



**FINLAND NATIONAL REPORT 2005 FOR THE
EUROPEAN OBSERVATORY ON HOMELESSNESS:
STATISTICAL UPDATE**

By Sirkka-Liisa Kärkkäinen ¹

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sirkka-liisa.karkkainen@stakes.fi

The National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health STAKES
P.O. Box 220, FIN-00531 Helsinki, Finland

¹ The contents of this statistical update have discussed with researcher Jouko Karjalainen, Stakes

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1. Homelessness in November 2004

The extent of homelessness has been decreasing during the last year. According to the latest Housing Market Survey conducted by the National Housing Fund in November 2004, the number of single homeless persons was nearly 7700. The number of homeless families was 360.

The changes in the different categories² of homelessness can be seen in Figure 1 and Table 1. The extent of homelessness has decreased most in the numbers of persons who stay temporarily with relatives and friends. The estimates reveal, however, that the number of the most vulnerable homeless people has not

² Categories of homelessness according to the Housing Market Survey. For the methodology of the survey, see Kärkkäinen, Statistical Update for 2004 (www.feantsa.org)

Single homeless persons

Living outdoors, staircases, night shelters etc.

- includes those without permanent accommodation who live in various types of temporary shelters and places not meant for habitation and who go around from one such place to another.

Living in other shelters or hostels for homeless people

- includes those in shelters and hostels for homeless people and in boarding houses. Usually a daily fee is paid by the social welfare authorities for these clients.

Living in care homes or other housing units, rehabilitation homes or hospitals due to lack of housing

- includes those who live in housing units or homes for substance abusers, or in various types of care home or homes for receiving institutional care, where a person stays due to a lack of housing. Units for supported housing, where a person is supposed to live for a longer period, are not counted.

Prisoners soon to be released who have no housing

- includes prisoners for whom no housing and supported housing has been arranged.

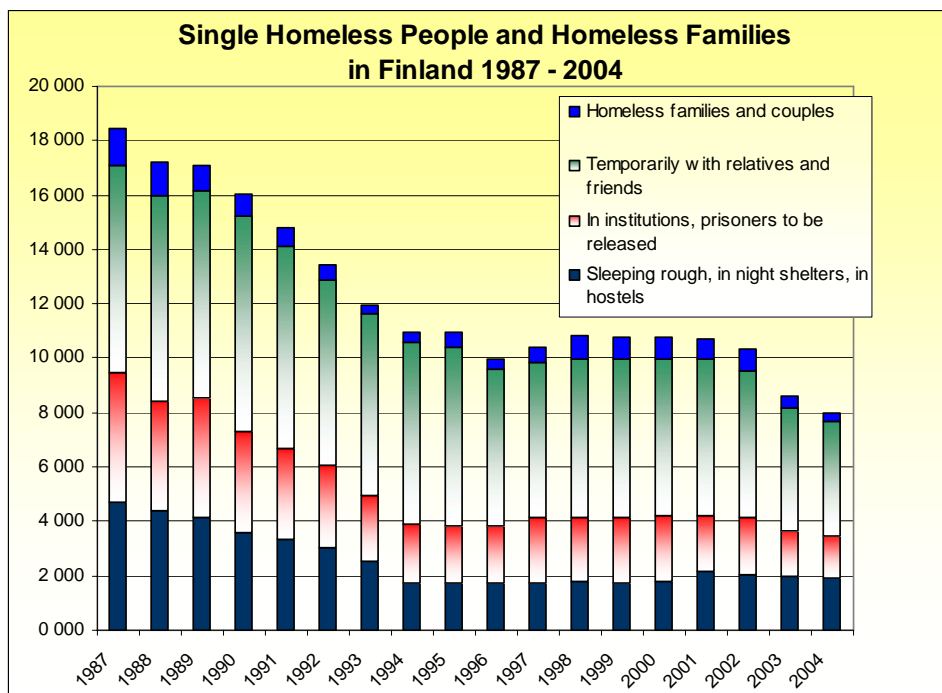
Living temporarily with relatives or friends

- includes persons who, according to the municipality's information or estimate, are living temporarily with relatives or friends due to a lack of housing or who move around between relatives and friends. This item does not include young people living in their childhood home.

