

Designing and implementing effective human rights-based housing strategies: answers to the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to housing - Finland and the Y-Foundation

Briefly about the work of the Y-Foundation

The Finnish Y-Foundation offers rental accommodation for people who are having difficulties in finding a home for themselves. The Y-Foundation operates in over 50 cities and municipalities with over 16 000 apartments.

Apartments are acquired through the purchase of individual homes in housing companies and by developing apartment blocks for rental purposes all over Finland. The capital region as well as other major cities and areas of growth are particular areas of focus when it comes to procuring accommodation. The subletting of individual apartments is at the core of the foundation's activities, and the majority of apartments are sublet to municipalities, parishes or to other partners. In addition to subletting, the Y-Foundation also owns apartments, mostly in the capital region, which it rents out directly to applicants. Residents are selected based on the applicant's need for housing and the applicants for the apartments come mainly through our partners.

In addition to purchasing individual apartments, the Y-Foundation also develops apartment blocks. Construction takes place based on local needs and wishes. Construction projects have included both regular rental accommodation as well as units for special groups allowing for support services.

The foundation is actively involved as a national developer of the Housing First principle, which is fast gaining ground especially in Europe.

The Y-Foundation coordinates Finnish organisations in the European umbrella organisation FEANTSA (the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless), which acts on behalf of homeless people throughout Europe. In addition to the Y-Foundation, other Finnish members of the organisation include the Helsinki Deaconess Institute, Vailla vakinaista asuntoa - VVA ry (No Fixed Abode NGO), The Association of Tenants and Homeowners in Finland, and Nuorisosasuntoliitto (Finnish Youth Housing Association). The Y-Foundation also coordinates together with FEANTSA the Housing First Europe Hub which focuses on training, research and practice related to homelessness work: <http://housingfirsteurope.eu/>

1. How those who are homeless and other stakeholders have been included in the design and implementation of housing strategies;

2. How the various needs and situations of different population groups, especially the most marginalized and excluded, are considered, consulted on and incorporated in the strategies?

Answering to both 1 & 2:

The Action Plan for Preventing Homelessness in Finland has two central goals. The first is to strengthen the prevention of homelessness. The second is to ensure that the recurrence of homelessness is prevented. In other words, people are helped to hold on to their homes.

The current Action Plan has in total of 18 AUNE-projects where different target groups such as previous prisoners or young people are in focus. Experts by experience are included into the Action Plan. Their experience is vital in the work of tackling homelessness. No Fixed Abode NGO (Vailla Vakinaista Asuntoa, VVA) supports the role of experts by experience in designing, developing and implementing the homeless services: <http://vvary.fi/english/>

See all the projects on Appendix 2. Projects implementing the programme:

[http://www.housingfirst.fi/files/5527/ACTIONPLAN_FOR_PREVENTING_HOMELESSNESS_IN_FINLAND_2016 - 2019_EN.pdf](http://www.housingfirst.fi/files/5527/ACTIONPLAN_FOR_PREVENTING_HOMELESSNESS_IN_FINLAND_2016_-_2019_EN.pdf)

3. How the roles of multiple levels of government and other authorities are coordinated or incorporated?

Ministry of the Environment has the primary responsibility of housing politics and reducing and tackling homelessness. The Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (ARA) is a governmental agency operating under the supervision of the Ministry of the Environment and being responsible for the concrete housing activities. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (SMAH) supports independent living, preventing of homelessness and coping with housing costs via various social subsidies and services.

Brief introduction to the main housing strategies during the past decade:

During the programmes to reduce long-term homelessness (PAAVO I & II 2008–2015), the Housing First principle was implemented in the work on homelessness and shelters were replaced by housing units based on supported rental housing. For the program periods, the state drew up agreements with cities and interested peri-urban municipalities, in which measures for preventing homelessness, combating homelessness and principles for joint development were specified. During the two programme periods, long-term homelessness decreased by 1,345 persons (35%). In 2015, homelessness decreased for the first time to fewer than 7,000 people. According to FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless, Finland is the only EU country in which homelessness continues to decrease despite the economic recession and social pressures. Even though the bold goal of removing long-term homelessness was not reached, according to the international assessment of the programme by researchers, the work to eradicate homelessness produced undeniable results, and Finland is one of the best examples of applying the Housing First principle successfully. See an International Review of The Finnish Homelessness Strategies here:

https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/153258/YMra_3en_2015.pdf?sequence=5

Reducing homelessness continues by strengthening the prevention of homelessness and preventing the recurrence of homelessness. The homelessness services are reformed in order to them to be more customer oriented and preventable. This work is done via The Action Plan for Preventing Homelessness in Finland (AUNE-program) in 2016–2019. PAAVO 1, PAAVO 2 and AUNE-programmes have been state level ran and have given specific organisations (from different Ministries such as the Ministry of Environment, Social Affairs and Health, Justice, Education and Culture to national level institutions such as National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) and The Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kela), to NGOs and to municipalities) certain responsibilities. The joint development work is carried out with multiple actors in various forums.

