

## **The right to adequate housing for Indigenous Peoples**

### **Contribution by the Government of Finland**

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In Finland, the number of homeless people has declined in recent years. This is mainly thanks to a carefully planned, comprehensive cooperation strategy called “Housing First”, a model bringing together homelessness NGOs, Y-Foundation, cities and the central government.

Traditionally, housing has been seen as the final goal of a social recovery process. Housing First shifts the paradigm and puts housing at the top of the list, as the first step in helping homeless people to get back on their feet. Repeated homelessness can be prevented more effectively when the paths that lead to it are recognized in time. The goal is to secure housing whenever the client is met in the service system.

Finland has been implementing modern homelessness policies ever since the 1980’s. From 2008 onwards, with the adaptation of the Housing First principles, the real breakthrough of early intervention in the prevention of long-term homelessness has been experienced.

Long-term homelessness in Finland (2008–2015) has decreased by 1,345 persons (35%). In 2016, overall homelessness decreased for the first time to fewer than 7,000 people.

There are three principles in preventing homelessness in Finland:

1. There is an ethical duty to provide a decent standard of living and environment to homeless people.
2. Both national legislation and international treaties require Finnish public authorities to address the problem of homelessness.
3. Reducing homelessness is an economically rational endeavour, because it reduces social and health care costs.

Practical solutions:

- Name on the door
  - A basic human need for privacy, a place of one’s own, a home;
  - A rental contract of one’s own (not second-hand contract or temporary social contract).
- Permanent housing allows other problems to be solved
  - Non-drinking is not a requirement for permanent housing.
- Separation of housing and services
  - Individually tailored services based on an assessment of needs.
- The solutions for homelessness cannot be temporary.
- Conventional shelters and dormitory-type hostels are not anymore adequate responses to homelessness
  - Hostels will be converted into supported housing units.

There are clear responsibilities on the level of the central government:

- Ministry of the Environment as the lead coordinator, in collaboration with Finance and Development Centre for Housing (ARA) and the Ministry of Health and Social Services;
  - Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations (STEA) has directed funding to third sector organisations for projects and for buying apartments from the market and renting them to homeless persons.
- State authorities and ten largest Finnish cities have made detailed agreements for concrete projects, such as site development, recruiting and training new staff, allocation of flats, commissioning and organising service provision.
  - A cross-governmental and cross-sectoral operation network has helped to identify and address the multiple and distinctive needs of the long-term homeless.
  - Finland has adopted an Action Plan for Preventing Homelessness in Finland 2016–2019.
  - Public funding for 2016-2019 is 78 M€.
  - The target group of the programme includes people who have recently become homeless and those who have been homeless for longer periods:
    - young people or families overburdened by debt or at risk of eviction;
    - young people leaving their childhood home for independent life;
    - people undergoing mental health and/or substance abuse rehabilitation;
    - child welfare after-care service clients;
    - asylum seekers who have received a residence permit but have failed to integrate; and
    - homeless released prisoners or prisoners going on parole.

The Government of Finland is not aware of homeless Sami people, the only indigenous people of Finland. Individual Sami people who do not have a dwelling live temporarily with their family or relatives.