes also the statutory fire and rescue plan.
- **neighborhood (community) work:** A supported housing unit must have a written action plan on how the interaction with the neighborhood is organized. It includes joint meetings with the neighborhood, informing the neighborhood about the unit and regular follow-up rounds. All feedback from the neighborhood must be processed and replied immediately.

The minimum standard for housing in supported and service-accommodation is a room with a shower, toilet and kitchen. Most of the new housing stock consists of fully equipped normal dwellings with room for services and group work in the premises.

3. Quality in the context of the specificities of homeless services

3.1 Transitional character of homeless services

Different quality standards are applied to emergency services for example in housing. For example, in Helsinki people often must share kitchens, showers etc. in emergency housing which is not accepted in other housing services. In winter time twice as many people were housed in the Helsinki Hietaniemi service center as is the actual capacity. Now the situation is in balance since many people have moved to the new housing solutions for long-term homeless people.

In the transitional housing services in the service center client feedback is collected in weekly meeting with the clients. This works fine since the clients live in supported housing. In other services the consultation of service users has been more challenging and developing new methods is going on. In 2010 there were 830 persons using these services and some of them were contacted very briefly. A joint meeting has been used as well as a suggestion box but these have not been very successful.

3.2 Diversity

The city of Helsinki requires that the service provision is flexible and takes into account the changing needs of the clients. Since all clients are involved in making their service plans and there is also a follow-up system this diversity can now be addressed. Homeless people have always been entitled to all general services but better coordination and help at site have improved the access to services.

3.3 Users' participation

Traditionally participation of service users has not been general in the Finnish service system. Some services run by NGOs have been more flexible in this respect and the value of participation and peer group support has been appreciated. The FEANTSA member No Fixed Abode is a good example in service users' participation. The explanation may be that the organization was founded by homeless people themselves.

The new housing units for the long-term homeless people offer new possibilities for participation. A personal service plan is done with every tenant and it is evaluated regularly. According to the service agreement with the city the service provider is required to collect feedback from the tenants and this information must be taken into account in developing services.

The communities in these housing units offer new possibilities for participation. For example The Helsinki Deaconess Institute has started in 2010 a community training program in the new Auroratalo complex. Both the staff and the tenants take part in training of community specialists. Students from the Helsinki Diakonia University of Applied Sciences take part in the group process and there will be a theses work made about the training. This year there will also start an ESR-funded project on "active dwelling" in the capital area to develop participation in service users' communities.

4. Implementation of quality provisions in homeless services

4.1 Governance

Local authorities (municipalities) are responsible for the service provision and monitoring the quality. Also the Regional State Administrative Agencies monitor the quality in supported housing and service-accommodation since they grant licences for service providers.

4.2 Methods

There are different measures used in different municipalities (see the methods used in the city of Helsinki in chapter 2.2).

Also service providers are creating their own quality provisions. Nowadays during the long-term homeless program it is generally done in cooperation with the cities. Also some RAY-financed projects have developed follow-up procedures of their own.

4.3 Staff training

Staff training is one criteria used when selecting service providers. After the implementation of the housing first –principle also new contents in staff training have been necessary. For example in the new Pitäjänmäki housing unit run by the Salvation Army there was a special training period for the staff about the situation of long-term homeless people before the tenants moved in. This was possible after the city used resources from the long-term homeless program funds by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. After that a one-year training program in community work was started to help the staff to adapt to new work methods.

(see also part 3.3)

5. Evaluation of the existing quality provision

5.1 Organisation of homeless services & 5.2 Quality provisions

There is no special legislation about homeless services. Services can be developed under the present legislation. Since the situation varies in different parts of the country general quality standards might be useful.

5.3 Specificities of the homeless services

In the SGEI-process the quality standards are clearly stated. It is easier for a big service provider to reach the standards in a cost-effective way than what a small provider can do. The standards in qualifications of the staff have been criticized to be too high and ignoring people with long experience but no professional training. In the quality standards of the city of Helsinki there is an option for a 3-year period of transition concerning training but so far no one has used it.

5.4 Implementation of quality

During the long-term homeless program a lot of innovative work is done to develop new ways to arrange services. Even though only ten largest cities are now included in the present homeless program the results have a wider impact also in the quality of services. Many local authorities are interested in the outcomes of the program, applying the SGEI-principals etc.

Understanding the homeless sector is maybe the most important thing in implementing quality in homeless services. It naturally includes user participation, support and other aspects. In the Finnish context cooperation and continuous reviewing is crucial since the new approach also means completely new thinking and reformed service models. But behind all this there must be a strong political will to promote the living conditions of homeless people and this attitude is, after all, the most important issue!

6. The role of the European Union

6.1 The impact of EU legislation

The EU rules on competition as well as the way they are put in practice on the national level have often weakened the supply and quality of housing services. The rules on public tendering are not suitable in all social and health services.

When another EU national has worked in Finland and has had an official address there are no limitations to use services. In emergency services there are also people who have come to Finland to seek work and they ought to arrange their living themselves. It is clear that they get help in emergency situations but it is not clear who defines if they are in an emergency situation. And what is the duration of the emergency situation?

6.2 Quality framework

The situation differs a lot on the European level. From the Finnish point of view a European quality framework in homeless services is not needed.

FEANTSA can definitely have an important role in supporting the development of quality in homeless services. Sharing knowledge based evidence and raising awareness both on the European as well as national level are necessary!

More information:

City of Helsinki www.hel.fi

City of Espoo: www.espoo.fi

Finnish Youth Housing Association www.nal.fi

Helsinki Deaconess Institute www.hdl.fi

Legislation: www.finlex.fi

RAY (Finland's Slot Machine Association) www.ray.fi

The Centre of Excellence of Social Welfare in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area www.socca.fi

The Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland www.ara.fi

The Ministry of Environment www.environment.fi

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health www.stm.fi

Vailla vakinaista asuntoa ry (No Fixed Abode NGO) www.vvary.fi

Y-Säätiö / Y-Foundation www.ysaatio.fi