

FINLAND



KEY STATISTICS

The Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (ARA) conducts an annual national survey on homelessness¹. The data collected on the 15th of November 2017 shows a slight decrease by 69 people in the number of single homeless people (6,615) as well as a decrease by 111 families in the total number of homeless families (214) compared to the previous year. In the survey 113 municipalities in mainland Finland reported homelessness. It is concentrated in the capital city area: most homeless people (3760, including single homeless and homeless persons in families) live in Helsinki.

The ARA survey covers a variety of living situations:

- People sleeping rough or in emergency accommodation (ETHOS 1.1 and 2.1): 415
- People living in homeless hostels (ETHOS 3.1): 244
- People living in institutions (ETHOS 6.2): 428
- People living temporarily with relatives or friends (ETHOS 8.1): 5,528

INCREASE/DECREASE IN NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

At the end of the 1980s, there were almost 20,000 homeless people in Finland. In the 2017, the number had fallen to 6615 single homeless people and this was the fifth consecutive year during which the number of homeless people decreased.

CHANGE IN PROFILE OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

Homeless people living temporarily with relatives or friends are the largest group of homeless people living in Finland. Their share has further increased compared to the previous year. In 2017 the total of 84 % of single homeless people belonged to this group. This reflects the strained housing market and lack of affordable rental housing especially in the Helsinki region.

At the end of 2017, 26.3% of single homeless people were of immigrant background (1 742) and 64.5% of homeless

families were immigrant families. The number of long-term homeless people decreased by 154 people. The number of homeless young people under the age of 25 increased by 186 people. In 2017, 24% of single homeless were young people. 23.3% of single homeless people were women.

NATIONAL STRATEGY:

Action Plan for Preventing Homelessness in Finland 2016-2019²

After two national policy programs targeted at reducing long-term homelessness (PAAVO I and II in 2008-2015), a new policy program focusing on prevention was decided by the Finnish Government in June 2016.

During PAAVO, the focus was on arranging permanent housing and support for the most vulnerable homeless people. New housing was built and arranged, service models were developed, and hostels were converted into supported housing units with independent flats and on-site services. The program targeted 11 cities with the highest numbers of homeless people and it was based on the Housing First approach. Homelessness decreased (as did long-term homelessness) by 1 345 persons (35 %).

The Action Plan for Preventing Homelessness emphasises early recognition of the risk of becoming homeless and rapid intervention when a person is at risk or has recently become homeless. The goal of the action plan is to link the work on homelessness more extensively to the whole of the work on preventing social exclusion based on the Housing First principle. In practice, this means ensuring that housing is secured whenever the client is met in the welfare system.

Scope

The focus is in 10 cities which have signed the agreement with the state. Programme work is also done with cities, in which homelessness is at risk of increasing and in which authorities are motivated to cooperate in preventing homelessness. In the joint development work, also other municipalities and organizations are involved through training and various networks.

¹ [http://www.ara.fi/en-US/Materials/Homelessness_reports/Homelessness_in_Finland_2017\(46471\)](http://www.ara.fi/en-US/Materials/Homelessness_reports/Homelessness_in_Finland_2017(46471))

² http://www.ym.fi/en-US/Housing/Programmes_and_strategies/Actionplan_for_preventing_homelessness

Objectives

The main goal is to continue to reduce homelessness. To reach this goal, it is necessary to strengthen prevention of homelessness and prevent recurrence of homelessness. The plan includes allocating 2,500 new dwellings or places in housing to the homeless or people at risk of becoming homeless.

Besides housing, the action plan includes 15 targeted measures to prevent homelessness. As a part of the action plan, a project under the coordination by ARA, is implementing a development process in which 6 cities draw up and execute strategies for the prevention of homelessness³. The threat of losing housing is prevented for households experiencing financial difficulties and access to housing is made easier for those who have lost their credit rating. Housing guidance services as well as low-threshold services are strengthened and transition from institutions/housing services to independent housing is secured. Service development and participation of service users are promoted. These measures aim to renew the service system related to dealing with homelessness so that it becomes more client-oriented, preventative and cost-efficient.

Resources

The cost estimate for the action plan is €78 million. The share of investments (construction, procurement and rental) is approximately €54 million, and the share of service development and coordination is approximately €24 million in total. Funding is gathered from several separate sources by using project funding, investment and development aid, funding from ministries' budgets, as well as other funding instruments. It is estimated that the share of STEA, the Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations⁴ during the programme period is approximately €23.6 million, and the share of the cities is approximately €6 million. The program funding is secured.

Governance

The programme is implemented in cooperation between the state, cities, NGOs, and service providers. The Ministry of the Environment, Energy and Housing is responsible for the management of the programme in close cooperation with the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the Ministry Employment and Economy, as well as the Ministry of the Interior.

The Ministry of the Environment has appointed a steering group for the programme from representatives of ministries, funders, cities, NGOs and other organisations. A smaller coordination group consisting of responsible

organisations prepares and implements the decisions as well as takes care of the day-to-day business of the programme. Joint development work is coordinated by the programme director together with the Networking for Development project based in Y-Foundation and implemented together with several organisations.

The state has signed agreements for the programme period with cities and interested peri-urban municipalities, in which measures for preventing homelessness, combating homelessness and principles for joint development work are specified.

TARGETED PREVENTION

Prevention of homelessness was included in the previous national programs on homelessness. Yet, to succeed in the target of ending homelessness, it is obvious that prevention must be at the centre of the work. Approximately 400 clients of homelessness services became homeless again from 2012 to 2015. In addition, new people are becoming homeless due to problems such as financial issues. Also, more and more immigrants are in a vulnerable position on the housing market. The organisations in housing, social services, health care and employment services have been divided into separate sectors. This has created challenges for sufficient early identification and prevention of homelessness

HOUSING-LED APPROACHES

The strategy is based on the Housing First principle. The key elements in the action plan are increasing the provision of affordable rental housing and developing support services matching the special needs of the tenants. In addition to utilising state subsidized rental housing stock in housing the homeless, new types of construction and experimental projects have been encouraged for example for young people.

REMARKS ON RESEARCH

The strategy is evidence-based. In 2014 an international research evaluation of the national programme was carried out and the results are taken into account in planning the action plan⁵.

REMARKS ON KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Positive

Overall policy shift from the staircase model towards housing-led solutions, which has provided a framework within which homeless people can benefit better from the general service system.

No street homelessness.

³ http://www.ara.fi/en-US/Housing_programs/Municipial_Strategies_to_Prevent_Homelessness

⁴ Until the end of 2016 called RAY, Finland's Slot Machine Association.

⁵ [http://www.ymparisto.fi/en-US/Housing/International_study_Finland_is_a_leading\(32702\)](http://www.ymparisto.fi/en-US/Housing/International_study_Finland_is_a_leading(32702))

No shelters in larger cities.

Decreasing homelessness.

Negative

Lack of affordable rental housing especially in the metropolitan region.

The number of young homeless people is increasing.

The regional government, health and social services reform has been planned for years. The process is still going on and this creates insecurity for the public sector as well NGOs and other service providers.