

Helsinki

The Helsinki Homelessness Programme 2026–2029





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1 Introduction

Helsinki is committed to working determinedly to end homelessness by 2030. The Homelessness Programme 2026–2029 has been created in order to continue uninterrupted homelessness work according to the Helsinki City Strategy 2025–2029. Helsinki is investing in the sufficiency of supported housing and the availability of housing advice. The Homelessness Programme has been created in cooperation by the Helsinki Social Services, Health Care and Rescue Services Division, the Urban Environment Division and the City Executive Office. The Homelessness Programme aims to strengthen and establish methods which have been found to work, as well as to seek and implement new ways of preventing and decreasing homelessness that work in this age. The Homelessness Programme is a part of the programme package for the strategy period. It is a strategic programme running in parallel with the substance abuse strategy. It forms a part of the objectives and reform programmes aimed at preventing segregation.

The Homelessness Programme continues the work carried out under two previous action plans aimed at reducing and eliminating homelessness in Helsinki. The action plan to prevent and reduce homelessness in 2020–2022 made progress largely in line with the defined objectives. The action plan helped to reach the main objectives of halving the homelessness of people living alone (-47%) and made significant progress in decreasing the homelessness of families and couples (-38%). Working methods which aim to decrease homelessness were developed, and new housing service units were introduced. Resources were allocated according to the defined objectives to housing counselling and outreach homelessness work, for example. These measures made it possible to reach people in need of assistance much more effectively than before, and their housing problems could be resolved at an earlier stage.

As a continuation of the previous action plan, a new action plan to remove homelessness was drawn up for 2023–2025. The decline in homelessness continued in 2023 in line with the defined targets, but in 2024, the homelessness of people living alone began to increase slightly. The decline in the number of long-term homeless people came to a halt. The number of homeless families and couples continued to decrease, in line with the target. In 2025, the number of homeless people began to rise significantly for other groups except families. In 2025, there were 979 homeless people living alone in Helsinki, which is 193 people more than in 2024. Homelessness has increased throughout Finland in 2025.

The Homelessness Programme 2026–2029 draws on the experience gained and the operating models developed during the previous action programmes. However, new approaches are also needed in the current situation, as new needs have been identified and the social context affecting homelessness has changed.

In 2024, Helsinki sought project funding from the national programme to [end long-term homelessness 2025–2027](#). The Ending Long-Term Homelessness in Helsinki 2025–2027 project focuses on preventing long-term homelessness and improving the functional capacity and social standing of those living in supported housing units through social work methods. The project also includes an impact review. Funding for the project was granted in January 2025. The project is playing its part in implementing the new Homelessness Programme.

The aim to end homelessness does not mean that there will be no homeless people at all in Helsinki. There will continue to be people who are completely without a home, as new homeless people continue to arrive in Helsinki from other areas, and Helsinki residents find themselves homeless for various reasons, despite the support available. It is also realistic to recognise that some residents of Housing First units lose their homes due to disruptive behaviour or rent arrears, in which case they end up back on the streets or in emergency or temporary housing. However, the aim is to use different support measures to keep the number of evictions to a minimum and to find suitable housing for those who have become homeless as quickly as possible.

Taking these factors into account, having no more than 200 homeless people in Helsinki without a permanent home at any one time is a realistic target when it comes to eradicating homelessness in Helsinki.

In addition, factors outside Finland will continue to contribute to homelessness in Helsinki. There is a fluctuating number of homeless mobile EU citizens and undocumented migrants. They are a part of the homelessness phenomenon in Helsinki, and emergency housing has been arranged for them in Helsinki. Furthermore, these individuals often experience hidden homelessness, which is hard to measure reliably.

The next section of the Homelessness Programme provides an overview of the Helsinki-specific characteristics and the current situation, based on statistics and data gathered from operational activities. The 2025 statistics are used as the baseline for the targets of the Homelessness Programme. However, the development of the number of homeless people has been monitored since 2019. The target indicator for the Homelessness Programme is the number of homeless people overall and within different groups. In addition to the target indicator, the responsible actors in the programme can support the management of operations using a number of statistical indicators which allow monitoring the progress of the actions, as well as the amount and effects of the work carried out. The progress of the actions and the degree of fulfilment of the objectives are monitored regularly throughout the city during the programme period. The level of homelessness is also monitored as part of monitoring the progress of the City Strategy, as homelessness is one of the impact indicators in it.

2 Situational picture of homelessness and the related services

2.1 The distinctive features of Helsinki – their impact on homelessness and the need for health and social services

Helsinki is Finland's only major city and, together with the other municipalities in the capital region, forms a metropolitan area with a population of over 1.3 million. The population of Helsinki has increased at a record rate over the last few years. In 2024, the population grew by nearly 10,000 people, accounting for around 30 per cent of the total population growth in Finland. Migration from abroad and other parts of Finland, often involving young adults, has had the greatest impact on the changes in the population of Helsinki.

At the end of 2025, there were over 684,000 people living in Helsinki. The age profile of the population of Helsinki is younger than that of Finland as a whole. Compared with the rest of the country, Helsinki has a relatively higher proportion of people aged 20–44, and a lower proportion of those under 15 and over 60. The proportion of people of foreign origin is also higher than the national average. One in five Helsinki residents is of foreign origin, meaning that their parents were both (or their only surviving parent was) born abroad. In fact, 23 per cent of all people of foreign origin in Finland live in Helsinki – and nearly half live in the Helsinki metropolitan area. Another distinctive feature of Helsinki is the prevalence of single-person households: one in every two homes in Helsinki is occupied by one person.

