

# HOUSING FIRST IN EUROPE

An Overview of Implementation,  
Strategy and Fidelity

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Comments on earlier drafts of this report sometimes produced varying estimations and opinions about the use of Housing First in the different countries. Where possible, the authors have sought to reflect the opinions and data that were most frequently cited or referred to, but readers should note that there can be some variation in opinion around Housing First. This links to wider points made in the report around the need to enhance and standardise data on the use of Housing First in Europe.

## DISCLAIMER

The views presented in this report are not necessarily those of the Housing First Europe Hub, FEANTSA, the Y-Foundation, the University of York or Lund University. Responsibility for any errors lies with the authors.



## FOREWORD

Housing First is an essential component of any strategy to successfully end homelessness. There is no better-evidenced or developed service model, and the outcomes recorded for people who have experienced homelessness exceed any comparable approaches. It is a rights-based intervention that when delivered at scale also has the potential to reframe our understanding and approaches to homelessness itself, seeing everyone as ready and entitled to a stable home.

The Housing First Europe Hub is dedicated to the full adoption and scaling up of Housing First across Europe. The Hub itself is a product of organisations that have seen first hand the transformative impact Housing First has on individual outcomes, systems of service provision, and national policy-making.

This study is the first of its kind in attempting to understand the development of Housing First across Europe. It is in some ways a tentative first step, with some acknowledged and significant gaps in the availability and quality of data across nations. It is nonetheless an important first step, from which the Hub will continue to build evidence of the relative progress and trends in scaling up Housing First.

The results of the study make clear that in most countries for which there is available data, Housing First is becoming more widespread. In some countries progress is slow, whilst others are beginning to make rapid progress, and Finland stands apart as an inspiring example of adoption of Housing First at a truly transformational scale.

Beyond exploring the scale of Housing First delivery, this report also highlights the essential supporting elements that determine whether programmes and successes in tackling homelessness can be sustained.

As the approach gains traction across Europe, we must also pay attention to whether funding is sufficient and secure. Without long-term security of funding, the fidelity of Housing First is at risk, and more importantly, the potential to change lives for the better is limited. Also, of crucial importance is whether Housing First has the back-up of political strategy in each context.

We hope this report helps provide a deeper understanding of the growth and scale of Housing First, and is useful to advocates and decision-makers in making the case for it as a cornerstone of strategies to end homelessness.



Juha Kaakinen (Y-Foundation)



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# REPORT SUMMARY

- This overview of the development of Housing First in 19 countries in Europe was designed to take a snapshot of how quickly Housing First is being adopted, the extent to which it is present in local, regional, and national strategies and homelessness programmes, as well as to provide a broad overview of fidelity to the model and the scale of service provision. The report attempts to capture developments up to the end of 2018 and, to some extent, look forward to commitments entered into at that time.
- This comparative research drew on a standardised questionnaire to homelessness experts and specialists in Housing First in 19 countries. In several instances, the respondents held senior positions in Housing First programmes, including at national level. The countries were Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK.
- This report defines Housing First services as: support for homeless people that closely reflects the core principles and operational practice of the model originally developed by Dr Sam Tsemberis and *Pathways to Housing* in the USA. Housing First is an intensive support model centred on enabling homeless people with *high and complex needs* to live in their own independent homes, exercising a very high degree of control over the nature of the support they receive. Housing First is distinct from rapid rehousing and housing-led services, which also aim to house people rapidly but are low intensity services intended for homeless people with low support needs, or whose needs can be largely, or entirely, addressed by the provision of an adequate, affordable and secure home.
- The homelessness sector varies between countries. In some cases, there is not a clear line between homelessness services and social services (social work) with respect to support and safeguarding of vulnerable adults. In some cases, Homelessness services centre on emergency shelters and, to varying degrees, on single site transitional housing. Other European countries have highly developed homelessness services and strategies. Housing First services have been introduced into countries with markedly different responses to homelessness, alongside significant variations in housing, welfare, and health systems.
- Across Europe, there is a varying extent to which Housing First features in homelessness strategies, programmes, and wider health and welfare policy at local, regional, and national level. The research found that Housing First, as a relatively new development in much of Europe, is sometimes operating on a small scale, is present in some areas but not others, and differs in how it is used alongside other homelessness services, with variation both within and between different countries. Housing First was shown to be highly developed or advancing quickly in some countries but progressing more slowly in others, and in a minority of countries was reported as absent from existing responses to homelessness.
- Housing First was demonstrated as not always operating in contexts where there had been wider systemic changes in responses to homelessness. In some cases, Housing First was observed to be out of sync with other elements of the homelessness sector and existed at the margins of homelessness policy.
- Fidelity to the core principles of the Housing First model could vary between services and between countries. Central and Eastern European countries tended to be reported as having lower levels of fidelity in Housing First services, but variations in fidelity, ranging in their nature and extent, were widespread and exact replication of the original Tsemberis model of Housing First appeared to be unusual. Some countries have developed their own standards for Housing First, although use of the *Housing First Guide Europe* as a reference point was widespread. **Low levels of fidelity sometimes increase the risk of associating the term 'Housing First' with European services that are not Housing First, which could bring discredit to the concept.**
- The bulk of Housing First services appeared to use scattered housing, but there was also some use of congregate or single-site models. In countries with larger social rented sectors, use of social, rather than private rented housing, was widespread.

- Housing First was typically reported as intended for homeless people with high and complex needs, but the ways in which it could be accessed varied. Some services required a psychiatric diagnosis, others focused on long-term homeless people, while others were focused on anyone who was homeless who had significant support needs.
- The reported extent of Housing First provision varied. Housing First is closely integrated into homelessness strategies and programmes in Finland. In some other countries, such as Denmark or France, Housing First is an integral part of responses to homelessness, operating alongside other services, but did not form a large element of service provision. As it is focused on homeless people with high and complex needs, Housing First would not necessarily be working at a very large scale in these countries, even if the entire population with these characteristics were being supported.
- Data on Housing First were variable in standard and often imprecise. Robust and uniform data on service outcomes were also not available. **There is a clear need to improve the quality and comparability of data on Housing First across Europe.**
- Housing First is developing faster in some countries than others. Housing First was reported to be an established, mainstream, part of the response to homelessness in Denmark and Finland. There were clear increases in the use of Housing First in France, Ireland, Italy, Sweden and the UK (particularly Scotland and England). Use of Housing First was reported to be developing less rapidly in Austria (centred only on some regions), Belgium, the Czech Republic, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Spain. Developments were slowest in central and Eastern Europe and Germany, although more attention was being paid to the idea in the latter.
- In many European countries, funding for Housing First was often reported as insufficient and could be unreliable. Larger programmes of Housing First were anchored in well-funded integrated homelessness strategies, as in Denmark, Finland, and France. In Sweden, the UK, and Italy, funding varied in extent and reliability, while in some other countries it was difficult to secure. **Sufficient and sustainable funding is necessary if Housing First services are to be successfully developed and sustained in Europe.**
- Securing suitable and sufficient housing supply - i.e. adequate, affordable homes with reasonable security of tenure - was a challenge across much of Europe. Austria, Hungary, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Sweden, and the UK, which were all described as being in a situation where finding suitable housing for Housing First was 'always difficult'. **Ensuring sufficient, adequate, affordable housing with security of tenure is essential to successfully integrating Housing First into European strategic responses to homelessness.**
- Political support for Housing First was reported as varied. Countries in which Housing First is a part of well-resourced, integrated homelessness strategy are those in which use of Housing First is at its most developed. The resources that came with mainstream political acceptance appeared important in determining the extent of Housing First. Some countries, such as Finland, had broad support for Housing First across key agencies, institutions, and civil society. Networks promoting Housing First, such as Housing First Italia, Housing First England, and Housing First Belgium, existed in several countries.
- There is strong evidence that Housing First provides an effective solution to homelessness among people with high and complex needs, but there is variation in strategic integration, resources and extent to which Housing First has achieved the momentum to become a mainstream response to homelessness. Enhancing data collection, ensuring clarity about fidelity and the role of Housing First in wider strategy, alongside ensuring sufficient resources are in place, including suitable housing, will further enhance the potential for Housing First to reduce homelessness among people with high and complex needs across Europe.

## GLOSSARY

- **'congregate housing model'** - people living in their own apartment or flat within a block containing other Housing First service users.
- **'scattered housing'**- people living in individual apartments/homes in different buildings.
- **'Housing First'** - support for homeless people that closely reflects the core principles and operational practice of the model originally developed by Dr Sam Tsemberis and *Pathways to Housing* in the USA.
- **'housing-led'** - services and strategies that emphasise rapid rehousing (i.e. housing-led approaches) but which are not intended for homeless people with high and complex needs and do not offer intensive support.
- **'housing ready'** – the belief that people need to meet certain criteria to be 'ready' or able to live in their own accommodation.
- **'staircase model'** – a more traditional, 'treatment as usual' approach to homelessness by which people move from rough sleeping to temporary accommodation and then eventually to permanent accommodation.
- **'high and complex needs'** – needs including, but not limited to, addiction, severe mental illness, and often recurrent or sustained experience of homelessness.
- **'rapid rehousing'**- services which aim to house people rapidly but provide low intensity services intended for homeless people with low support needs, or whose needs can be largely, or entirely, addressed by the provision of an adequate, affordable and secure home
- **'fidelity'** – how faithfully the model adheres to the core principles of Housing First.
- **'principle of subsidiarity'** – devolution to different regional or sub-regional authorities.
- **'paradigm'** – set of theoretical and practical ideas.
- **'ICM'** (Intensive Case Management) - high-intensity case management, which provides some support and creates connections between service users, and treatment and support provided by other health, support and social work services.
- **'ACT'** (Assertive Community Treatment) - ACT directly provides treatment for many needs, including mental health problems, drug/alcohol problems and poor physical health, alongside case management. In the original model of Housing First, ACT was intended for homeless people with particularly high support needs.
- **'CTI'** (Critical Time Intervention) - has considerable similarities to Housing First but differs in having an approach that is time limited, the core idea being that intensive support is used to get someone to a point where they can transition to lower intensity support or independent living, within a set timeframe.
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# 1 INTRODUCTION

This research report is based on a survey of experts and professionals working in the field of Housing First in 19 countries: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the UK. A detailed, standardised, questionnaire was sent to respondents identified from the national level contacts maintained by the Housing First Europe Hub<sup>1</sup> and contacts working in Housing First known to the research team. The respondents included several of the national leads for Housing First in Europe.

Additional information from the recently published European Observatory on Homelessness (EOH) research, *Homelessness Services in Europe*<sup>2</sup>, which also collected data on the extent of Housing First, adds some further information to this report. Research and analysis on the development, operation, fidelity, costs and outcomes achieved by Housing First, published throughout Europe, are also referred to throughout this report. The UK is treated as a single country, but differences between the UK nations are noted where appropriate.

The standardised questionnaire approach can be a very useful tool in conducting comparative research because it enables the collection of data on the same basis across a range of countries, whose own information gathering systems, policy researchers, and academics might not always use the same definitions and techniques as those employed in other countries.

There are clear methodological limits to this approach in the sense that even an expert in a field like Housing First will not necessarily have a complete picture of what is going on in each country. As Housing First becomes more widespread, keeping track of exactly where things are inevitably becomes more challenging. If there are two or three small pilot programmes using Housing First, understanding the development of Housing First means processing a relatively small amount of information. Once there are, for example, 40 or 100 Housing First services, getting an exact picture becomes more challenging, even where standardised data are being collected by those services.

To an extent, the limitations of relying on one expert can be countered by encouraging those experts to draw on all available data and to work with others where they are uncertain, as was the case for this research. However, this approach cannot generate the depth of information that a very large and expensive study - one that visited and evaluated Housing First projects and programmes across Europe - would be able to do. It is often the case that homelessness research has smaller budgets than are available to research other social problems, and researchers must often work within the resources they have to get the best data they can.

The next chapter of the report provides a brief overview of the provision of homelessness services in Europe, which provides context for the discussion that follows. Chapter 3 looks at the roles of Housing First in homelessness strategies at national, regional, and local level, assessing the extent to which Housing First can be described as a mainstream response to homelessness. Chapter 4 explores the question of fidelity in Housing First services, using the core principles defined in the *Housing First Guide Europe*<sup>3</sup> as its reference point. Chapter 5 contains five subsections; the first looks at the extent of Housing First in Europe, i.e. how many services there are and what sort of scale they are operating on, the third looks at the level and consistency of funding for Housing First services. This section is followed by an analysis of how Housing First services find suitable housing and concluding Chapter 5 with an analysis of the outcomes being recorded by Housing First services.

Chapter 6 looks at differences in levels and availability of funding for Housing First Services in the various countries surveyed. Chapter 7 draws on the results of the survey questions on the level and nature of political support for Housing First in Europe. These questions are important because political support is key to strategic integration, funding, and meeting challenges such as securing a sufficient supply of suitable housing. Chapter 8 presents the conclusions of the report.

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1 <https://housingfirsteurope.eu>

2 Pleace, N.; Baptista, I.; Benjaminsen, L. and Busch-Geertsema, V. (2018) *Homelessness Services in Europe* Brussels: FEANTSA.

3 <https://housingfirsteurope.eu/guide/>

# 2 HOMELESSNESS SERVICES AND HOUSING FIRST IN EUROPE

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of homelessness service provision in Europe. This chapter draws from the recently published EOH report, *Homelessness Services in Europe*<sup>4</sup> which collected data on homelessness services in Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the UK. Supplementary resources, including previous EOH reports and data from specific countries, are also drawn upon.

## DEFINING HOUSING FIRST

This report is concerned with the use of services that closely reflect the core philosophy and operational practice of the homelessness service model originally developed by Dr Sam Tsemberis and *Pathways to Housing* in the United States in the early 1990s. The definition used is taken from the *Housing First Guide Europe*<sup>5</sup>, on which Dr Tsemberis collaborated and which describes the core principles of Housing First as follows:

- Housing is a human right
- Choice and control for service users
- Separation of housing and treatment
- Recovery orientation
- Harm reduction
- Active engagement without coercion
- Person-centred planning
- Flexible support for as long as is required

Housing First is designed as an *intensive* case management service that supports people who have high and complex needs, with experience of homelessness, in their own independent housing. The service provides housing as soon as possible, without expecting someone to demonstrate that they are 'housing ready' (i.e. able to live independently or with only low levels of support), does not require abstinence from drugs and alcohol, and enables people using the service to exercise a high degree of

control over the support and treatment they receive, including whether or not to use different services. Housing First has a distinct role, being designed for homeless people with high and complex needs – such as severe mental illness and drug or alcohol dependency – and providing them with intensive, flexible support that the people using the service can shape for themselves.

Services and strategies that emphasise rapid rehousing (i.e. housing-led approaches) but which are not intended for homeless people with high and complex needs and do not offer intensive support can be seen as a 'light' version of Housing First. The distinction drawn by the 2010 *European Consensus Conference on Homelessness*<sup>6</sup>, which defined these less intensive services for homeless people with lower (or no) support needs as *housing-led* services, is helpful here, as the term *housing-led* draws a clear line between Housing First – a distinct service model for homeless people with high needs – and other, housing-led, homelessness services that are aimed at ending other forms of homelessness, which share some features with Housing First but function in a different way and are aimed at homeless people with a different set of needs.

The key point here is that a broader "Housing First" philosophy – i.e. using rapid rehousing and enabling people to move into an independent home without any requirement to be made 'housing ready' first – is a more effective response to homelessness, as evidenced by re-

4 Pleace, N.; Baptista, I.; Benjaminsen, L. and Busch-Geertsema, V. (2018) *Homelessness Services in Europe* Brussels: FEANTSA.

5 <https://housingfirstguide.eu/website/>

6 <https://www.feantsa.org/en/event/2010/12/10/european-consensus-conference-on-homelessness-9th-10th-december-2010?bcParent=22>

search from Finland and elsewhere. However, a broad philosophy of “Housing First” of tackling homelessness and preventing homelessness by focusing on getting anyone who is homeless into housing is not the same as a Housing First *service model* as developed by the organisation Pathways to Housing, which is designed for people with high and complex needs. This is why North America distinguishes between a ‘rapid-rehousing’ response, i.e. quickly getting homeless people into housing to stop their homelessness and ‘Housing First’ and why the 2010 Consensus Conference drew the distinction between Housing First and housing-led services.

Rapid rehousing/housing-led responses to homelessness for people with low support needs

or no support needs reflect a Housing First philosophy, but they are not a Housing First service. For example, most homeless families do not have high and complex support needs, but they do need a home as soon as possible, so a rapid rehousing/housing-led response often makes sense, but because they often do not have addiction issues or a severe mental illness, using a Housing First service as the only response family homelessness is not appropriate. Some families will have high and complex support needs that might mean they need a suitably modified version of Housing First. However, for many families a housing-led service that finds them an adequate, secure and settled home, will be the main form of support they require<sup>7</sup>.

## THE USE OF HOUSING FIRST AROUND THE WORLD

Housing First is very widespread across Canada and the USA. Most regions and cities have Housing First services and it is part of the national strategic response to homelessness. However, Housing First does not necessarily form the bulk of homelessness service provision. New York, where experiments led by Dr Sam Tsemberis first began in the early 1990s<sup>8</sup>, had an average of nearly 60,000 people living in homeless shelters at any one point during the course of 2017-2018<sup>9</sup>. In 2016, Canada - the home of the At Home/Chez Soi randomised control trial of Housing First<sup>10</sup>, which included 2,148 participants across five cities, 1,158 of who used Housing First - had 401 emergency shelters with 15,450 beds<sup>11</sup>. Alongside the evaluation of the French Housing First pilot programme *Un chez-soi d'abord*<sup>12</sup> the Canadian trial was one of the two largest evaluations of Housing First yet conducted.

Housing First is at the core of responses to homelessness in North America but in some respects it is still an *emergent* response, still in the process of development, being advocated over

existing service models but not the mainstream response to homelessness in every area. Likewise, in Australia, Housing First is clearly being talked about, but development remains in its early phases<sup>13</sup>.

As it develops, Housing First does not necessarily become the predominant response to homelessness in any particular country. There are two reasons for this. The first is that Housing First is designed for a specific group of homeless people with high and complex needs, including addiction, severe mental illness, and often recurrent or sustained experience of homelessness. The extent of Housing First relative to other homelessness services depends in part on what the homeless population in a country looks like. For example, in Denmark, a relatively small, largely lone, adult homeless population with a high level of complex needs forms the bulk of homelessness, meaning most existing homelessness can, at least in theory, be effectively reduced by using Housing First<sup>14</sup>. This logic is reflected in how the Danes have designed their homelessness strategy (see below).

7 Baptista, I.; Benjaminsen, L.; Busch-Geertsema, V. and Pleace, N. (2017) *Family Homelessness in Europe* Brussels: FEANTSA.

8 Tsemberis, S. (2010) *Housing First: The Pathways Model to End Homelessness for People with Mental Illness and Addiction* Hazelden: Minnesota

9 <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/dashboard/tables/FY2018-DHS-Data-Tables-Dashboard-revised-1'30'2019.pdf>

10 Goering, P., Veldhuizen, S., Watson, A., Adair, C., Kopp, B., Latimer, E., Nelson, G., MacNaughton, E., Streiner, D. and Aubry, T. (2014) *National at Home/Chez Soi Final Report* Calgary, AB: Mental Health Commission of Canada.

11 <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/communities/homelessness/publications-bulletins/shelter-capacity-2016.html>

12 Estecahandy, P., Agha, A. and Roebeck, M. (2018) Fidelity Study of the “Un chez-soi d'abord” Housing First Programmes in France *European Journal of Homelessness* 12(3), pp. 159-181.

13 Johnson, G., Parkinson, S., and Parsell, C. (2012). *Policy shift or program drift? Implementing Housing First in Australia*. AHURI Final Report No. 184. Melbourne: AHURI; AHURI (2018) *What is the Housing First model and how does it help those experiencing homelessness?* Melbourne: AHURI.

14 Benjaminsen, L., 2016. Homelessness in a Scandinavian welfare state: The risk of shelter use in the Danish adult population. *Urban Studies*, 53(10), pp.2,041-2,063.

By contrast, in countries like the UK or the USA, homelessness is more strongly associated with poverty<sup>15</sup>. This means there are more families, more people characterised not by high support needs, but by having low or very low incomes in a society that does not have enough affordable housing. In these situations, Housing First still has an important role, because small populations of homeless people with high and complex needs do still exist, and the evidence clearly shows they can very often find sustainable routes out of homelessness through Housing First<sup>16</sup>. However, as the bulk of homelessness in countries like the USA is not people with high and complex needs<sup>17</sup>, homelessness services cannot take the form of Housing First alone.

The second reason why Housing First may not predominate is that strategic responses to homelessness vary. Particularly important here is the longstanding - and still widespread - tendency across Europe<sup>18</sup> to use transitional/temporary supported housing and emergency shelters/night-shelters as the main response to homelessness, together with an increase in provision of preventative services. Prevention is designed to stop homelessness from occurring in the first place, which, if effective, should reduce overall experience of homelessness<sup>19</sup>. In practical terms, if homelessness prevention is working, it should reduce the need for Housing First over time, although it is important to note that Housing First may also become part of a preventative response when people with high and complex needs are at high risk of homelessness.

There is also a need to disentangle a broad 'Housing First' philosophy - essentially a *housing-led*

*approach* to homelessness<sup>20</sup> that characterises the Finnish homelessness strategy<sup>21</sup> and is mainstream practice in Denmark and the UK - from Housing First as a *service model*.

A 'Housing First' philosophy at strategic level means a focus on policy and practice that tries to keep people in existing ordinary housing if they are at risk of homelessness. It also means that if at-risk people become homeless, the response is to move them straight into ordinary housing, without first trying to make them 'housing ready' through staircase or linear residential treatment services. However, Housing First is also a *specific type* of service<sup>22</sup> which can play an important role in addressing homelessness among people with high and complex needs, but which is *not* designed as a response to every form of homelessness. The focus of this report is on Housing First as a specific type of homelessness service whereas the term 'housing-led' is used to describe other services and strategies following the same broad approach.

In summary, Housing First will have varying roles within strategic responses to homelessness. The extent to which Housing First is used will reflect the nature of homelessness in different countries and also be influenced by other aspects of homelessness strategy, such as the nature and extent of prevention. However, as the evidence indicates the presence of recurrently and long-term homeless people with high and complex needs throughout Europe - albeit that they do not always represent a majority of the homeless population - Housing First services should have an important role in every effective homelessness strategy<sup>23</sup>.

## HOMELESSNESS SERVICES IN EUROPE

There is no common dataset on homelessness services in Europe and only some countries have any data on the distribution, nature, and extent of homelessness services at national level. Data on services, linked either to the provision of homelessness services and/or to commissioning of those services do exist at regional, local au-

thority (municipality), and city level, but are often not aggregated to national or pan-European level. Accurately assessing the scale, disposition, and range of homelessness services across Europe, or within many European countries, is not possible at present<sup>24</sup>.

