



Finland - National Report

Housing Solutions for People who are homeless

FEANTSA Annual Theme 2008

Housing and Homelessness

The FEANTSA Questionnaire for the Annual Theme 2008

Housing Solutions for People who are homeless

Finland

Questions & Answers:

1. Basic questions about housing market

% social housing of total housing stock (and give brief definition of social housing)

We have 2.7 million apartments in Finland. About 420.000 rental apartments are financed by loans or interest subsidy of government. In those apartments government has given orders about the choice of tenants and defines the use of this property.

Mostly these apartments in rental houses are owned by municipal housing companies and nationwide housing corporations, which have partly they roots for example in trade unions and cooperative societies. There are also smaller organisations, mostly associations (NGOs), which are running social housing and give also support for people with housing problems.

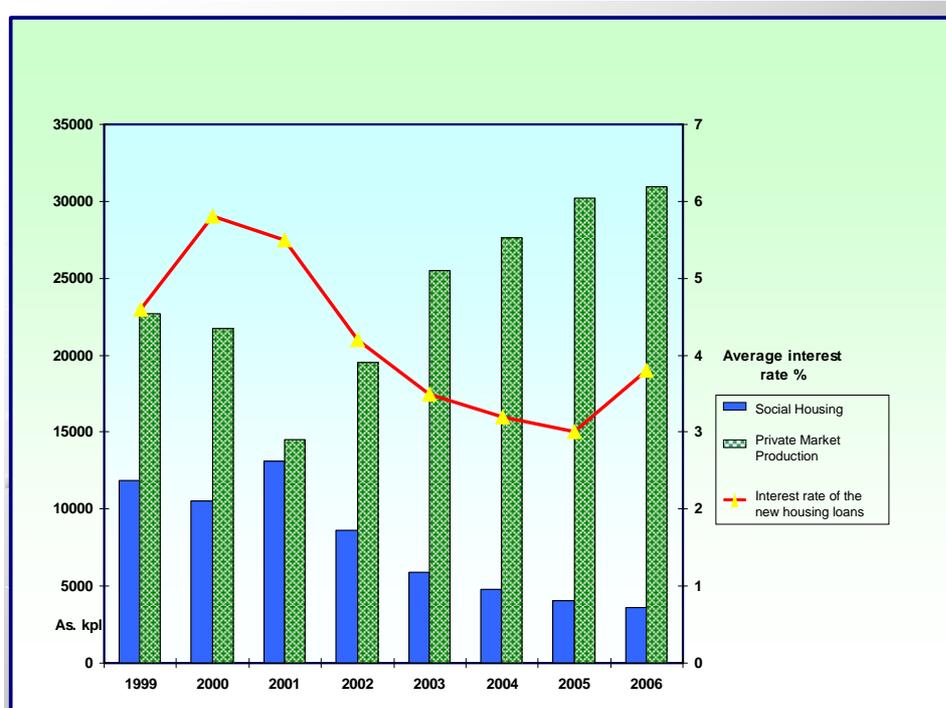
The state subvention in housing production started in Finland at the end of 1940s when there was a tremendous need for housing after the war. Also 400 000 people evacuated from the eastern parts of the country lost in the war had to be resettled.

In 1960s and 1970s Finland experienced a rapid migration from countryside to towns and industrial centres. 600 000 dwellings (25 % of the present housing stock) were constructed during a 10-year period. Also the social housing stock grew rapidly. For example in 1974 altogether 74 000 new dwellings were built and half of the amount were state subsidised.

During the recent years construction especially in social housing has been on a much lower level. As shown in figure 1 most of the new housing stock has been owner occupied housing in the private market. The lack of reasonably priced rental housing had led to new housing policy measures introduced by the Government.

Figure 1: Started housing production in social housing, private market and the average interest rate of new housing loans of households in Finland in 1999-2006.

(Source: Statistics by the Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland)



% rental housing of total stock

$$820.000 / 2.7 \text{ million} = \underline{30 \%}$$

% of sub-standard housing (and give brief definition of sub-standard housing)

Of all apartments 135.000 = 5 % are without adequate equipment. These apartments are missing at least one of these equipments: water pipes or outlets inside the building or toilets or warm water.

% of overcrowded housing (and give brief definition of overcrowding)

The number of families in overcrowded housing is 235.000 = 8.7 %. The standard used in Finland is nowadays less than one room per person (kitchen is not included in the number of rooms).

The Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (ARA) supervises the selection of tenants in state-subsidised housing production according to the criteria specified annually by the Government. The tenants are selected on the basis of social appropriateness and financial need. One of the main criteria is the urgency of the

applicants housing need. In these criteria overcrowded housing is defined as follows:

- **most urgent need for housing:** extreme overcrowding. More than three persons per one room (kitchen not included) or less than 10 m² per person.
- **urgent need for housing:** overcrowded housing. More than two persons per room (kitchen not included) or less than 15 m² per person.
- **in need for housing:** more than one person per room (kitchen not included).

