

HOME

Report on the measures needed to end homelessness by 2027

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Foreword

This report is based on a mandate from the Ministry of the Environment dated 5.10.2022. The task of the study was to identify how the objective of ending homelessness by 2027 can be achieved, what concrete measures are required to end homelessness and what the role of the different actors responsible for achieving this objective is. In line with the terms of reference, the study has made use of available data from public authorities and research. A list of the experts interviewed and the various persons who provided information for the study is annexed to the report. The study was carried out between 5.10.2022 and 30.1.2023.

The report describes the current state of homelessness and homelessness work, the starting points and conditions for ending homelessness, and presents concrete measures and recommendations for ending homelessness.

Prime Minister Sanna Marin's government programme sets a target of halving homelessness by 2023 and eradicating homelessness by 2027. Although the target of halving homelessness has not been fully achieved, the report suggests that the elimination of homelessness by 2027 is still a realistic goal.

The study has highlighted the diversity and richness of services and activities aimed at ending homelessness. Long-term work has produced results and a broad range of professionals committed to a common goal and to working together creates confidence in the success of the fight against homelessness.

I would like to thank the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Maria Ohisalo, for her confidence in the report and all the experts and professionals with homelessness who contributed to the report for their valuable help.

Hämeenlinna 30.1.2023

Juha Kaakinen

Rationale and justification

1. Trends in homelessness

Finland's Housing First model for reducing and ending homelessness has received a lot of international attention in recent years. This attention and interest is undoubtedly explained by the trend in homelessness. In contrast to most countries where homelessness has increased at an alarming rate, homelessness in Finland has decreased significantly in recent years. Alongside Finland, positive developments can be seen in Norway and, more recently, in Denmark and Scotland.

According to international researchers, the reduction in homelessness in Finland has been explained by a comprehensive strategy based on the Housing First model, the provision of affordable rental housing and extensive cooperation between different actors¹. A recent evaluation by domestic researchers of the success of the Finnish model also highlights the importance of a culture of working together².

In the light of the statistics, the reduction in homelessness is an undeniable fact. Year-to-year changes in the overall homelessness rate can be explained by random factors, such as changes in statistical methodology, but a longer-term analysis shows better the trend in quantitative developments. Over the period 2008-2022, the number of homeless people living alone has decreased by 54% and the number of long-term homeless people by 68%, according to statistics from the Housing Finance and Development Centre ARA³. The decrease in homelessness in Helsinki is the main explanation for the trend in the country as a whole. The number of both homeless people living alone and long-term homeless people in Helsinki has decreased by 72%.

Most of the reduction has taken place in all groups. For those living outdoors, in temporary shelters and dormitories, the decrease since 2008 is 68%, in institutions 77%, temporarily with relatives and acquaintances 47% and for families 45%. Among the homeless groups, the largest decreases have been among homeless women (40%) and young people under 25 (38%). The number of homeless immigrants has doubled since 2008 but the number has fallen since 2015. In 2022, there were 621 homeless immigrants which is a reduction of 99 from 2021.

So, what explains the fall in homelessness? A structural factor is the supply of rental housing and the changes in supply and rent levels across localities. The long-term work supported by national programmes to develop homelessness services and the expansion of preventive activities, particularly housing advice, also explain the decline. The importance of the establishment of individual Housing First units and the acquisition of supportive housing can also be seen in the development of localities.

For the purposes of this report, the situation in November 2022 is provisional. It shows that there were 3,686 homeless people living alone and 1,133 long-term homeless people in Finland. The number of homeless people decreased from 2021, with 262 fewer homeless people living alone and 185 fewer long-term homeless people than in the previous year. The number of homeless families and couples was 155, 10 fewer than in 2021.

¹ <https://www.feantsaresearch.org/download/strategy-review-19029039682682325644.pdf>

² Kirsi Juhila, Johanna Ranta and Suvi Raitakari in Successful Public Policy in the Nordic Countries: Cases, Lessons and Challenges: https://trepo.tuni.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/142330/de_la_Porte_et_al._2022_Successfull_Public_Policy_in_the_Nordic_Countries.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

³ Every year, ARA collects cross-sectional data from municipalities on the situation on 15 November. The data is mainly collected from the registers of the social welfare and housing service registers and from the registers of applicants for housing of the municipal rental housing companies. The definition of homelessness in Finland is based on the broad pan-European Ethos light classification.

In international comparison, the main difference is in the category of people living temporarily with relatives and acquaintances, which is not recorded in most countries. For the purposes of this report, homeless people are

defined as those experiencing homelessness according to the classification described above. Homelessness is not an individual characteristic.

The decrease in homelessness is explained by the positive development in Helsinki and Espoo. Of the larger cities, homelessness has increased in Tampere, Turku and Vantaa. Homelessness change has been reduced from 2021 for those living outside, in dormitories and in institutional units. Of concern is the increase in homelessness for both women (+19) and young people (under 25) (+104).

There were homeless people in 103 municipalities (data for 2021), which means that homelessness as a phenomenon affects all welfare areas. Homelessness has continued to decrease, but the target set in the government programme to halve homelessness by 2023 (starting from 2018) will not be met.

Statistics do not tell the whole truth about homelessness, not even in quantitative terms. It is a cross-sectional data and in practice a much larger number of people experience homelessness during the year. There are also uncertainties associated with the collection of basic data. The current statistical approach does not capture all hidden homelessness, if it is possible at all. Similarly, people who are not actually homeless are now recorded in the statistics with a homeless status.

Statistics Finland is currently investigating the use of register data in statistics on homelessness on behalf of the Ministry of the Environment. The use of register data is largely subject to the same uncertainties as the current data collection method, especially with regard to the timeliness of the data. Current statistics on homelessness are indicative and as such provide a sufficiently reliable data base for policy design. For the design of practical measures and services, the importance of real-time target group and individual-specific data is more important than statistical data.

More critical to the objective of ending homelessness than the quantitative change is the change in the nature and target group of homelessness. When The Finnish National Programme to reduce long-term 'homelessness' was launched in 2008, its key target group was homeless people with multiple problems living outside and in hostels, whose main substance use was alcohol. The image of homelessness has changed rapidly in recent years and now the hard core of homelessness is made up of severely marginalised people with multiple problems and drug problems who are on the margins of or outside the service system. The average age of homeless people has also fallen. The service system has not been able to respond adequately to this change in the nature of homelessness.

2. What does it mean to end homelessness?

Several national programmes have made the eradication of homelessness a declared goal. Although not always realistic, this objective has played an important role in guiding thinking and action. Rather than accepting the old myth that homelessness is inevitable: "There will always be homeless people", homelessness has been seen as a limited social problem that must and can be solved. Ending homelessness has become a widely accepted, socially important and worthy cause.

However, the positive trend in the overall homelessness rate in recent years has also made the elimination of homelessness a fully realistic goal. It is therefore necessary to specify what the permanent eradication of homelessness means. When will it be possible to say that there are no more homeless people in Finland?

Some estimates by foreign researchers have referred to Finland's low homelessness figures and stated that homelessness has been effectively eliminated⁴. Such an interpretation is certainly not adequate and does not reflect the

⁴ <https://www.feantsaresearch.org/download/strategy-review-19029039682682325644.pdf>

experience of people working in the field of homelessness. But does the elimination of homelessness mean that the annual statistics of ARA will show a clean zero? There are uncertainties in the statistics on homelessness. As noted: the statistics are indicative. If the target is not zero homelessness, 'a working figure' is needed to reach the target level.

In this report, the starting point for the proposed measures is the following definition of ending homelessness:

Homelessness has been effectively eliminated in Finland, with the annual cross-sectional statistics showing fewer than 300 homeless people. Of this number, no more than 100 in temporary accommodation (lasting less than one month) and no more than 200 temporarily living with relatives or acquaintances due to forced circumstances (lack of own accommodation).

By definition, there are no longer people living outside in Finland in this situation and no one is discharged from institutions as homeless. In addition, the period of residence in any temporary housing solution, including existing emergency shelters, emergency accommodation, dormitories or on the basis of fixed-term tenancy agreements, is limited to one month, after which a permanent housing solution must be provided.