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- 15 Bramley, G. and Fitzpatrick, S. (2018) Homelessness in the UK: who is most at risk? *Housing Studies*, 33(1), pp.96-116.
  - 16 Pleace, N. (2018) *Using Housing First in Integrated Homelessness Strategies: A Review of the Evidence* University of York: York.
  - 17 Culhane, D.P. (2018) *Chronic Homelessness Center for Evidence Based Solutions to Homelessness*.
  - 18 Pleace, N.; Baptista, I.; Benjaminsen, L. and Busch-Geertsema, V. (2018) *Homelessness Services in Europe* FEANTSA: Brussels.
  - 19 Pleace, N. (2019) *Preventing Homelessness: A review of the international evidence* Dublin: Simon Communities of Ireland.
  - 20 The statutory system across the UK is housing led but certain elements of it, for example priority need in England, Wales and Northern Ireland still restricts access to housing
  - 21 Y Foundation (2017) *A Home of Your Own: Housing First and ending homelessness in Finland* Helsinki: Y Foundation.
  - 22 Pleace, N. (2016) *Housing First Guide Europe* Brussels: FEANTSA.
  - 23 Pleace, N. (2018) Op.cit.
  - 24 Pleace, N.; Baptista, I.; Benjaminsen, L. and Busch-Geertsema, V. (2018) *Homelessness Services in Europe* Brussels: FEANTSA.



## PREVENTION

The line between homelessness prevention and social work/social services support for potentially vulnerable adults and dependent children is not always clear in many European countries. Social work services provide protection from homelessness to people within their remit, i.e. people for whom social work/social services are expected to be responsible, but not for people who do not qualify for social work support. Dedicated systems aimed at preventing eviction are quite widespread but are not universal and tend to be focused on urban areas, including advice, legal support and media-

tion services, with some countries, such as the UK, also working towards the wider use of rapid rehousing systems alongside preventative services. Meanwhile, preventative services appear to be at their most developed in Finland<sup>25</sup> and the UK, particularly in respect of Wales<sup>26</sup> and England. Other countries also have relatively extensive preventative services, including Austria, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, and Sweden. Prevention is less developed in Southern, Central, and Eastern European countries<sup>27</sup>.

## EMERGENCY AND TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

There is not a clear distinction between emergency and temporary accommodation in much of Europe, with 'temporary' accommodation services being used for emergencies and 'emergency' accommodation being used over prolonged periods. There are basic, shared homeless shelters in every country in Europe, alongside some much more extensive and well-resourced services that offer both relatively high standard accommodation and support services, most notably in Denmark, Ireland, and the UK<sup>28</sup>.

Emergency/temporary accommodation exists in many of the larger towns and cities throughout Europe, though it is much less common in smaller towns and cities and in rural areas. The available evidence suggests that emergency and temporary accommodation still forms the bulk of homelessness services in Europe. However, emergency and temporary accommodation also remains widespread throughout most of the countries that have

adopted housing-led and Housing First responses to homelessness<sup>29</sup>. In Denmark, it has been calculated that only 11% of the homeless people for whom Housing First might be suitable are being reached by Housing First services, while the hostel/emergency accommodation population has remained broadly static<sup>30</sup>.

The exception to this broad pattern is Finland, where use of emergency and temporary accommodation, in the sense of shelters, hostels and temporary supported housing, has dropped to extremely low levels. Homeless people living in hostels or boarding houses fell by 76% between 2008 and 2017<sup>31</sup>, the reduction reflecting the widespread use of prevention, replacement of older models of congregate and communal supported housing with Housing First and housing-led models, which largely replaced emergency shelters. In 2018, only 229 people were recorded in the annual homeless count as living in hostels or boarding houses in Finland<sup>32</sup>.

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25 Y Foundation (2017) Op. cit.

26 Mackie, P.K.; Thomas, I. and Bibbings, J. (2017) Homelessness Prevention: Reflecting on a Year of Pioneering Welsh Legislation in Practice *European Journal of Homelessness* 11(1), pp. 81-107.

27 Pleace, N. et al (2018) Op. cit.

28 Pleace, N. et al (2018) Op. cit.

29 Pleace, N. et al (2018) Op. cit.

30 Benjaminsen, L. (2018) Housing First in Denmark: An Analysis of the Coverage Rate among Homeless People and Types of Shelter Users. *Social Inclusion*, 6(3), pp.327-336.

31 Source: ARA.

32 Source: ARA.

## FOOD DISTRIBUTION, DAYCENTRES AND OUTREACH

Services that provide food, blankets, and clothing, or other basic services to people living rough remain widespread in European cities. Many countries also have daycentre services that offer this kind of support, quite often in combination with medical care, education, training and employment services from buildings that are open during the day, but which do not provide emergency shelter or temporary accommodation at night. Again, the available evidence suggests that these services are much less common in small towns and rural areas than in more densely populated areas.

The recent EOH research, *Homelessness Services in Europe*, found that all 16 European countries included in the research had some form of food distribution for people sleeping rough. Mobile and fixed site medical services, including 'street doctors', again intended for people living rough and in emergency accommodation, were also widespread. Outreach teams that are designed to connect people living rough to services, which can include Housing First as well as housing-led and temporary supported accommodation, are most widely used in countries such as Ireland, France, and the UK<sup>33</sup>.

## HOUSING-LED SERVICES

The recent EOH research on homelessness services in Europe found that housing-led<sup>34</sup> approaches to reducing homelessness, including Housing First, were mainstream policy in Austria<sup>35</sup>, Denmark, France, Ireland, the Netherlands and, to varying extents, in the UK (more so in Scotland than in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland). Germany, where Housing First was somewhat less developed, was nevertheless following a broadly housing-led model in homelessness policy and strategy<sup>36</sup>. Finland is – again – the archetype of a housing-led homelessness strategy with both prevention and Housing First at its core<sup>37</sup>. Housing First is

also being actively promoted in other countries, including Italy, Spain, and Sweden, although as is the case in Central and Eastern European countries, the bulk of homelessness service provision does not use housing-led or Housing First models<sup>38</sup> (see Chapter 5).

However, even in those countries where Housing First and housing-led approaches were integrated into homelessness strategy and policy, fixed-site temporary supported housing, emergency and temporary accommodation, and transitional housing services were often widespread.

## HOUSING FIRST IN CONTEXT

Housing First is neither the predominant response to homelessness in Europe, nor are Housing First services the main response to homelessness in any single European country. There are countries, like Denmark and Finland, where Housing First is widespread, but employed as part of a service mix, with a specific role in reducing long-term and recurrent homelessness as well as homelessness among people with high and complex needs. This makes logistical and strategic sense in that Housing

First as a service model is designed to work specifically with homeless people with high and complex needs, which not every homeless person has. Elsewhere, other forms of homelessness service can still predominate, but it is important to bear in mind that other European homelessness services vary hugely in scale, nature, sophistication, and effectiveness. While emergency shelters that would not have looked out of place 50 years ago still operate in many countries, European alternatives to Housing

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33 Pleace, N. *et al* (2018) Op. cit.

34 The term housing-led covers homeless policies that focus predominantly on: access to permanent housing solutions as soon as possible for homeless people; targeted prevention for people at risk of homelessness; provision of needs-based, person-centred support services to formerly homeless people/those at risk of homelessness. Such support addresses issues such as tenancy maintenance, social inclusion, employment, health and well-being for people who are living in housing, rather than prior to re-housing. It is delivered on a "floating" basis rather than in an institutional setting (source: FEANTSA).

35 Within some regions of Austria, not at national level

36 Ibid.

37 Y Foundation (2017) Op. cit.

38 Pleace, N. *et al* (2018) Op. cit.

First that are both humanitarian and effective - such as housing-led services and some forms of supported housing - are also present<sup>39</sup>.

The broad ideal or *housing-led philosophy* underpinning Housing First is more widespread across Europe - i.e. that homelessness is best prevented and stopped by: enabling people to choose the level of support they are ready to engage with; recognising their strengths as individuals; and providing suitable housing and mobile support tailored to their expressed needs, rather than trying to make them 'housing ready'. As noted, this includes some countries like Germany, where Housing First is still developing as a homelessness service model. The UK, with its long history of statutory homelessness systems, which were designed to provide eligible homeless people with settled housing, has also made considerable use of lower intensity,

housing-led services (referred to as tenancy sustainment/floating support<sup>40</sup>) for more than 20 years, but it is similarly still in the process of developing Housing First.

As in North America, Housing First is increasingly present as a mainstream service or, at the very least, is at the core of national debates around how to reduce homelessness across Europe. However, other forms of response to homelessness, some of which are at the leading edge of service development, such as innovative preventative strategies, and some of which closely reflect responses from decades ago, often form the majority of homelessness services in Europe. Some data on the extent of Housing First in the countries that took part in this research are presented in Chapter 5.

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39 Pleace, N. *et al* (2018) Op. cit.; Pleace, N. (2018) Op. cit.

40 Pleace, N. and Quilgars, D. (2003) *Supporting People: Guide to Accommodation and Support Options for Homeless Households* London: ODPM/ Homelessness Directorate.

# 3 HOUSING FIRST IN HOMELESSNESS STRATEGIES

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at how and to what extent Housing First is used in homelessness strategies at national, regional, and local level in the 19 countries surveyed. From the material gathered in the questionnaires, the chapter also presents an overview of the extent of mainstreaming Housing First as a response to homelessness.

## THE ROLE OF HOUSING FIRST IN HOMELESS STRATEGIES

What role does Housing First play as a response to homelessness? It is a rather fragmented picture that comes to the fore after analysing the material gathered in the questionnaires. In some countries, Housing First has been part of a national strategy for several years, whereas in other countries it is still a rather recent and emerging development. In Denmark, for instance, Housing First was introduced through the national homelessness strategy in 2007. Housing First was the overall principle in Danish homelessness strategy programmes which ran from 2009 to 2013, and since that point it has continued to be at the core of successive programmes.

In Ireland, there was only one officially-recognised Housing First service until 2019, with other self-described 'Housing First' projects led by NGOs, including a service for young people (see Chapter 5 for the development of Housing First). In the UK, the recent *Rough Sleeping Strategy*<sup>41</sup> from 2018 has speeded up the process of integrating Housing First, building on work by the homelessness sector and local authority commissioners in developing the use of Housing First across England. However, England has been slower to develop Housing First than some other European countries. Housing First services often only exist on a small scale<sup>42</sup> and are quite often

pilot programmes rather than an integral part of broader homelessness strategy. Within the wider UK, England is being outpaced by Scotland in terms of Housing First development at the time of writing. In Scotland, progress has been made through the development of the Housing First Scotland Fund<sup>43</sup>, working across five cities with a clear commitment to provide Housing First in each local authority (municipality).

Prior to the development of the 2018 English pilot programme, Housing First as a strategic response was advancing more quickly in Scotland, which had the UK's first Housing First service. Meanwhile, the Welsh Government has funded ten Housing First pilot programmes.

11 of the 19 countries reported having a national homelessness strategy and in 9 of those 11 countries, Housing First was mentioned as being part of that national homelessness strategy. Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, and the Netherlands have Housing First as an integrated part of their homelessness strategies. In Norway, Housing First is best described as a recommended model within the country's homelessness strategy. There are more countries (12 out of 19) reporting that they have regional, municipal or local homelessness strategies than there are national strategies (Table 3.1).

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41 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-rough-sleeping-strategy>

42 <https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/The%20picture%20of%20Housing%20First%20in%20England.pdf>

43 <https://www.corra.scot/grants/housing-first-scotland-fund/>



Table 3.1 Does the National Government have a Homelessness strategy?

		Housing First part of national strategy	Regional municipal local strategy	Housing First part of regional munic- ipal local strategy
Austria	No	Not applicable	No	Not applicable
Belgium	No	No	Yes	Sometimes
Czech Republic	Yes	Yes	Yes	Very often
Denmark	No	Not applicable	No	Not applicable
Finland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Very often
France	Yes	Yes	Yes	Sometimes
Hungary	No	Not applicable	No	Not applicable
Ireland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not often
Italy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Very often
Lithuania	No	Not applicable	No	Not applicable
Luxembourg	Yes	Yes	No	Rarely or never
Netherlands	Yes	No	Yes	Sometimes
Norway	Yes	Yes	Yes	Sometimes
Portugal	Yes	No	Yes	Very often
Romania	No	Not applicable	No	Not applicable
Slovenia	No	Not applicable	No	Not applicable
Spain	Yes	Yes	Yes	Very often
Sweden	No	Not applicable	Yes	Sometimes
UK*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Sometimes

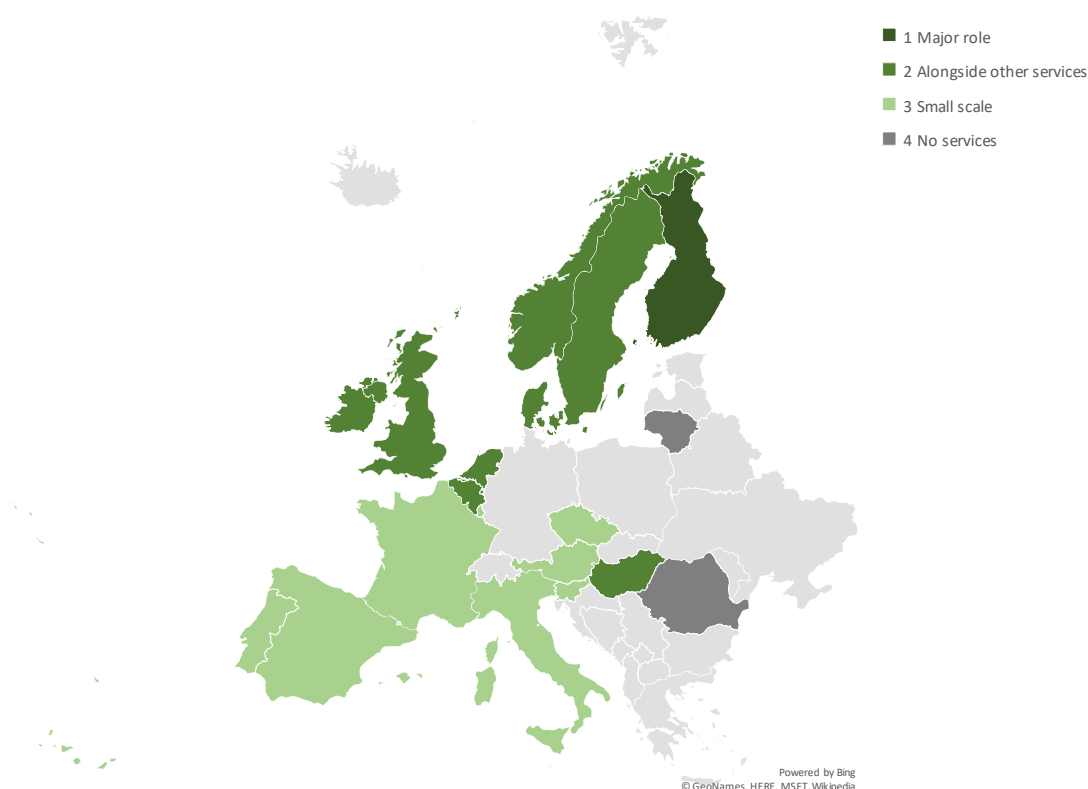
Source: Questionnaires.

\* Use of Housing First was more developed in Scotland and England than in Wales and Northern Ireland. National strategies are devolved in Scotland and Wales.

This finding could be connected to the principle of subsidiarity (devolution), but other explanations are plausible. From a policy perspective, it is interesting to see the impact that national strategies have on local development of Housing First services. In Finland, the national strategy tends to fold out to the local level in a coordinated manner. In France, the national level clearly directs what the local level does by only funding implementation of Housing First

in selected areas. In the Irish case, the recent adoption of Housing First at a national level has not yet been reflected in most regional strategies, as these are only in the process of periodic review. In the Netherlands, there is a national strategy (The Agenda 2018–2022), but the cities decide themselves on their own strategies. The spread of Housing First differs both between and within the responding countries (see Chapter 5).

Figure 3.1: Use of Housing First at strategic level



Source: Questionnaires.

Table 3.2 Housing First as a strategic response to homelessness

Main response	Used alongside other services	Used on a small scale	Rarely or never used
FI	BE DK HU IE NL NO UK	AT CZ ES FR IT LU PT SL SE	LT RO

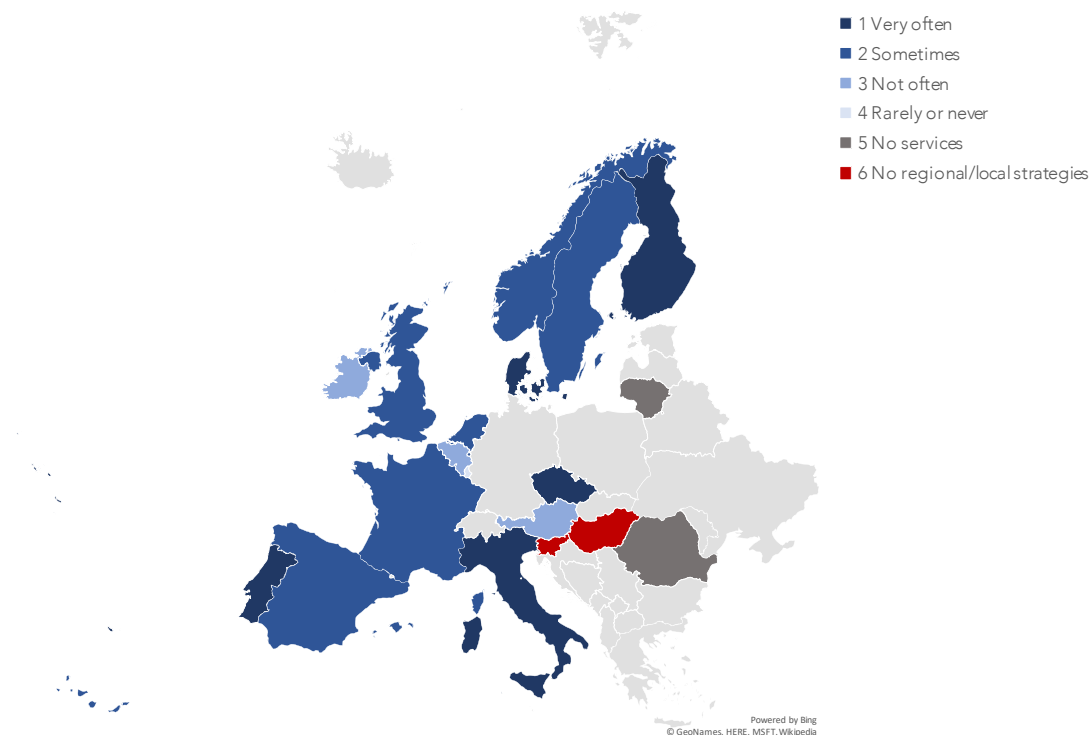
Source: Questionnaires Key: AT Austria; BE Belgium; CZ Czech Republic; DK Denmark; ES Spain; FI Finland; FR France; HU Hungary; IE Ireland; IT Italy; LU Luxembourg; LT Lithuania; NL Netherlands; NO Norway; PT Portugal; RO Romania; SE Sweden; SL Slovenia; UK United Kingdom.

In 5 of the 19 countries, Housing First was frequently used as a part of regional or local homelessness strategies. In another five countries, Housing First was used sometimes in regional or local strategies. Housing First can also be an integral part of local welfare policies without being part of a homelessness strategy, which is the case in Denmark, which has not had an official homelessness strategy since 2013, but where a substantial number of municipalities use Housing First as a component of general welfare services, as part of mainstreaming the Housing First approach. In 5 of the 19 countries there were no regional or local strategies, nor were there programmes or integration of Housing First into general welfare services as in Denmark. From the questionnaire, the use of

Housing First in local homelessness strategies forms the following groups:

- **Very often:** Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Portugal, and Spain
- **Sometimes:** France, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the UK (with greater, though not universal, use of Housing First in Scotland).
- **Not often:** Austria (used in Vienna), Belgium and Ireland
- **Rarely or never:** Luxembourg
- **No regional/municipal/local homelessness strategies:** Hungary, Lithuania, Romania and Slovenia

Figure 3.2: Use of Housing First in local/regional homelessness strategies



Source: Questionnaires.

The results show that there is a discrepancy between written strategies and the actual impact or use of Housing First in practice. Finland is the only country that reports Housing First as the main response to homelessness. In the Czech Republic, Italy, and Portugal, Housing First is only used on a small scale. The Portuguese case is interesting since Housing First is not part of the national strategy, but does play a role within the municipal strategy of Lisbon, which is also the only official municipal strategy described for Portugal. In fact, almost all of the Housing First provision in Portugal is in Lisbon (80%). This shows the uneven and variable development of Housing First in different countries. This is also the case in Sweden, where there has not been a national homelessness strategy since 2009.

Housing First is part of several municipal homelessness strategies and action plans across Europe. However, the lack of national governance regarding the homelessness situation creates a need for locally led strategies to reduce homelessness. The autonomy of municipalities can present both a challenge and an opportunity. The respondent from Spain

reports that even though there is a national homelessness strategy, the strategy is not really being implemented due to lack of funding<sup>44</sup>.

Housing First was most frequently described as being used on a small scale (8 out of 19 countries) or as being used alongside other homelessness services (7 out of 19 countries). Finland was the only country that reported Housing First as their main response to homelessness. In Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, and in the UK, Housing First was described as being used alongside other homelessness services, although in Denmark, Housing First has been official policy for a decade. In Austria, the Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden, Housing First was reported as being used only on a small scale (see also Chapter 5).

Neither Lithuania nor Romania had any operational Housing First services. It is noteworthy that France reported having Housing First only on a small scale at the same time as they have conducted one of the largest systematic evaluations on Housing First, because that pilot, *Un chez soi d'abord*, was only in four cities.

44 Source: Spanish questionnaire response.

The most recent development of homelessness strategies suggest that we would expect significant increase in the use and scale of Housing First in France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Sweden, and in the UK. One example of this expansion is the new French Housing First strategy, which will be carried out in 24 implementation territories from 2018–2022, together with an extension of the *Un chez soi d'abord* strategy - the combinations of which will result in an additional 2,000 places<sup>45</sup>.

In both Denmark and Norway, where Housing First is a clear part of their homelessness strategies, programmes, and policies, the respondents reported that there are still challenges. In Denmark this mainly concerns the up-scaling of Housing First, and in Norway this largely refers to the staircase model still being prevalent (as in many other countries). During the Danish national strategy, which ran from 2009–2013, 17 out of 98 municipalities took part in the development of Housing First. When the national strategy came to an end in 2013, an implementation programme was launched in which 24 municipalities participated. The biggest difference between the national strategy and the follow-up programme was funding. During the national strategy, there was sufficient funding whereas during the follow-up programme, municipalities had to fund the programmes themselves to a larger extent. In Norway, there are 21 Housing First programmes in 21 municipalities (out of 428). This is a rather rapid development, but at the same time it shows that national strategies rarely cover the whole country, often tending to focus on more urban areas with relative concentrations of homeless people (a trend also seen in Finland and Denmark).

The conclusion is that Housing First is integrated into homelessness strategies, at national, regional, and local level in many European countries. However, Housing First has not developed at an even rate; it can be quite prominently referred to in strategies, but remains quite uncommon in implementation. Housing First continues to be in the process of development and in some countries, it is still at a very early stage. The one country that stands out in the survey is Finland. It is the only country where Housing First can be seen as being the main response to homelessness. However, there is another emerging pattern, which includes countries like Denmark that have Housing First as an integral part of their homelessness work. In Denmark, 27 out of 98 municipalities have worked with Housing First. Some of these

municipalities have had the primary focus of mainstreaming the principles of Housing First into their general housing and support services. However, even though these practices are in place, Housing First is still not the default intervention across the whole of Denmark.

