

# How to end homelessness?

Juha Kahila

Head of international affairs

**Y-Säätiö**





# Y-Säätiö – Housing First Since 1985

Founders:

Prominent Finnish municipalities

Institutions

Associations

Trade unions.



City of Helsinki

The largest and the capital city of Finland with a population of 656,250.



City of Espoo

Second largest city in Finland with a population of 293,576.



THE CITY OF TAMPERE

Third largest city in Finland with a population of 241,672.



City of Vantaa

Fourth largest city in Finland with a population of 238,033.



CITY OF  
TURKU

Sixth largest city in Finland with a population of 194,244.



Kuntaliitto  
Kommunförbundet

Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities promotes local self-government and the modernisation of municipal services.

KIRKKOHALITUS<sup>†</sup>

Church Council is in charge of government, economics and operations of the Finnish Lutheran church.

mieli  
Suomen Mielensterveysseura

The Finnish Association for Mental Health, FAMH, is a Finnish non-governmental organization and a federation of over 50 local mental health associations.

Punainen Risti  
Röda Korset

The Finnish Red Cross is the most significant Finnish civic organization providing humanitarian aid.

Rakennusliitto  
BYGGNADSFÖRBUNDET

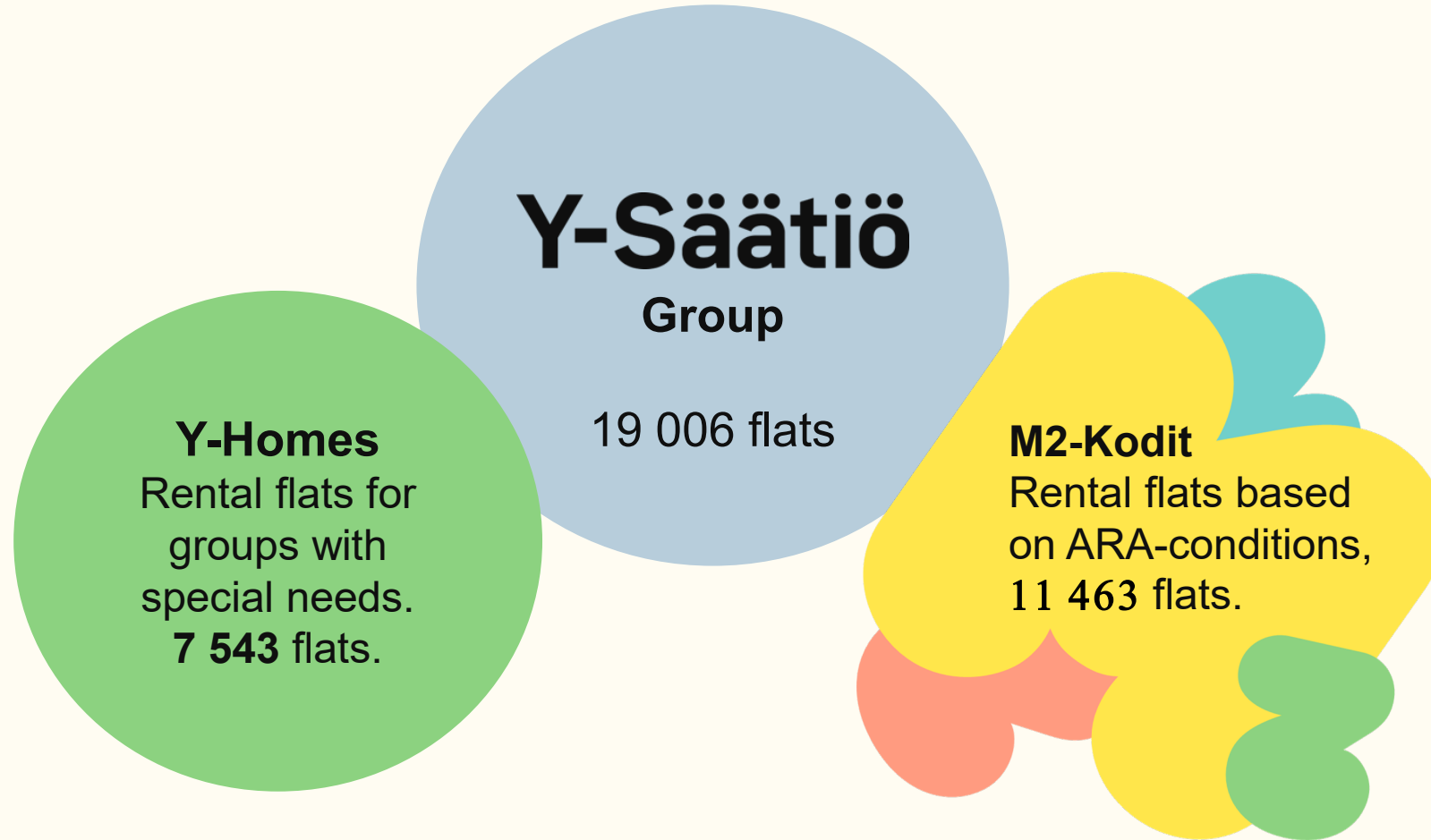
The Finnish Construction Trade Union is the trade union for employees working in the construction sector in Finland.



