

# HOUSE OF HELSINKI

## Annual Report 2024





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# Board 2024

**Artem Kuosti** – Chairperson

**Brix Ziemann** – Vise-Chairperson

**Veera Rautio** – Full Member



# Greetings from the chairperson

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## **At the heart of House of Helsinki's work in 2024 was community.**

This year highlighted the power of collective action, proving our strength lies in the people we serve and the networks we build.

### **Expanding Our Reach**

A major milestone in 2024 was expanding our team, thanks to a STEA grant that enabled us to hire a Communication Assistant. This strengthened our ability to connect with communities, improve communication, and enhance key projects like the integration guide for Ukrainian refugees under the REFUFIN project.

### **Supporting asylum seekers**

REFUFIN continued to be vital, offering online and offline support. With 1,481 online help requests and 105 offline cases assisting 277 individuals, we provided guidance on housing, employment, and legal matters.

Beyond Helsinki, our team engaged with communities in Rovaniemi, Imatra, and Pori, gathering insights on integration challenges. A survey with 686 responses will help shape future support systems.



### **Volunteering: Our Foundation**

Volunteers remain at the core of our work. In 2024, 90 new volunteers joined us, many with migration backgrounds, reinforcing our commitment to two-way integration.

**As we enter 2025,** we remain committed to fostering inclusive communities, strengthening advocacy, and expanding support networks. The funding landscape changes rapidly, and we must adapt to ensure sustainable NGO work. I am deeply grateful to every volunteer, partner, and supporter who has been part of this journey.

Together, we continue building a Finland where everyone can thrive.

### **Artem Kuosti**

Chairperson, House of Helsinki



# Our Employees

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**Darya Gulik**

Refudin-Project Manager

In 2024, the House of Helsinki team expanded after receiving a Paikka Auki grant from STEA for a one-year position. Following the recruitment process, we welcomed Yuno Tikhomirov as our new Communication Assistant, joining Darya Gulik and Nikolay Gofman.



**Nikolay Gofman**

Refudin-Project Coordinator

Yuno has played a key role in managing House of Helsinki's communications, including social media, creating brochures, website moderation, and supporting other general organizational tasks and events. As a talented social sector professional, Yuno brought significant improvements to our organization's visual culture and communication strategies.



**Yuno Tikhomirov**

Communications Assistant  
House of Helsinki

One of Yuno's most notable achievements was creating an updated integration guide—a cornerstone of the REFUFIN project—for people who fled the war in Ukraine and now live in Finland. This guide has become a central resource supporting individuals on their integration journey.

We are proud to have such a dedicated and highly skilled professional on our team, whose contributions have made a lasting impact on our work and the communities we serve.





# Advocacy and representation



## **"Ukraina ilta" 27.2.2024**

On February 27, 2024, House of Helsinki, representing the REFUFIN project, took part in an important event organized by Espoo International Lutheran Church, dedicated to honoring the unbreakable spirit of Ukraine.

HOH volunteers contributed in various roles, from assisting in the kitchen to helping with the program production. One of our volunteers, Maria Godunova, delivered a powerful and heartfelt speech to the audience, sharing her personal journey to Finland.

## **Järjestöbasaari 28.2.2024**

On February 28, 2024, HOH participated in the popular Järjestöbasaari event in Espoo, organized by HYTE and Omnia.

The event provided civil society organizations with an opportunity to present their activities, share informational materials, and engage directly with Omnia students.



*Photo: HOH volunteers at Järjestöbasaari event*



*Photo: HOH volunteers at Ukraina ilta" event*

## **Kansalaisareena 2024**

The Capital Region Integration Support Working Group (valikkoryhmä) strengthens the role and significance of NGOs and volunteers in supporting integration and settlement measures alongside official authorities.

The network brings together organizations, public officials, and professionals interested in developing integration practices. In 2024, Darya Gulik (House of Helsinki) shared the chairperson role with Elliisa Leino (City of Helsinki) in maintaining and coordinating the working group.





Photo: HOH team with volunteer Elena Tarashchanskaya from Rubikus.helpua at Maailma Kylässä 2024

## WORLD VILLAGE FESTIVAL 2024

On May 25, 2024, we had the amazing opportunity to showcase our organization at Finland's largest multicultural festival, World Village Festival. It was a wonderful day, and we are grateful to everyone who made it so special!