It is clear that for critical target groups, such as those living outside and those discharged from institutions, real-time, individual-level monitoring is needed; cross-sectional statistics are not sufficient. Therefore, in the future, once homelessness is removed, the most important issue to monitor will be real-time, monthly reporting of data on persons in temporary housing solutions (less than 1 month).

3. Why is it necessary to end homelessness?

There has long been a broad political consensus in Finland on ending homelessness. Since 2008, we have had a total of 8 different coalition governments, each of which has decided to pursue national programmes to end homelessness. Practically all parties represented in the current Parliament are thus committed to the goal of eradication. The fact that recently there has been no need to justify the target of halving and eradicating homelessness is a good illustration of this single-mindedness. Housing has been seen as a human right.

However, the arguments already put forward in the preparation of the PAAVO programme, in the 2008 report by Erasa Wise, are still relevant. The ethical, legal and socio-economic arguments should now be extended to include an internal security perspective.

3.1. Ethical criteria

The ethical imperative of ending homelessness is based on respect for the indivisible dignity of the human being and fellow human beings, which is made concrete in solidarity. This ethos has been aptly summed up by the President of Finland Sauli Niinistö on several occasions, most recently in his New Year's speech when he stated that survival is not measured by averages: *'It is essential that the most vulnerable also survive. It is time for a helping hand from fellow human beings'.*

In the Name on the Door report, Bishop Eero Huovinen summarised the ethical arguments as follows: *"Human dignity includes that everyone has a place to be and to live. An own place to live just as meaningful as birthplace, homeland and workplace. The place to live is a signal of equal belonging to the human community. Human dignity involves a shared responsibility to care for those who are unable or have no skills to do so. The human community is an entity in which no one should be pushed aside".*

3.2. Legislative justification

Finland has committed to several international agreements on measures to prevent and eradicate homelessness. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 25), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (entered into force for Finland on 3 January 1976) and the European Social Charter oblige all authorities to take action to eradicate homelessness. Finland also signed the Lisbon Declaration in 2021, by which the EU Commission, the European Parliament, Member States and representatives of civil society established the European Platform on Combating Homelessness and committed themselves to the goal of eradicating homelessness by 2030.

According to the Finnish Constitution (731/1999, 19.1§), everyone who is unable to acquire the security necessary for a decent life has the right to the necessary means of subsistence and care. The public authorities must also (§ 19.3) ensure adequate social and health services for everyone. It is also the duty of public authorities to promote the right of everyone to housing and the opportunity to arrange their own housing. (§ 19.4). A citizen does not therefore have a subjective right to housing by turning to public authorities.

The Act on Developing Housing Conditions (919/1985) stipulates that the municipality must ensure that measures to develop housing conditions are directed in particular at improving the housing conditions of homeless people and people in need.

The aim of the Act on Subsidies for Improving the Housing Conditions of Special Groups (1281/2004) is to increase the supply of rental housing suitable for the housing needs of special needs groups and affordable in terms of housing costs, in order to improve their housing conditions.

With the launch of the new wellbeing services counties at the beginning of this year, the Act amending the Social Welfare Act (2022/790) will play a particularly important role. According to this law, the tasks of a wellbeing services county include, among other things, the provision of temporary accommodation for a person who, for a special reason, needs short-term, emergency assistance from a wellbeing services county in order to organise his or her accommodation (§ 21). Article 21(a) of the same Act defines supported housing: 'Supported housing means independent living supported by social guidance. Supported housing is provided to a person who, for a specific reason, needs the assistance or support of a welfare area to live independently or to move to independent living'.

Articles 21.b and 21.c of the Act further define community housing and 24-hour service housing. Article 46c of the Act contains additional provisions on the organisation of community housing and round-the-clock service housing in the same building complex. The complex may also include dwellings occupied by persons other than those in community housing or 24-hour service housing.

The legislation requires very close and seamless cooperation between the wellbeing services counties and municipalities.

Ending homelessness is also an equality issue. In a letter to wellbeing services counties⁵, the Equality Commissioner has drawn their attention to the rights of all vulnerable people in social and health care.

5

[https://syrjinta.fi/documents/25249352/42722630/Kirje+hyvinvointialueille+yhdenvertaisuuden+edist%C3%A4misest%C3%A4+ja+syrjinn%C3%A4n+ehk%C3%A4isemisest%C3%A4+hyvinvointialueille+\(PDF\).pdf/26003046-fffa-5dac-3c2e3e58144f023a/Kirje+hyvinvointialueille+yhdenvertaisuuden+edist%C3%A4misest%C3%A4+ja+syrjinn%C3%A4n+ehk%C3%A4isemisest%C3%A4+hyvinvointialueille+\(PDF\).pdf?t=1671192011835](https://syrjinta.fi/documents/25249352/42722630/Kirje+hyvinvointialueille+yhdenvertaisuuden+edist%C3%A4misest%C3%A4+ja+syrjinn%C3%A4n+ehk%C3%A4isemisest%C3%A4+hyvinvointialueille+(PDF).pdf/26003046-fffa-5dac-3c2e3e58144f023a/Kirje+hyvinvointialueille+yhdenvertaisuuden+edist%C3%A4misest%C3%A4+ja+syrjinn%C3%A4n+ehk%C3%A4isemisest%C3%A4+hyvinvointialueille+(PDF).pdf?t=1671192011835)

The Equality Act allows for positive discrimination to ensure effective equality of treatment of persons belonging to a particular group by means of specific measures necessary to achieve this. According to the Equality Commissioner, effective equality may therefore mean taking into account the needs of groups particularly vulnerable to discrimination (for example, homeless people or asylum seekers).

3.3. Cost-effectiveness

Numerous international studies have shown that ending homelessness is also an economically sound investment. In Finland, the most extensive cost-effectiveness evaluation of homelessness eradication was carried out in 2011 by Tampere University of Technology⁶. The study was based on extensive client-specific data on the use of services in different sectors. According to the study, providing housing and support for one homeless person will save the society at least €15 000/person/year. The result of the study can be considered as a minimum estimate, as it does not explicitly take into account or calculate the economic impact of years of life lost or tax revenue lost due to homelessness. It can also be estimated that the cost-effectiveness of housing is increased over time as the need for support decreases and the resident may return to work.

In international studies⁷ estimates of the cost-effectiveness of homelessness are very similar. However, in Finland, changes in the profile of homelessness and in the service system make it necessary to update the cost-effectiveness assessment. The economic cost-effectiveness analysis would also be complemented by an assessment of the social return on investment using the SROI evaluation method⁸. The SROI takes into account not only the traditional economic impact but also social and environmental aspects.

The most cost-effective way to end homelessness is through homelessness prevention, where housing advice plays a key role. The City of Helsinki's housing advice service has estimated that savings from homelessness prevention can range from around €17,000 to €52,000 per person per year, depending on the life situation and the services used.

3.4. Internal security

The Report of the Council of State on Internal Security 2021⁹ states that security problems are prevented by tackling the root causes. Although Finland is the safest country in the world by many measures, social problems are accumulating and, for example, crime is increasingly affecting already vulnerable groups. The main underlying factor in inequalities in security is the risk of poverty and exclusion. Homelessness is an extreme form of exclusion and tackling homelessness is therefore important to reduce social inequalities.

⁶https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/41407/YMra7_2011_Asunnottomuuden_vahentamisen_taloudelliset_impacts.pdf?sequence=1

⁷https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279920775_At_What_Cost_An_estimation_of_the_financial_costs_of_single_homelessness_in_the_UK

⁸ A good description of the SROI method can be found in a report by the Rehabilitation Foundation:
<https://kuntoutussaatio.fi/assets/files/2021/01/SROI-investoinnin-sosiaalinen-tuotto-kuntoutuksen-kontekstissa.pdf>⁹
https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/163149/VN_2021_48.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

4. International interaction

The great interest in the Finnish Housing First model has significantly increased the international interaction between homelessness actors and has therefore not been purely one-way. Lessons have also been sought and sought from other countries. A key platform for interaction has been the Housing First Europe Hub, jointly established by the Y-Foundation and FEANTSA in 2016, which currently brings together 37 organisations from several countries, including the Spanish and Belgian Ministries of Social Affairs and the Danish National Board of Social Services. More recently, cooperation has intensified, especially among Nordic homelessness actors.

