

Preventing sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment in accommodation

Guidelines for home accommodation providers and residents

Introduction

These guidelines are intended for increasing the sensitivity of home accommodation providers, home accommodation residents and volunteers of the Home Accommodation Network, to prevent sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment and to help deal with situations where these occur. However, by no means are the guidelines intended for taking a position on any individual's sexuality or sex life. It is good to note that sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment are gendered phenomena. Women and members of gender minorities are most often the ones experiencing them, while men are the perpetrators. Even so, the victim or the perpetrator can be anyone, regardless of gender.

The guidelines have been created by the Home Accommodation Network's support association *Kotimajoituksen tuki ry* (Home Accommodation Support) in collaboration with Elina Nikulainen, Expert on Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment.

The Home Accommodation Network promotes carefully considered and agreement-based home accommodation that takes safety considerations into account and is provided without compensation, with the person seeking asylum staying in a local home. Our network strives for equality between the parties involved in home accommodation, rather than a clear helper-beneficiary setup, while also recognising that the accommodation provider will have more authority than the asylum seeker who is staying in the accommodation provider's home. Asylum seekers often come from challenging backgrounds, which is why the right to privacy, private space and a safe environment are especially important. These guidelines present the safe space related issues that should be paid attention to already when you are still just considering your motives for offering home accommodation or when you are thinking about moving to home accommodation. When establishing or changing the common rules, it is good to keep in mind that differences between cultures, communities and personal habits can be considerable. If any challenges arise, it will be important for both parties to know their rights and that support is available and where to contact.

These guidelines, which complement the Home Accommodation Guide that you may already be familiar with, are focusing on different situations and factors that require vigilance from all of us. Many of the home accommodation residents are in a vulnerable situation for a variety of reasons, which may not only increase their risk of sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment, but can also reduce their ability to respond to situations where these occur. The Home Accommodation Network therefore considers it very important to be aware of the potential risks associated with home accommodation in order to prevent and respond to problematic situations.

Definitions (World Health Organization WHO)

Sexual exploitation: Actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.

Sexual abuse: Actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.

Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) also include sexual relations with a child, in any context. According to international definitions, everyone under the age of 18 is a child, regardless of national laws

Sexual harassment: any unwelcome sexual advance, requests for sex and sexual favours, verbal or physical or other kind of conduct that is of a sexual nature and might create a hostile, harmful or offensive environment.

Preventing sexual harassment

When you make a homestay contract, discuss the fact that the accommodation is not in any way remunerated. You can also return to this topic later on if necessary. Talk also about personal boundaries. Discussing boundaries can be challenging because of various culture related taboos, but it is important to go through the basic things. The home accommodation resident and the accommodation provider can both tell if they start to feel uncomfortable about something. They should also be able to trust that the other person will react in a decent way. Establishing communication that is based on trust and respect will help also later in any possible discussions regarding the crossing of boundaries. Keep in mind that the accommodation provider and the resident also have the right to cancel the stay at any point if it seems like the right solution for any given reason.

Home accommodation is meant to be a safe space where everyone can be themselves, without having to hide their gender identity, for example, or the gender of their partner. It is important to respect everyone's privacy in every possible way. The home accommodation resident nor the accommodation provider should be placed in a situation where intimate boundaries get

violated, such as by asking about sexual preferences or by exposing the resident to seeing or hearing sexual or sexually explicit content, on television for example.

Home accommodation provider: Avoid putting the resident in awkward situations where it is difficult to say "no". Remember that you, as the accommodation provider, have a position of authority over the resident, which affects the home accommodation resident's ability to maintain their personal boundaries. For example, a hug may be too intimate. Refrain from any kind of physical or romantic relationship with the home accommodation resident staying with you or in a property owned by you.

It is always better to be overly cautious because things such as cultural differences affect how easy or polite it feels to say "no" to the accommodation provider. There may also be cultural differences in how the resident experiences overtly erotic art, for example, and the kind of atmosphere it may create. Culture also influences things such as dressing appropriately and the practices using sauna. It is therefore good to be as sensitive as possible while in the common areas.

Any kind of forcing, pressure or violation of another's boundaries, taking advantage of another's position, touching another without permission or after a positive answer obtained through pressure is abuse and exploitation. Selling, profiting from or enabling another's sex work is against the Finnish law. Remember that anyone under 18 is a child and subject to special protection according to the international rules, which applies to consensual relationships as well.

Addressing sexual harassment

If you have concerns about the behaviour of a member of the network, a home accommodation provider or a resident, or if you are not sure what to do, please contact the Home Accommodation Network's support association with a low threshold. You can contact our Community Mobilization Advisor Eva (e.kuhlefelt@kotimajoitusverkosto.fi, 044 239 7049).

Contact the police directly if you witness any clear signs of violence. In the case of a minor, the Child Welfare Services should always be contacted, also when uncertain.

"If you notice that you are starting to have romantic feelings towards the other party or vice versa, or if any other feelings that are unsuited for home accommodation start to develop, a transfer to the new accommodation should be arranged through the reception centre or the Home Accommodation Network."

Considering the possible trauma of violence of a person seeking asylum in Finland

Many of the asylum seekers who have come to Finland may have experienced the abuse of their sexuality in their home country or during their journey. They may also have been demanded or pressured to have sex, in exchange for a place to stay or food for example. For members of sexual and gender minorities, discrimination and pressure may also have been

part of everyday life in their home country. It is of utmost importance that asylum seekers never get the impression that they are expected to engage in sexual acts in home accommodation. People who have experienced traumatic events may be very sensitive: they may startle, be extra cautious, have panic attacks and have a strong desire to please others. This is something to bear in mind when considering and during home accommodation. In addition, the memory of a traumatised person may not always function normally, which can affect both their ability to function and their image of trustworthiness.

If a person staying in home accommodation with you tells you about their experience of violence, you can refer them to the following services for support:

The reception centre where the home accommodation resident is registered
migri.fi/en/reception-centres

SERI Support Centre for Victims of Sexual Assault

thl.fi/fi/web/vakivalta/apua-ja-palveluja/seri-tukikeskus-seksuaalivakivallan-uhreille

Nollalinja - helpline for victims of domestic violence and violence against women

nollalinja.fi/en/

Women's Line

naistenlinja.fi/in-english

[Rape Crisis Centre Tukinainen](https://tukinainen.fi/en/)

tukinainen.fi/en/

[Shelters for victims of domestic violence](https://thl.fi/en/web/thlfi-en/services/special-government-services-in-social-welfare-and-health-care/shelters-for-victims-of-domestic-violence)

thl.fi/en/web/thlfi-en/services/special-government-services-in-social-welfare-and-health-care/shelters-for-victims-of-domestic-violence

Shelter Mona

monikanaiset.fi/en/shelter-mona/

Pro-tukipiste - support point for anyone who sells sexual services or works in the erotic industry

protukipiste.fi/en/

Centre for Torture Survivors

hdl.fi/en/support-and-action/immigrants/rehabilitation-for-torture-victims/centre-for-torture-survivors-in-finland/

Association for Mental Health, multilingual support services

mieli.fi/en/

Helsinki Pride Community - support conversations, service coordination and peer activities for asylum seekers and individuals of refugee and immigrant backgrounds in sexual and gender minorities

pride.fi/en/information-and-support/support-and-advice/

Finland does not currently have exit services for those who wish to leave or are considering leaving sex work.