Helsinki is a prosperous city where the population's income and educational levels are higher than the national average. Income and education are strongly linked to health and wellbeing. According to many indicators of health and wellbeing, those on higher incomes and with higher levels of education fare better than those on lower incomes and with lower levels of education. Receiving basic social assistance is also more common in Finland than in the entire country, and the share of people with low income and without a basic education degree is on the same level as the country as a whole. Low incomes are most common among people living alone, single parents and people of foreign origin, as well as young adults and the elderly. There are significant differences in health and wellbeing between different population groups in Helsinki. These differences are also evident between residential areas: the regional concentration of deprivation and affluence is very clear in Helsinki. Socio-economic differences between residential areas have also increased in recent years.

Indicators descriptive of the need of Finnish health and social services, such as age-standardised morbidity, often recognise the affluence and overall wellbeing and health in Helsinki, but may overlook many phenomena related to disadvantage and marginalisation, which are typical to large cities. For example, certain illnesses suffered by some Helsinki residents are not reflected in morbidity indicators. These include substance-related illnesses, for which the mortality rate in Helsinki is significantly higher than the national average, for example.

Helsinki is home to both the best-off and the most disadvantaged people in Finland, when measured against the national average. Severe substance abuse and mental health problems, criminality and homelessness are particularly prevalent among the most disadvantaged people. Helsinki has the highest number of long-term homeless people in Finland. Poor and untreated mental and physical health, alongside substance dependence and financial hardship, is a key factor related to service needs among the long-term homeless. The number of long-term homeless people and those with severe substance abuse problems is evident on the streets of certain parts of Helsinki. Due to its size and the opportunities it offers, Helsinki constantly attracts homeless people from other parts of Finland. For example, homelessness among immigrants is even more concentrated in Helsinki than homelessness as a whole.

2.2 Availability of housing, the housing market, and the national housing policy

The availability of rental flats in Helsinki has improved significantly in recent years. There are currently almost twice as many privately funded rental flats available in Helsinki as there were at the start of the 2020s. At the end of 2025, Helsinki City Housing Company (Heka) had more than 1,700 apartments that were free or about to become free, which is significantly more than a few years earlier. At the end of 2025, there were approximately 8,000 active applications for Heka apartments. Of these, 17 per cent were in extremely urgent need of housing and 61 per cent were in urgent need of housing. Due to this situation, the prospects of homeless people or people at risk of homelessness to get a home through Heka have improved. By the end of 2025, nearly 1,600 people, or 24 per cent, of those offered housing through Heka were homeless. A total of 60 per cent of those who were offered a flat turned it down in 2025. Of the housing applicants who had stated that they were homeless, 45 per cent turned down the flat offered to them.

Average rents for flats continued to rise in 2025 across all cost areas in Helsinki. In particular, the rents in cost areas 3–4, which are further from the centre, have increased relatively faster, because their rent levels have been lower to begin with. Although the availability of rental flats in Helsinki is currently good, there is a shortage of flats affordable enough given the residents' income levels. This has caused a partial disparity between supply and demand.

The current housing construction market situation is challenging. Housing production in Helsinki has halved from the level of 2020, and the low numbers of building permits and projects started indicates that the construction level will remain low in the coming years. Difficulties in obtaining funding, consumers' and investors' decreased solvency and willingness to pay, lower levels of overall consumer confidence and the high price of construction have made it more difficult to implement construction projects. The low levels of construction and high population growth may lead to a tightening of the housing market in Helsinki by the end of the decade.

The government's housing policy has changed radically during the term of Petteri Orpo's government. The aim is to reduce the stock of state-subsidised housing and target it more strictly at those on the lowest income levels and the most marginalised groups. The government has frequently cut housing benefits in various ways, and maximum income limits have been introduced for the selection of tenants for state-subsidised rented housing with effect from the beginning of 2025. The granting of interest subsidy loans for the construction and renovation of state-subsidised housing will be significantly reduced in 2026–2027. Helsinki's share of this interest subsidy mandate has previously varied at annual levels of 20–50 per cent, and it can therefore be expected that the 2027 level will not be sufficient for the implementation and renovation rate planned for the City's own housing production.

In practice, investment subsidy for special needs housing is only available for housing projects for disabled or long-term homeless people. In addition, merging the Housing Fund of Finland to the state budget is likely to decrease the funding available, which will cause insecurity in construction subsidies in the future. The negative impacts are expected to hit high-price areas such as Helsinki particularly hard. Delays or suspensions in projects due to a lack of funding are also likely to cause delays in market-led projects. This is because projects in Helsinki are often located in the same neighbourhoods as state-funded projects and can be linked to one another through shared construction solutions. Changes to the national housing policy may also be reflected on regional housing policy and the willingness of municipalities in the region to commit to the construction of state-subsidised rental housing. The ending or significant decreasing of state-subsidised construction in some of the municipalities in the region may increase regional homelessness and the demand for reasonably-priced housing, and reflect on the situation in Helsinki, regardless of the City's own actions.

2.3 Supported housing units

Rental housing for special groups is a significant part of the housing policy of the City of Helsinki, as well as preventive work in fighting homelessness. Flats are allocated to people who require supported housing. The supported housing units have been decentralised around the city, which prevents regional segregation in accordance with Helsinki's segregation prevention objectives.

The administration of the housing for special groups was transferred to the Urban Environment Division's housing services in 2025. The aim of the change has been to strengthen the general management of providing housing for special groups, to ensure the optimisation of the housing stock, and to make housing services even more customer-focused. The housing services are responsible for the maintenance and technical management of the housing stock, the management of rental agreements, rent determination based on the cost principle, and targeting the housing in cooperation with the Social Services, Health Care and Rescue Services Division. In January 2026, there were 2,235 decentralised supported housing flats, and their occupancy rate was 95.9 per cent.