Rakennusteollisuus

The Confederation of Finnish Construction Industries RT (CFCI) is the joint interest organisation of building contractors, special contractors and the construction product industry.

# Home for all – Y-Säätiö's rental flats



Targeted for impoverished & low income individuals with urgent housing needs



**Housing for  
special groups**

**Economic and  
social well-being**

**Affordable rental  
housing**

# A home for all

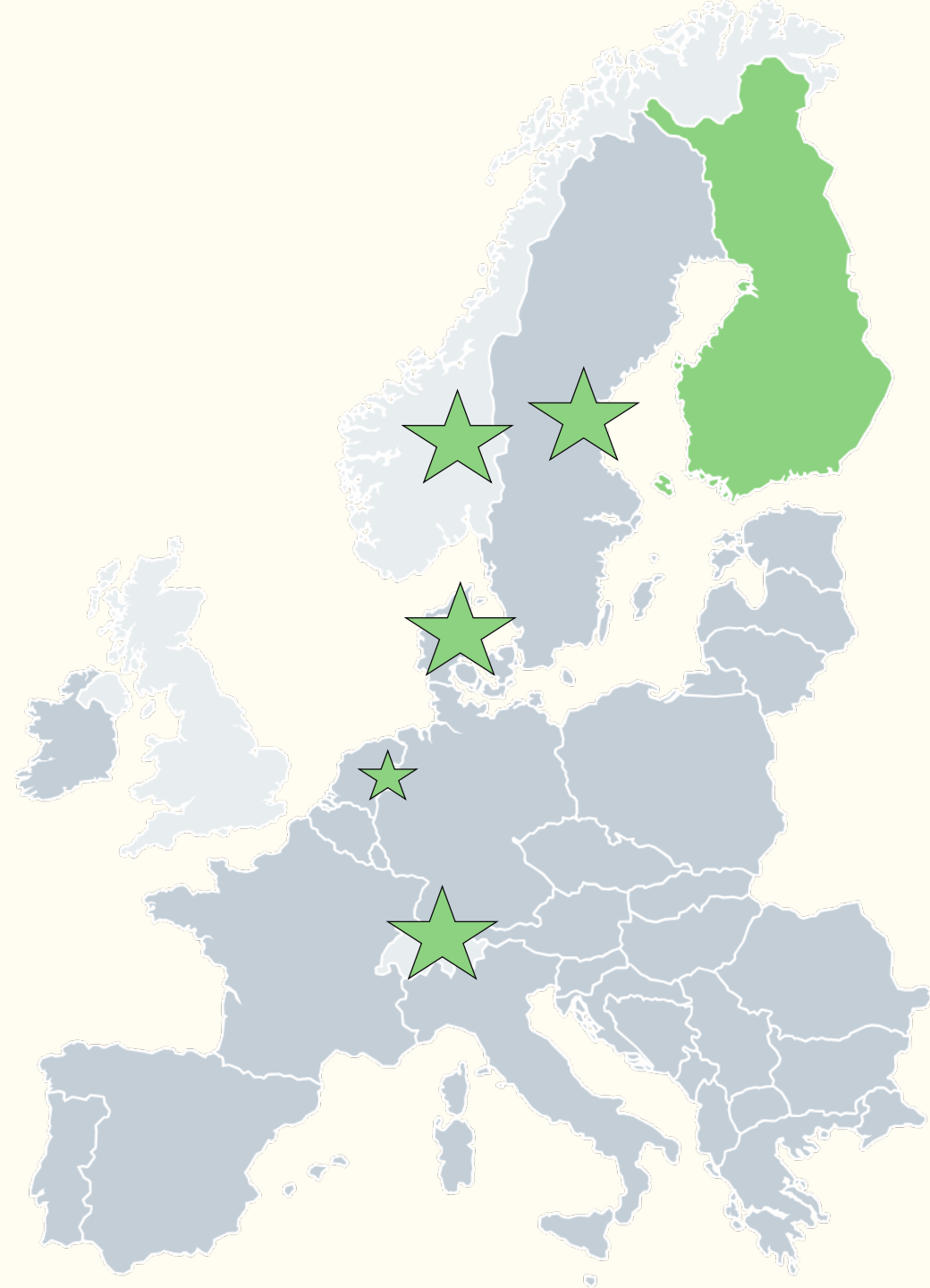
**Advocacy**

**Finland's fourth  
largest landlord**

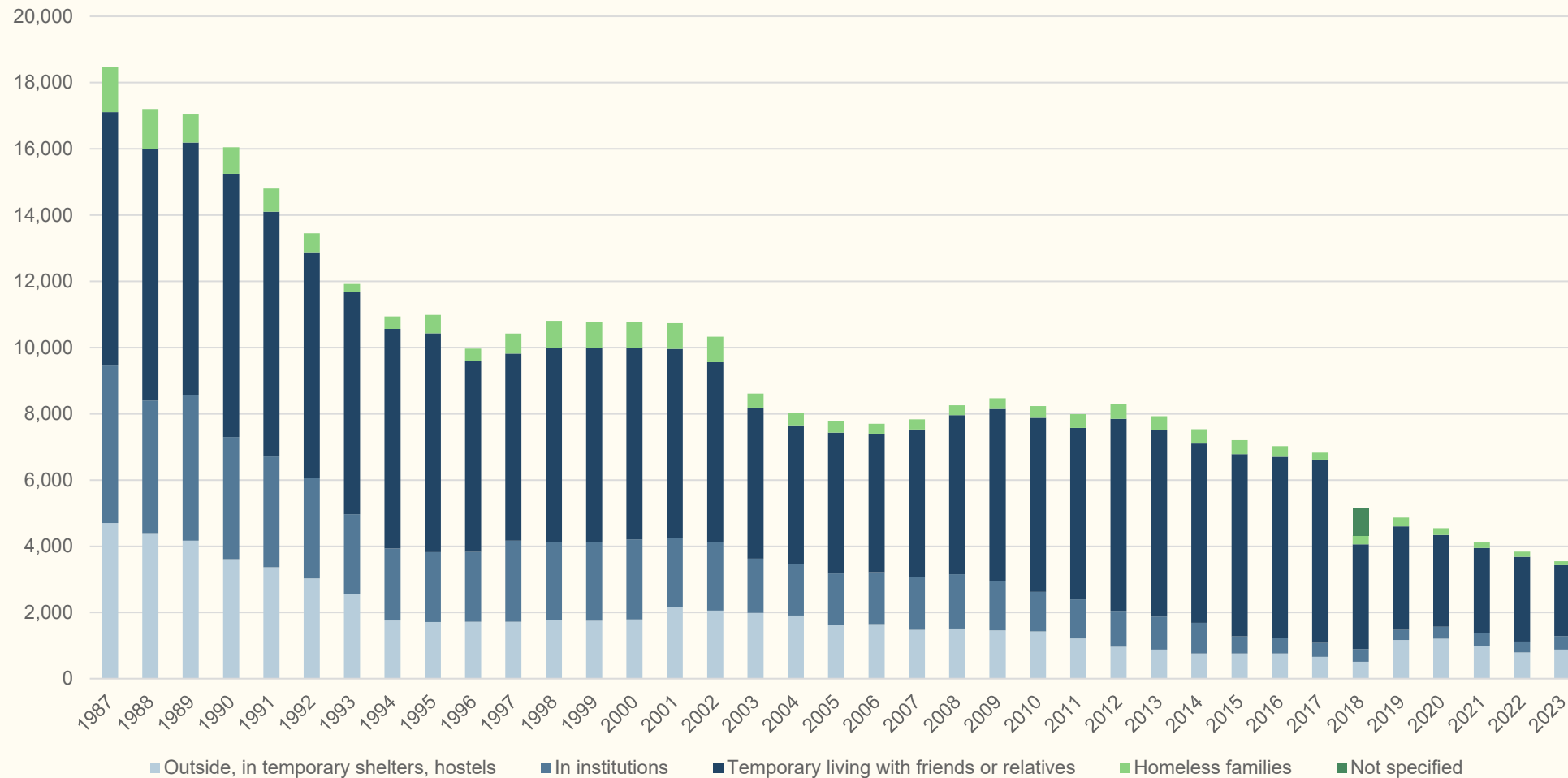
**Specialist  
in homeless-  
ness work**

