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The European Journal of Homelessness provides a critical analysis of policy and practice on homelessness in Europe for policy makers, practitioners, researchers and academics. The aim is to stimulate debate on homelessness and housing exclusion at the European level and to facilitate the development of a stronger evidential base for policy development and innovation. The journal seeks to give international exposure to significant national, regional and local developments and to provide a forum for comparative analysis of policy and practice in preventing and tackling homelessness in Europe. The journal also assesses the lessons for Europe, which can be derived from policy, practice and research from elsewhere.

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Editorial

The Housing First Europe Hub was established in 2016 by FEANTSA (the European Federation of National Organisations Working with Homeless People), the Y-Foundation (Finland) and other interested partners – including housing providers, cities, organisations and researchers – who were committed to Housing First, understood as both a strategy and a policy that places *housing, with supports as necessary*, and not simply a specific programme for those with complex needs, *as the core response to resolving homelessness*. Homelessness response systems in Europe (and beyond) are largely well-intentioned sticking plasters created in response to increasing residential instability resulting in increasing numbers of people forced to sleep rough or more commonly in temporary accommodation of varying quality.

In a recent review of homelessness services in Europe, Pleace et al (2018, p.12) concluded that: “[l]ow intensity services, offering basic non-housing support and emergency / temporary accommodation, probably form the bulk of homelessness service provision in Europe.” Despite extensive critiques of the limitations of low intensity services, offering basic non-housing support and emergency / temporary accommodation as a response to residential instability, and the largely negative experience of those who reside in such facilities, it remains, as Serme-Morin and Coupechoux (2019) concisely note “oversubscribed, insecure and unsuitable.”

There is no convincing evidence that the provision of large congregate shelters for people experiencing homelessness achieves anything other than a temporary, generally unpleasant, often unsafe, respite from the elements and the provision of basic sustenance, and for a small minority, an extraordinarily expensive and unsuitable long-term response to their inability to access secure affordable housing.

Recent research has indicated that expenditure on homelessness services is increasing across the EU as a whole, as a consequence of rising numbers of households experiencing homelessness and that this expenditure remains skewed towards shelter-based and housing-ready models (Pleace et al, 2021). In part, this research identified this increase in expenditure on shelter-based services as a legacy issue, in that services were largely designed as reactive responses to homelessness, centred around the provision of emergency accommodation.

In a number of countries, a not insignificant portion of expenditure is on over-flow expenditure, that is expenditure on hotel rooms and other temporary accommodation not designed to meet the needs of households experiencing homelessness, when existing designed services reached their limits. Thus, a degree of path-dependency is evident, whereby initial investment in emergency accommodation services, can result in generating the provision of further shelter beds when the numbers experiencing homelessness periodically increase, as this becomes the default response, and in some cases the use of hotel rooms when shelters are fully utilised.

The partners in the Housing First Europe Hub are committed to reducing, ending and preventing homelessness by applying the Housing First approach across homelessness and housing systems, in effect starting with housing for people who are experiencing homelessness and ensuring that any other supports they may require are available to them to maintain that housing. The Housing First Europe Hub works with actors involved in Housing First and homelessness from frontline workers to managers to policy makers at local and national level. Over the course of our work through training and exchanges and advocacy, it became clear that we had to think beyond the ‘homelessness sector’ in order to have a real impact.

Looking to existing examples, like Finland and Scotland, where the Housing First approach has been applied as a policy and a strategy at national and local level, the Housing First Europe Hub worked with Demos Helsinki to help re-think and re-frame how to articulate this idea of systems change. Demos Helsinki provided us with a new framework in which to talk about *how* systems need to change in order to end and prevent homelessness, and what role Housing First can play in this process. Their paper, *A New Systems Perspective to Ending Homelessness* is at the core of this ongoing work on systems change and led to the Housing First Europe Hub publishing a *Policy and Practice Guide*.

The Housing First Europe Hub utilised the Demos paper’s framework for change to interview Housing First partners across Europe to determine their progress, the obstacles to changing homelessness and housing systems so that they actually reduce, end and prevent homelessness. The Housing First Europe Hub distilled the key ingredients for making the necessary changes:

1. Motivated and dedicated people – champions ready to work towards ending homelessness rather than managing homelessness; advocates ready to drive change and use their leverage to affect practice and policy and bring others along with them.

2. A change in working culture and the way that people think about homelessness is essential. A culture shift needs to underpin the transition from ‘managing’ homelessness to dedicated efforts to end homelessness. Training, network building and ongoing awareness raising are crucial to ensure that all actors – those in frontline services, management, housing provision, and policy makers and administrators across different government levels and ministries – understand how they play an important role in this new approach.
3. Structures that can anchor change and support a system designed to end homelessness. These structures include: housing, the right policies to sustain change, partnerships with relevant actors, training and knowledge building.
4. Stable and predictable funding is crucial to embedding Housing First as the lever to reduce, end and prevent homelessness.
5. Policies and political commitment both to applying Housing First to a systems perspective, and a commitment to actually ending homelessness.

The Housing First Europe Hub published both the Demos paper and the Housing First Europe Hub policy and practice guide at its first conference in March 2022, held in Madrid. The conference provided an opportunity for actors ranging from frontline workers in Housing First services to Ministers from national governments in Spain, Belgium, and the EU’s Commissioner for Social Affairs, to consider *how* to make this systems change happen.

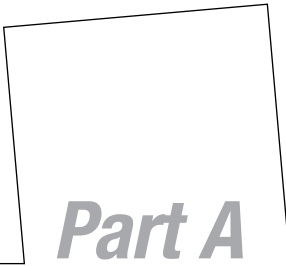
Following the conference, various conversations between the Housing First Europe Hub, the Y-Foundation, FEANTSA and the European Observatory on Homelessness concluded that it would be useful to tease out in more detail how to make systems change in the different member states and beyond, recognising the different contexts and constraints that existed. We asked actors from the NGO sector, local and national government and researchers to engage and reflect on the two papers in the context of their own specific national experience.

Contributions from Austria, Belgium, Canada, France, Ireland, Hungary, Germany, Finland, Netherlands, Italy and Sweden were received and we are grateful to all of our contributors to this special edition of the European Journal of Homelessness for their enthusiasm in responding to our request to reflect on the issues raised in the papers, and their forbearance. In addition, we sought a paper outlining the contribution that the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness, launched in Lisbon in June 2021 to bring about the required systems change to work towards the ending of homelessness by 2030, and we are particularly grateful for the contribution to this special edition by Yves Leterme and Patrick Develtere on this potentially game changing initiative.

What was particularly striking in the contributions was that there is little resistance to the idea that we can and should reduce and end homelessness. There is a consensus that we do not need to let homelessness persist, and there is an increasing understanding that homelessness is caused by structural issues and dysfunctional systems, rather than poor personal decision-making by individuals, and we hope the papers in this special edition provide both inspiration and concrete examples to help bring about the system changes required to end homelessness.



Articles



Part A



Don't Look Away: How a Society without Homelessness is Possible

Elisabeth Hammer

Chief Executive, neunerhaus, Austria

Introduction

I am convinced that a society without homelessness is possible. I also believe that the unique contribution of social organisations is essential to achieving this. As well as the individual support they offer to people in challenging situations, these organisations are experts in forging new partnerships, driving innovation, and lobbying for change. While it is clear that there are essential structural and policy levers involved in ending homelessness, to me it is unthinkable that this can be achieved without also drawing on the creativity and engagement of the social sector.

So how do organisations like neunerhaus and others working in the field of homelessness bring about systemic change? This article presents projects and innovative approaches that demonstrate that things can and should be done differently. They show that the vision of a society without homelessness is not naïve or unrealistic. They encourage us all to think about the contribution we can make, both within our organisations and in cooperation with others, to bring about change in the areas of housing, politics, public administration, and social attitudes. Ending homelessness is possible and I hope the following examples inspire us all to think about the roles we can play.

Society Under Pressure: Rising Housing Costs and Stagnating Incomes

While people experiencing homelessness have different needs requiring individualised support, one thing is always true – homelessness can only be ended long-term if people have their own permanent and affordable home. The current situation in Austria is not only exacerbating the difficulties people experiencing homelessness have accessing housing, but trends regarding housing costs and incomes are increasing housing pressure across society.

In Vienna, average net rents across private, municipal, and non-profit housing have increased by around 50% from 2010 to 2020, across Austria the increase is 40% (Statistik Austria, 2022). Research from the Vienna University of Technology analysing real estate advertisements found that only one-fifth of advertised apartments in Vienna were affordable for a single-person household on an average income (TU Wien, 2021). Further, while housing costs are rising rapidly, between 2010 and 2020, the median gross annual income increased by only 22% (Statistik Austria, 2021). This steadily widening gap between increases in income and rent is increasingly affecting the middle class as well, resulting in growing housing pressure and making affordable housing a scarce commodity.

Housing market and income dynamics have a significant impact on poverty and homelessness in our society. For example, people with low incomes on fixed-term rental contracts are particularly at risk of becoming homeless, yet it is precisely these groups who struggle to find housing away from the overpriced private rental market. These structural developments indicate that the risk factors for homelessness are becoming more acute in society. If structural safety nets disappear because income lags behind rises in housing costs, or certain groups are structurally excluded from social benefits, personal crises can cause existentially threatening situations. Therefore, innovative ideas and bold approaches are needed now more than ever.

Housing First in Vienna

In Vienna, Housing First has been offered by several social organisations since 2012, funded by the Vienna Social Fund (FSW). The success of this approach in the city is shown in FSW's most recent strategy, which recalibrates support in Vienna toward supporting people in their own accommodation, using Housing First, and floating support approaches (Gutleiderer and Zierler, 2020). This new strategic direction is due to the cooperation of different stakeholders in public administration and the social and housing sectors, supported by lobbying on a national and international level.

Neunerhaus has driven the development of Housing First in Vienna from the beginning at a conceptual, strategic, and operational level. Following an international literature review (Halbartschlager et al., 2011) and an evaluated pilot project (Schmatz et al., 2015), neunerhaus lobbied with others for wider implementation. Neunerhaus also played a central role in the development of the 'Viennese model', which defined quality criteria based on international practice, and served as a guideline for both the funding agency and social organisations (Fonds Soziales Wien/neunerhaus, 2012). By mid-2022, neunerhaus alone had offered a total of 234

apartments to 522 people, including 232 children (neunerhaus, 2022). Rent stability is also remarkable, with 92% of households continuing to live in their Housing First apartments after support ends (neunerhaus, 2022). Alongside these statistics, reports from tenants highlight how having one's own apartment helps regain future perspectives, security, and self-determination.

Although the success of Housing First is undisputed, the existing services in Vienna are far from sufficient to end homelessness. The lack of affordable housing, and the reluctance of many actors in the housing sector to take responsibility for housing vulnerable groups means access to housing is very difficult, especially for people experiencing homelessness and those on low incomes. Formal barriers, such as the cost of rent and deposits, sit alongside informal barriers such as stigmatisation. Therefore, projects facilitating access to affordable housing in cooperation with key actors in the housing sector, as in the two examples below, are critical.

The non-profit *neunerimmo GmbH*, founded in 2017 as a subsidiary of *neunerhaus*, is a bridge between the real estate sector and social organisations. *Neunerimmo* brokers, rents, and develops housing for people experiencing homelessness and people affected by poverty. As part of its portfolio, it also acquires affordable housing for Housing First. Through *neunerimmo*'s professional rent monitoring, which supports people to avoid rent arrears, Housing First is becoming an option for an increasing number of private landlords and housing developers in the non-profit or privately financed sector. Together with dozens of partners, *neunerimmo* has provided housing for almost 1 000 people since it was founded (*neunerimmo*, 2022).