International inspiration has been provided in areas such as women-specific work on homelessness, a trauma-informed approach to work, and ending youth homelessness. The most interesting examples of preventive work come from Australia and Wales.

New national strategies or programmes to eradicate/reduce homelessness have also recently been published by several countries. In almost all of them, the Housing First principle is a strong starting point, and the Finnish example and experience is also referred to several times. New strategies have been developed in the UK, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and other countries.

The new Danish strategy¹⁰ is of particular interest to Finland. The Danish strategy seeks a structural change similar to the one implemented in Finland during the PAAVO programme periods 2008-2015. In Finland, the change from a dormitory-based service wholly based on temporary housing to permanent housing and related support was implemented by allocating up to 50% of the investment grant for special groups to renovate dormitories into supported housing units where each resident has his or her own rented accommodation and to hire support staff (50%) for the duration of the programme.

In Denmark, municipalities have previously been eligible for a 50% state subsidy for temporary accommodation in dormitories. The new strategy has a clear financial incentive: there is a 90-day time limit for temporary housing support, after which the municipality can only receive state aid for providing support related to a permanent housing solution.

All the strategies highlight the importance of close cooperation between housing and social services, regardless of whether the ministry responsible for housing or social affairs has the actual steering responsibility within the state administration. An exception is France, where in 2010 a specific organisation, Dihal (délégation interministérielle à hébergement et à l'accès au logement), was set up to implement the national homelessness strategy and to ensure smooth inter-ministerial cooperation in its implementation.

5. Observations and assessments of the current state of homelessness work and the homeless service system

This section is divided into three parts. The first part presents, first of all, the views of the best experts working in the field of homelessness, practitioners and who are working with clients, on the changing profile of homelessness, the current state of services and development needs; the second part presents examples of good practices and approaches developed; and finally, a summary assessment of the current state of homelessness work at system level. The views expressed here by experts in the field are based on a survey conducted for the participants of the national homelessness seminar (17.10.2022).

¹⁰ <https://socialstyrelsen.dk/nyheder/2020/nationale-retningslinjer-for-indsatsen-mod-hjemloshed>

an online survey with a total of 75 responses, and the views of the Housing First Development Network's¹¹ large expert group (see Annex 2 for the composition of the group).

5.1. Main problems and barriers to ending homelessness in the current situation

The responses provide well-weighted views based on practical experience. Understandably, the responses highlight the inadequacy of appropriate housing solutions, services and support and the difficulties homeless people have in accessing services in general. There is also concern about the functioning and coordination of the whole system and the erosion of the 'housing first' model.

"The main problem is that there is currently no homelessness programme covering the whole of Finland. The lack of a programme leader has meant that work has largely been done in silos, each in its own city. In addition, old remedies have once again been found for speeches and measures: new emergency accommodation has been opened and temporary housing has been increased. The 'housing first' model also seems no longer to be as widely understood as it once was."

"The housing-first model is not implemented everywhere, not even in large municipalities (Turku as an example)."

"Homelessness work in my municipality has been left behind by the social welfare reform."

"I think the real need is coordinated cooperation between municipalities and the voluntary sector. Municipalities do a lot of good cooperation with each other, NGOs with each other. But both in their own silos."

"It seems that homelessness is seen as too small a social problem that is not being addressed in different regions and municipalities. Another problem is that responsibility for tackling homelessness is divided between ministries and there is a lack of overall coordination."

There are concerns about the maintaining of the work on effective cooperation structures. On the other hand, there are very pragmatic views on the situation:

"In the implementation of the homelessness targets, we cannot wait for the whole of Finland's social and health services to be fully operational before we can achieve results. It's too long a wait! We must demand resources for the main problem areas (psychiatric and substance abuse services) and work within the existing framework."

The inadequacy of both substance abuse and mental health services and the bouncing of clients between services, especially for homeless people with both substance abuse and mental health problems, is a major problem. Housing units, especially if the support provided is not adequate, are unable to address these problems and therefore result in unnecessary evictions.

5.2. What's the solution?

The responses suggest solutions both at system level and for individual work. Strong government involvement is seen as important and there is a renewed desire to make homelessness a common cause. The need for national guidance and coordination is mentioned in several responses:

¹¹ <https://asuntoensin.fi/ohjelma/historia/asunnottomuuden-ennaltaehkaysyn-toimenpideohjelma-2016-2019/network-builders-project/>

"The eradication of homelessness must be on the government's agenda and its management must be organised and accountable (the lack of a programme leader is obvious). Wellbeing services counties should draw up area-specific plans to eradicate homelessness and link them to MAL agreements".

In general, the responses highlight the importance of professionally strong, individualised support, the flexibility of the service system and customer-friendliness. The need for more specialised small supported housing units is evident. The following response summarises almost all the essential points:

"Tackling homelessness requires both strongly subsidised, dispersed housing and small, housing-first units for those who cannot cope in scattered housing. It should be borne in mind that some of the 'hard core' of homeless people would have lived their lives in psychiatric hospitals in the past. Now that there is a desire to move away from institutions, housing services should be developed where people with serious psychiatric illnesses (including substance abuse) can live safely and for long periods without having to spend years in emergency housing services, where they are exposed to a wide range of violence and abuse. Both in supported housing units and in supportive housing in scattered housing, there must be multidisciplinary expertise and, in the case of health care, mobile care and treatment assessment for both somatic and mental health. Attention should also be paid to what happens after a person has been placed in supported housing or rented accommodation, i.e. they often need support to give their lives meaning, which can be rehabilitative in terms of employment or social interaction. To be effective in the fight against homelessness, it is important to understand that we are dealing with people in very complex life situations, who are not numerous but for whom the assistance provided must be tailored and sufficiently 'heavy'. It is not a question of basic services, but of work requiring specific expertise, and strong social and health professionals to carry it out. They also need to be partnered by people with lived experience and others with a peer background who can focus on helping with very concrete issues and be present as listeners."

Responses also highlight the need to change the current policy on shelters/equivalents:

Emergency shelters should be converted into care facilities because people in them are basically in bad shape.

Emergency/crisis accommodation should be transformed in all municipalities/wellbeing services counties into emergency housing services, where the psychological and physical situation is first assessed and a few alternative housing solutions are offered for the future."

The responses also provide a very comprehensive list of groups for whom new housing solutions and support are needed. This list illustrates well both the complexity of the homelessness profile and the need for individual solutions. The following response is in many ways startling and also illustrates the unhealthy consequences of prolonged homelessness:

"We have a group of elderly ex-homeless people who have a history of heavy substance abuse. With home ownership and ageing, substance abuse has gone and the frailty of old age has taken its place. These elderly people need their own, peaceful environment to call home. We have noticed that older people seem to be "pushed" or even bullied by younger people in residential units. This cannot be the case."

5.3. Homeless people in need of multiple services

There is a lot of international research on the effectiveness of the Housing First model. They show that on average 80% of homeless people who have been given housing have been able to keep it, including in Finland. If homelessness is to be completely eradicated, it must also be possible to provide housing for this 20% of the population of homeless people who are in need of intensive support and services. This is the question that the Housing First Development Network's large group of experts have been seeking answers to in their workshops.

The group has structured the underlying causes of the risk of homelessness, such as health determinants (mental health problems, addiction, neuropsychiatric and somatic illnesses), social and cultural determinants (inherited deprivation, antisocial lifestyles and cultural factors such as language skills among immigrants).

Risk factors also arise from the service system, the lack of a client-service interface, overload and congestion of services, and poor coordination (the client has to coordinate his/her own services and information is not passed on from one specialist to another).

Among the identified risk groups, the working group identifies the excluded homeless, homeless people without services, revolving door clients, people with substance abuse, psychosis, neuropsychiatric symptoms, people with trauma, people with a criminal background, people with violent/challenging behaviour, young people in institutional care, people with an immigrant background, people with multiple somatic and physical illnesses.

