

From Fidelity to Adaptations: A Qualitative Analysis of Contextual Factors Shaping Housing First

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Feantsa Research, Utrecht September 19th, 2025



Background



Erasmus+ funded project looking at the implementation of Housing First model in Europe



Four partner organizations: Sophia Housing (Ireland, project lead), Arrels Fundació (Spain), Housing First Berlin (Germany) and Y-Foundation (Finland)



Schedule: 2023-2025

Data

Individual interviews (N=51) with front line workers, experts, public officials and decision-makers working in the field of Housing First and homelessness

Focus group interviews (N=8) for the HF staff including peers and residents

European level survey of the training needs related to Housing First

Case studies of different adaptations of HF from the partner countries (2-5/country)

Questions:

1. What contextual factors related to the implementation of the Housing First model emerge in the practical conduct HF work?
2. How they challenge or support the implementation of Housing First?
3. How Housing First is adapted to address the challenges posed by the context?



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Y-Säätiö
40 vuotta

Eight Core Principles (Pleace 2016)

- 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



Why Study Adaptations?



Housing First Research

- Some elements of HF might not be applicable in every country (Wygnańska, 2020)
- Ending homelessness and successfully implement HF does not require high fidelity (Pleace & Bretherton 2013)
- Programmatic variation does not necessarily mean the Housing First model lacks clarity (Chen 2019)
- Adherence to HF fidelity might overlook service user's needs (Parsell 2016)
- Adaptations may respond better to the needs of some resident groups (Montgomery 2019; Harris ym. 2019)

Research on Policy Adaptations

- Policies must typically be implemented and modified over time (Warren et al. 2001)
- Realities of policy adjustment involve learning, debate, contention among a variety of stakeholders (ibid.)

Active Adaptation

(Lancione et al. 2017; Demos Helsinki 2022)

- The importance of context must be considered if Housing First is to be applied successfully
- A desired outcome of policy drift from one context to another would be active adaptation, which in the case of Housing First would mean **preserving the core ethos of the model but adapting the practical work to fit the context** (Lancione et al. 2017)
- Housing First as a compass: a goal and a set of principles to aim for, but also a possibility to find their own way of achieving them (Demos Helsinki 2022)

Focus Group Interviews in Finland, Germany, Ireland & Spain



Eight focus groups,
with altogether 44
participants



Semistructured
interviews covering
three themes:
housing, support and
training needs



Front-line workers,
peers and residents of
HF as informants

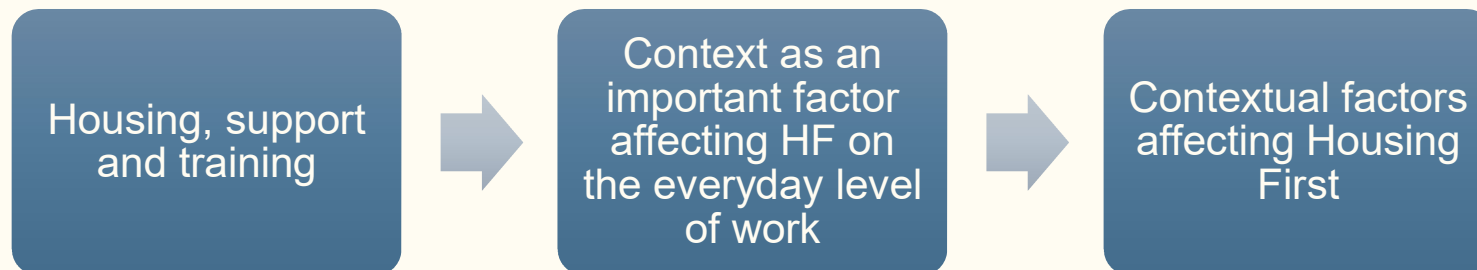


Reflexive Thematic
Analysis (Braun &
Clarke 2022)



Identifying recurring
themes and patterns
in the data and giving
an interpretation to
these themes and
patterns

