

Helsinki


**From Agenda to Action:  
Implementation of the UN Sustainable  
Development Goals in Helsinki**

**2021**



# Content

This is a PDF version of the City of Helsinki's second voluntary local review (VLR) on sustainable development to the United Nations. The report was published on the website in May 2021 and it highlights concrete actions as well as recognizes themes that require attention. The report includes the Helsinki's sustainable development indicator dashboard. Report can be accessed at: [sustainable.helsinki](https://sustainable.helsinki.fi)



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# Helsinki in a nutshell

Population in Helsinki

**656,920**

Population in Helsinki Region

**1,524,489**

Average age of Helsinkians

**40,9**

Average size of households

**1,7** persons

Employment rate (2020)

**73,4** %

Number of libraries

**45**

Kilometres of cycling routes

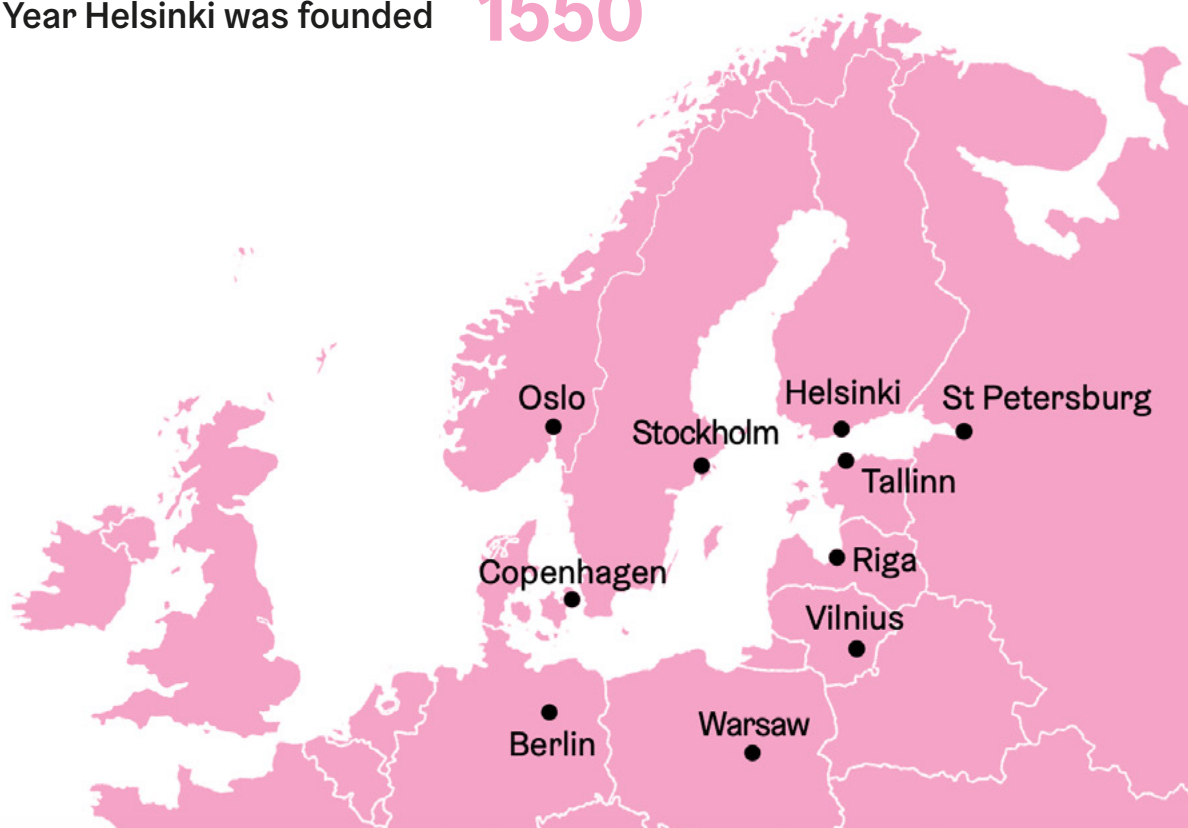
**1,200**

Greenhouse gas emissions cut since 1990

**26** %

Year Helsinki was founded

**1550**



# Mayor's greeting



Image: Jussi Hellsten

Helsinki wants to inspire other cities to get involved in the SDG efforts and to share its solutions openly so that others can benefit from them. Helsinki also wants to learn from others.

In 2018, Helsinki committed to the city-level reporting of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals as the second city in the world and the first city in Europe. The model for the city-level reporting, i.e. Voluntary Local Review, had been created less than a year earlier by the City of New York with the aim of furthering the Agenda 2030 goals and, as the home of the UN headquarters, helping ordinary New Yorkers understand how the achievement of these goals relates to their own lives – how everyone can contribute to the fulfilment of the agenda goals.

When Helsinki's first report was released in June 2019, a few cities from around the world were involved. Now, two years down the road, almost a hundred cities have joined the efforts. The step taken by a few pioneering cities has turned into a global move-

ment, and both New York and Helsinki played a critical role in its formation. Voluntary Local Review has also become a joint tool and language that the cities involved can use to achieve the SDGs. In Finland, a report has so far been prepared by Helsinki, Espoo and Turku.

**“THE AGENDA 2030 GOALS CAN NEVER BE ACHIEVED WITHOUT THE LOCAL LEVEL”**

Agenda 2030 was originally a global commitment between countries, which was created to ensure the fulfilment of the UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Country-specific progress reporting is an established way of aggregating successes and monitoring worldwide developments. The SDGs have

also become a global language of responsibility that brings together countries from Finland to Sierra Leone.

However, it was clear relatively quickly that a simple commitment between countries would not be enough. National measures regarding aspects such as taxation and regulation are of course critical, but the majority of the Agenda 2030 goals require local implementation.

Originally, the aim of the actions taken by the cities was to make the world and the UN understand that the Agenda 2030 goals can never be achieved without the local level. It is essential for cities across the world to commit to the goals, but it is especially important in areas where the countries do not support the SDGs. Local governments can compensate for any shortcomings of the central government.

**“A SUSTAINABLE CITY STRENGTHENS EQUALITY, WELL-BEING AND PARTICIPATION OPPORTUNITIES AMONG ITS RESIDENTS THROUGH CONCRETE ACTIONS”**

At the same time, it is clear that we can achieve something even greater by joining forces. From the perspective of the UN, Finland and Helsinki have served as prime examples to demonstrate the ways in which national and city-level reporting and goal-oriented efforts form the most efficient path towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. For the first time this year, the cities involved will gain an official position in the UN scheme for monitoring the achievement of the SDGs. This is an important step in acknowledging the role of local administration. Increasing the role of cities within the UN has been among the most important goals for both Helsinki and New York.

However, reporting is not what the cities want to focus on in the long term. Even more important is to ensure a sufficient operational level and the successful city-level implementation of the sustainable development solutions. A sustainable city strengthens equality, well-being and participation opportunities among its residents through concrete actions.

## Majority of the Agenda 2030 goals require local implementation.

Helsinki's first report was a test aimed at understanding not only the efficacy of the reporting but also the city's actual performance in terms of realising the Sustainable Development Goals. First and foremost, the report served as a strategic tool. The second report covers all the SDGs and expands the examination to encompass the entire organisation instead of the strategy alone. Efforts have been made to describe and analyse the goals from Helsinki's perspective.

**“HELSINKI HAS A LONG TRADITION IN PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT”**

In Helsinki, sustainable urban development is not an empty promise. Helsinki's second sustainable development report focuses on actions as well as highlighting successes and development needs. Thanks to the contribution of the City's divisions and enterprises, the report is a collection of dozens of stories and examples of sustainable development efforts. Helsinki has a long tradition in promoting sustainable development, and many of the perspectives have already been integrated into the City's basic services to create a solid foundation for sustainable development efforts.

Helsinki is doing well with regard to many of the SDGs, and we have ambitious goals. That said, there is still much to do to achieve the goals, and one of the key challenges is ecological sustainability – we must be able to examine global impacts and our planet's capacity.

In addition to this, the extraordinary circumstances and financial difficulties brought about by the coronavirus crisis have strained Helsinki residents across all population groups. In Helsinki, the polarisation between population groups was greater than elsewhere in the country even before crisis, and the pandemic has brought the inequality into starker relief. There is widespread concern over well-being and learning among children and young people. Constant monitoring and learning are required to determine what the change in sustainability thinking means for Helsinki and how the various measures come together in the short and long term.

**“THERE IS MUCH TO DO AND LITTLE TIME”**

Helsinki wants to inspire other cities to get involved in the SDG efforts and to share its solutions openly so that others can benefit from them. Helsinki also wants to learn from others. The UN Youth of Helsinki association provided comments on this VLR report.

Most of all, we want to inspire and support all local residents, businesses and other parties to work together to make Helsinki a sustainable city and the world a place where the Agenda 2030 goals can become a reality. There is much to do and little time, so every step counts.

# Helsinki and Agenda 2030



Image: Jussi Heilsten

Helsinki is committed to the goals of Agenda 2030 (Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs) and wants to promote the achievement of the SDGs and highlight the role of cities in their implementation. Helsinki published its first Voluntary Local Review in 2019 as the second city in the world.

**T**he global agenda for sustainable development for all UN member states, Agenda 2030, was adopted at the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development in September 2015. The joint action plan sets common goals for all countries for the next 15 years. Finland is strongly committed to the goals of the Agenda and has already published two national reports.

A significant part of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals takes place at local level. Therefore, cities play a significant role in the success of the goals. Especially in Finland, municipalities play an important role: they are responsible for many activities and services related to social, ecological and economic sustainability.

## **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IS PART OF THE CITY'S CORE ACTIVITIES**

Measured by many international indicators, Helsinki is doing well in the field of sustainable development. Among other things, Helsinki is in the top three in the comparison of European cities.

One of Helsinki's strengths is the fact that the spirit of the SDGs of respecting the environment, well-being, equality and cooperation is already quite well reflected in the city's values and actions. For example, the starting point for organising basic services is making the services open and accessible to all. In many respects, sustainable development is part of the city's core activities, and its connection to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals is not always

# Finland and Helsinki do well in international comparisons of sustainable development.

even thought about. Helsinki has a wealth of expertise, enthusiasm and ability to put the SDGs into practice, as indicated by many of the stories in this report about the city's various activities.

From the perspective of sustainable development, some of Helsinki's strengths are high-quality and equal learning opportunities, cultural and leisure services, good health care, well-functioning infrastructure and clean nature as well as the development of a functional and intelligent city.

## CHALLENGES INCLUDE CLIMATE CHANGE AND INCREASED INEQUALITIES

Despite the good starting points, Helsinki still has a lot of work to do to achieve the SDGs, and the challenges are further accentuated by the COVID-19 crisis. In particular, Helsinki's challenges relate to combating climate change, consumption and safeguarding biodiversity.

In terms of social sustainability, the challenges relate to increased inequalities, health disparities between income groups and residential areas, and

mental well-being. The challenges in economic sustainability include the increase of perceived income disparities and housing prices, the deteriorating employment situation and the transition from a linear economy to a circular economy.

In general, challenges in promoting sustainability are posed by the fragmentation of measures through operational and economic planning into a number of separate actions by the city's different organisations. However, better coordination of strategic entities has been developed during the council term, for example, with regard to the comprehensive and cross-cutting well-being and health plan and the Carbon-neutral Helsinki Action Plan, as well as by strengthening the City Executive Office's strategy department as a coordinating operator.

## Targets of sustainable development reporting and Helsinki's approach

This second Voluntary Local Review of sustainable development by Helsinki intends to go beyond the previous review and cover all 17 SDGs. The report seeks to assess the strategy period from the perspective of sustainable development, emphasising concrete actions and, at the same time, identifying themes for development. The report consists of a concise description of various themes, indicators measuring progress and story-like examples of the city's various activities in everyday life.

The report examines sustainable development from the point of view of ecological, social and economic sustainability. Cultural sustainability is also reflected in a number of different themes, although less is said about it as a whole.

Through the spirit of Agenda 2030 and Helsinki's focal points, the cross-cutting themes have been identified to be fairness and openness, digitalisation, recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and cooperation

## Helsinki's first VLR

**THE CITY** of [Helsinki's first Voluntary Local Review \(VLR\)](#) of sustainable development was handed over to the UN in 2019. It described the Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021 and its implementation in the SDG framework.

For reporting purposes, mapping was carried out by cross-tabulating the goals of the Helsinki City Strategy, the mon-

itoring meters and the goals of the Carbon-neutral Helsinki 2035 Action Plan with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, at this stage, links between the seven key projects implementing the strategy and the UN goals were mapped, and examples of concrete measures taken or under way in the city were gathered.

In line with the New York model, the actual reporting was limited to the UN HLPF priorities for 2019. At the same time, key indicators were selected which best describe the development in Helsinki in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.







and partnerships. The purpose of the report is to describe how Helsinki can contribute to the achievement of the SDGs through its own actions and specify which SDGs we have weaknesses in relation to.

### INTERPRETING THE SDGS

The UN Agenda 2030 gives cities the opportunity to focus on both the global and national level in their work on sustainable development. The goals are an important common language at different levels and create a common objective.

Efforts have been made to open up and describe the global SDGs from the perspective of Helsinki's operations.

Although the global goals of Agenda 2030 as an overall reference framework are also well suited to the implementation of sustainable development at the local level, many of the targets under the SDGs are not directly appropriate for the local level and especially not for an advanced and prosperous city such as Helsinki.

Efforts have been made to open up and describe the global SDGs from the perspective of Helsinki's operations. For example, absolute poverty or a lack of basic health care are not problems here, but that does not mean that we do not have other challenges in these themes as regards, for example, well-being disparities, obesity or mental well-being.

Moreover, our consumption and economy are not sustainable, but we are exceeding the limits of the Earth's carrying capacity, so it is particularly important to look at our global impact.

The SDGs are strongly interlinked, and it is challenging to make completely unambiguous interpretations between the SDGs and the city's themes. We have tried to identify the key SDGs and link them to the different themes. SDGs 11 (*Sustainable cities and communities*), 16 (*Peace, justice and strong institutions*) and 17 (*Partnerships for the goals*) have been identified as clearly cross-cutting SDGs.

### REPORT IMPLEMENTATION

The reporting work was coordinated by a city-level working group with representatives of all the divi-

The SDGs are strongly interlinked, and it is challenging to make completely unambiguous interpretations between the SDGs and the city's themes.

sions and enterprises of the city as well as other key experts. In addition to the working group, several other experts participated in writing and commenting on the report. The sustainable development reporting process and the report will also be utilised in preparing the city strategy for the next council term and future projects and programmes.

#### Report in figures:

- 32 authors from 8 divisions and enterprises
- 10 working group meetings
- 54 indicators
- 8 presentations in different management teams and 5 other internal events
- 3 open stakeholder events
- 7 international presentations

## Strategy period 2017–2021

Helsinki's sustainable development report in 2019 noted that the objectives of the Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021 are linked to many SDGs.

During the strategy period, good progress has been made in securing sustainable growth in the development of the urban structure and housing in line with the objective. Development targets include the development of the vitality of the city centre and residential areas as well as larger entities in the emission reduction programme.

Developing services have made progress in the client orientation of basic services, including the study path of local early childhood education and basic education services, services that are provided to the elderly at home and support their living at home, and the promotion of physical activity.

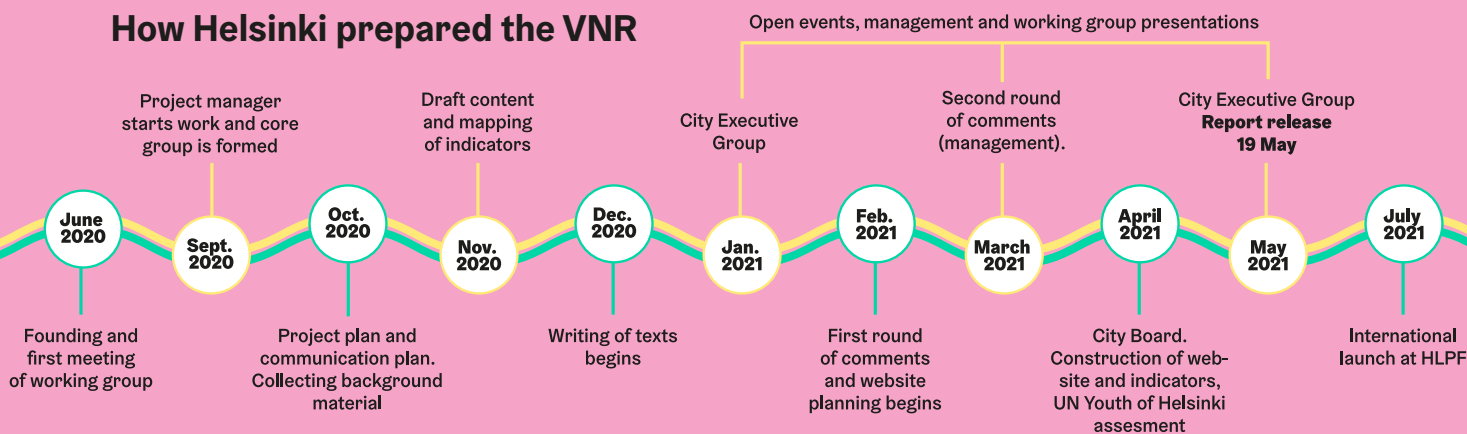
Digitalisation has also progressed at an accelerating pace. Challenges have been caused by increasing disparities in well-being and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on well-being and service deficiencies.

In responsible financial management, the beginning of the council term proceeded as planned with the exception of the productivity objective. The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the situation is changing the chances of succeeding in the economic objectives, and the loan portfolio is increasing.

### SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PROMOTED THROUGH KEY PROJECTS

During the strategy period, sustainable development themes have been promoted not only through the development of basic activities, but especially through the strategy's key projects. There have been seven

## How Helsinki prepared the VNR



## Securing sustainable growth



## Developing services



## Responsible financial management



Helsinki's sustainable development report in 2019 noted that the objectives of the Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021 are linked to many SDGs.

key projects during the strategy period: the Health and Welfare Promotion Project, Project for Youth Social Inclusion, Exercise and Mobility Scheme Project, Helsinki Maritime Strategy Project, Land Policy Guideline Project, Real Estate Strategy Project, and Central Pedestrian Zone and Underground Distributor Street Project.

Some of the main successes in the key projects have been the increase and strengthening of city-wide activities to promote the maritime aspects, physical activity, well-being and health and to prevent the marginalisation of children and young people. The importance of climate policy has been increased at the city level through the implementation of the Carbon-neutral Helsinki 2035 Action Plan, and the focus has been turned towards large emission reductions.

The lesson learned from the key projects during the strategy period was that it would be good to focus on a smaller number of more effective measures. Adequate attention must also be paid to the resourcing, planning and project coordination of the selected sets of strategic measures at an early stage when deciding on them.

The SDGs and the sustainability aspect should also be more fully integrated into the strategy and plan-

ning of activities. Although the role of the SDGs as a whole has not changed or grown much during the strategy period, it can be noted at the level of individual programmes and initiatives that the importance of the SDG framework is increasing, and many programmes or road maps created during the strategy period contain stronger references to sustainable development.

## Promoting sustainable development in the city organisation

Helsinki has a long tradition in promoting sustainable development. Helsinki was the first European capital to draw up an action plan for sustainable development in 2002.

Currently, various sustainability themes are managed through sub-programmes coordinated at the city level, strategies or key projects under the city strategy. There are also various networks, committees and working groups operating in the city that promote sustainability themes, such as the SDG working group, human rights network and climate network.