In some countries, a housing-led approach to homelessness is being established. On one hand, this is a positive evolution, but at the same time it can blur the lines between a 'Housing First' philosophy and a continuation of a 'staircase model'. Some of the issues around fidelity to the Housing First model are discussed in the following chapter.

Having Housing First written into homelessness strategies is not enough to guarantee that Housing First will be used for homeless people with high and complex needs. The results of the survey show that the strategy can be put in place, but in practice Housing First is not used very often or only operates in a few areas. As is discussed in Chapter 5, a strategy, whether it is local, regional, or national, has to have resources behind it to successfully develop Housing First. There must be enough adequate, affordable housing with reasonable security of tenure and there must be financial support that is both sufficient and reliable to enable Housing First services to work properly.

Equally, other research has shown that it is important to make a paradigmatic shift away from staircase models and the idea of making homeless people 'housing ready' - i.e. 'housing last' approaches - to actually understanding what a Housing First model is. The evidence base shows services that begin with meeting housing needs are a precondition for a strategy to effectively end homelessness for people with high and complex needs. At this stage, it seems like Finland has had the biggest intellectual shift in their homelessness work as a country using a new Housing First/housing-led strategic paradigm. They have gone through a shift from a shelter and hostel-based approach - where the homeless person had to be housing ready - to a general system of Housing First and a housing-led approach. This institutional change can be seen as a process of displacement<sup>46</sup>. In both Denmark and Norway, Housing First can also be described as a paradigm shift, where the Housing First principles are being integrated into general housing and support services, although it is not yet a universal response in either country. More recent trends in the overall homelessness strategies include a stronger focus on housing-led approaches with the ambition of increasing social housing supply, and a greater focus on prevention.

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45 Source: French questionnaire response.

46 Streeck, W. & Thelen, K. A. (2005) Introduction: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies. In Streeck, Wolfgang & Thelen, Kathleen Ann. (eds.). *Beyond continuity: institutional change in advanced political economies*. New York: Oxford University Press; Knutagård, Marcus & Kristiansen, Arne (2019) Scaling up Housing First Pilots – Drivers and Barriers. *Nordic Journal of Social Research*, 10, (1): 1–23.



# 4 FIDELITY IN EUROPEAN HOUSING FIRST

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at the ways in which Housing First was reported as being designed and delivered in the 19 countries, drawing on some supplementary data from other sources, including policy and academic resources to widen the discussion. Housing First services were compared against the *Housing First Guide Europe* core principles for Housing First. The chapter briefly describes the core principles of the guide before moving on to discuss fidelity to the Housing First model in different countries.

## CORE PRINCIPLES

Eight core principles for Housing First in Europe were agreed as part of the process of assembling the *Housing First Guide Europe*, a process that involved Dr Sam Tsemberis, the creator of the first Housing First services in the USA, who supported the development of the guide<sup>47</sup>:

- **Housing is a human right**
- Housing First has always been based around the principle that everyone has a right to housing. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights defines a home as offering legally-backed security of tenure, as affordable, as habitable, as having essential services such as power and water, as accessible to the people who live in it and as located within access to necessary services such as schools and shops. Housing must also be culturally appropriate to someone's needs.
- **Choice and control for service users**
- It should not be assumed that all homeless people with high support needs will share behaviours and other characteristics. Their needs cannot be effectively met with a standardised package of services that makes no allowance for individual needs, characteristics, behaviour, or experiences. The best way to understand a homeless person's needs is to listen to the person and their views on the kinds of help they need.
- **Separation of housing and treatment**
- Housing provided via Housing First is not conditional on behavioural change or accepting treatment. In practice, this means housing is still offered if someone does not stop drinking, will not accept treatment for mental health problems or turns down other offers of support. Remaining in housing provided via Housing First does not require someone to change their behaviour or accept treatment.
- **Recovery orientation**
- A recovery orientation means that Housing First focuses on the overall well-being of an individual. This includes their physical and mental health, their level of social support (from a partner, family or friends) and their level of social integration, i.e. being part of a community and taking an active part in society.
- **Harm reduction**
- Housing First uses a harm reduction model, as ending problematic drug and alcohol use can be a complex process and that services requiring abstinence, or detoxification, do not work well for many homeless people. As Housing First offers the people using it choice and control, they can opt to use alternative approaches such as abstinence-based programmes or detoxification treatment if they wish to do so.
- **Active engagement without coercion**
- There is an emphasis on trying to persuade people using Housing First to engage with the help they need. Housing First should never deny access to housing, evict someone from their housing, or remove support or treatment if someone is not behaving in what is seen as their own best interest. Hous-

47 <https://housingfirsteurope.eu/guide/core-principles-housing-first/>

ing First is assertive, though very importantly not aggressive, working with Housing First service users in a positive way that makes them believe that recovery is possible.

- **Person-centred planning**
- In Housing First, support and treatment are organised around an individual and their needs. Housing First adapts itself to service users, rather than expecting someone to adapt themselves to a Housing First service.
- **Flexible support for as long as is required**
- If a Housing First service user is evicted, Housing First remains in contact with that person and seeks to house them again. Equally, if someone using Housing First finds that they are unable to cope with living in their own home and abandon it, Housing First continues to work with them. Even when someone has been in settled housing for a considerable period of time, Housing First should keep working with them until they no longer require that form of support.
- 6 of the 18 countries were reported as not following one or more of the core principles in the *Housing First Guide Europe*. There was no single principle that countries were less likely to follow than all the others, instead it was a case of a minority of countries not following particular principles.

In summary:

- The **Czech Republic** was reported as not following choice and control or harm reduction. If accurate, this would mean that none of the services referred to as 'Housing First' were within the Housing First model.
- **Hungary** was reported as not using a model that saw housing as a human right, as not following active engagement and not offering flexible support for as long as was required, offering services that can be time-limited. Again, while Housing First was not widely used in Hungary, this would mean that none of the services in operation were within the Housing First model.
- **Slovenia** was reported as not following choice and control, separation of housing and support or recovery orientation, but this was in a context where Housing First was not really operating at all.

- **Spain** was reported as not separating housing from treatment in Housing First services. The detail of this is important, as Housing First can be offered through arrangements that allocate specific apartments/houses to Housing First service users, which are not available to anyone else. If the legal right to live in such apartments - an individual holding their own tenancy - is not influenced by whether or not they continue to use Housing First, it can be regarded as a Housing First model<sup>48</sup>. However, if someone does not have an independent, legal right to their home if they stop using Housing First, then it is not a Housing First service.
- **Lithuania** and **Romania** had no Housing First services.

Adherence to the core principles of the *Housing First Guide Europe*<sup>49</sup> was widespread in Europe and four countries reported that the guide was used as a national reference point for service and programme design (Ireland, Italy, Norway and Sweden). In the UK, Homeless Link based its own guidelines *Housing First in England: The Principles*<sup>50</sup> on the eight European core principles. The Welsh Government published its own guidelines on Housing First in early 2018, which again are broadly in line with European guidance<sup>51</sup>. The Glasgow Homeless Network published principles for Housing First in Scotland,<sup>52</sup> which, as in Wales and England, draw on the *Housing First Guide Europe*. Norway also produced a methodological guide supervised by Dr Sam Tsemberis. All of the Nordic countries surveyed were reported as following the core principles, along with Austria, France, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and the UK (Figure 4.1). The Housing First *Italia*<sup>53</sup> network promotes the standards of the *Housing First Guide Europe* and other networks such as Housing First Belgium<sup>54</sup> also actively promote fidelity to Housing First. In Norway, fidelity to Housing First is similarly actively promoted: the original fidelity score was translated into Norwegian and a process for scoring Housing First teams has started to be implemented.

48 This practice is followed in the congregate Housing First services operating in Finland, where people living in apartments for Housing First service users retain full rights to those apartments when or if they stop using Housing First support.

49 <https://housingfirsteurope.eu/guide/>

50 [hfe.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/HousingFirstinEngland\\_ThePrinciples.pdf](https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/HousingFirstinEngland_ThePrinciples.pdf)

51 <https://gov.wales/docs/desh/publications/180206-housing-first-en.pdf>

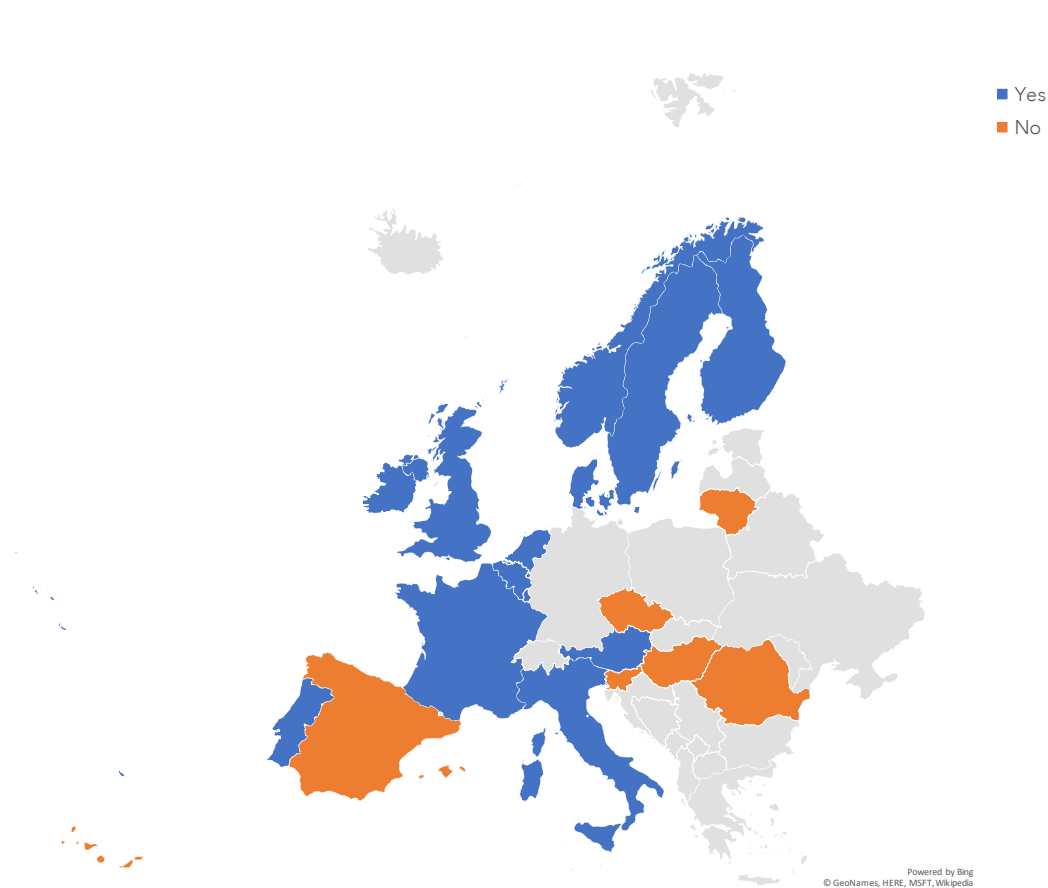
52 <http://www.ghn.org.uk/shien/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2018/01/Housing-First-The-Principles-v2.pdf>

53 <http://www.housingfirstitalia.org>

At the time of writing, Housing First services were reported as not yet being operational in Poland, where there was still heavy use of housing ready models using transitional forms of housing, alongside shelter services. Polish research that was reported on in 2015 explored the scope for using Housing First and concluded that specific arrangements would be needed to find a suitable housing supply for Housing First in Poland<sup>55</sup>. There were elements in the homelessness sector and academics and researchers in Poland who were actively advocating for development of Housing First.

German use of Housing First was limited but in a process of expansion at the time of writing (see next chapter). German practice in reducing homelessness was quite heavily focused on housing-led service models, using medium to high intensity support, alongside a range of preventative services. Housing First, in terms of actual services, was not yet common, but a housing-led philosophy underpinned strategy and service design in ways that were similar to some Nordic countries where Housing First was more widely used. The European guide has been translated into German<sup>56</sup>, although this process was led by Austrians (see Chapter 3).

Figure 4.1: Countries following the *Housing First Guide Europe Core Principles*



Source: Questionnaires.

54 <http://www.housingfirstbelgium.be>

55 Różycka, A. and Wygnańska, J. (2015) Summary of the feasibility study for “Housing First” – Evidence based Advocacy Project

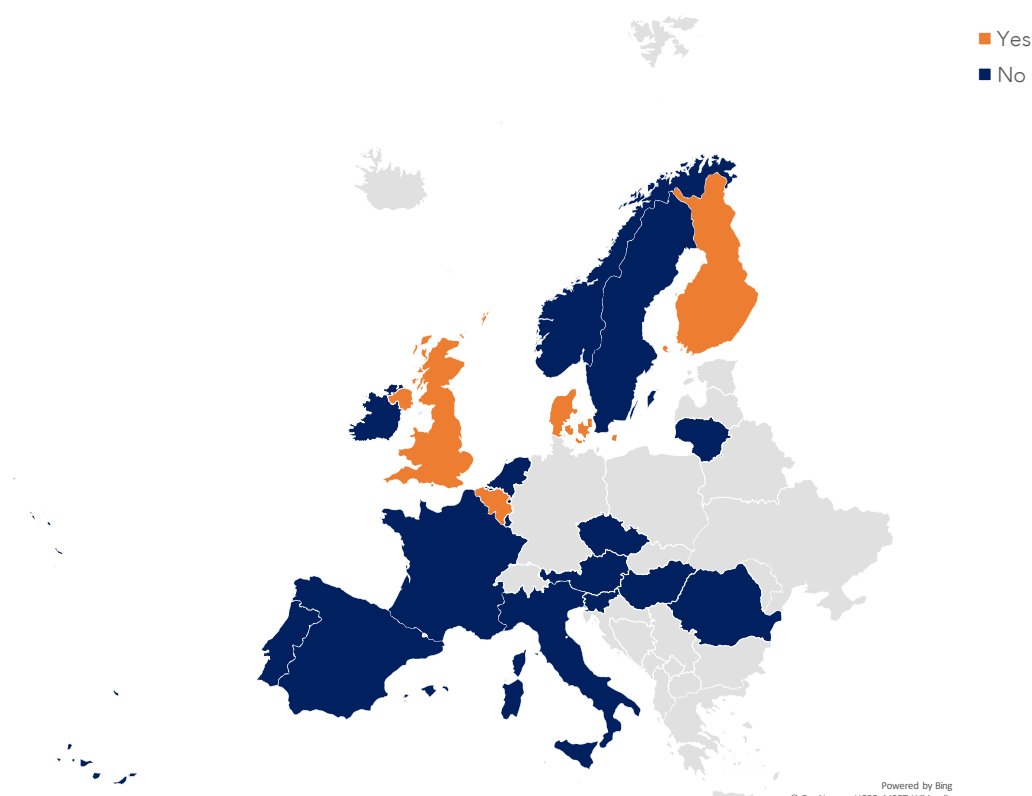
56 <https://housingfirsteurope.eu/assets/files/2017/12/housing-first-guide-deutsch.pdf>

## NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR HOUSING FIRST

Most of the 19 countries did not have their own guidelines or sets of standards for Housing First, taking guidance either from North America, such as that written by Dr Sam Tsemberis and colleagues, or the *Canadian Housing First*

*Toolkit*<sup>57</sup>, or following European guidance from the *Housing First Guide Europe*<sup>58</sup>.

Figure 4.2: Whether countries had their own national standards for Housing First



Source: Questionnaires.

The relative lack of specific, national-level guidance, combined with the evidence that the core principles of the European guide are widely recognised, indicates that there is largely a shared vision in Europe around Housing First. This has to be seen in the context of uneven development of Housing First in different European countries, but is nevertheless a positive finding.

The questionnaire also showed there were some examples of 'Housing First' services that do not follow the core principles in several coun-

tries where European guidance was a reference point, including France, Italy, Sweden and the UK. However, where Housing First is present and integrated within strategies or is becoming increasingly widespread across the homelessness sector, the services being developed often follow a shared philosophy.

57 <http://housingfirsttoolkit.ca>

58 <https://housingfirsteurope.eu>

59 Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J. (2013) The case for Housing First in the European Union: A critical evaluation of concerns about effectiveness *European Journal of Homelessness*, 7(2), pp. 21-41.



## FIDELITY IN THE OPERATION OF HOUSING FIRST

It has been argued elsewhere that there is a distinction between following the broad philosophy of Housing First, i.e. following the core principles, and reproducing the *detailed operation* of the original Housing First service model<sup>59</sup>. Fidelity to the Housing First model can be – and is – interpreted in various ways.

A recent study of fidelity in Housing First services in Europe has identified some of the challenges that exist in remaining faithful to a model originally developed for a specific context (New York in the early 1990s) while implementing the approach in a range of different countries with considerable differences in their health, welfare and housing systems, as well as their cultural and political responses to homelessness. Published in a special issue of the *European Journal of Homelessness* in late 2018<sup>60</sup>, a series of papers look at questions of fidelity in European countries, the USA, and Canada, focusing on particular programmes and Housing First services. This research, echoing some earlier analysis<sup>61</sup>, highlights the questions that can arise in balancing fidelity and adaptation when

developing Housing First services. Too much emphasis on detailed replication of the original model might mean that Housing First is not properly adapted to a specific country, region, city, or municipality, but too much adaptation to local circumstances could dilute the Housing First model and potentially undermine its effectiveness.

Based on comparing both Housing First programmes and individual services, the same study reported that fidelity to the original Housing First model was high in five countries. This included an original Tsemberis-led American service, the *Casas Primeiro*<sup>62</sup> programme in Portugal, the major French Housing First programme *Un chez-soi d'abord*<sup>63</sup>, a Norwegian Housing First service and a Canadian Housing First service. In Housing First services and programmes studied in Belgium, Ireland, Italy, and Spain, fidelity to the original Housing First model was lower. In part, the relative age of the programmes and services was considered to be an explanation for this, with longer-established services tending to score more highly on fidelity measures<sup>64</sup>.

## ACT AND ICM

The results from the survey of 19 countries conducted for this report showed that there were variations in the nature of support provided by Housing First services both within and across different European countries. Technically, a majority of countries had Housing First services offering both ACT (assertive treatment) and ICM (intensive case management) support (Figure 4.3). ICM offers high-intensity case management, which pro-

vides some support and creates connections between service users, and treatment and support provided by other health, support and social work services. In contrast, ACT directly provides treatment for many needs, including mental health problems, drug/alcohol problems and poor physical health, alongside case management. In the original model of Housing First, ACT was intended for homeless people with particularly high support needs<sup>65</sup>.

60 [https://www.feantsaresearch.org/public/user/Observatory/12-3\\_EJH\\_2018\\_v04.pdf](https://www.feantsaresearch.org/public/user/Observatory/12-3_EJH_2018_v04.pdf)

61 Johnson, G. et al (2012) Op. cit.

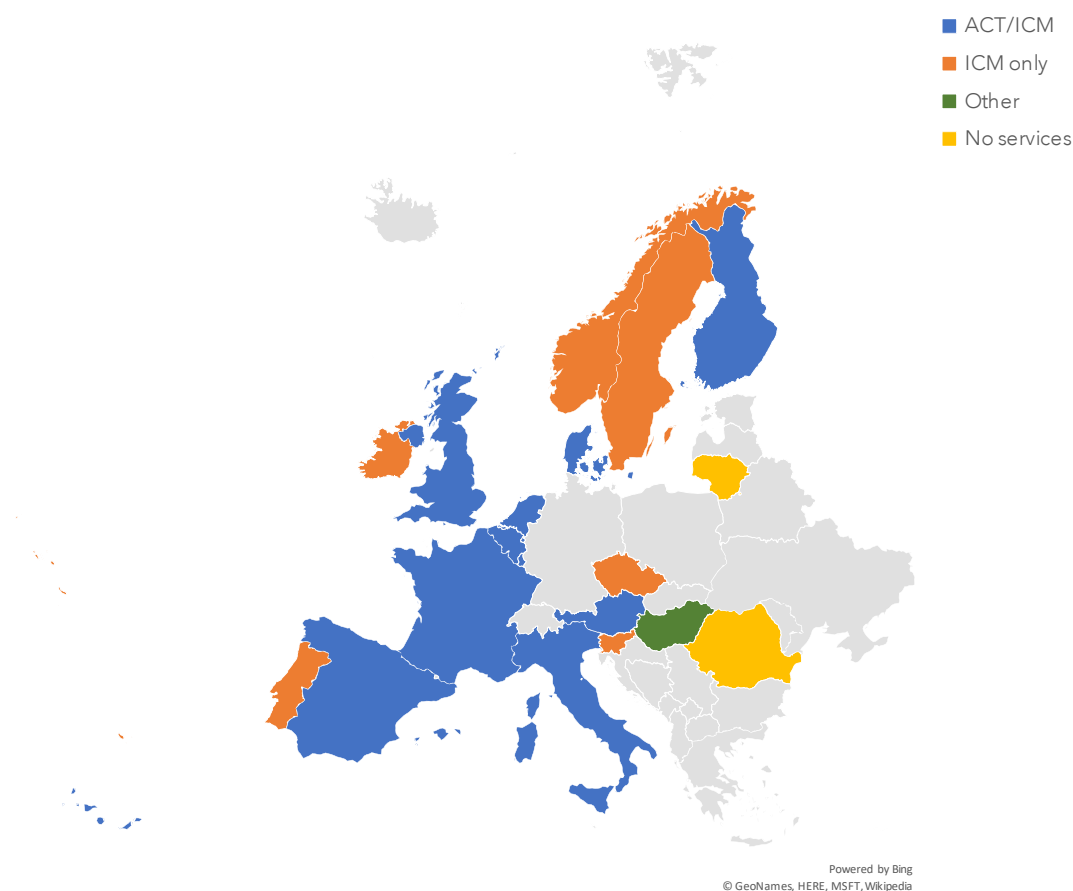
62 <http://www.aeips.pt/habitacao/casas-primeiro/>

63 [http://www.cohesion-territoires.gouv.fr/l-acces-et-le-maintien-dans-le-logement?id\\_courant=4195](http://www.cohesion-territoires.gouv.fr/l-acces-et-le-maintien-dans-le-logement?id_courant=4195)

64 Greenwood, R.M., Bernad, R., Aubry, T. and Agha, A. (2018) A Study of Programme Fidelity in European and North American Housing First Programmes: Findings, Adaptations, and Future Directions. *European Journal of Homelessness*, 12(3), pp. 275-297.

65 Tsemberis, S. (2010) Op. cit.

Figure 4.3: Types of support offered by Housing First by country



Source: Questionnaires.