# Homelessness in Europe

Finland is **the only EU country with a long-term reduction in homelessness**



# Homelessness in Finland 1987-2023



# Homelessness in Finland 2023

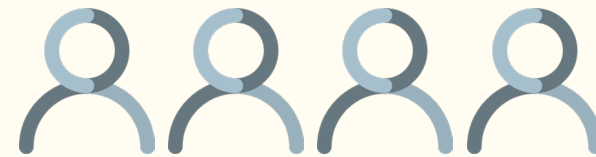
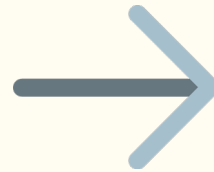
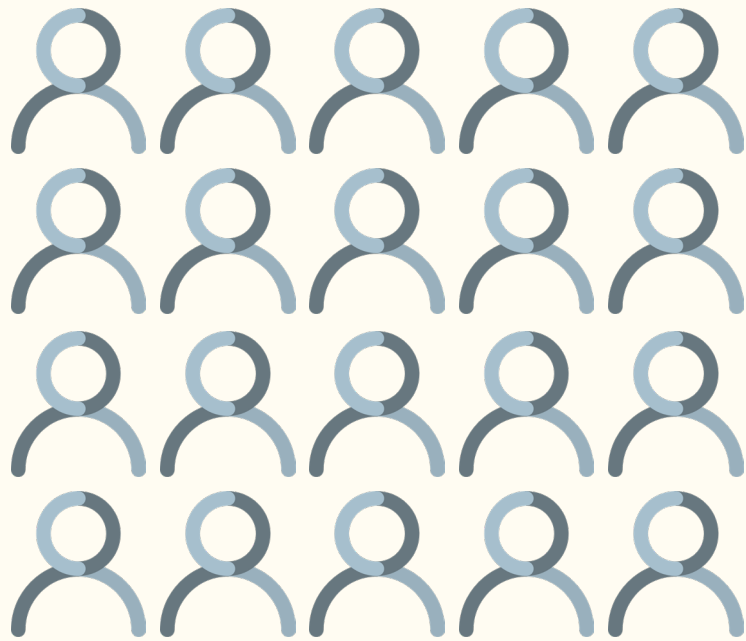