	1 NO POVERTY	2 ZERO HUNGER	3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING	4 QUALITY EDUCATION	5 GENDER EQUITY	6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION	7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY	8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH	9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE	10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES	11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES	12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION	13 CLIMATE ACTION	14 LIFE BELOW WATER	15 LIFE ON LAND	16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS	17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS
City strategy 2017–2021	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Well-being plan	●		●	●				●		●							
City's economic policy			●	●				●	●		●						
City plan 2016								●	●	●	●		●	●	●		
Housing and land use programme	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●	●	●	●			●	
Environmental policy Environmental policy						●	●				●	●	●	●	●		
Carbon-neutral Helsinki 2035			●	●			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		
Equality plan					●					●							
Non-discrimination plan				●	●					●							
Ethical principles					●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●			●	●
Procurement strategy							●	●			●	●	●			●	
Physical Activity Programme			●							●	●						
Programme for Youth Social Inclusion	●		●	●						●	●						
Digi programme			●	●			●	●			●					●	●
COVID-19 recovery plan	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●	●	●	●			●	

Inter-linkages of SDGs and City of Helsinki programmes.

The city's divisions and enterprises are active in promoting the sustainability aspects; in particular, ecological sustainability has been systematically promoted in the divisions and enterprises. The City Executive Office's communications have overall responsibility for communications relating to sustainable development and the SDGs.

In the future, the integration of the SDGs into the city's strategy, financial and operational planning and practical activities should be further promoted.

The figure below shows the relationship between the city's key programmes and strategies and the SDGs. The SDGs have not yet been thoroughly applied in the planning of programmes and strategies so that they would be directly reflected in the programmes and strategies, but the SDGs are being promoted on a rather broad scale. SDGs that are particularly highlighted include SDG 3 (Good health and well-being), 4 (Quality education), 8 (Decent work and economic growth), 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure), 10 (Reduced inequalities) and 11 (Sustainable cities and communities).

In the future, the integration of the SDGs into the city's strategy, financial and operational planning and practical activities should be further promoted.

In this report, the review of the implementation of the SDGs has been extended to the entire Helsinki City Group and even beyond it. In autumn 2020, familiarity with and implementation of sustainable development in the City of Helsinki's subsidiaries were studied as part of a thesis. The figure shows SDGs that have been identified as the most important in the activities of the subsidiaries.

Many people are relatively familiar with the goals of Agenda 2030, but their inclusion in the activities and use as a tool has not usually been identified. The ecological aspect of sustainable development was particularly emphasised in the activities of the subsidiaries.

Also 1,002 [commitments for sustainable development](#) have been made in Helsinki. Most of the commitments are made by private individuals. In addition,

Taking the SDGs into account in the city's subsidiaries

82% are familiar with the sustainable development goals.

55% have set their own sustainable development goals.



more than 100 companies, 20 schools and educational institutions, as well as more than 40 NGOs and interest groups have made a commitment in Helsinki.

## Openness, fairness and cooperation

Openness and fairness are important principles in the city's activities. Open decision-making and different opportunities for citizens to participate are the foundations of good governance.

The City of Helsinki emphasises honesty, fairness, equal treatment and openness in all its activities. Helsinki's services are open to all, and many are also free of charge.

The City of Helsinki's ethical principles apply to all of the city's employees and elected officials. The principles guide all of the city's activities in work communities and with partners. All the city's work units are also familiar with ethical principles through materials for virtual orientation. SDG 16 (*Peace, justice and strong institutions*) has been identified as a cross-cutting goal in this regard.

## PARTNERSHIPS ARE AN INTEGRAL PART OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT WORK

Helsinki has been actively cooperating with the Prime Minister's Office, which coordinates national sustainable development work. Close cooperation also takes place with the six largest cities in Finland, the Ministry of the Environment and the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities.

Helsinki has actively participated in cooperation promoting sustainable development at the national and international level. Helsinki participates in many different networks or projects promoting sustainable development, including Eurocities, UNICEF's Child Friendly Cities Initiative and the Bloomberg Foundation's projects.

Helsinki also actively participates in the WHO Healthy Cities Network. In particular, the work internationally promotes the targets of SDG 3 (*Good health and well-being*) by developing the Culture Kids activities and memory-friendly Helsinki and promoting models for affirmative action.

Helsinki has also highlighted the SDG work in the networks it coordinates. For example, the Baltic Sea



Image: Camilla Bloom

Challenge has analyzed the link to SDG targets and a cooperation seminar on the promotion of the SDGs was organised for the Helsinki Climate Partners, as part of which the Climate Partners were asked about their SDG-related activities.

More than 90% of the respondents said that they take the SDGs into account in their activities. The Climate Partners comprise almost 90 members, most of which are large companies and research and education institutions operating in Helsinki.

Open decision-making and different opportunities for citizens to participate are the foundations of good governance.

#### **INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**

Agenda 2030 is increasingly becoming a key reference framework for sustainable development. By setting an example in the utilisation and reporting of the SDGs at the local level, Helsinki can promote sustainable development globally and have a wider impact on the state of the world than just within its own borders.

Helsinki's SDG work has contributed to the emergence and deepening of many strategic international partnerships. Helsinki has, in a completely new way, managed to enter into cooperation with UN institutions (e.g. UN-HABITAT, UN DESA, UN General Assembly and the High-Level Political Forum HLPF) and to represent cities and promote urban goals in these forums.

The City of Helsinki is one of the dozen or so cities globally to have been invited to participate in the SDG Leadership Cities network, which is coordinated by the Brookings Institution, one of the most prestigious think tanks in the world. Among the partner cities, cooperation with the City of New York in particular has received a significant boost from the SDG cooperation.

#### **Impact of the COVID-19 crisis and sustainable recovery**

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a massive global health, social and economic crisis. The crisis has hit Helsinki harder than the rest of Finland.

Around 40% of the country's COVID-19 infections and more than half of the COVID-19 deaths have been

recorded in Helsinki. The unemployment rate has grown clearly higher than in the previous year.

In response to the uncertainty of the environment, Helsinki is building and implementing recovery planning, the key content of which is to ensure the implementation of the city’s strategy such that the measures particularly serve recovery from the crisis.

Helsinki aims to minimise direct damage, create the conditions for new growth and ensure that Helsinki is the most functional city in the world even after the COVID-19 crisis. The three main themes for recovery:

1. Citizens’ activity and trust
2. Boosting enterprises and entrepreneurship
3. Evolving and sustainable city organisation

### THE ELDERLY AND YOUNG PEOPLE FELT THEIR QUALITY OF LIFE HAD DETERIORATED

The exceptional circumstances and financial difficulties have put a great deal of strain on Helsinki residents in all population groups. Inequalities between population groups in Helsinki are already greater than elsewhere in the country, and the inequalities have become even more pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The prevailing exceptional circumstances have complicated the situation of already disadvantaged groups (such as children who need help, the elderly, those in a weak position in the labour market, the economically weak) in many ways. Women have also been put under more strain.

Especially the elderly and young people in Helsinki felt their quality of life had deteriorated as a result of the COVID-19 crisis in spring 2020. The number of unemployed people and households receiving basic income support and general housing allowance in particular are higher in Helsinki than in the previous year, and the prolongation of these circumstances may have various multiplier effects on health, quality of life, lifestyles and well-being.

The COVID-19 crisis also causes a risk of learning deficiencies and social exclusion for school-age children.

### COVID-19 CREATED NEW WAYS TO PROMOTE WELL-BEING

In addition, care and services are lagging behind due to the pandemic. For example, services in basic health care have been put on hold. The potential impact of this break on well-being and health may be seen in the coming years.

## Top recovery measures and their link to the Helsinki City Strategy and SDGs

Theme		Helsinki city strategy				UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)
		Being the world’s most functional city	Securing wellbeing and sustainable growth	Developing services	Providing responsible financial management	
Restoring resident confidence and vitality	Making the city an appealing destination again	●	●			8, 9, 11
	Improving service availability and increasing digitalisation	●		●		10, 11
	Ensuring the continuation of employment and studies			●	●	4, 8, 10
	Fostering general wellbeing and citizen participation		●			1, 2, 3, 10, 11, 16
Boosting business and entrepreneurship	Using municipal resources as a platforms for new activity	●		●	●	11, 8, 9, 7, 13
	Helping business activities and owners get back on their feet	●	●		●	11, 8, 9
	Providing smoother transactions and streamlined permits	●		●		8, 9
Shepherding sustainable city management	Balancing the budget and steering projects				●	8, 9, 11, 7, 13
	Distributing skills and resources flexibly					3, 4, 8, 11
	Employing digitalised cross-sectional processes & platforms	●		●		8, 11, 16

In the work to promote well-being and health, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused many of the measures in the welfare plan to progress more slowly than planned, or not at all. On the other hand, new ways to help and promote the well-being, health and safety of the city residents emerged in the spring.

Good examples of this are Helsinki help for the elderly, increased guidance and counselling for families with children, the transition of cultural and physical activity services to digital services, and the transfer of the work input of the city's employees to various telephone services. (Source: Health and Welfare Barometer)

Helsinki is striving for green and innovative recovery. The aim is to target the recovery funding in such a way as to accelerate green economic restructuring and the digital transition and to support the development of innovative and more efficient public services.

Relationship of Helsinki's COVID-19 crisis recovery plan to the SDGs.

## Digitalisation

In 2019, Helsinki launched an ambitious digitalisation programme, which enables the city to improve its services and modernise its activities in many ways. The changes relate not only to new technologies but also to the culture of development, organisation, leadership and staff competence.

Helsinki wants to be more customer-oriented and agile in its activities and to use data in its services and decisions. Digitalisation can contribute to the SDGs in many ways and offer new solutions and opportunities for people to participate.

On the other hand, digitalisation can also increase inequalities. Digital exclusion has been identified as a growing problem. Social exclusion and lack of participation can befall people of all ages.

The COVID-19 pandemic strongly highlighted the danger of the elderly becoming digitally excluded. When local services turned into remote services and everything had to be handled online, a signif-

icant proportion of the elderly were deprived of the opportunity to participate even in the management of their own life.

### INVESTMENT IN ACCESSIBILITY

Helsinki has invested heavily in increasing digital skills and improving the quality of digital services, so that everyone has equal access to them. However, more efforts are needed, especially for the elderly, and attention must also be paid to the availability of equipment for all age groups.

Accessibility is also an important aspect. Accessible digital services are easy to use for all users, including the elderly and people with various disabilities. Once accessibility is taken into account, as many people as possible can use digital services independently.

In terms of the accessibility of digital services, Helsinki aims to reach at least the AA level specified in the WCAG guidelines. After the transitional period, an accessibility statement will be available in each of the city's digital services. The statement describes how well the website or application meets the accessibility requirements and how accessibility feedback can be provided to the city or supervisory authority.

### RESIDENTS HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO CONTROL THE PERSONAL DATA COLLECTED

Helsinki has been one of the world's most active cities in opening its data. Open data can be used in, for example, research or creating new services. With open data and interfaces, services can also be innovated by companies and communities instead of the city inventing and producing everything itself. The city defines ethical principles for the use of data and artificial intelligence. It is important that everyone knows what kind of information Helsinki has about them and can influence how the city uses it. Helsinki uses the data responsibly with the permission of the city residents and for the benefit of the city residents.

Helsinki wishes to develop its MyData capabilities. MyData is a principle of personal data management according to which people must be able to control, use and pass on the personal data collected about them.

MyData capabilities pave the way for a fair, sustainable and prosperous digital society in which the sharing and utilisation of personal data is based on a confidential relationship between people and organisations. Using data in a smart way also enables the city to provide the city residents with personalised and targeted services more efficiently and proactively when they need them.

To promote these goals, Helsinki has joined the international MyData Global network.

Digital exclusion has been identified as a growing problem.



# Environment



As a city with high consumption and living standards, ecological sustainability is a major challenge and, globally, the ecological footprint of Helsinki residents is high: our consumption level exceeds the limits of the Earth's carrying capacity.

In the Environment theme, we look at ecological sustainability and the progress of the below SDGs in Helsinki. As a city with high consumption and living standards, ecological sustainability is a major challenge and, globally, the ecological footprint of Helsinki residents is high: our consumption level exceeds the limits of the Earth's carrying capacity. On the other hand, the state of the environment in Helsinki has improved according to many indicators, and environmental protection and services like waste management and water supply are at a good level.

As the city grows, the biggest challenges of the future are caused by urban consolidation and the im-

pact of traffic on air quality, noise levels and nature. The city plays a key role in ensuring ecological sustainability as it is responsible for many related activities, such as local climate and environmental protection measures, maintenance of green and recreational areas, urban planning and infrastructure.

## CITY-LEVEL PROGRAMMES AND REPORTS

- [Environmental Report](#)
- [Carbon-neutral Helsinki 2035 Action Plan](#)
- [Climate Change Adaptation Policies](#)

- [Joint Baltic Sea Action Plan of the Cities of Helsinki and Turku 2019–2023](#)

## Climate and energy



Much has been invested in mitigating climate change in recent years, and important decisions to reduce emissions have been made for several years to come, including investment decisions for coal replacement (€300 million) and wind energy (€100 million).

### PACE OF EMISSION REDUCTION MUST BE INCREASED

The majority of Helsinki’s emissions come from the energy use of buildings and traffic. Helsinki’s greenhouse gas emissions decreased by 26 per cent from 1990 to 2019. The main reasons for the reduction in emissions are the replacement of coal with natural gas in energy production, improved energy efficien-

cy of the building stock and increased renewable energy.

Helsinki’s energy production is still heavily based on fossil fuels, which is why the city launched the international Helsinki Energy Challenge competition. The competition sought solutions to make the city’s heating system sustainable, i.e. to get rid of fossil fuels without switching to significant biomass use.

The competition lasted one year (from March 2020 to March 2021). As a result of the competition, the city now has a significant number of [solutions](#) and eye-opening lessons to help make further decisions for an emission-free heating system.

### TOWARDS A TOTAL HEATING SYSTEM THAT IS AS MODIFIABLE AS POSSIBLE

The competition showed that the future heating system consists of several partial solutions and operators optimised to work together. Such a system challenges the traditional way of working. There are many operators in the model of the future, and reconciling their interests requires new ways of thinking and operating.

On the basis of the competition results, the city has started systematic further processing of the matter. The aim is to build a total heating system that

### Total CO2 emissions



Source: Helsinki Region Environmental Services HSY

# Especially young people are concerned about climate change.

is as modifiable as possible and does not exclude future technologies or new players, but, on the contrary, enables innovation.

The lessons learned and solutions found in the competition will help not only Helsinki but also other cities looking for sustainable and innovative solutions; Helsinki is committed to sharing the output of the competition with all cities.

## EMISSIONS FROM CONSUMPTION ARE SIGNIFICANT

Another major challenge in terms of improving energy efficiency is the private building stock. The city has launched the Energy Renaissance, which aims to start approximately 350 energy renovations in private housing companies each year.

Reducing emissions from traffic requires further efforts and closer cooperation with the state.

In addition to emissions generated in the area, it is also important to consider emissions from the consumption of Helsinki residents, since they at least double Helsinki's emissions. Emissions from consumption refer to emissions that arise elsewhere than in Helsinki as a result of, for example, the production of goods or food used by Helsinki residents.

Helsinki is involved in the development of consumption-based emission calculations, which can be used to make emissions from consumption visible and raise them more strongly in the discussion.

## CONCERNS ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE

In late 2018, the city commissioned a safety survey, 66% of whose respondents were concerned about climate change. The proportion of those concerned has clearly increased compared to the previous survey conducted three years earlier.

Respondents highlight many global or city-wide concerns more than just concerns about their own lives. Climate change was a common concern shared by all respondents, regardless of their age.

However, the greatest increase in the number of those concerned has occurred among young people. This is also reflected in the Youth Barometer 2018 for

young people across the country, where concerns about climate change had increased dramatically.

## ADAPTATION MUST BE INTEGRATED MORE STRONGLY INTO PLANNING

The importance of preparing for and adapting to climate change has not been understood well enough in the city organisation. It is important to adapt to the changing climate well in advance and to prepare for extreme weather phenomena and the global effects of climate change.

The whole must be integrated and connected more strongly to all of the city's activities and planning. In particular, planning should focus on measures to prepare for rising sea levels, increasing amounts of rainwater, hot spells and flooding caused by heavy rainfall.

Green areas have a significant impact on adaptation to climate change, and planning must ensure that they have the capacity to adapt to different climate-related situations. The ability to adapt to change, *resilience*, is improved by preserving diverse nature, implementing diverse green structures and securing nature-based solutions, such as rainwater management solutions.

In an increasingly dense urban structure, the amount of rainwater is expected to increase but, with good planning, rainwater can be used as a pull factor in urban recreational areas and as a biodiversity-enhancing element in built parks.

### SUCCESSSES:

- The Carbon-neutral Helsinki 2035 Action Plan has been strongly integrated into the city's activities.
- The city has climate change adaptation policies, a highly integrated rainwater management programme and climate risks assessed.
- The launch of the Energy Renaissance programme is a major step towards improving the energy efficiency of housing companies.
- The Helsinki Energy Challenge competition was a new and innovative way of approaching Helsinki's big challenge in heating emissions.

### DEVELOPMENT TARGETS:

- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions must focus on finding alternative sources of energy for fossil fuels.
- Climate change adaptation policies need to be translated into concrete actions, and the implementation of the most effective of them needs to start immediately.
- Helsinki has not much managed to influence emissions from consumption.



Image: Jussi Hellsten

## Local nature and diversity



Helsinki is a green city by the sea. Green areas cover more than a third of the city's land area, and two-thirds of the entire city area is sea. Seamlessly linked to the "blue palm" of the sea, the green areas form a finger structure whose integrity and continuity is unique among the cities of the world.

Green areas cover more than a third of the city's land area, and two-thirds of the entire city area is sea.

### NATURE IS IMPORTANT FOR HELSINKI RESIDENTS

The nature of Helsinki is diverse: forests, meadows, wetlands, shores, islands, streams and parks. There are still many quite natural habitats in the forests and on the shores of Helsinki.

However, there is no clear picture of the direction of development. It is known that flying squirrels have increased in number and spread, the total number of bird species has increased and the number and size of protected areas have increased.

In order to identify a more precise trend, a long-term nature monitoring plan is being drawn up.

### WEB OF GREEN BELTS MUST BE SECURED

The network of green and recreational areas is web-like and diverse, but discontinuous due to wide traffic routes. The city strives for planning that saves green areas, but green areas are being reduced due to construction.

Therefore, it is important to ensure the quality of the remaining green areas, but also to explore the possibilities for ecological compensation. It is also important to ensure that Helsinki's green fingers will remain sufficiently large and continuous in the future and that the transverse connections of the green network also cover the built areas. This will ensure adequate recreational services for the growing population while safeguarding ecosystem services.

The movement of animal species between habitats is secured by taking into account the important links between ecological networks throughout the city. In

the built environment, the potential of new environments like soil fill areas, former landfills, areas around transmission lines, railway yards and green roofs as habitats to replace meadows has been identified.

### NUMBER OF NATURE CONSERVATION AREAS TO DOUBLE

The enhancement of urban biodiversity is guided by Helsinki’s biodiversity action plan and nature conservation programme. At the moment, there are 62 conservation areas. The number of nature conservation areas will double with the ongoing nature conservation programme.