Housing affordability rate (and give short explanation of how it is measured)

On average the residential costs in Finnish households (after all housing subsidies) are 18 % of the income of the family. The fifth with the lowest income in the group of tenants use 28 % of their income in housing costs. Without housing benefit this would be 47 %.

Other information that might be indicative of the housing situation in your country.

The housing markets in general are labelled by strong regional differences. During the recovery from a deep recession in economy in 1990s the new demand for housing has been concentrated in just a few growth areas. In the Helsinki Metropolitan area as well as in some regional growth centres there is a constant lack of rental housing and also homeless people whereas in the thinly populated eastern and northern parts of the county the landlords are struggling with the problem of empty houses. This has led to a rapid rise in the price of owner occupied housing and in the rents of free market rental housing especially in the capital area.

The regional housing market situation can nowadays also change suddenly and very dramatically due to changes in corporate policies of large international companies. Transferring the production in technology and wood processing industry to the developing markets has led to sudden losses of job opportunities. During the past year huge paper mills have been shut down in northern and south-eastern Finland. Thousands of people are finding themselves unemployed and probably have to move to find a new job.

One characteristic and important feature in housing production in Finland is that various forms of tenure are combined in the same residential area, city block or even building. In this way residential areas become socially integrated and problems of regional social segregation have for the most part so far been avoided.

As elsewhere in Europe, also the Finnish population is ageing rapidly. This sets new requirements for the housing stock in equipment and accessibility. There are e.g. government subsidised grant schemes for housing repairs for the elderly and for the construction of lifts in residential buildings.

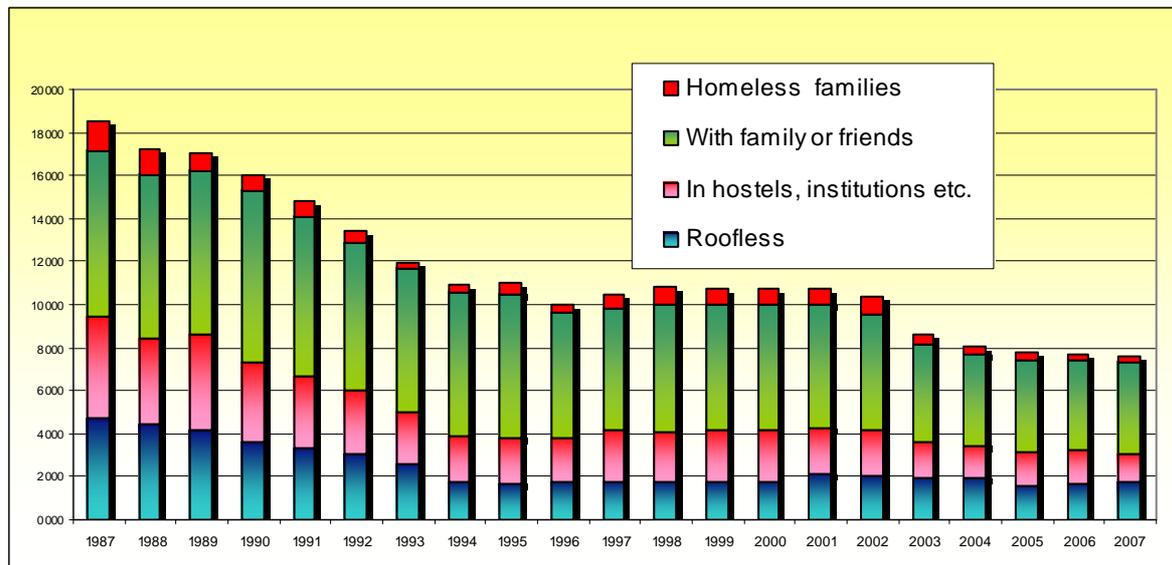
2. Public housing policies

Homelessness in Finland

Homeless strategies in Finland have for several years targeted in building and buying homes for the homeless. Financial preconditions for building rental housing for special groups have been developed and also the meaning of support services is recognized. Combating homelessness has been a target in the programmes of several previous governments and there have been action plans both on the national and regional level (Helsinki Metropolitan Area).

Figure 2. Development of homelessness in Finland since 1987

(Source: Statistics by the Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland):



The results of these efforts can be seen in the figure above (Figure 2). The number of homeless people has declined considerably in recent years. At the end of the year 2000 there were some 10 000 homeless single people across Finland as well as 800 homeless families. In 2007 there were 7300 single homeless people and 300 families listed homeless in the national housing market survey. The numbers are declining but painstakingly slowly.