A huge thank you to our dedicated volunteers who came to help, and to everyone who stopped by to say hello. We were happy to see both new faces and familiar friends, which brought even more joy to the day.

It was a pleasure to share information about our work, welcome new volunteers, and receive kind words of appreciation for what we do.

We were also excited to meet Elena Tarashchanskaya, a volunteer from our international partner Rubikus.helpUA, and to discuss our shared efforts in supporting people fleeing the war in Ukraine.

Special thanks to Moniheli for the opportunity and the excellent hosting that made our participation possible. And a big thank you to the World Village Festival organizers for making all of this happen!

Together, we create change and celebrate diversity!



## SuomiAreena festival 2024 in Pori

Our chair person of House of Helsinki Artem Kuosti hosted a panel discussion on the topic “Finnishness 2.0 – How Do We Define Finnishness?” that was facilitated by Familia Ry during the SuomiAreena festival. The panel included Hunderra Assefa (Chairperson of the Finnish Muslim Forum), Päivi Majaniemi (Chairperson of the Finnish Roma Association), Dora Puhakka (Expert from the Jade community), and Janina Waenthongkham (Mixed Finns anti-racism expert and non-fiction author). House of Helsinki’s chair person Artem Kuosti hosted the panel and wrote a reflective article inspired by the dialogue.

The concept of Finnishness is diverse and owned by many. Finland has always been multicultural. We have had our own minorities for centuries. There has never been a single truth about Finnishness that everyone shares. The definition has changed according to who has been in power. The category of Finnishness needs to be expanded. We need an open discussion about who we Finns are. Who has the right to define someone else's identity? What is Finnishness? Who is Finnish?

Even if our personal preferences differ from traditional perceptions, each of us has a place in this community and the right to call ourselves Finnish.

*Photo: Hunderra Assefa (Chairperson of the Finnish Muslim Forum), Päivi Majaniemi (Chairperson of the Finnish Roma Association), Dora Puhakka (Expert from the Jade community), and Janina Waenthongkham (Mixed Finns anti-racism expert and non-fiction author)*





*Photo: by Bisher Sawan Photography / Darya Gulik with HOH volunteers at Integration 2024*

## **Integration 2024**

The REFUFIN project proudly represented House of Helsinki at Integration 2024 in Turku. This was a great opportunity to share information about REFUFIN's activities, connect with new partners, and attend insightful talks and panel discussions on integration.

We also saw this event as an excellent opportunity for our volunteers, who had the chance to expand their networks and gain valuable experience in the field of integration.

A big thank you to our amazing volunteers — Nadejda Ridal, Alena Anikushyna, and Olga Nemlander — for their fantastic work at our booth!

And of course, heartfelt thanks to Darya Gulik for making our participation possible!

One of our volunteers shared her thoughts on the experience:

“Participating in the Integration 2024 event was a valuable experience that deepened our understanding of current challenges in integration in Finland. I believe that our work within the REFUFIN project, along with active participation in events like this, not only raises awareness but also helps us find new ways to support those in need.

I warmly thank the organizers and all participants for the opportunity to share knowledge and experiences.”\_

The next Integration event will take place in 2026 in the City of Vantaa — we’re already looking forward to it!





REFUFIN 



# REFUFIN project

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The REFUFIN project (2023–2025) provides guidance, counseling, and support services to individuals who have fled the war in Ukraine and are now residing in Finland. Relunched in February 2023, the project also focuses on training and supporting volunteers and producing comprehensive support materials for Ukrainians and those working with them. The project is funded by STEA (Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations in Finland).

The year 2024 marked a period of growth for the project: operations expanded further in response to an increasing number of support requests and the arrival of new, active volunteers. The REFUFIN team also visited several cities and held meetings with the target group outside the capital region.

The REFUFIN project primarily operates through two core activities, designed to address the needs of Ukrainians:

1. Online Support. This service offers a platform on our website where individuals can submit questions related to their integration challenges. Common topics include housing, employment, education, navigating Finnish systems, and other aspects of adapting to life in Finland.
2. Offline Support. For those in need of in-person assistance, REFUFIN provides individual guidance and practical help, ensuring that people receive the support they need to deal with specific issues or processes.