# Homelessness has decreased in Finland

**1985: 20 000 homeless**

**2023: 3 429 homeless**

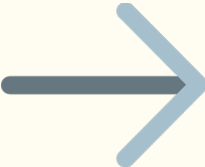


**-83%**

# Number of families experiencing homelessness

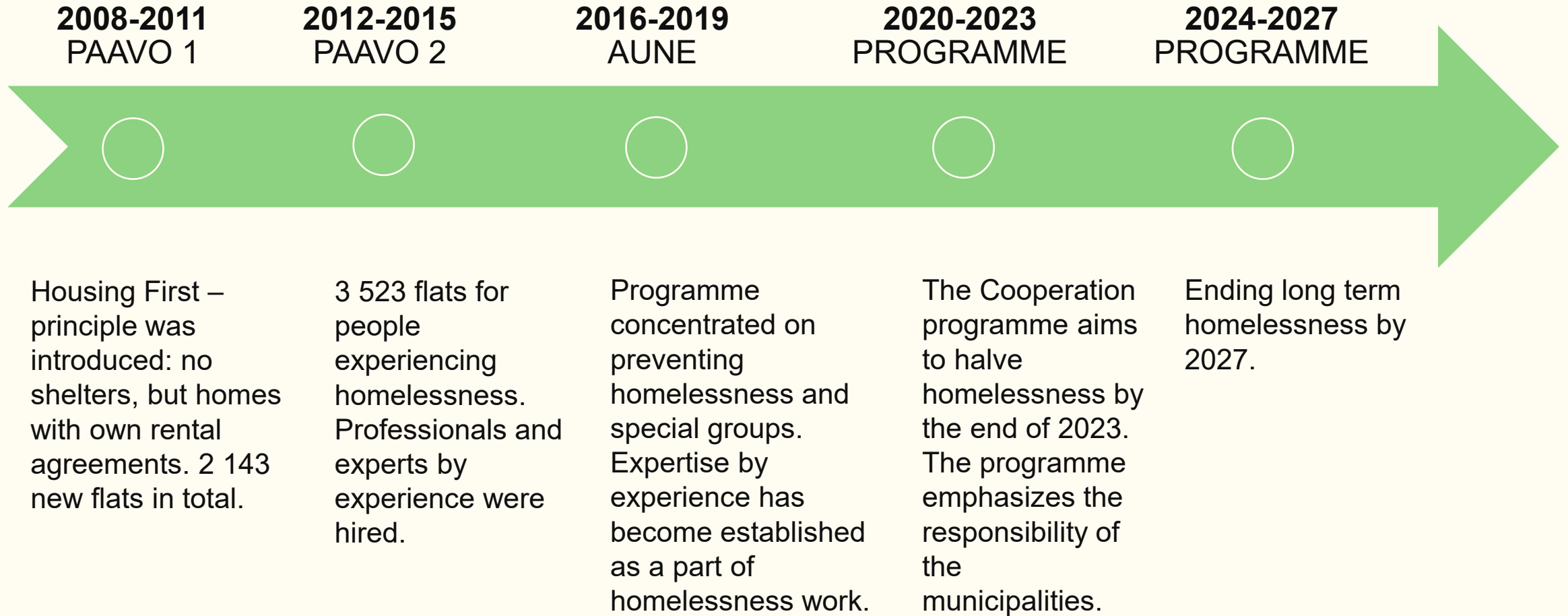
**1987:** 1 370 families

**2023:** 123 families



**-91%**

# National Homelessness Programmes



**2008-2011**  
PAAVO 1

**2012-2015**  
PAAVO 2

**2016-2019**  
AUNE

**2020-2023**  
PROGRAMME

**2024-2027**  
PROGRAMME

Housing First – principle was introduced: no shelters, but homes with own rental agreements. 2 143 new flats in total.

3 523 flats for people experiencing homelessness. Professionals and experts by experience were hired.

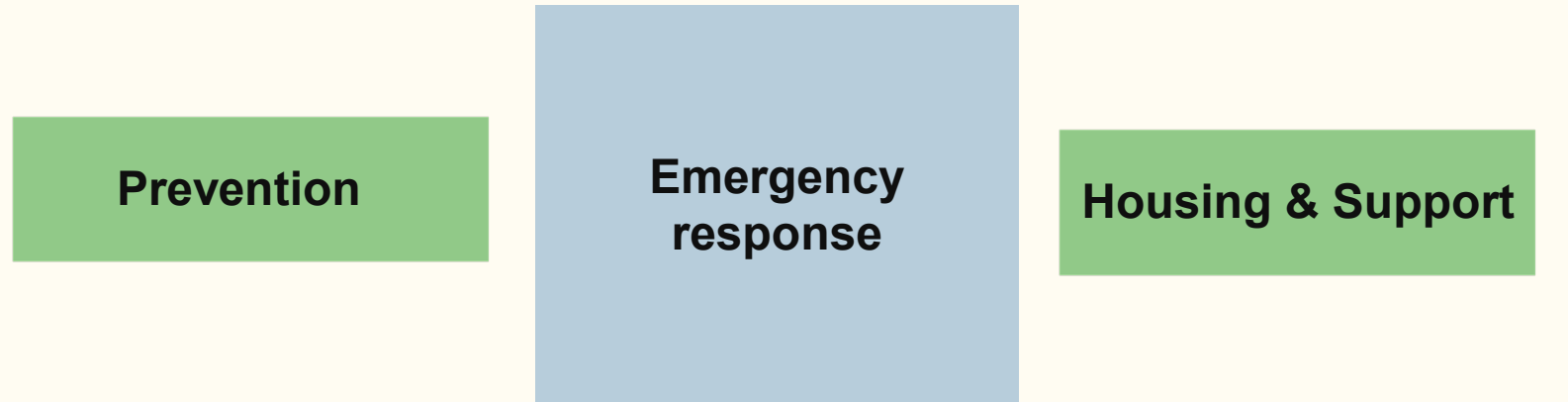
Programme concentrated on preventing homelessness and special groups. Expertise by experience has become established as a part of homelessness work.

The Cooperation programme aims to halve homelessness by the end of 2023. The programme emphasizes the responsibility of the municipalities.

Ending long term homelessness by 2027.

# Systemic Change

Finland  
moved from  
this...



...to this



# Finnish Housing First

Designed for anyone facing homelessness or the risk of homelessness

1

## Different Permanent Housing Options

Scattered housing and supported housing units. Options for specific needs and circumstances.

2

## Tailored Support Services

Personalized support services are integral. Aims to address diverse challenges that people may face.