Homeless families

Families and couples who have split up or are living in temporary housing

- includes families forced to live apart because of lack of housing, or in temporary accommodation, such as a boarding house, or temporarily with friends or relatives. Homeless families also include mothers in temporary mother-and-child homes or families in crises homes without a home of their own. (Housing Market Survey, instructions)

Figure 1. Single Homeless People and Homeless Families in Finland 1987–2004**Table 1. Homelessness from 1996–2004 (as recorded annually on November 15th)**

Single homeless people	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
1. Sleeping rough, in night shelters	508	421	454	410	451	563	480	504	476
2. In hostels	1216	1296	1319	1340	1339	1598	1580	1482	1436
3. Institutions and care homes due to lack of housing	1670	1946	1873	1931	1998	1396	1385	1307	1264
4. Prisoners to be released who have no housing	441	506	474	456	417	686	695	337	283
5. Living temporarily with relatives or friends	5777	5645	5874	5851	5794	5723	5420	4556	4192
All single homeless people	9612	9814	9994	9988	9999	9966	9561	8186	7651
of these									
women	1799	2516	1964	1822	1752	1723	1628	1574	1450
young people under 25	1516	2158	1964	1835	1753	1675	1644	1558	1424
immigrants	..	..	..	..	..	330	330	243	282
Homeless families									
of these immigrants	361	600	818	777	783	782	774	415	357
	..	..	..	..	..	132	210	79	80

Source for the figure and table:

Tiitinen V. & Pelvas P (2005). Asunnottomat 2004. ARA Valtion asuntorahasto, Selvityksiä 8/2005 (Homelessness in 2004, Housing Fund of Finland). Can be found at www.ara.fi/download.asp?contentid=20100&lan=fi

decreased: the number of persons staying in emergency shelters has been around 500 for several years. This reflects the changing profile of the homeless population; there are a growing number of people with more serious problems.

The housing market situation has been favourable for houseless people. The rental housing stock increased for some years³ and dwellings in social housing have been more available than in the beginning of the decade. Nevertheless, a shortage of small dwellings still prevails especially in the capital region. The Government's programme for diminishing homelessness is currently being implemented. No evaluation has yet been made on its efficiency, but it is obvious that the programme has had an effect on the homelessness situation. The programme is being continued in the form of a new programme for the capital region; more than half of homeless people live in the capital region.

2. Categories of homelessness according to ETHOS

The following analysis is based on the European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion ETHOS which is being developed by Feantsa and the European Observatory on Homelessness. The latest version of the ETHOS categories can be found on the web pages of Feantsa.⁴

ROOFLESS

The number of roofless persons was in November 2004 around 500 (see the table above). The extent of rooflessness is, however, difficult to estimate accurately, as there are a number of roofless people who do not visit the low threshold shelters and services. They usually contact the municipal social welfare authorities in order to apply for cash payments of living allowance, but they are not willing to be involved in the services (many of these people, especially young people, belong to the groups who stay with relatives and friends, i.e. category 8).

Many roofless people move around, sometimes staying in night shelters for a couple of nights or for a period, and then to temporary accommodation with relatives and friends or to a hostel for a short period—and even on to rough sleeping, which in the Finnish climate means sleeping in staircases or various types of shelter and places not meant for habitation (a small number of roofless people live in the woods in their own huts). During the day, many roofless people visit the day centres for homeless people. In Helsinki, many of them visit the night café.

Thus, the numbers cannot be easily separated into categories like *sleeping rough (1.1)* and *low threshold shelters (1.2)*. The numbers are usually included category 1.2.

1.1. Sleeping rough

See above. The numbers of rough sleepers cannot be distinguished from the number of persons visiting low threshold shelters.

Finnish concept:

Ulkona asuvat = people who stay outdoors

Number of persons:

Not a separate category, the numbers are included in 2.1.

The category *conducted by outreach services* is not a separate category in the Finnish circumstances; it is only one measure of social work. No statistical information is available about the extent of outreach services, though the extent of these services is very small.

³ Quite recently, there seems to have began a turn to opposite direction again. Private rental dwellings have been sold and turned to owner-occupied dwellings.