Y-Foundation has recently published a handbook about Housing First and the work on ending homelessness in English. It also outlines the history of the main strategies. The book can be read here: <https://ysaatio.fi/in-english/the-book/>

4. What goals and timelines have been set and whether these have been met?

The current Action Plan states: “By 2019, at least 2,500 new dwellings or places in housing will be allocated to the homeless or groups at risk of becoming homeless. The share of the Helsinki metropolitan area of the whole is approximately 1,700, the share of Helsinki itself is approximately 750, that of Espoo and Vantaa together is approximately 850 and the share of the peri-urban municipalities is approximately 100. The goal is to implement at least 800 dwellings or places in housing in Tampere, Lahti, Kuopio, Oulu, and Jyväskylä by 2019. New ARA rental housing is utilised in the offering, as well as dwellings rented for subletting and acquired from the market.”

5. What independent accountability mechanisms have been put in place?

See the current Action Plan.

6. What roles have been assigned to independent authorities such as National Human Rights Institutions or Ombudspersons?

The Finnish National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) is formed by The Parliamentary Ombudsman of Finland and The Finnish Human Rights Centre (and its group of delegates). It has an A-status since 2014. Its mandate covers the right to housing (and thus issues related to homelessness). The Parliamentary Ombudsman has solved at least one complaint related to homelessness and various complaints related to housing and rights to housing. In the work of the Finnish Human Rights Centre homelessness related issues, according to them, have not been actively on the agenda, but the Centre is aware of the problem.

Contact information to The Finnish Human Rights Centre: <http://www.ihmisoikeuskeskus.fi/in-english/contact-us/>

Contact information to The Parliamentary Ombudsman of Finland:

https://www.oikeusasiamies.fi/en_GB/web/guest/the-parliamentary-ombudsman-of-finland

See also: The Finnish League for Human Rights (FLHR): <https://ihmisoikeusliitto.fi/english/> →

Their work has not been bound to the National Action Plan but housing and homelessness questions have been (according to them) handled as part of discrimination related projects such as Roma people rights project in 2012-2015.

7. How access to justice for claimants of the right to housing has been ensured in legislation or otherwise

7.1 In the **Section 19 - The right to social security** the Finnish Constitution states:

“The public authorities shall promote the right of everyone to housing and the opportunity to arrange their own housing.” <http://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1999/en19990731.pdf> However this does not guarantee the subjective right to housing.

Finland’s state of housing rights is presented on the web page of Housing Rights Watch:

<http://www.housingrightswatch.org/page/state-housing-rights-4>

7.2 A broad network of homelessness actors in Finland have in 2016-2017 generated Housing First -quality recommendations that outline the work done in tackling homelessness. As the recommendations are new their implementation still varies between actors. The aim of the recommendations is to highlight proven and successful ways of working in accordance with the Housing First principle to complement and concretise legislation.

The principles are published in Y-Foundation’s new handbook (from page 108): A Home of Your Own.

Housing First and ending homelessness in Finland: <https://ysaatio.fi/in-english/the-book/>

Especially recommendations in the chapter three “Freedom of choice and opportunities to influence” outline the residents’ rights in the services and housing.

Social (Welfare) Ombudsmen in municipalities promote the legal protection of social and health care customers.

8. What new initiatives or approaches are being considered in plans for implementation of the New Urban Agenda and Goal 11 of the SDGs, particularly target 11.1:

The Government Report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development outlines (on page 34) that “the government’s housing policy strives to provide all citizens with housing appropriate to their life situations. The housing conditions of different population groups will be improved and **homelessness** will be prevented through the existing standard housing policy procedures”:

http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/79455/VNK_J1117_Government_Report_2030Agenda_KANSILLA_netti.pdf?sequence=1