*Photo: HOH communication assistant Yuno Tikhomirov and REFUFIN team: Nikolay Gofman and Darya Gulik*





# REFUFIN project 2024 in numbers

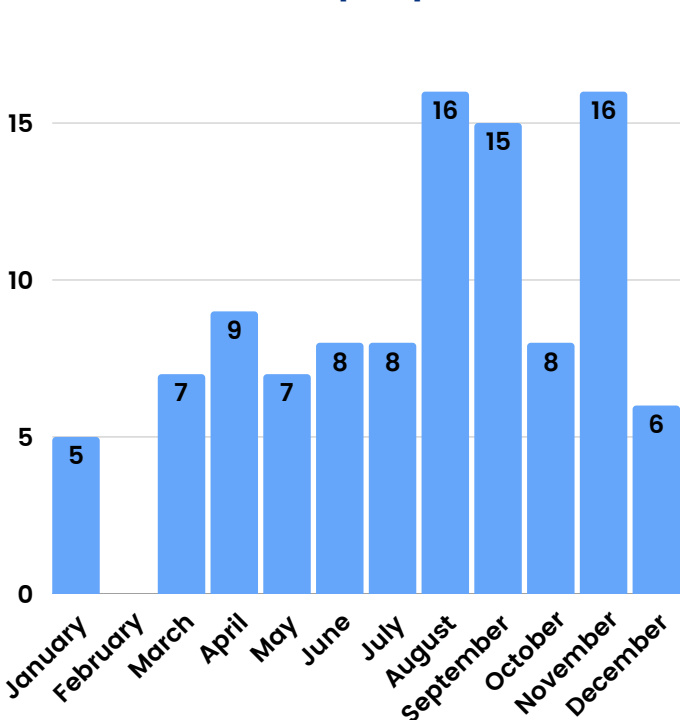
In 2024, the REFUFIN project made a significant impact by addressing both online and offline support needs of the Ukrainian community in Finland.

A total of 105 offline cases were recorded, providing direct assistance to 277 individuals throughout the year. The most common involved meeting newcomers at airports or ferry terminals, as well as assisting individuals in reaching the police and subsequently the reception centers. Some cases were particularly emotional and crisis-driven, such as supporting children with serious health conditions during their transfer from Ukraine to Finland.

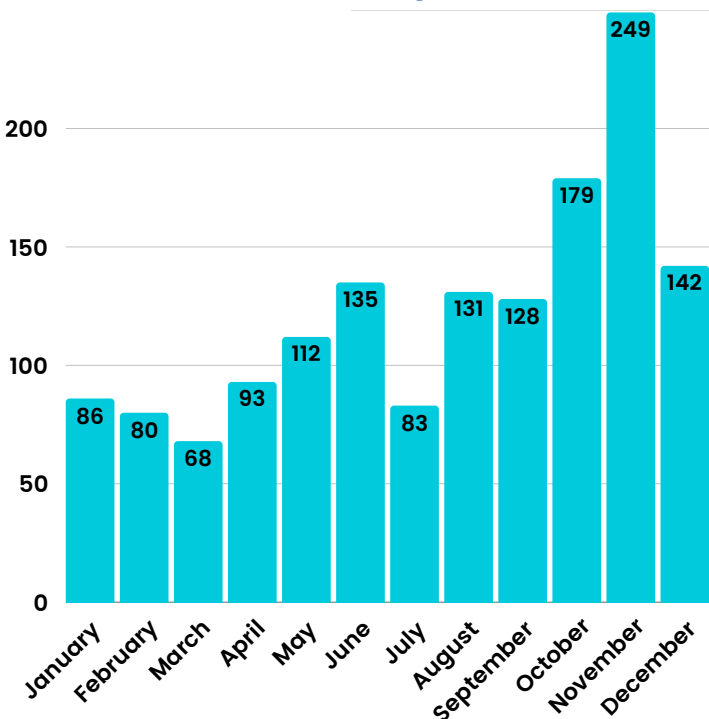
In addition, REFUFIN handled an impressive 1,481 online help requests over the year. In terms of online support, we count the number of requests rather than the number of individuals, as we often don't know the exact number of people behind each inquiry. Frequently, a single person reaches out on behalf of their children, spouse, or even their entire family. The consistent rise in inquiries highlights the growing reliance on and trust in the project's online support services.