The most vulnerable homeless people have not been able to benefit from the present options. Arranging decent housing and services suitable for the needs of this hard core of homeless people requires new measures and service concepts. In 2005 it was estimated, that only one third of the homeless people living in Helsinki Metropolitan area (where most homeless people live in Finland) can be helped by arranging them a home (Asunnottomien asumispalvelujen kehittyminen 2005, 11). Long-term homeless and homeless people with multiple problems need therefore special measures to improve their situation in a sustainable manner.

What are the aims/objectives of public housing policy in relation to homelessness (if any)?

Government Programme of Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen's second cabinet introduce following:

- The extension of the scope of Housing Fund subsidies in the context of sheltered housing will be evaluated.
- Aid to assist the long-term homeless (investment subsidy) will be increased to 50 per cent, and the rate of subsidies for housing for people with disabilities will be increased.
- Resolutions on the more detailed housing policy measures and related funding were specified in the Housing Policy Programme. One of the main targets of the programme is a more effective land use to enable the production of reasonably priced rental housing in the developing areas.
- A programme for alleviating long-term homelessness will be prepared for the period 2008–2011 for inclusion in the housing policy programme.

The Finnish Government programme to reduce long-term homelessness 2008 – 2011 was approved on 14 February 2008. The programme focuses on the 10 largest urban growth centres, where also most of the homeless live. The main priority is the Helsinki metropolitan area.

The programme is structured around the “**Housing First**” principle. Accommodation is a requirement which also allows other problems of the homeless people to be solved. The programs objectives are:

- To halve long term homelessness by 2011.
- More effective measures to prevent homelessness.

The programme to reduce long-term homelessness points out following measures:

A. Targeted action to reduce long-term homelessness

1. To make it possible by 2011 to allocate 1.000 homes, subsidised housing units or places in care to the long-term homeless in the Helsinki metropolitan area. The goal for other big cities is to allocate a total of 150 homes.
2. The 10 biggest cities involved in implementing the programme to draw up plans of execution for reducing long-term homelessness. The plans to specify the need for housing solutions and support and preventive action and to identify and schedule projects and other measures. The plans should cover the use of the stock of social rented accommodation to assist the homeless. In the beginning of June 2008 the cities have just made their plans and the Government is just preparing the letters of intent with the cities.
3. Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (ARA) to allocate investment grants for groups with special needs in respect of projects approved under the programme. Grants to be allocated during the period 2008 – 2011 at a maximum of € 20 million per annum.
4. The use shelters for long term housing of the homeless gradually to be abandoned in favour of residential units which allow for independent subsidised and supervised living.
5. The Finnish Slot Machine Association (RAY) to be involved in implementing the programme by allocating investment grants to eligible associations, organisations or

foundations responsible for residential homes, for basic renovation work and for converting them into subsidised housing units. The Slot Machine Association will use approximately € 18 million in assistance for suitable projects under the programme in the period 2008 – 2011.

6. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to finance the production of support services for new serviced accommodation units under the programme. The money to go increases in personnel needed to produce special services under the programme. The cities will fund 50 % of these salary costs and the Ministry 50 %.
7. In the period 2009 – 2011 the Finnish Slot Machine Association to support organisations which develop and arrange subsidised accommodation for clients of the probation service. € 2.5 million of the whole amount of the money for accommodation for groups with special needs for 2009 – 2011 may be spent specifically in the procurement of subsidised housing for recently released prisoners.
8. The Criminal Sanctions Agency, in collaboration with the 10 biggest cities and the organisations producing housing services, to undertake a development project to produce viable local and client-specific practices for the subsidised housing of homeless prisoners.

B. Prevention of homelessness

9. A Young Peoples Subsidised Housing project run by the state, the cities, the Church, business and organisations to be started to prevent homelessness among the young.
10. National guidelines and development regarding the prevention of homelessness and advice on better housing conditions to be among the tasks of the Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (ARA) in 2008.
11. State funds to be granted to local authority housing advisory services in council estates by launching a programme for suburban population centres in the period 2009 – 2011. The local authority must have practises jointly agreed by the social services and housing actors in place to prevent eviction and to help them cooperate in eviction situations.
12. The Ministry of the Environment, Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (ARA), National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (STAKES), the cities of Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa and Tampere to hold a national concept competition in 2008 to establish new types of accommodation unit and services for the long-term homeless. The competition to be co-financed by the state and the local authorities.

Which decision-making level leads on the issue of housing (local, regional, national...)?

Nowadays national level leads again. Local authorities have the main responsibility in public housing policies. Due to economic problems on the municipal level, attitude, lack of will and relieved normative control of the central administration the local authorities have been inactive in public housing policies. Especially evident has the lack of initiatives been in the capital area of Helsinki. On Governments agenda public housing policy has nowadays a stronger role than before.

Do housing policy makers have a leading role in addressing and preventing homelessness (in relation to policy development – not service provision!!)? Why (not)?