In practice, the picture shown in Figure 4.3 needs some qualification. In several countries where Housing First offering ACT was available, it was a relatively small proportion of the Housing First provided. Much of the Housing First in Denmark, Finland, Italy, Spain and the UK was in the form of ICM-only projects, meaning services were typically quite close to those in Austria, Ireland, Portugal and Sweden in what they provided. In France, however, a high-fidelity version of Housing First mirrored the original Pathways to Housing model of Housing First services and the Canadian At Home/

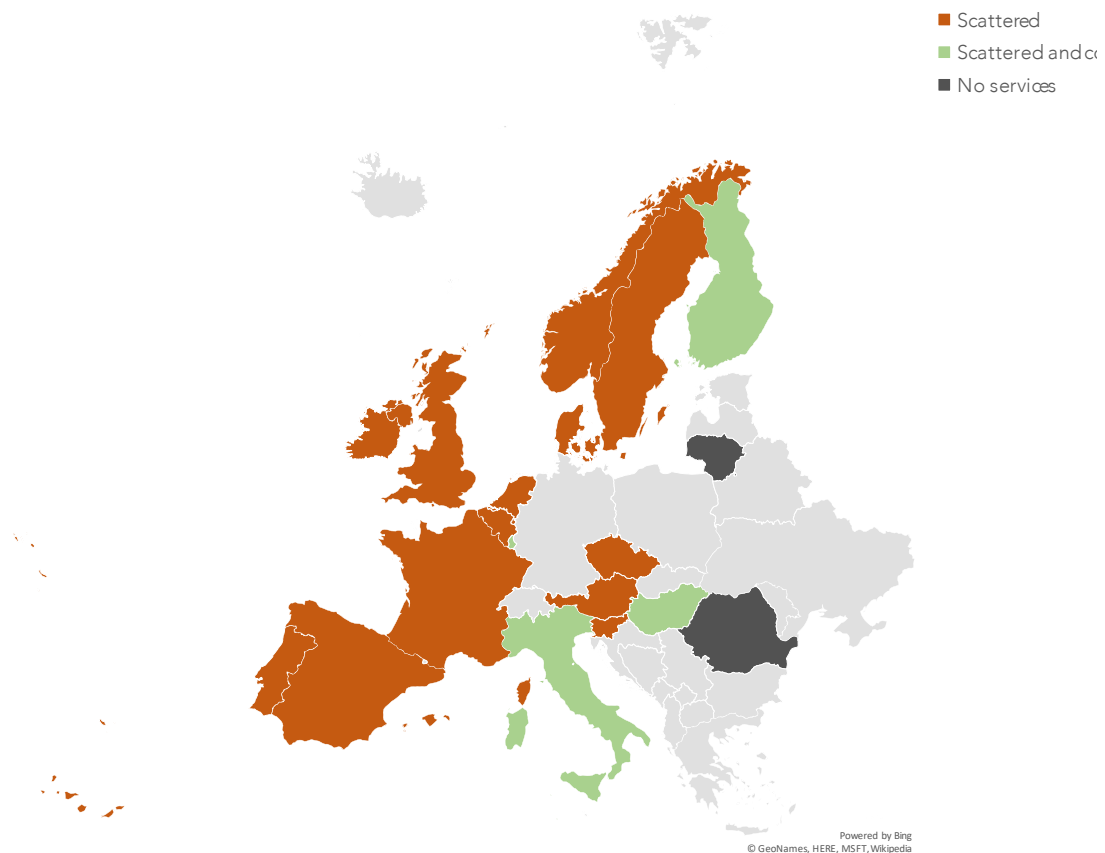
*Chez Soi* programme<sup>66</sup>. In comparison, Hungary was described as having Housing First services that were providing a version of intensive case management that did not follow the standardised ICM approach. There is evidence that some English Housing First services provide an intensified version of the low to medium level mobile housing support that is offered by housing-led services, which again did not follow either a standard ICM or ACT approach, although it very closely resembles ICM<sup>67</sup>.

66 [http://www.cohesion-territoires.gouv.fr/l-acces-et-le-maintien-dans-le-logement?id\\_courant=4195](http://www.cohesion-territoires.gouv.fr/l-acces-et-le-maintien-dans-le-logement?id_courant=4195)

67 Bretherton, J. and Pleace, N. (2015) *Housing First in England: An Evaluation of Nine Services* York: Centre for Housing Policy.

## TYPES OF HOUSING

Figure 4.4: Types of housing used by Housing First by country



Source: questionnaires

The definition of what constitutes congregate housing - i.e. people living in their own apartment or flat within a block containing other Housing First service users - is not exact. There are examples, especially in Finland, of Housing First that uses a dedicated apartment block containing only people who are current or former Housing First service users, although there is also wider use of Housing First and housing-led services using 'scattered' housing.

'Scattered' housing can potentially be situated within the same apartment block, so that while some of the neighbours are not using Housing First, others are, which means there is not necessarily a clear line between whether or not an apartment block becomes (effectively) congregate when the proportion of apartments with people using Housing First reaches a certain level. In the original Housing First, which advocated use of scattered housing, this was handled by setting an upper limit as to the proportion of a given apartment block that should be occupied by Housing First service users<sup>68</sup>.

As can be seen, there were no countries in which Housing First was only provided using congre-

gate housing. In Finland, where use of congregate models of Housing First service was comparatively widespread, housing-led/Housing First support is often provided using scattered housing. Luxembourg was reported as making seemingly heavier use of congregate models than scattered housing, but in a context where use of Housing First was not widespread. Scattered housing can be seen as supporting social integration, as Housing First service users are in ordinary housing within ordinary communities, not in separate blocks<sup>69</sup>. Some research has reported potential risks around isolation and variable outcomes in social integration for Housing First service users in scattered housing. Congregate forms of Housing First may offer better social support from living alongside people with shared experiences, and because staffing is on-site, may be better equipped to support people with particularly high and complex needs. However, congregate housing is physically separate from communities and may also contain potential risks, such as people living alongside other drug users while trying to reduce or end their own drug use<sup>70</sup>.

68 Tsemberis, S. (2010) Op. cit.

69 Ibid.

70 Pleace, N. (2018) Op. cit.

## THE FOCUS OF HOUSING FIRST SERVICES

This section looks at the different ways in which Housing First has been implemented. Housing First is intended to support people who have high and complex needs, but there are some differences in the focus of Housing First services. For example, in France, the *Un chez soi d'abord* programme is very much an intervention designed for homeless people with mental health problems, which means it is often working with people with longer-term and repeated experiences of homelessness who have a psychiatric diagnosis. However, there are reports that a much broader approach is being taken by 24 cities that are accelerating Housing First programmes. The *Un chez soi d'abord* programme has been described as a health led initiative that contributes to broader homelessness strategy - the plan *Logement d'abord* - but does not constitute the homelessness strategy for France. In Finland, the focus is on long-term homelessness, which means that Housing First is often working with people with mental health problems, although this group includes individuals who may *not* have a psychiatric diagnosis, but to whom Housing First is available because they

have not been able to exit homelessness using other services<sup>71</sup>. In the UK, the scope of services can be even broader, encompassing any homeless people with high and complex needs more generally, but not people who have been homeless for a given amount of time, or who have a specific set of support needs<sup>72</sup>. There have also been experiments with developing versions of Housing First that are for women with lived experience of homelessness and high and complex needs<sup>73</sup>, or for vulnerable populations of homeless young people with a history of contact with social work child protection services, as in Canada<sup>74</sup> and the UK<sup>75</sup>. One commonality between all forms of Housing First is that they all encompass people with experience of long-term and recurrent homelessness, although further support needs such as a psychiatric diagnosis may be required to access the service in some cases.

Practice does of course vary within countries, so there is a UK Housing First service that focuses only on people who have been using other homelessness services, without being able to exit homelessness, for a sustained period.

## VARIATIONS IN HOUSING FIRST SERVICES

Respondents across the 19 countries were asked how similar or dissimilar they thought Housing First services were in their country. Most of the countries were described as having Housing First services that were either similar to each other (Belgium, Ireland, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden) or as showing some variation, but being broadly similar (Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain). However, Austria, Norway and the UK were described as having Housing First services that were 'quite different' from one another, with the Czech Republic being described as having

Housing First services that were 'very different' from each other.

These findings broadly reflect those around the core principles, which most but not all countries were described as following, along with the variations in the types of housing used and the kinds of support provided. Again, there was more evidence here of consistency between Housing First services than of variation at European level, but as other recent research has shown<sup>76</sup>, European Housing First services do not always follow an identical philosophy and show variation in their operational details.

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71 Y Foundation (2017) Op. cit.

72 Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J. (2013) *Camden Housing First: A Housing First experiment in London* York, Centre for Housing Policy, University of York

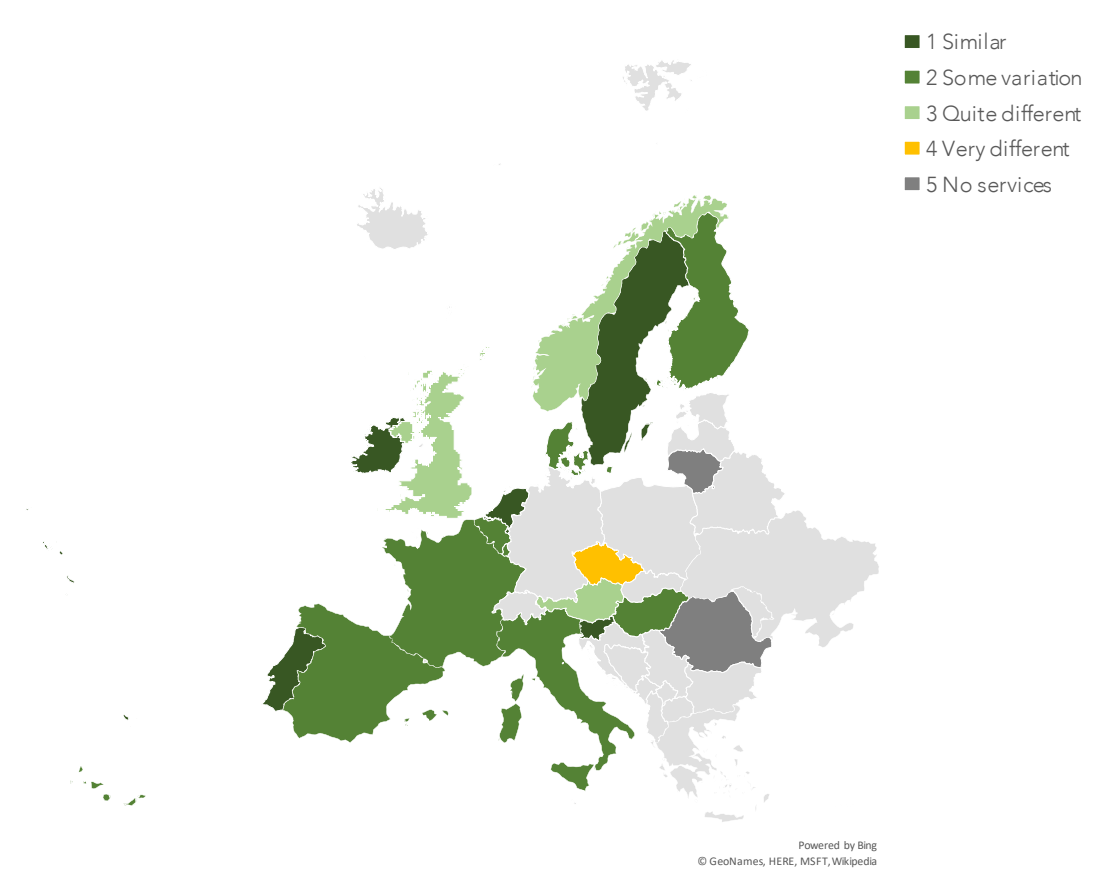
73 <https://thp.org.uk/services/HousingFirst>

74 <https://www.homelesshub.ca/HF4Y>

75 <https://www.scottishhousingnews.com/article/first-youth-housing-first-project-launched-in-the-uk>

76 Greenwood, R.M. *et al* (2018) Op. cit.

Figure 4.5: How similar or different Housing First services are from one another by country



Source: Questionnaires.



# 5 HOUSING FIRST IN EUROPE

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the extent of Housing First in Europe. This part of the report explores the number of Housing First places being offered in different countries and compares countries where Housing First is relatively well developed, with those where there is less progress and countries in which growth of Housing First is rapid.

## THE EXTENT OF HOUSING FIRST

Housing First is not always a very widespread form of homelessness service provision in European countries and data on the extent of Housing First within countries can be variable. Sometimes there is a lack of centralised information because the data that do exist are collected at the level of individual services, regions, or municipalities and not added together for use in a national level database. Another reason that Housing First is sometimes not very widespread is that it is still in the process of development in some European countries.

Housing First is also intended for a specific group of homeless people with high and complex needs. In Great Britain (England, Scotland, and Wales) the total need for Housing First was estimated at between 18,400 and 32,500 people in 2018<sup>77</sup>. This can be compared to around 80,000 statutorily homeless households, containing some 130,000 children, who were living in temporary accommodation in England at any one point during 2018<sup>78</sup> or an (estimated) 40,000 individuals and households living in hostels, refuges and night shelters on any given night in Great Britain<sup>79</sup>.

Across the 19 countries, only four reported that they had more than 1,000 people being supported by Housing First services in late

2018 and only five reported that they had 20 or more active Housing First services in operation (Figure 5.1 and Table 5.1). Precise data on the number of Housing First services and the number of people being supported by those services were often not available, but the indications were that Housing First was most extensively used by Austria (mostly Vienna), Finland, Italy and the Netherlands. Elsewhere, as in France, Housing First was integrated into national and regional homelessness strategy but was not supporting a very large number of people.

There is a clear need to improve the quality and comparability of data on the use of Housing First services across Europe. Alongside some of the reasons already discussed - such as only collecting data on Housing First at the level of individual services, municipalities, or regions and not using a common framework for data collection - there can also be a focus on outcomes rather than on service activity. Finland, for example, lacks detailed national data on what its Housing First services are doing and their scale, but is working on the (not unreasonable) assumption that the reductions achieved in long-term homelessness are associated with the strategic shift from 'housing ready' to housing-led and Housing First services<sup>80</sup>.

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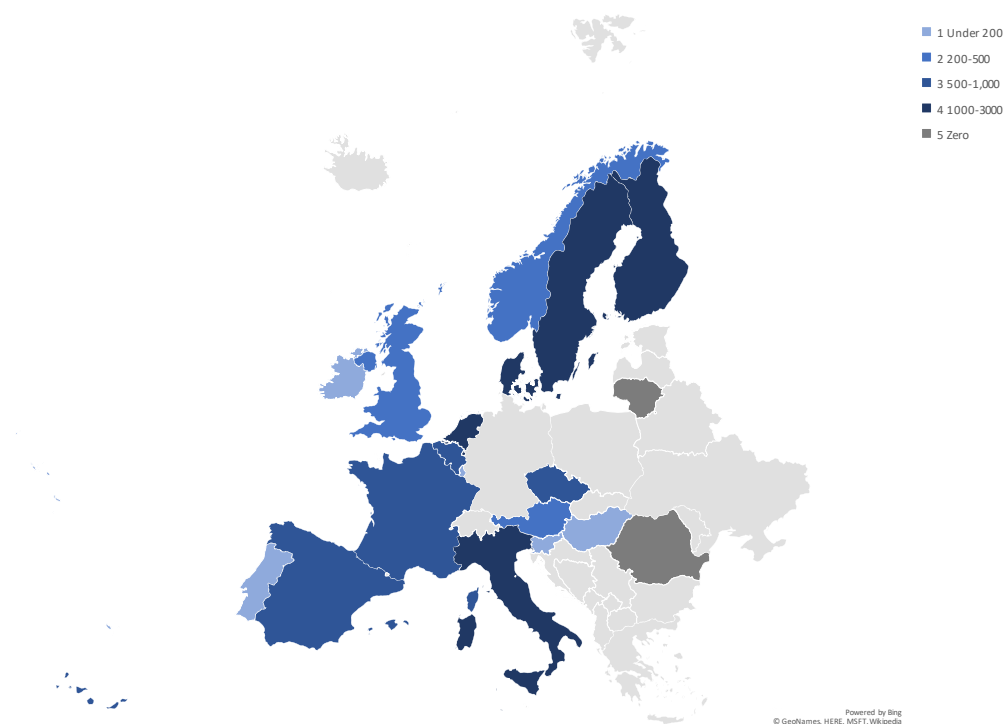
77 Blood, I., Goldup, M., Peters, L., Dulson, S. (2018) *Implementing Housing First across England, Scotland and Wales* London: Crisis.

78 <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/homelessness-statistics>

79 Bramley, G. (2018) *Core homelessness in Great Britain*. London: Crisis

80 Pleace, N. (2017) *The Action Plan for Preventing Homelessness in Finland 2016-2019: The Culmination of an Integrated Strategy to End Homelessness?* *European Journal of Homelessness* 11(2), pp.95-115.

Figure 5.1: Approximate extent of places in Housing First in Europe



Source: Questionnaires. Based on data and estimates.

Table 5.1 shows some of the gaps in information in more detail. One of the more striking findings is uncertainty about the number of Housing First services that are operating in most of the countries. In some cases, such as Italy, where the Housing First *Italia*<sup>81</sup> network brings together the homelessness organisations that are providing Housing First services, national level data are available, likewise in England (but not the UK as a whole) through the Housing First England<sup>82</sup> network. In Denmark and Finland, the measurement of Housing First

is more of a challenge because there is a high degree of philosophical integration of the approach within a broadly housing-led strategy, which means the lines between 'Housing First' and other homelessness services is harder to draw. This reflects how widely Housing First has been mainstreamed into local welfare services in several municipalities in these countries. By comparison, high-fidelity Housing First services in France are clearly distinct from other homelessness services

81 <https://www.fiopsd.org/en/housing-first-italia/>

82 <https://hfe.homeless.org.uk>

Table 5.1 Data on the scale of Housing First

Country	Actual size (data)	Estimated size	Housing First services (data)	Housing First services (estimated)
Austria	Not available	200-500	Not available	5-10
Belgium	Not available	200-500	17	Not applicable
Czech Republic <sup>1</sup>	Not available	500-1,000	Not available	11-20
Denmark	Not available	1,000-3,000	Not available	27 areas <sup>2</sup>
Finland	Not available	1,000-3,000	Not available	Not available
France	Not available	500-1,000	Not available	11-20
Hungary	Not available	50-200	14 <sup>3</sup>	Not applicable
Ireland	Not available	50-200	Not available	5-10
Italy	Not available	1,000-3,000 <sup>4</sup>	35	Not applicable
Lithuania	No services	No services	No services	No services
Luxembourg	Not available	50-200	4	Not applicable
Netherlands	Not available	1,000-3,000	Not available	21-30
Norway	253 <sup>5</sup>	Not applicable	21	Not applicable
Portugal	Not applicable	100	4	Not applicable
Romania	No services	No services	No services	No services
Slovenia	Not available	55-65 <sup>6</sup>	Not applicable	3
Spain <sup>7</sup>	Not available	500-1,000	Not available	31-40
Sweden	558 <sup>8</sup>	Not applicable	20	Not applicable
UK	Not available	660 <sup>9</sup>	Not available	49 <sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Czech questionnaire notes that an estimate of Housing First services and places is problematic because fidelity to the Housing First core principles is variable (see Chapter 3).

<sup>2</sup> Housing First services are integrated into the homelessness services of 27 Danish municipalities, but some have mainstreamed the principles of Housing First into their general housing and support services, so a separate or detached 'Housing First' service does not necessarily exist in every area.

<sup>3</sup> Based on ESF funding of homelessness services in Hungary. Other few (app. 5-10) NGO pilots are not included.

<sup>4</sup> In total, 688 people were supported by Housing First services between 2014-2016 (source: Housing First Italia/fio.PSD), the current estimate at the time of writing was 1,000 plus.

<sup>5</sup> Data collected October 2018 at bi-annual national HF network-meeting.

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Social Affairs estimate.

<sup>7</sup> Data on Housing First in Spain in 2016 are available in the survey to homelessness services conducted by the National statistics institute in 2016 see:

[http://www.ine.es/dyngs/INEbase/es/operacion.htm?c=Estadistica\\_C&cid=1254736176925&menu=resultados&secc=1254736195145&idp=1254735976608](http://www.ine.es/dyngs/INEbase/es/operacion.htm?c=Estadistica_C&cid=1254736176925&menu=resultados&secc=1254736195145&idp=1254735976608)

<sup>8</sup> Lund University research, November 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Sources: Homeless Link (England), Welsh Government, Scottish Government, Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Blood *et al*<sup>83</sup>.

Norway appeared to have solid data at national level as to how many Housing First services there were and how many people were being supported. Sweden, where Lund University has been leading research and practice around Housing First for some years and taken on a role in coordinating data, also has reliable national level numbers. In Portugal, activity is confined to a small number of services, but again there is a clear national picture.

In the UK, things were more of a challenge because administration of England, and Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales is separate in terms of homelessness policy. Scotland led the development of Housing First in the UK, with the first operational service run by Turning Point Scotland in Glasgow, while dedicated funding was set to expand the number of services to at least five major cities, supporting approximately 800 people at any one point. The Scottish Government's requirement for all local authorities to provide rapid rehousing and Housing First action plans is significant. Direction from central government has been described as making a real difference in moving Housing First from pilot programmes into the default model for homeless people with high and complex needs. In Wales, 10 Housing First services were reported as operational in early 2018 although they were described as operat-

ing at small scale and some were in the process of being set up<sup>84</sup>, but it can be estimated there were at least 50 places in Wales. The first Welsh Housing First service, run by the Wallich in Ynys Mon, became operational in 2012<sup>85</sup>. England reported 32 services supporting 350 people as at the end of 2016 and Housing First England estimated that this number is now higher<sup>86</sup>. The first English Housing First service appears to have been set up in Camden, London in early 2012<sup>87</sup>. In Northern Ireland, a Housing First pilot located in Belfast began operating in 2013. The pilot was evaluated, found to be successful<sup>88</sup> and continues to operate, with a second service having also been developed. Together, the two services have rehoused 87 people as of June 2018 and with an approximate capacity of 60<sup>89</sup>.

The UK is illustrative of the wider issue of data on the use and extent of Housing First not always being coordinated and aggregated at national level. At the extreme, data on Housing First seem to only exist at the level of individual projects, or perhaps at city, municipal, or regional level (depending on how local government is structured). The possibility of creating a shared database on European Housing First services should be explored, as a clearer picture of services and what they are achieving could be generated, this point is revisited in the concluding chapter.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF HOUSING FIRST

In Denmark and in Finland, Housing First could be described as already established and working as an integral part of homelessness strategy and policy. In France, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and the UK, Housing First was described as 'increasing quickly' in scale and significance. There is evidence that Germany is also starting to see increases in the use of Housing First. In Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Spain, and Slovenia, a slow increase in the use of Housing First was reported, although in three

of these countries, Austria, Belgium, and the Netherlands, Housing First was clearly already part of the strategic response to homelessness. Hungary, Lithuania and Romania were reported as having no increase in Housing First, but of the three countries only Hungary was described as actually having any working Housing First services linked with ESF (European Social Fund) funding or NGO initiatives.

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84 Blood, I. *et al* (2018) Op. cit.; Bellis, A. and Wilson, W. (2018) Housing First: tackling homelessness for those with complex needs *House of Commons Briefing Paper* Number 08368, 17 July 2018.