The objective of nature conservation in wooded areas is to preserve the environmental conditions and

structural features of natural habitats. In parks, street environments and other areas of the built environment, different plant species and varieties are used as diversely as possible. The proportion of flowering trees, shrubs and perennials in plantations will be increased for human pleasure as well as for the food of insects and other urban animals.

A key goal is to diversify the urban biotopes in parks and traffic areas and to preserve traditional plants in traditional and cultural environments.

### COVID-19 HAS INCREASED THE USE OF GREEN AREAS

Invasive species have been removed from Helsinki’s plant species recommendations and are primarily combated in connection with other nature man-

## Nature reserves in Helsinki

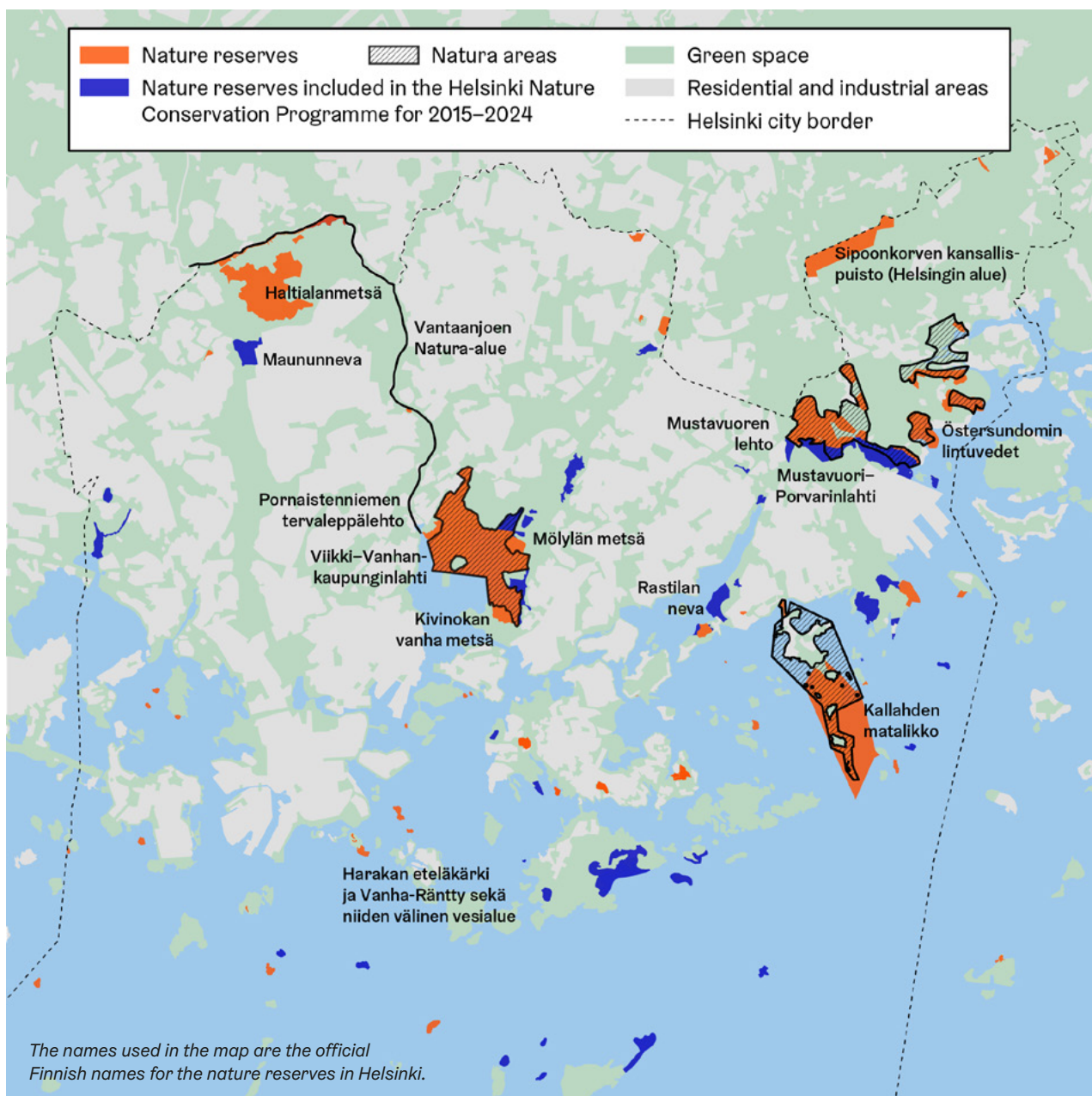




Image: Jussi Hellsten

agement and greenery work, especially in and near valuable natural sites. Community efforts are organised to stop invasive species, and advice and guidance on invasive species is provided, for example, on the treatment of harmful plant waste.

Given the important health and well-being benefits of urban nature and green areas, special attention must be paid to the landscape, natural values, sustainability and accessibility of these areas.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, nature has become even more important in people's everyday lives and well-being, and the use of natural and green areas has increased significantly. The sustainable use of natural areas will require the development of responsible nature and hiking services in the future, so that natural areas can withstand the heavy use.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, nature has become even more important in people's everyday lives.

#### SUCCESSSES:

- There is a lot of original nature left in Helsinki, and there are plenty of recreational areas in relation to the population.
- The number of nature conservation areas is increasing, and more attention has also been paid to the development and sustainability of nature services through various projects and programmes.

#### DEVELOPMENT TARGETS:

- The preservation of local nature sites and the protection of biodiversity must be better taken into account in all the activities of the growing city.
- The rapidly growing hiking and nature tourism are putting pressure on the sustainable use of nature areas.

#### Water ecosystems



SDG 6, *Clean water and sanitation*, is one of the goals that Helsinki has achieved to a large extent. In Helsinki, clean drinking water and efficient wastewater management are available to everyone. In addition, wastewater treatment is of the highest quality. SDG 14, *Life below water*, is particularly related

# Coastal ecosystem has not yet recovered and eutrophication is also a key problem in the sea area off the coast of Helsinki.

to the Baltic Sea in Helsinki. The state of the sea has improved in recent decades, but it is still one of the most sensitive and polluted seas in the world, particularly affected by eutrophication.

## STATE OF WATER ECOSYSTEMS MUST BE SECURED

Helsinki's water areas comprise large sea areas and freshwater areas, which include the Vantaanjoki River, streams, ditches, ponds and springs. Helsinki's archipelago of 300 islands stretches from the sheltered inner archipelago to the open sea.

The water quality and the ecological status of small bodies of water and sea areas are affected by nutrients and harmful substances, litter, water traffic, treated wastewater and the condition of the open sea in the Gulf of Finland. The city's water protection is guided by the Baltic Sea Challenge action plan, small water programme, rainwater management programme and flood instructions.

The nutrient load in coastal waters has decreased in recent decades, but the coastal ecosystem has not yet recovered and eutrophication is also a key problem in the sea area off the coast of Helsinki. Key actions have been the development of wastewater treatment technologies and centralisation of treatment plants.

The Viikinmäki wastewater treatment plant, located in Helsinki, is the largest treatment plant in the Nordic countries with world-class treatment efficiency. The Viikinmäki treatment plant treats all wastewater from Helsinki and, in addition, wastewater from other municipalities in the Helsinki region, i.e. the wastewater of approximately 860,000 residents.

## BALTIC SEA UNDER THREAT

Despite the reduction in external loads, phosphorus concentrations in the coastal waters of Helsinki have been increasing since the early 1990s, mainly due to scattered loading from the large catchment area of the Vantaanjoki River and internal phosphorus loading from the seabed. In addition, an alarming number of harmful chemicals and microplastics are found in the water environments.

For these reasons, many ecosystems and habitats in the Baltic Sea are under threat. The underwater nature of the Helsinki sea area is not yet known well enough for important habitats to be taken into account in the planning and use of the sea area.

The aim is to improve the state of the Baltic Sea not only through the development of the city's own activities but also through the Baltic Sea Challenge. The Baltic Sea Challenge is a network initiative of the cities of Helsinki and Turku, which invites organisations to voluntarily commit to the protection of the Baltic Sea and to draw up their own Baltic Sea action plans.

Small bodies of water in Helsinki are important habitats and pathways for various organisms as well as recreationally valuable destinations for city residents. The ecological, recreational and landscape value of small bodies of water has increased considerably, and it is important that they are better taken into account in urban planning and ecology.

Indeed, efforts have been made in recent years to restore streams and ditches to more natural conditions and, at best, they have managed to attract the extremely endangered sea trout to settle in them. However, the situation of ponds has deteriorated and they are eutrophicated.

## SUCCESSSES:

- Through the Baltic Sea Challenge, the city's water protection activities have been strategically and cross-sectorally developed and other operators have been encouraged to participate for 14 years now.
- Wastewater treatment in the Helsinki region is world-class and covers the wastewater of 860,000 residents.

## DEVELOPMENT TARGETS:

- In rainwater management, more attention must also be paid to the loading and littering of the sea area, especially microplastics.
- The renovation of the combined sewerage system into separate sewers must be continued in order to reduce wastewater discharges.

# Examples of Helsinki's actions



## The City's energy experts provide support for housing companies

The City of Helsinki offers engineering help and support for housing companies running block of flats and interested in finding out how to carry out effective and financially viable energy renovations.

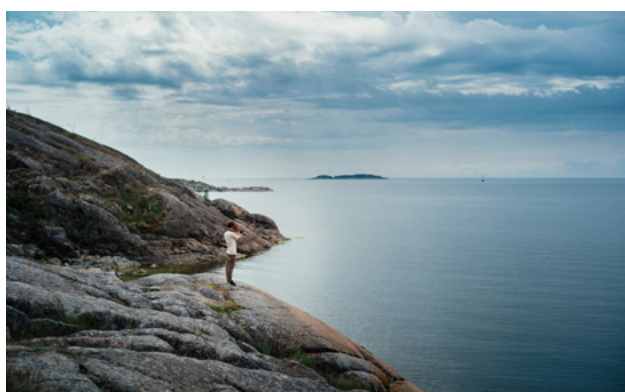
[Read more](#)



## Helsinki Energy Challenge

Helsinki Energy Challenge A global one-million-euro challenge competition to answer the question: How can we decarbonise the heating of Helsinki, using as little biomass as possible?

[Read more](#)



## The Baltic Sea Challenge

The Baltic Sea Challenge is a free-of-charge, international network focused on protecting the waters and open to all actors. The members have committed to take concrete action to protect the waters on a voluntary basis, exceeding the requirements of law and...

[Read more](#)



## Green Hearts

Green Hearts is a park website made by The City of Helsinki's Urban Environment. This site invites you to discover the city's many delightful parks with the help of planned walking routes.

[Read more](#)



# People



Image: Jussi Helminen



Social sustainability and well-being are at the heart of the city's activities, since they are directly related to the basic services provided by Helsinki. The theme is broad and linked in particular to the SDGs related to good health and well-being, learning, reduced inequalities and gender equality.

In global terms, Helsinki is a very prosperous city, and we do not have any big challenges relating to basic health care or hunger, for example.

Our learning outcomes and education services are also of the highest quality. In particular, the challenges of the theme relate to the general increase in inequalities and well-being disparities, mental well-being, obesity, intimate partner violence and promotion of non-discrimination.

## Well-being and health



The promotion of well-being and health is a joint effort by all operators, based on sustainable development, including support and activities to strengthen



Image: Jussi Helliö

the resources of various population groups, to improve living conditions and other structural frameworks, and to support equal opportunities for people to manage their health and well-being. This work is guided by the Helsinki Welfare Plan through the priorities specified for each council term.

The perspective of the welfare plan on promoting health and well-being is very broad and relates in particular to SDGs 3 (Good health and well-being), 2 (Zero hunger) and 10 (Reduced inequalities), but it is also linked to many other goals. Cultural well-being has also been highlighted as part of promoting health and well-being.

#### **RESOURCES AFFECTED BY PERSONAL HEALTH**

All Helsinki residents – young, old or with functional defects – should have the opportunity to lead a good and fulfilling life and receive the necessary support and services at all stages of their life. Health and welfare promotion influences the comfort of life of the citizens, improves their perceived well-being, quality of life and health and ensures that their everyday environments support a good and physically active life.

An individual's experience of their health and well-being affects their resources and also reflects on, for example, quality of life, social relationships, activity in society and ability to manage in everyday life. For example, only 17% of citizens with feelings of loneliness considered their quality of life to be good on average. The same connection is seen in feelings of happiness; just 9% of lonely people had feelings of happiness,

whereas over one-half of non-lonely people had experienced feelings of happiness in the past month.

#### **CHALLENGES INCLUDE OBESITY AND MENTAL WELL-BEING**

Lifestyle greatly influences health and well-being. Physical inactivity and obesity, smoking and alcohol abuse are all linked to morbidity and reduced capacity to work. Perceived income adequacy has a connection to physical activity, i.e. young people who feel very good about their family's economic situation and residents who find it easy or quite easy to make a living are physically more active than the other population groups.

Obesity is a significant challenge in terms of national health. Based on the available statistics, the weight of children, young people and the working-age population is increasing. Obesity is one of the risk factors behind various public health problems. Work in lifestyle-related well-being and health promotion measures, such as weight control, oral health care, school food panels and the 'child health clinic at day care' operating model, were partially interrupted in spring 2020 due to COVID-19. However, during the council term, foundations have been laid and good practices have been tried, and their implementation and evaluation can be continued. According to population surveys carried out before the COVID-19 pandemic, the mental well-being of Helsinki residents was already at a lower level than in the whole country or elsewhere in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. The

# Accessibility of the urban environment and green areas, for example, is an essential factor in promoting the well-being of urban residents.

views of the new mental health strategy on positive mental health by strengthening resources should also be made more visible.

## MAKING LOCAL NATURE SITES EASILY ACCESSIBLE

Accessibility of the urban environment and green areas, for example, is an essential factor in promoting the well-being of urban residents. The proximity of green areas promotes physical activity and thereby also health and well-being.

A tool for measuring the accessibility and degree of use of green areas for the purposes of environmental

planning was completed during the council term. The tool can be used to assess the adequacy of parks in connection with land use planning, as well as the need to renovate parks and improve their durability in use.

From the point of view of equality, local nature sites should be made easily accessible to all residents. For those in a weaker position, such as the elderly or people with reduced mobility or low income, it is not so easy to move to more remote nature conservation areas.

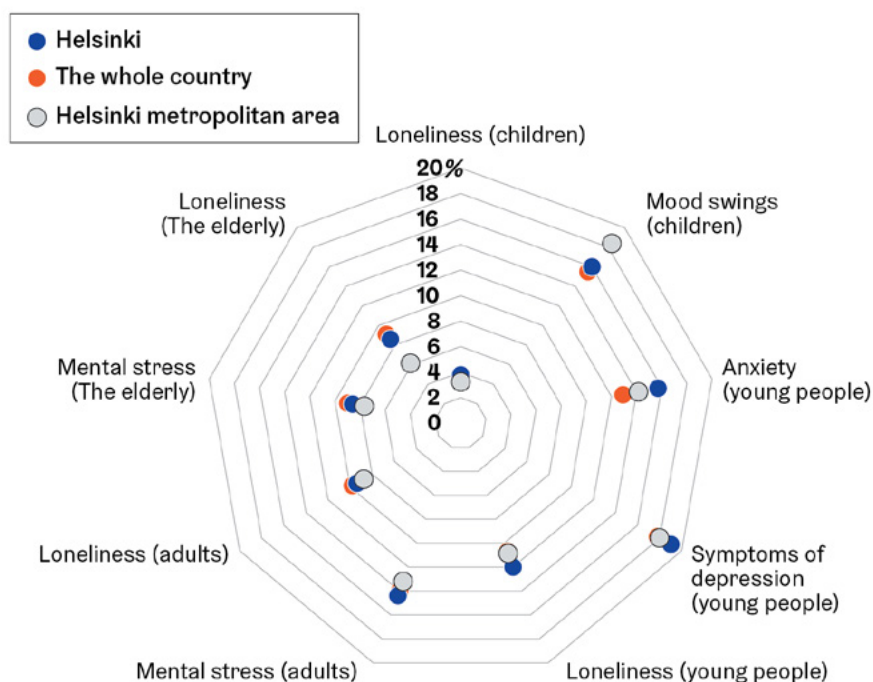
The rights and well-being of children are promoted in Helsinki in all divisions and in cooperation with organisations and other operators. Helsinki was approved in February 2021 for UNICEF's Child Friendly Cities model.

The model is a tool that helps the municipality to make the right decisions for the well-being of children in the municipal administration and everyday services for children. The model helps municipalities to ensure that the rights of the most vulnerable children in particular are respected.

## WELL-BEING AND HEALTH STATUS BY AGE GROUP

**Children and young people:** Although many early preventive services have been developed, mental health services and service chains have been improved and recreational activities have been promoted in recent years, concerns remain about the increased loneliness and mood swings of children and young people, children's increased obesity and lack of physical activity, young people's increased use of cannabis and easy access to drugs, and regional differences in hobbies and physical activity.

In promoting well-being and health and preventing



Source: Helsinki's welfare report 2018-2021

# Physical activity plans have been drawn up for the playground units.

social exclusion, it is important to enable participatory experiences, provide activities and hobbies, ensure good learning and safe growth and learning environments, and promote children's and young people's daily physical activities. All these activities contribute to positive experiences of mental well-being.

**Adults:** The majority of the adult population feel good about their quality of life and health and are happy, but there are still differences in the experiences of quality of life, health and happiness depending on perceived income adequacy. These differences may, in turn, be reflected in differences between population groups in lifestyles, mental well-being or morbidity.

In promoting well-being and health, it is essential to take into account the city's well-being in terms of quality of life and health but, at the same time, also note how the extremes of well-being are emphasised.

**Elderly:** During this council term, numerous steps have been taken in the development of communication for the elderly and digital support services. Nevertheless, not all elderly people have equal opportunities in the use of electronic services. There is also room for improvement in the healthy lifestyles of the elderly, and city-wide actions are needed to promote the day-to-day mobility and functional capacity of the elderly.

## HELSINKI HAS INVESTED PARTICULARLY MUCH IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The main focus of health and well-being promotion in the current strategic period has been the promotion of everyday physical activity, which has been implemented through the Physical Activity Programme. The aim of the city strategy's Physical Activity Programme is to increase the daily physical activity of residents of different ages and city employees, reduce sitting time and reduce the share of people who do not exercise in their spare time.

## ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROGRAMME:

### Small children

- Content relating to physical activity has been strengthened in Helsinki's early childhood education plan.

- Almost all early childhood education units have joined the national programme for physical activities in early childhood education (Liikkuva varhaiskasvatus).
- Physical activity plans have been drawn up for the playground units.
- Early childhood education staff have been trained and bicycles have been purchased for playgrounds.
- The city's day-care centres received a donation of €50,000 for sports equipment from the Urlus Foundation.
- A communication campaign promoting everyday physical activities for children (Anna arjen liikuttaa lasta) was carried out for parents of small children in cooperation with child health clinics, playgrounds, day-care centres, home service for families with children and the Culture and Leisure Division.
- The Family Hullabaloo concept of Sports Services was extended to eight areas in 2020.

### Schoolchildren and students

- In 2019–2020, conditions for physical activities were improved in ten schoolyards with a separate appropriation.
- Individual, low-threshold counselling for secondary school pupils has been extended to more than 20 comprehensive schools.
- Helsinki has started cooperation with the Partnership for Healthy Cities to promote active mobility on the journey to and from school.
- The "Anna arjen liikuttaa" campaign and parents' meetings with physical activities took place in autumn 2020.
- A digital hobby pass has been introduced for secondary school pupils.
- Schools in Helsinki have been jointly providing time for hobby activities each Wednesday since the autumn term 2019.
- The operating model for physical activities at school (Liikkuva opiskelu) has been extended to all Helsinki upper secondary schools and Helsinki Vocational College campuses.

