



4H entrepreneurship: supporting rural youth to start businesses in Finland

SUMMARY

The Finnish 4H, has operated a youth entrepreneurship model across rural Finland since 2008, equipping people aged 13-28 through structured training, mentoring, and support to start their own small businesses.

In rural areas where jobs and work experience are scarce, the model provides a practical pathway to employment. Young people develop business ideas, complete training, and establish a 4H enterprise offering local services.

In 2025 alone, more than 3 100 young people operated as 4H entrepreneurs, generating over five million euros in turnover. The model is available in almost every municipality in Finland and has become an established national youth entrepreneurship pathway.



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Themes: Entrepreneurship, youth, education and training, access to services, employment, rural revitalisation

Country: Finland

Organisations:

> Finnish 4H Federation , non-governmental / civil society organisation

Start & end date: 08/2008 - ongoing

Budget: Over EUR 2 million between 2008 and 2026

Funding sources:

> Private funds at national and local levels

> LEADER/CLLD at local level

Website: <https://www.4h.fi/en/4h-enterprises-learn-and-earn/>

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CONTEXT

Young people in Finnish rural municipalities face limited access to summer jobs, work experience, and local services, decreasing local vitality and opportunities to remain connected to their communities.

The 4H entrepreneurship model addresses these challenges by providing guidance, training, and mentoring to start their own light businesses.

The resulting 4H enterprises increase the availability of local everyday services, such as yard work, cleaning, childcare, and digital assistance, thereby supporting the vitality and resilience of rural communities. The model creates benefits for both young people and the wider rural society.



OBJECTIVES

- > Respond to rural challenges, including limited job opportunities, youth outmigration, and declining services;
- > Improve young people's opportunities for employment, entrepreneurship, and active participation by strengthening entrepreneurial skills, self-confidence, and working-life readiness, while promoting rural vitality and social inclusion;
- > Increase the availability of local everyday services for the wider rural community;



ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

The Finnish 4H entrepreneurship model is delivered by local 4H associations as a structured pathway supporting young people from their first business idea to entrepreneurship in practice. It is rolled out across rural areas with limited employment opportunities, in partnership with municipalities, schools and local businesses, with support typically including mentoring, funding and visibility.

Implementation focuses on guiding young people through a full entrepreneurship cycle, from initial engagement to running their own enterprise:

- > **Outreach and recruitment:** local 4H associations identify and engage interested young people, prioritising rural areas with limited employment opportunities.
- > **Entrepreneurship training:** participants acquire basic business skills, including budgeting, marketing, customer service, sustainability and invoicing.
- > **Business plan development and approval:** participants develop their own business idea and prepare a simple business plan, which is reviewed and approved before launch.
- > **Establishment of a 4H enterprise:** young people begin offering services or products locally or nationally through their new 4H enterprise, typically including yard work, cleaning, childcare, handicrafts, digital support and small-scale food services.
- > **Ongoing mentoring and partnerships:** local 4H associations continuously provide advice and peer support, while municipalities, schools, local businesses and other partners reinforce activities through funding, mentoring or visibility.



RESULTS

- > More than **3 100 young people operated as 4H entrepreneurs in 2025**. The number of 4H entrepreneurs doubled between 2020 and 2025.
- > Around **11 000 young people** have participated in the 4H Entrepreneurship model since it kicked off in 2008, strengthening their **work-life skills, self-confidence, financial literacy and entrepreneurial capabilities**. Many gained their first customer contacts, work experience and income through the model.
- > Turnover generated by **4H entrepreneurs exceeded EUR 5 million in 2025**, creating real economic activity and local value in rural communities.
- > Rural communities benefitted from **increased availability of local services** delivered by 4H entrepreneurs, which strengthened local resilience.
- > The 4H entrepreneurship model has been continuously implemented for over 15 years and is now an **established youth entrepreneurship pathway in Finland**. It has helped **retain young people in their home regions**, contributing to rural vitality and preventing social exclusion.



SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

- > **Strong local presence:** the 4H model operates in almost every Finnish municipality, including rural areas, allowing guidance and support to reach young people close to where they live. The model is anchored in the national **'Three Steps to Working Life'** framework.
- > **A practical, free-time pathway:** entrepreneurship takes place mainly outside formal education and is grounded in young people's own ideas and learning by doing in a safe, supported environment.
- > **A regulatory challenge to manage:** 4H entrepreneurs are subject to the same legal requirements as adult entrepreneurs in Finland.
- > **Replicability:** the model can be transferred wherever local youth organisations, municipalities or community actors are able to provide training and mentoring support.
- > **Sustainability:** the approach is relatively low-cost, builds on existing local structures, and encourages young entrepreneurs to adopt ecological and responsible business practices.
- > **Key lesson:** youth entrepreneurship works best when it is practical, local, well supported, and grounded in young people's own ideas and initiative.



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