In particular, the working group has considered what models of action should be taken and further developed in the wellbeing services counties. The proposals can be summarised in three words: integration, cooperation and concentration. Clients with high needs are most often clients of both social and health services. The importance of joint client plans and information exchange is therefore highlighted. The target group needs tailor-made services, the implementation of which may require the pooling of expertise.

For a group with high service needs, the importance of an active, adherent approach by workers is highlighted. Services must be delivered to the client's home and actively provide the service that the client deserves, rather than waiting for the client to be active.

According to the working group's assessment, there is a need for a greater variety of housing units based on the housing-first principle. For residents with high service needs, small units of around 20 beds, staffed by people with strong substance abuse and mental health expertise, are best suited. Larger units can also be developed by building communities within the unit and profiling within the unit.

Accessibility and access to services are key conditions for helping the target group. Access to treatment should be facilitated and the ability to access treatment should not be a requirement, for example, access to detoxification treatment should be threshold-free. In general, services for this most challenging group need a high degree of flexibility. Clients with high service needs are a small group in terms of numbers and place a burden on a number of social and health services, as well as other public authorities and the third sector. For clients who do not conform to standards, the average services that conform to standards will not work. It is therefore important to seize the opportunities to attract customers to services. When a customer contacts any service, we ensure that they find the service they need: not by referral, but by escorted exchange.

5.4. Comprehensive evaluation

Homelessness has fallen by an average of 300 people a year in recent years. This is a positive development in itself, especially when compared to the overall European trend, but the pace is too slow for the 2027 target. The efficiency of the measures is currently not sufficient. In Helsinki, for example, in 2021 a total of 900 apartments were allocated to homeless people, but homelessness was reduced by only 300 people. At the same time, the number of evictions throughout the country has remained at the same level ¹²

¹² <https://ysaatio.fi/haatojen-maara-ei-laske-vaikka-asunnottomuus-laskee>

Simply increasing the number of allocated apartments is not enough if new homeless people continue to arrive at the same rate. The service system also produces homelessness itself. There are also evictions from Housing First units and supported dispersed housing.

While not all evictees end up homeless, prevention of evictions is a key element in the fight against homelessness. There is ample evidence of the effectiveness of housing advice. The Housing Advice Pilot Act and the extension of housing advice to all forms of housing is therefore an important step in extending and improving the prevention of homelessness. A good example of the versatility of housing advice is the Helsinki Housing Advice Service. Housing advice is provided by the cities, rental housing companies and organisations/foundations. There has been a strong development of multi-professionalism and a search for new forms of action, such as pop-up housing advice and targeting of different groups such as immigrants and young people.

Making people homeless for economic reasons is both extremely inappropriate and costly for society, so everything possible must be done to prevent it. The threat of financial homelessness must be identified and prioritised by debt settlement services. An accelerated debt settlement process will safeguard housing by allowing either a comprehensive solution to balance the financial situation or a referral to other appropriate services.

Financial and debt advice is available from a number of providers. It has also developed into a multi-agency service, as exemplified by the 30 or so financial advice centres. The client can go to a financial advice clinic without an appointment and meet a specialist from the social services, financial and debt advice and debt enforcement, while in some centres you can also talk to a specialist from Kela (The Social Insurance Institution), the One-Stop Guidance Centres or the Guarantee Foundation (Takuusäätö).

The challenge of prevention is to reach those in need of services early enough. Services are well available as such, but mainly in agencies and offices for those who know how to apply for them. However, the people most at risk are those who, for one reason or another, are unable to access services. Prevention also needs to be more proactive and outreach.

Prevention is already a multi-faceted and multi-stakeholder activity, and its effectiveness can be enhanced by improving coordination and information flow, and by bringing together what are now separate activities into a larger whole. The coordinating role of the wellbeing services counties is also key here. Improving prevention does not in itself require a significant increase in resources.

In preventive work, a cultural change is visible with the strengthening of housing social work. This development is reflected in the way housing and housing conditions are addressed in social and health services, but also in youth services and activities for young people, such as Red Cross youth shelters and One-Stop Guidance Centres.

Environmental and neighbourhood work is also an illustrative example of working together across borders, where the proactive preventive work of the police plays an important role. Environmental and community work also plays a key role in tackling the still regrettably common problem of Nimby.

The changing profile of homelessness has highlighted the importance of outreach and floating support to reach the marginalised and unserved homeless. The need for outreach work has become even more visible during the pandemic. Examples of outreach work include the City of Helsinki's outreach work, No Fixed Abode NGO's Yökiitäjä outreach work, the Helsinki Deaconess Institute's Tukialus and the A-Clinic Foundation's Katuklinikka. The work on the frontline of homelessness needs to be supported by coordination and a clear service pathway forward, otherwise the work may remain supportive, which of course is already valuable.

There are significant problems with access to mental health and substance abuse services for homeless people. The paucity of mental health services is currently widely reflected in services for homeless people and in the care of homeless people with high needs. Too rapid a reduction in psychiatric inpatient beds has led to overcrowding in outpatient clinics and short treatment stays, which in practice can mean that

patients may be discharged directly to emergency housing services. Supported housing services and outreach work would need to be supported by, inter alia, addiction psychiatry expertise in the form of outreach and/or consultation.

Understaffing of social and health services for the homeless is commonplace in many cities and now also in wellbeing services counties. Part of this is also due to difficulties in finding skilled staff, which is currently also reflected in housing services for homeless people.

The inadequacy of housing solutions and support is structured as a multi-level issue. Partly, it is a question of the simple absence of the necessary housing solutions or support. In smaller localities, there may be a desire for shelter-type solutions, even though housing and support for a relatively small group of substance-using homeless people could be provided through cost-effective housing and support solutions under the Housing First model without new investment.

In larger localities, where the range of services is more varied, there are also problems with coordination and processes. Clients may simply be in the wrong places: in supported housing there are residents who could cope in independent accommodation with less support, while in dispersed housing there are residents with little or no support who clearly need more support.

In recent years, there has been a lively interest in developing services for homeless people, boosted by STEA (Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations) project funding and operating grants, systematic training activities by Housing First Development Network and increased international interaction. Cities' own service development activities have also picked up, especially due to project funding from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health for the 2020-2022 programming period. Project funding has been used to develop, among other things, the Nopsajalka concept of mobile support and the Kotikonsti substance abuse rehabilitation service in Jyväskylä.

A particularly promising model for the development of the Housing First 2.0 model is the Nopsajalka model of mobile multi-professional support, which is described in more detail in Chapter 7 of the report.

The challenges for project activities are the same as before: making the developed activities permanent. It is also seen as a way of filling obvious resource gaps. However, it is encouraging to see that there has been development in the methodological development of client-specific work. It is not always a question of large-scale and formal project implementation, but of small innovations, of everyday cleverness, which have improved the smooth running of services and client orientation. Of particular importance is the "normalisation" of expertise of people with lived experience in both service development and support work.

Confidence in the effectiveness of homelessness work is also boosted by the increase and diversification of research on homelessness and the emergence of young researchers. Research is being carried out both as basic academic research and as applied research close to practice. Finnish researchers are also internationally recognised for their expertise and are sought-after partners in international projects. The multidisciplinary nature of research is well reflected, for example, in the Y-Foundation's research team, which also includes expertise in economics and cost-effectiveness research.

However, getting the full benefit of the development work done would require better and closer cooperation and collaboration between cities (now wellbeing services counties) and NGOs, as development is still too much done in isolation and NGOs are seen more as service providers than as genuine partners. It is largely a question of ownership, of who takes clear coordination responsibility for the work to end homelessness.

None of the challenges described above is insoluble. But ending homelessness requires a new kind of partnership and joint action in which the wellbeing services counties play a crucial role.

6. Changes in the operating environment

In terms of the objective of ending homelessness, the current situation has many similarities with the situation in 2008, when the Finnish National Programme to Reduce Long-term Homelessness (PAAVO 1) was being launched. The economy is entering a recession, which increases the risk of unemployment and thus homelessness. At the same time, the economic downturn is making it more difficult to finance public welfare services.