Nationally, the "zuhaus ankommen" initiative aims to sustainably combat homelessness in Austria by providing housing to people at risk of poverty following Housing First principles. Financed by the Austrian Social Ministry and coordinated by BAWO, the national membership organisation for homelessness organisations, the project is implemented through a network of 12 Austrian social organisations and 50 non-profit property developers in different Austrian states. In its first year, the project allocated 246 apartments to 485 people who became homeless in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and have now regained access to permanent, affordable housing of their own (BAWO – Wohnen für alle, 2022). The project is an opportunity for social organisations and non-profit developers to work together on a sustainable solution to homelessness that can also serve as a model for society as a whole.

However, these initiatives alone will not be enough to end homelessness. This is why BAWO, alongside FEANTSA, is committed to ensuring that ending homelessness is anchored as a responsibility of housing policy in light of human rights obligations. This needs to be supported by appropriate policy incentives and regulations at the federal, state, and local levels. According to BAWO, 25 000 apart-

ments are needed to end homelessness in Austria by 2025 (BAWO – Wohnen für alle, 2021). Given the political will to implement the suitable parameters, this is not a naïve utopia, but a thoroughly realistic goal.

Lobbying to Close the Gap in Support

Vienna has a comprehensive system of support services for the vast majority of people experiencing homelessness. However social organisations working with people at the very margins of society are consistently confronted with gaps in support. Austria, like many European countries, has high requirements for foreign citizens accessing social benefits. Many people, including those living in Austria for many years, are excluded from housing and social benefits based on requirements around residency or employment status (Verband Wiener Wohnungslosenhilfe, 2022). This therefore excludes them from the majority of homelessness support services in Vienna.

To fill this gap in provision, Vienna has implemented the so-called ‘Winter Package’, an additional 900 beds to ensure people experiencing homelessness have a place to stay in winter (Fonds Soziales Wien, 2021). This offers people the chance to stabilise over the winter; however, their situation is once again precarious once this support ends. If people are not accommodated in donation-based, basic emergency shelters, they are forced to sleep on the street until the next winter, or risk living in exploitative housing conditions (Unterlerchner et al., 2022). Against this background, different alliances are advocating for a year-round, full-day service. The Summer Package Initiative raised awareness of this issue in the summer of 2019 (Initiative Sommerpaket, 2019), and more recently, social organisations in Vienna have submitted a concrete proposal for implementation to the City of Vienna (Unterlerchner et al., 2022).

It is welcome that powerful lobbying is taking place on this issue, but we must ask ourselves how we are in a situation where vulnerable people are excluded from support services. One factor is the inadequate implementation of existing human rights obligations, as illustrated by a recent Amnesty International report (Amnesty International, 2022). Homelessness must be regarded as a violation of the human right to adequate housing. This right derives from the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, which Austria has undertaken to implement. Despite this, the right to adequate housing in Austria is not enshrined in constitutional law, nor is there a nationwide legal basis for the provision of homelessness assistance. As a result, there continue to be gaps in support (Amnesty International, 2022).

Against this background, the implementation of a year-round, all-day service for everyone experiencing homelessness in Vienna would be an important step in implementing Austria's signing of the 2021 'Lisbon Declaration'. The right to adequate housing for everyone in Austria must also be enshrined in the Constitution, alongside a wider social discussion around issues relating to needs, exclusions, standards, freedom of choice, etc. (Reinprecht and Kachapova, 2021). There is freedom to implement changes without waiting on legal clarifications at national or EU level – this was demonstrated by positive changes to service provision during the pandemic, where, for example, the 'Winter Package' was extended to the warmer months. The first steps have therefore been taken, but must be made permanent by political stakeholders, and others must follow promptly.

Experience helps: Peer work as a “missing link”

For a society to succeed in ending homelessness, it needs the expertise and participation of people with experience of homelessness. They know first-hand the practical exclusions from the housing market and homelessness services, the impact of marginalisation and stigmatisation, and what qualities are needed for support services to be effective. The experiences of people experiencing homelessness must also be included in the development of overarching human rights-based strategies to end homelessness, as Amnesty International rightly calls for (Amnesty International, 2022). Special consideration should be given to the experiences of particularly marginalised groups, including women, migrants, destitute EU citizens, young adults, and LGBTQI+ persons. But stakeholder participation can go far beyond consultation. Designing support services from scratch and integrating people who have formerly experienced homelessness in all steps of service delivery is a powerful statement for inclusion. This is precisely the goal of peer work.

Peer work has been implemented in the homelessness sector in Vienna since 2019. Every year around 20 people with current or former experience of homelessness are trained as peer workers in a certificate course recognised by the Austrian Public Employment Service. The high diversity of participants in the course, whether in terms of age, gender, nationality, professional experience, health status, etc., is indicative of the breadth of experiences in the field of homelessness. The certificate course is funded by the Vienna Social Fund (FSW) and delivered by the neunerhaus Peer Campus. After an initial application and selection process, the course consists of seven modules, a multi-week internship, and a final thesis. Participation in the course is free and interest in the course regularly exceeds the places available, indicative of the importance of vocational prospects as a route out of homelessness. In the four courses held so far, 62 peer workers have been trained. Around

two thirds are now employed in homelessness services in Vienna, showing how a tailor-made programme can result in successful labour market integration, particularly for people with precarious work and education histories.

People who have formerly experienced homelessness, as peers, change their perception of themselves and their experiences through training and subsequent employment. They recognise that they have acquired skills that allow them to successfully navigate difficult situations. Building on this insight, they can provide support to people currently experiencing homelessness in a way incomparable to other professional groups. Peer workers translate, mediate, connect, and build bridges in many different directions.

On an individual level, the connection between peer workers and people using homelessness services facilitates successful support. Peer workers show that a way out of homelessness is possible and inspire hope in people facing difficult situations, even if these have lasted for years. In terms of concrete support, peers facilitate access to homelessness services, health care, and social services, as well as to the labour market, if applicable, through their unique position between staff and people using the service.

The inclusion of peer workers also increases the effectiveness of homelessness services. Their feedback helps services continuously review and adapt to be accessible and fit for purpose. The inclusion of peer workers has a particularly important impact on transforming cultures within homelessness services. It not only supports the end of homelessness, but also ensures that support services are participatory and dignified.

System Effectiveness and (re)Thinking Radically: The Role of Social Organisations

To achieve a society without homelessness, the contribution of many stakeholders is needed, and social organisations play a significant role. They are the linchpin between services offered at an individual level and structural solutions lobbied for, decided, and financed at a political level. Social organisations can be agents of change, influencing the way social problems are defined and how vulnerable people are helped – even beyond the boundaries of their own organisation. They can have a substantial impact at the systemic level if they explicitly understand this form of social impact as part of their mission. To achieve this, there are in my experience a number of crucial factors.

– *Self-critical analysis*

The more a self-critical culture is anchored in an organisation, and the more diverse feedback from users, staffs and cooperation partners is welcome, the more likely it is that a true assessment of the current situation can be made. This may result in the conclusion that the current models are no longer suitable or sufficient.

The homelessness sector has had to be self-critical and admit that established forms of support in place for decades no longer work, and that homelessness cannot be ended comprehensively and sustainably by social organisations alone in the way it has been dealt with up to now. Such a realisation can of course be confronting in the everyday work of those involved in delivering support services, but it opens up a space for discourse in order to think radically about new solutions.

– *Mobilising for change with an attractive vision*

Social organisations being inspired by radical approaches opens up new perspectives and creates energy away from business as usual. In homelessness services, working with Housing First principles has demonstrated that it is not just a matter of providing help and support to individuals, but that it must be about the bigger picture in socio-political terms, about permanently ending destitution, and achieving a society free of homelessness. In the last ten years or so, this vision has mobilised many actors in Vienna and Austria and triggered concrete steps towards realising this vision. The direct involvement of the experience of peer workers has been an additional catalyst.

– *Implementing ambitious pilot projects*

We have all experienced great ideas with energy behind them that peter out in the face of daily business and responsibilities. Courageous managers and financial flexibility are needed to follow up on these ideas and invest in innovation, as well as stable structures to support the implementation of new projects. For organisations committed to research, innovation, developing new concepts, finding partners and implementing pilot projects, suitable organisational structures and processes are needed to manage these alongside existing work. Pilot projects implement a large vision on a smaller scale, showing that it can be a practical reality.

In piloting the peer worker training, the interplay of several factors made it successful: preparatory work on the content of the course with different partners who concretised the project idea and spread the vision within the homelessness sector. Suitable funding channels financed the very first certificate course, networking and communication activities won supporters, activated multipliers, and allowed us to engage in critical professional discourse. Last but not least, there were people who – even in the face of obstacles and resistance – were not

disuaded from their belief that training peer workers was feasible and could have an individual and systemic impact. This courageous approach has been rewarded by the fact that peer workers in homelessness services have become an integral part of the service landscape in Vienna within only five years.

– *Mainstreaming pilot projects with partners*

One pilot project alone has rarely triggered structural change. And yet, ambitious pilot projects can change the larger picture. Pilot projects are particularly effective when they are carried out with partners and transcend the boundaries of one's own organisation. If the initial results are promising, then it is possible to convince other multipliers to continue to drive it forward.

As an example, Housing First started as a small pilot project in Vienna and now there are many cooperations between non-profit housing associations and social organisations. Actors from the housing industry have been systematically linked with social organisations, the relevant umbrella organisations have been won over as supporters for the approach, and the administration has been convinced to provide financial support for the implementation of a new model.

– *Networks and alliances*

Changing social realities can be difficult and it can be more effective to explore networks and alliances to lobby for common goals and to address different audiences. In the example of lobbying for year-round provision for particularly vulnerable groups, it is important to acknowledge that substantive and permanent improvements are not yet underway. Structural changes require staying power. However, preparing facts collectively, sharing knowledge, and concretising the necessary next steps contributes to support at various levels, builds up social pressure, and encourages decision-makers to act courageously.

– *Intuition and creativity*

The role of intuition and creativity in creating change should not be underestimated, and organisations would do well to develop these competencies; using intuition to grasp the right moment for an issue or a project, to know how to design it, and to identify enthusiastic stakeholders inside and outside the organisation to take responsibility for it. Creativity can bring new ideas to life, link them to existing challenges, and enjoy overcoming the countless hurdles faced when implementing innovative projects. Intuition and creativity are not limited to the achievements of individuals, but are most effective when the culture and climate of an organisation allows them to thrive.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that we are in challenging times and that the impact of the pandemic, war, and rising costs on the people we support is, and will remain, significant. However, challenging times can also be catalysts for change. They force people to think creatively, challenge the status quo, and break down boundaries, at both the organisational and systemic level. Radical approaches in the social sector can change organisational cultures, empower people supported by homelessness services, and embolden key players across the social, housing, and political sectors to act. We all have a role to play in ending homelessness, but I believe social organisations have the necessary qualities to be the pioneers. Now, more than ever, we need to use our expertise, tenacity, and spirit of innovation to show what can be achieved.

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The European Platform on Combating Homelessness (EPOCH): From Policy to Practice and from Practice to Policy

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Introduction

Over one in five EU citizens are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This phenomenon has remained relatively stable over the last years, even decades. Homelessness is for sure the most extreme manifestation of poverty and social exclusion. Contrary to the general stable picture of poverty and social exclusion in Europe, we see a homelessness scene that is increasingly crowded. It is therefore no surprise that homelessness is becoming very visible in Europe. More and more people are living on the streets or in public spaces and a growing group of people rely on emergency accommodation. During the day they are wandering in the streets and rely on people's generosity to survive. Some people experiencing homelessness are less visible because they just prolong their stay in penal or health care institutions if a home is not (yet) available. Others seek refuge in mobile homes or stay a period of time with friends or family to avoid rooflessness.