3

## Affordable Housing

400 000 state-subsidized rental-apartments. Tenant selection is based on the need for housing.

4

## Prevention of Homelessness

Proactive measures: detecting the risk of homelessness & recognizing the significance of early intervention and support.

5

## Low-Threshold Work Activities

Acknowledge the diverse skills and capacities of individuals & provide opportunities for engagement that align with their abilities and aspirations.

6

## Normality

Normal rental agreements. Main-stream universal social and health services.

# ARA housing stock under restrictions (following SGEI rules by EU)

- **Ordinary rental dwellings 250 000**
  - Over 70 % owned by municipality-owned companies
- **Rental dwellings for special groups 100 000**
  - Rental dwellings for elderly
  - Rental dwellings for students
  - Other different special groups
- **ARA- rental dwellings in total 350 000**
  
- **Right of occupancy dwellings 50 000**
  
- **ARA –dwellings total 400 000**
  - 13 % of all housing



+ 50 000 dwellings  
without restrictions



# Occupancy types of existing and planned residential buildings in the Jätkäsaari waterfront housing area (City of Helsinki, HSY)

## Social Mix in practice

The City of Helsinki owns 70 % of its land area

The City's housing assets consist of 63 000 housing units, of which 50 000 are *ARA-subsidised rented housing units* and 5 000 *ARA Right-of-occupancy housing*.

The City also has its own housing developer



# How Finland prevents homelessness?

## With housing advice

- Ministry of Environment drafted a 5-year law for housing advice for 2023-2027
- Aim is to improve the availability of housing advice in Finland by ARA's grants