At this moment – Yes! The Ministry of Environment is responsible for housing matters and it is also responsible for the Government programme on long-term homeless people. The Ministry implements the programme and makes contracts with cities about the targeted measures.

What is the % of the public housing budget spent on homelessness (if you include prevention of homelessness, please specify)?

The public Housing budget (2008) is a complicated mix of transmissions and payments in and out of the state housing budget and Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (ARA) and between them. So it is difficult to give just one exact figure or percentage.

State takes income of € 148 million from the Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (ARA). State does not allocate this sum to housing. The total expenses of the essential state housing budget are € 69 million, without any special allocations to homeless.

Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (ARA) gives loans and guarantees for social housing. At this moment the subsidy is quite little because the common interest rate is also low. ARA has right to give subventions € 102 million in 2008. € 85 million of the sum is allocated to vulnerable groups on housing market and € 20 million (20 %) especially to investment grants for reducing homelessness.

The Finnish Slot Machine Association (RAY) has right to give grants of € 312 million in 2008. € 36.5 million is allocated to the housing of groups with special needs. In 2008 approximately € 3 million is allocated to investment grants to eligible associations, organisations or foundations for basic renovation work and for converting residential homes into supported housing units.

The financing scheme for reducing long-term homelessness covers the time period 2008-2011 both in ARA and RAY –financing.

3. Access to housing as a trigger/cause of homelessness

Does housing play an important role in the pathways in and out of homelessness? Please explain?

Housing has a key role in the pathways in and out homelessness. The supply of reasonably priced rental housing is of vital importance since rapid changes in the housing market can otherwise make large groups of people vulnerable to homelessness.

In the Finnish context also the development of good quality supported housing facilities is crucial since a great majority of homeless people need support services to be able to keep their homes and to manage their responsibilities. So apart from housing also well functioning welfare services are important. The possibility to move to independent living after a support period is important for many homeless people. Yet it must be recognized that there are homeless people who need support services of various kind on a permanent basis.

Do you know of any evidence that bad/inadequate housing causes homelessness? Please explain.

Bad or inadequate housing is not in a major role in Finland as a cause to homelessness. The housing stock is relatively new and well equipped and there are government subsidies to loans and grants available for renovating.

Do you have evidence that homelessness increases when the housing market is stressed (or the other way around)? Please explain.

During an over-heated situation in the housing market private landlords are selling their housing stock. This increases the demand for rental housing in a situation where buying a dwelling is not a good option. At the moment the increasing numbers of applicants in social housing show clear signs of a stressed market situation. According to the statistics by the Housing Finance and Development Centre there were 20 % more applications last year in the capital area to social housing than in 2006 and 70 % more compared to the situation in 2005. Also the current rapid raise of rents tells about a stressed situation in the housing market. If the construction of social housing remains low there is a risk that more and more people are vulnerable to homelessness.

Related to adequacy of supply? Please, explain

The most important housing related problem leading to homelessness in Finland is the adequacy of supply. There is a constant lack of small and reasonably priced rental dwellings in the growth areas. This is the type of housing that could fit to the needs of single homeless people. According to the information from Statistics Finland 73 % of households were small (1-2 persons) in 2007.

Another important problem is related both to housing and support services. It is not easy to find suitable location to supported housing facilities but it has not been easy to arrange financing to the support services either. Many homeless people in Finland could benefit from options to some kind of services to secure their housing.

4. Role of hostel accommodation

Please explain what is the role (if any) of hostels in the transition process to permanent/independent housing for people who are homeless?

Do you believe that hostels are a necessary step towards more independent forms of accommodation for homeless people? Please, explain.

It is often argued that many homeless people (who are on the streets or in hostels) are not capable of independent living. Please explain what hostels (can) do to make homeless people *housing ready*?

What are the most important obstacles for people to move on from hostel accommodation to more independent housing?

Hostels are a low threshold solution for crisis situations and they are not meant to be a permanent housing solution for anyone. Yet there are homeless people who live in hostels for long periods of time. Staying in a hostel is not a necessary step to independent living as such, very often living there happens by the force of circumstances. A good quality hostel can nevertheless be a step forward after a chaotic life style and help a person to find some kind of life management in more secure surroundings.

Most homeless people in Finland live in Helsinki. The city has developed a comprehensive system of housing facilities including support homes and independent dwellings. The target is to minimize the use of shelters and support the clients to live in normal rental housing. Since many of the clients are suffering from multiple problems also other social welfare and health services are needed. The idea of moving step by step towards independent living does not, however, work for all homeless people. Also supported housing facilities are needed.

The present programme on long-term homelessness (introduced in part 2) includes a scheme for renovating residential homes and shelters to supported dwellings.

Can (certain types of) hostel accommodation be a *permanent solution* for certain people who are homeless? Please, explain.