At European level, a consensus has been developing that homelessness and housing exclusion, such as rooflessness, are human and social rights violations. They diminish a person's dignity, severely affect the quality of life of people, limit the person's interactions with the wider society, reduce their productive potential, and are a waste of human capital. Different EU institutions therefore called for a concerted and comprehensive European approach to combat homelessness.

We thus see in Europe an expanding problem of homelessness and a growing recognition that concerted efforts and policy measures are needed to tackle it at local, national, and European levels. At the same time, it is being realised that it is possible to solve this European wide problem with European-based solutions. Witness to this is the fact that Finland has managed to reverse the trend in home-

lessness. According to statistics of the Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (ARA), in 2008-2022 the number of people experiencing homelessness decreased by 54% and the number of people experiencing long-term homelessness by 68%. This exemplary national effort to tackle homelessness has motivated the country to solve the problem by 2027 (Y-Foundation, 2022).

The experience of Finland has inspired and motivated many countries and activists. But it cannot be just copy-pasted since situations in countries and regions differ to a great extent. That it is possible to go beyond a one-size-fits-all solution was evidenced in a ground breaking publication of the Housing Solutions Platform¹: The “50 Out-of-the-Box Housing Solutions to Homelessness and Housing Exclusion” (2019).

The European Pillar of Social Rights, launched in Gothenburg (Denmark) during the Juncker administration, called the shots in 2017 and made explicit reference to the action needed to combat homelessness. In 2021, the current Commission took the initiative to launch a European Platform on Combating Homelessness (EPOCH).

In this article we will zoom in on this European Platform to see how it can be understood as a specific example of collective policy making, collective learning, and collective action at the European level because it is underpinned by two mutually reinforcing mechanisms: multi-stakeholdership and multilevel governance. We will also try to draw some lessons from the first years of functioning of EPOCH in a view to contribute to its mission to effectively combat homelessness.

European-Level Efforts to Combat Homelessness

In the beginning, the European project only timidly looked at social policy as an integral and necessary dimension of its collective effort to advance the welfare of its citizens. Initially, for example, steps were taken to coordinate social security systems and the European Social Fund was established. But after long debates between European institutions, Member States, and stakeholders, new social policy provisions were taken time and again.

At this moment, the EU project has a strong social and fundamental rights dimension. This was re-enforced by the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009. Article 3 of the *Treaty of the European Union* lays down that the Union has the duty to aim at full employment and social progress. Combating social exclusion is one of the common objectives of the EU and its Member States.

¹ The Housing Solutions Platform is a partnership between FEANTSA, Fondation Abbé Pierre, and Housing Europe.

Many times and in different ways European institutions have called for collective attention and action for homelessness, the most extreme form of social exclusion. In 2005, for example, the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs (EPSCO) Council, which brings together the Ministers responsible for Social Affairs, Employment, and Health of the EU Member States, identified homelessness as a priority. In June 2012, EPSCO asked the Commission “to develop and promote adequate schemes for persons who are homeless” (Council of the European Union, 2012, p.11).

In 2008, the *European Parliament* issued a written declaration on ending street homelessness. It called on the Commission to develop an EU framework definition of homelessness, to gather comparable and reliable statistical data, and to provide annual updates on action taken and progress made in Member States toward ending homelessness². This was followed by another written statement in 2014³, and resolutions in 2011⁴ and 2014⁵.

The *Committee of the Regions* issued a so-called own-initiative opinion on combating homelessness in 2010 and later again in 2014. The *European Economic and Social Committee* took a similar initiative in 2011. *The Commission* itself reflected on the matter and wrote a Staff Working Document, entitled “Confronting Homelessness in the European Union”, in 2013. The document was accompanied by a Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council of the EU, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions.⁶

In the same year, the *Irish Presidency* organised an informal round table on the subject (Culhane and Randall, 2013). The final communication stated that “the Commission should support and facilitate Member States in their efforts to combat homelessness through implementation of the Social Investment Package in a defined way.”

The Juncker Commission (2014 – 2019) committed further to social fairness and a ‘Social Triple A’ for the EU. One of the masterpieces of this Commission was the *European Pillar of Social Rights*. The Pillar, with its 20 Principles, was proclaimed in 2017 at the Gothenburg Summit (Denmark) by the European Parliament, the European Council, and the European Commission. It was acclaimed by the

² https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-6-2008-0163_EN.html?redirect.

³ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-7-2010-0499_EN.html?redirect.

⁴ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-7-2011-0383_EN.html?redirect.

⁵ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-7-2014-0043_EN.html?redirect.

⁶ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ebf7ae74-f090-4459-bed8-1530ce4b8f69/language-en>

European social partners and a wide range of civil society organisations. In its *Principle 19, the European Pillar of Social Rights stresses the need for social housing or housing assistance of good quality for those in need, the right to appropriate assistance and protection against forced eviction for vulnerable people and adequate shelter and services for people experiencing homelessness*. In the aftermath of the Gothenburg Summit, the European Commission established an Inter-service Working Group on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion to see how the different services of the Commission that were dealing with housing and poverty issues could streamline, coordinate, and intensify their efforts to combat homelessness. The *European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan*, elaborated in 2021 by Commissioner Nicolas Schmit during the current European Commission (2019 – 2024), intends to turn the 20 Principles into concrete actions. The Action Plan is a policy response to the consecutive and consonant pleas of different European institutions to do something about the expanding problem of housing exclusion and at the same time a timely translation of a broad-based call for it amongst the European population.

The Action Plan⁷ states that “access to affordable housing is an increasing concern in many Member States, regions and cities. Homelessness is increasing in most Member States. While policies to end homelessness can only be successful through a tailored local or regional approach, many stakeholders have called for a European impetus to end homelessness across the EU by 2030.” The Plan explicitly referred to the European Parliament resolution of 24 November 2020. With the Action Plan the European Commission announced that it envisaged the launch of a European Platform on Combating Homelessness (EPOCH) to support Member States, cities, and service providers in sharing best practices and identifying efficient and innovative approaches.

The European Platform on Combating Homelessness (EPOCH)

One of the main priorities of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU, in the first semester of 2021, was to strengthen the social component of the European Union. Although in the midst of the corona-crisis, the Portuguese Minister of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, Ana Mendes Godinho, together with the European Commission, organised a High-Level Conference on 21 June 2021 in Lisbon to debate homelessness and to agree on a joint strategy with European institutions, Member States, and civil society organisations. Several people with homelessness experience also got on the stage and gave witness of how they became homeless, what it means to be homeless, and how they found exits to their

⁷ <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/european-pillar-of-social-rights/en/#A76>.

dire situation. On that occasion, national ministers as well as representatives of the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of Regions, civil society organisations (Feantsa, the Social Platform, Housing Europe, Social Economy Europe), social partners (ETUC, SGI Europe), and cities (Eurocities, Council of European Municipalities and Regions) signed the *Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combating Homelessness (EPOCH)*.

The signatories pledged to work together under the umbrella of the Platform and to deliver actions within their respective competences. They agreed on the following ambitious objective of ending homelessness by 2030 so that (a) no one sleeps rough for lack of accessible, safe and appropriate emergency accommodation; (b) no one lives in emergency or transitional accommodation longer than is required for successful move-on to a permanent housing solution; (c) no one is discharged from any institution (e.g. prison, hospital, care facility) without an offer of appropriate housing; (d) evictions should be prevented whenever possible and no one is evicted without assistance for an appropriate housing solution, when needed and (e) no one is discriminated due to their homelessness status.

The ambition of the EPOCH is to realise this through the promotion of policies based on a person-centred, Housing-Led, and integrated approach. The signatories of the Declaration are convinced that a policy that tries to manage the problem of homelessness, through the provision of shelter or other humanitarian assistance, is insufficient and inadequate. Preference is given to the promotion of policies that more fundamentally tackle the problems related to homelessness.

But What Does It Mean to ‘End Homelessness’?

So far, there is no internationally recognised definition to ‘ending homelessness and rooflessness’. Two options would apply. A first one is to aim at an ‘*absolute end*’ to homelessness, whereby nobody is homeless anymore as from a certain point-in-time, and the risk of becoming homeless, in any form it can take (sleeping on the street, relying on temporary shelter with a friend...), is completely excluded. The second is called the ‘*functional zero*’ homelessness, where homelessness becomes a manageable problem and the policy measures, the available resources, and services are appropriate and sufficient to deal with homelessness associated problems. Reaching functional zero implies that we apply the tools necessary to make homelessness rare and exceptional. Also, that when it is occurs, it is brief and permanently resolved thereafter. This approach is more realistic and pragmatic than the first option because it accepts that it is quasi impossible to solve the problem of people who are defined or considered ‘voluntary homeless’ or do not

accept housing offers. Still, the functional zero approach does not exclude adhering to an absolute end option as an aspirational goal (Delvetere, 2022). It is clear that the EPOCH community opted for the second approach and aims at functional zero.

The Platform immediately went into action after the Lisbon summit. Notwithstanding the practical problems linked to the COVID crisis and the hindrances to meet in-person, multiple interactions and meetings started between the different stakeholders. Under the Slovenian Presidency (second semester of 2021), the discussion focused on the actual work programme of the Platform.

The Platform intensively discussed the issue of homelessness, different national approaches, and strategies, but also listened to key stakeholders, the leadership of FEANTSA and its members, activists, academics, and researchers. One of them was Julien Damon, a French academic, editorialist, and author of 'La Question SDF' ('The Problem of People Without a Stable Home') (Damon, 2021). He, amongst others, insisted on the fact that the popular image of a person experiencing homelessness tends to be someone sleeping on the street or in a place not intended for human habitation. These so-called "homeless people" account for only a very small part of homeless service users. So, people experiencing homelessness narrowly construed, Damon explained, include neither people who are houseless and so forced to stay in a B&B or staying with someone else or in a squat. Likewise, people in particular types of shelter, such as temporary structures or improvised shelters, are not counted in this category. This is anything but a residual clarification then, and establishing a continuum of situations from people in ordinary housing to 'homeless' street-based sleepers could warrant a revisiting of the entire 'homelessness issue', this time including the home.

This discussion pushed the members of the Platform to apply for a broad definition of homelessness and rooflessness as was suggested by a 2007 study commissioned by the European Commission (Edgar et al., 2007): *the ETHOS Light classification*. This typology defines homelessness and housing exclusion as encompassing six categories: people sleeping on the streets, people in emergency accommodation, people living in accommodation for the homeless, people remaining in institutions because of lack of housing, people living in non-conventional dwellings (such as mobile homes) due to lack of housing, and people experiencing homelessness living temporarily in conventional housing with family or friends due to lack of housing.

The dialogue with Damon and other prime witnesses of the homelessness sector also learned that there are three types of countries in the EU: those with no significant investment or integrated homelessness strategy; those that have no integrated

strategy but have or are allocating resources, mainly to provide temporary shelter; and those with an integrated, explicit, and solid strategy to eradicate the homelessness and housing exclusion problem in the country.

EPOCH as an Example of Multi-Stakeholder Engagement

As we mentioned, the Platform kick-started with the Lisbon Declaration in 2021. The idea behind EPOCH was, and is, that the engagement of a variety of stakeholders is needed to find a variety of solutions to the problems of homelessness and housing exclusion. Realising Principle 19 of the European Pillar of Social Rights is not the sole responsibility of the European institutions. Nor was it the sole task of the Member States. Local authorities, civil society, and social economy actors are also involved and take up their responsibility. This choice for a multi-stakeholder arrangement, which is very unique in the European setting, implies three things.

First, the principle of *co-management of the EPOCH*. The Platform is guided by a Steering Board that provides guidance, prepares the work programme, monitors the delivery of the work programme's outputs, and ensures oversight of progress in the fight against homelessness. The Steering Board is composed of representatives of EU institutions, of the EU Council Trio of Presidencies, as well as of civil society.