These numbers demonstrate the crucial role REFUFIN plays in providing tailored assistance to individuals and communities, addressing their immediate needs, and supporting their integration journey in Finland.

Number of offline help requests: 105



Number of online help requests: 1481





## Community Outreach

In 2024, the REFUFIN team conducted several trips to different cities across Finland to connect with the Ukrainian community, local volunteers, and organizations. These meetings provided a platform for Ukrainians who fled the war to ask questions about integration challenges, such as finding employment, accessing education, or establishing their own Ukrainian cultural organizations. Each gathering brought together 8–15 participants, fostering an open and supportive environment.



Photo: REFUFIN team at SPR office in Pori

Photo: REFUFIN team in Imatra



**Pori.** In August, we held our first warm gathering with Ukrainians in Pori Red Cross branch, answering questions and even inspiring some guests to volunteer.

**Rovaniemi.** Our farthest trip took us to Rovaniemi, where we met with the Kotokunta reception center, our local volunteers and Ukrainians. This meeting provided us with valuable feedback to improve our support.

**Imatra.** In Imatra, we connected with Red Cross staff, city officials, and the Ukrainian community to discuss their needs and offer guidance on local services.





*Photo: REFUFIN team in Imatra*

During these trips, we also had the chance to engage with local volunteers, getting to know them better and strengthening our collaboration. We were also able to bring active volunteers from the capital region to these meetings, which helped us respond to participants' questions and, when needed, interpret our presentations and answers into Ukrainian.

These activities allowed us to expand our network and build partnerships with municipalities, reception centers, and civil society organizations. The overwhelmingly positive feedback highlighted the success and importance of these trips, further reinforcing our commitment to supporting Ukrainians in their integration into Finnish society.





# Volunteers

*Kuva: REFUFIN team with volunteers*

A heartfelt thank you to all REFUFIN volunteers for their incredible dedication and hard work in 2024. This year, we onboarded 90 new volunteers, whose enthusiasm and contributions have been essential to the success of our project.

## **Interesting Facts About REFUFIN Volunteers:**

- Currently, 60% of our active volunteers are men, and 40% are women.
- The average age of our volunteers is 30 years

- A 95% of REFUFIN volunteers have migrant backgrounds. For many, volunteering is not just a way to give back—it's also a platform for two-way integration. It enables them to connect with their new community, share their skills, and build a strong sense of belonging.

## **Expanding Our Volunteer Team**

Starting at the end of 2024, we are actively seeking Finnish- and English-speaking volunteers to join our team.



# Volunteers Across Finland

REFUFIN's volunteer network extends across **almost every region of Finland**, ensuring that support is available wherever it is needed. The blue dots on the map represent locations where we have at least one or more active volunteers, highlighting the widespread reach of our community. This decentralized approach allows us to provide assistance not only in major cities but also in smaller towns and rural areas where access to support services might be more limited.

In 2024, **80 people applied** to become volunteers at House of Helsinki. Out of these, **75% (60 people)** successfully completed our onboarding process, joining our team and contributing to various forms of support, including online assistance, face-to-face help, translation services, and specialized volunteer initiatives. This continuous growth reflects the strong commitment of individuals willing to support Ukrainians in Finland and the impact of our structured volunteer program in equipping them with the necessary skills.

**In total, House of Helsinki now has 140 volunteers** actively participating in different roles and initiatives, making a meaningful impact through their dedication and diverse contributions.