### City staff

- An office workout application has been installed on all employees' workstations.
- The opportunity to use city bikes has been made a staff benefit.
- In cooperation between occupational health care and Sports Services, a sports training model has been developed in which the employee receives personal support from a sports professional for a personal lifestyle change.
- In 2020, a new Most Active Workplace (Liikkuvin työpaikka) competition was launched, attracting more than 1,600 employees.
- In summer 2020, an innovation challenge was organised for companies for the first time, seeking new solutions to increase the physical activity of staff.

# There are major differences between districts in health status and physical activity. The differences have been growing.

## Elderly

- More than 70% of home care clients have a Mobility Agreement in place. The use of the agreement will be extended to all hospital, rehabilitation and care services in 2021.
- During COVID-19, investments have been made in the mobility of the elderly by implementing the YLE exercise sessions as a joint effort by YLE and the City of Helsinki.
- In collaboration with Harvard University and the Bloomberg Philanthropies Foundation, an innovation programme for mobility for the elderly has been implemented.
- In 2021, the mobility of the elderly was made a common goal of the city's health and well-being promotion.

## SUCCESSSES:

- The majority of Helsinki residents feel good about their quality of life and are happy.
- Low-threshold mental health services have been opened in Myllypuro and Kalasatama, and service chains for children and young people have been described.
- During the Sutjakka Stadi action plan for obesity prevention and treatment (2015–2020), many measures were taken to prevent obesity, including in child health clinics and schools.
- The Mobility Agreement is a scheme for systematically supporting the day-to-day mobility of elderly people during home care visits. The Mobility Agreement has been signed by 73% of the home care clients.

- Helsinki has been awarded at the Finnish Sports Gala with both the Most Active Finnish Municipality and the Most Active Workplace awards.
- There is a growing understanding of the importance of daily physical activity. Hundreds of thousands of Helsinki residents have been reached through campaigns, events, websites and materials.

## DEVELOPMENT TARGETS:

- There are differences in quality of life, health and happiness depending on perceived income adequacy.
- The mental well-being of Helsinki residents is weaker than in the country on average. Child welfare notifications due to mental well-being or substance abuse have increased.
- Despite the numerous measures taken, overweight and obesity have not decreased in Helsinki during the action plan, but the weight of children, young people and the working-age population is increasing. Obesity is a significant challenge in terms of national health.
- There are major differences between districts in health status and physical activity. The differences have been growing.
- COVID-19 has reduced the amount of physical activity in everyday routines and hobbies and has caused delays in the activities. Stamina among schoolchildren has been on the decline.
- There are projects, experiments and good practices, but there are challenges in getting them established. The integration of physical activity into the basic activities of the divisions is incomplete and random.

## Links to related programmes, reports and websites

- [Physical Activity Programme website](#)

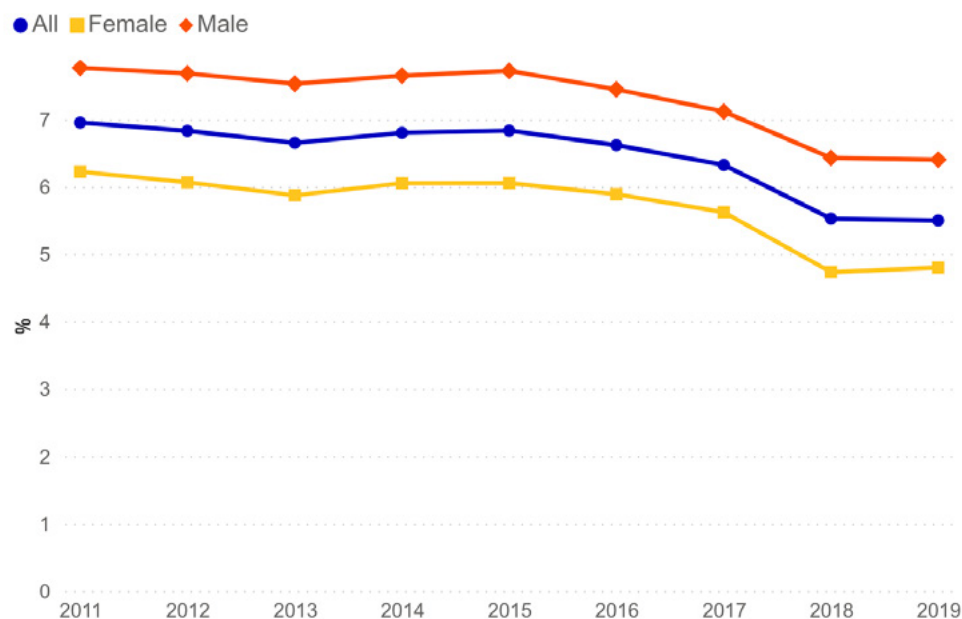
## Learning



Helsinki wants to be the world's most effective place to learn. The city offers high-quality and attractive early childhood education and basic education services close to the residents.

The ever-growing Helsinki requires active measures and investments to ensure open, equal and high-quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. SDG 10 (*Reduced inequalities*) is also strongly linked to the theme of learning, in addition to SDG 4 (*Quality education*).

## Young adults (16-29 yrs.) not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)



Source: Statistics Finland

### SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN CURRICULA

The aim of the teaching is that pupils receive the necessary support in their local school and study with other pupils in their neighbourhood. The city offers educational opportunities for all young people in Helsinki and vocational skills for the needs of working life.

In learning, we utilise the entire city as a learning environment. Day-care groups and classes make

Sustainable development has been taken into account throughout the City of Helsinki's early childhood education plans and curricula.

study trips to art, culture, working life and experience destinations. The city offers free public transport for the groups.

Sustainable development has been taken into account throughout the City of Helsinki's early childhood education plans and curricula. In the Education Division, a sustainable future learning path was developed in 2020. It enables learners of all ages to interact with sustainable development themes in their day-care and school life and upper secondary studies.

The learning path is based on the value base of eco-social education and innovative or transformative learning. SDG 4 (*Quality education*) is one of the goals that is already achieved quite well in Helsinki.

### FOX CHARACTERS GUIDING TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLE

The learning path starts with early childhood education, which introduces a sustainable lifestyle with the help of a fox family. The KETTU (FOX) model combines climate and environmental education, future literacy and creative learning. For example, the nature relationship will be strengthened with the Outdoor Fox, different futures will be created with the Artist Fox, and circular economy will be studied with the Inventor Fox.

The model was developed together with children, because growing into participation and influence is a key starting point for learners of all ages. The KETTU model is also used as an applied version in grades 1-6 of basic education.



FOX education model for sustainable lifestyle

The sustainable future learning path continues in secondary school, where sustainable development is studied in lessons of different subjects and across subject borders. To support phenomenon-based learning, the KIERRE model for future skills from circular economy has been developed, combining natural resource awareness, climate understanding, design education and creative learning.

The learning path continues in both upper secondary school and vocational education. In cooperation with the staff and students of upper secondary schools, a cross-curricular climate course was developed under the name Carbon-neutral Helsinki. The title of the course comes from the Carbon-neutral Helsinki 2035 Action Plan. The course will be compulsory for all first-year upper secondary school students starting from August 2021. Helsinki Vocational College has launched the “Professionals of a Sustainable Future” programme, which examines how sustainable development can be strengthened in all study programmes. The vocational college offers training for more than 50 different professions.

For example, those graduating as restaurant professionals can influence the carbon and water footprint of thousands of people when designing menus, and construction professionals can promote sustainable and energy-efficient solutions.

### CULTURE OF READING AND FUTURE WORKING LIFE SKILLS

In all units of the Education Division, eco-supporters have been appointed who, in addition to their other duties, promote environmentally sustainable practices and raise environmental awareness.

Sustainable development is promoted not only in education but also in other activities of day-care centres, schools and educational institutions. From 1 August 2020, meals containing red meat were reduced from the school menus, an oat milk experiment was conducted during the school year and an extensive recycling survey was carried out on the premises of

both day-care centres and schools. Environmental criteria are always taken into account in the design and construction of new day-care centre and school buildings.

Sustainable development was also promoted through a wide range of projects. The Joy of Reading (Lukuinto) project strengthened the culture of reading, Know Work 2.0 (Tunne Työ 2.0) supported pupils' future working life skills and the Project for Youth Social Inclusion (Mukana) promoted the participation and well-being of children and young people.

In addition to basic and secondary education, the city offers diverse learning opportunities for learners of all ages through adult education centres and libraries, for example. The city also organises environmental education activities.

The nature centres and nature schools of the Helsinki Metropolitan Area organise courses for teachers, day-care personnel, educators and residents. The Harakka Island in Helsinki, in front of Kaivopuisto, and the nature school there provide a wonderful setting for nature education and Baltic Sea education to support educators.

### SUCCESSSES:

- The early childhood education participation rate grew by 3% between 2017 and 2020.
- The number of first-graders choosing their local school grew by 6% between 2017 and 2020.
- The availability of special support for pupils in local schools has increased during the strategy period.
- The sustainable future learning path has been developed and launched.
- The overall customer satisfaction rate is 5.6 (scale 1–7).

### DEVELOPMENT TARGETS:

- The number of dropouts in vocational education increased by 4% from 2019 to 2020. This requires systematic and long-term investment and close cooperation with different operators.
- COVID-19 has increased learning deficiencies and undermined well-being among children and young people.
- Mental health problems among young people have increased; poor social well-being is reflected, for example, in an increased number of clients in student welfare services.
- The KETTU and KIERRE models must be made an integral part of activities in day-care centres and schools.

### Links to related programmes, reports and websites

- [Helsinki Learns website](#)



Image: Jussi Hellisten

## Gender equality and non-discrimination



Helsinki aims to be a city built on human rights where everyone can be seen and heard and can live and participate on an equal footing without any direct or indirect discrimination. Achieving this goal requires strong commitment and continuous and determined work to promote equality and non-discrimination in the city. This is particularly relevant to the promotion of SDG 5 (*Gender equality*), but also closely related to SDG 10 (*Reduced inequalities*) and SDG 8 (*Decent work and economic growth*).

A gender analysis of the indicators for the 2017–2021 strategy period shows that men’s unemployment and deprivation are at a higher level than women. Particular attention should be paid to the exclusion of young men from education and to the symptom of crime. For women and girls, on the other hand, it would be good to pay attention to security experience, the employability of immigrant women and the anxiety and loneliness of girls in upper secondary school. The corona crisis has also affected young women in particular. More information would be needed on the situation of different gender minorities.

A gender analysis of the indicators of the 2017–2021 strategy period reveals that unemployment and deprivation are at a higher level for men than for women. Particular attention should be paid to young boys’ exclusion from education and proneness to crime. In the case of women and girls, attention should be paid to perceived safety, the employment of immigrant women and the anxiety and loneliness of girls in secondary school. Young women have also been hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 crisis. More information is needed on the situation of various gender minorities.

### CONCRETE MEASURES TO PROMOTE EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

According to the strategy, gender equality is a principle permeating all activities of the city. During the past strategy period, a large research and development project was carried out in the city, focusing on gender impact assessment and gender-sensitive budgeting. It is important to invest in the implementation of the recommendations compiled in the final reports of the project in order to ensure that the city benefits from the project on a lasting basis.

The separate equality and non-discrimination plans for services approved by the City Board in 2019 and 2020 contain concrete measures for the work of the City Executive Office and divisions to promote



equality and non-discrimination. The internal intermediate assessment of the equality plan for services at the end of 2020 concluded that fairly good progress had been made in the overall implementation of the measures: five measures had been implemented, 16 were ongoing and two had not been started.

The equality and non-discrimination plan for services for the 2022–2025 council term will be drawn up as a coherent whole in order to comprehensively address the issue from a wide range of perspectives. In other respects, too, the city’s work for equality and non-discrimination increasingly seeks to take into account the intersectional aspect, meaning how an environment built on diverse and intersecting norms affects the lives and opportunities of the city residents.

### HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK ESTABLISHED

As service providers, the city’s divisions play a central role in ensuring that equality and non-discrimination are implemented in the city’s services in practice. In addition to city-level equality and non-discrimination planning, it is important for the divisions to take into account the equality and non-discrimination perspective at different levels of their activities in planning, resourcing, monitoring and evaluation alike.

The COVID-19 crisis has increasingly highlighted the need to pay particular attention to the most vulnerable.

The city-level development of the equality and non-discrimination of services is coordinated by the City Executive Office. A human rights network was also established in spring 2019, which can be joined

by any city employee interested in promoting human rights.

In addition, the city has an equality and non-discrimination coordination group composed of managerial and executive-level representatives, as well as two politically elected bodies, the Gender Equality Commission and the Non-discrimination Commission, which monitor the equality and non-discrimination work in the city.

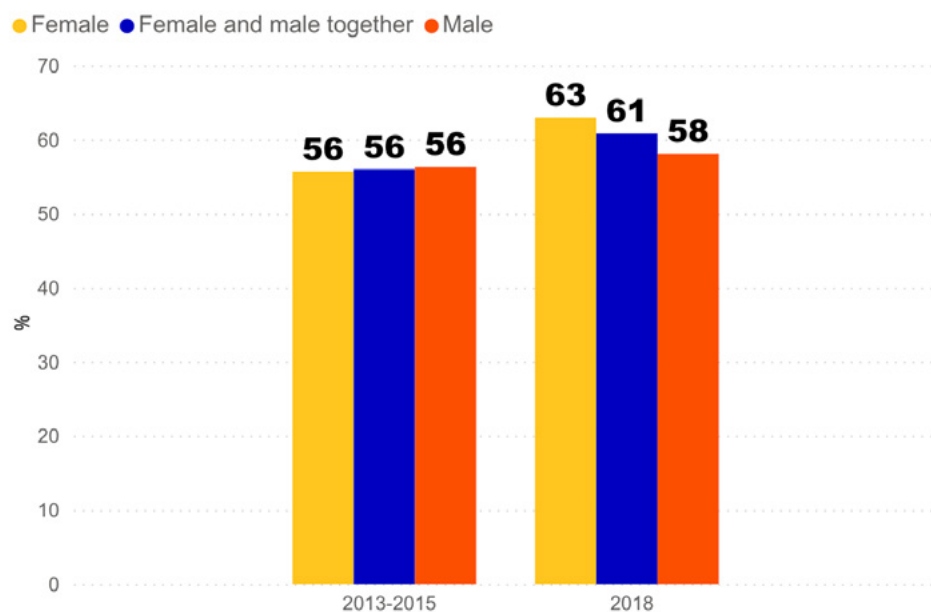
Statutory decision-making bodies the Elderly Citizens Council, the Council on Disability and the Youth Council focus on monitoring the implementation of equality among their own reference groups, as well as on highlighting their perspectives and needs in the city’s activities and decision-making.

### STAFF PERSPECTIVE ON EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

The City of Helsinki is the largest employer in Finland, employing approximately 39,000 people. The city has worked for a long time to promote the well-being and equality of its staff. The gender equality plan and non-discrimination plan for personnel guide HR policy work in promoting equal and non-discriminating working life.

The measures of the non-discrimination plan promote, among other things, the employment of people with disabilities. The City of Helsinki has also tried anonymous recruitment. It is based on the equal and non-discriminating treatment of applicants and promotion of staff diversity.

### Proportion of those who consider their quality of life be, on average, good (WHOQOL-8), by gender



Source: Finnish Institute for health and welfare, ATH (2015) and FinSote (2018) surveys

The aim is to give all applicants an equal opportunity to be invited to the job interview without being affected by anything irrelevant to the job. The annual staff report also covers the implementation of equality and non-discrimination.

The city has also used the virtual Helvi group discussion instructor in equality and non-discrimination themes, preparing an equality and non-discrimination Helvi for work communities and a diverse recruitment Helvi for supervisors.

The Helvi instructors help work communities, supervisors and experts to discuss how everyone can promote equality and non-discrimination through their own work and in recruitment.

#### SUCCESSSES:

- Human rights have been highlighted as the basis for the development of equality and non-discrimination work in the city.
- The extensive investigation and practical piloting carried out in the gender equality project (2018–2019) and the clear recommendations for further-measures based on them provide a good basis for cementing gender impact assessment and gender-conscious budgeting practices in the city.
- The human rights network brings together city employees across administrative boundaries to learn, think and discuss; the common goal is to promote equality and non-discrimination in the city's services.

- An anonymous recruitment experiment, intranet pages in support of diverse recruitment and Helvi virtual coaching for supervisors for diverse recruitment.

#### DEVELOPMENT TARGETS:

- Lack of indicators to verify the realisation of gender equality and non-discrimination
- Practical implementation of the recommendations of the gender equality project's two final reports for gender impact assessment and gender-sensitive budgeting
- Better consideration of different subsets (women vs. men vs. gender minorities; native Finnish women vs. immigrant women, etc.) in the information production of the city and in monitoring and reporting the implementation of the goals of the city strategy, divisions and segments, so that differences between groups that are important for the planning of measures are not overlooked
- Comprehensive consideration of equality and non-discrimination aspects in the management and aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis (e.g. sign language communication/crisis communication)

#### Links to related programmes, reports and websites

- [Human Rights in Helsinki website](#)
- [Staff reports](#)
- [Participation website and evaluation of the council term](#)



Image: Lauri Rotko

## Reducing inequalities



In global terms, Helsinki is at a good level in many inequality-related issues when looking at SDG 10 (*Reduced inequalities*). Nevertheless, inequalities and social exclusion are among the most serious problems in Helsinki. They are also persistent and long-lasting problems, although many of the city's programmes and goals have aimed at reducing them for years.

### **COVID-19 HAS WORSENERD THE SITUATION OF THE HOMELESS**

The number of Finns at risk of poverty or social exclusion has increased during the COVID-19 crisis. Health and well-being disparities between population groups have also increased, as have regional differences.

In the prevention of social exclusion, Helsinki has particularly invested in children and young people. Digital exclusion has also emerged, especially during the COVID-19 crisis, when digital services have become even more important.

Homelessness and undocumented status are bigger challenges in Helsinki than in the rest of the country. More than half of the homeless in Finland are in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. In 2019, there were over 2,000 homeless people in Helsinki. The challenges of homelessness in Helsinki are exacerbated by the city's attractiveness as a big city, the high cost of housing, the large number of marginalised people and the inadequacy of temporary accommodation.

We want children and young people to be able to participate, feel a sense of belonging, influence matters and be heard.

The COVID-19 crisis has further worsened the situation of the homeless, as support services have had to be restricted. Particularly worrying is the number of young homeless people, which has not decreased as strongly as that of other groups.

### **HOMELESS AND UNDOCUMENTED PEOPLE ARE VULNERABLE**

Helsinki aims to halve homelessness by 2023. The city particularly focuses on the development of support services and the service segment as well as on preventive services. Food aid is also available. In spring 2021, approximately 900–1,000 portions of food were distributed to homeless people per day.

The number of undocumented people in Helsinki is difficult to estimate. The undocumented are a diverse group but, in practice, an undocumented person is someone who resides in Finland without a residence permit. The everyday lives of undocumented and homeless people are marked by constant uncertainty about their future.

The homeless and undocumented are in a vulnerable position and are also at high risk of violence and exploitation.