Do you believe that a *housing first approach* (i.e. provide immediately permanent/independent housing, offer (social) support in this housing and adapt it to the changing needs of the tenant, rather than keep homeless people in temporary accommodation, try to solve their problems through support, and provide independent housing when the person is deemed to be *housing ready*) can work in your country? Why / why not? Please, explain.

Housing first approach is the basic principle in the Finnish Government's programme to reduce long-term homelessness in 2008-2011. According to the plan solutions to social and health problems cannot be a condition for organising accommodation: on the contrary, accommodation is a requirement which allows other problems of people who are homeless to be solved. Having somewhere to live makes it possible to strengthen life management skills and is conducive to purposeful activity.

The success of the approach depends to a large extent on the availability of support services and secondly on the possibilities to find suitable housing for the long-term homeless people. Since this programme is targeted to help the hard core of homelessness it is clear that these people without any special measures will hardly ever be *housing ready* in the normal housing market. Yet the importance of a comprehensive service provision must be underlined. Also new kind of service concepts need to be developed to match the multiple needs of these homeless people.

The Finnish social and health system is residence based. After getting a home a person has better opportunities to get services and also benefit from them if the conditions of living are decent. In addition to the general service system also more precisely targeted, individually tailored support solutions are necessary. The support must be far more dedicated than before and include rehabilitation, monitoring and supervision.

5. Home-ownership

Is repossession due to mortgage default an issue in relation to homelessness in your country?

No.

Has homelessness increased recently because of increasing cost of home-ownership and repossession rates?

No.

Can home-ownership be a sustainable solution for homeless people?

Most homeless people in Finland live in the capital area where also prices are high. Taking into account the low income level of most homeless people it is not realistic that home-ownership could be a sustainable solution at least in the short run.

Repossession due to mortgage default is not a major issue in relation to homelessness and neither is extreme poverty amongst home-owners. The development of interest rates is monitored since housing costs of households are high and housing loans are nowadays big and the loan periods are long.

6. Role of private rental housing market?

Do you think that the private rental housing sector can be a genuine actor in the provision of decent and affordable housing for homeless people?

In general private rental housing can be an important actor in the housing market by increasing the volume of rental housing stock. Private sector does not provide affordable housing for homeless people unless there are other reasons to "be social" (e.g. poor quality of the dwelling).

During the recent years the general interest in investing in private rental housing has been falling since prices of dwellings have been rising faster than the rents.

Do you know of policies aimed at *socialising* the private rental sector for homelessness people? Please, explain how (and why) they work/do not work?

The terms of government subsidised loans for housing were altered in 2002. It is nowadays possible for municipal or non profit housing companies to get a state subsidised loan to buy private rental blocks. According to the terms of the loan 30 % of the dwellings must be targeted to homeless people or some other special group (refugees, Roma people etc.). Y-Foundation has used this type of financing in the capital area and bought four housing companies from the private market. This has worked fine: by tailored selection of tenants, suitable support services and with the help of a housing adviser both the former tenants as well as the former homeless people

have been satisfied with the solution.

What are the most common obstacles to convince private landlords to rent out dwellings to homeless people? How can these obstacles be overcome?

Payment defaults in personal credit data can be an obstacle. Also a security deposit can be a problem since the deposit can be even as large as three months rent and all private landlords do not accept a security deposit granted by the social welfare office.

Do you think rent regulation works to ease housing market pressures and make private rental housing more affordable for very vulnerable groups such as homeless people? Explain why/why not and how it works.

Do you know of successful policies that aim at reducing vacancy rates and making vacant housing available for homeless people?

There are examples of renovating vacant houses for homeless people, especially to be used as some kind of supported housing. In Finland there is a geographical problem in doing this: homeless people live mostly in Helsinki and vacant housing is situated in northern and eastern Finland.

Do you know of policies aimed at specific landlords with substantial amounts of vacant housing such as shops, the church...?

Do you know of effective policy measures to stop speculation in housing?

Is very inadequate/substandard housing in the private rental market a big problem in your country?

Inadequate housing in the private rental market is not a major problem. Yet there are private landlords who rent substandard housing for homeless without much thought about the ethics of that kind of business. This is, however, not a large scale matter.

Do you know of housing situations (both related to physical standards, bad housing management practice, and housing insecurity) in the private rental market that amount to the experience of homelessness? Please, explain.

What public intervention/regulation exists to stop very inadequate housing by slum landlords?

A municipal health inspector is an investigating authority in terms of health hazards of apartments, houses and other premises. In case there is a clear health risk the inspector can forbid the landlord from using the dwelling in residential use or oblige the landlord to do necessary reparations. Otherwise the Act on Residential Leases (481/1995) gives a large freedom of contract to the landlord and the tenant.