However, the differences are significant. The war in Ukraine has not only caused unprecedented human suffering, but it has also had an impact on the daily lives of large sections of the population in Finland. Electricity prices, inflation and rising interest rates are all adding to the financial difficulties of households and also increasing the risk of homelessness. As the war in Ukraine drags on, the number of refugees seeking temporary protection may also increase significantly, and the transition of Ukrainians already in the country from reception centres may be reflected in a tightening of the rental housing situation in some localities.

A lot has happened since 2008. The overall homelessness rate has practically halved and the focus has shifted from temporary to more permanent housing solutions. At the same time, professional skills in homelessness work and the development of different types of work and support for residents have reached a whole new level. There is one similarity with the situation in 2008. As in 2008, targeted interventions are needed for the most vulnerable and needy group of homeless people. However, there is a clear change in the profile of the target group, which needs to be taken into account in the design and implementation of measures and services.

Launched in 2008, the PAAVO programme aimed at a systemic change in homelessness policy and eradication of homelessness, to a service system based on a permanent housing solution based on Housing First, instead of a step-by-step model based on temporary housing solutions. Although systemic change is still underway and elements of the staircase model are visible locally, a similar need for systemic change is not apparent. The 'housing first' model as such needs updating, and this work has already been done with the 'housing first 2.0' model.

Tackling homelessness is part of a policy to combat exclusion and reduce inequalities. The central premise of this report is to understand homelessness as a finite, societal problem with a permanent solution. The aim is therefore not to build a permanent, specialised service system for homelessness. Instead, a strong structural homelessness prevention package is needed.

Systemic change in the same sense as in 2008 is not needed, but the elimination target cannot be achieved by simply increasing the same, i.e. by resource increases alone. So, what are the drivers of change on which to build the necessary transformation in a situation where the welfare reform has rearranged the key 'building blocks' of the homelessness eradication ecosystem?

The eradication of homelessness is a social objective, the ownership of which is unequivocally in the hands of the public authorities. This ownership is already defined in legislation, but it has become particularly pronounced with the funding of wellbeing services counties. This does not mean that there is a consensus on ownership within the State administration between the various ministries or at regional and local level between municipalities and wellbeing services counties.

Ownership is also a crucial steering power for achieving the objective. Government ownership and control in this project can take the form of both legislation and resource management. In the context of previous reduction programmes, the emphasis on governance has been strongly on resource management and the financial incentives that go with it. The only real exception is the new pilot legislation on housing advice, but even this includes financial support as an important element.

State control of the wellbeing services counties is based on existing legislation and resource management. From the perspective of the objective of ending homelessness, resource management through financial incentives remains the preferred and most effective option.

The use of financial incentives is also justified by the cost savings from the eradication of homelessness, which will accrue to several sectors of government, including the police and the judiciary. It is clear that financial incentives need to be sufficiently targeted and impact-based rather than performance-based. The need for more binding legislation should only be assessed if the measures currently proposed prove insufficient.

Wellbeing services counties are becoming a key element in the fight against homelessness. Homelessness can only be eliminated through permanent housing solutions, and housing remains of course the responsibility of municipalities. Yes, but homeless people, especially those most in need of support and services, are totally dependent on the services provided by wellbeing services counties.

According to the legislation on wellbeing services counties, services must be provided primarily in your own wellbeing services county. People have not moved to the wellbeing services county, but continue to live in the municipalities. However, in reality, the reform has blurred the meaning of municipal boundaries. Housing plays an important role in the planning of services in a wellbeing services county and, conversely, services in a wellbeing services county can play a crucial role in regional development. For small groups of clients, such as the homeless, there may be financial pressures to centralise services, but by the very nature of the services, they should be delivered primarily as local services. For example, housing emergency services and short-term temporary accommodation should be provided on a regional basis according to need.

From the point of view of the economy of a wellbeing services county, homelessness may well appear to be a minor issue. However, the eradication and prevention of homelessness is a challenge for the wellbeing services counties and their ability to tackle a phenomenon-based social problem where ownership and responsibilities are shared between several actors and sectors. There is no reason to doubt that the wellbeing services counties are capable of meeting this challenge.

7. Housing first 2.0 as a basis for work to end homelessness

Prime Minister Sanna Marin's government programme states that "the proven Housing First principle will be upheld". This is the first time that the Housing First principle has been mentioned in a government programme. However, the Housing First principle has been the basis for policies and measures to reduce homelessness since 2008, and individual projects and housing units had been implemented in line with the principle even before then.

The Finnish Housing First model can be briefly summarised as follows:

The right to housing and the necessary support is part of a decent life and a fundamental right. The resolution of social and health problems is not a precondition for the provision of housing, but housing is a condition that also enables the resolution of other problems of a person experiencing homelessness. The starting point is therefore the allocation of housing to a homeless person on the basis of an own tenancy agreement of indefinite duration, without any preconditions. Housing should always be accompanied by the necessary support. The model emphasises the individual's right to self-determination and voluntariness; no change of lifestyle is required, but the approach is rehabilitative and support services must be actively offered to those who need them. However, housing and services are separated and living in the same dwelling can continue even if the need for support ends.

The general principles of the Housing First model are comprehensively described in the Housing First Europe Guide¹³. The website www.asuntoensin.fi, maintained by the Y-Foundation, contains practical application guidelines and experiences with the application of the Housing First model. Of particular note is the Housing First Quality Recommendations¹⁴, developed on the basis of extensive expert work, which continues to be useful both for developing practical work and for procuring services.

In the Finnish model, the Housing First principle has been seen as a model to be developed and evolved, which must respond to changes in homelessness and the environment. To address the problems identified by experts and practitioners, the Housing First model was updated in autumn 2019 as a result of a change laboratory facilitated by researchers at the University of Tampere and involving 30 experts. Housing First 2.0 - Let's make it possible for everyone together.¹⁵

The concrete measures proposed in the Housing First 2.0 model will, if possible, be even more relevant after the social services reform. The Housing First 2.0 model has identified the changing profile of homelessness, the need for more intensive support for clients and the need to better integrate social services into the work of the Housing First model.

A better understanding of the life of homeless clients, a respectful encounter and a rehabilitative approach based on building trust are clearly building the foundation of the Housing First 2.0 model. Of particular importance are all low-threshold services aimed at reaching and helping the most vulnerable and marginalised, as well as multi-professional outreach and mobile support.

With this development work, a Finnish model for support work based on the Housing First principle is emerging. Outreach work as such has been done for a long time, for example in the Yökiitäjät (outreach work) activities of the No Fixed Abode NGO or in the City of Helsinki's activities, now known as "neighbourhood work". The closest ACT team to the HF Pathways model is the Aurora Hospital's mobile outpatient clinic, which offers comprehensive multidisciplinary support to people with psychosis. The Tukialus of the Helsinki Deaconess Institute and the Street Clinic of the A Clinic Foundation have both brought to the fore the needs of drug users in particular.

The Nopsajalka model of mobile and mobile support was created in 2019 in a Change Laboratory at the University of Tampere, which involved representatives from the City of Tampere's social and health services, housing services and major third sector service provider organisations, and also drew on the experiences of LiiTu activities in Pori. The Nopsajalka model has been further developed in Jyväskylä in a project launched in autumn 2020. Professor Annalisa Sannino's working group's modelling is based in particular on Jyväskylä's Nopsajalka experience.

Jyväskylä's Nopsajalka team serves clients who need special support, are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness and have difficulties in accessing the social and health services they need. The team consists of a psychiatric nurse, a social counsellor and a social worker. The team has expertise in adult social work, child protection, substance abuse, crisis and trauma work.

The Nopsajalka team provides low-threshold social counselling, housing advice and substance abuse and mental health work. The team responds quickly to the client's situation, assesses their service needs and guides and supports them to other services they need. The service process is intensive and time-limited. The key operating principle of the Nopsajalka multi-professional team is 'escorted interchange', whereby, if necessary, the client is accompanied to ensure access to and continuity of services and support. If a person has no home, no e-mail, no debit card and not necessarily a telephone, a simple referral is not enough.

The Nopsajalka multi-professional team is a remarkably cost-effective and flexible model for ensuring access to services and support for homeless people, compared to the ACT team under the HF Pathways model.