### **PREVENTING THE SOCIAL EXCLUSION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AS A KEY PROJECT IN THE STRATEGY PERIOD**

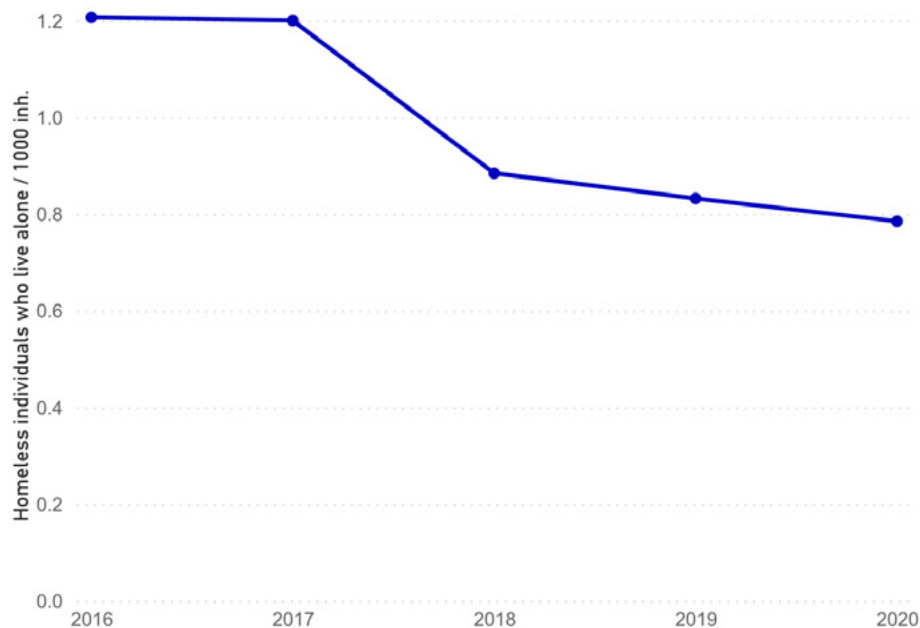
Inequality among children and young people is reduced by high-quality teaching and early childhood education, ensuring that every young person has a hobby, preventing loneliness and bullying at school, and improving mental well-being. In addition, we want children and young people to be able to participate, feel a sense of belonging, influence matters and be heard.

Aiming to prevent the social exclusion of children and young people, the Project for Youth Social Inclusion (Mukana) has invested in ensuring that every child receives education in the City of Helsinki. The competence of staff has been increased, for example, to support children with neuropsychiatric symptoms, and a total of 5,000 professionals from early childhood education to comprehensive school and upper secondary education will receive training in identifying and tackling racism. At the same time, the language awareness of staff will be increased so that pupils can also make use of their native language in learning.

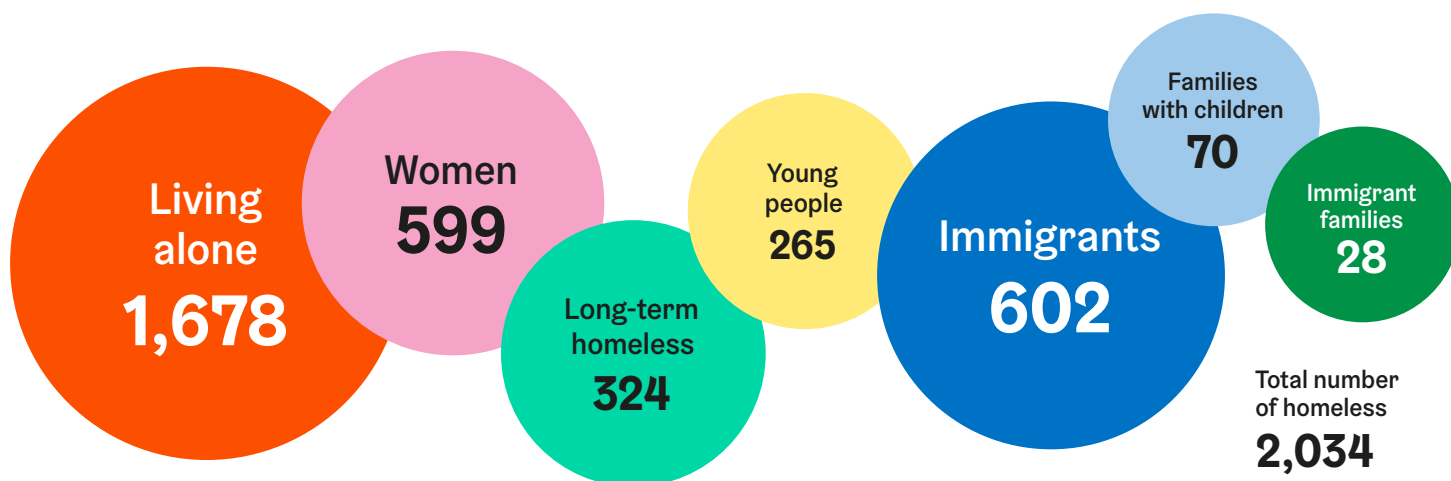
Helsinki has built an anti-bullying programme (ABP13) to prevent and intervene in bullying. The 13 measures in the programme tackle bullying from different directions.

K-0 activities have solved some of the most difficult and long-lasting cases of bullying, and the service is available to all schools and educational institutions. In 2020, K-0 activities had an impact on over 900 people.

### Homeless individuals who live alone / 1000 inhabitants



Lähde: ARA - The Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland



### COACHING AND WORK PARTNER ACTIVITIES

In order to eradicate black-and-white thinking and extremism, secondary school pupils and upper secondary school students have received My Eyes, Your Eyes (Minun silmin, sinun silmin) training. Safe adults have been added to schools for responsive work, to listen to young people and prevent various problems. School coaches are now working in 19 comprehensive schools and, in addition, 16 multilingual instructors are supporting children and young people with an immigrant background and their families in a total of 45 units.

Emotional and interactive skills are systematically taught in the Me schools. For example, in Laakavuori

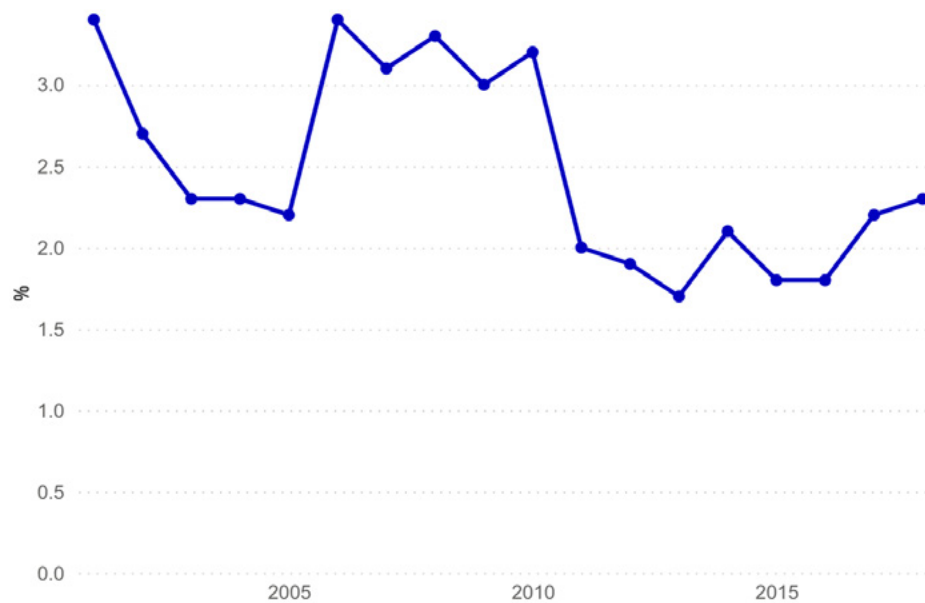
Lower Comprehensive School in Mellunmäki, these lessons are included in the timetable for each class.

A fieldwork partner model to support school attendance (Koulunkäynnin jalkautuva tuki) has supported pupils and families in north-eastern Helsinki, for example, to prevent early school leaving. In addition to traditional activities, the well-being and learning of vocational students is monitored by means of a mobile survey, so that no young people leave their studies unfinished.

In Kontula, a language training model has been piloted for the employment of immigrant parents, where parents go to school to learn Finnish and things related to job-seeking.

## Proportion of students dropped out during the school year, %

● Dropped out for general upper secondary education and did not continue any other e...



Source: Statistics Finland

### MORE EFFECTIVE MEASURES

A key challenge in preventing social exclusion has been the fact that the impact of preventive work addressing the root causes cannot be seen in the short term. At the same time, the prevention of social exclusion requires everyone's efforts.

There is enthusiasm and a willingness for cooperation, but the structures and responsibilities should be developed more systematically. Preventive work has been made more difficult by COVID-19 and the exceptional period, as services have been closed and families or young people have not always been able to be reached as usual. In addition, inequality has increased during the pandemic and the well-being of young people has deteriorated.

Significant efforts will continue to be needed to prevent social exclusion and reduce inequalities. In the future, we should focus on a smaller number of more effective measures.

### AFFIRMATIVE ACTION PAYS OFF

One way of tackling inequalities and preventing exclusion is affirmative action, also known as positive discrimination. In the Education Division, funding for affirmative action is implemented in early childhood education, basic education, upper secondary education and vocational education.

Different school levels use different allocation cri-

teria for funding affirmative action. The model has sought to support the realisation of equality in services and to compensate for regional differences in well-being due to the urban structure.

Studies have been carried out on the effectiveness of affirmative action in basic education in the City of Helsinki. The appropriation for affirmative action has been found to reduce early school leaving when moving to upper secondary education.

In addition, the Audit Department assessed the regional equality of basic education in 2019. The assessment also examined the effectiveness of the support measures for basic education, i.e. the appropriation for affirmative action, and concluded that the use of the money had a positive impact.

Among other things, the appropriation had been used to increase small-group instruction and learning support, enable flexible teaching solutions, strengthen the positive learning experiences of learners, purchase diverse teaching tools and hire more staff.

### FUNDING ALLOCATED TO SELECTED TARGET AREAS

The concept of affirmative action should be extended to other activities of the city.

Studies show that funding for affirmative action is one of the tools to reduce health and well-being disparities, and calculation models have been further developed during the council term. Funding for af-



Image: Maija Astikainen

firmative action is currently available in the Education Division, the Social Services and Health Care Division and, from 2020, also the Culture and Leisure Division.

Funding has been allocated to target areas selected on the basis of the calculation models developed. The appropriations have been used to recruit and train staff, to strengthen reading-dog activities and Läksyhelp support for homework in libraries and to establish cultural youth work. In addition, child health clinic work, school and student health care, child health clinic psychology services and social instruction have been strengthened in selected target areas, and maternity and child health clinic services for the undocumented have been launched.

### **INTEGRATION PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN REDUCING INEQUALITIES**

In Helsinki, the share of the foreign-language speaking population is increasing all the time. Population change in Helsinki is affected more than before by work-related and family-based immigration, as well as by asylum seekers, whose number varies greatly from year to year.

Of immigrants who moved to Helsinki, 43% were employed in 2018. At the end of 2019, there were 106,000 foreign-language speakers in Helsinki. Be-

tween 2005 and 2019, their share of the total population grew from 7% to 16%.

Integration is a wide-ranging phenomenon that includes, for example, language learning and cultural assimilation, identification with the local community and society, and the formation of a social network extending to different population groups. Employment is generally considered to be the most important aspect of structural integration. In addition, the monitoring of integration often also looks at, for example, success in education systems, housing conditions and political participation.

The employment path of working-age people is rather long and the employment rate of part of the immigrants is exceptionally low. The path of stay-at-home parents to working life has also been weak, and integration services have not reached them at home.

The group of second-generation immigrants is growing in Helsinki, and it has been noted that this group is not doing as well as the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking groups. Issues related to the development of integration services have often been implemented through projects, so it has not been possible to guarantee systematic and long-term activities also from the state side or to allocate resources especially to the Helsinki Metropolitan Area, where the majority of foreign-language speakers live.

## SUCCESSSES:

- Families with children receive support at an earlier stage thanks to new operating models.
- In supporting young people's mental health, the service chains have become clearer and new services have been developed.
- The model of hobbies has been developed in cooperation between divisions to ensure that every child gets a hobby.
- Affirmative action has had a positive impact on reducing inequalities, and the approach was also extended to other divisions.

## DEVELOPMENT TARGETS:

- Much of the development work for reducing inequalities and integration is carried out in projects, making it more difficult to carry out systematic and long-term work.
- Cooperation between divisions must be further improved, and structures for preventing social exclusion must be further developed.
- The COVID-19 crisis has further increased the risk of social exclusion of young people and has weakened the position of the socially excluded and homeless.
- The performance of second-generation immigrants is weaker than that of the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking groups.
- The immigrants' path to employment is too long.

### Links to related programmes, reports and websites

- [Strategy page of the Project for Youth Social Inclusion](#)
- [Anti-bullying programme website](#)

Affirmative action has had a positive impact on reducing inequalities.

## Participation



Promoting participation is particularly relevant to SDG 10 (*Reduced inequalities*), SDG 11 (*Sustainable cities and communities*) and SDG 16 (*Peace, justice and strong institutions*), which highlight equal opportunities for participation, citizen involvement in urban planning and participatory decision-making. In global terms, participation opportunities and interaction are at a good level in Helsinki.

### EXPERIENCE OF PARTICIPATION STRENGTHENS TRUST

The goal of the participation and interaction model approved in Helsinki in 2017 is to increase the transparency of decision-making and to strengthen customer- and user-orientation aspects in the development of services. The principles of participation include the utilisation of the knowledge and expertise of individuals and communities, enabling independent activities and creating equal opportunities for participation.

The city-level participation and interaction model describes the structures, goals and key areas of participation work. The participation plans of the divisions summarise the objectives and measures to strengthen the participation of residents in the development of services.

The participation objectives are implemented in ten themes: regional participation especially through the city pilot and corporate pilot activities, processing and utilising initiatives and feedback, open data, promoting digital inclusion, opening up the use of the city's premises, participatory budgeting, divisions' participation work, volunteering, and aspects presented by decision-making bodies (Youth Council, Council on Disability and Elderly Citizens Council).

The experience of participation strengthens citizens' trust in the activities of public authorities and in social activities and services in general. It helps to accept commonly established rules and practices and to understand the reasoning behind different perspectives. Participatory budgeting has increased discussion about the development needs of city districts between residents and communities.

### DIGITAL SUPPORT IS IMPORTANT

The city supports the activity of city residents and service users in organisations and communities with significant financial and operational investments. The city has also opened premises for residents and communities for independent activities.

However, participation in the planning and deci-

# The experience of participation strengthens citizens' trust in the activities of public authorities and in social activities and services in general.

sion-making of the city's services cannot be imagined today without the digital dimension. For this reason, it is important to recognise that participation in digital platforms requires adequate skills and appropriate equipment, which are not available to all residents. The digital support services provided by

the city at service points and in the form of remote digital support make it possible to lower the barriers to participation.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has also been seen in the city's participation work. A wide variety of digital ways of interacting with residents have emerged, and so have hybrid events within limitations.

## SUCCESSSES:

- The voting turnout of 8% in the first round of participatory budgeting in 2019 is good internationally.

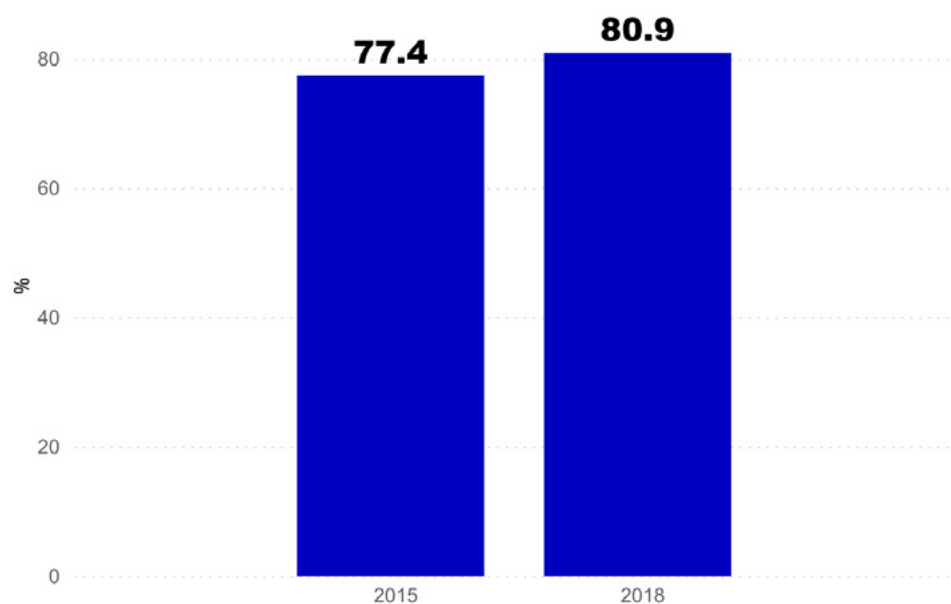
## DEVELOPMENT TARGETS:

- Intimate partner violence remains a problem, especially violence against women, and the COVID-19 crisis seems to increase violence in homes.
- The equality of citizens and accessibility of participation channels for all must be ensured in the implementation of participation.

## Links to related programmes, reports and websites

- [Participation website and evaluation of the council term](#)

**Share of Helsinki residents who feel safe moving about their own local area on weekends, %**



**Source:** City of Helsinki, Helsinki Safety Survey



## Safety



According to the 2018 safety survey, Helsinki residents feel that their neighbourhood, the city centre and means of transport are safer than ever. The change has been positive for both women and men, although the experience of insecurity is still much more common for women.

Many other indicators also point to positive safety developments in Helsinki: for example, people see less violence in their own residential area that they did at the beginning of the millennium, and safety concerns about the residential areas have diminished.

People are more concerned about the surroundings in areas they perceive as unsafe. People's safety concerns about their residential area have decreased between the last surveys (2015–2018). The issues that Helsinki residents are the most concerned about are social exclusion, property damage and graffiti and the reduction of green areas. A total of 15 concerns about the living environment were covered by the survey.

There are differences in the concerns of residents between various parts of Helsinki. In areas where experiences of insecurity are more prevalent, there are particular concerns about people's misbehaviour, street violence, crime, drug use and dealing as well as conflicts between different language and cultural groups.

Concerns about traffic behaviour and the reduction of green areas are common in all types of areas and are not equally linked to the perceived safety of the residential area. (*Helsinki's present state and development 2019*)

### WORK AGAINST INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE REQUIRES FURTHER EFFORTS

Intimate partner violence, especially violence against women, is a problem in Finland. Finland is the second most violent country in the European Union for women, which has also been highlighted in the national work on sustainable development. The exceptional situation caused by COVID-19 seems to continue to increase violence in homes.

The working group for the prevention of domestic and intimate partner violence has been operating in Helsinki for about 10 years and involves numerous organisations. The current working group has been set to operate until 2025. Its task is to promote the local implementation of national recommendations and suggestions for measures in Helsinki, to promote cooperation with other cities in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area and to monitor the develop-

ment of the number of violent crimes in intimate relationships.

The working group makes suggestions for measures, information and training to prevent intimate partner violence. The working group is also responsible for producing guidelines for residents and information campaigns.

The working group for the prevention of domestic and intimate partner violence operates as part of a network for the promotion of well-being and health, which contributes to the well-being, health and safety of the city residents. The work against intimate partner violence has also been integrated into Helsinki's safety planning principles for 2019–2020 and, thereby, into the work of Helsinki's safety planning specialist group.