The Chair of the Steering Board has a central role in connecting the Members of the Platform and ensuring communication amongst them. In particular, the Chair advocates on behalf of the Platform in order to enhance the visibility of its mission with the Member States and relevant stakeholders. He also liaises with the rotating presidencies of the Council of the EU in setting the political priorities and steers the discussions in the Steering Board.

Meetings of the Platform at ministerial level are convened at least every second year by the incumbent Presidency of the Council of the EU. This already happened under Portuguese and French Presidencies. The Plenary meetings of the Platform are convened by each incumbent Presidency of the Council of the EU, or at the request of the Steering Board. They bring together the Member States at expert level, the European Institutions and civil society. After the signing of the Lisbon Declaration, the Platform was extended with two new members: Eurodiaconia, a European network of Protestant NGOs providing social and healthcare services and advocating social justice and the International Union of Tenants, a non-governmental and not-for-profit membership organisation of national tenants' organisations. The Secretariat of the Platform, which is responsible for managing its daily operation, is arranged for by the Commission.

Secondly, multi-stakeholdership implies that there is a common ground and understanding of the mission of the platform. This is translated in a *common work plan*. The work plan was discussed and agreed upon during the French Presidency in 2022, and covers the period 2022 – 2024. In other words, the period under the current Commission.

The work plan foresees *three work streams*. One work stream sets in motion a number of activities that will help us to better understand the problem of homelessness, to *measure* it, and to *monitor* progress. In this work package we focus on a common definition of homelessness, on stimulating and harmonising counting methodologies, and on ways to look at evolutions in terms of numbers of people experiencing homelessness and their profiles. This work has to help policy-makers and other stakeholders to justify their investments in projects and programmes, to evaluate their effectiveness and impact, as well as to steer or reorient them.

A second work stream foresees a multitude of activities that stimulate *mutual learning*. Authorities, national, regional, and local, but also other stakeholders, exchange experiences in preventing homelessness. But they also want to learn from each other on how to design Housing-Led strategies, how to deal with specific groups of vulnerable people such as women, children, or migrants, how to cater for the needs of the people experiencing homelessness when there is an epidemic like the Covid crisis, how to communicate about homelessness, how to make the housing market more inclusive, etc.

A third work stream relates to *access to finance*. At the European level, there are a multiplicity of possibilities to finance homelessness-related projects and programmes such as the European Social Fund (ESF+), the European Regional Development Fund, the InvestEU programme, and the European Union Recovery Instrument (New Generation EU). However, very often national and local authorities develop projects and programmes for people experiencing homelessness that are not cognizant of the existing funding possibilities. The same goes for the many civil society and social economy actors involved in the field of homelessness.

Thirdly, multi-stakeholdership implies a *division of labour*. In other words, the realisation of the action plan is a joint engagement, but not everybody does everything together at the same time. In this, the principle of subsidiarity, which is key in the European ‘household’, is the golden rule or compass of EPOCH. The European institutions, and especially the European Commission, do not take over the role of the Member States nor the role of regional and local authorities and non-state actors. Every actor plays the role that is best suited for them.

The European Commission is not only the secretariat of the Platform, but also functions as a facilitator, a convener, and a funder. It also supports monitoring. It requested the OECD to produce a policy toolkit to help Member States to develop national strategies. In addition, the Commission stimulates monitoring through the Social Protection Committee that is looking at the overall evolutions of social indicators in the Member States. The Commission is also involved in the measurement of homelessness. On the demand of the European Parliament, the Commission set up a Pilot Project to count the number of people experiencing homelessness in cities all around Europe.

EPOCH as an Example of Multi-Level Governance

Combating homelessness is an uphill struggle. It needs a collaborative effort of actors who operate at different, yet interconnected, levels. EPOCH was created to be a platform that mobilises actors at all levels of European society, from the local up to the European level, in a dynamic and mutually reinforcing way. EPOCH is instrumental in developing appropriate policies that can be translated in effective action on the ground. At the same time, there is room for positive feedback loops when lessons are learned from the concrete projects and programmes that are useful to finetune the policy making.

In the previous section we already had a look at the key actors that are involved at the European level. All of them have multiple ways to represent the realities on the ground at national, regional, and local levels and at the same time to give these realities certain stimuli.

The European institutions work in a concerted way with the governments and institutions of the Member States. They provide forums to the Member States to discuss the issue, to exchange, and to learn from each other. As such, the issue of homelessness comes to their joint table when Ministers of Social Affairs or national officials meet. Sometimes homelessness is the only point on the agenda, as was the case when the Platform was launched in 2021. Sometimes homelessness is part of a broader discussion, for example when the EU Disability Strategy is on the table, or the EU Roma Framework, the EU Gender Equality Strategy, or again the EU Child Guarantee.

Funding is a forceful tool to stimulate and support action on the ground. The European Commission, but also the European Investment Bank and the Council of Europe Bank, have a variety of funds and programmes to finance local, regional, and national initiatives. Within EPOCH, a working group has been created to look

at these funding opportunities and to see how creative mechanisms, such as blending loans with grants, can help local authorities and other actors to get access to the much needed funding.

EPOCH seeks to work intensively with non-state actors that are well rooted at local level and networked at national and European level. FEANTSA, the Social Platform, Housing Europe, Social Economy Europe, ETUC, SGI Europe, Eurocities, and Council of European Municipalities and Regions were among the initiators of the Platform. Since then, Eurodiaconia and the International Tenants Union also signed the Lisbon Declaration. This expanding community of civil society organisations undoubtedly represents the vast majority of the action already taken on the ground to combat homelessness. This includes services such as shelter, medical and food assistance, social rental initiatives, and Housing-Led strategies. With special regard to FEANTSA members, they have a long experience, profound understanding of the origins and realities of homelessness, and daily contacts with people experiencing homelessness or having lived through periods of homelessness. They are learning-by-doing experts and stimulate the Platform to find solutions to homelessness that go beyond the management of it.

The Way Forward

“A civilization can be measured by how it treats its weakest members”. This quotation is often wrongly attributed to Mahatma Gandhi but holds a lot of truth. It is certainly applicable for the reality of expanding homelessness and housing exclusion in Europe. All Member States must be committed to the European Pillar of Social Rights. Translating Principle 19 of the Pillar into policies and actions that reduce homelessness to a functional zero level is key in proving that Europe stands loyal to its values.

This is the tremendous task of the European Platform on Combating Homelessness. It has therefore been created as an open Platform, as a joint venture of authorities and non-state actors, and as a facilitator and stimulator for both policy-making and concrete action.

This kind of a European Platform is a novel way of contributing to social policy and change making. Its multi-actor approach and multi-level governance fit well with the complex nature of the problems addressed and the multi-layered European house. It is based on local and national experience, it monitors and stimulates these decentralised initiatives, and calls local and national authorities and actors that are not as yet fully committed and involved to join this European wide effort to combat homelessness and housing exclusion.

The Platform needed time to be constructed and to put in motion its three work-streams of Measurement and Monitoring, Mutual Learning, and Access to Funding. It now needs extension, endurance, and expertise.

Extension means that the Platform will have to make everything more visible, the problem of homelessness as well as the solutions to it. It also means that more and more stakeholders, both state and non-state actors, will have to adhere to the objectives of the Platform. It further implies that all of these actors will get into action.

Endurance will be needed to realise, or at least to come close to, the high ambitions set in Lisbon, the objective of eradicating homelessness by 2030. Only with stamina and perseverance, as well as with the explicit support of the next Commissions and national governments, will the Platform and its constituencies be able to keep the momentum and the drive beyond 2030. Without a doubt there will be a permanent need for continuous attention for the causes and mechanisms driving people into homelessness, even after 2030 when we have the policy toolkit active and running.

Therefore, the Platform has to invest systematically in gathering and building *expertise* at local, national, and European levels. It is the only way to move continuously from policy to action and from action to policy.

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Transitioning the Model: From Sheltering to Housing the Homeless in Ghent, Belgium

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Gaining New Insights on Addressing Homelessness

The city of Ghent has decided to eradicate homelessness through innovative housing solutions. A big challenge in these days of housing and energy crises. To accelerate policies to realise this intention, in 2019 the city became the lead partner of the URBACT project ROOF. During this project, innovative approaches with a focus on data collection and Housing First were exchanged between nine European cities, an advocacy trajectory was set up on a multitude of policy levels from the European to the local level, and each city developed a local action plan. Together with local stakeholders, Ghent developed an action plan to end homelessness for people with legal residence¹ by 2040 by making a shift from shelter to Housing (First/led) (and by better prevention). The plan was approved by the council in spring 2022. The next step is to start preparing the systemic change. This article explains both the road toward the Ghent action plan, including the principles of the action plan, to then reflect on the challenges and opportunities to make the systemic change as described in the article *A New Systems Perspective to Ending Homelessness* by Demos Helsinki.

Data on (social) housing and homelessness in Ghent

Ghent is a historical city with over 267 000 registered inhabitants, as counted at the end of 2022. It is the second largest city of the Flemish Region. The poverty rates of 2022 are quite high with an estimate of around 18.7% of the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion and 13.2% with an income below the poverty threshold, which is 1 366 euros per month for a single person. In 2021, there were over 81 000 students registered at higher education institutions who were not official residents,

¹ For those without a legal residence permit, Ghent has a policy to support them to get attain legal residency or to return voluntarily. In some cases shelter is provided.

but nonetheless, half of them do live in the city and occupy more and more homes for families. This is partly due to shortage of affordable student housing. The attractiveness of the city and its growth, combined with macro-economic evolutions, have over the past 15 years resulted in a real housing crisis. Both the prices to rent and to buy have risen extensively over the past decade, making housing unaffordable for many citizens. Four out of 10 of the people who rent only have one income and have to spend over 40% on rent and housing costs.

Ghent has more social housing than most Flemish cities in Belgium, but still too little to cover the needs. Ghent has a stock of 15 000 social houses (2022), whereas some 11 000 households (2022) are on the waiting list, some for more than 10 years. Consequently, more and more households rent cheap, unhealthy, unsafe, too small private houses or end up in barracks/caravans/cars or on the streets. An estimate of 1 800 people are homeless according to the ETHOS light typology (Feantsa, 2007; Hermans et al., 2021). Around half of them do not have Belgian nationality, and over half of that number are people without legal documents.

From sheltering the homeless in Belgium to a more housing-oriented approach in Ghent

In Belgium, not for profit Centres for General Welfare Work (CGWWs) provide the majority of homelessness care services. The city provides statutory social services, but also subsidises many interventions to the homeless, mostly to be framed within a staircase model. In the staircase of transition, services and supports are conceptualised as a continuum, people start in emergency drop-in services and night shelters with intensive support then go through to transitional housing units and permanent supportive housing with moderate to low levels of support (Harvey, 1998 in O'Shaugnessy & Greenwood, 2021).

For a long time, the general staircase-oriented way of treating the homeless also prevailed in Ghent through night shelters with approximately 65 beds during the year and four family units and reception centres where shelter is provided 24/7. Ghent has six reception centres, albeit with different *modi operandi*, and a shelter for women who are victims of domestic violence.

As time went by, it became obvious that this system (alone) was not going to end homelessness. It was an expensive system; people in the shelters were mostly too busy surviving to make real progress, especially those with complex problems. Often they were 'revolving door' clients, going in and out of the system, and using the same services many times. This called for the adoption of new approaches to homelessness, a gradual process that focused more on both prevention and housing. Regarding housing, Ghent started a Housing First approach in social

housing in 2004, and gained support by housing coaches in 2007. Ghent was also integrated in the experiments developed by the Belgian Government to test and evaluate Housing First (Buxant, 2018) between 2013 and 2016.

