

# Samaaria Haapsalu - Estonia

## Introduction

Samaaria Haapsalu, also known as Haapsalu Shelter, is a facility in Haapsalu Linn, an urban municipality in western Estonia, in Lääne County. The facility is managed by the NGO Samaritan Estonian Mission. The Samaritan Estonian Mission is a widespread network of shelters, nursing homes, and second-hand charity stores. Founded in 1991 through a collaboration with Swedish Christians, the NGO originally focused on distributing humanitarian aid and providing shelter for those affected by the societal changes following Estonia's independence. Samaaria Haapsalu was founded in 2008. The facility provides support for individuals facing homelessness, poverty, addiction, or burnout, offering them a chance to rebuild their lives and reintegrate into society. The organisation manages a similar facility in Pärnu.



What makes Haapsalu Shelter unique is its strong missionary foundation, the facility was literally built by the very people it sought to help, giving participants a sense of purpose from the beginning. While the shelter has a partnership with the prison system, it remains an independent initiative, emphasizing rehabilitation and community support without formal contractual obligations.

## Scale

Samaaria Hapsalu is a small-scale facility with a maximum capacity of eight people.

### RESCALED-principles in practice:

- Small-scale
- Differentiated
- Community-integrated

## Differentiation

### *Target group:*

Samaaria Haapsalu accommodates men aged eighteen and older who want to change their lives but need help re-integrating society. These difficulties may have been caused either by a criminal past, by addictions, by poverty, by burnout, or any other cause. To be accepted in the facility, applicants must show motivation and desire to change, which is assessed in an interview. People referred from prison or probation just to get housing without a genuine willingness to change their lifestyle are not accepted.

To apply, incarcerated people must send an application and a motivational letter from prison, which is then reviewed by the team of Samaaria Haapsalu. An interview follows, either through video call or in person at the prison. The typical stay is between six and twelve months, with a minimum of six months to allow for real progress. There is no strict limit on how long someone can stay, and some have lived here for up to two years.

#### *Forms of security:*

Security at Samaaria Haapsalu is built on relational, procedural, and static security. Relational security is based on mutual trust and personal responsibility. This is guaranteed by the presence of staff 24/7. Volunteers are also used and sometimes stay overnight. At least one staff member is always on site and a guard is available if needed. Rules are rarely broken but if they do happen (usually outside the facility) honesty and responsibility are strongly emphasized.

Static security measures are minimal because the facility is designed to encourage individual responsibility. Rooms can only be locked from the inside, and security consists of locks on the front door and cameras that are viewed randomly or when misconduct is suspected. Random security checks are also conducted to maintain order without creating a restrictive environment.

Procedural security ensures compliance, especially since most activities take place outside. Residents must be back in the facility by 10 p.m. and their movements must be pre-approved. During the first month, they are not allowed outside unsupervised to help them adjust. Alcohol, drugs and smoking are strictly prohibited both on and off the premises. If a resident returns under the influence, staff will take appropriate action. A guard is on hand to intervene if necessary.

#### *Activities:*

Residents at Samaaria Haapsalu are encouraged to take responsibility for their recovery and plan their activities from day one. They participate in various educational and vocational programs outside the facility, helping them develop independence while adhering to house rules. During the first month, residents must stay within the facility unless supervised by staff, and they are not allowed to spend their independent time alone in the city. After this period, their independence gradually increases.

The daily schedule is structured to promote discipline and routine. On weekdays, residents begin their day with breakfast, morning routines, and work or group activities. Afternoons are dedicated to work assignments, hygiene, and clerical lessons or independent training. Evenings include cleaning tasks, sauna

time, and personal time before nighttime hours. Weekends offer more flexibility, with joint activities, personal development tasks, and the option to attend church services.

Residents have opportunities for voluntary work, education, and sports outside the facility. They are encouraged to complete courses through the Unemployment Office or pursue online education during their free time. Gym visits are allowed if the resident can pay the fee, and they can visit the library or take part in work assignments that teach life skills. Necessary appointments, such as medical visits or bank meetings, are highly encouraged to support reintegration into society.

An individual approach is applied to each resident, guiding them to online lessons for secondary education and vocational training. Counseling sessions with therapists, debt advisors, social workers, and probation officers are provided to strengthen support networks. Family relationships are also a focus, with staff facilitating contact to help repair broken connections when possible. The program is based on Christian values and emphasizes community and responsibility. Visits are regulated, with designated meeting areas and prior approval required from staff.

## **Community-integration**

### *Location and architecture:*

Samaaria Haapsalu is located in the center of Haapsalu, a small town in western Estonia with about 10,000 inhabitants. Everything is within walking distance, which makes daily life easy. Over time, the once quiet neighborhood has grown into an industrial area, leading to more noise and lots of truck traffic. The facility has good public transportation connections. Samaaria Hapsalu consists of a shelter, a warehouse and a store.

Residents have private bedrooms and share bathrooms, a kitchen and living room. The common areas are welcoming. The walls are decorated with framed artwork, motivational posters and religious pictures. The dining room has a large communal table where residents eat together. Large windows let in plenty of natural light, and the walls are painted in bright, cheerful colors such as green, yellow and pale pink.

Outside, the facility has a spacious yard with a basketball hoop, an indoor gym with fitness equipment and bicycles for each resident for transportation around town. Additional amenities include a sauna, a well-stocked library, a desk computer for online courses and a television room. A counseling room, which doubles as a visitor's room, provides a private space for meetings with professionals or family members.

### *Interaction with the community:*

A lot of interaction is taking place between the residents of the facility and the community. However, initially, the facility faced opposition from the local community, with negative articles appearing in local newspapers. Over time, concerns diminished, and there have been no incidents between residents and the community. Today, Samaaria Haapsalu has strong ties with local organizations, including the municipality, probation services, the Unemployment Office, and the Food Bank, which provides food aid. The local Baptist and Methodist churches are also closely involved, offering work assignments and support.

The facility maintains a positive relationship with the municipality, which funds participation fees and helps residents transition to independent living. New residents are introduced to local authorities to foster integration. The facility also collaborates with local banks and employment offices to assist with financial and professional matters.

In return, Samaaria Haapsalu contributes to the community through various services, including moving assistance, transport services, demolition work, carpentry, and firewood preparation. Additionally, a social enterprise linked to the facility operates second-hand shops, with proceeds supporting the shelter.

#### **Samaaria Haapsalu**

Founded: 2008

Capacity: 8

Security level: Low

Nearest city/town:

Haapsalu Linn (Estonia)

Nature of interaction:

Visited by Village of Hope  
(19/11/2024)

### **Publicity/ read more**

- About Samaaria Haapsalu at the official website of Samaaria Haapsalu.:

Samaaria. (n.d.). *Turvakodud*. Retrieved February 10, 2025, from <https://samaaria.ee/turvakodud/>