Housing for special groups is mainly provided through a subleasing model, in which the City acts as the lessor. The City makes a primary rental agreement with the property owner, and then rents the flat to the tenant. This model enables the availability of housing, centralised management, clarity in rental agreements and the integration of services. The City is responsible for the rental agreement with the tenant, rent determination, controlling the payment of rent, and maintenance during tenancy. The property owner is responsible for the structural condition of the property and long-term investments. The tenant uses the flat in accordance with the rental agreement and pays rent to the City. The subleasing model makes it possible to react flexibly to changing needs, while supporting the City's ability to target housing solutions efficiently.

The joint special housing development project of the Urban Environment Division and Social Services, Health Care and Rescue Services Division has noted that there have been residents in supported housing units whose factual need for support has not been examined in a long time. The project has introduced a systematic approach where the residents' need for support is assessed. Those who do not require support are transferred as direct tenants of the owner and are allowed to continue to live in the same flat where possible. Since May 2024, 124 residents have been transferred as direct tenants of the property owner. In addition, together with Heka, a positive flow model is used which allows a resident to be transferred as a direct tenant after fixed-term housing. In 2025, 51 Heka residents became direct tenants. The transition to independent living frees up resources for those who need support.

A central objective of the development of the management of the housing units is to optimise the amount of housing units. This means that the City's housing stock for special groups meets the needs of the target groups as well as possible, is appropriately located across different neighbourhoods, and is managed cost-effectively. Optimisation requires continuous data-driven management, impact assessment and the allocation of resources to where they are most needed. The prevention of segregation and the equal accessibility of housing are also considered in housing development.

The housing services of the Urban Environment Division and the Social Services, Health Care and Rescue Services Division have strengthened their cooperation, which will be further developed in a systematic manner during the programme period.

Client work and the service processes overall will be developed so that they become increasingly client-oriented. One of the central areas of development is strengthening customer-oriented debt collection, which aims to support tenants in early stages of financial challenges and prevent evictions.

The success of the operations requires flexible, tight and goal-oriented cooperation across the Divisions of the City. Organising housing for special groups requires joint planning, sharing information and coordinating services between the Urban Environment Division, Social Services and Health Care Division and other central operators.

2.4 Prevention and early support

In line with the City Strategy 2025–2029, Helsinki is investing in ensuring access to housing counselling. This objective is also supported by the Implementation Programme on Housing and Related Land Use and the service strategy of the Social Services, Health Care and Rescue Services Division. The housing counselling produced by the Social Services, Health Care and Rescue Services Division is mainly funded by Municipal Helsinki. The housing counselling aims to help Helsinki residents with housing-related problems. Early housing counselling support helps prevent homelessness and settle situations where a threat of homelessness exists. Housing counselling services are provided at six different units across Helsinki. The service is also available via a low-threshold chat service and by telephone.

Housing counselling has reached an ever-increasing number of Helsinki residents at risk of homelessness. In 2025, the housing counselling had a total of 28,689 client contacts, which is 14 per cent more than the previous year. There was growth in the number of young and unemployed clients, in particular. The share of clients aged 25–29 increased by 30 per cent, and the share of unemployed clients increased by around 23 per cent compared with the previous year. The housing counselling work has been able to prevent evictions, settle rent arrears and organise housing for homeless people and those at risk of homelessness. The apartment finding service related to homelessness has proven to be a necessary intermediary service for clients with no need for other services.

It has been noticed in client work that some lessors no longer make payment arrangements for rent arrears, as they often transfer the payables quickly to collection agencies. This makes the one-off fees too high for the income levels of evicted people. Making payment arrangements in early stages supports people in clearing their rent arrears and prevents the risk of homelessness.

Services for the unhoused include organising temporary housing for clients with no need for supported housing but who for a special reason require the last possible form of support in arranging their housing due to acute homelessness-related situations, according to section 21 of the Social Welfare Act. A total of 70 families with children and 107 people living alone received temporary housing in 2025. Evictions and domestic violence were accentuated among the reasons which led to homelessness and the situations of people in need of temporary housing. Changes in the operating environment are also reflected in the need for temporary housing. The effects were particularly evident in the increasingly difficult situations of families with children: their amounts of rent arrears and low income levels have increased the challenges.

The temporary housing services have been renewed during the previous action programmes, and they are now increasingly customer-oriented. The temporary housing services of the Social Services, Health Care and Rescue Services Division and the housing services of the Urban Environment Division have developed a rapid housing model for helping single residents, couples and families with children.

Housing quotas have been abandoned, and housing can now be offered based on the clients' needs from the entire housing stock. Temporary housing is offered around the metropolitan area, and the clients' needs for support can be considered in a more individual manner than before. The revised model is better able to provide homes for families with children near their children's schools. Support is offered using means of social work and social guidance as part of the temporary housing. Services provided at home and cooperation with various networks have increased.

Child welfare after-care mostly has functional housing and service solutions to secure the housing of their clients and take individual needs into consideration. The housing solutions for after-care clients depend on the varying needs and situations of the clients: housing can be arranged on the open market, through subleasing flats, or through supported housing produced as a purchased service, where the service provider offers housing and service solutions or heavily supported housing. Finding housing may prove difficult in situations where independent rental housing is impossible due to the clients' life management issues or acute substance abuse issues, for example. In 2025, approximately 45 of the total 1,400 clients receiving after-care were homeless. However, all aftercare clients are offered some form of housing solution, but not everyone is able or willing to accept it.