Over recent years, more housing-oriented approaches have been installed to fight homelessness. Firstly, expanding Housing First through cooperation of the social housing sector – who provide 59 social rental houses for people that are homeless or leaving psychiatric institutions or youth care – and the welfare sector who offer quite intensive guidance. Secondly, expanding the affordable housing stock through a Social Rental Agency, an intermediary organisation which rents houses from private owners and sublets them to financially vulnerable people, mainly people experiencing homelessness. In Ghent that constitutes 10% of the social housing stock for both systems. Though this situation is now evolving with the establishment of the unified social housing company that merges the different social housing companies and the Social Rental Agency. The legislation stipulates that between 20- 50% of the social housing stock is reserved for a variety of vulnerable groups, including people who are homeless or on the verge of becoming homeless.

A cry for fundamental change in Ghent

For years, Ghent street level workers have been pointing at the lack of decent and affordable housing options for marginalised groups in society. Several actions were undertaken to confront both the local and supra local politicians with the often horrible situations poor people are living in. Furthermore, discrimination is rampant², people experiencing homelessness face stereotyping, and despite really good results with the Housing First projects, some of the formerly homeless people have difficulties keeping their house because of nuisances, not paying the rent, or breaking the rules of social housing.

In 2017 the City of Ghent started a Taskforce Housing and Shelter together with the social and housing sector to tackle these problems. A huge challenge as the recent global issues of the pandemic and energy crisis have been making the situation worse than it ever was.

The city politicians recognised that drastic measures are needed. With the election of a new City Council in 2018, the city engaged itself to invest in a plan to combat homelessness through a stronger investment in housing and guidance and to promote and implement Housing First and Housing Led approaches to homelessness. This decision was based on research evidence, individual positive experience with Housing First, and the amount of time and means invested in guiding people from short term shelter options to housing. The scientific consensus points to a shift

² Praktijktesten op de private huurmarkt | Stad Gent (Discrimination tests on the Ghent private rental market).

from shelter to housing as a paradigm shift (Benjaminsen, 2018). The bulk of research on Housing First exemplifies this trend. Research shows overwhelming evidence of the efficacy and efficiency of Housing First interventions. The Ghent experiments confirm this. The City of Ghent firstly appointed a civil servant to conceptualise and implement a Housing First and Housing Led strategy to combat homelessness and secondly decided to coordinate an international network of nine, mainly middle-sized, European cities to exchange knowledge and make local action plans on ending homelessness through data collection and making the shift from shelter to Housing First. This network was financed by URBACT and was called ROOF³.

A politically approved action plan towards a systemic shift and ending homelessness by 2040

Via the Taskforce, a task-specific, consensus-oriented governance model gradually came about at the local level.⁴ A first important step was taken in 2020, when, during the ROOF project, the City of Ghent agreed to perform a point in time homeless counting with the financial and organisational support of the King Baldwin Foundation and the Catholic University Leuven. It was executed together with 35 local organisations. A milestone in our policy, as numbers can also reflect negatively on a city; also, a great cooperation between the local organisations committing to the same goal. The counting was based on the FEANTSA ETHOS light definition and shows 1 472 homeless adults and 401 homeless children, 932 of whom have legal residence. These data confirmed the seriousness of the situation and formed the basis for the action plan on ending homelessness. The goal is to repeat the count every three years in order to keep monitoring the size and the composition of homelessness in Ghent.

A second important step was creating a local action plan together with the local stakeholders, a requirement of the URBACT ROOF project⁵. This was also a perfect opportunity to change the mindsets of the local stakeholders toward ending homelessness rather than managing it, and toward making the shift from shelter to Housing First as the best road to achieve this. The point in time data collection formed the basis for the action plan. To develop this plan, Ghent collaborated with its housing and welfare partners (including mental health, sheltered housing, etc.), its politicians, societal organisations like the not-for-profit Centres for Social Welfare, poverty organisations, homeless shelter sector, institutions, housing actors, academics, etc. Many of whom were already a member of the Taskforce Housing and Shelter. At the city level, the departments competent for social welfare and for housing started collaborating more closely, which was also a prerequisite.

³ urbact.eu/roof, roofnetwork.eu

⁴ This task-specific, consensus-oriented local governance model combines network, grassroots, and experimental governance.

⁵ urbact.eu/roof, roofnetwork.eu

This action plan became the tool to stimulate the governance processes to realise the systems change: joint learning from the field, capacity building at all relevant policy levels, and pointing directionality bottom-up from the task-specific local governance structure to include the above local competent authorities.

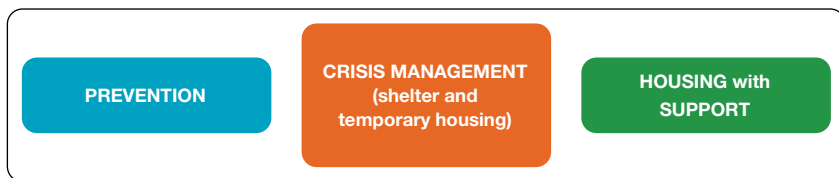
In May 2022, another milestone was reached as the City of Ghent approved the action plan to reach functional zero by 2040 through the shift from shelter to housing for those experiencing homelessness who have a legal residence permit. This was a big shift in its vision, now acknowledging that ending homelessness is indeed possible and even preferable, more effective, and humane compared to managing and even facilitating a homeless way of life. Even more so, the city chose to put a deadline on when homelessness needs to be ended.

The action plan on how to end homelessness in Ghent by 2040

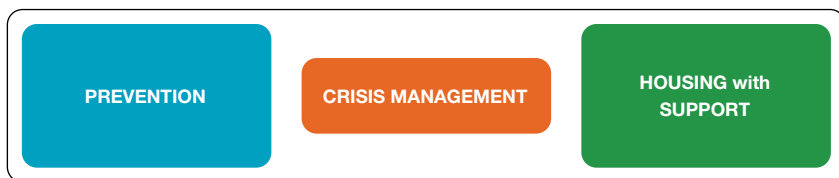
The plan has its main focus on creating a systemic model for housing with support in Ghent. In Ghent, homelessness is currently being managed by three methods: prevention, crisis management (shelter and temporary housing), and permanent housing with support. Our future strategy is to invest more in prevention and permanent housing with support, so that we are able to minimise crisis management. Extensive research and practices around the world show that housing with support (Housing First, Rapid Rehousing, etc.) helps to end homelessness. Moreover, it helps people who have previously experienced homelessness reach more positive outcomes in terms of well-being, social integration, health, and other life domains. By maximising prevention and permanent housing with support, we can end homelessness for legal residents.

STRATEGY TO END HOMELESSNESS

Can we go from this...

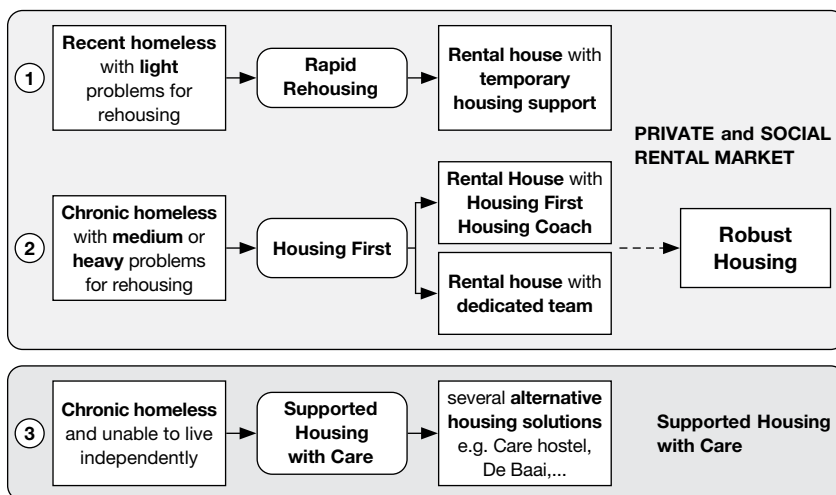


To this...



The model for housing and support focuses on permanent housing. Shelter and temporary housing solutions are still a necessity as long as there are no sufficient, available, and affordable permanent housing solutions, but they are not part of the plan and the here presented model.

We want to deliver **three different types of housing solutions** in the future, with which we can deliver a suitable solution for all types of homeless people:

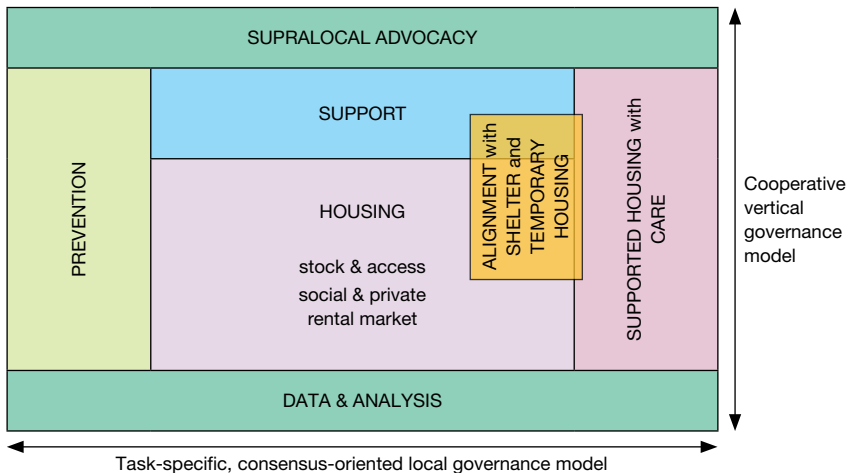


1. **Rapid Rehousing.** This contains a regular rental house (social or private) with temporary support for an average of one year. A solution aimed at households that became homeless recently (less than one year, or less than two years without substantial problems to be rehoused). It is for those households who are capable of a stable life in their house with temporary support to get income, children's education, network, etc... back on track.
2. **Housing First.** This contains a regular rental house (social or private) with support as long as needed. We divide here into two types of support: Housing Coaching for those with medium needs and a Dedicated Team for those with heavy or complex needs. Robust Housing (based on the Danish model 'Skaeve Huse'), involves housing units for people with complex social problems combined with mental health issues, addiction problems, who cannot live within the regular housing market, and are not allowed to live in residential services for homeless people because of extremely disruptive behaviour and nuisances. They often live in socially stressful environments like regular social housing blocks. The robust houses are delivering a stress-free environment, not directly connected to neighbours, with intensive multidisciplinary support. Eleven robust houses are currently being built.

3. **Supported housing with care.** This contains a collection of housing solutions aimed at those experiencing homelessness who are not able to live in a regular rental house mostly due to physical or mental health problems. Different projects are set up from different sectors, e.g., mental health sector, disability sector, and elderly care.

The action plan provides for a gradual build-up to sustainable living for all people experiencing homelessness. During the build-up, shelter and temporary housing will be a necessary and complementary offer. Coordination between these various methods is crucial to arrive at a well-integrated and conclusive whole. An important concern of several local societal organisations.

To implement the model, we have formulated 18 actions on the themes in the figure below:



The principles of the Ghent action plan are approved by stakeholders and the council. Time to take the next steps.

Making the shift

It is clear that in Belgium, and in Ghent, it is time to make the shift from experimenting to upscale Housing First. A transition that requires a systemic change.

Demos Helsinki and the Housing First Europe Hub (2022) stated in *A New Systems Perspective to Ending Homelessness* that:

Given the wide scope of any homelessness system, it is apparent that systems change is not only about getting the policy design right. It is first and foremost about identifying a clear and aspirational purpose for promoting deep, structural transformation across these layers. This entails steering actors, restructuring their processes, and challenging their values. (p.5)

The article describes different ways to make the systemic change toward Housing First, what works, and what does not in different countries. The governance processes as described in the article are indeed good to follow. In the Ghent version, the local governance model, which cannot be copied from any of the described cities, is task-specific and consensus-oriented combined with a cooperative vertical governance model (a combination of the Finnish top-down and the Scottish bottom-up models).