The City of Helsinki and its partners campaigned against intimate partner violence in autumn 2019 and in spring 2020 through the Declaration of Family Peace. In 2019 and 2020, approximately 1,300 people participated in the training.

In 2019, the theme of the training was honour violence. The training themes for 2020 were crisis and trauma work, digital violence in a relationship, sexual harassment of children, grooming and sexual violence against children in digital media, sexual violence as trauma, and meeting traumatised children and young people using cognitive methods.

Although active efforts have been made against intimate partner violence, further efforts are still needed.

#### SUCCESSSES:

- Perceived safety has improved among both men and women.

#### DEVELOPMENT TARGETS:

- Intimate partner violence remains a problem, especially violence against women, and the COVID-19 crisis seems to increase violence in homes.
- There are differences in perceived safety, both between genders and between residential areas. Intimate partner violence against women must be reduced.

# Examples of Helsinki's actions



## Let everyday activate you

Helsinki has launched a Physical Activity Programme, with the aim of encouraging its residents to move more and sit less. Helsinki wants to make physical activity an easy and attractive choice in people's everyday lives. Every step helps!

[Read more](#)



## ABP13 is an anti-bullying programme

ABP13 is an anti-bullying programme that consists of 13 ways to prevent and address bullying. It is a toolkit for preventing, intervening in and following up on bullying.

[Read more](#)



## Participatory budgeting

OmaStadi is the City of Helsinki's way of providing participatory budgeting services. Helsinki has allocated 8.8 million euros to realising residents' wishes. The ideas are developed together into proposals that Helsinki residents can vote on.

[Read more](#)



## Stadin safka – more than just food aid

Stadin safka develops the food aid process in Helsinki together with other food aid actors and utilises surplus food to benefit people.

[Read more](#)

# Economy



Image: Jussi Hellsten

The perspective of sustainable economy is broad and is linked to a number of different SDGs. The main SDGs for a sustainable economy relate to poverty, work and livelihoods, consumption, industry and innovation. Under the theme of sustainable economy, we also discuss the themes of sustainable housing, construction and traffic.

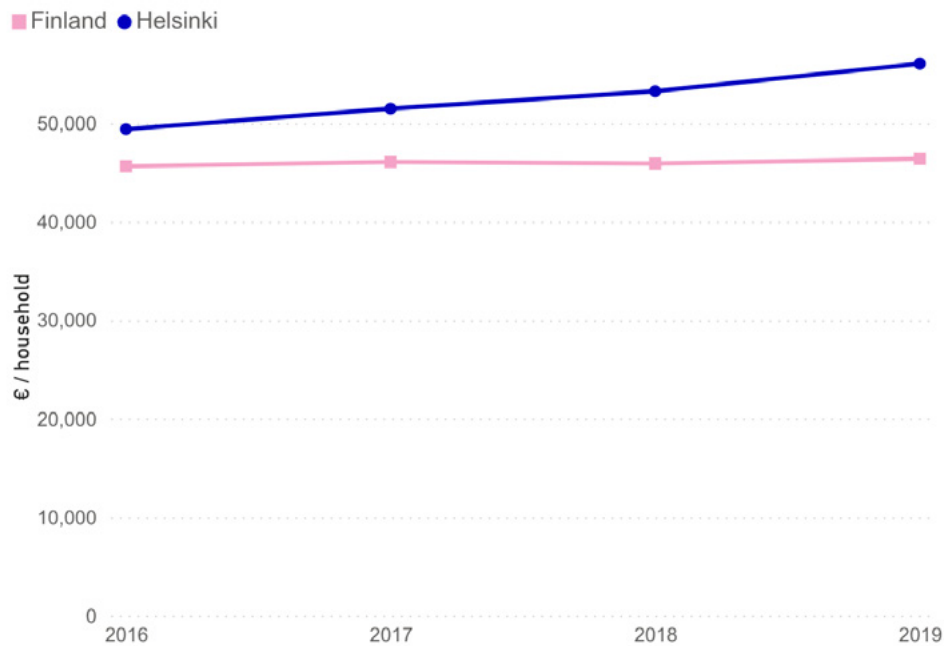
**H**elsinki's economy is strong and, globally, we are at a good level in many goals. The city can contribute to a sustainable economy by various means, such as industrial policy, urban development and marketing, procurement and employment services. In particular, Helsinki's challenges relate to sustainable consumption, employment and matching the workforce as well as the increasing income differences and indebtedness of households. The transition to a circular and low-carbon economy requires significant efforts and, in order to succeed, sustainability needs to be further integrated into economic and operational planning.

## Livelihood and employment



Globally, Helsinki is at a good level in achieving SDG 1 (No poverty). Helsinki's challenges have to do with relative poverty caused by high living standards and costs, perceived income adequacy and increasing poverty of families with children. Helsinki is better placed than most other municipalities and cities in Finland to cope with future challenges, even though

## Household debt (avg. eur / household)



Source: Statistics Finland

demographic changes are beginning to hamper growth in Helsinki, too. According to population forecasts, migration will remain favourable to Helsinki, and the diverse business and premise structure will increase employment opportunities and tax revenues.

### POSITIVE FINANCIAL RESULT DESPITE THE COVID-19 CRISIS

The City of Helsinki's financial result for 2020 appears to be nearly €500 million positive. Municipal tax revenues also seem to be slightly higher than in 2019, although the unemployment rate was clearly higher in 2020 than in 2019 and the total amount of wages and salaries also remained slightly lower than in the previous year.

Last year, the operating expenses of all municipalities and joint municipal authorities in Finland grew by 2.0%, tax revenues by 4.0% and central government

transfers by 27.2%. In the long run, however, the additional costs caused by COVID-19 and the loss of revenue for municipalities may exceed the state aid. The surplus now generated will buffer these effects.

The worst nosedive in the national economy caused by COVID-19 seems to be over, at least temporarily. According to both the Confederation of Finnish Industries and Technology Industries of Finland, the outlook for enterprises was improving in January 2021.

### AGEING OF POPULATION PUTS PRESSURE ON MUNICIPAL FINANCES

In addition to the development of the national economy and the related tax revenues, a key issue concerns expenditure in the municipal sector. There, pressure is created by the ageing of the population, which affects public finances in two ways: the growth of the elderly population creates pressure on health, care and pension expenditure, and the shrinking of the working-age population weakens the growth potential of the economy, which is directly reflected in the development of the tax base.

The pressure created by the ageing of the population particularly affects municipal finances, as municipalities currently bear the responsibility for social and health care services. Measures to improve employment and increase the efficiency of social and health care service production can potentially improve the sustainability of public finances.

Increased work-related migration will, under certain conditions, have a faster and more beneficial impact on long-term sustainability than the birth rate.

According to population forecasts, migration will remain favourable to Helsinki

# The COVID-19 crisis led to a sharp increase in the number of unemployed job seekers from March 2020 onwards.

Permanently higher net immigration would strengthen public finances if the average employment and wage levels of immigrants did not differ significantly from the native population.

## COVID-19 WEAKENED THE POSITION OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND PEOPLE WITH A FOREIGN BACKGROUND IN THE LABOUR MARKET

The decrease in the number of unemployed people in Helsinki faded by the end of 2019 and, at the beginning of 2020, the number of unemployed people was the same as a year earlier. The COVID-19 crisis led to

a sharp increase in the number of unemployed job seekers from March 2020 onwards.

The unemployment rate (proportion of unemployed people in the labour force) in Helsinki peaked at 18.6% in May. Full-time lay-offs accounted for 41% of unemployed jobseekers.

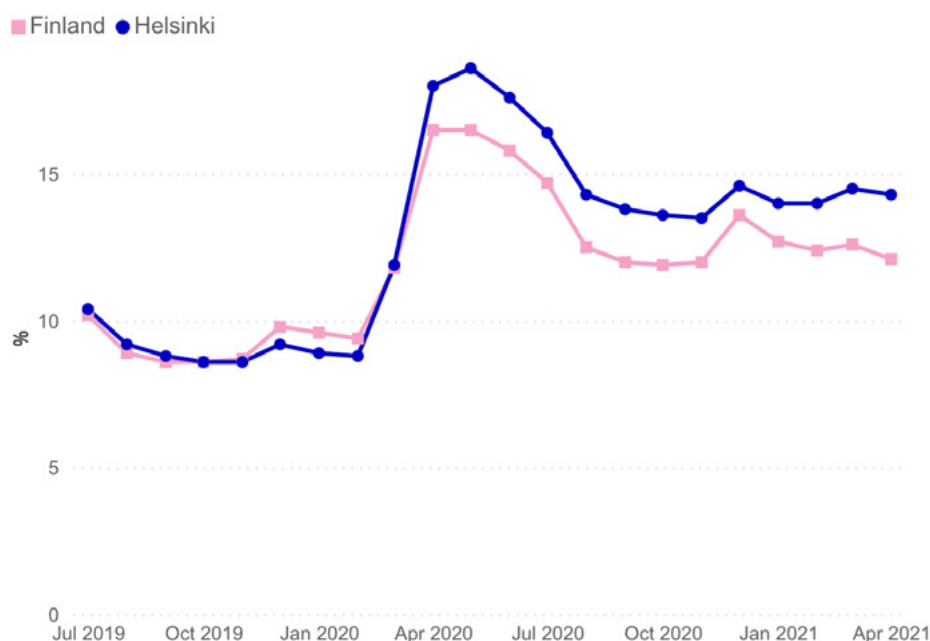
At the end of 2020, some of the restrictions related to COVID-19 remained in place and consumers were still cautious. In December 2020, the total number of unemployed job seekers was 51,100, of whom 40,100 were fully unemployed and 11,000 laid off full-time. Unemployment has hit the tourism, restaurant, cultural and specialised retail sectors the hardest.

The COVID-19 crisis has significantly weakened the position of young people and people with a foreign background in the labour market. The number of young unemployed people has doubled from a year ago. Many young people working in the service sector have become unemployed, and many recent graduates have difficulties entering the labour market.

## NUMBER OF LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYED HIGH IN HELSINKI

Unemployment has hit those with upper secondary and lower tertiary qualifications the hardest. Unemployment and lay-offs are also reflected in an increase in the number of recipients of basic income support and general housing allowance. Long-term unemployment may lead to an increase in inequalities in the coming years and have a significant impact on the risk of social exclusion of young people and people with a foreign background.

**Unemployment rate, %**



**Source:** Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland

The number of long-term unemployed is high in Helsinki and started to grow strongly in autumn 2020. As a result of the COVID-19 crisis, those who were already unemployed did not succeed in finding employment. The risk of long-term unemployment increases with age. Half of the long-term unemployed are over 50 years old. At the end of 2020, there were 15,300 people in Helsinki who had been unemployed continuously for more than a year, which was 46% more than a year earlier.

Regionally speaking, the number of unemployed people has grown more in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area than in the rest of the country. There are also gender differences: for example, the unemployment rate of immigrant women is much higher than that of men.

### LABOUR SHORTAGES IN THE HIGH-TECH AND DIGITALISATION SECTORS

In terms of labour demand, the trend is a decrease in the number of low-skilled jobs and increase in the number of expert and managerial positions. The share of skilled professionals in the labour force is expected to remain almost unchanged, while the share of workers with a low level of education will decrease.

The training requirements of the workforce needed for job openings by 2035 are expected to be significantly higher than those of the employed at the end of the last decade. As skills requirements increase, it is essential to improve the level of education and training of those already in employment.

Supply and demand do not properly match in the labour market, and Helsinki suffers from labour shortages, especially in the high-tech and digitalisation sectors. Helsinki must attract experts from abroad.

Helsinki participates in the local government pilot on employment, which is organised nationwide from 1 March 2021 to 30 June 2023. Part of the tasks of the Employment and Economic Development Offices will be transferred to municipalities in areas selected for the local government pilots on employment. The nationwide goal of the local government pilots on employment is to promote the employment of unemployed jobseekers and their guidance towards train-

ing and services more effectively and to create new solutions for the availability of skilled workforce.

#### SUCCESSSES:

- Growth in employment and number of enterprises before COVID-19.
- Support for employment is available, and foreign language-speakers are also actively involved.

#### DEVELOPMENT TARGETS:

- The employment of people with a foreign background, young people and minorities must be improved.
- An increase in unemployment and long-term unemployment, which has further increased during the COVID-19 crisis.

#### Links to related programmes, reports and websites

- [Financial statements and budget](#)

## Industry and innovation



The most important condition for the vitality of Helsinki is a well-functioning city. The bedrock of competitiveness is formed by high-quality services, cleanliness, accessibility, safety, liveliness, equality and other things that increase the quality of life of citizens. Every division and individual employee of the City of Helsinki influences the city's vitality with their daily work. In Helsinki, SDGs 8 (Decent work and economic growth), 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure) and 11 (Sustainable cities and communities) are well advanced in many respects. Helsinki's economy and competitiveness are strong, and the city invests in research and development and business services in many ways.

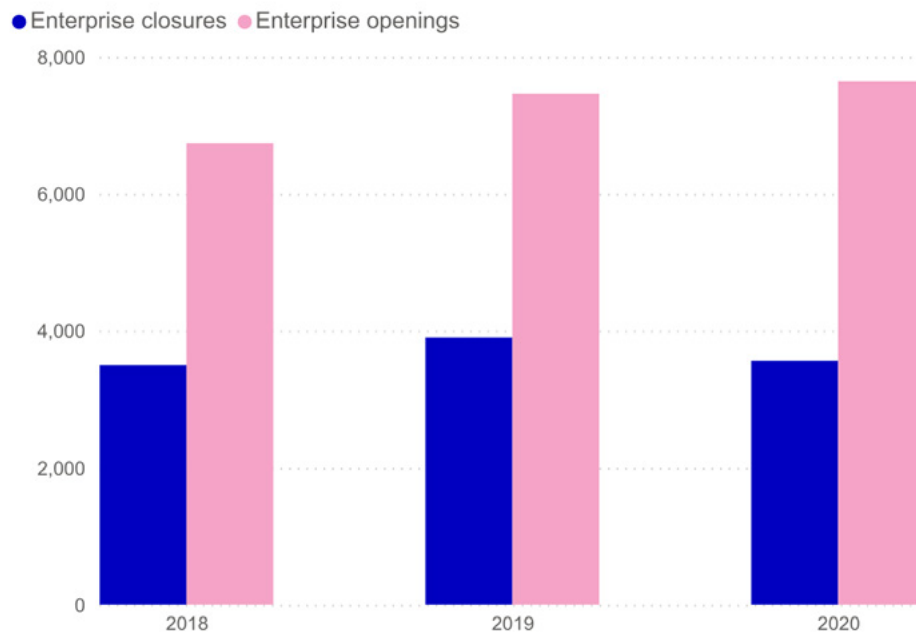
#### SERVICE-INTENSIVE INDUSTRIAL STRUCTURE

Helsinki utilises the opportunities and strengths of a well-functioning city in its long-term industrial policy. The city's permanent task is to develop the business environment, promote the employment of Helsinki residents and enable sustainable and knowledge-based economic growth. The three priorities of industrial policy are defined as follows: internationally attractive Helsinki, a city of skilled labour and a platform for new and growing business.

The number of enterprises in Helsinki grew by 10.1% between 2013 and 2019. At the same time, the

The number of enterprises in Helsinki grew by 10.1% between 2013 and 2019.

## Number of enterprise openings and closures in Helsinki



Source: Statistics Finland

Helsinki	Number	Number of personnel	Revenue
Primary production	2.3%	0.1%	0.0%
Processing	9.5%	15.9%	39.9%
Services	88.2%	84.0%	60.1%

Entire country	Number	Number of personnel	Revenue
Primary production	20.9%	3.5%	0.6%
Processing	17.7%	31.7%	41.9%
Services	61.4%	64.8%	57.5%

Source: Statistics Finland, Structural business and financial statement statistics

number of enterprises in the whole country grew by 2.8%. Between 2013 and 2019, the number of employees in companies increased by 14.9% in Helsinki and by 3.5% in the whole country.

In Helsinki, the industrial structure was highly service-intensive, as nearly 88.2% of Helsinki's enterprises operated in the service sectors in 2019. Helsinki plays an important role in the business activities of both the Helsinki Metropolitan Area and Finland as a whole. Helsinki is an important area of business activity that offers the opportunity to innovate, develop new things and make profitable and stable business.

### COVID-19 HAS TWO KINDS OF EFFECTS

In the case of companies, COVID-19 has two kinds of effects. In those enterprises and industries most af-

ected by the restrictions, turnover has fallen sharply compared to 2019. The decrease in turnover and sales has directly hit jobs and employment in the city.

In particular, restaurant and accommodation services, arts, entertainment and recreation as well as specialised shops have been severely affected by the restrictions. This has been reflected both in the slight increase in the number of bankruptcies opened and the small number of companies started. On the other hand, growth has been seen in many sectors, such as construction, grocery trade and information and communication, which have not been greatly affected by the restrictions.

Summary of the industrial structure of Helsinki and Finland as a whole in terms of number of enterprises, number of employees and turnover in 2019

# Industries most affected by the restrictions, turnover has fallen sharply compared to 2019.

## SMART CITY DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATIVE EXPERIMENTS

Helsinki has continued and expanded its experimental platform activities. Companies can now propose innovation cooperation to develop their own business through the new testbed.helsinki website. In addition, the city publishes various challenge and experiment competitions on the site, which are used to find the best solutions.

Innovations have been developed in areas such as intelligent transport, mobility of the elderly, air quality, energy efficiency and learning environments. The city's divisions also employ innovation agents, whose task is to facilitate cooperation between companies and the city and to find new sustainable solutions to various challenges facing the city.

One of the key innovation development environments of the Smart City of Helsinki is located in Kalasatama, where business services have been developed and cooperation across the city's divisions has been strengthened. Local residents have participated in the activities and actively started using the smart city solutions, and they have also felt that they can lead a more sustainable everyday life in this area than in their previous places of residence.

In the next phase, which has already started, the activities will be extended to other city districts. A new theme for smart city development is the digitalisation of the natural environment and new solutions for green infrastructure, which also involve interesting opportunities for new business.

## GREEN GROWTH AND A CIRCULAR ECONOMY CLUSTER PROGRAMME

The city wants to promote green growth business so that the post-pandemic recovery can take place in accordance with sustainable development. Helsinki is launching a new circular economy cluster programme, which aims to create business in line with circular economy, especially in construction.

As part of the post-pandemic recovery, new business incubator activities will also be established on the campuses of universities and universities of applied sciences, aiming to create more R&D&I- and student-oriented entrepreneurship and jobs. Sustainability and positive social impact are growing phenomena and drivers in Helsinki's growth company ecosystem, especially among students and young people.

### SUCCESSSES:

- Successful and participatory Smart City piloting in Kalasatama and a decision to expand the activities.
- Helsinki launches a circular economy cluster programme as part of a sustainable recovery.

### DEVELOPMENT TARGETS:

- Innovative procurement and wider use of different procurement models have not been possible.

## Housing and communities



Living neighbourhoods offer the opportunity for a good and active life, based on safe and pleasant living and urban space. Good planning and smooth movement ensure a well-functioning daily life. An inspiring, high-quality and diverse cultural life is a key part of the city's vitality and comfort and essential for well-being. Culture and arts play an important role in promoting community spirit, increasing mental well-being and providing experiences of participation. During the council term, Helsinki has prepared a vision for arts and culture that extends to 2030.