⁴ http://www.feantsa.org/files/indicators_wg/ETHOS/ethos_2004_01.pdf

2.1. Low-threshold /direct access shelters

Finnish concepts:

The most common concept is *ensisuoja=emergency shelter*. Also the term *yömaja=night shelter* is often used. Nowadays many of the municipal shelters are named as *service centres for homeless people (asunnottomien palvelukeskus)*, because the quality of the premises is quite good and, in particular, because the task of these shelters is to provide social services and help the clients to proceed further to other social services or treatments, as well as into housing services.

Asunnottomien päiväkeskus=day centre for homeless people

Yökahvila=night café (in Helsinki)

Number of persons:

Around 500 single homeless persons as of November 15th, 2005. A large majority of the clients are substance abusers. There are no special emergency shelters for families in Finland, but women's shelters function as emergency shelter for women and children (see 4.1).

Source:

The Housing Market Survey, the information gathered by the municipal housing and social welfare authorities.

Physical space:

Emergency shelters: Common space for sleeping, common dining rooms and washing facilities in emergency shelters.

There are rooms for 1–3 persons who are waiting for housing or care arrangements (who have currently ceased substance abuse).

Day centres: Common space, washing facilities.

Rooms for the staff and the nurse in both.

Stuff

Professional social workers, usually a nurse, catering personnel etc.

Legal space:

Temporary stay, paid by the municipal social welfare office

Access criteria:

Free entrance

Period of stay:

Short term stay. A number of homeless people, elderly and those with serious problems may stay a longer period.

Purpose:

For all persons in need of shelter who otherwise would sleep rough

The descriptive categories *arranged (e.g. low budget hotel)* and *short-stay hostel* do not exist in Finland or they cannot be separated from other categories. Homeless people for whom temporary accommodation has been arranged in hotels are counted in category 3. It is not possible to provide any numbers, but the number is small. E.g. homeless clients are housed in some hotels in Helsinki, but they are of not such low quality that they could be included under the category of emergency shelters.

HOUSELESS

3.1. Short-stay homelessness hostel

Hostels are the primary category of accommodation for people who are still homeless, or who are not housed in a dwelling. The majority of the hostels for homeless people are run by voluntary organisations. There are hostels that are run by private persons and enterprises, too. Some hostels are run by the municipal social welfare agencies.

If the hostel is run as an accommodation business, it is subject to regulation as a business under a decree governing 'accommodation and restaurant business' (*Decree on Accommodation and Restaurant business (727/1991)*) (translation S-LK) rather than under the social welfare legislation. According to this law, the activity does not belong to the sphere of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, it belongs the Ministry of Trade and Industry. An amendment in the legislation is just being made by Parliament.

Municipal social workers visit most of the hostels. The daily fees of the clients who stay in the hostels are paid by the municipal social welfare office (a minority of the clients have their own income, e.g. pensions by which they pay the fees). Thus the municipality has control over the quality of the provision and can refuse to pay if the quality is too low. The physical conditions of some hostels have been rather deficient; in some cases the municipal social welfare authorities have refused to pay for the clients' stay there. Usually the hostels not accepted by the municipality have been closed; in some cases they have continued to house the clients.

A few hostels are run by municipal social welfare agencies, in which case they act as accommodation for people waiting for other accommodation, care place or housing to be arranged (especially rooms in the emergency shelters). These hostels are run directly according to the social welfare legislation. Many hostels run by NGOs are run under the control of social welfare legislation.

Finnish concepts:

Asuntola=hostel

Number of persons

Around 1400 (1436) single homeless persons as of November 15th 2004.

There are no hostels for families in Finland.

However, there are rooms for couples in many shelters; the demand for these rooms is high.

Source

The Housing Market Survey, the information gathered by the municipal housing and social welfare authorities.

Physical space

Single or double rooms, common cooking and dining spaces and washing facilities. Large variation in the quality of physical space.

Staff

Having professional social workers on the staff is not so common. Municipal social workers have their receptions in many hostels.

Legal space

Temporary stay, paid by the municipal social welfare office. Some people pay themselves by means of their pensions. The fee is usually counted on a daily basis, in some cases on a monthly basis. There is no rental contract.