85 Blood, I. *et al* (2018) Op. cit.

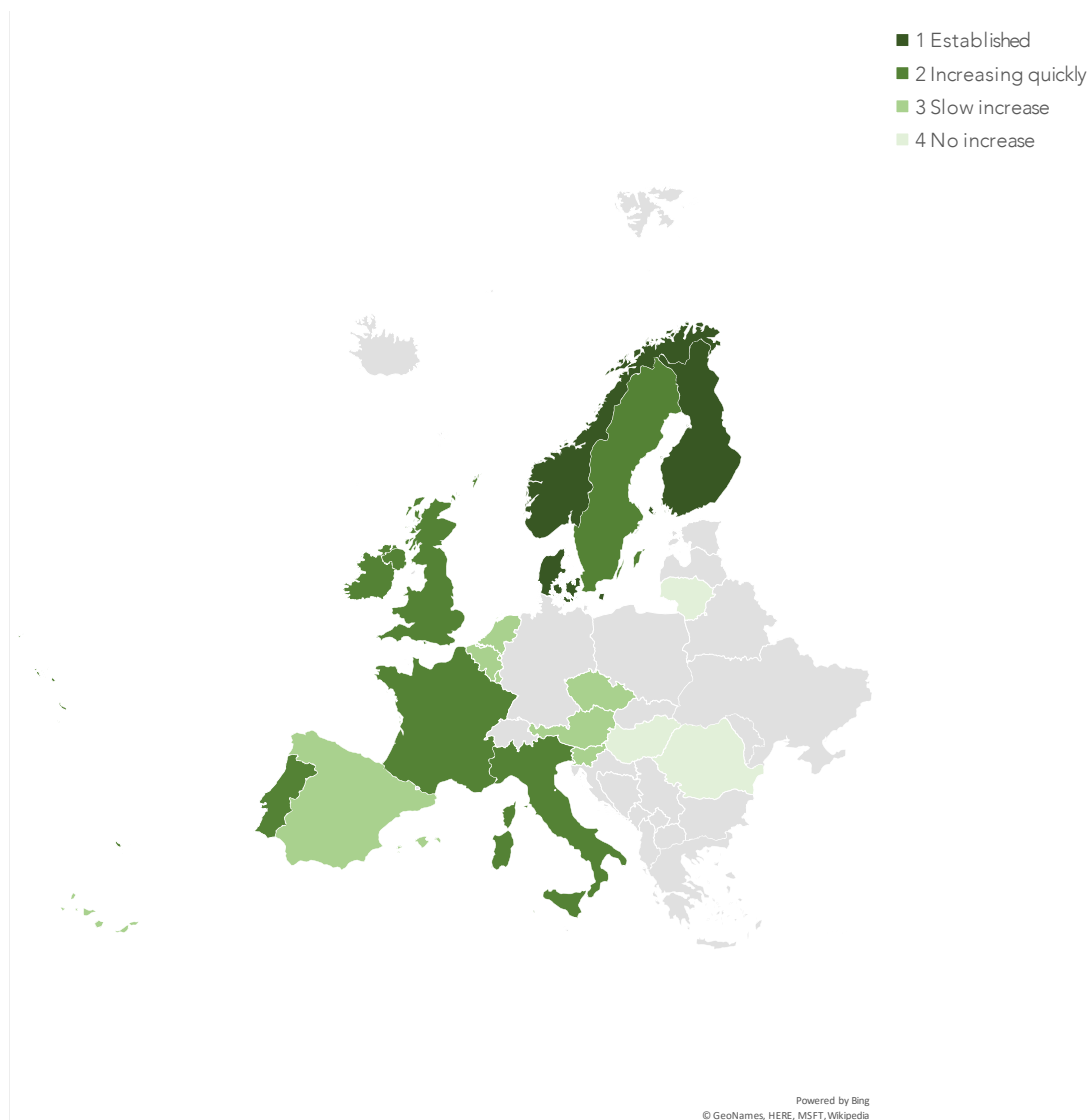
86 Housing First England (2016) *The Picture of Housing First in England* London: Homeless Link. These data were referred to in the questionnaire response for the UK.

87 Bretherton, J. and Pleace, N. (2013) Op. cit.

88 Boyle, F.; Palmer, J. and Ahmed, S. (2016) *The efficiency and effectiveness of the Housing First support service piloted by Depaul in Belfast, funded by Supporting People: An SROI evaluation* Portsmouth: North Harbour Consulting.

89 Depaul (2018) *Housing First Leading the Way Together: Report on Fidelity Assessment of Depaul Belfast and Derry/Londonderry Housing First Services* Belfast: Depaul.

Figure 5.2: The development of Housing First in Europe



Source: Questionnaires.

## HOUSING FIRST AS AN ESTABLISHED APPROACH

In Denmark, use of Housing First began with the 2007-2013 homelessness strategy, which contained the development of a Housing First programme (see Chapter 3). The wider strategy was influenced by a Housing First/housing-led ethos, with a clear emphasis on providing access to permanent housing with intensive social support. The programme used two elements taken directly from the North American Housing First model, Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) and Intensive Case Management (ICM) (see Chapter 4). The Danish programme also included another model of support from North America, Critical Time Intervention (CTI), which has considerable similarities with Housing First but differs in having an approach that is time limited, the core idea being

that intensive support is used to get someone to a point where they can transition to lower intensity support or independent living, within a set time-frame.

All these services were intended for homeless people with high and complex needs. There was variation in how Housing First approaches were used - scattered housing was more common, as was use of ICM - but there was a congregate service and an ACT-only service in operation. In total, 17 out of 98 municipalities began to provide one or more services; these 17 municipalities contained around two-thirds of all the homeless people recorded in the bi-annual Danish homeless count. ICM was most widely used and has helped around 700 people, with CTI being the next most com-



mon at around 300. The single ACT-only service, based in Copenhagen, supported 90 individuals. There is heavy use of social housing for Housing First in Denmark, although some issues with securing and funding places in social housing exist, alongside some challenges in relation to using the private rented sector (see below)<sup>90</sup>.

The results of the Danish programme clearly showed that on an individual level the combination of access to permanent housing and intensive support within a Housing First approach had very positive outcomes for the homeless people who received these interventions. A further programme was supported from 2014-2016, with 24 municipalities participating. During this period about 350 individuals were rehoused via Housing First and housing-led approaches, retaining their housing at very high rates<sup>91</sup>.

In Finland, the experience of developing and deploying services with a Housing First approach, together with the use of an integrated, national strategy that followed a broad 'Housing First' (housing-led) philosophy similar to that of Denmark, has been described in the 2017 Y-Foundation publication, *A Home of your Own: Housing First and Ending Homelessness in Finland*<sup>92</sup>. The Finnish Housing First model was originally developed to tackle the long-term homelessness and, since 2008, has been seen as the cornerstone of Finland's response to homelessness. The process

of development can be broadly characterised as having two phases. Initially, Housing First was rapidly deployed using a congregate approach, which converted existing large homelessness shelters and other buildings into dedicated apartment blocks providing Housing First. As the Finnish strategy has matured, a wider programme of new-build and scattered-housing services has followed, using a mix of Housing First and housing-led approaches<sup>93</sup> (see Chapter 3). Housing First services are more heavily concentrated in metropolitan areas where homelessness is at higher levels, broadly reflecting patterns of Housing First use in Denmark<sup>94</sup>. Finnish strategy has concentrated on using Housing First services for long-term homeless people who often have high and complex needs.

Norwegian use of Housing First is similarly focused on a relatively small group of 21 municipalities, within 428 municipalities across Norway as a whole. As in Denmark and Finland, Housing First is operating in the capital and in more urbanised areas. Housing First is clearly targeted at people with high and complex needs, within a broader policy context in which homelessness is unlikely to be caused by purely economic reasons. This again mirrors the patterns seen in Denmark and Finland, where welfare systems are also extensive and long-term/recurrent homelessness is linked to high cost, high-risk individuals with complex support needs<sup>95</sup>.

## COUNTRIES WHERE USE OF HOUSING FIRST IS INCREASING QUICKLY

In France, following the successful *Un chez-soi d'abord* pilot of four Housing First services in Lille, Paris, Marseille and Toulouse - the largest and most socially scientific robust trial of the Housing First yet conducted in Europe<sup>96</sup> - it was announced that the Housing First programme would be expanded to 16 services in 2017. The 16 Housing First services coming on-stream are designed to offer 2,000 places over the course of 2018-2022, with additional support to develop Housing First and housing led services in another 24 cities. Within the five-year plan from 2018-2022<sup>97</sup>, there is specific provision for technical and financial support to develop Housing First services at local level. Significant-

ly, France has taken the decision to expand the original focus of the *Un chez-soi d'abord* pilot, which was (like Canadian and American services) intended for homeless people with a psychiatric diagnosis with a *Logement d'abord* Housing First programme that has a wider focus across homelessness. As in Finland, there is a broader philosophical emphasis on a Housing First/housing-led approach to homelessness underpinning the national homelessness strategy<sup>98</sup>.

In Ireland, government-funded Housing First is found only in Dublin, where initial experiments with Housing First began in 2011. A small number of Housing First services have

90 Source: Danish questionnaire response.

91 Source: Danish questionnaire response.

92 <https://ysaatio.fi/en/housing-first-finland/a-home-of-your-own-handbook>

93 Pleace, N.; Culhane, D.P.; Granfelt, R. and Knutagård, M. (2015) *The Finnish Homelessness Strategy: An International Review* Helsinki: Ministry of the Environment

94 Source: Finnish questionnaire response.

95 Source: Norwegian questionnaire response.

96 <http://www.home-eu.org/85-percent-homeless-persons-france-keep-home-two-years/>

97 [https://www.gouvernement.fr/sites/default/files/contenu/piece-jointe/2018/03/plaquette\\_lda\\_4p\\_vf.pdf](https://www.gouvernement.fr/sites/default/files/contenu/piece-jointe/2018/03/plaquette_lda_4p_vf.pdf)

98 Source: French questionnaire response.

also been run by the NGO sector, including two projects supported by Dr Sam Tsemberis, operating with more limited funding. NGO initiatives also included one of the first European services for homeless youth<sup>99</sup>. In 2014, the Dublin Housing First programme was expanded from 35 tenancies to 100, but focused on people who were long-term rough sleepers rather than on homelessness among people with high and complex needs. In 2017, Dublin Housing First services were further expanded to 300 places, and the services began to work with long-term homeless people in homeless shelters, as well as people sleeping rough. Although experiments with Housing First were among the first in Europe, and Housing First was first mentioned in government policy in 2011, Housing First was not formally integrated into homelessness strategy until 2016. The Irish Government created the post of National Director of Housing First in 2018 and published the *Housing First National Implementation Plan 2018-2021*<sup>100</sup> later that year<sup>101</sup>.

In Italy, the federation of homelessness organisations, *fiopSD*<sup>102</sup> has taken a leading role in the development of Housing First through the Housing First *Italia*<sup>103</sup> network which incorporates homelessness service providers, researchers, and academics. Use of Housing First has been expanding significantly since 2014, with a mix of more than 50 local authorities, non-profit, and faith-based organisations being involved. Development is being led through the Housing First *Italia* network although there has been an increase in government support. Initially, Housing First was concentrated in larger cities, identified as having more than 400 homeless people in the 2015 Istat national homelessness survey, but can be described as becoming more widespread in some regions, including Piemonte, Lombardia, Emilia-Romagna, and Sicilia. There is some use of Housing First for homeless families with support needs in the South, but Northern Italian services tend to focus on long-term homeless people<sup>104</sup>.

The scale of Housing First in Portugal was still relatively small, but the idea has been be-

coming an increasingly mainstream response to homelessness, which is broadly comparable to the situation in Germany. Housing First was heavily concentrated in the Lisboa region, which reflected the wider trend across Europe to focus services on major urban areas and capital cities, where lone adult homelessness was relatively concentrated. There were approximately 80 places in the Lisboa (Lisbon) services and another 18 in Cascais. The fourth Housing First service in Braga in Northern Portugal was very small in scale in late 2018<sup>105</sup>.

In Sweden, at least 20 municipalities were either providing or funding Housing First services at the end of 2018, with the bulk of services following an ICM approach. Although Housing First was not yet an established part of the policy response to homelessness it was seen as becoming increasingly widespread and as a subject that was very widely discussed. In Stockholm, Housing First services were running, but without formal cooperation or support from the city. Lund University has taken an active role in promoting the use of Housing First and working in collaboration with the municipalities<sup>106</sup>. From 2018-2020, a homelessness hub run by the Swedish National City Missions - in collaboration with Lund University - is operating with support from national lottery funding, and taking a role in disseminating Housing First across Sweden<sup>107</sup>.

In the UK, Housing First had been developing quickly in Scotland, with the announcement of £4 million (€4.6m) in funding to support local authorities (municipalities) in the five cities participating in the joint Social Bite and Corra Housing First initiative<sup>108</sup> around a Housing First Scotland Fund, designed to support purchasing housing for Housing First in the major cities. Scotland may be the first part of the UK to develop a national level Housing First programme and, like Ireland, is among the first European countries to be developing Housing First for youth<sup>109</sup>. In England, progress has been variable and funding for Housing First has often been erratic and short-term. Individual projects and programmes have been developed by

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99 [https://www.endyouthhomelessness.ie/download/pdf/youth\\_housing\\_partnership\\_approach.pdf](https://www.endyouthhomelessness.ie/download/pdf/youth_housing_partnership_approach.pdf)

100 [https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/housing\\_first\\_implementation\\_plan\\_2018.pdf](https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/housing_first_implementation_plan_2018.pdf)

101 Source: Irish questionnaire response.

102 <https://www.fiopSD.org/en/>

103 <http://www.housingfirstitalia.org/>

104 Source: Italian questionnaire response.

105 Source: Portuguese questionnaire response.

106 <https://www.soch.lu.se/en/research/research-groups/housing-first>

107 Source: Swedish questionnaire response.

108 <https://www.corra.scot/grant-programmes/housing-first-scotland-fund/>

109 <http://www.rocktrust.org/housing-first-for-youth/>

some cities but not others and, as in Italy with Housing First *Italia*, a network has been built, Housing First England<sup>110</sup> and a feasibility study was funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Housing First Europe Hub, which was commissioned by the homelessness charity, Crisis<sup>111</sup>. A £28m (€32m) three-year pilot programme, supported by central (UK) government, directly led from this study and was announced in 2018, focusing on major urban centres in Merseyside, the West Midlands and Greater Manchester<sup>112</sup>. In Wales, Housing First has also been integrated into wider homelessness strategy, with Welsh

Government funding being used to support the development of 10 services and a task group centred on reducing youth homelessness and implementing Housing First was established in 2018<sup>113</sup>. Progress in Northern Ireland is more limited, but two services are running in Belfast and Derry and extension of Housing First services is a goal of the 2017-2022 homelessness strategy<sup>114</sup>. The UK has also seen some experiments with modifying the Housing First model, including a service focused on homeless women with high and complex needs operating in Manchester<sup>115</sup> and a service focused on young people in West Lothian (Scotland)<sup>116</sup>.

## COUNTRIES WHERE USE OF HOUSING FIRST IS INCREASING SLOWLY

Austria was described as experiencing uneven development of Housing First. Services were well established and increasing in Vienna, following a 'Viennese Model' of Housing First, which closely reflects European guidance, whilst a new strategy paper released by *Fonds Soziales Wien* shows the important role of Housing First in Vienna. There are also services in Graz, Salzburg and the Vorarlberg region of Austria, where Housing First is part of the regional strategy in response to homelessness. However, development of Housing First in the rest of Austria, and across the homelessness sector, was described as focused on particular areas and some homelessness service providers<sup>117</sup>.

Experiments with Housing First in Belgium have been quite extensive, with Housing First services being tested in Antwerp, Brussels, Charleroi, Ghent, Hasselt, Liège, Molenbeek, and Namur over the course of 2013-2016. From 2016 onwards, regions and local cities have continued to develop Housing First services, with Housing First services up and running in 16 locations. However, services are not large and Housing First is a minority of homelessness service provision in Belgium, with progress regarded as being relatively slow<sup>118</sup>.

Belgium is also illustrative of the regional variations that can arise within individual countries, with local authority (municipal) fund-

ing and support being directed to supporting Housing First in the Flemish region, but not the Walloon region, and with Housing First also running under different arrangements in the Brussels region.

In the Czech Republic, versions of Housing First services were being developed in Ostrava with a goal of developing 105 apartments offering a service to homeless individuals and families. As of September 2018, 85 households had been placed in adequate homes. Collectively, as the group using these services included families – an approach also reported in Southern Italy – 215 people had been helped out of homelessness (122 adults and 93 children). Funding for the project, which had been described as precarious in the Czech Republic (see next section) was due to end in September 2019. Outside Ostrava, use of Housing First was not widespread and did not appear to be developing at scale<sup>119</sup>. As noted above, there were some questions around the extent to which Czech services were following a Housing First approach.

In Germany, Housing First services have become operational in Berlin, both of which are funded by the city. The *Sozialdienst Katholischer Frauen* (SKF) service provides apartments and support exclusively to homeless women, while a second Cooperation project between

110 <https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/>

111 [https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/237545/housing\\_first\\_feasibility\\_study\\_for\\_the\\_liverpool\\_city\\_region\\_2017.pdf](https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/237545/housing_first_feasibility_study_for_the_liverpool_city_region_2017.pdf)

112 Source: UK questionnaire response.

113 Bellis, A. and Wilson, W. (2018) Op. cit.

114 [https://touch.nihe.gov.uk/draft\\_homelessness\\_strategy\\_2017\\_22.pdf](https://touch.nihe.gov.uk/draft_homelessness_strategy_2017_22.pdf)

115 Quilgars, D. and Pleace, N. (2017) *The Threshold Housing First Pilot for Women with an Offending History: The First Two Years: Report of the University of York Evaluation* York: University of York.

116 <http://www.rocktrust.org/housing-first-for-youth/>

117 Source: Austrian questionnaire response.

118 Source: Belgian questionnaire response.

119 Source: Czech questionnaire response.

*Stadtmission* and *Neue Chance*, provides up to 50 Housing First places to both genders. Another development is the Housing First Fund<sup>120</sup> in North Rhine Westphalia, which is intended to provide funding for up to 100 apartments for people using Housing First services. The fund subsidises the purchase of apartments by 20-25%, on condition that a Housing First approach is used for the homeless people they house, made possible by a donation from the painter Gerhard Richter<sup>121</sup>. Germany, like Finland, tends to follow a housing-led approach in homelessness policy and strategy. Housing First is an increasing presence in Germany, but development is still relatively slow.

Luxembourg Housing First was described as small in scale and making relatively heavier use of a congregate rather than scattered housing approach. There was also reported to be some variation in how the idea of Housing First was interpreted. Use of Housing First was not widespread and was not seen as likely to expand significantly<sup>122</sup>.

The Netherlands had some similarities with Belgium; Housing First was a clearly established response to homelessness in many cities, but was described as not having expanded into the mainstream to the same extent as was found in Denmark, Finland, or Norway. Housing First services were present in 20 cities, but only Amsterdam had adopted Housing First as the preferred service model for homeless people with addiction issues and/or mental health problems. As in most of Europe, existing Housing First services were focused on urban areas. Serious issues with housing supply across the Netherlands were reported as impeding the development of Housing First. As in the UK, there were some specialist services, including Housing First for youth projects, in Amsterdam and the Hague<sup>123</sup>.

Some information on the development of Housing First in Poland was collected for the recent EOH research on homelessness service provision in Europe. There is discussion and research to explore the development of Housing First in Poland, but development of Housing First could be characterised as slow. There are financial considerations and other issues around housing supply that create practical barriers. However, plans are in place to develop Housing First pilot programmes in three cities - Gdańsk, Warsaw and Wrocław - using ESF funding<sup>124</sup>.

Housing First is being used in Spain, with services working in Madrid, Murcia, Lleida Barcelona, and Málaga among many other areas. The questionnaire response for Spain noted that there could be considerable differences between Housing First services, with some services operating on a small scale while others were considerably larger. Particular organisations, including *RAIS* (through its *Habitat* programme)<sup>125</sup> and *Arrels Fundació*<sup>126</sup>, alongside *Sat Joan de Déu Serveis Socials Barcelona*<sup>127</sup> and *Suara-Sant Pere Claver*<sup>128</sup>, are active providers of Housing First. However, Housing First was not widespread in late 2018 and the development of services was described as being slow<sup>129</sup>.

Slovenia has been using Housing First since 2008, when Norwegian charitable partners and the Municipality for Ljubljana began to support a Housing First service. The Ministry of Social Affairs took over the financing of Housing First when the Norwegian support came to an end. There are three Housing First programmes running in two regions and there is considerable discussion of Housing First. However, development of Housing First has not been rapid, both because there is some concern about changing existing homelessness programmes and because financial support for Housing First is restricted<sup>130</sup>.

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120 <https://www.housingfirstfonds.de>

121 Source: Correspondence, Prof Dr Volker Busch Geertsema.

122 Source: Luxembourg questionnaire response.

123 Source: Dutch questionnaire response.

124 Data collected for Pleace, N. *et al* (2018) Op. cit.

125 <https://raisfundacion.org/en/habitat/>

126 <https://www.arrelsfundacio.org/en/>

127 <https://www.sjdserveissocials-bcn.org>

128 <http://www.santpereclaver.org/noticies/#.XS2sEC2ZPUI>

129 Source: Spanish questionnaire response.

130 Source: Slovenian questionnaire response.

## COUNTRIES WHERE USE OF HOUSING FIRST IS NOT INCREASING

Housing First services in Hungary are diverse in size, scope, and the range of support offered. As in the Czech Republic, levels of fidelity were variable in relation to the core principles of the European guide (see Chapter 4). Shortages of resources, with both funding and suitable housing supply being inadequate, limits the size of services, who they can work with, and for how

long they can provide support. Even limited expansion of Housing First was seen as not being possible in this context<sup>131</sup>. There was no provision of Housing First in Lithuania and Romania and the respondents thought it unlikely that any would develop in the short or medium term.

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131 Source: Hungarian questionnaire response.





jects outside Dublin where it was first piloted and funded. These projects are being put out by the lead local authority in each region and will largely be funded by the central government. As the national expert underlines: 'Each of the tenders require the contracting organisation to provide a proportion of the Housing First housing units from their own housing stock (government schemes exist to part fund such acquisitions) with the large balance coming from allocations of social housing stock by the local authority and from the private rented sector.'<sup>132</sup> At the time of writing, these tenders had not been published and the programmes that they will deliver are not included in this report.

Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Norway were also reported as having relatively good funding, but not at the same levels as Finland and Ireland. However, the financing of Housing First programmes in these four countries presents some diversity in regard to the level of funding which is made available by various funding sources (Table 5.2). Unlike Denmark, the Netherlands, and Norway, the national government in Austria does not support Housing First. In Austria, Homelessness support services lie within the competence of the federal states and the financing of social and public services is mostly run by funds from the federal states and municipalities<sup>133</sup>.

In the Netherlands and Norway, national government is an important source of financing for Housing First programmes, alongside major cities (Netherlands) and regional authorities (Norway). In both countries, Housing First is being used alongside other services within homelessness strategies (see Chapter 3). In the Netherlands, the funding for Housing First programmes comes through the budget of the 43 biggest cities which receive a special grant from the national government for implementing homeless policies (including Housing First programmes) of €400 million annually.

Housing First became an integral part of Danish homelessness strategy in early 2007. The programme funding structure enabling local implementation has undergone an important change since its outset in 2009: switching from a programme widely funded by central government (from 2009–2013) towards a programme where municipalities have largely had to fund interventions out of their own budgets (from 2014 onwards). According to the Danish national expert this important change occurred in a context of generally tight municipal budgets and of local competition for resources among different areas of welfare services. Thus, he argues, 'an unintended consequence may have been that the scale

of successive programmes turned out to be less ambitious than the strategy programme (2009–2013):

Belgium, France, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the UK were all reported as not having enough funding to develop Housing First (Figure 5.3.). Yet, there is wide diversity within this group of countries in regard to the role of Housing First within homelessness strategies, as well as to the current pace of service development. Use of Housing First was described as increasing quickly in France, Italy, Portugal, Sweden, and the UK (see above) – although only in France is Housing First clearly a part of an overall homelessness strategy<sup>134</sup>.