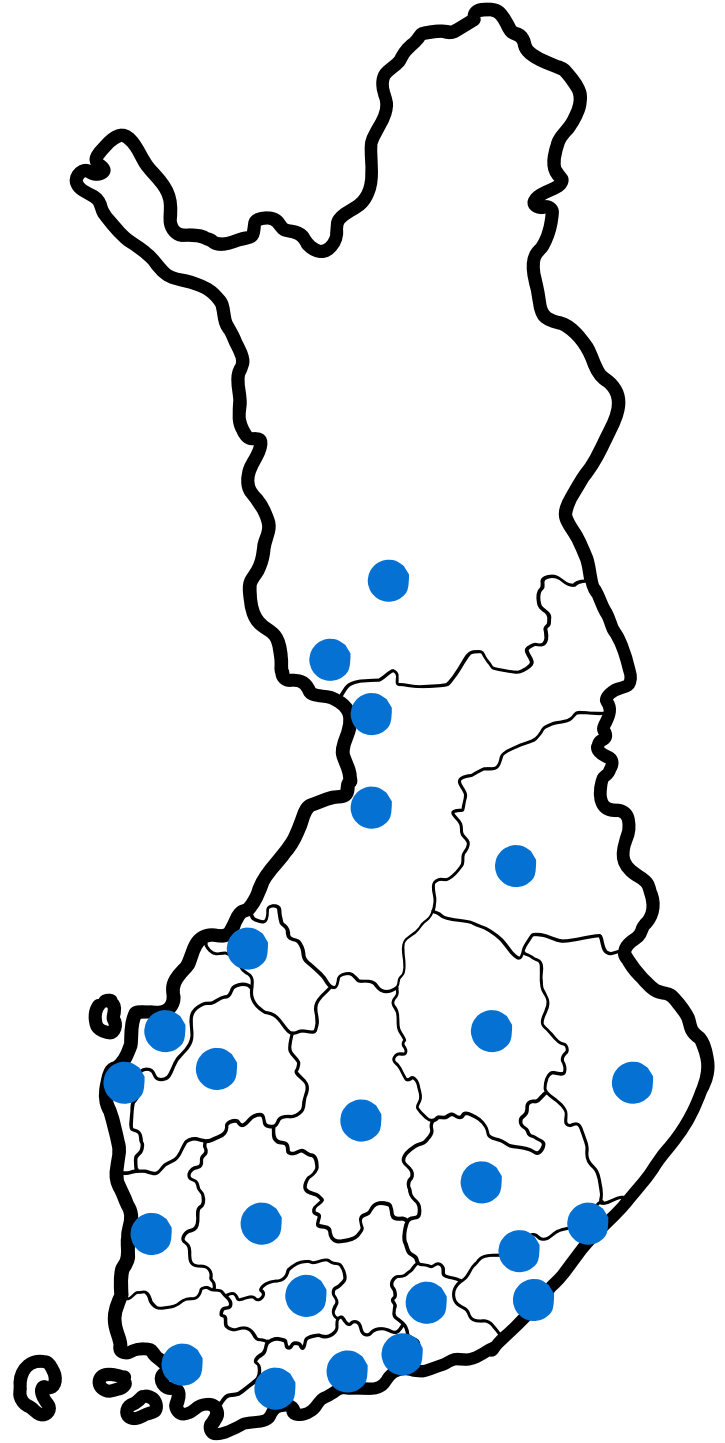






Photo: REFUFIN volunteers

## Volunteer meetings

In 2024, REFUFIN organized **30 volunteer meetings**, both online and offline, to support and develop our team. These meetings included a range of activities, from skill-building trainings to supervision sessions, all designed to empower volunteers and ensure their well-being.

We hosted several expert-led training sessions, such as "Cultural Sensitivity" and "Stress Management", conducted by our skilled volunteer Tetiana Khoroshylova. Additionally, we offered supervision sessions facilitated by Veera Mustonen, a board member of Fenix Finland, and

Julia Korpela, a specialist from Mieli Ry. These sessions were instrumental in preventing burnout and providing essential support for volunteers involved in crisis work.

Alongside these structured sessions, we also organized monthly meetings called "Chai", which provided a relaxed and welcoming space for volunteers to casually discuss their experiences, share feelings, and brainstorm plans. These gatherings played a key role in fostering a sense of community and connection within our volunteer team.



## Other Volunteer Activities

In addition to the core volunteer roles focused on online and offline support, REFUFIN also offers a variety of other volunteer activities aimed at developing skills and providing meaningful experiences for our volunteers.

For example, volunteer Tetiana Khoroshylova provides individual support to volunteers working with crisis cases. As a psychologist with experience in supporting internally displaced people in Ukraine, Tetiana now offers keskustelutuki (discussion support) to volunteers who assist vulnerable individuals.

We also have a dedicated team of volunteers responsible for translations.

Since we support people whose native languages are Ukrainian or Russian, it's crucial to recognize that people have the right to receive support in a language they are comfortable with. Our translation team plays a vital role by helping translate responses for online support. They handle up to ten translations weekly, primarily into Ukrainian, ensuring that language is never a barrier to receiving help.