Making the shift requires cooperation among the different political levels (national, regional, and local), among the different sectors (homelessness, housing, welfare, (mental) health), and among the different stakeholders (housing or service providers, civic associations, field workers, management, civil servants, citizens, homeless people, volunteers, researchers).

The (complex) Belgian State structure and division of responsibilities have their impact on a local level. Housing, homeless, and regional poverty policies, including the not-for-profit Centres for General Welfare Work, are responsibilities of the Flemish Region, whilst the Federal State is in charge of poverty policy and policy for the Public Centres for Social Welfare. The latter have large discretion in realising the right to social welfare on a local level. The municipalities and cities are seen as the directors of homeless policies. The City of Ghent also has separate departments for homelessness and housing, but there is close cooperation. Divided responsibilities of course make it more complex to have a uniform policy to combat homelessness.

To be able to make the shift in Ghent, the **supra local level** will play a decisive role at the level of actors, processes, and core values (three main elements of the homeless system):

1. EU needs alignment of resources and vision on ending homelessness and affordable and sustainable housing, especially since the highly mobile nature of homelessness, also between the EU Member States. Belgium can use the opportunity of being president of the council of the EU in 2024 to bring this to the next level in close cooperation with the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness.

2. Belgium and the regions need to choose ending homelessness and affordable and sustainable housing as a priority in order to be able to tap into European funds (e.g., ESF+). Affordable housing is a prerequisite to make the most out of European means (e.g., for employment).
3. Belgium and the regions need to take the initiative to build a unified national Housing First approach together with experts, regions, cities, and stakeholders. The main principles should be: aiming to end homelessness, based on the fundamental rights to housing and privacy which cannot be met through shelters or temporary accommodation; building on the experience of the past Housing First experiments in the cities, based on shared principles and values; set for different groups of people experiencing homeless, with a clear ownership and division of tasks and budget among the different sectors. This requires an alignment of the federal and regional competences and policies, i.e., alignment with the Flemish Action plan to prevent and combat homelessness and homelessness 2020-2024 with a clear aim to eradicate homelessness.
4. Belgium and the regions need to facilitate and coordinate the transition from shelter to Housing First.
 - Coordinate the different levels:
 - o Identify political, organisational, and operational obstacles to make the shift and find a way to solve them together.
 - o Install and coordinate a partnership between levels, sectors, and actors to discuss progress regarding policy, funding, and actors.
 - o Provide training for the different stakeholders.
 - Align legislation of the different political levels and write and change legislation where needed, e.g., making Housing First a part of the national and regional housing and welfare/poverty/health strategy.
 - Develop a policy of incentives: subsidising the conversion of existing shelters into supported housing arrangements (a carrot); enforcing Housing First-only procurement for both shelter and housing services (stick).
 - Establish a supra local or even Belgian foundation aimed at building affordable housing specifically for the homeless (cf. the Finnish Y Foundation).
 - Provide and help look for funding:
 - o To make the transition on a local level (to change business models, new approach for field workers, convert buildings), including for staff.

- o To consolidate Housing First for the long term, with sufficient housing and support.
- o Through partnerships on the different policy levels and between sectors and actors.

Affordable and sustainable housing and adequate guidance in housing remains a big challenge to realise. In Ghent there is a clear aim to end homelessness by 2040. To put this high on the political agenda, different strategies have been used: data collection, advocacy, influencing by showing the advantages of a shift in homelessness policy from other research results, the use of the international ROOF network to show the international support in housing based solutions, involving supra-local, national, and European stakeholders such as MEP's and the Commissioner that are responsible for social affairs, and continuing the work we started with the ROOFTOPEU2022.

The city and relevant stakeholders are for the most part convinced that housing the homeless is the way forward and ending homelessness can be reached. However, having political support and the action plan is only the beginning. The foundations are laid, but the concretisation and effective implementation of the action plan is the crucial and probably most difficult step. It is also necessary to get the necessary funding, to create sufficient and affordable housing, and to have quality support to guide the people in housing.

To be able to make the shift on a **local level**, the city of Ghent itself will have to:

1. Coordinate the implementation of the Ghent Action Plan;
2. Find substantial financial investments for the different actions of the Action Plan to begin within the next legislature of the Local Government (2025-2030). The biggest financial needs will be: scaling up prevention, provide housing to people who cannot live independently because of their addiction and mental health issues by making residential institutions more inclusive and/or by creating a care hostel, scaling up housing support and the creation of dedicated teams, scaling up robust houses and join the set-up of a preferably supralocal or even national Y-Foundation type of organisation which can develop affordable and qualitative housing which is one of the Achilles heels in deploying the action plan, and further scaling up of prevention. All of which are a big challenge in times of crisis and rising inflation. The selection of the cases in the article shows us that there is a need to look for funding outside of the city's budget, e.g., by partnering up with different societal organisations or companies, organising fundraisers, private investors, etc.

3. Prepare the actual systemic shift by taking similar actions as the supra local level:
 - Continue advocacy stressing both the economic advantages of this shift and the realisation of human dignity and human rights for the homeless in Ghent;
 - o On the different policy levels, and
 - o With all the relevant actors such as the people who work in the shelters and housing first, mental health care, welfare, people experiencing homelessness, the social housing company, etc.
 - Identify local political, organisational, and operational obstacles to make the shift in Ghent and find a way to solve them together, where needed by adjusting local rules and regulations;
 - Initiate and coordinate a local partnership between the actors of the different sectors;
 - Guide the local transition process;
 - Organise training;
 - Earmark its local subsidies; and finally,
 - Persevere.

Conclusion

Ending homelessness is possible, definitely in middle sized cities and even at country level. Making the shift from shelter to Housing First is key, though challenging. It requires more housing and more support long term, but just as much a temporary investment in the transition itself. To this end, all political levels need to cooperate and make efforts, in all directions and together with the stakeholders from the different sectors. Through task-specific, consensus-oriented local and cooperative vertical governance, based on mutual respect and recognition of all stakeholders' specific expertise, the transition can be successful in Belgium. What it takes now is a mix of good coordination, a supported Housing First/led vision, aligned policies and resources, earmarked Housing First subsidies, sufficient long-term capacity for housing (e.g., through a Y foundation-like vehicle), support, and learning, with extra resources for the cities and local actors to make the actual transition.

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Housing First as a Systems Approach to Ending Homelessness? Lessons Learned from the Canadian Governance Landscape and Future Directions for Systems Transformation

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Introduction

The implementation of Housing First in Canada almost 20 years ago represented a paradigm shift. It pushed back against traditional thinking that placed blame on individuals experiencing homelessness for their plight, with solutions relying on such individuals to make personal changes until they were deemed fit and ready for housing. Housing First turned all of this on its head, and as a rights-based approach, claimed that everyone was ready for housing, and moreover, people would recover better when they were first housed and provided the wrap around supports they needed to recover, and reduce the risk of their return to homelessness. Along with Housing First came a realisation that individual organisations providing Housing First could work more effectively if they were coordinated into a single system, with centralised intake, data management systems, and efficient flow through to help those in greatest need to exit homelessness. This was a significant change that promised to give us the tools to prevent and end homelessness.

From a systems perspective we ask, is this sufficient? Optimising the homelessness sector as a system focusing almost exclusively on enhancing the coordination of services to deliver Housing First is an important approach to thinking and operating as a system, but it must be distinguished from approaches that emphasise coordination between systems. The current arrangement of homelessness systems optimisation as a new orthodoxy is well-intended, but the evidence suggests it is not sufficient to end homelessness. Our argument is that we need to address the inflow into homelessness through prevention. Moreover, to create positive impact

through prevention, a multiple systems approach is needed to call upon other public systems, including those that perpetuate homelessness (health care, child protection, justice) to contribute to solutions to homelessness.

Homelessness Governance and Housing First in Canada: Systems Change or New Orthodoxy?

Constitutionally, governmental responsibilities in Canada are divided between different orders of government including the Federal Government and provincial/territorial governments. Municipalities, while not constitutionally established entities, also play important governance roles devolved upon them by the provinces/territories. All three orders of government provide funding for homelessness services (supported by philanthropic and charitable giving) which are delivered at the local level by a range of not-for-profit services. When Canada established its first homelessness strategy in 2000, it went around the provincial and territorial governments to directly fund activity at the local community or municipal level by initially dividing the country into 61 'designated communities', each governed by a 'community entity' which in most cases was the Municipal Government. Despite federal funding accounting for much less than 20% of local spending on homelessness¹, the Government of Canada has historically played a very important leadership role in setting national directives, collecting and aggregating national-level data on the state of homelessness, and supporting local homelessness system integration.

Housing First (HF) gained traction in Canada between 2005 and 2010. A key development that contributed to the broader adoption of HF was the decision by the Government of Canada to invest \$110 million in a five-year HF demonstration project called *At Home/Chez Soi* to conduct research on HF in five cities across the country. Using a randomised-controlled trial methodology, 2 148 individuals experiencing chronic homelessness and mental health challenges were randomly assigned to receive HF services or the standard care in their community. This large-scale project produced impressive results impacting policy and practice across Canada (MacNaughton et al., 2017). Under the federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy, not only did the Federal Government openly endorse HF, but they required the cities and communities to invest a large percentage of federal funds received in implementing HF locally.²

¹ For an example, see the Ontario provincial government's breakdown of funding by order of government, where the federal government accounts for only 8% of spending on homelessness (Government of Ontario, 2019).

² The 10 largest cities in Canada were required to use 65% of their federal funds on HF, and the other 51 Designated Communities were required to spend 40% (Macnaughton et al., 2017).

A change in government in 2015 led to the development of a new homelessness strategy called Reaching Home. As part of the redesigned homelessness strategy, the Federal Government set a goal of reducing chronic homelessness by 50% over the next 10 years, which was then expanded to eliminating chronic homelessness by 2030. However, in 2019, the Government announced that “all mandatory Housing First investment targets that were under the previous federal homelessness programme have been removed” and the cities and communities it funded were instead offered “more flexibility” in how they used federal funds to address homelessness locally (Infrastructure Canada, 2019). One mandatory requirement is the use of federal funds to invest in ‘Coordinated Access Systems’ to coordinate homelessness services and enhance community entities’ ability to deliver HF. The Federal Government’s efforts in this regard have been supported by the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness’ Built for Zero campaign.

The impetus to coordinate the homelessness system at the local level was linked with the adoption of HF. Following American practices – which have been highly influential on homelessness practices in Canada – local municipalities combined an investment in HF with plans to end homelessness, data management systems, centralised governance and decision-making, coordinated access, and the broad adoption of highly problematic common assessment tools to assist with prioritisation (Brown et al. 2018; Cronely, 2020; Wilkey et al., 2019). All of this was designed to integrate homelessness services as a unified system at the local level, with governance and coordination assigned to community entities. This was to become the key mechanism to help communities shift from a central focus on, and investment in, an emergency response, toward coordinating local service providers to work together to implement HF.

Over the past 10 years, this approach to ending homelessness in Canada has become the new orthodoxy – the formula that will enable communities to ‘end’ homelessness, or at least achieve ‘functional zero’.³ However, we suggest there is an important distinction to be made between this singular system approach reflected in dominant frameworks for ending homelessness, and a multiple systems approach which calls all relevant systems and sectors into solidarity and shared accountability for action to both prevent and end homelessness. The former places the weight of the responsibility for ending homelessness on the relatively small and under-resourced homelessness sector, while the latter calls on a broader network of primarily public systems that are implicated both in the causes of homelessness, but also potential solutions. This distinction stems from our understanding of systems theory which characterises homelessness as a complex, fusion policy

³ Functional Zero is a concept in which a population has the equivalent housing and supports available to meet the needs of the of people who become homeless at any given point in time.

issue perpetuated through social practices across societies and therefore requiring rights-affirming governance across numerous public, private, and not-for-profit systems. A multiple systems understanding of how homelessness is (re)produced gives us a framework for assessing existing and proposed efforts' potential for ending homelessness.