In Portugal, interest in developing Housing First programmes is rapidly increasing in many cities. Although the current National Homelessness Strategy acknowledges the importance of adopting the model and explicitly announces the intention to increase the provision of both individualized and permanent housing solutions through Housing First programmes, no funding has yet been made available. However, it should be noted that a collective application to social security's PROCOOP (Program for the Conclusion or Extension of Cooperation Agreements for the Development of Social Responses) funding channel was recently submitted, which, if approved, would provide for the implementation of Housing First Programs in various Portuguese territories. The Lisbon Municipality created the first funding stream specifically targeting the promotion of the Housing First model within its 2016–18 Homelessness Municipal Programme. This programme is currently being upgraded into a Municipal Plan for the period from 2019–2021, which will strengthen its current political support, since it has to be approved at the municipal council, thus committing all the city's political parties. Table 5.2 shows Portugal's position among other European countries with respect to the different levels of state support for Housing First.

In Sweden, the national expert argues that the discourse around funding for Housing First programmes often centres on the lack of resources available in Sweden to finance these programmes. However, there is evidence regarding the much higher costs of providing support within the still largely predominant staircase<sup>135</sup> system when compared to Housing First programmes, which has persuaded some municipalities into using Housing First. Housing First programmes are being pursued inconsistently, i.e. by some cities and local authorities but not by others (see Chapter 3).

132 Irish questionnaire response (2019).

133 Data collected for Pleace, N. et al (2018) Op. cit.

134 Housing First has become an integral part of Scottish and Welsh strategy in the UK and has a developing role in England, see Chapter 3.

135 i.e. 'housing ready' rather than Housing First services.

In the UK, a recent report supported by Crisis<sup>136</sup> notes that Housing First is still in its infancy but has been growing in importance and scale across England, Scotland and Wales: The Westminster Government has committed £28 million to pilot Housing First in Greater Manchester, the Liverpool City Region, and the West Midlands. The Scottish Government has allocated £21 million for rapid rehousing and Housing First. The Welsh Government now funds ten pilot projects to test different delivery approaches of Housing First<sup>137</sup> (see preceding section).

In Belgium, Slovenia, and Spain, national experts also reported a lack of sufficient funding. In Spain – as in Portugal – important funding for the implementation of Housing First programmes is mostly channelled by major cities, as there is no funding from central government (Table 5.2). This lack of national government financial support for Housing First in Portugal and Spain exists alongside rhetorical support of the Housing First model in their national strategies, but competence for service provision actually lies at regional and municipal level. In these two southern countries, the strategic planning of new approaches to tackling homelessness inscribed in national strategies is not accompanied by the necessary implementation conditions; in both countries there is evidence of a clear mismatch between what can be seen as wishful intentions and the practical provision of funding to enable actual change in service provision<sup>138</sup>.

Recent comparative research on Fidelity across a range of Housing First Programmes in

Europe and North America<sup>139</sup> shows that limited governmental or municipal funding may have negative impacts on programmes' abilities to provide the necessary support to clients (e.g. as regards the intensity and range of services) and to ensure the adequate working conditions from Housing First teams (e.g. understaffing, lack of resources for training, ethical conflicts arising from combining part-time jobs in services operating under opposite working philosophies).

In the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Luxembourg, and Romania, funding was described as very limited, although within this group, only Luxembourg was using Housing First as part of its response to homelessness at local level. None of these countries identified any important source of funding for the promotion of Housing First. In fact, among these are the countries which more frequently reported “no funding” (Table 5.2) across the different sources of funding identified in the questionnaire (e.g. Hungary, Luxembourg, Lithuania, Romania<sup>140</sup>). In the Czech Republic, the use of Housing First is reported to be developing rapidly in specific municipalities and it is often part of local homelessness strategies, yet there is very limited funding for its development. In Hungary, Housing First has been piloted for several years now from European Social Fund (ESF) money – co-funded by national government – but on a very limited scale<sup>141</sup>. In several other Eastern EU member states, EU funds also play an important role in the promotion and evaluation of Housing First projects<sup>142</sup>.

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136 Blood, I., Goldup, M., Peters, L., Dulson, S. (2018) *Implementing Housing First across England, Scotland and Wales* (London: Crisis).

137 Blood, I. et al (2018) Op.cit., p. 4.

138 Baptista, I. (2016) Strategically moving forward in combatting homelessness in Spain. *European Journal of Homelessness*, vol. 10 (2).

139 Greenwood, R., Bernad, R., Aubry, T., Agha, A. (2018) A Study of Programme Fidelity in European and North American Housing First Programmes: Findings, Adaptations, and Future Directions. *European Journal of Homelessness*, vol. 12 (3) pp. 275-297.

140 Lithuania and Romania reported no active Housing First services (see preceding section).

141 Pleace, N., Baptista, I., Benjaminsen, L., Busch-Geertsema, V. (2018) *Homelessness Services in Europe*. (Brussels: FEANTSA).

142 Fehér, B. and Teller, N. (2016) An Emerging Research Strand: Housing Exclusion in Central and South East Europe. *European Journal of Homelessness*. 10(3) pp. 67-85; Lindovska, E. (2014) Homelessness Coping Strategies from Housing Ready to Housing First Perspectives. *European Journal of Homelessness* 8(1) pp.97-115; Lux, M. (2014) Milestones in the Development and Implementation of a Governmental Strategy on Homelessness in the Czech Republic. *European Journal of Homelessness* 8(2) pp.95-118.

Table 5.2 Countries reporting different levels of funding support to Housing First, according to the funding sources

Funding sources	Important funding	Some funding	No funding
Major cities/municipalities	AT BE DK ES FI IE IT NL PT SE SI UK	CZ FR NO	HU LT LU RO
Small local authorities/municipalities	AT DK SE UK	BE CZ ES FI IE IT NO	HU LT LU NL PT RO SI
Regional authorities	AT BE NO UK	BE ES FR IT	LT LU NL RO SE SI
National government	FI FR IE IT NL NO SI UK <sup>1</sup>	BE DK HU* LU	AT ES LT PT RO SE
NGOs/homeless service providers	IT PT	BE CZ ES FI FR IE SE SI	DK HU LT LU NL NO RO SE
Charities		BE ES FR IT SI UK	DK FI HU IE LT LU NL NO PT RO SE
The Church/religious organisations		CZ ES FI IT SI UK	BE DK HU IE LT LU NL NO PT RO SE
Philanthropy		BE IE UK	DK ES FI HU IT LT LU NL NO PT RO SE SI

\* National ESF co-funding.

Source: Questionnaires Key: AT Austria; BE Belgium; CZ Czech Republic; DK Denmark; ES Spain; FI Finland; FR France; HU Hungary; IE Ireland; IT Italy; LU Luxembourg; LT Lithuania; NL Netherlands; NO Norway; PT Portugal; RO Romania; SE Sweden; SI Slovenia; UK United Kingdom. <sup>1</sup> Including the Scottish and Welsh national governments and the UK government.

It should be noted that major cities/municipalities and national governments are the two most relevant sources of funding channelling 'important' financing resources to the implementation of Housing First. Charities, religious organisations and philanthropists were much less likely to be providing significant funding (Table 5.2)

NGOs and homelessness service providers provided funding for supporting Housing First programmes across 11 out of the 19 participating countries, although at different levels. In Italy and the UK, the main driver behind the adoption of the model has been the homelessness sector, although problems with scarce and unreliable funding have been reported in both countries<sup>143</sup>.

With the exceptions of Slovenia and the Netherlands, most of the countries reporting at least some national government funding for Housing First had Housing First as part of their national homelessness strategies. In Denmark, as referred to above, Housing First is part of mainstream homelessness policy with important funding being allocated by central government and municipalities, although with an evolving role over the years.

A limited number of countries reported any kind of funding role from regional authorities. However, this finding has to be interpreted with caution since the role (and extent) of regional authorities varies greatly among countries.

143 Pleace, N. (2018) Op. cit.

## RELIABILITY OF FUNDING

International research<sup>144</sup> shows that there is a need for Housing First programmes to have enough resources and reliable funding to ensure programme fidelity and growth. The lack of adequate funding for the development of Housing First programmes may constitute a significant barrier to their implementation and sustainability, with potential negative impacts on fidelity and growth.

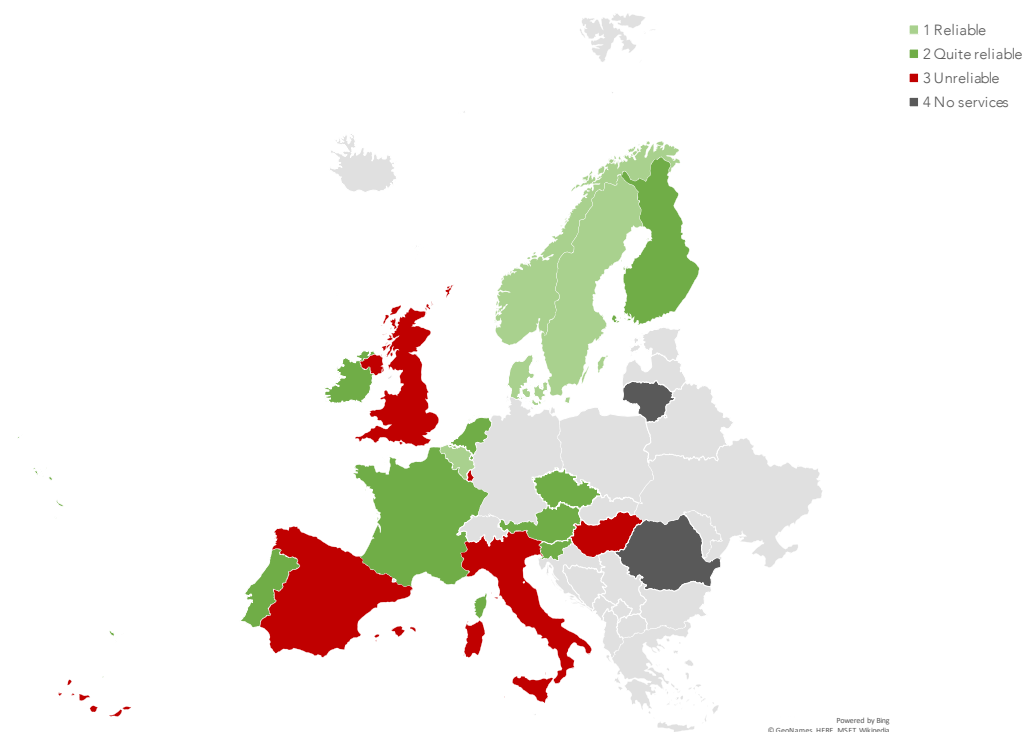
Countries that described funding for Housing First as reliable<sup>145</sup> were again in minority (shown as light green countries in Figure 5.4). Only Denmark, Norway and Sweden reported that existing funding is reliable. However, the Swedish expert specifies that reliability is limited to those cities where funding has become permanent or is ensured by contracts lasting for several years and Norway reports difficulties in moving from project-based funding into regular Housing First services.

Belgium and Finland were also reported as having relatively reliable funding for Housing First programmes. In Finland, two major sources of funding ensure a stream of regular funding for the development of the Housing First model, which

has been at the heart of the Finnish national programme to eradicate and prevent homelessness. The ARA (The Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland) operating under the Ministry of Environment provides funding for the provision of affordable housing; and the STEA (Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations) provides funding for the development of projects and for the acquisition of scattered housing for homeless people.

The picture in Spain seems to be rather different, in spite of the identical rating level to this question obtained in the questionnaire. The funding structure for the development of Housing First programmes – and for the homelessness sector in general – involves a diverse range of funds (e.g. regional or local tenders, grants from national, regional, or local administrations, NGOs member fees, a few private donations) which, among other constraints, tend to present a high degree of instability (e.g. subject to annual renewal and strongly dependent on political priorities and pressures)<sup>146</sup>.

Figure 5.4: Level of Reliability of Funding for Housing First



Source: Questionnaire

144 Busch-Geertsema, V. (2013) Housing First Europe Final Report (Brussels/Bremen: PROGRESS); Greenwood, R. *et al* (2018), *op. cit.*

145 National experts were asked to report on reliability of funding based on criteria such as: funding paid regularly, funding paid on time or funding provided on a long-term basis.

146 Bernad, R. (2018) Assessment of Fidelity to the Housing First Principles of the HÁBITAT Programme. *European Journal of Homelessness* 12 (3) pp. 79-102.

Austria, the Czech Republic, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal and Slovenia reported a medium level of reliability (Figure 5.4) as regards the funding of Housing First programmes. In the Czech Republic, Portugal, and Slovenia, this assessment on the reliability of funds for the development of Housing First programmes needs to be contextualised by the existence of scarce or very scarce funding (see Figure 5.3) within countries which reported that Housing First was used on a small scale. In fact, the scale of Housing First in any of these three countries is limited to less than 200 people.

The national expert for Portugal reported that funding for Housing First was reliable in the sense that once it gets approved it will be provided. However, there are issues regarding delays in the release of funds by local authorities, as well as in the fixed three-year period of such financing which, if not renewed, may compromise the actual delivery of services according to Housing First principles, i.e. providing support for as long as is needed and the rental payment guarantee. Lisbon's private housing market situation is dire and, although state intervention in social housing supply for Housing First projects in this region has been timidly discussed, it has not yet been properly explored as an alternative.

Although Ireland and the Netherlands also reported the same level of funding reliability, national contexts differ significantly from the former group of countries. In both countries, Housing First is clearly a part of overall homelessness strategies and was reported as having a good level of funding (see figure 5.3). Nevertheless, Ireland also reported problems with funding being arranged on a time-limited basis – with contracts running over 3–5 years – in spite of considerable improvements registered in Housing First funding reliability in recent tenders. Irrespective of the duration of funding contracts in Ireland, commitments to service users are supposed to be for as long as is needed.

A third group of countries – Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain, and the UK – reported the lowest level of funding reliability amongst all the countries in the study, mostly related to the fact that these are often one-off funds granted via EU funding schemes, i.e. temporary financial support. All of them had already reported a lack of sufficient funding for supporting the implementation of Housing First programmes in their own countries. Lithuania and Romania had no services in operation.

In Italy and the UK, development of the Housing First model has been uneven, but the responses by the national experts indicate that services are growing in importance and scale. Strengthening the

reliability of funding should therefore be a major concern if programmes are aiming at further growth whilst ensuring effective prevention and reduction of homelessness. In fact, research has shown<sup>147</sup> that in both countries time-limited funding to pilot projects has in several cases prevented the necessary commitment to offer on-going support to clients, enabling only time-limited support, in contradiction with Housing First principles.

Blood *et al.*<sup>148</sup> conducted a study aiming at reviewing and analysing existing evidence in order to identify what is needed to support the implementation of Housing First across Great Britain<sup>149</sup>. The results clearly indicate that the expansion of Housing First will only be possible if current funding models are significantly changed in order to ensure that support will not be time limited, thus giving service providers, tenants, and landlords enough confidence on the reliability of funding. Another study on the current and future funding of Housing First in England<sup>150</sup> also highlights the fact that although most Housing First services in England offer a long-term service they tend to rely on 'short-term confirmed funding, which is an area of some tension'<sup>151</sup>. Recommendations from both studies include the need for funders to make longer-term commitment to funding, ensuring that the approach moves away from short-term funding cycles which impede the sustainability of Housing First and a high level of fidelity to the principles of the Housing First model.

In summary, the evidence collected from the 19 responding countries seems to confirm that there are still very few countries across the EU where the provision of funding for the implementation of the Housing First model is both sufficient and reliable. When funding is scarce and unreliable, developing and sustaining Housing First services becomes extremely difficult, if not impossible. The largest Housing First programmes in Europe (e.g. Denmark, Finland and France) anchored in national homelessness strategies have managed to secure comparatively higher levels of sustained funding. There is also evidence from the countries under analysis that even in contexts of relatively low resources, Housing First programmes adopting the ethos and core principles of the model can be successful. Nevertheless, if Housing First is to increase in scale and importance across Europe, actually changing outcomes in homelessness policy, then there are still extensive challenges to be overcome as regards funding models, namely in terms of the level and reliability of funding supporting the development of programmes.

147 Pleace, N. (2018) *op. cit.*

148 Blood *et al.* (2018) *op. cit.*

149 i.e. England, Scotland and Wales, see Blood *et al.* (2018) *op. cit.*, p.4.

150 Rice, B. (2018) *Housing First England. Investigating the current and future funding of Housing First in England Exploring innovation and identifying opportunities to sustain and expand Housing First services.* (London: Homeless Link).

151 Rice, B. (2018) *op. cit.* p. 10.



## FINDING HOUSING FOR HOUSING FIRST

There is a general lack of affordable and adequate housing for Housing First. Most of the countries reported that suitable housing was either always difficult to find (9 out of 19) or often difficult to find in most areas (5 out of 19). This reflects the increasing problem of housing exclusion in Europe<sup>152</sup>.

There are major differences between the responding countries in relation to different housing systems and the possibility to provide housing. In the UK, there is a long history of providing homeless people with housing through the statutory systems. In Austria, the Viennese system is the most developed, but practice

varies across regions<sup>153</sup>. Social Rental Agencies (SRO) are found in Belgium<sup>154</sup> but not used to the same extent in some other countries. In both Denmark and Sweden, public housing was an important tool for regulating the housing market, but Sweden had a huge deregulation of the housing policies in 1991 that led to a systemic shift in the housing system. By contrast, public housing in Denmark retains a core role in meeting housing need and the Danish public housing law 'enables municipalities to allocate up to 25 per cent of vacancies in public housing to people in acute need according to social criteria set by the municipality'<sup>155</sup>.

Table 5.3 Possibility of finding housing for Housing First

Not difficult	Difficult in some areas, but not in most	Not difficult in some areas, but difficult in most	Often difficult in most areas	Always difficult
	FI NO	DK FR PT	BE CZ IT ES	AT HU IE LU NL SL SE UK

Source: Questionnaires Key: AT Austria; BE Belgium; CZ Czech Republic; DK Denmark; ES Spain; FI Finland; FR France; HU Hungary; IE Ireland; IT Italy; LU Luxembourg; LT Lithuania (not applicable); NL Netherlands; NO Norway; PT Portugal; RO Romania (not applicable); SE Sweden; SL Slovenia; UK United Kingdom.

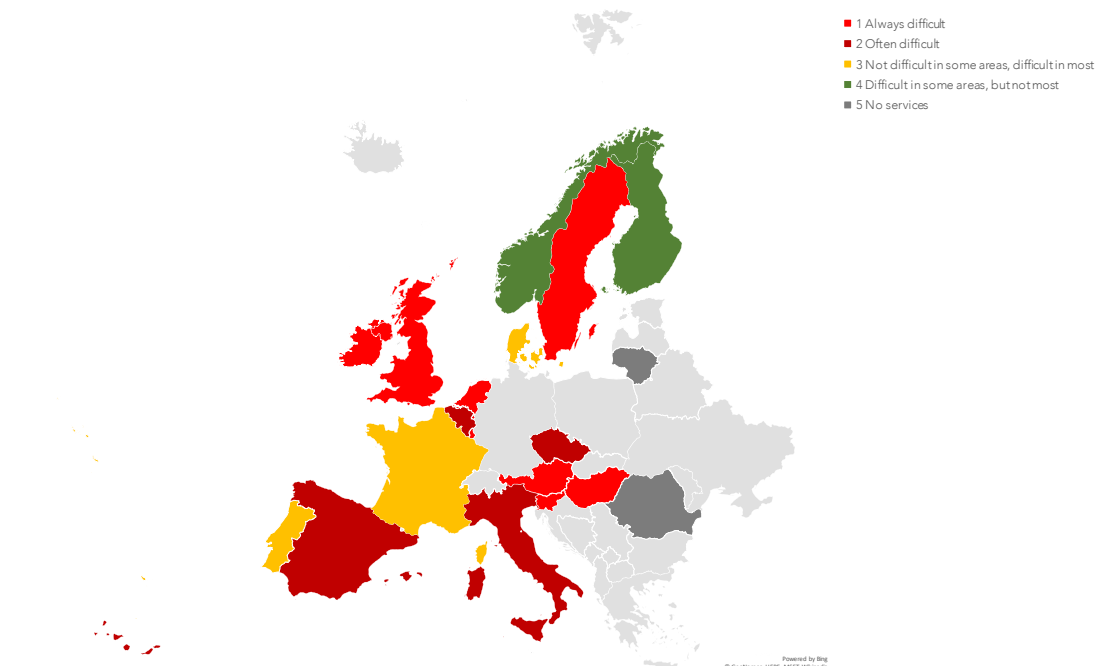
152 <https://www.feantsa.org/download/full-report-en1029873431323901915.pdf>

153 Moss, Sarah. Two (different) peas in a pod: - The opportunities of bringing Viennese Social Housing to Melbourne [online]. *Planning News*, Vol. 45, No. 1, Feb 2019: 20-21.

154 [https://www.feantsa.org/download/2012\\_06\\_22\\_sra\\_final\\_en-2-2292903742234225547.pdf](https://www.feantsa.org/download/2012_06_22_sra_final_en-2-2292903742234225547.pdf)

155 Source: Danish questionnaire response.

Figure 5.5: How easy or difficult is it to find housing for Housing First (summary)



Source: Questionnaires (Denmark and Finland both reported some areas were difficult, with Finland reporting the least issues, see Table 5.3).

All countries - except Italy - responded that there was not enough housing for Housing First to work effectively. In most countries, the provision of Housing First units (apartments, houses) comes from both social housing and from the private rental sector. Eight countries reported that they had structures that enhanced access to housing for Housing First service users. One example is the Danish public housing law that

enables municipalities to bypass ordinary waiting lists by allocating up to 25 per cent of the vacancies in the public housing sector to people with social housing needs, although the extent to which this was done for lone homeless adults could be variable. Nine of the responding countries did not have any structures in place for making the access to Housing First easier.

Table 5.4 Enough housing for Housing First and mechanisms for easier access

	Is there enough housing for Housing First	Mechanisms for easier access to Housing First
Yes	IT	AT BE DK FI IE NL NO SE
No	AT BE CZ DK FI HU IE LU NL NO PT RO SL ES SE	CZ FR HU IT LU PT RO SL ES

Source: Questionnaires Key: AT Austria; BE Belgium; CZ Czech Republic; DK Denmark; ES Spain; FI Finland; FR France; HU Hungary; IE Ireland; IT Italy; LU Luxembourg; LT Lithuania (not applicable); NL Netherlands; NO Norway; PT Portugal; RO Romania; SE Sweden; SL Slovenia; UK United Kingdom.

The social housing sector in Norway only constitutes 10% of the housing stock (77% of people own their own homes). In countries like Slovenia, the privatisation of the housing sector has been dramatic. The respondent from Romania says that the publicly owned housing stock has declined from 67% in 1989 to 1.7% today. This suggests that while Housing First is not yet being used in Romania, finding affordable housing supply would be a challenge if Housing First were to be introduced.

The Lisbon Metropolitan Area has been struggling with a staggering surge in rental prices in the private market. It can even be considered a particular case among other EU countries, with flats rents increasing by 19% and houses by 16%<sup>156</sup>. In spite of a huge discrepancy between Lisbon's private rental market and other regions, 96% of the Portuguese Housing First places are located in the Lisbon area (80 in the city of Lisbon plus 16 in Cascais).