## Affordable social housing

***Targeted*** for impoverished & low income individuals with urgent housing needs.



# Housing options

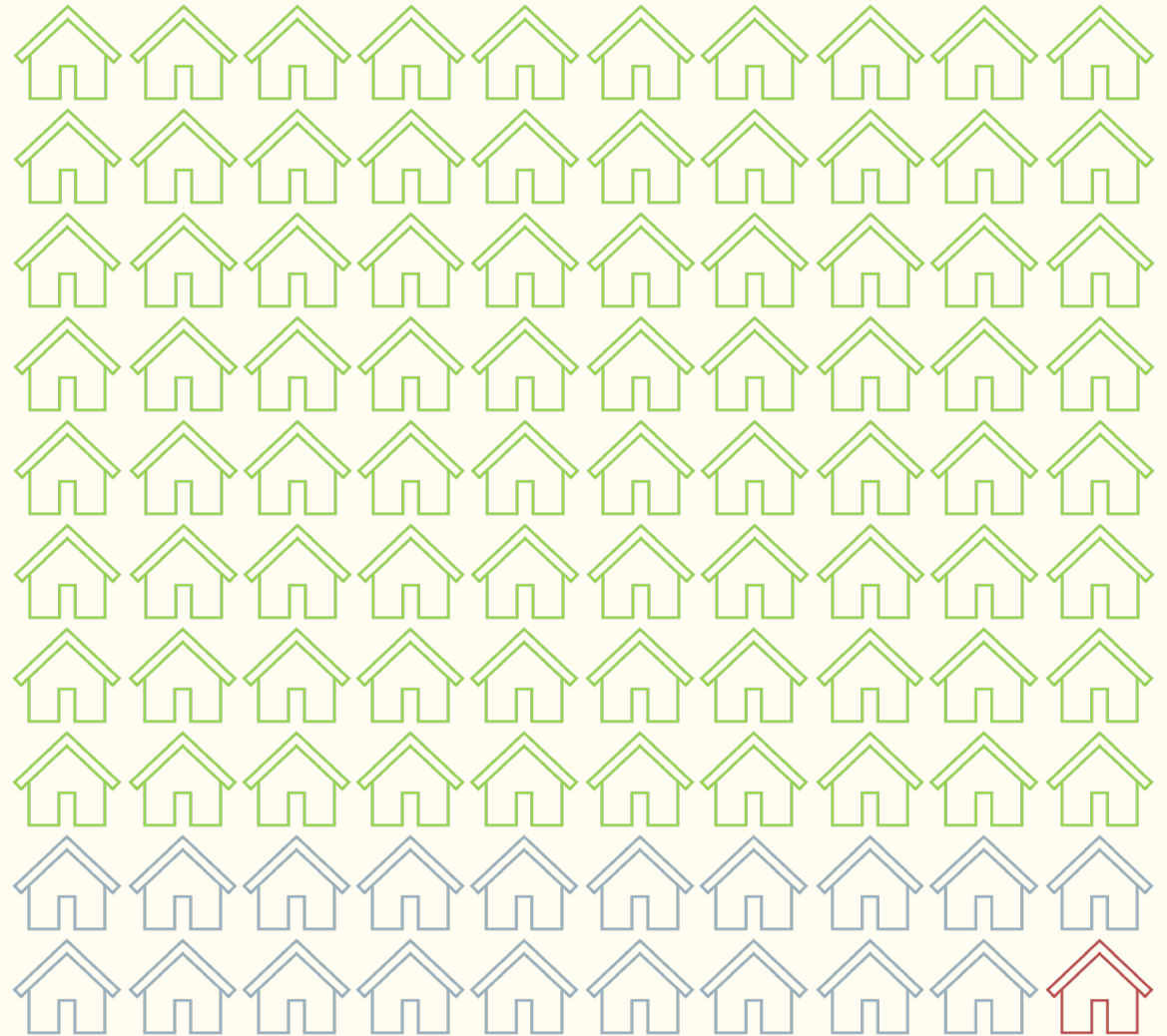
**Flats in scattered housing**



**Flats in supported housing units**



**Hybrid**





# Shelter renovation: Why we wanted to get rid of shelters and hostels – and what made it possible?

Living in a hostel or shelter is always a temporary solution

A person living in a hostel is still homeless

No privacy and very limited professional help in your problems

Hostels sustain a culture of irresponsibility, a “prison-like” subculture

Renovation of hostels has increased public safety

**Carrot:** State grants for renovation 50%

**Stick:** Obligation to work according to Housing First principles in the future

Systematic training for personnel (also new personnel hired)

# Sahaajankatu (City of Helsinki)

80 bed places, closed down in 2009.



# Väinölä (SLEY)



# Väinölä Housing Unit, Espoo

- Completed in 2014
- 33 apartments
- The Salvation Army as a serviceprovider



# Housing First, From shelters to homes

- Own apartment and rental contract
- A kitchen and a bathroom in each apartment



# Appikatu 25

Opened in 1936:

As a shelter with 250 bed places

Since 2012:

Supported housing

81 independent rental apartments

88 residents

Apartment size 19–36 m<sup>2</sup>

On site personnel by Salvation Army

22 employees





# TENANTS FACILITIES

Every tenants **own apartment is equipped with:** a bathroom & kitchen. Tenants pay their rent, and electricity.

The tenants can also use the common sauna, gym, three laundry rooms, a cafeteria and a game room with dartboard, pool table and ping pong table.



# UNIT FACILITIES

Each floor has a furnished common room, where floor-specific events such as meeting sessions are being held.

The common room also has a kitchen, books and computer access.

There is also space to hold group gatherings and get-togethers, such as relaxation, movie and music clubs.