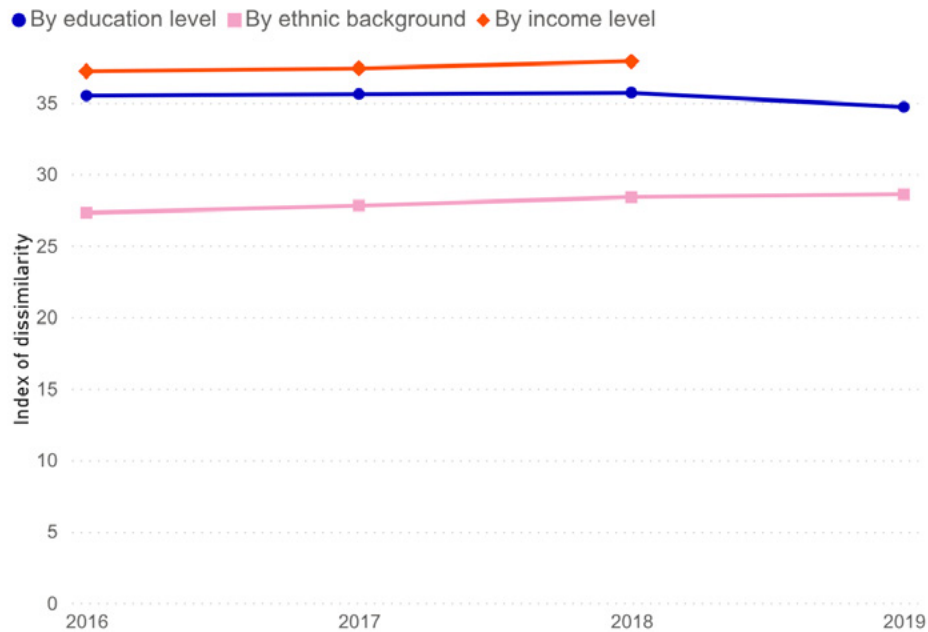
### HOUSING COSTS KEEP GROWING

SDG 11 (*Sustainable cities and communities*) is achieved in Helsinki in many respects, but special attention should be paid to enabling affordable housing, preventing segregation and providing residents with participation opportunities. The population of Helsinki is growing, and housing construction has remained at a record level for the past few years. The development of residential areas will continue through both the construction of new areas and the development of existing ones. Housing construction is strong in Kalasatama, Jätkäsaari, Kruunuvuorenranta, Kuninkaantammi and Pasila.

Housing prices will also continue to rise, which is a challenge for affordable housing. Helsinki plans to develop indicators for analysing the realisation of af-



## Index of dissimilarity



Source: City of Helsinki, Urban Research and Statistics

fordable housing, measuring the relationship between income and housing expenditure.

### PREVENTING SEGREGATION

The City of Helsinki aims to be a European model city for preventing *segregation* in residential areas and has been fairly successful in this regard. Helsinki has internationally been regarded as a city of relatively mild segregation, but there are also signs of worrying developments in Helsinki.

Although no part of the city has deteriorated in absolute terms, the development of well-being has been faster in the most prosperous regions than in other regions, which has increased disparities. At the same time, deprivation has become more multi-layered with, for example, low income, unemployment and low educational level accumulating more clearly in the same areas. The socio-economically weakest regions are mainly located in eastern and north-eastern Helsinki.

### SEGREGATION CAN BE SEEN AS DIFFERENTIATED SERVICE NEEDS

Ethnic segregation in Helsinki is also relatively mild on the international scale, compared to Stockholm or Copenhagen, for example. However, there has been an increase in segregation over the past 10 years. The share of immigrants and their children born in Finland of the population of Helsinki has increased considerably in the 21st century and, at the same time, large changes have taken place in the demographic structure of individual areas.

Regional differences in the socio-economic structure of the population are reflected in differences in morbidity and perceived well-being. This is reflected in regionally differentiated service needs. There are also significant regional differences in the types of pupils and children in schools and day-care centres.

In addition, regional differences are reflected in perceived safety. Studies have shown that the segregation development also has an impact on migration choices and on the segregation of housing prices and school learning outcomes. Migration within the city can intensify the segregation development, if people who move house start making their choices based on the characteristics of the areas, markedly favouring other areas and avoiding others.

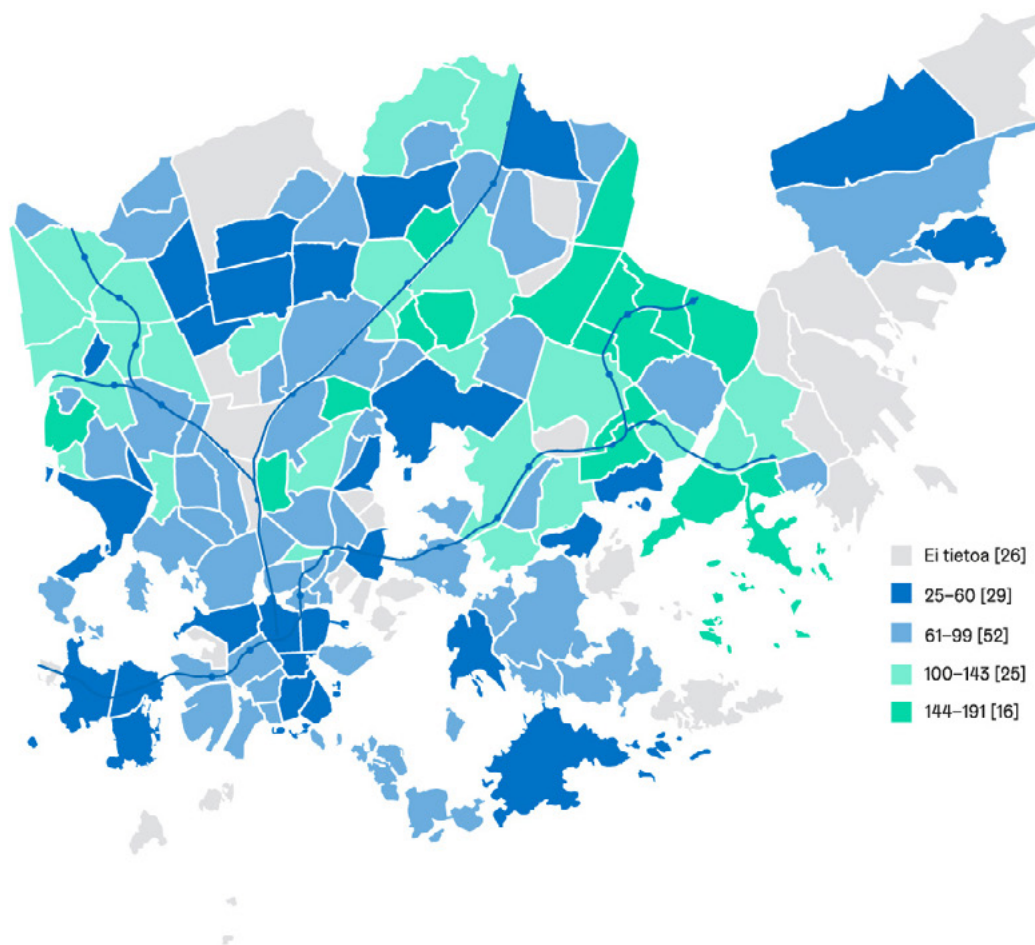
### DISTINCTIVE, VIBRANT AND INTERESTING RESIDENTIAL AREAS

With the Helsinki City Strategy, the importance and value of complementary construction in old areas alongside completely new residential areas has increased in recent years. The positive change increases well-being and creates sustainable growth for the city.

Helsinki is a pioneer in sustainable urban development. Sustainable urban development in Helsinki means an energy-efficient, dense city that is built around rail connections in a climate-wise manner and utilising the circular economy. It also means a socially sustainable city where the segregation of residential areas is halted by active urban renewal.

Helsinki launches a new cross-division urban re-

The socioeconomic sum index of Helsinki May 2020. The index sums up the portion of low education level, unemployed and low income residents. Education data from turn of the year 2019, unemployment percentage from turn of the year 2018 and income data from the year 2017 (grey = no data).



newal model with [Malminkartano-Kannelmäki](#), [Malmi](#) and [Mellunkylä](#) selected as pilot areas. In these areas, a significant part of the built environment has reached a stage in its life cycle where renewal is called for. The choice was also influenced by the location of the regions near good rail connections.

The aim of the urban renewal is to improve the comfort and attractiveness of the residential areas comprehensively across division boundaries and to enable high-quality complementary construction. The urban renewal is a tool by which Helsinki aims to achieve this strategic goal and, thereby, enable the equality and well-being of the city districts. The aim of the urban renewal is to both preserve and develop distinctive, vibrant and interesting residential areas that offer different options for living, outdoor activities and enjoyment.

#### SUCCESSSES:

- Experiences of the urban renewal model and its extension to new areas.
- Helsinki has generally been reasonably successful in tackling the development of segregation.

#### DEVELOPMENT TARGETS:

- The growth of the city threatens local green areas, which are particularly important for disadvantaged people.
- Housing costs are constantly increasing in Helsinki.
- Differences between regions have increased, and ethnic segregation has increased over the past 10 years.

#### Links to related programmes, reports and websites

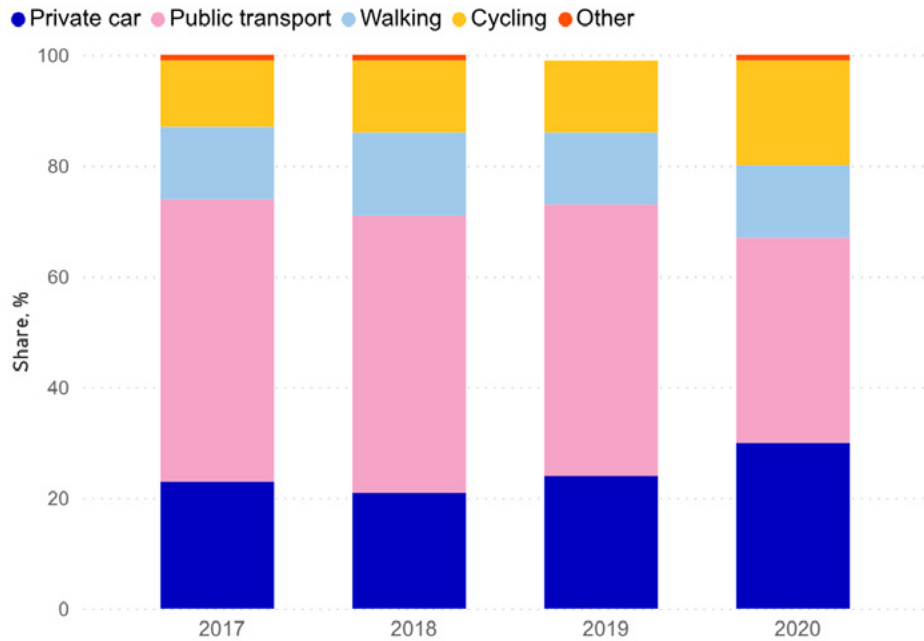
- [Helsinki New Horizons website](#)

## Sustainable infrastructure



Sustainable infrastructure is the foundation of the city, and this is particularly linked with SDGs 11 (*Sustainable cities and communities*) and 9 (*Industry, innovation and infrastructure*). In these goals, Helsinki should still invest especially in environmental health,

## Modal split by main mode of transportation



Source: City of Helsinki, Urban Environment Division

climate-friendly and adaptive planning, promoting clean technologies and nature-based solutions. In Helsinki, the infrastructure is functional and good development takes place all the time, in construction and traffic planning.

vesting in public transport, especially in the development of rail traffic, and cycling. Promoting cycling as a mode of transport improves and extensively develops the comfort and vitality of the city and the functionality of the transport system.

### HELSINKI IS GROWING INTO A DENSE CITY

The master plan is a long-term land use plan that guides the development of the city's community structure. It affects what Helsinki will be like in decades from now. A new master plan is drawn up in Helsinki approximately every ten years, and it guides the zoning.

The 2016 master plan enables Helsinki to grow into a dense city with several centres connected by rail traffic: the metro, trains and light rail lines. Construction has been specifically targeted at rail traffic hubs and around major stations. For example, Malmi, Itäkeskus, Kontula, Herttoniemi, Kannelmäki and Malminkartano can grow into new centres with diverse housing, services and jobs.

According to the master plan, Helsinki is still a green city whose strengths are urban forests and cultural environments. Important new areas for recreation and tourism are planned for islands no longer used by the Finnish Defence Forces.

As regards traffic planning, Helsinki has invested in sustainable traffic planning by, for example, in-

### ACCESSIBLE HELSINKI

The Accessibility Guidelines of the City of Helsinki serve as uniform general guidelines for the whole city and all the administrative branches in accessibility work. The accessibility guidelines are divided into five focus areas: zoning and traffic planning, buildings, public areas, living environment and services.

The accessibility guidelines apply to all the administrative branches whose activities are linked to the entity in question. The accessibility of public areas and buildings in Helsinki is progressing in the right direction, but the progress has been considerably slower than originally thought.

Among the successes in accessibility, we could mention the accessibility recognition given to the Lammassaari duckboard path by the Council on Disability and the National Accessibility Award given to the Hämeentie street renovation project by the Helsinki and Uusimaa Visually Impaired Association.

Various guides have been prepared to promote accessibility, including guides for schools, day-care centres and indoor swimming pools, and separate

# Helsinki joined the World Green Building Council's Net Zero Carbon Buildings Commitment.

accessibility requirements have been added to the quality requirements of social and health care facilities.

## IMPROVED ENERGY EFFICIENCY IN CONSTRUCTION

According to the Carbon-neutral Helsinki 2035 Action Plan, the energy consumption of new building stock in the Helsinki region must decrease significantly, local renewable energy production must increase and emissions from centralised energy production must decrease considerably.

The city carried out an extensive study of the emission and cost impacts of a new area's energy solutions in the Malmi Airport area. An energy survey of the carbon-neutral Malmi Airport area was prepared as a basis for the planning of the area's energy system and in order to achieve the carbon neutrality objectives.

The aim is to implement a carbon-neutral energy system in the Malmi Airport area that provides energy with the lowest possible emissions from the beginning of construction.

## DEVELOPING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF LIVING IN BLOCKS OF FLATS

In addition to regional energy systems, the city's main instruments for planning a carbon-neutral city include zoning, plot allocation conditions and land use agreements. In 2019, the city's plot reservation terms were tightened to the strictest level in Finland, the A2018 energy efficiency level became mandatory in quality and price tender competitions, and carbon neutrality also favours plot reservation on other plots.

In December 2019, Helsinki joined the World Green Building Council's Net Zero Carbon Buildings Commitment. The city commits to making the energy use of all buildings controlled by the city car-

bon-neutral by 2030 and to developing its construction guidance towards carbon-neutral buildings by 2030.

Six new projects were approved in 2019 for the Re-thinking Urban Housing programme aimed at improving the quality of living in blocks of flats in Helsinki. The development theme in all six projects is sustainable construction. There will be three buildings in the same block in Oulunkylä: Sustainable Apartment Building, Living Building and Wooden Apartment Block of the Future.

In Helsinki, developers have been encouraged for several years to build energy-efficient buildings by offering a 30% discount on the building permit fee for a residential building project if the site is designed for a low energy level. In 2019, a policy was also made to abolish the permit fee for smaller geothermal heating systems that are drilled to less than 300 metres.

## ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH – GOOD WATER QUALITY, MAJOR CHALLENGES IN AIR QUALITY

Helsinki's environmental health is at a good level on the global scale. Drinking water and also swimming water are of good quality, with the exception of occasional outbreaks of blue-green algae. The health risks associated with waste and chemicals are also low.

The main causes of health risk are air quality and noise. In particular, indoor air involves many challenges, also in the city's service buildings. The problems with indoor air are caused by, among other things, the repair backlog and the risky structures of old buildings. Helsinki has developed a ten-year indoor air programme to help solve indoor air problems.

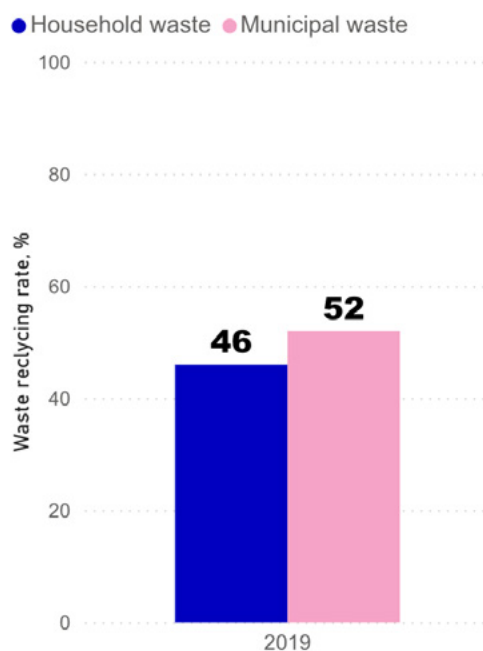
The air quality in Helsinki quality has improved in recent decades and is relatively good on the international scale. However, the health-based annual limit value for nitrogen dioxide in the EU Air Quality Directive is still being exceeded or at risk of being exceeded in the street canyons in the city centre.

This is due to exhaust emissions from traffic, especially diesel vehicles. Respirable particles, i.e. dust, also reduce air quality, especially in spring and in the vicinity of large construction sites.

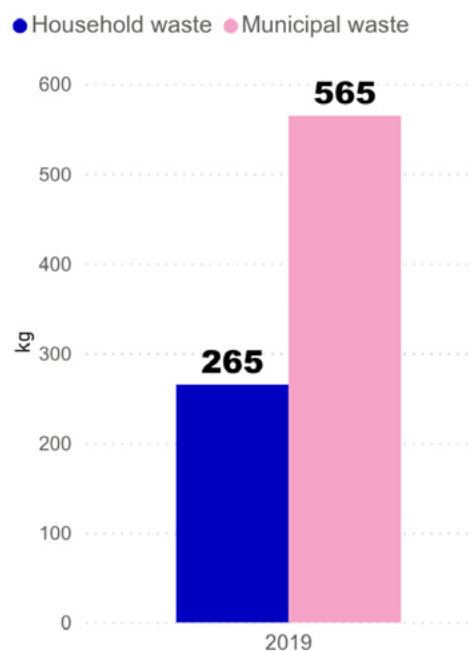
## NOISE PROBLEMS CAUSED BY ROAD TRAFFIC

In the case of street dust, too, there is still a risk of exceeding the limit value. In dense single-family house areas, air quality is decreased by residential wood burning in fireplaces and sauna stoves. In the Helsinki Metropolitan Area, particulate emissions from fireplaces are even higher than those of traffic. In addition, black carbon from wood-burning smoke warms the climate. The city's Air Quality Plan aims to reduce emissions that are harmful to health.

## Waste recycling rate, %



## Amount of waste per capita, kg



Source: Helsinki Region Environmental Services HSY

Environmental noise is a significant factor reducing the quality and comfort of the living environment in Helsinki. Strong continuous noise also causes damage to health. The biggest noise problem is caused by road traffic.

37% of Helsinki residents live in areas where the noise level caused by road traffic exceeds the reference level of 55 dB during the day. Noise is also caused locally by, for example, construction and renovation work, public events and restaurants. The City of Helsinki's noise abatement work is guided by the noise abatement action plan for 2018–2022. Noise problems are prevented by land use and traffic planning.