It is noteworthy that Lisbon's 2016-2018 Municipal Programme envisaged a gradual increase from 80 places in 2016, to 150 in 2018, with an increased investment from 230.000€ in 2016, to 980.000€ in 2019<sup>157</sup>. But after three years the situation remains basically the same as it was back in 2016: 80 places. Finding affordable, well located and quality housing supply in Lisbon seems to be the greatest impediment to the scaling-up of Housing First.

If housing supply is increased, budgets need to be sufficient to ensure that Housing First can provide sufficient support. In a few Housing First programmes in Sweden, the programmes have had to say no to new apartments because there have not been enough support workers to deal with the larger case-load.

The lack of affordable housing is a clear obstacle to the scaling-up of Housing First strategies. In many countries, there is a lot of vacant housing, but it can be too expensive to buy or too costly to rent, or it is often the case that it is located in areas that are depopulating for economic reasons. For those countries where Housing First is still in its infancy, affordable housing shortages slow down development of services.

A lack of affordable housing also forces different groups of people to compete for the same housing, often leaving the most vulnerable be-

hind. From the data gathered, another explanation of the difficulties in implementing Housing First was the established culture or institutional practice within social services and other organisations in relation to housing people with addiction or mental health problems. Most of the Housing First services are concentrated in bigger cities and metropolitan areas in the responding countries. The service structure and availability of service providers are greater in these areas, but are also in cities where the housing costs are most expensive and most difficult to find.

The Finnish success of implementing their Housing First strategy and reducing the long-term homelessness was very much dependent on the construction of new affordable housing and buying housing. Targeting new build housing at lone homeless people is also a reason for the success of the wider Finnish homelessness strategy<sup>158</sup>.

One challenge that was raised by the respondent from Ireland was that Housing First has been introduced as an innovative service model, while simultaneously maintaining existing practices. As a consequence, some of the potential transformative power of changing the homelessness system is lost. There were challenges in finding suitable Housing First tenancies in Ireland, while policy was at the same time creating six times more shelter beds<sup>159</sup>. This development of parallel systems based on totally different logic, shelters are still being developed even where Housing First is being used<sup>160</sup>. There are many other examples of a similar pattern like the use of emergency social housing and 'winter accommodation services' in France. In contrast, the Finnish experience highlights the effectiveness of a strategy that finds a clear role for Housing First, in this instance focusing on long-term homelessness within a coordinated, integrated, housing-led national strategy addressing all the dimensions of homelessness while enhancing homelessness prevention.

The difficulty of finding suitable housing also has implications for the fidelity of Housing First programmes. The different local and contextual factors demand local adaptation, but it can lead to programme drift. The respondent from Belgium says that a consequence of the housing shortage is that some Housing First projects have to use temporary accommodation or mobile houses.

156 [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/6939681/7243182/Booklet\\_2019\\_rents\\_2018\\_e\\_DRAFT.pdf/1321ca38-8039-4f95-aade-434e9550462e?fbclid=IwAR1\\_LJm9sRjoLoaTp54G980mM9jNjWHYOgOxYDYQh-19q9pQLAQGgSar2Pw](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/6939681/7243182/Booklet_2019_rents_2018_e_DRAFT.pdf/1321ca38-8039-4f95-aade-434e9550462e?fbclid=IwAR1_LJm9sRjoLoaTp54G980mM9jNjWHYOgOxYDYQh-19q9pQLAQGgSar2Pw)

157 [https://observatorio-lisboa.eapn.pt/ficheiro/Programa\\_Municipal\\_para-as-Pessoas-Sem-Abrigo-Outubro2015.pdf](https://observatorio-lisboa.eapn.pt/ficheiro/Programa_Municipal_para-as-Pessoas-Sem-Abrigo-Outubro2015.pdf)

158 Y Foundation (2017) Op. cit.

159 Source: Irish questionnaire response.

160 Busch-Geertsema, Volker & Ingrid Sahlin (2007) The Role of Hostels and Temporary Accommodation". *European Journal of Homelessness*, 1: 67-93. Knutagård, Marcus & Marie Nordfeldt (2007) Natthärbärgat som vandrande lösning" [The shelter as a recurrent solution to homelessness]. *Sociologisk forskning*, (4): 30-57.

## DATA ON OUTCOMES

The evidence base on Housing First is extensive, with very large and methodologically robust studies having been completed for the French *Un chez-soi d'abord*<sup>161</sup> pilot programme and the Canadian At Home/*Chez Soi*<sup>162</sup> pilot programme that demonstrated the greater effectiveness of Housing First in ending homelessness among people with high and complex needs. While not at equal levels of social scientific rigour, research from Denmark, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the UK - as well as the US evidence base - has indicated remarkably consistent results for the Housing First approach, ending homelessness among people with high and complex needs at rates of around 80%<sup>163</sup>.

The questionnaire provided an opportunity to ask about the extent of data on Housing First available in the 19 countries. Two countries, Lithuania and Romania had no services and in others, the extent of Housing First was quite limited, but some information was available from the other countries.

Where data were reported, either based on evaluative research, administrative data or some combination of the two, the now expected pattern of Housing First's success in ending homelessness among people with high and complex needs<sup>164</sup> was clearly in evidence. However, data were variable in quality and extent on this most basic question, whether or not Housing First effectively ended homelessness, with only France having robust comparisons with other homelessness services.

Table 5.5 Data on housing sustainment for Housing First

Country	Housed at one year (data)
Austria <sup>2</sup>	75-95%
Belgium	93%
Czech Republic <sup>1</sup>	96%
Denmark <sup>2</sup>	80-90%
Finland	82%
France <sup>2</sup>	80-85%
Hungary	No data
Ireland	85%
Italy	90%
Lithuania	No services
Luxembourg	76%
Netherlands <sup>2</sup>	70-77%
Norway	75%
Portugal	80%

161 [http://www.cohesion-territoires.gouv.fr/l-acces-et-le-maintien-dans-le-logement?id\\_courant=4195](http://www.cohesion-territoires.gouv.fr/l-acces-et-le-maintien-dans-le-logement?id_courant=4195)

162 Goering, P. *et al* (2014) Op. cit.

163 Based on a measure of exiting homelessness and sustaining housing for one year, the range is between the 70% and 90% plus, Pleace, N. (2018) Op. cit.

164 Pleace, N. (2018) Op. cit.

Romania	No services
Slovenia	No data
Spain <sup>3</sup>	100%
Sweden	76%
UK	70%

Source: Questionnaires

<sup>1</sup> Czech Housing First is not always following a Housing First model in respect of the core principles in the European guidance.

<sup>2</sup> Varying by specific service type and who it is working with. <sup>3</sup> Data were reported to be limited in the Spanish questionnaire response (rates of 95.6% were reported by the RAIS Habitat programme). Total retention of housing has not been reported elsewhere<sup>165</sup>

In the last few years, questions have been asked about the overall effectiveness of Housing First in the sense of achieving other positive outcomes beyond housing sustainment. There is some evidence that outcomes with respect to improvements in addiction, mental health, social integration, cost effectiveness, and the success of specialist versions of Housing First - e.g. services focused on homeless women or young homeless people - can be mixed<sup>166</sup>.

The level and quality of data on addiction, mental health, social integration, cost effectiveness and specialist Housing First services were highly variable. Only seven of the 17 countries that were running Housing First services had data on cost effectiveness. France<sup>167</sup> and Finland<sup>168</sup> had relatively robust data on cost, which were broadly positive, while information from some other countries, such as the UK<sup>169</sup> was more limited, although it again reported broadly positive outcomes. Gaps were also evident with respect to addiction and mental health, with only seven of the 17 countries with services reporting that data were available. Italy<sup>170</sup> and the UK<sup>171</sup>, where Housing First was increasing in scale and scope, but where initial development had not been supported at strategic level, had at least some data on addiction and mental health but Finland, where Housing First is firmly established, did not.

Data on social integration were reported in seven countries. Again, countries with established Housing First services and programmes did not always have data on this, including Belgium, Finland, and France (although some data had been collected on family connections for the *Un chez soi*

*d'abord* programme). Evidence did not tend to be collected on specialist Housing First services, such as services focused on women or young people, with only Belgium, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands and the UK reporting that they had any such information. More generally, only Denmark (which collected social integration data across its homelessness programmes), Italy, and the UK had at least some data around mental health, addiction, social integration, cost effectiveness and specialist services. In contrast, Austria, Hungary, Ireland, Luxembourg, and Spain were reported as having no data on these areas<sup>172</sup>.

Again, the unevenness of data of Housing First, both in the sense of variation and inconsistency across Europe and in terms of simple gaps in information, is a quite striking finding. Information on outcomes around mental health, addiction, cost effectiveness, and social integration may become important in the light of research that has reported inconsistent results in these areas. Understanding potential challenges that may arise in implementing Housing First in Europe, so that any limitations in service design can be addressed, is very important to the long-term success of the approach. It is clear that Housing First is very often able to stop homelessness among people with high and complex needs - there is also some evidence of improvements around mental health, addiction, social integration and with respect to cost effectiveness - but results can be uneven, and if there is any need to revise or improve Housing First, having an evidence base to facilitate that process is essential.

165 Bernad, R. and Yuncai, R. (2014) Introducing the Housing First Model in Spain: First Results of the Habitat Programme European Journal of Homelessness 10(1), pp. 53- 82 and also Bernad, R. (2018) Assessment of Fidelity to the Housing First: Principles of the HÁBITAT Programme *European Journal of Homelessness* 12(3), pp. 79-102. No other Housing First service or programme has claimed this level of housing retention, although very high rates were also reported elsewhere.

166 Johnson, G. et al (2012) Op. cit.; Quilgars, D. and Pleace, N. (2016) Housing First and Social Integration: A Realistic Aim? *Social Inclusion* 4.4, DOI: 10.17645/si.v4i4.672

167 [http://www.cohesion-territoires.gouv.fr/l-acces-et-le-maintien-dans-le-logement?id\\_courant=4195](http://www.cohesion-territoires.gouv.fr/l-acces-et-le-maintien-dans-le-logement?id_courant=4195)

168 <https://asuntoensin.fi/aineistopankki/asunto-ensin-yksikoiden-kustannusvaikuttavuus/>

Table 5.6 Data collection on Housing First outcomes

Country	Addiction and mental health		Specialist Housing First effectiveness	Cost effectiveness
Austria	No	No	No	No
Belgium	Yes	No	Yes	No
Czech Republic	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Denmark	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Finland	No	No	No	Yes
France	Yes	No	No	Yes
Hungary	No	No	No	No
Ireland	No	No	No	No
Italy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lithuania	No services	No services	No services	No services
Luxembourg	No	No	No	No
Netherlands	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Norway	No	No	No	No
Portugal	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Romania	No services	No services	No services	No services
Slovenia	No	Yes	No	No
Spain <sup>1</sup>	No	No	No	No
Sweden	No	No	No	Yes
UK	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Source: Questionnaires

<sup>1</sup> The current evaluation of the Habitat Housing First programme in Spain is collecting data on addiction, mental health and social integration and recording cost effectiveness <https://raisfundacion.org/en/habitat/>

169 Bretherton, J. and Pleace, N. (2015) Op. cit. Note that more detailed information will shortly be published as Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J (2019) *The Cost Effectiveness of Housing First in England* London: Homeless Link.

170 <https://www.fiopsd.org/housing-first-in-italy-core-principles-evaluation-and-results/>

171 Bretherton, J. and Pleace, N. (2015) Op. cit.

172 Source: questionnaires and supplementary literature searches.



# 7 POLITICAL AND SOCIETAL SUPPORT FOR HOUSING FIRST

## INTRODUCTION

Drawing on the comments and responses to the questions in the questionnaires, this chapter looks at the political and societal support for Housing First in the different countries, considering both the nature of such support and how variations in support might influence the use of Housing First.

## THE EXTENT AND NATURE OF POLITICAL SUPPORT

In recent years, Housing First has become a core element of homelessness policy in many EU member states, alongside Norway and parts of the UK. However, the level of political support for introducing Housing First as mainstream policy within the sector is not uniform across Europe. In some countries, governments

have actively promoted the adoption and evaluation of Housing First as the main element of their strategic responses to homelessness, whereas political support for the model has been less extensive, or altogether absent, in other countries.

Table 6.1 Countries reporting different levels of political support for Housing First, according to different levels of government

Support to Housing First from...	Strong support	Some support	No support
Local politicians in cities	AT DK ES FI IT PT	BE CZ ES FR IE NL NO SE SI UK*	HU LT LU RO
Local politicians in small towns		AT BE DK ES FI FR IE IT NL NO SE UK	CZ HU LT LU PT RO SI
Local politicians in rural places		DK FI FR IE NO UK*	AT BE ES HU IT LT LU NL PT RO SE SI
Politicians for regions or large areas	FI IE	AT BE FR IT NL NO SI UK*	CZ ES HU LT LU RO SE
National politicians	DK FI FR IE IT	BE LU NL NO PT SI UK*	AT CZ ES HU LT RO SE

Source: Questionnaires. Key: AT Austria; BE Belgium; CZ Czech Republic; DK Denmark; ES Spain; FI Finland; FR France; HU Hungary; IE Ireland; IT Italy; LU Luxembourg; LT Lithuania; NL Netherlands; NO Norway; PT Portugal; RO Romania; SE Sweden; SL Slovenia; UK United Kingdom.

\* Political support for Housing First was more developed in Scotland and England than in Wales and Northern Ireland. National strategies are devolved in Scotland and Wales

The responses to the questionnaires confirm the existence of different patterns of political support for Housing First ranging from more polarised and intense support around one or two levels of government, to more scattered and moderate support from a wider spectrum of political actors.

Political support for Housing First across the 19 participating countries in this study was described as being mostly moderate (Table 6.1) with only eight countries (Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain) identifying the existence of strong political support from any of the levels of government considered. Political support – either strong or moderate – is mostly reported from local or national government. In Austria, for example, Housing First is part of Vienna's government agreement since 2011 and has gained the support of local politicians in the social field as an innovative approach within the city's homelessness support programme.

Local politicians in rural areas were least likely to support Housing First, with no evidence of 'strong' support and only five countries reporting 'some' support for Housing First at this level of government. The fact that increasing evidence on the success of Housing First approaches is strongly related to specific groups of homeless population – i.e. homeless people with high and complex needs – may help explain the low level of interest within territories where there may be a low presence of people from this particular group.

Political support for Housing First also seems to be less likely to occur among local politicians in small towns – no country reports the existence of 'strong' support – although in a relatively large number of countries (11) experts report the existence of 'some' political support at this level of government. In a small group of countries (Hungary, Lithuania, Romania) the national experts reported a total absence of any kind of political support for Housing First.

In Hungary – where the government has enforced criminalisation of homelessness – Housing First is project based, promoted by NGOs and other service providers and is being funded through the European Social Fund (ESF). According to the national expert, there is evidence of serious delays in launching projects at the local level which were connected with institutional obstacles regarding EU funding, namely

the low efficiency of the organisation responsible for supporting local projects.

In Lithuania and Romania, there is no evidence of the use of Housing First services and no political support whatsoever. On the contrary, both experts refer to persistent perceptions of homeless people as 'undeserving' – among politicians and the general public – which act as strong barriers towards any kind of approach based on the promotion of housing as a basic human right.

Strong political support for Housing First at the national level is mostly acknowledged in countries where Housing First is well established as a strategic response to homelessness (e.g. Denmark, Finland) or where Housing First has recently gained increased political endorsement and its use is rapidly increasing (e.g. France, Ireland).

Finland is the only country in the study exhibiting 'strong' political support from all relevant<sup>173</sup> levels of government, i.e. local, regional, and national. The Housing First principles have been adopted (and adapted) into the government's national programme since 2007, with the aim of eliminating and preventing long-term homelessness. The strong political endorsement of a housing-led/Housing First approach has enabled the setup of a coherent and comprehensive cooperation strategy, as well as the programme's long-term operating funding (see Chapter 3) bringing about sustained positive outcomes in the reduction of long-term homelessness<sup>174</sup>.

France is reported to be undergoing a stage of significant development of Housing First services, following the boost brought about by the *Un chez soi d'abord* experiment which was implemented from 2011 onwards and which will now be extended to cover 16 territories by 2022 (see Chapter 3 and 5). The role of the DIHAL – an interministerial body with strategic responsibility for French homelessness strategy – has been paramount to the development of the Housing First approach in France for the last ten years. Moreover, the French government has recently adopted a five-year plan for reducing homelessness from 2018-2022<sup>175</sup>, which will continue to provide technical and financial support for the implementation of the Housing First approach at the local level, including an additional 24 cities from 2019 onwards.

173 According to the national expert homelessness is not necessarily a relevant issue in smaller towns and rural areas.

174 Pleace, N., Culhane, D., Granfelt, R., Knutagård, M. (2015) *The Finnish Homelessness Strategy. An International Review* (Helsinki: Ministry of the Environment).

175 Available at: [https://www.gouvernement.fr/sites/default/files/contenu/piece-jointe/2018/O3/plaquette\\_lda\\_4p\\_vf.pdf](https://www.gouvernement.fr/sites/default/files/contenu/piece-jointe/2018/O3/plaquette_lda_4p_vf.pdf)

In Ireland, there is also evidence of strong commitment to Housing First from national government in *Rebuilding Ireland*<sup>176</sup> – the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness 2016-2021. Pillar 1 of *Rebuilding Ireland* is ‘addressing homelessness and keeping people in their own homes’ and includes a specific key action on Housing First: ‘triple the targets for tenancies to be provided by Housing First teams in Dublin and extend the housing-led approach to other urban areas’. The national expert underlines other relevant recent government initiatives such as the creation of a post of National Director of Housing First and the publishing of a formal national implementation plan on Housing First in 2018. The latter resulted in a series of Housing First tenders being put out by the lead local authority in each region, largely funded by central government money (see Chapter 3). But the national expert argues that these recent developments should be put into context: although Housing First has been presented as the primary response to rough sleeping and chronic homelessness in Ireland for the last 5 years, there is a clear imbalance in the actual support for the implementation of services over this period, i.e.: ‘the Dublin region has created 186 Housing First tenancies and opened over 1,200 new shelter beds.’<sup>177</sup>

Spain – where the main responsibility for policy design and service provision is devolved to the regions and to local governments – is reported as having both ‘strong’ and ‘moderate’ support for Housing First from local politicians in cities. This assessment may reflect the diversity of regional and local administrations across the Spanish territory and their stronger or weaker involvement (and interest) in developing Housing First services, without any additional funding support from central government<sup>178</sup>.

Another set of responding countries report a different pattern of political support across the various levels of government, i.e. no ‘strong’

support for Housing First identified at any one level; ‘some’ political support for Housing First displayed by a wider range of politicians within the country. Belgium and Norway, for example, reported that ‘some’ political support for Housing First exists among local politicians in cities, in small towns, for regions and at the national level. In Norway, it is also possible to identify support for Housing First among local politicians in rural areas.

In Belgium, it is important to recall that there is a complex division of competencies across different policy levels in regard to homelessness arising from the complex institutional model of a federal parliamentary state made up of communities and regions which have their own governments. Indeed, Housing First is explicitly mentioned in homelessness plans in both Flanders and Brussels; local experiments developed under the *Housing First Belgium*<sup>179</sup> programme between 2013-2016 under Federal State funding. Since 2016, it has been up to the regions and the cities to develop and expand Housing First services across Belgium. Within this context, there are currently 17 officially known Housing First services in Belgium, which, as the national expert argues, still represent the ‘exception’ among homelessness responses for people with high and complex needs.

Local municipalities manage all of the 21 Housing First programmes in Norway. Although a national network to support programme development has been organised by the Norwegian Resource Centre for Community Mental Health (NAPHA), there is evidence of barriers to the implementation of the Housing First model in a systematic way across the country. The scattered pattern of the response ‘some political support’ – across five levels of government – provided in the questionnaire may reflect that uneven development.

## SUPPORT FROM THE HOMELESSNESS SECTOR

Overall, the level of support for the Housing First model from the homelessness sector, including campaigners, service providers/faith based organisations and policy and academic researchers specialising in homelessness was

reported as comparatively stronger than the level of political support. Most of the responding countries (15) identified the existence of strong support for Housing First from at least one of the categories selected (Table 6.2).

176 Available at: [http://rebuildingireland.ie/Rebuilding%20Ireland\\_Action%20Plan.pdf](http://rebuildingireland.ie/Rebuilding%20Ireland_Action%20Plan.pdf)

177 Source: Irish questionnaire response.

178 Bernad, R. (2018) Assessment of Fidelity to the Housing First Principles of the HÁBITAT Programme. *European Journal of Homelessness* 12 (3).

179 <http://www.housingfirstbelgium.be/en/>

Table 6.2 Countries reporting different levels of societal support for the Housing First model

Support to Housing First from...	Strong support	Some support	No support
Homeless service providers	AT ES FI IE IT LU NL NO	BE CZ DK FR HU LT PT SE SI UK	RO
Campaigns to reduce homelessness	BE CZ ES FI HU IE IT UK	AT DK NO PT SE SI	FR LT LU RO
The Church/religious organisations	FI IT	CZ DK ES HU IE LT SI	AT BE LU NO PT RO SE
Universities/researchers	AT CZ DK HU IE IT PT SE SI UK	BE ES FI FR NL NO	LU RO

Source: Questionnaires. Key: AT Austria; BE Belgium; CZ Czech Republic; DK Denmark; ES Spain; FI Finland; FR France; HU Hungary; IE Ireland; IT Italy; LU Luxembourg; LT Lithuania; NL Netherlands; NO Norway; PT Portugal; RO Romania; SE Sweden; SL Slovenia; UK United Kingdom.

Strong support for the Housing First model has been identified among universities/researchers, homelessness service providers and through campaigns aiming at reducing homelessness. In some countries, support from civil society stakeholders is aligned with strong political support for Housing First from local and/or national government levels (e.g. Finland, ES, Italy, Ireland, Portugal, Spain).

In other cases, there is clear dissonance between political and societal support (e.g. Hungary and, to a lesser extent, the Czech Republic and Luxembourg). Romania reported no political or societal support for Housing First at any level, and in Lithuania only faith-based organisations are reported to support the Housing First model. In both countries there are no actual Housing First projects/programmes being implemented.

In both Hungary and the Czech Republic, the promotion of Housing First projects has mainly been supported by financial support from ESF. Service providers, NGOs and advocacy organisations – alongside some municipalities reported in the Czech Republic – have been the only actual promoters and supporters of the Housing First model.

In Denmark – where there is strong commitment and support from central government agencies and some municipalities – support for the Housing First model seems to play a relatively smaller role. The Danish expert reports the persis-

tence of some scepticism around the use of Housing First within the homelessness sector, often fuelled by the practical experience that local services have of ground level barriers to the implementation of Housing First (e.g. the lack of affordable housing or inadequate social support capacity)<sup>180</sup>.

Academia in the majority of countries included in the study has played an important role in promoting and advocating for the use of the Housing First model. In Sweden, Lund University has been actively promoting the idea of Housing First – and actually pioneered its use – working in collaboration with homelessness service providers and policy makers since 2009.<sup>181</sup> The main focus of such collaboration has been to test and translate the core principles of the Pathways to Housing model, taking into consideration the local context.