Can an Integrated Homelessness System Focusing on Housing First Actually End Homelessness?

There can be no doubt that HF is an effective and evidence-based intervention for addressing the needs of people experiencing homelessness, especially for those who have long histories of homelessness and have high needs regarding mental health and substance use. It should also be said that the broad application of HF can and should have a positive impact on the problem of modern mass homelessness. The weight of research evidence in this regard is overwhelming (Tsemberis and Eisenberg, 2000; Tsemberis et al., 2004; Tsemberis, 2015; Gaetz et al., 2013), and Canada's At Home/Chez Soi has been a major contributor to this evidence base with over 130 scholarly articles published (Goering et al., 2014; Hwang et al., 2012; Aubry et al., 2015; Nelson et al., 2014). Additionally, efforts to coordinate the homelessness sector to facilitate and optimise the functionality of the sector to deliver on HF is a good idea. This of course requires effective governance, strong and high-quality data collection and management systems, coordinated access systems, available and adequate housing, and quality HF programmes. This is what we consider a single system response.

It is an askable question to consider whether this single system response is sufficient for ending homelessness? Unfortunately, evidence suggests that this is unlikely. Investment in HF combined with system coordination to support its implementation, and prioritising people with long histories of homelessness has been arguably the dominant paradigm for how to address homelessness for over 20 years in the United States, and almost 20 years in Canada. Such efforts have been supported by national organisations (with active campaigns), different orders of government, and significant local action and effort. Yet, the evidence for the achievability of ending homelessness through such efforts is surprisingly slim. In the United States, to date only a handful of communities have reached Functional Zero, and only one in Canada (Medicine Hat).

Moreover, data released by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development sheds some light on important trends. In 2007, there were approximately 120 000 people with long histories of homelessness in the US. By 2016, the number dropped to 77 000, and then by 2020 the number was back up to over 110 000 (Henry et al.,

2020). Over the 14 years they have been collecting data, there has not been a significant, nor sustainable, drop in the number of people with long histories of homelessness, so how do we account for the decline that happened between 2009-2016? Further analysis points to the US Government's response to veteran homelessness, which saw a 50% reduction between 2010 (73000) and 2020 (37000) (Henry et al., 2020). Spending on veteran homelessness more than doubled from \$717M in 2010, to \$1.65B (USD) in 2017 (NAEH, 2018). Yet more than increased investment, US Veterans Affairs is its own integrated cross-government system, including health care (medical centres, outpatient clinics), housing assistance, disability supports, education benefits and supports, careers and employment, support accessing benefits, and family supports. This is *systems integration* at a very comprehensive level that goes well beyond simply coordinating homelessness services.

While the resulting reductions in veteran homelessness were no doubt impressive, there are no realistic opportunities in the United States to effectively coordinate the same broad range of public systems (including health care) outside of Veterans Affairs – in other words, this cannot easily be replicated as long as the relevant public systems are not mandated to participate. More ambitious efforts to coordinate public systems would require all orders of government to collaborate in ways that would be incredibly challenging given the constitutional division of responsibilities among federal, state, and municipal governments. Absent the data on the reduction of veteran homelessness, the figures suggesting a decline in the levels of people with long histories of homelessness from 2007 to 2020 are hardly impressive. What is missing from current efforts? We argue that we need to go beyond a narrow focus on coordinating the homelessness system and relying on HF to carry the entire weight of ending homelessness, and take a multiple systems approach that prioritises a range of housing-led approaches for both preventing and sustaining exits from homelessness.

Working Across Systems to Prioritise Homelessness Prevention Alongside Housing First

Through complex systems modelling, Fowler et al. (2019) demonstrated that the widespread adoption and resourcing of HF could have comparable impacts to a combined HF and homelessness prevention approach on the overall number of people experiencing homelessness in the United States. So why not solely focus our efforts on HF? Even with the political will to secure the funding and housing to make HF available to all who need the intervention, the approach is generally not designed to prevent homelessness. In the context of the full realisation of people's social and economic rights, including the right to adequate housing, exclusively

resourcing HF leaves people vulnerable to negative impacts of housing loss and precarity and does not sufficiently demand the cross-systems and broader structural changes required to avoid these rights violations in the first place.

One of the challenges in both Canada and the United States is that preventing homelessness has not been a priority until recently. There has not been a widespread understanding of what homelessness prevention is, whether it works, and who is responsible. The fact that prevention has not been widely taken up within the homelessness system to date may in fact be a reflection of the lack of effort across multiple systems to support people's housing rights.

The reality is that homelessness is a 'fusion policy' issue that necessarily implicates a broad range of public systems and all orders of government in solutions to homelessness, and ideally a multiple systems approach will require deep and ongoing engagement to support working with such systems in an integrated way. This includes not just housing and homelessness services, but public systems responsible for health and mental health, justice, children and child protection, income supports, families, training, equity and employment, and education.

Fortunately, in the last five years, there has been a growing body of scholarship that seeks to define and expand the evidence base that contributes to a broader understanding of what the prevention of homelessness entails and the possible roles of various systems (Gaetz and Dej, 2017; Gaetz et al., 2018a; Dej et al., 2020; Oudshoorn et al., 2020; Fitzpatrick et al., 2021; Mackie, 2015; Mackie et al., 2017; Gaetz, 2020). Our work through Making the Shift – Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab⁴ has given us important insights into how we should be approaching the prevention of youth homelessness in particular. As we have sought to design prevention focused interventions such as Family and Natural Supports (Borato et al., 2020), Youth Reconnect (Gaetz et al., 2020), Upstream (Mackenzie, 2018; Sohn and Gaetz, 2020), Housing First for Youth (Gaetz et al., 2021a; b), and Duty to Assist in Canada (Bridgeable, 2019; Gaetz et al., 2018b), we have applied a human-centred design approach, which challenges our assumptions about how people navigate and engage services to get their needs met.

Thinking about the circumstances of youth struggling with homelessness provides insights into the importance and necessity of engaging public systems in solutions to homelessness. Generally, youth who are precariously housed and in crisis do not engage the homelessness sector for help, or at not least right away, in part because they typically do not consider themselves to be homeless (O'Grady et al., 2020), nor do they have any understanding of what kind of help might be available to them and their families. Additionally, in Canada, there generally are no homeless-

⁴ Making the Shift – We Are a Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab. <https://makingtheshiftinc.ca/>.

ness supports for youth under 16 (and in some jurisdictions, under 18), despite the reality that more than 40% of youth currently experiencing homelessness had their first experience before they were 16 (Gaetz, et al., 2016). Many youth will keep their struggles to themselves, or if they do reach out for support will approach meaningful adults in their lives who are often connected to or embedded in public institutions outside of the homelessness sector, such as teachers, counsellors, coaches, instructors, community workers, health care professionals, child protection workers, and employment supports. In these scenarios, people working in these institutional contexts are generally not responsible for or trained to support young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, and lack connections to services and supports that could be helpful to young people and their families. But what if we coordinated these various systems of supports to more effectively help young people and their struggling families? With the right mindsets, leadership, investment, and a commitment to working in solidarity across multiple systems, we could transform our response to homelessness so that people are supported effectively in all circumstances before they become homeless and their health and well-being declines dramatically.

There are of course major challenges to this type of systems integration. That major public systems including health care, corrections, and child protection (all the responsibility of provincial and territorial governments) are not required nor mandated to actively participate in addressing homelessness through investing in and supporting Housing First and the prevention of homelessness means the work of integrating such public systems falls to homelessness sector organisations and their ability to network and build relationships with people who work in such systems. Unfortunately, such fragile connections between public systems and the homelessness sector undermines the success of Housing First programmes and the desire to take such interventions to scale.

In an effort to unpack the complexity of the current state of cross-systems efforts to prevent and end homeless in Canada, one of our collaborative initiatives, the Systems Planning Collective, engaged in a series of conversations with leaders from across the country working locally to coordinate and implement plans and activities addressing homelessness. The discussions mapped out the opportunities and challenges faced by the individuals, organisations and entire communities to engage across orders of government, different mindsets, and conflicting mandates around homelessness. The resulting report, the *State of Systems Approaches to Preventing and Ending Homelessness in Canada* (Buchnea et al., 2021), demonstrates that despite valiant and relentless efforts to be more strategic in the coordination of local homeless services, interpersonal, systemic, and structural challenges continued to undermine sustainable reductions in homelessness. The key challenges communities face are (1) navigating the complexity of transforming

responses to homelessness, (2) moving beyond managing crises reproduced by inequitable systems and structures, and (3) difficulty knowing where to begin and how to avoid reinforcing the status quo. The report also demonstrates a groundswell of interest in engaging in challenging conversations, learning from on-the-ground examples of transformative systems change, and taking action to create a more just future.

Conclusion: A Systems Approach to Ending Homelessness Not an End in Itself

The concepts of 'systems thinking' and 'systems change' are frequently used, yet difficult to pin down in the context of social innovation and social policy discourse and can easily become detached from broader social justice goals. This has troubling implications – without a clear definition, any minor adjustment to even a singular system might be considered 'systems change', regardless of its impact on the status quo which perpetuates inequitable social conditions such as homelessness. To achieve the significant and transformational goals of both preventing and ending homelessness and upholding social and economic rights, including the right to adequate housing, we need more nuanced understandings of systems change.

Much of the foundational thinking around systems theory and systems change comes from management studies addressing organisational changes to adjust to a rapidly changing world (e.g., Senge and Sterman, 1990). Beyond change management practices at the organisational level, systems thinking has been applied to the changes across individuals, institutions, and entire societies/structures to achieve social justice ends. More recently, Kramer et al. (2016) use the definition of systems change from Social Innovation Generation Canada, which is "shifting the conditions that are holding the problem in place" (p.3). 'Systems change' is an ongoing process rather than end state, which addresses the complex interplay of policies, practices, resources, relationships and connections, power dynamics, and mental models. Petty and Leach (2020) highlight the importance of engaging in deep equity work from the individual to the systemic and societal levels of systems change to enact sustainable and equitable change. This is an emergent field with significant insight and potential to bring to the work to address homelessness.

Within the report on the *State of Systems Approaches to Preventing and Ending Homelessness in Canada* (Buchnea et al., 2021), the authors draw on the works of systems thinkers to propose a framework for systems transformation for addressing homelessness within four interrelated spheres of systems change work:

1. **Systems thinking and awareness** refers to changes to beliefs, values, and assumptions at the individual and philosophical level. This sphere requires what Petty and Leach (2020) refer to as the ‘deep inner work’ to challenge the mental models that shape our individual and collective perceptions of the causes and responses to homelessness, and our roles within the work to prevent homelessness.
2. **Systems planning, implementation, and evaluation** involves changes to the practices, distributions of power, and the ways of relating within and between organisations and local communities. This requires assessing power dynamics, relationships, roles, and responsibilities of the various systems and sectors within a community to better coordinate for an equitable future state.
3. **Systems change and accountability**, which goes beyond merely improving the organisation of service delivery within a community, to seek accountability from policymakers and funders to address the policy and funding structures that result in systems barriers and failures leading to homelessness.
4. **Systems transformation toward systems justice** articulates the ultimate goals of large-scale structural and societal change which promote and sustain the equitable and just realisation of social and economic rights.