2.5 Long-term homelessness

The reasons behind homelessness in general seem to be reflected on the number of long-term homeless people, the need for emergency housing, and the increase in spending nights outdoors. The resources added to fight long-term homelessness, services developed, and operating methods used during the two previous action programmes for removing homelessness are no longer sufficient to decrease long-term homelessness in the current situation. New measures are needed.

In 2025, there were 347 people experiencing long-term homelessness in Helsinki. The number increased by 50 people from 2024.

According to calculations made on 1 August–15 November 2025 by street-based outreach work, the number of people who spend their nights outdoors or in public spaces had increased by 59 people from the previous year. During the reporting period, a total of 151 people were found who had spent nights outdoors or in public spaces. Of these, more than half were known to be Helsinki residents. The rest were from other areas or their home town was unknown. Of the Helsinki residents interviewed, 33 said they did not wish to use emergency housing.

The number of people staying in emergency housing increased from June 2025 onwards. Some people had also been left outside emergency housing in the autumn due to the emergency housing units being full. Additional capacity was therefore procured from the service provider.

There are 116 places available for emergency housing for residents of Helsinki, 20 of which are substance-free. There is a separate housing area for women. In 2025, an average of 77 people stayed in emergency housing each day. A total of 821 different people used emergency housing during the year. The number of users increased by 128 compared with 2024. Just over half of the stays were one-off stays, and under half stayed in emergency housing for 11 days or more during the year.

The Blue Ribbon Foundation provides a meeting and support unit for young people with substance abuse problems in Helsinki, which provides emergency housing for 12 people. 40 per cent of these people were not Helsinki residents. In addition, No Fixed Abode – VVA ry holds a night-time café where a maximum of 15 people can stay overnight.

There are 90 places available for emergency housing for undocumented immigrants. In 2025, there were an average of 40 overnight stays per day.

Substance abuse is often a contributing factor to long-term homelessness. Substances are readily available. The effects of the drugs bought are often unpredictable, and they can cause aggression and confusion. The current situation in the substance abuse market and its impact on people who use substances has been evident on the streets and in support services. This has been particularly evident in Housing First units, where evictions issued on the grounds of violence and vandalism have more than doubled compared with 2022. Similarly, evictions carried out due to rent arrears have more than doubled compared with 2022. This upward trend began in 2023, and in 2025, 68 people were evicted due to violence or disruptive behaviour, and 24 people were evicted due to rent arrears. The mortality rate among residents in Housing First units is approximately five per cent annually.

2.5.1 Housing support

The housing support unit organises supported housing for the long-term homeless, both as part of its own operations and through purchased services. The housing service is based on a recovery-oriented approach, which starts from maintaining and improving the client's physical, mental and social functional capacity and wellbeing. Strengthening the client's independent coping and initiative by encouraging and supporting them to use their strengths according to the objectives they have defined is an essential part of the recovery orientation. For some clients, the aim is to rehabilitate them to live independently or to move into a less intensive housing service. For others, supported housing helps to maintain functional capacity, in which case the aim is to secure permanent housing in a housing service that meets the client's support needs.

In 2026, there are 1,031 flats in Housing First units. The number has increased by 48 compared with 2025. However, the capacity for support housing in housing units does not yet meet current demand. In addition, approximately 250 decentralised permanent flats with less intensive support are available through Housing First units. Approximately 1,750 decentralised flats arranged by the Urban Environment Division's housing services are available for housing support clients. For these units, the street-based housing support team provides the everyday support the residents need for a successful everyday life mostly through service coordination. The temporary housing units have 167 places available.

The services provided by the Hietaniemenkatu service centre are aimed at homeless adults living in Helsinki who have nowhere to sleep at night. Intoxication is not a barrier to accessing services. Day activities cover meal and hygiene services, social guidance services, and the services of a nurse and doctor. The service centre offers a free breakfast, as well as affordable lunch and dinner every day of the week, for those staying overnight. The sauna and shower facilities are available every day. In addition, emergency housing is provided at an emergency housing unit as a purchased service. The unit has a separate ward for substance-free clients.

The Assessment and Placement workgroup is responsible for assessing the homeless person's need for support. The social workers in the workgroup are responsible for providing adult social work services for clients staying in temporary and supported housing units organised by the housing support service. A separate service has been set up for prisoners due to be released.

Social workers and nurses in the housing queue work with homeless clients on the waiting list for supported housing using a flexible and proactive approach.

2.5.2 The Ending Long-term Homelessness in Helsinki 2025–2027 project (Pitkäaikaisasunnottomuuden poistaminen Helsingissä)

The Ending Long-term Homelessness in Helsinki 2025–2027 (Pitkäaikaisasunnottomuuden poistaminen Helsingissä 2025–2027) project by the City of Helsinki is a joint project of the City of Helsinki Social Services, Health Care and Rescue Services Division and Urban Environment Division. The project is carried out with funding from the Ministry of the Environment as part of a national programme to eliminate long-term homelessness by 2027. The project continues Helsinki's long-term efforts to reduce homelessness and aims to eliminate long-term homelessness from the city for good.

The aim of the project is to prevent long-term homelessness and its recurrence, and to improve the wellbeing, health and social inclusion of people who have experienced long-term homelessness, while ensuring that the City's rental flats are utilised efficiently and appropriately in the prevention of long-term homelessness and the strengthening of housing continuums.

Practical measures aimed directly at clients focus on preventing evictions and providing early support, as well as outreach social work carried out among those who have experienced long-term homelessness and are living in Housing First units. Cooperation between the Urban Environment Division and social services will be further developed by establishing a joint operating model for the division of labour and the secure exchange of information, so that the continuity of housing can be ensured and service chains run smoothly.