Team composition

¹³ <https://asuntoensin.fi/aineistopankki/asunto-ensin-opas/>

¹⁴ <https://asuntoensin.fi/assets/files/2017/10/Laatusuosituksset.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://asuntoensin.fi/aineistopankki/asunto-ensin-2-0-tehdaan-yhdessa-jokaiselle-mahdollisuus/>

composition may vary according to local needs. The most important thing is to have both social and health expertise in the team. It is also conceivable that a similar multidisciplinary team could be built around housing advice.

8. Proposals for action and recommendations

8.1. National programme to end homelessness by 2027

Based on the Government's decision in principle, a national programme will be launched without delay with the aim of eliminating homelessness in its current form by 2027, while building an effective homelessness prevention entity.

8.1.1. Goal and objectives

The Action Programme continues and completes a long-term programme work to eradicate homelessness in Finland. The eradication of homelessness is part of a wider effort to combat exclusion and social inequalities. The programme includes both targeted measures to eradicate remaining homelessness and the strengthening of the preventive entity of services and activities to protect against homelessness.

The entity includes the allocation of 3,600 dwellings for homeless people or people at risk of homelessness.

8.1.2. Impacts to be achieved

Eradicating homelessness

With targeted measures, the total number of homeless people in 2027 will not exceed 300, of whom no more than 100 will be in temporary accommodation and no more than 200 will be temporarily staying with relatives and acquaintances while awaiting a permanent housing solution. The numbers refer to a real-time situation reported on a monthly basis.

The programme aims not only to eradicate homelessness but also to better integrate homeless people into society through rehabilitation services and job opportunities.

Building a service system that protects against homelessness

Ending up homeless is most often the result of a failure of the service system or the service system not even reaching a person at risk of homelessness in time. A cross-sectoral prevention package will be built into the service system, including service coordination and an alert system to enable early identification of the risk of homelessness and the provision of assistance to prevent homelessness.

Achieving cost savings

Previous studies have shown that housing one long-term homeless person saves the society at least €15,000 a year. These cost-effectiveness estimates will be updated during the implementation of the programme. The cost-effectiveness will be increased by intensifying measures to reintegrate homeless people who have been housed into the labour market.

Although it is difficult to demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of preventive action, clear cost savings have been demonstrated in the case of housing advice, for example by cancelling evictions. The Helsinki Housing Advisory Service estimates that the savings from homelessness prevention range from €17,000 to €52,000 per year, depending on the services used.

8.2. Financing of the programme

Funding for the programme comes from several sources.

An additional €36 million in targeted funding for the implementation of the programme will be allocated to the wellbeing services counties for the programming period. Funding will be granted on the basis of applications and will be conditional on the wellbeing services counties, together with the municipalities in the area, having drawn up an implementation plan to eradicate homelessness. The amount of funding granted is linked to the commitment of the wellbeing services county and its municipalities to provide housing for the long-term homeless.

The precise use to which the funding is to be put will be specified in the implementation and financing agreement between wellbeing services counties and the State. The funding may be used for outreach work and mobile support, as well as for support for permanent housing under the Housing First model, among other things. Funding can also be allocated to the recruitment of people with lived experience for the tasks described above, including housing support for released prisoners. Funding cannot be used for temporary accommodation.

For those wellbeing services counties and municipalities that do not apply for additional funding, the necessary measures will be agreed in the context of the regions' annual evaluation and steering process and will be financed within the regions' normal financial framework.

Responsible parties: Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health

The amount of investment grants for specific groups is estimated at €10 million per year. The current level of ARA's allocation powers allows for this. The investment grant can be used to build around 400 apartments in service/supported housing over the programming period. Investment grants will be awarded primarily for the acquisition and renovation of existing properties. Any new construction should be carried out as integrated/hybrid projects. For new build projects, the carbon footprint should be minimised by implementing the projects as far as possible in the form of wood construction or other low-carbon energy efficient projects. In construction projects, developers will be required to implement social responsibility by employing people experiencing homelessness

Responsible parties: Ministry of Justice, ARA

A STEA/ARA investment grant of €10 M€/year is allocated to NGOs for the purchase of scattered housing. This funding can provide around 130-150 dwellings per year for homeless people moving to independent living and/or in need of light support. During 2023, the transfer of investment grants from STEA to ARA and the necessary changes in legislation, award criteria and practice will be examined.

STEAs continue to provide grants to NGOs for operational work and development related to housing support. The total amount of grants will be maintained at the current level during the programming period.

In addition, the implementation of the programme, in particular the projects implemented by the NGOs, can be supported through various project funding schemes, including EU funding programmes.

Research support will be allocated to the implementation of the programme in the wellbeing services counties. The funding requirement is €350 000 per year.

8.3. Programme management and coordination

It is evident from the survey that those working on homelessness have a strong expectation that the programme will continue. Participation in national programmes has played an important role in local homelessness reduction and related decision-making. The need for programme work is underlined in a context where the organisation of services and cooperation structures for homelessness reduction in wellbeing services counties is not yet in place.

The Ministry of the Environment has been responsible for the management and coordination of homelessness reduction programmes. In the 2020-2022 programming period, the national programme focused on development projects funded through the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The lead responsibility of both the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health for a major national programme is justified.

In the view of the rapporteur, based on feedback and past experience, it is appropriate to keep the management and coordination of the homelessness eradication programme under the responsibility of the Ministry of Environment. The social authorities of the municipalities (and now of the wellbeing services counties) responsible for homelessness work, as well as the municipal housing operators and NGOs working on homelessness, have a strong confidence in the Ministry of the Environment in this respect. The Ministry being in charge is also justified by the need to ensure continuity of action and to emphasise the priority of housing in accordance with the Housing First principle. Despite being in charge, there is a need for closer cooperation between the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in implementing the programme.

It is clear that it is not possible to coordinate and manage a complex and demanding programme within the framework of normal official work. It is therefore proposed to recruit a programme leader for the eradication programme, based at ARA. The placement of the programme leader at ARA will also create synergies, as ARA will play an important role in the implementation of the programme, including the financing of investments and prevention through housing advice. A separate operating budget of €100,000/year will be allocated to ARA for the recruitment of the Programme Manager.

A steering group will be set up for the programme, inviting the leadership of the key cities and wellbeing services counties participating in the programme. The steering group will be co-chaired by representatives of both the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The programme leader will also be supported by a small steering group, the composition of which will be decided separately. This small steering group will be composed of experts responsible for the practical implementation of the programme in the wellbeing services counties and municipalities, service providers, representatives of the ministries involved in the programme and a representative of people with lived experience.

8.4. Contracts

The implementation of the national programme will be the subject of separate agreements defining the roles of the parties, the measures to be taken and the financing. These agreements are based on the implementation plans drawn up by the wellbeing services counties. The agreement is signed by the ministries and other governmental organisations involved in the implementation of the programme and the wellbeing services counties and municipalities participating in the programme. The agreements will be coordinated with the MAL agreements and the objectives defined therein. The MAL agreements concern land use, housing and transport and are concluded by the State of Finland with the seven largest urban regions.

The MAL agreements have played an important role in securing housing development, particularly in terms of the supply of affordable rental housing. The current agreements also include a target to halve homelessness. However, this mention is not concrete; the agreements merely refer to the cooperation programme to halve homelessness. The MAL agreement therefore has no direct guiding effect on the production of housing for the homeless.

The aim of the current MAL agreements has been to increase the share of ARA production to 30%. In practice, however, the production of 40-year subsidized housing and housing for special groups has, with some exceptions, remained below 20%. At the time of contract renewal, the target level for 40-year subsidized housing, including special needs housing, should be at least 25%. The MAL agreements should also include concrete housing targets for the eradication of homelessness, coordinated with the measures set out in the homelessness eradication programme agreements.

9. Measures needed to end homelessness

9.1. Restrictions on temporary housing

Ending homelessness requires permanent housing solutions. Temporary housing solutions will not solve homelessness. The use of temporary housing solutions should therefore be kept to a minimum, both in terms of quantity and time. During the programme period, temporary housing will not be increased, and its use will be limited to a maximum of one month. Temporary housing here refers to emergency shelter, emergency accommodation, crisis housing, temporary rental accommodation for the homeless and 'evaluative housing'.