Access criteria:

The client is sent to the hostel by the municipal social welfare office. The hostel and the owner of the hostel agree on whether the client is accepted. Some clients may come directly.

Period of stay:

For short term stay. Many homeless people, however, stay a long period, even several years.

3.2.– 3.4. Temporary housing

The category *temporary housing* is difficult to define exactly. It is not a specific concept but can be used to describe different kinds of situation in which persons or families are living temporarily in a flat, usually provided by the municipal welfare authorities or NGOs. They do not have a permanent rental contract.

Physical space is usually a dwelling, though not often a hostel room, but there is no exact definition, while temporary housing is a diffuse concept; it can mean several things in Finland; either *väliaikainen asunto*= *a temporary dwelling* or it is a more general concept, *väliaikainen asuminen*=*temporary housing* meaning temporary living accommodation or staying somewhere.

Homeless families are usually housed in temporary, often crisis dwellings while waiting for ordinary independent or supported housing to be arranged.

According to the housing market survey, the number of *homeless families was estimated to be 360 in November 2004. Of these 80 were immigrant families.*

A portion of homeless families live in temporary dwellings, but there is no statistics on how many (See category 4, too). A large share of homeless families stay temporarily with relatives, especially in the case of immigrant families (see category 8).

4.1. Women's shelters

Women's shelters—in the sense that women stay in a shelter with a child—have not usually been counted as services for homeless people in Finland, because the women stay there only for a short period. It is, however, sometimes difficult for the social welfare authorities to find a suitable dwelling for the family and for these reasons the mother and the child have to stay longer in the shelter. In these cases, they should have been included in the figures of homeless families of housing market survey.

Lately, the number of immigrant women residing in shelters after fleeing family violence has increased. A third of the women in shelters are estimated to be immigrants.

The Federation of Mother and Child Homes and Shelters in Finland have altogether 14 shelters for women who are escaping from family violence. Municipal social welfare authorities as well as some other organisations have shelters or crises dwellings for battered women and their families, too. The Federation of Mothers and Child Homes and Shelters have a further 17 homes for mothers and children.

There is no research available on the housing situation or homelessness of the women who have stayed in the women's shelters. However, it might be time to include this category as a homelessness category.

5.1. Accommodation for asylum seekers and immigrants

Asylum seekers have likewise not been counted as homeless, as long as they stay in the state asylums or in otherwise regulated circumstances. If the asylum application is accepted, housing is arranged by the municipalities in which the asylum seeker will be living. If the immigrants move away from this municipality, some of them can then become homeless.

There are 2500 places in the centres for asylum seekers. 3861 asylum seekers came to Finland in 2004 and 1662 refugees were accepted.

Although (before they have been accepted) the asylum seekers are not considered to be homeless (houseless) in the meaning that the municipality should arrange proper housing for them, the physical spaces of the asylums—the more or less common spaces where they live—would classify them under the criteria of being homeless (=houseless).

Homeless immigrants (who no longer stay in the asylums) are included into the other categories of homeless people (282 single homeless persons, and 80 families)

6. Institutional Release

6.1. Penal institutions

The category "Prisoners soon to be released who have no housing" includes prisoners who will be released within a couple of months and for whom no ordinary or supported housing has been arranged.

According to the housing market survey the number of these homeless people was **280 as of November 2004**. This is a number estimated by the municipal authorities; it means that all persons about whom the authorities have knowledge are included. However, the number is obviously higher. According to the prison officials, 29% of all prisoners who have been in prison for more than six months and who will be released with 1 year have housing problems. On the basis of these figures, about 500 of all these prisoners have housing problems. Most of the prisoners stay in prison for a short period; how many of them are included in the estimations of the municipalities, is difficult to say.

7.2. Institutions (care and hospital)

The category "Living in care homes or other housing units, rehabilitation homes or hospitals due to lack of housing" includes those who live in housing units or homes for substance abusers, in various types of care homes or homes providing institutional care, where a person stays due to a lack of housing. Units for supported housing, where a person is supposed to live for a longer period, are not counted."

