

FINLAND



KEY STATISTICS

The Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (ARA) conducts an annual national survey on homelessness.ⁱ On the 15 of November 2019 there were 4600 single homeless people and 264 homeless families. *(Estimating among previous years in families there were 680 people, includes families with minors and couples without children). The real number of homeless people would then be approximately 5280 and the number of the homeless people has decreased 200 from year 2018.*

In total, 97 municipalities in mainland Finland reported homelessness in their area. Homelessness is concentrated in southern Finland: most homeless people 2392 (52% including single homeless and homeless persons in families) live in the Helsinki metropolitan area.

The ARA survey covers a variety of living situations:

- People sleeping rough or in emergency accommodation (ETHOS 1.1 and 2.1): 739
- People living in homeless hostels (ETHOS 3.1): 429
- People living in institutions (ETHOS 6.2): 312
- People living temporarily with relatives or friends (ETHOS 8.1): 3,120

DECREASE IN NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

At the end of the 1980s, there were almost 20,000 homeless people in Finland. In 2019, the number had fallen to 4600 single homeless people. The number of homeless people has decreased seven consecutive years from 2012 to 2019.

CHANGE IN PROFILE OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

Homeless people living temporarily with relatives or friends are the largest group of homeless people in Finland.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

(2019): Approximately 5,280 homeless people in Finland (based on ARA annual survey data)
 (2012-2019): The number of homeless people has decreased for seven consecutive years

In 2019, the total of 68% 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 2019, 23 % of single homeless people were of immigrant background (1,096) and 39 % of homeless families were immigrant families. The number of long-term homeless was 961. Long-term homelessness decreased for the 11th year in a row. In 2019, 15 % (687) of single homeless were young people. 26 % (1,190) of single homeless people were women.

The Housing First 2.0 Change Laboratory - toward a new programme

Along with the national program a Change Laboratory Work was executed with the guidance of: Annalisa Sannino, Professor, Director of the Doctoral Programme Education & Society, Faculty of Education and Culture, RESET, Tampere University; Hannele Kerosuo, Senior Researcher, Tampere University; and Yrjö Engeström, Emeritus Professor, University of Helsinki. The work was organized in collaboration with AUNE-program, Y-Foundation and the Network Developers. The work was done in wide co-operation with the municipalities, cities, government, and non-governmental organizations. The work continues.ⁱⁱ

NATIONAL STRATEGY

Finland is a country which has set for itself the goal of eradicating homelessness by 2027. The Program of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government published on 10

December 2019 spells out that this goal will be pursued by continuing to operate according to the Housing First principle. This is the first time a Finnish government program mentions Housing First, despite the fact that with this principle, the country has distinguished itself as the only European nation that has been able to significantly reduce homelessness for a decade since 2008 (Abbé Pierre Foundation & FEANTSA 2018).

The Finnish Housing First (FHF) is an approach which started by the initiative of four activists and led to three interconnected national programs (Pleace et al. 2016). It consists in supplying affordable housing and tailored services to clients with complex problems and high need for social and healthcare (Y-Foundation, 2017).

Homeless policies have been based on Housing First approach since 2008. The government's PAAVO programs (2008-2015) targeted long-term homeless people. The following national policy program AUNE (2016-2019) focused on prevention of homelessness. The target of the present Government program (2020-) is to halve the number of homeless people in following four years and to end homelessness in the next eight years. The Government program states:

“We will halve homelessness during the government term and eradicate homelessness within two government terms, in other words, by 2027. We will continue to operate according to the ‘Housing First’ principle, which has proved to be effective.”ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ https://www.ara.fi/en-US/Materials/Homelessness_reports

ⁱⁱ <https://filesender.funet.fi/?s=download&token=c41155d8-a6d2-45ca-a44a-81b4bc34157f>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/marin/government-programme/housing-policy>

The key element in the new program is the work done in the local level with municipalities and cities.

Comparable data on homelessness has been available since 1987 when there were almost 19,000 homeless people in the country. Since then the number of homeless people has decreased thanks to determined action plans. Also, long-term homelessness has decreased significantly since the PAAVO programs were introduced by the Finnish government, which made the Housing First approach the default for addressing homelessness in Finland. There are almost no rough sleepers in Finland now. ^{iv}

Current data for homeless people – by which we mainly mean people living with family or friends, indicate that in 2019, the number of single people in these circumstances was 4,600 and the number of families, 264. As the numbers show, Finland have achieved important reductions in homelessness, but there is still important work to do.

RESEARCH

Annalisa Sannino: Enacting the utopia of eradicating homelessness: toward a new generation of activity-theoretical studies of learning.^v

^{iv} <https://housingfirsteurope.eu/countries/finland/>

^v <https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2020.1725459>