Another key aspect of the project is to strengthen the support network for clients at health and well-being centres who require a high level of services, so that they receive the health and social services they need in a timely and comprehensive manner. At the same time, we are assessing the need for a strong network in Helsinki to specialise in tackling long-term homelessness, and laying the foundations for partnership councils that bring together City operators, organisations, service providers and experts by experience.

As part of the project, the Y-Foundation will carry out a practice-based impact study to assess the effects of the project's measures on the clients' wellbeing, the effectiveness of services and the development of cooperation structures. Research supports knowledge-based management and helps to identify sustainable solutions that can be embedded as parts of the City's service structure.

The project supports the overall Helsinki Homelessness Programme by strengthening service chains, timely support and positive transition, as well as promoting the overall wellbeing of people who experience or have experienced long-term homelessness.

2.6 Financial resources allocated to the prevention and elimination of homelessness

Funding allocated directly on homelessness work consists of the housing support share from the Social Services, Health Care and Rescue Services Division, the share of youth services and adult social work, and the housing counselling funding directed by Municipal Helsinki to the Social Services, Health Care and Rescue Services Division. In addition, the housing unit of the Urban Environment Division targets services particularly at housing homeless people.

Helsinki has responded to the increase of homelessness in 2025 by adding 15 employees to its homelessness work and two to its housing counselling service. Furthermore, Helsinki has increased outreach substance abuse work and significantly accelerated access to treatment and rehabilitation for people with substance abuse problems.

In 2025, the housing support service used 36,300,000 euros directly on homelessness work. The sum consists of internal production and purchased services in supported and emergency housing, as well as homelessness social work, social guidance services and healthcare.

The Social Services, Health Care and Rescue Services Division has reserved a supplementary appropriation of 3.5 million euros in the housing support budget for 2026 for implementing actions to decrease long-term homelessness. During 2026, Helsinki will have 48 new homes based on the Housing First principle, and planning has begun for the City's own new housing unit. In addition, the current situation of lonely unhoused people will be assessed and the necessary further measures will be planned.

Organisations which carry out homelessness work also operate in Helsinki and receive project funding or operating grants from STEA and the City of Helsinki. The City and organisations cooperate closely on practical client work and its coordination.

The share of funding for services for young people and adult social work that is directly targeted at homelessness work (emergency and temporary housing) is approximately 3,000,000 euros. The share of mobile and undocumented people is approximately 1,600,000 euros, and the share of intensively supported housing related to after-care is approximately 1,500,000 euros. In addition, support from adult social work and other health and social services play a significant role in recognising and eliminating the risk factors for homelessness. In 2025, 2,200,000 euros in social assistance was granted for the payment of rent arrears.

Municipal Helsinki applies for a grant from the government to fund its housing counselling operations every year. The total cost of housing counselling services in 2025 was 2,100,000 euros. The costs and needs for additional resources are assessed annually. In order to secure the prevention of homelessness, it is important to ensure the continuation of the funding model.

The funding for homelessness work in the housing services by the Urban Environment Division was 2,133,000 euros in 2025. The total amount consisted mainly of staff costs related to the selection of tenants, tenancy monitoring, management and housing counselling in supported housing.

In total, the City of Helsinki uses nearly 50 million euros every year directly on homelessness work.

2.7 An overview of the future operating environment for homelessness work

Homelessness is a varied phenomenon, and removing it does not always present a sufficient view of an individual's social and health-related wellbeing. Social and health-related disadvantage may persist even after securing housing, and the risk of homelessness may recur. To eliminate homelessness and reduce disadvantage, ensuring a sufficient capacity for supported housing solutions for the long-term homeless, the accessibility and availability of health and social services, and homelessness prevention and early support in housing-related problems are therefore essential. Achieving this objective requires City-wide cooperation across Divisions, as well as networked cooperation with service providers, organisations, peer support operators and the users of the services.

Homelessness cannot be eliminated or prevented simply through sufficient housing production and health care and social welfare services. Reducing the risk factors for homelessness requires a strong, multi-sectoral and preventative social investment on the wellbeing and operational preconditions of vulnerable families, children and young people, in particular. Success requires actions from the state, wellbeing services counties and municipalities.

At the outset of the new Homelessness Programme, there are a number of risks in the way of achieving the goal of ending homelessness. Structural factors contributing to homelessness have become more pronounced.

The worsening employment situation, cuts to benefits and rising housing costs all have a negative impact on the lives of many Helsinki residents. A large proportion of those receiving unemployment benefits and general housing allowance are now receiving less support than before following the cuts. The situation for students has also deteriorated. From the start of August 2025, most students became eligible for the housing supplement for study grant. The amount of this grant is significantly lower than that of general housing allowance, and it is only paid for months during which the student receives a student grant.

The number of people on low income has increased. At the end of 2024, there were 93,600 people on low incomes in Helsinki, which was 9,000 more than the previous year. Following cuts to social security, an ever-increasing proportion of the costs of housing for those with low income has been left to be paid by the support recipient. The number of evictions has increased by 22 per cent since 2023. In 2025, the number of initiated evictions continued to rise, but the number of evictions carried out fell slightly compared with 2024. There are also fewer flats available in Helsinki than before where the rent does not exceed Kela's limits for housing costs. Another indication of insufficient income is that the number of people receiving basic social assistance in Helsinki has increased by eight per cent since 2023. However, the eligibility criteria for basic social assistance were also tightened in early 2026. These changes will soon be felt in the daily lives of those receiving support.