According to the housing market survey there were ***about 1260 single homeless persons in institutions and care homes in November 2004, due to lack of housing of their own.***

It is, however, quite difficult to obtain exact figures for this category in particular. There are persons who live in care homes and other units because they do not have proper housing and persons who live there because they are in fact in the need of care. It is the staff who define whether the person is staying in the institution only for a lack of housing. The actual needs of a person may change, too, in the course of a short period.

Thus, the numbers above are based on an estimate made by the municipal authorities, for that specific date. See category 7.

7. Specialist supported accommodation for homeless people

7.1.– 7.2.

This is the main category of housing for homeless people who are not considered able to live independently. Housing is arranged either for a defined term or for a longer stay.

If this form of housing is appropriate for the particular person, he or she is not considered to be homeless (houseless) any more. However, if he or she needs to stay in this kind of housing longer than it is necessary, for the lack of other options (e.g. insufficient ordinary independent housing or supported

housing), a person is considered to be homeless – or houseless (see above category 6). However, the distinction between homeless and houseless is very vague.

According to the Social Welfare Act, "Housing services mean the provision of service housing and supported accommodation". "Housing services are provided in the case of persons who, for special reasons, need help or support with organising housing or their living conditions." (Social Welfare Act)

According to the statistics on housing services collated by STAKES, housing services are divided into two categories, housing services with 24-hour assistance and housing services with part-time assistance. The former are counted in the same group as institutional care. However, there is no specific category on the statistics for homeless people, as former homeless people are counted either with people living in housing services for substance abusers, mental health persons or elderly people—or they are not included at all in the statistics.

For this reason, the contents of category 7 that follows is based to an extent on the knowledge of the author as well as on the basis of the information of the www-pages of the service providers.

A very large variety of supported accommodation or housing is available, provided both by municipalities and voluntary organisations.

Finnish concepts:

Asumispalvelu=housing service is a general concept for these services.

However, in practice a wide variety of names and concepts are used. Some examples: *tukikoti=a support home*, *puolimatkankoti= a half-way home*, *hoitokoti=a care home*, *suojakoti=a sheltered home*. Each service provider has developed names of their own for the housing services. There are services for families, too, e.g. *perhekoti=a family home*.

Most of the housing services for former homeless people simply bear the name of *tukiasunnot = supported dwellings*. The concept *palveluasunto =service housing/sheltered housing* is also a very much used concept.

Number of persons:

No numbers are available for housing services for former homeless people. There are, however, several thousand accommodation places or dwellings.

Physical space:

The quality of the physical spaces varies a lot. A large share of accommodation, especially supported dwelling, are ordinary small dwellings; of these the new ones are of very good modern quality.

A large share of housing services consists of a group living with private rooms and a common living room and other facilities. Modern group-living homes are of good quality, too, with private toilet or bathroom and own kitchen equipment. However, there are a large number of housing services of lower quality; two persons share a room and other facilities are in common use.

Staff:

Professional staff workers, the number and the qualification depends on the purpose of the housing service.

Legal space:

Group living is often meant for temporary stay, paid by the municipal social welfare office for a defined period. A rental contract is not usual in group living, but rental contracts are sometimes written in these cases, too, especially in new, modern units.

Rental contracts are usual in separate supported dwellings. Often the rental contract is at first made for a shorter period, for e.g. three months, and it will be continued if the person manages well in the dwelling. Very often the inhabitant has to sign a support contract with the service provider in addition to the rental contract.

Access criteria:

Specified criteria for access. The service provider and the municipal social welfare office, which pays for the housing services of the client, usually negotiate the criteria and consider whether the client will be suitable for this kind of housing unit.

Period of stay:

The period of stay depends on the person and the purpose of the service. Some persons stay in these dwellings or housing units for the rest of their lives, even in a group living unit, if this kind of living is suitable for the person. The purpose is to find a home that satisfies the person's individual needs.

In the separate supported dwellings, the stay may continue for a long time and even turn into ordinary housing. Some persons stay until they have acquired sufficient skills to live independently.

Many people have to leave the services, because they cannot cope with the regulations imposed by the unit on their lifestyles.

Purpose:

There is a large variety of purposes (treatment, care or supported living).