9.2. Emergency housing services

Existing emergency shelters will be replaced by emergency housing services.

This is both a functional and physical change. The use of dormitories with 'shared air' will be discontinued and replaced by facilities that provide adequate privacy. The shelter is not intended for long-term occupation. In the emergency housing service, the client's situation will be assessed and a housing solution will be found that meets the client's needs. This functional change to an emergency housing services requires that the unit has adequate facilities for the next steps of housing. It is appropriate to place the emergency housing services with the other facilities of the social and health services. Wellbeing services counties must contribute to ensuring the regional availability and location of emergency housing services in order to avoid concentrations of homelessness.

Responsible actors: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, wellbeing services counties, municipalities

9.3. The rapid re-housing model

The rapid re-housing model will be introduced nationwide.

The model of rapid re-housing has been tested in Espoo for homeless people who can be referred to scattered housing. The model is based on a contractual cooperation with landlords, where the housing provided as quickly as possible is accompanied by a fixed-term (12 months) support to secure housing. Limiting temporary housing to 1 month requires mainstreaming this model and extending it to all permanent housing solutions.

Responsible actors: wellbeing services counties, municipalities, NGOs

9.4. Introducing and consolidating multi-professional mobile support in wellbeing services counties

As a joint process between the participating wellbeing services counties and the Housing First Development Network a comprehensive description of alternative approaches to multi-professional mobile support will be produced. The development work is based on the Nopsajalka modelling by Professor Annalisa Sannino's research group.

The regionally applicable models of multidisciplinary mobile support created as a result of the development work will be established in the wellbeing services counties.

A plan will be generated to develop training content to support the skills required for multi-professional mobile support in wellbeing services counties and to integrate it into existing training programmes.

Responsible actors: wellbeing services counties, Housing First Development Network, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry of Education and Culture (training)

9.5. Permanent housing solutions

For permanent housing solutions, the starting point is primarily the use of the existing housing and property stock, where necessary through renovation. The use of the existing housing stock is justified both by the timetable for implementing the programme and by climate considerations. Any new construction should be primarily in the form of wood construction or energy-efficient low-carbon projects.

The individual dwellings required will be sourced from the following sources:

ARA dwellings of municipal rental housing corporations and non-profit rental housing corporations

Dwellings of private institutional rental housing owners (direct and sub-rentals)

Dwellings of private landlords (direct and intermediate rentals)

For supported housing units under the Housing First principle, there is an additional need for groups in need of intensive support, such as homeless people who use drugs or elderly long-term homeless people. In the case of stand-alone units, the maximum number of dwellings will be 30.

The preferred option is to implement the units as integrated units with other housing or as hybrid projects.

9.6. Housing advice

The pilot legislation on housing advice came into force at the beginning of the year. The pilot legislation extended housing advice to all forms of housing. The state subsidy for housing advice, granted by ARA, is now channelled to municipalities, which can also obtain the service from other providers.

Housing advice is also provided by NGOs and foundations as a STEA-funded activity. Housing advice is closely linked to social work, so it is also conceivable that the wellbeing services counties provides housing advice to the city.

During the programming period, legislation will be prepared to safeguard the current multi-channel funding and delivery of housing advice.

Responsible parties: Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, ARA

10. Recommendations for regional action plans and further work

The eradication of homelessness is entirely dependent on the work of the wellbeing services counties in partnership with the municipalities. More detailed plans must therefore be drawn up in the regions where there is the best expertise on regional needs. The national programme will create the conditions for the implementation of regional plans.

Ending homelessness requires the provision of effective housing and support solutions for critical client groups such as homeless people using drugs, criminal justice clients, young people and people using multiple services.

10.1. Ending homelessness of people using drugs

There is no research data on the number of homeless people who use drugs, but outreach and outreach experts estimate that the number is increasing. The increase in overdose deaths and the young age of the user population also indicate the seriousness of the problem. The drug problem is not confined to the metropolitan area. Drug use increases the risk of homelessness and lack of housing makes access to and adherence to treatment more difficult.

In connection with the preparation of a possible pilot scheme of drug consumption rooms, it should be examined whether the rooms could be located next to other services, such as health advice points or other low-threshold units, where other services, social support and access to care would also be available.

The preferred housing option is community housing with intensive support.

10.2. Reducing and ending homelessness among criminal justice clients

Homelessness among prisoners and people in community sanctions remains high. Around one third of prisoners are still released homeless. Around 5-6% of clients in community sanctions are homeless. Lack of housing may also be one of the reasons why a person cannot be sentenced to supervised release or cannot be granted supervised probation because he or she does not have the necessary housing.

The social rehabilitation of criminal sanctions clients and the prevention of re-offending require seamless cooperation between the Criminal Sanctions Agency, municipalities, NGOs and wellbeing services counties, in which the wellbeing services counties plays a coordinating role. This cooperation is particularly important in the organisation of housing and support after release. Together with the municipalities, the wellbeing services counties must ensure that suitable housing solutions and related support are available in a timely manner. In the procurement of housing services, it is justified to give priority to operators who are able to offer not only housing but also employment opportunities.

10.3. Ending youth homelessness

Statistics show that youth homelessness has decreased in recent years. Since 2008, there has been a 46% reduction. The latest preliminary statistics show that youth homelessness has started to rise again. However, there is also a hidden homelessness among young people that is not visible in the statistics.

The production of affordable youth housing has played an important role in preventing youth homelessness. Securing the supply of youth housing requires that municipalities allocate sufficient land for new construction. The MAL agreements can also define more precisely the production targets for youth housing.

The Youth Homelessness Network, coordinated by the Youth Housing Association, has drawn up its own recommendations for ending youth homelessness¹⁶. For young people who do not need special support for substance abuse or mental health problems, a model of rapid rehousing combined with light guidance and support would be an effective solution. This target group is well reached by The One-Stop Guidance Centers. Cooperation between youth housing, One-Stop Guidance Centers and outreach youth work has been strongly developed in recent years. These actors also play a key role in developing the rapid rehousing model for young people.

10.4. Homeless people who use a lot of services

People with multiple problems, dual diagnosis of substance abuse, mental health problems, neuropsychiatric symptom. The list of groups of homeless clients using multiple services is long and simultaneously they burden a number of different services, although the group itself is small in number. Providing housing and support/care for this heterogeneous group requires specialised professional expertise, such as addiction psychiatry, from both the social and health sectors, and its more effective use. The use of specialist expertise and the delivery of care is significantly complicated by a lack of psychiatric resources, which prevents specialists from providing floating support in homelessness units.

This most challenging group of homelessness also raises the question of the need for homelessness-specific services. In the past, the Housing First model has emphasised the use of standard social and health services. For challenging groups, the provision of homelessness-specific services, even for a small group, may be justified in order to increase the effectiveness of the service. At the same time, it can free up resources in mainstream services for other work.

¹⁶ <https://nal.fi/nuortenasunnottomuus-suositukset/>

10.5. Utilisation of empty homes and properties

Exploring the potential of empty homes and properties as a means of tackling homelessness would be in line with the principles of the circular economy. There is currently activity in this area in several countries in Europe, which has been boosted by the war in Ukraine. It would be useful to draw on these experiences from other countries.

10.6. Research programme

Despite increased research in recent years, we still know too little about homelessness. Ongoing research projects and evaluations, as well as available international research data, are increasing our understanding of the homelessness phenomenon, but there is still a need for research that is of concrete use in practice. We still know too little about the causes of homelessness, the process of becoming homeless, new homelessness and also the effectiveness of different housing solutions. A multidisciplinary research agenda will be of significant benefit in achieving the objective of ending homelessness.

In 2027

So, what will the entity what has made homelessness an extremely rare and short-lived experience look like in 2027?

In 1987, statistics on homelessness began in Finland. Exactly 40 years later, ARA announces that national statistics on homelessness will be discontinued when there is no longer anything to report. No Fixed Abode NGO is considering changing its name to People with Lived Experience NGO. Despite all the doubts, the goal of making Finland the first country without homelessness has been achieved. Thanks to the political decision-makers who consistently promoted the goal and to the thousands of professionals and volunteers whose work gave homeless people a home and a new start in life.