Coding Process I : from everyday implementation of HF to contextual factors



Coding Process II: adapting Housing First

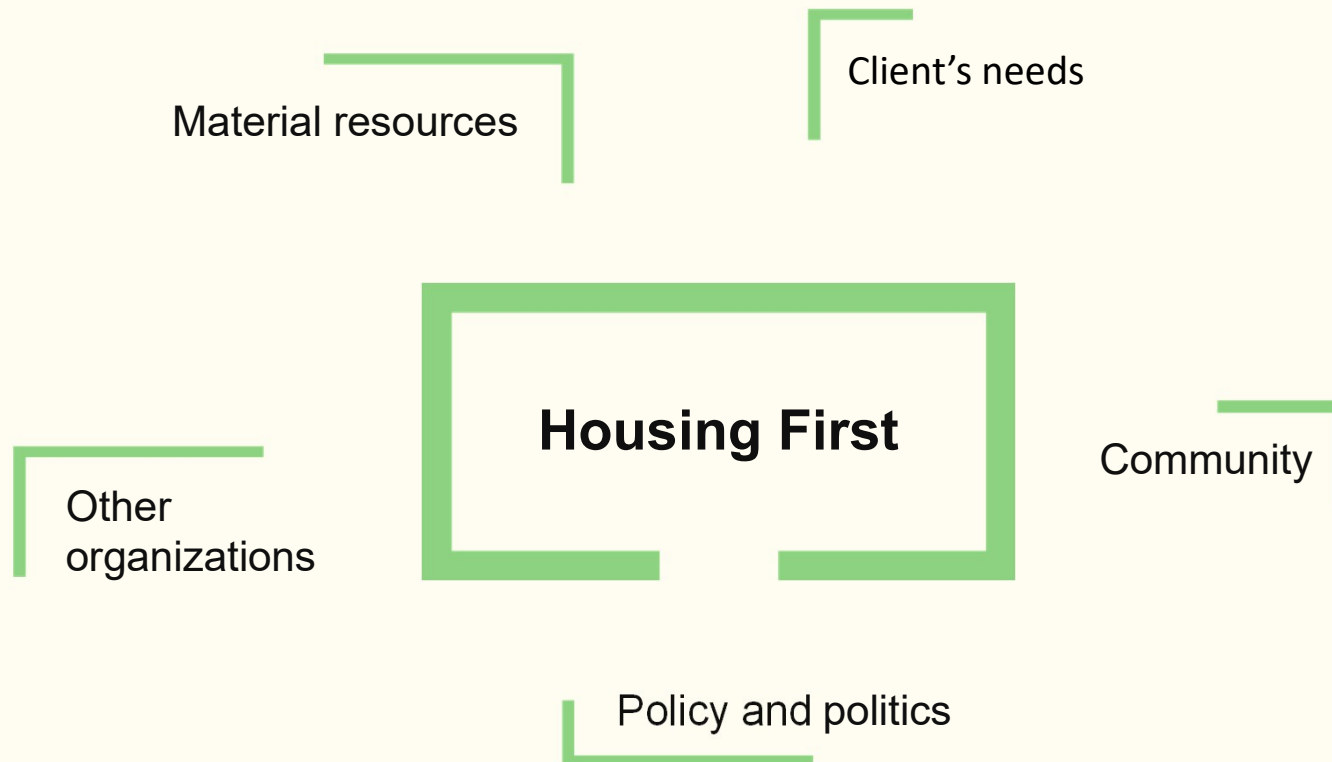


Results

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Contextual Factors Affecting Housing First



Contextual factors affecting the implementing of Housing First

Client's needs: drug problems, youth homelessness, problems of the families and couples, immigration, isolation and loneliness, everyday emergencies, poor health and mobility

Material Resources: lack of housing, lack of suitable housing; not enough resources for support OR vice versa

Service System: Clashing views on how to handle homelessness, moralism, exclusionary practices, BUT also successful co-operation

Policy and Politics: legislation, strategies and resources facilitating the implementation of HF, OR vice versa

Community: cooperation with other NGOs, work opportunities, inclusion and community, but also exclusion and feelings of isolation

Barcelona Focus Group, spring 2024, support team worker

Client's needs affecting Housing First

Some people are not successful in the (HF) program. Maybe because they have behavioral problems, maybe because they have mental issues, or maybe because they have addictions, or even everything at the same time. So, this gives us a very complex profile, and people that cannot live in the housing options that we offer them

Dublin Focus Group, spring 2024, front-line worker

Material Resources Affecting Housing First

I1: Ten years ago, you paid 400 euros a month for a bedsit. It has shifted a lot. Accommodation has gotten very expensive, housing crisis, I think (...)