7.3. *Teenage parent accommodation* is not a homelessness category in Finland (see above 4. Mother and Child Homes).

8. *No tenancy*

8.1. *Living temporarily with relatives and friends (not through choice)*

The definition in the housing market survey is: "Living temporarily with relatives or friends includes persons who, according to the municipality's information or estimate, are living temporarily with relatives or friends due to a lack of housing or who move around between relatives and friends. This item does not include young people living in their childhood home. It is impossible to obtain accurate estimates based on housing applications alone especially in big cities."

This group consists both of people who can be defined simply as "houseless", though there are an increasing number of very vulnerable young homeless people in this group.

Thus this category should be analysed in more detail and divided into subcategories in Ethos, too.

As of November 2004 the number was estimated to be around 4200 single persons. Many homeless families live temporarily with their relatives, too, especially homeless immigrant families.

8.2. *Living in a dwelling without a standard legal (sub)tenancy*

No information. There certainly are a number of persons and families living without a legal tenancy contract. Numerous young people, drug abusers, often stay in a dwelling for which only one person

signs the tenancy contract. The threat of being evicted is great. If these persons become known to municipal authorities, they are included in category 8.1.

9.1. Legal orders enforced (rental housing)

7767 eviction applications were submitted to the court in 2003, with actual eviction realised in 1262 cases. Other households moved of their own volition or there was an arrangement agreed with the landlord and the household continued (figures for 2004 are not available).

9.2. Repossession orders (owned housing)

Repossession orders submitted to the courts are quite few. The occupant, the owner of the dwelling, moves usually of their own volition, but there is no information gathered as to where they move. Sometimes housing companies (the Finnish tenure form for owning blocks of flats and row houses) ask for help in eviction, but eviction procedures are not usually realised. So there are practically no court cases.

10. Violence, living under threat of violence from the partner or family (police recorded incidents)

This is not counted as a separate homelessness category. Moving from home as a result of violence or other family reasons very often causes homelessness. Men are more often at threat of becoming homeless due to family troubles, because the family home is often left to the woman and children. But there are no figures available. However, see above category 4, immigrant women.

11. Temporary structure

11.1. Mobile home /caravan

No larger caravan communities. There may be a small number of persons and households who live temporarily or even more or less permanently in caravans, but there are no statistics. Authorities should have included them in other homelessness figures above.

11.3. Illegal occupation (Squatting)

Squatters stay usually only for a short while in buildings. They are usually not necessarily homeless (e.g. youngsters who live in the family homes), thus squatting has not been counted as a homelessness category in Finland.

12. Unfit Housing

Dwellings unfit for habitation under national legislation (occupied)

The health authorities prohibit the use of a dwelling for habitation if it is unfit for human habitation. Some statistical information of these cases is available, but it would not give any information about homelessness, because the most common reason for closing a dwelling is mould problems etc. in the house. However, even in some cases the occupant—especially a tenant—can become temporarily homeless, if he or she cannot afford to rent another dwelling. A hostel is then an option.

13. Extreme Overcrowding

Statistics Finland has four different norms for overcrowding of dwellings. The norm commonly used is Norm 4, according to which a dwelling is overcrowded if it has more than one person per room, with kitchen excluded from the number of rooms (According to this norm 10.9% of households are overcrowded).

According to Norm 1, the oldest of the norms for overcrowding, a dwelling is overcrowded if it has more than two persons per room, with kitchen included in the number of rooms. These persons are registered in these dwelling; they do not necessarily all live there.

Overcrowded dwellings according to this norm number 20 600 (0.1% of all households) in 2002 (calculated by the author on the basis of housing statistics; Statistics Finland no longer publish figures based on this norm).

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The Ministry of Labour, Statistics on migration, www.mol.fi

Statistics of the Directorate of Immigration /www.uvi.fi

Statistics of Criminal Sanctions Agency

Statistics and other information from the Ministry of Justice

About women's shelters:

The Federation of Mother and Child Homes and Shelters

(www.ensijaturvakotienliitto.fi/English2/etusivueng.htm) and <http://www.vakivalta.net/>

The Social Welfare Act (710/1982)