Homelessness prevention has now built a strong protective edge against homelessness. Housing social work and housing advocacy are well established as it is a routine part of the services to ask “how do you really live?”. A broad-based cooperation based on common practices, involving a large number of authorities and organisations, including wellbeing services counties, municipalities, Kela, the police, the Criminal Sanctions Agency and the Enforcement Agency, reaches people at risk of homelessness at a sufficiently early stage.

In practice, you cannot end up homeless for financial reasons. This is taken care of by financial and debt counselling and a nationwide network of financial counsellors, as well as the services of the Guarantee Foundation (Takuusäätiö) and the tools developed for financial management. There is also a functioning system for settling rent arrears.

The housing advice service, which has developed into a multi-professional service that is actively developing its activities, is also good at reaching people in crisis. You may come across a housing advice pop-up point in the aisle of a shopping centre.

To everyone's surprise, the functionality of information systems and problems of accessing information are off the agenda. Information is flowing and people are grateful. At times, staff shortages have been overcome by the widespread use of digital tools to support residents, for example.

Well-working solutions for clients with high service needs have been found, as access to substance abuse and mental health services has improved thanks to significant increases in resources. The need for outreach work has decreased and work has become more on-call and based on community-building. Mobile support, based on the "Nopsajalka" model, ensures that those in need have access to the right service.

A crucial factor in the success of the national target to end homelessness was that the City of Helsinki almost succeeded in eliminating long-term homelessness by 2025. Welcome additional funding was also found from private ethical investors, as a workable model for impact investment was finally found. Impact investments also made more efficient use of empty properties and brought a small relief to the finances of wellbeing services counties and municipalities.

It may sound utopian, but it can just as easily be a reality when you decide and work together towards a common goal. However, no system of government is completely watertight and does not remove individual responsibility. Ultimately, ending homelessness is about solidarity, respect and caring for others through encounters and small acts. Ethics is not talk, it is action. It is in human muscle memory.

Annex 1 / Interviews and consultations

Interviews and consultations have been conducted in the form of face-to-face meetings, team discussions or telephone interviews, either individually or in groups, with some interviewees/groups being interviewed more than once. The interviews are based on the personal expertise of the interviewees and the report does not include official positions of the different organisations; the conclusions are the responsibility of the author of the report.

The interviews were conducted between 5.10.2022 and 25.1.2023. The interviewees are listed in alphabetical order of the organisations and the name of the organisation according to the interview date.

Kaarlo Simojoki	A-Clinic NGO
Jarmo Lindén	ARA
Sina Rasilainen	
Heli Alkila	Helsinki Deaconess Institute Hoiva Oy
Tapio Rätty	Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsman
Peter Fredriksson	F-Consults Oy
Robert Koski	Helsinki Deaconess Institute/Tukialus
Daniel Sazonov	City of Helsinki
Mikko Tamminen	
Leena Luhtasela	
Anne Kinni	
Samuel Adouchief	HUS
Susanna Hult	City of Jyväskylä
Pasi Pajula	KELA
Ritva Anttonen	Central Finland Wellbeing Services County
Paavo Voutilainen	Kidesäätiö
Riitta Rainio	
Laura Hassi	Association of Local and Regional Authorities
Tapio Nieminen	Western Uusimaa Wellbeing Services County
Marianne Mäki	Ministry of Justice
Heidi Lind	
Minna Bishop	

Sanna Helesuo	
Katja Karppinen	City of Oulu
Jari Karppinen	Salvation Army
Susanna Lähde	Well-being Region of North Ostrobothnia
Heikki Mäkiprosi	Police
Matti Järvinen	City of Pori
Riitta Kari	Criminal Sanctions Agency
Anna Arola-Järvinen	
Sanna Kohvakka	
Pia Puolakka	
Tiina Raatikainen	
Satu Rahkila	
Karoliina Taruvuori	
Kimmo Rönkä	Rönkä Experts Oy
Kimmo Karvonen	Sininauhasäätiö
Sanni Joutsenlahti	
Virva Juurikkala	Ministry of Social Affairs and Health
Mikko Hytönen	
Samir Omar	S-Bank
Hanna Heinonen	STEA
Veera Väisänen	
Leena Lehtonen	Suur-Helsinginvalkonauha ry
Pilvi Azeem	
Juha Pantzar	The Guarantee Foundation
Aura Pylkkänen	
Maritta Närhi	City of Tampere
Eeva Liukko	THL
Pekka Karjalainen	
Anna Pärnänen	Statistics Centre
Helena Aaltonen	
Sanna Tiivola	No Fixed Abode NGO
Jussi Lehtonen	
Jenni Eronen	

Harri Eerikäinen	
Harri Nieminen	City of Vantaa
Johanna Hankomäki	
Liisa Kankkunen	
Henna Kaukonen-Nyholm	
Sari Kurkinen	
Laura Lindroos	
Jari Salonen	
Patrik Silfverberg	
Tiina Snellman	
Minna Tuovinen	
Arja Wallenius	
Tommi Laanti	Ministry of the Environment
Tuula Tiainen	
Teija Ojankoski	Y-Foundation
Juha Kahila	
Sari Timonen	
Juha Niskanen	
Saija Turunen	
Krista Kosonen	
Spyridoula Fotinis	
Elisabetta Leni	
Riikka Perälä	
Juha Soivio	Housing First Development Network/Y-Foundation
Mia Saarela	
Marko Leimio	Office of the Commissioner for Equality

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Sanna Sunikka Organisation supporting ex-offenders

Tiina Irjala Youth Housing Association

Annalisa Sannino University of Tampere

Tomi Henriksson	City of Vantaa
Markku Rautiainen	VAT network

Annex 2 / Participants of the Expert Group

First name	Surname	Organisation	City	26.10.22
Samuel	Adouchief	HUS Psychiatry	Helsinki	x
Petri	Ahonen	City of Pori	Pori	
Pilvi	Azeem	Greater Helsinki White Ribbon Association	Helsinki	x
Elizabeth	Erkkilä	City of Helsinki	Helsinki	x
Jenni	Eronen	No Fixed Abode NGO	Helsinki	x
Saija	Haikarainen	Sirkkulanpuiston toimintayhdistys ry	Kuopio	x
Ulla	Hännikäinen	Keusote	Järvenpää	x
Marianne	Hulbakkmo	City of Helsinki	Helsinki	x
Mirka	Järvinen	ARA	Lahti	x
Matti	Järvinen	Pori	Pori	
Päivi	Jouttimäki	City of Espoo	Espoo	x
Mia	Juselius	Organisation supporting ex-offenders (KRITS)	Helsinki	x
Rosa	Karjalainen	Criminal Sanctions Agenct	Helsinki	
Jari	Karppinen	Salvation Army		x
Tiina	Koponen	NAL Services	Helsinki	
Niina	Kroeger	City of Helsinki	Helsinki	x
Elina	Liikanen	City of Tampere	Tampere	x
Pinja	Marjamäki	Keusote	Hyvinkää	
Katarina	Mårtenson	City of Helsinki	Helsinki	x
Taru	Neiman	Helsinki City Social Services/Astu	Helsinki	x
Harri	Nieminen	City of Vantaa	Vantaa	x
Elina	Perkiö	City of Tampere, Adult Social Services	Tampere	x
Heini	Pesonen	Kela	Joensuu	x
Mika	Rautanen	Prison health services	Helsinki	x
Markku	Rautiainen	RISE, Joensuu Community Sanctions Office	Joensuu	x
Scrooge	Rokosa	City of Helsinki	Helsinki	x
Senni	Rönkkö	ViaDia Pirkanmaa	Tampere	x

First name	Surname	Organisation	City	26.10.22
Leena	Rusi	The Blue Ribbon Foundation	Helsinki	
Sanna	Sunikka	KRITS	Helsinki	
Hannu	Suvanto	City of Helsinki	Helsinki	x
Aleksi	Tapola	City of Helsinki	Helsinki	x
Sanna	Tiivola	No Fixed Abode NGO	Helsinki	x
Tiina	Irjala	NAL	Helsinki	x
Krista	Kosonen	Y-Foundation	Helsinki	x
Riikka	Perälä	Y-Foundation	Helsinki	x