### SUCCESSSES:

- Safety of the transport system: no traffic deaths in Helsinki in 2019.
- Energy efficiency in new construction has improved considerably.
- Taking accessibility considerations into account in planning has improved, and Helsinki has received awards for it.

### DEVELOPMENT TARGETS:

- Noise, air pollution and dust reduce comfort and threaten health.

- Indoor air problems in the city's service buildings.
- Improving the energy efficiency of the existing building stock.

## Responsible procurement and circular economy



Responsible procurement reduces negative environmental impacts and promotes positive impacts. The city will also be able to support the creation of responsible markets by leading the way in the development and implementation of new solutions that are energy- and material-efficient and promote the circular economy and the preservation of biodiversity.

### PROCUREMENT CAN CONTRIBUTE TO SUSTAINABILITY ON A LARGE SCALE

The City of Helsinki's annual procurement volume is approximately €4 billion, making it Finland's largest operator engaging in public procurement. Helsinki is committed to promoting environmental, social and economic responsibility in its procurement, and the city has a comprehensive network of responsible procurement.

In accordance with the city's environmental policy, environmental impact assessment must be car-

# The City of Helsinki's annual procurement volume is approximately €4 billion

ried out in all procurements exceeding the national threshold value. The promotion of responsible procurement is implemented in particular by the [City of Helsinki's procurement strategy](#), which was approved by the City Board in December 2020.

In the new procurement strategy, Helsinki places greater emphasis on the responsibility and effectiveness of procurement. The three main themes of the strategy are functional markets and promoting innovations; impact and responsibility; and procurement management and procurement skills.

Although Helsinki is very committed to promoting responsible procurement at the upper level, there is still work to be done in the implementation of the

objectives. The challenge has been to systematically link the responsibility criteria to the procurement processes, which would require better procurement management, training and awareness-raising.

In addition, monitoring and impact assessment should be developed. In order to facilitate the preparation of procurement, the city's common criteria bank was established in 2020 to collect successful examples of the responsibility criteria used in procurement.

## HELSINKI INVESTS IN LOW-CARBON PROCUREMENT

In particular, there is still work to be done in acknowledging global responsibility and human rights and in promoting the circular economy and nature-based solutions. Better progress has been made in taking environmental and climate considerations into account, as well as in employment through procurement.

Helsinki has begun to take climate impacts into account in its procurement through the six-year Canemure project. The aim of using carbon footprint calculation is to take better account of climate impacts in procurement. The project has put emission reduction measures into practice and carried out development work in, among other things, building and infrastructure construction and food, textile and ICT procurement.

In 2020, Helsinki also signed Green Deal agreements for emission-free construction sites and the reduction of harmful substances in procurement in early childhood education. The Green Deal is a voluntary agreement between the state and the public sec-



Image: Jussi Hellsten

tor or business sector to reduce emissions and harmful substances.

## CIRCULAR ECONOMY HAS PROGRESSED SLOWLY

Helsinki has recognised the significance of the circular and sharing economy in solving major sustainability challenges. New models of the sharing economy created by residents and businesses diversify the city socially and financially.

In accordance with the Carbon-neutral Helsinki 2035 Action Plan, the City has prepared a road map for the circular and sharing economy, the time span and goals of which extend to 2035. Work in Helsinki is only just beginning, and the implementation of the road map requires additional resources for, among other things, the implementation and monitoring of measures, personnel training, surveys and various pilots.

Until now, the circular economy has not grown to a very large extent, but its importance is expected to increase in the future. The circular economy has so far been promoted mainly through the use of recycled materials and soil masses in infrastructure construction, which have also achieved significant emission and cost savings.

The circular economy is also promoted through the city's new demolition guidelines and, at the same time, the capacity and utilisation possibilities of the city's own recycling operators have been investigated. Furniture recycling and the Tavarat Kiertoone recycling system have also been developed, but there is still work to be done. To support phenomenon-based learning, the KIERRE model for future skills from circular economy has been developed, combining natural resource awareness, climate understanding, design education and creative learning.

### SUCCESSSES:

- The new procurement strategy places a strong emphasis on responsibility.
- Guidelines and cooperation have been developed to promote responsible procurement. The Canemure project has contributed to the development of low-carbon procurement.
- A road map for the circular and sharing economy has been prepared to promote the circular economy. The promotion of the circular economy has started in many ways: for example, through demolition guidelines, the Kierre concept for circular economy education at schools and the circular economy cluster.

### DEVELOPMENT TARGETS:

- The circular economy and sustainable procurement have not yet been sufficiently promoted, and many targets are progressing too slowly.

## Links to related programmes, reports and websites

- [Road map for the circular and sharing economy](#)
- [Procurement strategy](#)

## Sustainable tourism, events and city marketing



Ensuring sustainable growth is the city's most important task. This is linked to SDG 8 (*Decent work and economic growth*), which also highlights the promotion of sustainable tourism. The tourism and event industry is a key part of the city's vitality as the capital. Sustainability has also been put at the forefront of the development of tourism, events and urban marketing in Helsinki. Responsibility is emphasised in the development of tourism and in the Roadmap for Events. In 2020–2021, Helsinki is also co-ordinating the Carbon-neutral Tourism project, whose the long-term goal is to contribute to reducing CO2 emissions and increasing energy efficiency in the tourism sector.

## RESPONSIBILITY INCREASES HELSINKI'S ATTRACTIVENESS AND COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Urban marketing has highlighted sustainability, equality and nature as Helsinki's strengths. Through responsibility, Helsinki seeks a competitive advantage internationally, attracts experts and companies to Helsinki and supports the sustainable growth of visitors. The aim is to make Helsinki a world leader in sustainable solutions and a pioneer in responsibility.

Helsinki Marketing's digital service Think Sustainably helps locals and visitors to choose more sustainable ways to live in Helsinki and enjoy their time in the city. The service is based on criteria for more responsible choices tailored for Helsinki, which highlight local operators and services that invest in responsibility in their operations, such as restaurants, shops, destinations, events, venues and accommodation options.

Helsinki Marketing's Helsinki Freedom concept aims to attract international experts to Helsinki. The concept presents ten cornerstones of good life in Helsinki, which are strongly related to various themes of responsibility. In Helsinki, freedom means that everyone can live their own kind of life.

The Global Destination Sustainability (GDS) index measures destinations using social and environmental responsibility indicators. Helsinki is one of the founding members of the index as part of the ICCA Scandinavian Chapter. In 2019, Helsinki was ranked 17th among 50 cities.

# Helsinki is one of the most popular congress destinations in Northern Europe.

## EVENTS ARE AN IMPORTANT PART OF URBAN CULTURE

Events are the best possible means of supporting and implementing the goals of the city strategy for an international, vibrant and fascinating city. Helsinki's events are original, diverse, responsible and functional.

The offering of events has been developed in Helsinki for a long time with notable results. The city is one of the most popular congress destinations in Northern Europe.

Helsinki has many hard-working event producers on both a small and large scale. High-quality and easily accessible cultural and sports events bring people together and increase mutual understanding.

The events have complex social and cultural impacts as well as strong economic multiplier effects. A Roadmap for Events has been developed in Helsinki to support and develop cooperation related to events.

The tourism and event sectors have been severely affected by the COVID-19 crisis, and it is still difficult to assess how these sectors will recover after the crisis.

### SUCSESSES:

- Helsinki won a top position in the European Commission's new European Capital of Smart Tourism 2019 competition.
- The Think Sustainably service has encouraged more than 90% of users to take concrete steps to increase responsibility (Impact Analysis 2019, Demos Helsinki).

### DEVELOPMENT TARGETS:

- As part of the recovery from COVID-19, focusing support measures on the divisions and particularly on sustainable tourism and event production.
- Developing carbon footprint calculation in the tourism, restaurant and event sectors and thereby reducing the carbon footprint on the basis of lessons learned in projects.
- Developing tourism-related mobility services through concepts like Mobility as a Service, particularly involving maritime transport.

### Links to related programmes, reports and websites

- [Sustainable Tourism](#)
- [City marketing](#)



Image: Maija Astikainen



# Examples of Helsinki's actions



## Testbed Helsinki

Through the Testbed Helsinki website you can comprehensively find development and testing opportunities for new products and services offered by the City of Helsinki. The site is specifically aimed at companies and RDI actors. The key content areas of our...

[Read more](#)



## Suburban regeneration model

Helsinki has launched a new kind of suburban regeneration model, the purpose of which is to comprehensively create new vitality in residential areas, across the City's administrative divisions.

[Read more](#)



## Think Sustainably service

The Think Sustainably service helps to choose more sustainable ways of living in Helsinki and enjoying the city. It filters content from the MyHelsinki.fi website to suggest sustainable services, such as restaurants, shops, sights, events and accommodation. The base...

[Read more](#)



## Employment conditions in public procurements

Helsinki is applying employment conditions in the City's procurements to help people in a difficult position in the labour market with finding work. The employment conditions are a part of the responsibility...

[Read more](#)

# Summary of indicators

## People

Indicator	Development trend 2017 >	SDG
	<span style="color: green;">●</span> positive <span style="color: yellow;">●</span> unchanged <span style="color: orange;">●</span> negative	
Perceived quality of life – Share of people who feel their quality of life is good on average (%)	<span style="color: green;">●</span>	3
Perceived health – Share of people who feel their health is mediocre or worse than mediocre (%)	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span>	3
Life expectancy	<span style="color: green;">●</span>	3
Deprivation index	<span style="color: green;">●</span>	1,10
Mental well-being (entire population and children)	<span style="color: orange;">●</span>	3
Body mass index – Percentage of overweight adults	<span style="color: green;">●</span>	3
Body mass index – Percentage of overweight children	<span style="color: orange;">●</span>	3
Share of lonely children and young people	<span style="color: orange;">●</span>	3
Children and young people with a hobby (%)	<span style="color: green;">●</span>	3, 10
Child welfare reports due to an adolescent's mental health issues and/or substance abuse	<span style="color: orange;">●</span>	3
Share of people who exercise (%)	<span style="color: green;">●</span>	3
Number of people exposed to traffic noise (2012 > 2017)	<span style="color: orange;">●</span>	11
Share of people with a higher education degree (%)	<span style="color: green;">●</span>	4
Share of early leavers from upper secondary education (%)	<span style="color: orange;">●</span>	4
Share of children in daycare and pre-primary education (%)	<span style="color: green;">●</span>	4
Share of foreign-language speakers among upper secondary school graduates (%)	<span style="color: green;">●</span>	4
Share of people without a place to study (%)	<span style="color: orange;">●</span>	4
Share of people with only basic education (%)	<span style="color: green;">●</span>	4,10
NEET share (Not in Employment, Education or Training)	<span style="color: green;">●</span>	10
Gender gap in unemployment	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span>	5,10
Gender pay gap	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span>	5,10
Gender gap in perceived quality of life	<span style="color: orange;">●</span>	5,10
Gender gap in learning outcomes (FINEEC and matriculation examination)	<span style="color: green;">●</span>	5,10
Number of homeless	<span style="color: green;">●</span>	1
Perceived safety	<span style="color: green;">●</span>	11
Gini coefficient	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span>	10
Turnout in municipal elections (2012 > 2017)	<span style="color: green;">●</span>	16
Number of young people committing crimes (per 10,000 young people)	<span style="color: orange;">●</span>	11
Crime rate	<span style="color: green;">●</span>	11

## Economy

Indicators	Development trend 2017 >	
	<span style="color: green;">●</span> positive <span style="color: yellow;">●</span> unchanged <span style="color: red;">●</span> negative	SDG
Share of population receiving housing allowance (%)	●	1
Share of children living in low-income households (%)	●	1
Share of people with low income (%)	●	1
Share of population receiving income support (%)	●	1
Amount of debt in households	●	1
Unemployment rate	●	8
Long-term unemployment	●	8
Youth unemployment rate	●	8
Investments in research and development	●	9
Number of new enterprises or start-ups	●	9
Companies' willingness to recommend Helsinki as a location (share of recommendations)	●	9
Regional segregation by ethnic background	●	10
Air quality (NO <sub>2</sub> , PM <sub>10</sub> ; Mäkelänkatu and Mannerheimintie)	●	11
Share of sustainable modes of transport	●	11
Number of traffic accidents per 100,000 inhabitants	●	11
Municipal and household waste recycling rate (also residents in strategy)	●	11

## Environment

Indicators	Development trend 2017 >	
	<span style="color: green;">●</span> positive <span style="color: yellow;">●</span> unchanged <span style="color: red;">●</span> negative	SDG
CO <sub>2</sub> emissions (CO <sub>2</sub> eq.) and change in emissions: total emissions	●	13
CO <sub>2</sub> emissions per capita	●	13
Renewable energy production and share (%)	●	7
Energy consumption per capita (kWh)	●	7
Total surface area of forested and wooded areas or their relative share of the land area	●	15
Number of nature conservation areas and their share of the total area (%)	●	15
Percentages of wastewater treatment (nitrogen and phosphorus)	●	6
Ecological state of surface waters (2013 > 2019)	●	14

# Summary of the sustainable development report

**O**n a global scale, Helsinki is at a relatively good level when it comes to sustainable development, and the implementation of many of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is already well underway. However, this does not mean that additional effort is no longer required for us to reach these goals.

Helsinki has not fully integrated the SDG framework as foundation for its operations and management, even though sustainability is taken into account in various fields and Helsinki has numerous sub-programmes in place for promoting sustainability. A wider-scale sustainability review and the use of the SDG framework could help the City promote sustainability across its entire organisation and between different programmes.

Moreover, strengthening recognition of the effectiveness and synergy opportunities between different goals would be beneficial, e.g. identifying ways in which climate actions and energy efficiency can promote a sustainable economy and vitality in the long run, or how biodiversity and sustainable mobility can promote health and well-being.

## **ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY POSES THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE**

Improving ecological sustainability presents a big challenge for Helsinki. Our Earth Overshoot day comes earlier each year, and the pace at which we are reducing our emissions is not yet sufficient.

Furthermore, transferring away from linear economy towards circular economy, and protecting biodiversity, are some of the challenges in achieving ecological sustainability. Helsinki's global impact should be assessed in more depth from a sustainability angle, and negative effects should be reduced while positive ones should be enhanced.

## **HEALTH AND WELL-BEING HAVE INCREASED**

The coronavirus crisis has put a strain on social sustainability and the economy in a number of ways. The deterioration of people's mental well-being and the increase in loneliness, unemployment and inequality are particularly worrying. The pandemic has wors-

ened the gap in children and young people's learning, and harmed their mental well-being.

According to a well-being report, the majority of Helsinki's residents feel that their health and quality of life are good. However, differences in welfare and mental well-being were mentioned as some of the challenges. Other concerns revolved around children's overweightness and lack of physical activity.

However, many steps have been taken in the promotion of health and well-being during the strategy period. Furthermore, a physical activity programme has been used to create models for promoting active lifestyles, and the Mukana youth social inclusion programme is working to prevent social exclusion amongst young people.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE IS ON THE RISE**

Despite the coronavirus pandemic, Helsinki's financial situation is fairly good. The City has also been able to invest in progress in numerous ways, including its ambitious digitalisation programme, various innovation activities and development projects.

So far, cultural sustainability has been on the back burner, but in the future it will receive more attention and be linked to the other areas of sustainability. The importance of culture as something that increases well-being is already recognised as a key element. Furthermore, the connection between the promotion of the SDGs and urban culture and new democracy trends should be assessed in more detail.

The dozens of stories included in this report demonstrate that the City's divisions and municipal enterprises have been actively carrying out a diverse range of actions that promote the UN Sustainable Development Goals. All in all, Helsinki has the competence and all the opportunities to become a leading city in sustainable solutions and to share this expertise globally.

# Report assessment by the UN Youths of Helsinki

**A**s part of the *From Agenda to Action 2021* sustainable development reporting efforts, we asked the UN Youth of Helsinki association to provide comments and views on the report content. The comments are an element of Helsinki's efforts around continuous sustainable development. For the comments, the UN Youths were provided with the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the content of the report in advance, and the comments were then reviewed in a joint discussion. The UN Youth association will also have the opportunity to speak about the comments in the release event for the report. The comments yielded a great deal of valuable insights and development suggestions for our further efforts. The following is a summary of the observations made by the UN Youth association.

## **General observations:**

- The report acknowledges the comprehensiveness and intertwined nature of the agenda goals, which is seen as both a challenge and opportunity.
- The report is clear and easy to read.

Collaboration between local residents and various sectors is extremely important and should be increased.

- However, the SDGs should be integrated into the planning and implementation of the City's key programmes and strategies in a more informed manner, which is acknowledged in the report. This would ensure that the impacts expedite the realisation of the sustainable development goals even more effectively than before.
- It would be important to involve young people as early on as possible in order to integrate their contribution into the end results of corresponding projects.
- As it is, the City of Helsinki SDG report rarely goes beyond presenting abstract goals, which is evident in the scarcity or lacking implementation of measures to fulfil certain development needs.
- Collaboration between local residents and various sectors is extremely important and should be increased. An example would be to utilise Helsinki's strong start-up culture more efficiently to develop sustainable solutions.

## **Environment:**

- It would be important to increase young people's awareness of various practical engagement opportunities through communications, in order to alleviate climate anxiety. The repercussions of the impending climate crisis will impact the future of young people, which is why they should be more actively heard and included in climate-related decision-making.
- Helsinki has the potential and, due to its globally privileged position, the obligation to pioneer various trials related to energy and consumption.
- Contiguous and expansive green areas should be secured in construction efforts, as they support the well-being of urban residents. Furthermore, it is important to ensure easy access to natural locations and green areas for everyone, not only those with a car.

## **People:**

- As an example, all age groups are affected by loneliness, which has been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. As such, it would be important to know how the City has supported and plans to support those who suffer from it.

- The report places a fairly heavy emphasis on obesity as a national health challenge. However, the measures primarily focus on increasing physical activity, even though it would be important to examine and address the root causes more widely. Another aspect that should be considered in this context, too, is mental health.
- It should be acknowledged that an approach centred around human rights must go beyond simply eliminating discrimination (for example, the right to sufficient income must be considered). In addition, the report mentions intersectionality but does not cover it as an overarching theme. The report as a whole should also represent sexual and gender minorities more clearly.
- The report does not directly indicate how experiences of insecurity are related to participation and engagement. Furthermore, even though domestic violence is an important topic, the report once again neglects other sexual or gender-based violence. Other issues that are left unaddressed include harassment and hate speech, which have a massive impact on experiences of safety and social engagement.

**Economy:**

- We hope that, in the future, the economic section

of the report will more widely cover the ways in which financial themes intersect with the SDGs related to the well-being of people and the environment. For example, the protection of land and sea ecosystems should be considered in more detail, in addition to the effects of the economic section's themes on gender equality and inequality.

- We appreciate the City of Helsinki's willingness to change and commit to green values in the context of themes related to the economy, housing and infrastructure.
- Helsinki is a vibrant and growing region, which is why it is important to ensure that all residents of the area can enjoy the City's economic growth and opportunities.
- Other intersectional aspects, such as speaking a foreign language and having an immigrant background, should be covered more comprehensively in future reports.
- The term 'responsibility' is repeated towards the end of the report's economic section. In order to ensure that the Sustainable Development Goals can be achieved, clearer definitions for responsibility and related enticement schemes in the context of procurement, business operations, tourism and economic growth are required, as are clear, ambitious and effective frameworks.



Image: Jussi Hellsten



City of Helsinki, publications of the  
Central Administration 2021:31

ISBN: ISBN 978-952-331-978-3 (pdf)

Layout: Aste Helsinki

Cover image: Jussi Hellsten

