



Housing First in Europe

State of play and challenges

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Housing First in Europe: State of play

- Ever growing evidence that Housing First works well in different national and local contexts, also in Europe
 - Housing First Europe, high housing retention rates in Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Glasgow and Lisbon
 - Positive evaluations of national schemes using HF in Denmark and Finland
 - Large randomized controlled trial in 4 French cities (*Un Chez-Soi d'abord*: Paris, Marseille, Toulouse and Lille)
 - Local evaluations of HF in Dublin, London (Camden), 9 English projects, Spanish scheme.....
 - And of course: Housing First Belgium



Classification of Housing First as public policy intervention (FEANTSA)

- As important national public policy intervention (FI, DK)
- As large national experiments promoted and funded by government. Would normally be brought to scale and turned into public policy in due time (BE, LU, FR (VBG:? or FR similar status as FI and DK?))
- As scattered local experiments which contribute to a common dynamic and mobilise serious political/government support (IT, ES, IE, VBG: NL)
- As local experiments independent from each other which have not yet created a common dynamic or mobilised serious political support (HU, SE, UK, AT)
- As isolated projects which are often led by individuals on their own initiative in spite of little public support/interest available (PL, DE, HU, CZ, SI, SK)



Debates and Challenges

- Fidelity vs. adjustments to local contexts
 - Risk of “window dressing” (HF label for traditional services, for transitional approaches with many requirements etc.)
 - Set of basic principles to be followed
 - Deviations from New York pioneer (PtH) in Europe:
 - Target group (less focused on diagnosed mentally ill)
 - Use of social housing, more direct rent contracts
 - Less ACT, more cooperation with specialised services
 - Less peer experts
- How much flexibility is needed, how much fidelity necessary when implementing HF?



Debates and Challenges

- Which target group?
 - Only for people with complex support needs (mental health and addiction)?
 - Principles also relevant for other homeless groups with less severe needs?
- Part of the menu or fundamental mind shift needed?
 - Housing First for small group of chronic homeless people and staircase for the rest?
 - Housing led policies for all homeless people!



Debates and Challenges

- Scattered housing vs. congregate housing with on-site support
 - PtH principle: Independent scattered housing, 20 % max per block; gone in the HFE-guide
 - Majority of homeless people prefer scattered housing, and personal choice and preferences play key role in HF
 - HFE experimentation project: congregate housing should be restricted to a minority who wishes to live like that or has failed several times in scattered housing
 - Differentiation needed regarding size and specific setting of congregate housing; small projects with individual apartments, core-and-cluster housing....



Debates and Challenges

- “Housing First is nice, but where is the housing?”
 - Access to housing essential for Housing First and housing led policies
 - Long-term housing needed where people can stay on after support has diminished or stopped, no transitional housing. Protection against arbitrary eviction important
 - Lack of housing should not delay implementation of HF, successfully implemented in very tight housing markets
 - Creativity, courage and innovation needed to improve access to housing for homeless people: Priority in social housing, use of vacant housing, social rental agencies....
 - Link with housing policies badly needed



Debates and Challenges

- Services
 - To what extent multi-disciplinary services needed in countries with a broad range of specialised services?
 - How to implement principle of providing “support as long as it is needed” in time-limited projects?
 - Critical Time Intervention by definition time-limited, the right service for Housing First?
 - How to adjust service provision and intensity to individual needs (also a question of budgets required)?



Debates and Challenges

- Housing First! What's second?
 - Specific challenge to achieve further social inclusion beyond housing retention
 - Results sometimes “underwhelming” regarding improvements of health and addiction problems
 - What is needed to overcome social isolation, lack of something meaningful to do and poverty / exclusion from the labour market?
 - Expectations need to remain realistic, some changes need more time than others, structural barriers



Debates and Challenges

- Cost savings vs cost effectiveness
 - Cost saving arguments very powerful, but not always backed by the facts
 - Housing First is not a low-cost service and providing intensive support as long as it is needed requires substantial resources
 - Savings for small group of people with high needs producing high costs in sectors of health and criminal justice, but not for others
 - Ample evidence that Housing First is much more cost-effective. Cost effectiveness should be main financial argument and there are other arguments....



Scaling up? Some way to go!

- Housing First projects still isolated and fragile experiments in many EU countries
- Staircase systems or urgency provision still dominating in most
- Evidence for Housing First is overwhelming, some more focused analysis of gender and age specific needs might be helpful
- Stronger political will needed for scaling-up Housing First projects and for developing housing-led policies
- Integrating Housing First in broader housing led homeless strategies (including strong focus on prevention) has helped
- Cooperation between different policy areas essential. Don't forget the housing department!!



Scaling up? Some way to go!

- Service providers should become more aware of the potentials of support in housing and prevention and become allies of “Housing First movement”
- In countries with less developed support systems: Why not jump the “staircase-phase”?
- Implies important mind-shift, but in line with broader developments in other areas (normalisation, decentralisation, personalisation, deinstitutionalisation)
- Lobbying needed at all levels
- New initiatives at European level (HF guide and HF hub) will hopefully help to provide answers to some of the questions raised and provide basis to further promote scaling-up of Housing First



Thank you for your attention!

- ❁ Questions?
- ❁ Comments?
- ❁ Criticism?
- ❁ Suggestions?





Contact

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