The effects of cuts to social security are felt most acutely by groups that are already in a more vulnerable position. Changes to social security have been implemented at a time of very high unemployment. Housing problems and homelessness resulting from income poverty have increased. The consequences of these factors on the living conditions and functional capacity of individuals and families can be long-lasting.

In addition to the economic consequences of cuts to social benefits aimed directly at individuals, funding for health care and social welfare services will be significantly tightened in the near future. This will affect Helsinki's financial capacity to establish and safeguard sufficient services for tackling homelessness. At the same time, the reduction in STEA funding is undermining organisations' ability to carry out homelessness work.

At the outset of the Homelessness Programme, the future funding for housing counselling also remains unresolved. The state has previously contributed 30 per cent of the funding.

Cuts to reception services are expected to have the greatest impact on the homelessness situation in Helsinki, as undocumented migrants who are excluded from these services tend to seek refuge in the capital region, and in Helsinki in particular.

Furthermore, the substances available on the drug market pose a particular challenge to the homelessness situation, as they seriously undermine the ability of the users to manage their lives and cause disruption both on the streets and in the housing situation.

Alongside changes in social policy, there has been a major shift in the government's housing policy, with the aim of reducing state-supported housing production and targeting it at a more limited group than before. The government's housing policy is currently strongly guided by economic policy objectives which aim at reducing public debt. Following a statistical change in 2022, loan guarantees related to state-supported housing construction have been included in public debt, which significantly increases Finland's debt-to-GDP ratio. This is likely to reduce the amount of interest-subsidised lending for housing construction and renovation, which in turn will reduce the construction of new properties, leading to a decline in the availability of affordable housing. As the state's role in housing policy weakens, there may be a divergence in the willingness and ability of municipalities in the Helsinki region to commit to the construction and maintenance of state-supported rental housing. If the proportion of state-supported housing elsewhere in the Helsinki region decreases, the situation may have a negative impact on the homelessness situation in Helsinki, regardless of Helsinki's own measures or the extent to which interest subsidies are allocated to Helsinki in future.

Helsinki's main opportunity to influence the external environmental factors described above is through lobbying. Helsinki has many strengths within its own operating environment. Homelessness work in Helsinki has long been backed by a desire shared by all political groups, which is also visible in the entries in the latest City Strategy. Following the separate solution for Uusimaa, Helsinki is a city in which the Social Services, Health Care and Rescue Services Division is one of the City's many Divisions. This structure allows for smooth and close cooperation between different Divisions and the comprehensive management of the city, which is particularly essential in complex issues such as homelessness. Through determined efforts, Helsinki has managed to significantly reduce homelessness, and many successes have been made. Helsinki has developed Finland's strongest expertise in homelessness work, which is also recognised internationally and which others wish to learn from.

Through bold reform, the careful and effective allocation of resources, and by trusting the expertise of our staff and partners, we are continuing to move towards our goal of ending homelessness. However, first we must focus on preventing the rise in homelessness and minimising its adverse effects.

3 Targeting of measures

In terms of the number of people, the largest group of homeless people consists of men living alone, many of whom have substance abuse problems. Homelessness work and housing services have also historically been developed to meet the needs of this target group. The clients of housing counselling, however, have more diverse backgrounds.

Continuing to provide and further develop established and effective services remains a priority. At the same time, we recognise the diversity of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and are reforming our services to meet the needs of the different groups.

During the programme period, we will select a number of target groups and activities for more detailed development and monitoring. Some of the development work continues to focus on the specific needs of men living alone, while other work is better suited to the needs of other groups than before.

- The sufficiency of housing counselling and legal and financial counselling for the prevention of homelessness is ensured.
- Helsinki has succeeded in practically eliminating the homelessness of families with children. This situation must be maintained and particular attention paid to preventing homelessness caused by domestic violence.
- An experiment of support provided at home for working-age people who require special support is launched. Support provided at home can prevent evictions, the accruing of rent arrears and the need for more intensive health and social services, for example.
- The utilisation of the subleasing model is continued in housing special groups. The model enables reacting flexibly to changing needs and supports the effective targeting of housing solutions.
- The utilisation of the positive flow model for Heka is continued, and the transfer to independent housing after fixed-term housing ends will be supported.
- During the programme period, efforts will be made to prevent the accumulation of rent arrears and to encourage the use of payment plans in cooperation with landlords.
- Women often find themselves in a subordinate and abused position in subcultures of those with substance dependencies. In supported and temporary housing, women are provided with options that take their specific needs into account.
- Substance-free people may feel threatened by intoxicated people in emergency housing units. They will be provided with substance-free emergency housing as required.

- The increase in homelessness among Helsinki residents with immigrant backgrounds is part of the segregation phenomenon. The success of housing is supported by developing means of housing counselling and social work in situations where the poor Finnish or Swedish language skills or lack of knowledge of the Finnish systems cause risks to housing.
- There are undocumented homeless people in Helsinki who are not covered by almost any services, and who often find themselves in a vulnerable position. The required emergency housing solutions and the related necessary services will be secured for such people.
- Heka prioritises homeless housing applicants in choosing tenants.
- Youth homelessness and its underlying causes are prevented and addressed through targeted measures in after-care, substance abuse work and mental health services, for example.
- The prevention and elimination of long-term homelessness is continued using the work methods developed in the Ending Long-term Homelessness in Helsinki (Pitkäaikaisasunnottomuuden poistaminen Helsingissä) project, strengthening outreach work, and increasing the number of Housing First supported housing.
- A report will be made regarding the situations and services received by people recognised in the homelessness survey, which will be used to improve the recognition of the risk factors for homelessness and developing services further.
- A report will be made regarding the situation of prisoners due to be released in Helsinki and on their housing solution, and the results will be used in developing the housing service model further.
- Cooperation between the Divisions will be further strengthened and systematically developed further during the programme period. Clear and permanent cooperation structures will be created to support the smooth work and enable the early identification of and response to housing-related challenges. The flow of information between the Divisions and shared operating models will be developed so that homelessness and evictions can be prevented more effectively than before. The Urban Environment Division provides information on the housing challenges of residents to the health and social services at a sufficiently early stage to enable providing appropriate support measures at the right time.