I2: There's too many STAs (short term accommodation) and not enough LTAs (long term accommodation) and I would love to see that change.

Berlin Focus Group, autumn 2023

HF, staff member

Another problem is that **we are now financed for two years**, and we would like to be part of the regular service system, and it is hard for the administration of the regular system to imagine how this (Housing First) works here.

Helsinki Focus Group, Spring 2025

HF manager

Service System affecting Housing First

Of course, if you have **a lot of resources**, there's always clearly more opportunity to do something (...) **Then, there's the rest of the service system.** Both in substance abuse treatment and in other areas, the emphasis is on harm reduction, and there is a decline in services. Substance abuse services have deteriorated, and mental health services have also deteriorated, but perhaps substance abuse services have deteriorated the most.

HF Resident Barcelona, spring 2025

Community Affecting Housing First

In my case I have a flat thanks to X (organization). They took me off the streets. I was lost in alcohol too. And now I work in the clothing department, washing the clothes from people who are showering. And I'm very happy here. I know everyone, we are all fond of each other. We play domino and board games and we're like a family and that boosts your self-esteem.

Adapting Housing First: Responding to the Context

- **Communal/single site Housing First and community work** as the most often mentioned adaptations responding to clients needs and also to pressures stemming from the lack of material resources. Germany was the only country offering only scattered housing.
- Also calls for HF **adaptations for different target groups**, particularly young people and families
- **Neighborhood Work** responding pressures from the surrounding communities
- **Service Integration** as a way of responding to the material pressures

Communal or Single Site Housing in Dublin, Barcelona & Finland

- We also talk a lot about this **isolation issue (...)** I think there's a camaraderie in the likes of this unit (single site housing). You're in the same corridor and you can just knock in to say hello. They won't knock around for a cup of tea or drop a milk or whatever it is (in scattered housing) (Dublin, spring 2024)
- And then we also have a single building with apartments where they only share the kitchens, so each apartment is shared between two users and they only share the kitchen, but they have, for example, the room for themselves (...) **It's a model that I like a lot, and that it works very well, because it gives them some autonomy, they are sort of free, but at the same time, they have support**, so they have these two options. (Barcelona, spring 2024)
- **The neighbors may tolerate very little of any disturbance.** A lot of things can happen in a fast cycle. And then it will result in the termination of the lease. Then you're in debt and then it's all over again. (Helsinki, spring 2024)

Single Site on the Housing Pathway, HF resident, Helsinki

- I've been completely homeless for a couple of years, and then I got to live in the unit (single site housing). Then I got a job and lived in X (scattered support apartment) for a while. And then nowadays I'm completely on my own and I've got contracts and training and I'm going to school. In a way, through the HF principle, I've managed to reintegrate back into society, or become part of it, as I've never really belonged in it in the first place. (Finland)

Community Work and Service Integration in HF

- So, you try and use those resources in the community as well (..) External services that we have around our service. They're very good at manoeuvring the groups and separating them into different groups so that the women (from the single site) are comfortable in the groups (Dublin)
- Volunteers will pick them up from X and X or wherever (...) They do everything, museums, movies, go to the cinema to watch movies. The possibilities are endless. (Finland)
- We try to cooperate (with the service system) as much as it is possible (...) It's hard work to organise this collaboration, but we try to do it in different directions, especially to mental health care. (Berlin)

Conclusions

- The contribution of the analysis to research on HF is twofold.
- First, the data shows how context shapes the implementation of HF, regardless of what the model itself is aiming for or hopes to achieve.
- Secondly, the article brings to the fore the different adaptations of HF, which have been designed to meet different needs and challenges posed by the context.
- The results add to the discussion on the future development of the HF principle and the societal factors surrounding this development.

Conclusions

- For instance, Chen (2019) discusses the programmatic differences of HF, which can benefit the development of the model and the residents
- In our data, adaptations were benefit to serve the development of Housing First, as they responded better to residents' needs than the original and offered possibilities for optimal use of surrounding resources.

Y-Säätiö



Y-Säätiö



Y-Säätiö



Y-Säätiö



Jotta
jokaisella
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