In Italy, a collaboration between service providers, municipalities and academics – Housing First *Italia*<sup>182</sup>, has been operating under the auspices of fio.PSD for the active promotion of Housing First. The collection of empirical data and outcome evaluation of Housing First projects have been two important contributions of research work carried out in both cases.

In Portugal, the reported strong support from academia has to be understood within the context of a very restricted number of research and academic organisations involved in promoting the

180 Source: Danish questionnaire response.

181 Knutagård, M., Kristiansen, A., (2013) Not by the Book: The Emergence and Translation of Housing First in Sweden. *European Journal of Homelessness* 7(1) pp.93-115; Pleace, N. (2018) *Using Housing First in Integrated Homelessness Strategies. A Review of the Evidence*. (York: Centre for Housing Policy/University of York); Pleace, N. (2016) *Housing First Guide Europe*. (FEANTSA: Brussels), available at: <http://housingfirsteurope.eu/guide/>.

182 <http://www.housingfirstitalia.org/>

Housing First model. According to the national expert, there is one university in Lisbon that has been actively advocating the use of Housing First since its very beginning, which was also one of the partners of the first Housing First programme in Portugal. The university coordinated the recent European “Home EU”<sup>183</sup> research project - involving 12 partners from 9 countries - aiming at developing a foundation from which to promote the mainstreaming of the Housing First model as a European social policy to end homelessness.

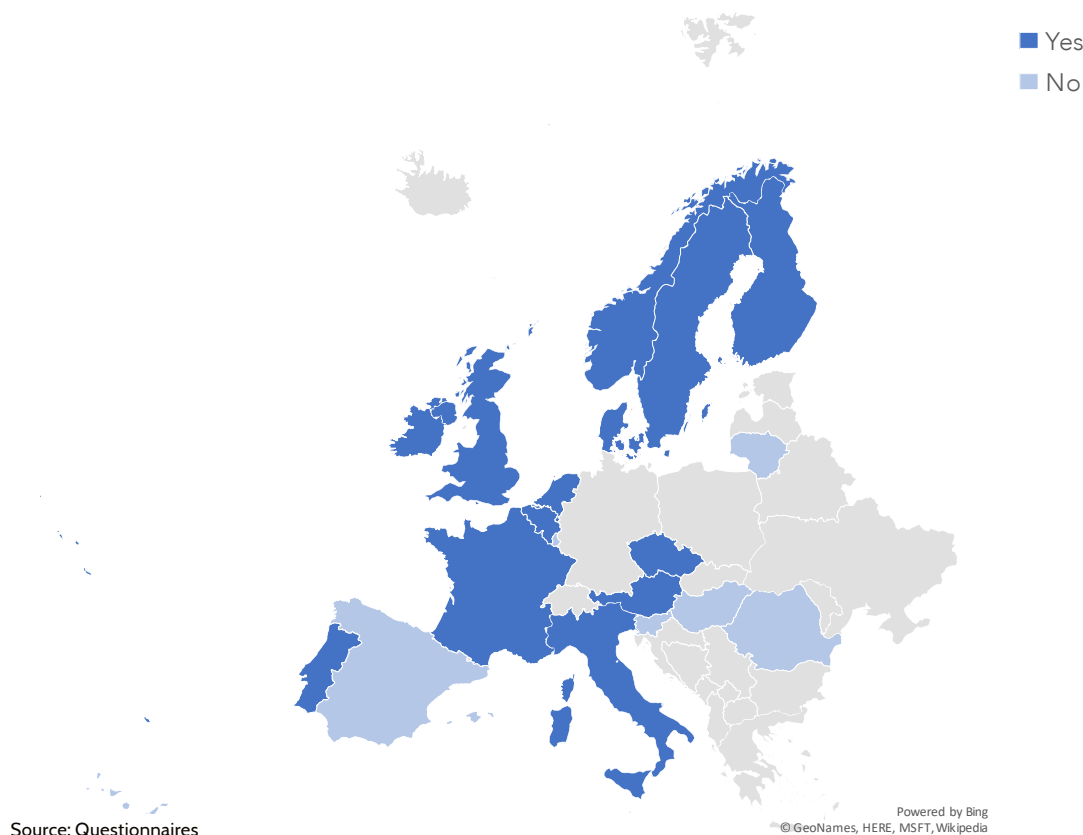
Homeless service providers are also reported as a major source of societal support for the use of Housing First although with different intensity (only Romania reports no support whatsoever from this sector). In the Netherlands, for example, the expert argues that there is a limited knowledge on the Housing First model, which is mostly confined to a restricted number of organisations, and among which there is strong support for the use of Housing First. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that Housing First is being implemented across 20 cities in

the Netherlands alongside other homelessness services<sup>184</sup>.

In Spain, homelessness service providers have played a pivotal role in the introduction and dissemination of Housing First<sup>185</sup>, where it is currently being implemented across different regions and cities. The advocacy work led by organisations like *RAIS*, *Sant Joan de Déu*, and *Arrels Foundation*, together with the implementation and evaluation of the first housing first services in Spain, fostered the debate about the potential of Housing First and sparked increasing interest among several regional administrations for the implementation of the model.

In several countries (e.g. Belgium, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway) support from service providers and other actors within the homelessness arena seems to go beyond the scope of single organisations. More than half of the countries in the study (10 of 19) reported the existence of regional and/or national networks of Housing First providers (municipalities are the main providers of Housing First in some countries) and advocates (Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1: Countries with Housing First networks



183 <http://www.home-eu.org/>

184 Source: Dutch questionnaire response.

Significant differences are again to be found among this group of countries as regards the composition and the actual operational capacity of such networks. In the Czech Republic, the Platform for Social Housing, established in 2013, brought together NGOs, and experts in the field of social housing<sup>186</sup>. Within the overall aim of working together to address and overcome the structural barriers in relation to resettlement processes of homeless people, the Platform is currently providing training, promoting education, international exchanges, and support to organisations interested in delivering and funding Housing First services.

In Portugal, there is an informal “National Housing First Network” composed of some 12-15 service providers, including organisations already delivering Housing First services and others which are interested in delivering such services. The Network meets several times a year.

France is reported to have multiple cooperation structures – both public and non-governmental – in place for promoting and implementing the Housing First approach across the country. DIHAL (the Inter-ministerial Delegation for Housing and Access to Housing) has been supporting the implementation of Housing First projects across the country, through the calls for social innovation projects. The *Abbé Pierre* Foundation, the Federation of Solidarity Actors (*Fédération des Acteurs de la Solidarité*) and the ANSA (*Agence Nouvelle des Solidarités Activées*) are established non-governmental networks which have been advocating the Housing First model and providing training and support for their members for several years.

Ireland reports the operation of a Housing First Good Practice Platform, which brings together all the Irish NGOs interested and/or committed to promoting the use of Housing First. It also includes NGOs from Northern Ireland. The platform promotes debate, experience sharing, and training among its members. Housing First *Nederland* – established in 2016 – is a platform of 20 organisations implementing Housing First services in the Netherlands. Their main activities involve knowledge and experience exchange, as well as advocacy work.

In Belgium, the Housing First Lab also provides training, discussion, education, international exchanges and support to organisations interested in delivering and funding Housing First services. In England, Homeless Link, the federation of homelessness service providers, have developed ‘Housing First England’<sup>187</sup>, a programme designed to promote Housing First at policy level and as a model of good practice. It provides training, discussion, international exchanges and support for organisations interested in delivering and funding Housing First services, with networks also operating in Scotland<sup>188</sup> and Wales<sup>189</sup>.

In Italy, the *Housing First Italia* network<sup>190</sup>, a collaboration between service providers, municipalities and academics, operating under fio.PSD (the federation of Italian homelessness organisations) was established in 2014. The Italian network was responsible for coordinating the Housing First pilot projects promoted by its members, and its activities include advocacy, training, and support<sup>191</sup>. The ultimate aim is to enhance a paradigm shift in homelessness intervention methods addressing people with high and complex needs.

In Finland, the Housing First network - Networking for Development – takes the form of a partnership project, which operates within the national Action Plan for Preventing Homelessness in Finland 2016-2019 (AUNE). It brings together five NGOs working with homeless people: The Y-Foundation: Helsinki Deaconess Institute (HDL); No Fixed Abode NGO (VVA ry.); Street Mission in Rauma Region and the Finnish Blue-Ribbon Y, and is coordinated by the Y-Foundation. It is funded by STEA (the Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health).

Norway has a national network of Housing First Programmes - established in 2013 – and bringing together the 21 Housing First programmes all run by local municipalities. The network is organised by the Norwegian Resource Centre for Community Mental Health (NAPHA). It fosters collaboration among the local programmes and provides guidance and support.

185 Boixados, A., Matulic, M.V., Guasch, F., Cardona, M., Noro, R. (2018) Fidelity Findings from the Arrels Foundation Housing First Programme in Barcelona, Spain. *European Journal of Homelessness* 12(3) pp.129-154; Bernad, R. (2018) Op. cit.

186 Lindovská, E. (2014) Homelessness Coping Strategies from Housing Ready and Housing First Perspectives. *European Journal of Homelessness* 8(1) pp.97-115.

187 <https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/>

188 <https://www.corra.scot/grants/housing-first-scotland-fund/>

189 <https://www.24housing.co.uk/news/wales-gets-closer-to-full-implementation-of-housing-first/>

190 [www.housingfirstitalia.org](http://www.housingfirstitalia.org)

191 Consoli, T., Cortese, C., Molinari, P., Zenarolla, A. (2016) The Italian Network for Implementing the ‘Housing First’ Approach. *European Journal of Homelessness* 10 (1) pp. 83-98.



In Denmark, throughout the period of the homelessness strategy and during successive programmes, there have been regular networks and meetings amongst the municipalities involved in the Housing First programme and the National Board of Social Welfare - the government agency responsible for the implementation of the programmes. These networks have had the broad function of supporting implementation at local level and exchanging results and experiences.

In summary, the evidence collected from the national experts' questionnaires suggests that there are varied degrees and patterns of political and societal support for Housing First across the 19 participating countries. National and local level governments have been instrumental in making Housing First central to tackling long-term homelessness in several countries (e.g. Denmark, Finland, France).

In other countries (e.g. Italy, Ireland, Spain) there is evidence that the role of grass-root organisations in promoting advocacy, discussion and experimental implementation of Housing First projects was crucial in helping put this important innovation that reduces homelessness

among people with high support needs on the policy agenda. Eastern EU member states are 'captured' between an almost total absence of political support at any level (e.g. Hungary, Lithuania, Romania and to a lesser extent the Czech Republic and Slovenia) and, a) strong mobilisation efforts across different societal groups – namely homelessness service providers, advocacy groups and academia – for promoting and financing Housing First experiments (e.g. Czech Republic, Hungary); and b) no advocacy or grass-root support for promoting the Housing First model (e.g. Lithuania, Slovenia, Romania).

Collaborations between service providers and universities, as in Sweden, Italy, the Netherlands, and Portugal, bring together professionals in service delivery with professionals in evaluation, and have the potential to enhance capacity to lobby effectively for Housing First by collecting strong evidence and demonstrating outcome impact. Despite not being backed up by strong political support at national level (e.g. Netherlands, Portugal), this collaborative effort leads to significant variations in the use of Housing First as a response to homelessness.

## 8 CONCLUSIONS

### INTRODUCTION

This final chapter brings together some conclusions from the research. The results show that Housing First is increasingly at the core of European responses to homelessness. The development of Housing First in Europe remains uneven, both across Europe as a whole and within some European countries, but Housing First is clearly growing in significance. Information on the extent and nature of Housing First was available for every country where Housing First was being used, with two countries, Lithuania and Romania, reporting no activity. Some gaps existed in information, with even those respondents who worked at the core of Housing First policy and practice unable to answer certain questions in certain countries, as some information was held at municipal, local authority, or service level, and not collated nationally.

### THE RISE OF EUROPEAN HOUSING FIRST

There is much in this research to encourage everyone who advocates for Housing First as a service and homelessness strategies that follow a housing-led/Housing First philosophy. A decade ago, Housing First was not present in Europe in the way that it is now. Housing First is at the core of Nordic homelessness strategies in Denmark and Finland, is developing in Norway, and is gaining momentum and importance in Sweden. In France, the Netherlands, and Ireland, Housing First is clearly important to homelessness policy and strategy. While growth has been uneven, Housing First is developing fast in Italy and the UK, in both cases driven by the homelessness sector, which in the UK has effectively led the national governments and central government towards Housing First, while *Housing First Italia* has built up both a supportive network and an evidence base. In some countries, like Austria and Spain, development has happened in some areas but not in others, there is not quite the same sense of momentum as exists in Portugal, Italy or the UK, but Housing First is there and it is influencing debates on how to respond to homelessness.

German development of Housing First is just beginning but, similar to the UK, the mainstream practice in homelessness service design and strategy is already housing-led, which means there is a policy environment that is already inclined towards an approach like Housing First. In the UK, this had initially caused an element of resistance, as Housing First had enough similarity to existing services for the re-

action to be that it was already being used<sup>192</sup>. In Sweden too, Housing First has been seen as similar to the housing-led services that were already in place. Finland is sometimes described as adopting the American model of Housing First, but the Finnish interpretation of Housing First is distinct and a housing-led/Housing First approach to homelessness at strategic level was arrived at independently<sup>193</sup>.

Housing First does not operate at a very large scale anywhere in Europe apart from Finland, although it has become, or is close to becoming, integral to strategic responses to homelessness in some countries, and is still confined to a minority of homelessness service provision in many countries. However, as has been noted throughout this report, Housing First is intended for a relatively small group of people, those who experience homelessness on a sustained or repeated basis and other homeless people who also have high and complex needs. There are some countries, like Denmark, where homelessness is largely confined to this group, who are not numerous, probably because extensive welfare and social housing systems prevent larger scale homelessness associated with poverty. As noted above, a housing-led/Housing First approach can be seen as the logical response to most Danish homelessness. In other cases, such as the UK or USA, homelessness triggered by and associated with poverty is much more common. In these instances, many homeless people need adequate, affordable and secure housing, not Housing First, but the evidence is that a smaller group of homeless

192 Johnsen, S. and Teixeira, L., 2012. 'Doing it already?': stakeholder perceptions of Housing First in the UK. *International Journal of Housing Policy*, 12(2), pp.183-203.

193 Y Foundation (2017) Op. cit.

people, with high and complex needs, is still present and that their best chance of a sustainable exit from homelessness is Housing First<sup>194</sup>.

The role and extent of Housing First will vary according to the nature of homelessness, but in many senses the key message of this research is less about the current extent of Housing First, it is instead that Housing First is already at the core of some European homelessness policy and already highly influential in other countries. There is a high degree of adherence to the core principles in the *Housing First Guide Europe* (which has been translated into eight languages)<sup>195</sup> and evidence of a shared vision of Housing First across Europe. The main finding of this research is that Housing First is growing in importance in responses to homelessness across Europe and that, while still developing, has a clear and important presence in homelessness policy and debates about how best to end homelessness.

Finnish practice and strategy, described in detail elsewhere<sup>196</sup>, has seen the successful combination of Housing First services, closely mirroring the key elements of the original *Pathways to Housing* model (although these services were developed independently in Finland), within what is described as a wider 'Housing

First' strategy. This can appear confusing at first glance, as Finland employs a wide array of services to reduce and prevent homelessness, alongside other homelessness services that are recognisably a form of Housing First. Perhaps the best way to understand this is to think in terms of Finland as always placing housing at the core of every response to homelessness, i.e. a housing-led approach (which is referred to as a broad 'Housing First' philosophy by the Finns). Finland shows what Housing First services can do: reducing levels of long-term homelessness very significantly as an integral part of a much wider housing-led strategy that uses prevention, supported, and transitional housing, together with lower intensity housing-led mobile support services to reduce other forms of homelessness, including for families and people with low-to-no support needs. This kind of strategic integration of Housing First into mainstream homelessness strategy and successful coordination with other homelessness services - alongside social housing, health, and other service providers - shows the potential for actually ending homelessness, particularly the extremes of homelessness experienced by people with high and complex needs.

## CURRENT CHALLENGES

### Housing supply and finance

There are two key challenges around the development of Housing First in Europe:

- Finding sufficient, affordable, adequate housing with reasonable security of tenure.
- Ensuring that funding for Housing First is both reliable enough and sufficient enough for Housing First to develop as a mainstream response to homelessness among people with high and complex needs across Europe.

In many of the more economically prosperous areas of Europe - both in the sense of countries that are more affluent and in terms of the most affluent areas within those countries - there is a general undersupply of adequate and affordable housing. In the less affluent countries and areas, issues with the quality and standard of housing, as well as with supply, are often present. An absence of reliable housing supply limits

what Housing First can achieve. It restricts the scale at which services can operate and it also risks impeding the efficiency of those services if, for example, someone cannot realistically be housed within a few days or weeks, but is waiting in emergency or temporary accommodation for months, perhaps even years, before a Housing First service can house them. Finland tackled the challenges around adequate housing supply by building, purchasing houses, and redeveloping some existing homelessness services and other sites. In other countries, Housing First services have to work with existing social housing, which is often under pressure, and private rental housing, which may be less than ideal, and can result in delays and compromises. Housing First needs the right kind of housing. It cannot work properly without it, and there are many places in Europe that simply do not have enough affordable homes<sup>197</sup>.

Funding is an issue, both in terms of whether it is sufficient and whether it is reliable. The more

194 Pleace, N. (2018) Op. cit.

195 <https://housingfirsteurope.eu/guide/>

196 Pleace *et al* (2015) Op. cit.; Y Foundation (2017) Op. cit.; Pleace, N. (2017) Op. Cit.;

197 Abbé Pierre Foundation FEANTSA (2018) Third Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe 2018 Brussels: FEANTSA.

challenging environments, such as the UK where funding is being cut and is increasingly short-term, or Italy, where getting together funding is inherently difficult, make provision of Housing First precarious, which undermines the potential for effectiveness and making significant strategic impact. Beyond this, there are countries where expenditure on homelessness services is just not very high, where what money there is may be from charitable or faith-based organisations and the State takes little or no role in funding services. If there is not enough money to build good quality Housing First services and the funding for Housing First services is unreliable, Housing First is less likely to be effective.

However, nature and meaning of fidelity is important here. There is some evidence from Italy and the UK that services that follow the core principles of Housing First can still be effective, even if they simply do not have anything like the

level of resources put into the original US services. It is arguable that comparably well-resourced Housing First services, such as those in Denmark or France, may deliver better outcomes, but even with limited resources, versions of Housing First that follow the core principles can perform well. There has always been a risk that Housing First will be diluted when governments take hold of it, and will lose coherence and effectiveness as a result, so it is important to note that the Italian and UK services are still high intensity and relatively expensive, even if costs are lower than for services more closely aligned to the operational detail of the original Tsemberis model<sup>198</sup>. Housing First was designed for people with high and complex needs, not as a solution to all forms of homelessness, and again, the distinction between a housing-led response to all homelessness, a broad 'Housing First' *philosophy*, and what is meant by a Housing First *service* is important.

## USING EVIDENCE

A lot of existing evidence around Housing First in Europe is positive. However, there is some evidence that outcomes around health, mental health, social integration and addiction are more uneven than those around sustaining exits for homelessness<sup>199</sup>, although different studies of Housing First do report varying results, including positive results around addiction<sup>200</sup>.

Housing First is not necessarily perfect, but by being prepared to look critically at limitations where they arise, reacting practically and working to address any issues that require attention, the model can be improved if and when necessary. Housing First solves homelessness for a majority of homeless people with high and complex needs, providing the foundation that the original Pathways to Housing model saw as essential for promoting social integration and recovery<sup>201</sup>. If processes of social integration and recovery are uneven, it may be that aspects of the support offered by Housing First services need some modification, such as enhancement of different aspects of support by drawing on good practice from elsewhere in the European homelessness sector or from other areas, such as social care policy and practice.

There are some cashable savings from using Housing First. Evidence suggests it is more cost efficient to replace use of some existing homelessness services for people with higher and complex needs, with Housing First, according to Finnish<sup>202</sup>, French<sup>203</sup> and UK research<sup>204</sup>, so that the overall efficiency of homelessness services is improved.

However, Housing First will not always save money. Costs may spike because Housing First connects people to services, like healthcare, that they require but have not been using. Potential savings may also not necessarily be cashable, i.e. homeless people with complex needs having less contact with criminal justice systems or emergency medical services, but there is not enough overall contact with homeless people, who are a tiny fraction of total population, to allow costs to be cut. However, while Housing First will not necessarily *always* save money (though it may often be more efficient), the ultimate test of effectiveness is in addressing the high human costs of homelessness and this is an area in which Housing First is consistently effective.

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198 Pleace, N. (2018) Op. cit.

199 Johnson, G. et al (2012) Op. cit.; Quilgars, D. and Pleace, N. (2016) Op. cit.

200 Urbanoski, K., Veldhuizen, S., Krausz, M., Schutz, C., Somers, J.M., Kirst, M., Fleury, M.J., Stergiopoulos, V., Patterson, M., Strehlau, V. and Goering, P. (2018) Effects of comorbid substance use disorders on outcomes in a Housing First intervention for homeless people with mental illness. *Addiction*, 113(1), pp.137-145.

201 Tsemberis, S. (2010) Op. cit.

202 <https://asuntoensin.fi/aineistopankki/asunto-ensin-yksikoiden-kustannusvaikuttavuus/>

203 [http://www.cohesion-territoires.gouv.fr/l-acces-et-le-maintien-dans-le-logement?id\\_courant=4195](http://www.cohesion-territoires.gouv.fr/l-acces-et-le-maintien-dans-le-logement?id_courant=4195)

204 Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J. (2019) Op. cit.

Alongside this, there is a need to explore the development of universal outcome indicators that would allow a database to be built that showed the effectiveness of Housing First in different European countries and across Europe as a whole. One of the best methods for showing the effectiveness of Housing First, in terms of cost, in terms of ending homelessness, and in respect of other positive outcomes, is large-

scale statistical datasets. Bringing together and enhancing statistical information on Housing First across Europe would help to build a robust evidence base, highlight any challenges facing services and help improve understanding of the effectiveness of Housing First in different contexts, such as lower and higher stress housing markets.

## STRATEGIC INTEGRATION OF HOUSING FIRST

This research provides further evidence that the use of Housing First within an integrated homelessness strategy is at its most advanced in Finland. Crucially, Housing First is used in a complementary relationship with other services, which include prevention, housing-led, and supported housing services, in a mix that has brought down homelessness and reduced use of emergency accommodation to negligible levels. It is this careful use of Housing First, alongside other services and within an integrated strategy that appears to be the most effective way of tackling homelessness. To ensure Housing First is truly effective, it must not exist in a loose relationship or be separated from other homelessness services but instead must be a part of an integrated strategy.

Beyond this, Housing First conveys important messages about the nature of homelessness and the people who experience it<sup>205</sup>. The most important of these messages is the focus on housing as a human right and the need to respect the opinions and experience of homeless people, working with them to solve homelessness. Housing First is effective because it recognises and responds to the humanity of homeless people<sup>206</sup>, not treating them as somehow distinct or different from other individuals; as fellow citizens whose needs have to be understood and experiences listened to, not as a group who are somehow different from the rest of us and who need to be disciplined into becoming 'housing ready'.

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205 Kathleen R. Arnold Arnold, K. R. (2004) *Homelessness, citizenship, and identity: the uncanniness of late modernity*, Albany: State University of New York Press

206 Pleace, N. (2018) *Op. cit.*





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