

## **1-0 Visit to Merihaka Civil Defence Shelter (context)**

Guided tour of the Merihaka Civil Defence Shelter led by Jukka Lehtiranta, President of the Helsinki Civil Defence Association, on Friday 12 June 2026 from 4.30 pm to 5.30 pm

This tour offers an insight into Helsinki's civil defence shelter system, with a particular focus on the Merihaka underground shelter. Jukka Lehtiranta explains the geological advantages of Finland's ancient granite bedrock, which enables the construction of robust shelters.

The ownership, capacity and history of the Merihaka shelter are detailed, along with broader statistics on the overall capacity of Helsinki's shelters, which far exceeds the city's population, ensuring protection for residents and visitors alike.

### **1. Merihaka Underground Shelter**

- **General Information**

- The shelter is officially known as the Merihaka Civil Defence Shelter, also referred to as the rock shelter or underground shelter.
- It is carved directly into the Finnish bedrock.
- The name 'Merihaka' refers to the part of the city where it is situated, near large, whitish buildings known as Gedingshavn.

- **Geological Background**

- The Finnish bedrock is around two billion years old, much older than mountain ranges such as the Alps, the Andes or the Rockies.
- Around 10,000 to 11,000 years ago, the area was covered by three to four kilometres of ice.
- The expansion and retreat of this ice eroded the softer rock, leaving the hard granite exposed. This solid granite makes underground shelters possible.

- **Construction and Ownership**

- The ground level in the Merihaka residential area is five metres higher than the surrounding ground level, making individual shelters impractical.
- Developers raised funds which the City of Helsinki used to build the Merihaka underground shelter.
- The shelter is currently owned by the City of Helsinki.

### **2. Helsinki's Civil Defence Shelter System**

- **City-Owned Shelters**

- The City of Helsinki directly owns 52 underground shelters of various sizes and designs.
- The total capacity of these city-owned underground shelters is over 200,000 people.

- **Overall Shelter Capacity in Helsinki**

- There are approximately 5,500 shelters in total in Helsinki.
- Most of these shelters are privately owned.
- The total shelter capacity for the whole of Helsinki is 950,000 people.

- **Population Coverage**

- Helsinki's population is expected to reach 700,000 this year.
- The capacity of the shelters represents 135 per cent of the population, providing space for all residents as well as other people, such as visitors.