Are homeless people put into cheap hotel accommodation because of lack of other alternatives?

Why?

The responsibility to arrange housing for the homeless people is on the local level, in municipalities. The number of homeless people varies greatly in the country, and so does also the way housing for the homeless is organized. There are cities (e.g. Helsinki) which have developed alternative forms of housing but there are also municipal authorities that use cheap hotel accommodation because there are not enough other options available.

The present Government programme to reduce long-term homelessness is a serious effort to encourage local authorities to develop more suitable housing options for the homeless.

What is the cost (annual cost per country or indication thereof)?

What public measures are taken to reduce the use of hotel accommodation?

See above part 2: the Government programme on long-term homelessness.

Is squatting considered to be an issue related to homelessness? Please, explain.

7. Role of social/public housing

(make difference between both if necessary)

How is social housing defined in your country and what are the statutory aims?

Constructors and landlords in Finland can get a status of the non profit organisation. After the nomination they can get government loans and in some case also subventions. Mutually they accept roles of the government in rent control, choice of tenants, in use of profits and in buying and selling houses.

In social rental housing the roles of Government point out following things in choice of tenants:

- Homeless people and other people with urgent housing needs have priority.
- The property of the family got to be under specified level.
- Families with lowest incomes have priority.

What role does the social housing sector play in addressing and preventing homelessness?

It is the main tool. Especially significant role in preventing homelessness have those housing providers which give also support to vulnerable people.

Do social housing landlords have a statutory obligation to house homeless people? If yes, please explain?

Yes. Look answer above. Local authorities have the responsibility to control the choice of tenants. In recent years the control of local authorities over the choice of tenants has weakened. Also the criteria in the selection of tenants have been made more liberal to foster work based migration.

Are you aware of any other policies that help/incite social housing landlords to provide housing to homeless people?

All the local authorities and associations, companies and foundations with the status of non profit organisations have right to get subsidy for building, renovating and buying the apartments for groups of people with special needs, including the homeless. The maximum grant is nowadays 35 %. The Government has just given a legislative proposal to increase the investment subsidy for building the housing units for long-term homeless people to 50 per cent.

What are the most commonly used arguments for social housing landlords to house/not to house homeless people? Do you agree with these arguments?

There are two types of social housing providers in Finland. Municipal and some other social housing providers such as Y-Foundation house homeless people. Yet there are also housing corporations which in principle construct also social housing but are much stricter in the selection of tenants.

With higher grants it seems out that the willingness to built special units for long-term homeless is also growing.

Do you think the social housing stock is large enough to allow social housing landlords to play an effective role in addressing and preventing homelessness? If not, what happens with homeless people during the time more social housing is made available?

The social housing stock (15 per cent of the total housing stock) makes possible to keep the amount of homeless quite low, especially among the people with adequate skills to live with support in normal rental housing. Construction of special units for homeless with more difficult problems will help to get the amount of homeless people even lower. Quite high quota of social rental housing makes it possible to take care of the diversity of the residents in social rental houses. The majority of inhabitants are common working or studying people, with a little bit lower income and young families in the beginning of their housing career.

In Finland social housing is not a source of marginalisation or social segregation, but on the contrary way to integration. Inside the sector one part of the social housing cooperatives are specialised not only to run social housing but also give support to

people with housing problems.

Does the funding regime help/complicate social housing operators to focus on homeless people?

Yes. The funding regime helps.

Do you agree that social housing should be allocated primarily on the basis of the urgency of housing exclusion – even if that would jeopardise social mix in the social housing stock? Please, explain.

Adequate number of social housing takes care that there is no conflict between these aspirations.

Are you aware of any structural cooperation between the homelessness sector and social housing providers? If yes, can you explain how the cooperation is organised (voluntary or statutory basis) and give examples of good practices.

Many municipal house owners have special actions to homeless people. They have special municipal working groups which are trying to get apartments and organise support to homeless people.

Also many NGOs are running housing projects to build and get apartments and support for homeless people. In funding NGOs Finnish speciality is Slot Machine Association (RAY), which has a national monopoly in slot machines and casinos. Association gives its profit for NGOs which are running different kind of social projects – for example in supported housing.

Do you agree that mixing housing tenures and social & ethnic groups is a precondition for building sustainable communities? Please, explain.

As mentioned in part 1 mixing housing tenures has been a leading principle in the Finnish housing policy. It has helped to avoid large scale regional segregation but the target has not recently been achieved as well as intended.

How can one solve the tension between building socially mixed communities and providing housing for the most excluded?

The adequate number of social housing is very important to solve the tension.

Local authorities have a key role in planning the land use. Municipal authorities can use policy instruments in land acquisition to ensure a sufficient supply of building sites provided that there is a strong political will to do so. Very often appeal processes can make construction for special groups difficult. That is why it is important to have a ready town plan which specifies the land use.