# LOW THRESHOLD WORK ACTIVITIES

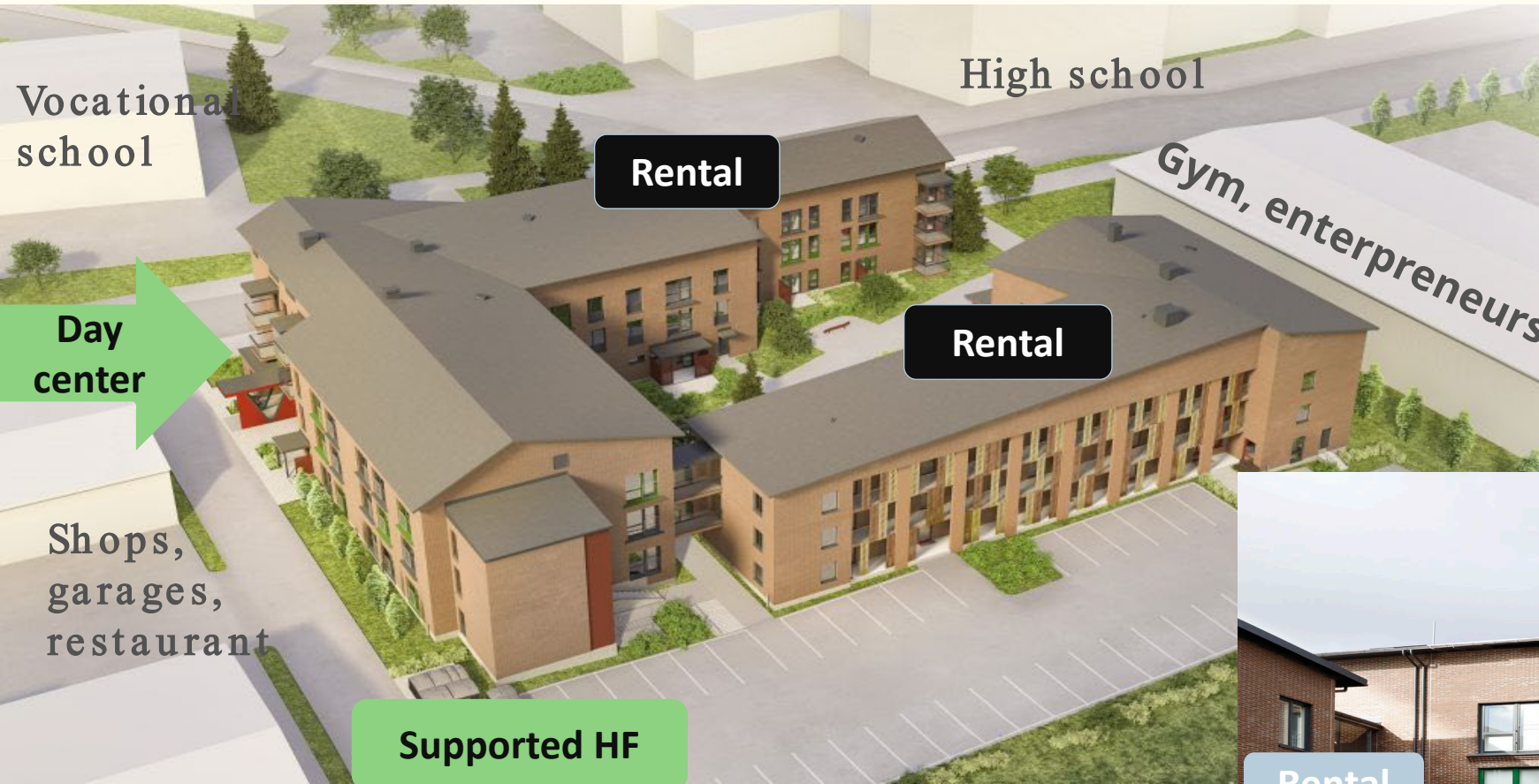
The aim of the work activity at is to provide **meaningful opportunities** for our tenants to participate and engage in activities of their liking.

**Work activities ease housing problems and loneliness.**

Secondary goal is to rehabilitate residents so that they can get employed in the open job market.



# HF unit Wäylä + daycenter + scattered housing



# Critical elements of ending homelessness

## On a society level

1. Affordable social housing (structural prevention)
2. General housing benefit
3. Implementation of Housing First
  - Wide partnership
  - Concrete quantitative goals



# Critical elements of ending homelessness

## On an individual level

1. Housing First as a mainstream policy
2. Permanent housing solutions
3. Alternative housing solutions and tailor-made support



Sillanpirtti 2, Helsinki

# What has worked?

- Permanent homes for over 6000 homeless people
- Systemic change from shelters and hostels into a Housing First based permanent housing
- Supported housing units



# What has worked?

- Prevention: Housing advisors preventing evictions
- Increasing social housing supply
- Experts by experience involved in planning
- Culture of collaboration
- Development network





# What has not worked so well: Challenges and Failures

- Attitudes: Complacency
- More people need more support
- Insufficient availability of rehabilitation for drug users
- Recent Government decisions
- Nimby
- Lack of small affordable flats



What does  
a city without  
homelessness  
look like?

Y-Säätiö



# With Housing First Helsinki has more or less ended street homelessness

## Safer and more pleasant city for everyone

- The local community
- Visitors & tourists
- Businesses & investments



# Ending homelessness is a cost-effective and profitable use of public finances

## Economic benefits on various government functions

- **Safer Society Pays Off**  
Law enforcement, court appearances, incarcerations, nights in prison
- **Minimizing the Negative Effects of Homelessness**  
Unemployment, physical and mental health, instability etc.
- **Better Access to Services Saves Resources**  
Emergency services




# Y-Säätiö and ARA collaborates on European and International level

- ✓ Development
- ✓ Research
- ✓ Training



**Nordic  
Homelessness  
Alliance**



A photograph of a wooden door with a silver handle, a lock, and a mail slot. The text is overlaid on the door.

You can't have Housing First  
without having housing ...  
first.

# Y-Säätiö

Juha Kahila

**Head of international affairs**

[juha.kahila@ysaatio.fi](mailto:juha.kahila@ysaatio.fi)