In addition, one of our volunteers, Olga Nemlander, took the initiative to open a volleyball club for Ukrainians. This volunteer-led activity provides an opportunity for both volunteers and members of the Ukrainian community to engage in sports, promoting physical well-being and social connections.

*Photo: REFUFIN volunteers at the Good People event*





## Good People Event 2024

This year marked the second annual Good People Event at **Helsinki Missio**, continuing the tradition of celebrating our volunteers' work on the Refufin project. The event was even bigger this year, bringing together volunteers, the House of Helsinki team, board members, close partners, and steering group members, all united in commitment for our cause of making Finland a welcoming home for people fleeing the war in Ukraine.

We talked about the values that drive House of Helsinki and Refufin and listened to an inspiring speech from our board member Brix Ziemann.

Several volunteers shared heartfelt stories about their journeys in Finland and their experiences volunteering with Refufin. We also held a Mentimeter quiz to test everyone's knowledge about House of Helsinki and Refufin, throughout which we shared behind-the-scenes details about our history. Our dedicated volunteer Maria Godunova was the winner of the quiz!

*Photo: REFUFIN volunteers and Stakeholders at the Good People event*





# Volunteers of the year 2024





## Introducing the Volunteers of the Year 2024

### Mariia Godunova

Mariia's proactive approach and dedication make her an outstanding volunteer. She sets an excellent example by respecting personal boundaries while consistently supporting applicants, the project team, and fellow volunteers. Mariia is deeply engaged in the volunteer community, actively participating in trainings and volunteer meetings. She willingly shares her knowledge and experiences with others, inspiring and supporting her fellow volunteers while contributing to a positive and collaborative atmosphere.

### Anton Kriukov

Anton is an incredibly active and dedicated participant in REFUFIN. His strong organisational skills and ability to manage crisis situations have made a huge impact on the project. Anton's team spirit and commitment to helping others are deeply valued. Anton is not just a skilled volunteer; he's also a consistent presence at trainings and meetings for volunteers, where he actively engages, learns, and shares his insights. He regularly offers support to other volunteers, sharing his expertise and encouraging them in their roles, making him a cornerstone of our volunteer community.

*Photo: Anton and Mariia at REFUFIN Pikkujoulut*





# Mapping the needs of people who fled the war in Ukraine and now reside in Finland

To gain a deeper understanding of the needs of people who fled Ukraine and arrived in Finland, we conducted a survey and a series of group interviews over a period of three months, from July to September. This mapping project, carried out in Ukrainian and Russian, has helped us identify areas where additional support could make a meaningful difference in the near future.

The mapping process resulted in:

- **686 survey responses**
- **14 participants in group interviews**
- **An analysis of 1,623 received support requests**

The REFUFIN team, in collaboration with Ekaterina Nironen and Julia Persidskaia, is compiling and analyzing the data from late autumn 2024 to spring 2025. Our goal is to publish a comprehensive report by March, offering key insights for Finnish governmental and civil society organizations to better support people arriving from Ukraine — and potentially from other countries as well.

We are deeply grateful to all participants for their time and openness, as well as to our partners, reception centers, support organizations, online advocates, and everyone who helped share the survey widely.

Huge thanks to our working group:

- **Petra Pulli** (City of Vantaa)
- **Tanja Fomina** (Fenix Finland Ry)
- **Maria Stenar** (Uusimaa ELY Centre)
- **Anzhelika Butenko** (Katto Project / Moniheli Ry)
- **Terhi Aaltonen** (Kotimajoituksen tuki Ry)
- **Ekaterina Nironen** (University of Helsinki)
- **Julia Persidskaia** (Data Analyst / Volunteer)



# **Thank you all partners and networks!**

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- City of Helsinki
- City of Vantaa
- Finnish Red Cross
- THL
- Luona Oy Vastaanottokeskukset
- Länsi-Uudenmaan hyvinvointialue - LUVN
- Naapuriäiti- NICEHEARTS RY
- Moniheli Ry
- Uudenmaan ELY -keskus
- Fenix Finland Ry
- Rubikus.helpUA
- Kansalaisareena Ry
- FINUA Ry
- Helsinki Missio Ry
- Mieli Ry
- Tampereen ukrainalaisten  
yhdistys Suomessa Ry
- City of Imatra



# HOUSE of HELSINKI

Since 2019