4 Objectives

Main objective: The number of homeless people shrinks every year, and homelessness will be eliminated by 2030

Indicator: Annual monitoring for the Centre for State-Subsidised Housing Construction (15 November)

Target level on 31 December 2029: There are no more than 200 homeless people living alone in Helsinki, and there are no homeless families.

Responsible party: Social Services, Health Care and Rescue Services Division, Urban Environment Division, City Executive Office

Table 1. The number of homeless people in Helsinki on 31 December 2025 and trends 2019–2025

HOMELESSNESS IN HELSINKI	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
People living alone	1,678	1,534	1,209	896	739	786	979 (-42%)
Homeless families and couples	130	122	88	81	33	10	12 (-91%)

Table 2. Homelessness in Helsinki among different groups on 31 December 2025 and trends 2019–2025

PEOPLE LIVING ALONE	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Women	559	498	320	317	192	228	247 (-56%)
Young people (under the age of 25)	265	239	152	184	61	71	91 (-66%)
People with immigrant backgrounds	602	518	345	180	266	259	277 (-54%)
Long-term homeless people	594	601	518	450	332	297	347 (-42%)

*The percentual change is shown compared with 2019. The same person may appear in more than one set of statistics. The number of long-term homeless people is based on the statistics of the Social Services and Health Care Division of the City of Helsinki published annually in November, people queuing for supported housing units and decentralised housing.

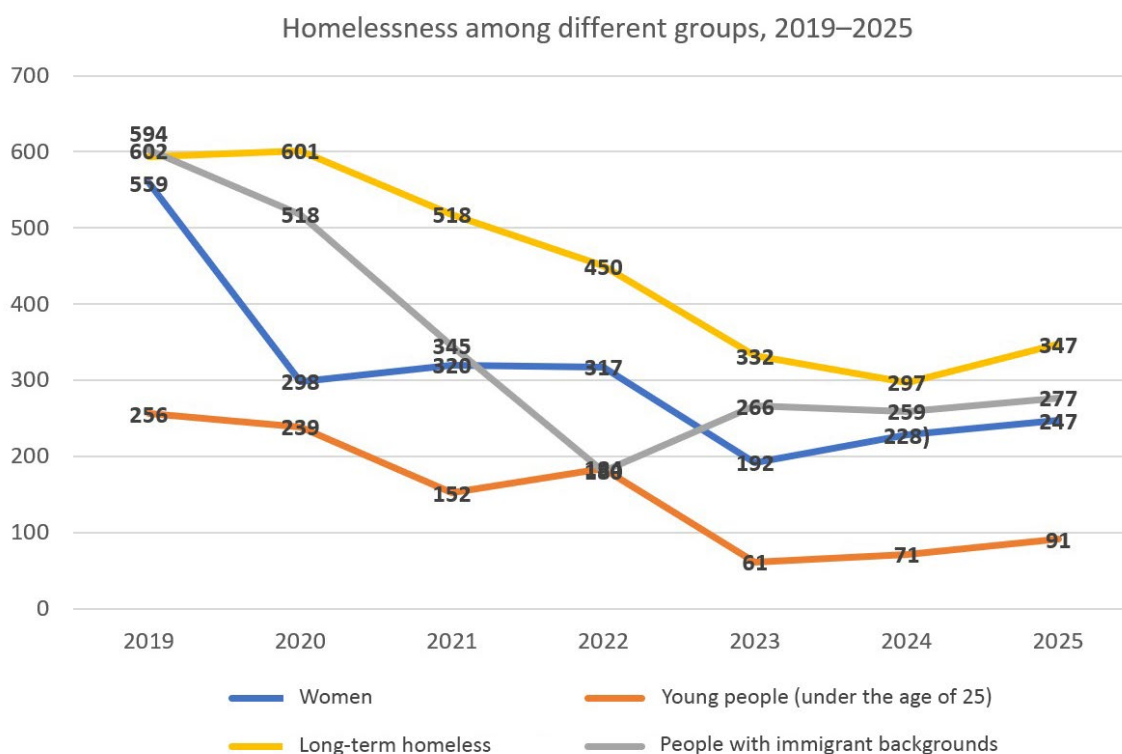


Image 1: Homelessness among people living alone in different groups, 2019–2025.

*The number of long-term homeless people is based on the statistics of the Social Services and Health Care Division of the City of Helsinki published annually in November, people queuing for supported housing units and decentralised housing.

In 2025, 25 per cent of homeless people living alone were women, nine per cent were young people under the age of 25, 35 per cent were long-term homeless, and 28 per cent were immigrants. There is also a fluctuating number of undocumented people and mobile EU citizens in Helsinki without housing.

In addition to the target indicator for the Homelessness Programme, the responsible actors in the programme can support the practical management of operations using a number of statistical indicators which allow monitoring the progress of the actions, as well as the amount and effects of the work carried out. The progress of the measures and the implementation of objectives are monitored regularly throughout the city during the programme period.