The NIMBY-phenomenon can not always be avoided but usually the opposition occurs when a new project is planned. With sufficient support services and open cooperation

with the surrounding community prejudices and problems can be overcome.

During the recent years the main obstacles to construct more social housing have been high construction costs, the lack of suitable land for construction and the development of interest rates. The demand for owner occupied housing has been high for many years and the interest rates low in the private market.

8. Prevention of homelessness

What are the main interventions in the housing area aimed at preventing homelessness? Please, explain. (summarise if necessary)

The existence of good quality and reasonably priced social housing with secure tenure is very important in preventing homelessness. Also the existence of supported housing and service housing facilities are important especially in the Finnish situation where many homeless people have multiple problems and need help in keeping their home.

The present Government programme on long term homelessness described in part 2 is a serious and comprehensive effort in housing area to improve the situation of the most vulnerable group of homeless people. The programme has also a strong preventive bias: building housing is not enough, also suitable support is of vital importance to obtain sustainable housing solutions.

Is eviction an important issue in relation to homelessness? Why/why not – please, explain

Eviction is an important issue in relation to homelessness. In most cases it causes a crisis situation and very often costly measures are needed to improve the situation again (treatment or rehabilitation services, supported housing etc.). Eviction causes a default in personal credit data and makes it difficult to get a new rental dwelling in the future.

Sometimes the landlord has to evict a person just because there are not suitable support services available or the tenant for some reason is reluctant to accept any kind of help. This is why supported housing options are important: very often a person is capable of maintaining life management with suitable support services is a safe environment.

% of people evicted who become homeless?

What are the main reasons for people being evicted?

Most evictions are done on the basis of unpaid rents. According to a study about evictions in Finland in only 6 % of the cases in threat of eviction rent arrears were not mentioned at all (Salovaara & Muttillainen 2004, 41). On the other hand it is easier for the landlord to get a person evicted on the basis of unpaid rents than on the basis of antisocial behaviour. This is why it is not possible to draw a conclusion that 94 % of evictions happen only because of the rent arrears. Very often there are other reasons, too.

Eviction cases received by the enforcement services almost doubled during the economic depression in the first half of the 1990s. In the 1980s there were merely about 3000 evictions per year but in 2003 enforcement services received about 7700 cases. There are worrying signs of an increase in financial and debt problems of Finnish households at the moment.

What public intervention exists to prevent eviction?

The system of housing allowance and the possibility to get social assistance are the most important financial options in preventing homelessness. Thus also people with low income level can keep their home even in crisis situations.

Housing allowance can cover a remarkable part of housing costs so that also a person living with minimum income can afford to pay the rent. In a study about the allocation of housing allowance in 2004 it was found out that this form of support helps especially low income households (Pasanen 2007, 49-51). 77 % of the housing allowance was allocated to people in the two lowest income groups. As housing allowance covers only housing costs it does not directly help a homeless person. But as soon as a person gets a dwelling it can cover a large part of the expenses.

One important preventive measure is the work of housing advisers. Most large social housing companies or some municipalities have special housing advisers in their staff to help tenants in various problems of life management. They do service counselling and contact tenants who are in danger of being evicted. Very often people need help in financial difficulties. Housing advisers meet also people suffering from health problems and incapability to take care of their obligations. Networking with social and health services is therefore a crucial part of their work.

Many cities have developed special social services to help people in housing problems. In Helsinki, for example, there is a special welfare service for homeless people with a comprehensive system of housing services. Along with the supported housing facilities this office has also over 2000 normal dwellings at its disposal for homeless people. There is, however, a constant lack of housing options for people who need some kind of supported housing. Supported housing is certainly more cost-effective than evicting a person repeatedly – as well on economic as on humanitarian grounds.

Do you have evidence that this intervention reduced the number of people who are homeless?

Please, explain the importance of housing allowances as a tool for prevention of homelessness? Is it cost-effective? Does it reach homeless people?

**Is housing advice an effective way to prevent/address homelessness?
What kind of housing advice do people need?**

How should it be provided?

Is intervening in the housing market a cost-effective way to prevent homelessness? Please, explain.

9. Right to housing

Is the right to housing enshrined in the constitution and/or legislation of your country? If not, why?

Is the right to housing justiciable (can it be invoked through legal proceedings)?

For whom (what category of the population)?

How?

Is it effective? Why/why not (implementation problems...)?

According to the Constitution Act of Finland the public authorities are obliged to *promote each and every citizen's right to housing*. The methods used to realise this fundamental right are not regulated and so the provision does not establish a subjective right to housing for anybody (Fredriksson & Pätäri 2006, 36).