Other objectives to be monitored separately:

1. Objective: Decreased number of evictions

Indicator: Eviction proceedings initiated and carried out

2. Objective: Improved access to housing for the homeless

Indicator: Homeless people who have been allocated housing by Heka

3. Objective: Homelessness services strengthen people's ability to live independently

Indicator: A positive flow from Housing First units to less supported or standard rented housing

4. Objective: Resources for housing counselling are secured and the work is effectively targeted

Indicator: Evictions prevented through housing counselling

5 Appendix

5.1 The definitions of concepts

This appendix explains the key concepts and terms used in the programme in order to provide greater clarity.

Homelessness and the different groups affected by homelessness:

Homeless: People are defined as homeless if they do not have their own home (rented or owned) and, due to a lack of housing, are living in one of the following situations: 1. outdoors, in stairwells or in overnight shelters; 2. in housing units or accommodation establishments; 3. in housing service units, rehabilitation centres, hospitals or other institutions; 4. temporarily staying with friends or relatives (definition from the Homelessness report by the Centre for State-Subsidised Housing Construction).

Long-term homeless person: The term ‘long-term homeless person’ refers to a homeless person who has a social or health problem that significantly impedes their ability to maintain housing, such as debts, substance abuse or mental health issues, and whose homelessness is prolonged or at risk of becoming prolonged due to the ineffectiveness of conventional housing solutions and a lack of suitable support services. Homelessness is considered long-term if it has lasted for at least one year or if the person has been homeless on several occasions over the last three years. The need for help and care is emphasised in long-term homelessness, while the duration is secondary (Centre for State-Subsidised Housing Construction).

Hidden homelessness: Hidden homelessness refers to a form of homelessness in which a person does not appear in official statistics. This group includes people who do not seek services and stay unofficially in other people’s homes, for example. Some may have an existing address, but be unable to live in it for some reason (e.g. No Fixed Abode – VVA ry).

People sleeping outdoors: people without a permanent place of residence, who live in various temporary shelters and locations and move from place to place. People staying outdoors, in stairwells, tents, public transport vehicles or stations, shopping centres or car parks, for example, are included in this group, as well as homeless people who stay overnight in overnight shelters, service centres or similar places where accommodation is available for only one night or a weekend at a time (Centre for State-Subsidised Housing Construction).

Undocumented people: people coming from a country outside the EU, EEA, or Switzerland, residing in the country without a residence permit, whose residence permit has expired, or whose entry to the country or residence therein is not lawful. (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare)

Person of a foreign origin: A person whose parents were both (or their only surviving parent was) born abroad (Centre for State-Subsidised Housing Construction, definition used by Statistics Finland).

Key services:

Housing counselling: Housing counselling aims to prevent housing-related problems and homelessness. The housing counselling service helps all Helsinki residents who are experiencing problems with their housing. You can seek advice on problems with paying rent, applying for a flat or other housing-related challenges, for example. Housing counselling also supports homeless people in their search for housing.

Temporary housing: In accordance with section 21 of the Social Welfare Act, temporary housing is provided for a person who requires short-term, urgent assistance in arranging their housing for a special reason. Temporary housing refers to the provision of a temporary housing solution for homeless people. Temporary housing is short-term. The service is intended for low-income and indigent clients of adult social services who have a short-term and urgent need of housing. Temporary housing is provided either in flats owned by private service providers or in the City's own temporary housing flats and temporary housing units.

Child welfare services after-care: After-care refers to the comprehensive support provided to a young person following the end of their placement in child welfare substitute care or an extended community care placement. After-care aims to support the settling of the young person after substitute care or becoming independent by helping them to achieve sufficient skills for an independent everyday life and adulthood.

Local outreach work: Local outreach work refers to health and social services work carried out on the streets and in public spaces. Local outreach work social instructors and nurses work in pairs on streets, in shopping centres, facilities intended for residents and other public and semi-public spaces. Outreach work is carried out with people who sleep outdoors and those outside the reach of services.

Emergency housing: Emergency housing refers to short-term accommodation lasting just one night or over a weekend.

Supported housing: Supported housing refers to independent housing supported through social guidance services. Supported housing is provided for people who require assistance or support from the wellbeing services county to live independently or to make the transition to independent living for special reasons.

Housing First unit: The Housing First units are part of an approach known as the Housing First principle. In the service, homeless people are provided with a permanent residence without terms such as sobriety or commitment to care. In the units, the person has their own rented flat (not temporary housing), access to support for everyday life (e.g. social work, health care services), and their living does not depend on the use of services or the success of rehabilitation. The aim is that a stable home will provide a foundation for other changes in life.

Subleasing model: The subleasing model used in special housing in Helsinki refers to a system where the City makes a primary rental agreement with the property/flat owner, and then rents the flat to a client of special needs housing services. In this model, the City acts as the lessor.

The positive flow model: A positive flow refers to the movement from supported housing units or decentralised supported homes to less supported housing or normal rental flat. A positive flow is an indication of the effectiveness of the services, and supported housing can be made available to those who need it most. Evictions leading to repeated homelessness, for example, can be considered negative flow.

Supported housing: Supported rental housing solutions aimed at special groups.

Other key concepts:

Interest subsidy mandate: The interest subsidy mandate refers to the maximum amount defined in the state budget that the state can grant interest-subsidised loans for the construction, acquisition or renovation of rental and right-of-occupancy apartments during a certain year.

Implementation Programme on Housing and Related Land Use: The Implementation Programme on Housing and Related Land Use is a strategic plan created by the City of Helsinki for each council term (4 years), which guides the City's housing policy and land use. The programme aims to ensure the production of versatile and socially sustainable housing production and development of neighbourhoods at reasonable cost.



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