The Constitution of Finland (731/1999) prescribes in Section 19 about the right to social security. "Those who cannot obtain the means necessary for a life of dignity have the right to receive indispensable subsistence and care. Everyone shall be guaranteed by an Act the right to basic subsistence in the event of unemployment, illness, and disability and during old age as well as at the birth of a child or the loss of a provider. The public authorities shall guarantee for everyone, as provided in more detail by an Act, adequate social, health and medical services and promote the health of the population. Moreover, the public authorities shall support families and others responsible for providing for children so that they have the ability to ensure the wellbeing and personal development of the children. *The public authorities shall promote the right of everyone to housing and the opportunity to arrange their own housing.*"

Even though there is not a general right to housing in the Finnish legislation the public authorities are obliged to help people also in housing matters. The Social Welfare Act (710/1982) states that housing services (service housing or supported housing) are provided in the case of persons who for special reasons need help or support with organising housing or their living conditions. Also the Mental Health Act (1116/90) states that a person suffering from a mental illness or some other mental disorder must be provided with rehabilitative or service housing appropriate to the necessary medical or social rehabilitation. Such housing shall be organized in cooperation with the social welfare department of the municipality in question. Also young people and families in need of child welfare services are entitled to improve their housing conditions and their situation is mentioned in the selection criteria for social housing. This is why young people who have been taken into care get a home from social housing as they come of age (18 years).

10. Immigration

On the request of the Administrative Council, we added a section on migration. It might be useful (depends on the situation in your country...) to provide some

information on the impact of migration on the housing market and on**the housing situation of immigrants (in as much as it amounts to the experience of homelessness).****An issue of particular concern could be the rights of EU migrants (in particular of migrants from the new EU member states to the old EU-15) to housing and hostel accommodation**

The theme immigration and homelessness is relatively new in Finland. Traditionally Finland has been a country of emigration. In 1970s and 1980s Finland started to receive small numbers of quota refugees. The rise in immigration started in 1990s when ethnic Ingrian Finns living in Russia, Estonia and other parts of former Soviet Union were offered returnee status and also Somalis were seeking asylum. At the end of 2006 a total of 121 700 foreign nationals lived permanently in Finland representing 2.3 % of the entire population.

In 1980s Finland adopted a dispersal reception policy according to which refugees were resettled in small groups all over the country. Refugees are provided with a first dwelling by the municipality to which they are first assigned. The target was to prevent the concentration of immigrants to certain areas. This policy proved not, however, very effective. Since immigrants are free to move inside the country most of them have preferred to move to Helsinki region and other large cities in southern Finland. This migration towards cities has caused homelessness or over-crowded housing since immigrants are concentrating to areas suffering from the shortage of rental housing.

The number of homeless immigrants is small but it is very difficult to get exact knowledge about the extent of homelessness among immigrants because their relatives or friend usually accommodate them temporarily (Mikkonen & Kärkkäinen 2003, 3). Homeless immigrants are entitled to same social and health services as anyone else living permanently in the country but they also have to queue for the same social housing dwellings as anyone else.

Nowadays the main concern in public discussion is work-based migration. Finland is facing a vast demographic challenge in the near future as the supply of labour is beginning to fall after 2010. The Government Programme emphasises work-based immigration and a policy programme is implemented to actively promote labour migration and integration.

The alteration of labour markets is already visible. There are EU-nationals working in Finland, especially from Estonia. Often they work as temporary work force (leased manpower) and they do not necessarily move permanently to Finland since the costs of living are lower in Estonia or their families stay there. Instead the workers stay in a shared and over-crowded dwelling during the work week and maybe travel home for the weekend. Otherwise EU-nationals are in housing matters facing the same problem as Finns in the growth areas: the lack of reasonably priced rental dwellings and high costs of living.

Work-based migration includes also risks. Rapid economic changes and short term work contracts can leave a person unemployed and vulnerable to homelessness, too. Some of the companies hiring work force seem to operate in a questionable manner and controlling their action is challenging. There is evidence that the terms and conditions of employment of temporary workers do not match the statutory Finnish

level. For example the workers may have to pay high rents in a shared dwelling to the employer. This is why apart from employment other factors such as information about the legislation, language skills, integration and professional education are important to emphasise when work related migration is promoted.

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Useful links:

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

www.environment.fi The website of the environmental administration in Finland

www.finlex.fi (legislation)

www.hel.fi City of Helsinki

www.intermin.fi Ministry of the Interior

www.kela.fi The Social Insurance Institution of Finland

www.migri.fi Finnish Immigration Service

www.mol.fi Employment Services

www.nal.fi Finnish Youth Housing Association (NGO)

www.stakes.fi National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health

www.stm.fi Ministry of Social Affairs and Health

www.stat.fi Statistics Finland

www.tem.fi Ministry of Employment and the Economy

www.vvary.fi No Fixed Abode (NGO)

www.vn.fi Finnish Government

www.ysaatio.fi Y-Foundation