This framework creates a more comprehensive picture of the change work required to address homelessness from a systems perspective. The report demonstrates the importance of equity, justice, and accountability to move from eligibility-based, crisis responses reliant on the homelessness system toward rights-based, preventative, cross-systems solidarity. It involves a strong attunement to and ongoing reflection on the ways in which power is distributed and whose voices and interests are not only heard, but acted upon within systems change work. Equitably and deeply engaging with community members with lived expertise⁵, for example, is essential to all four spheres of systems change work to address homelessness.

It has been suggested that systems change will result from changing the goal of the homelessness system from ‘managing’ to ‘eliminating’ homelessness. While it is true that the late and prolific systems modeler, Donella Meadows, asserted that changing the goals, purpose, or function of systems is a strong leverage point for systems change, it was not *the* strongest. In her posthumously published manuscript *Thinking in Systems* (2009), Meadows identifies both changes in paradigms

⁵ People with lived expertise refers to those who have/continue to experience homelessness and housing precarity. It should be noted that people with lived expertise are not a monolith but have diverse experiences and perspectives and intersecting identities. Attending to equity and power dynamics in lived expert engagement is just as important as in all other aspects of systems change work to address homelessness.

(deeply held beliefs and assumptions) and transcending paradigms as possibly the most powerful leverage points for systems change. From this standpoint, there are important questions to ask of the existing paradigms for addressing homelessness in Canada and internationally. What are the underlying assumptions and whose beliefs inform the ways in which the goal of ending homelessness is pursued? Is it enough to reorient the homelessness system toward ending homelessness solely through better governance and the delivery of Housing First? How might the homelessness system be left vulnerable to the paradigms of systems with more power, resources, and potentially contradictory goals? Interrogating and moving beyond the prevailing paradigms surrounding approaches to homelessness is an important part of the complex and dynamic systems change required to transform responses to homelessness.

This article calls on homelessness advocates, policymakers, researchers, and practitioners to critically reflect on the past, current, and future directions of preventing and ending homelessness. The goal of 'eliminating homelessness' is noble and inspiring in its intention. However, if an end to homelessness is merely understood as optimising our ability to use Housing First to rectify failures of other systems to keep people housed, we would fall short of fully realising people's social and economic rights. Ending homelessness, like systems change, is an ongoing process working toward an imagined future state in which individuals, communities and systems relate to one another differently than the current status quo. It requires deep and ongoing consideration of the paradigms that inform policy and practice and goes beyond the governance of the homelessness system to bring an end to the conditions across multiple systems that perpetuate homelessness. It is not a path easily or fully charted by any nation state, yet there is transformative potential within the growing body of international knowledge from research, practice and lived experience advocacy demonstrating ways forward that are preventative, rights-based, and social justice-oriented.

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Moving Beyond Shelter Culture: Embedding the Housing First Model in the Lyon Metropolitan Area

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Introduction

Since 2018, Lyon Metropolitan Area has been recognised as a region which is “accelerating its implementation of Housing First (HF) and its fight against homelessness.” With this in mind, it responded to a call for expressions of interest piloted by the State and DIHAL (France’s Interministerial delegation for accommodation and access to housing). This ‘accelerated implementation’ is part of France’s national top-down public policy that explicitly refers to HF principles and “offers a transformation of the existing model. It aims to quickly and sustainably reorient homeless people from the streets or shelters to housing, and offers them adaptable, flexible, and multidisciplinary support.” (Ministère De La Cohésion Des Territoires, 2018).

For the Lyon Metropolitan Area, this call for expressions of interest arrived at an opportune moment. As the staircase model had been widely criticised at local level for its ineffectiveness despite proactive partnerships, local stakeholders – and particularly housing associations and public bodies – had already been moving toward HF since 2016. This confluence of reflection and determination enabled Lyon to respond to the call for expressions of interest with a genuine aspiration to change the existing paradigm and thus reduce homelessness. However, it takes more than a declaration to turn aspiration into reality. A plan was needed that took a systemic approach to change, and dealt with shelter culture from the outset.

A New Political Directive to Transform Shelter Culture

When DIHAL launched its 'Five-year Plan for Housing First and for Combating Homelessness' in 2018, use of the HF model in France was still limited to the '*chez soi d'abord*' experiment, which exists on the fringes of a shelter culture that is still strongly ingrained in practices and institutions.

A dominant shelter culture

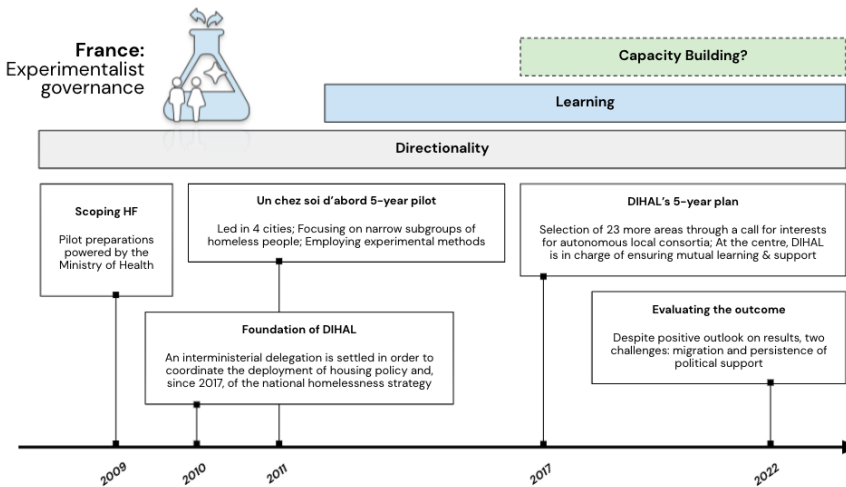
The HF process was in direct conflict with the 'staircase model' that had been dominant in France (and across Europe) since World War II. This model was (and indeed still is) the benchmark professional culture in the shelter and homelessness sector in France. This shelter culture is primarily an economic model for a significant number of associations that manage these long-standing establishments (15-year accreditation, cost-per-day, etc.). This model is also a legacy of the 1990s and 2000s when researchers and politicians had a vision of housing as the natural destination to the pathway through shelters for vulnerable people (considered unfit to access housing). The literature abounds with examples validating the staircase model. Furthermore, the dominant social work culture has always reaffirmed this approach. The beneficiary has little role to play in the decisions that impact them and the normative approach prevails, whereby the social worker judges the person's 'capacity to access housing'. This is still the case within Lyon's shelter sector where there is a local practice, between housing corporations and social institutions, of deeming the person experiencing homelessness 'ready to leave' once it is decided that they can access public housing.

The wider housing sector also aligns with these principles: the collective imagination is based on a social elevator which entails progressive integration and residential solutions from less to more – from night shelters to accessing social housing. Each step in the staircase model corresponds to a housing or accommodation product: night shelter, accommodation and social rehabilitation centre, social residence, sub-let tenancy, social housing, etc.

As such, whether through the stakeholders and their professional practices, the institutions and their housing and accommodation solutions, or the public authorities and their decrees, the staircase model remains structurally embedded in the landscape. In the words of the Demos Helsinki study, the homelessness situation was being 'managed' through addressing an apparently inevitable and unsolvable need for accommodation (Demos Helsinki, 2022).

A new political direction

To deal with the professional culture that had been structurally embedded for decades, DIHAL chose to leverage local actors, on a voluntary basis, to establish the HF model. This was the objective of the first call for expressions of interest in 2018, followed by a second one in 2021, which led to 47 *départements* across France implementing HF in an ‘accelerated’ manner. This amounts to what the Demos Helsinki report calls ‘experimentalist governance’ (Demos Helsinki, 2022).



From DEMOS/HELSINKI p. 16

In this way, DIHAL hopes, through trials and the support of local authorities, to extend the HF model by establishing it firstly on a voluntary basis. It supports these trials through funding and supporting stakeholders in their implementation goals. It is not just about endorsing territories and funding them; it is also about creating conditions that promote transformation of the paternalistic model, by further expanding HF where it is already being rolled out by local authorities. This expansion relies heavily on the HF Guide (Pleace, 2016) as a reference.

The same goes for DIHAL which is itself also going through a transformation. Using the so-called ‘BOP 177’ – a budget line for the shelter sector – it has committed to change by promoting what it calls the ‘AHI trajectory’.¹ This trajectory aims to systematise the transformation of shelters into long-term housing units by the operators themselves. It is therefore vital that state services shift their mindset and come to grips with the HF framework.

¹ AHI stands for *Accueil, Hébergement, Insertion* [Reception, Shelters, Integration] which encompasses the entire accommodation sector.

How Lyon is Responding – Structural Change

In responding to the call for expressions of interest, the Lyon Metropolitan Area wanted to commit to structural transformation of the shelter sector and its paternalistic model, along HF lines. To do this, it worked proactively to set high ambitions and to structure its response to the issue in a transformative way. It was firstly necessary to avoid the pitfall of creating responses that would merely function as extra measures, and thus just be an addition to the status quo.

Ambition based around proactive objectives

The Lyon Metropolitan Area is still feeling the effects of endemic housing exclusion. There are multiple reasons for this situation, with much confusion between cause and effect: the strong economic and tourism value of real estate², booming property markets, migration policies leading to large numbers of people with limited rights³, increased precariousness among fragile populations, inadequate construction of affordable housing, etc. Nonetheless, in answering the call for expressions of interest, the Lyon Metropolitan Area immediately committed to – at least partially – ending homelessness. This ambition manifested in four pro-active goals over five years. They include:

1. Reducing by at least half the number of person experiencing homelessness within the metropolitan area;
2. Providing every young person experiencing homelessness without means with the supported housing solution they need to become independent;
3. Avoiding people leaving institutions, child protection services, prisons, or psychiatric hospitals without housing solutions in place; and
4. Avoiding evictions from private or public housing due to high rents or untreated psychosocial issues, unless an alternative solution is in place.⁴

One might ask why the ambition to completely end homelessness was not there from the outset, and the reason is that, initially, the planning was based on a five-year, medium-term horizon. Today it can be said that eradicating homelessness in the Lyon Metropolitan Area is no longer a utopian idea but an end goal that councilors expect to reach in the coming decade.

² It is thought that housing exclusion today affects about 24000 people from a total population of 1.4 million. In addition, there are more than 70000 applicants for social housing in the metropolitan area.

³ These people do not have the required administrative status to access public housing. They are eligible only for the shelter system.

⁴ Extract from Lyon's first response to the call for expressions of interest.

A project-focused response

To meet its goals, the Lyon approach was project based and uses the principles of HF.⁵ Lyon Metropolitan Area built its strategy around three pillars:

1. Developing the supply of affordable housing

Given the structural lack of affordable housing in the Metropolitan Area, it was – and still is – obvious that one of the priorities of HF policy has to be producing a supply of affordable housing, whether private or public, whether ordinary or specific, so that it is compatible with the new model.

2. Implementing innovative, multidisciplinary supports whose goal is direct access to housing (pilot projects) by partners in the Metropolitan Area

Lyon's idea was to involve its housing and shelter sectors as much as possible by asking them to develop their own project(s) on condition that they followed HF principles. This led to more than 30 pilot projects organised around five themes: maintaining residential continuity, preventing rental evictions, housing for young people, support hubs⁶, and employment. These projects aim, on the one hand, to trial new ways of working through HF principles, and on the other hand, to share their results and new forms of intervention throughout the local ecosystem. It is mainly about leaving behind practices that are based on the paternalistic model, such as prescribed support, predicting 'readiness to house', housing as the end goal of support, mandated stays in shelters, etc. The Lyon Metropolitan Area is currently in a phase of evaluating and funding these projects with a view to further rolling out the most inspiring actions.

3. Supporting the change in culture and professional practices for all local actors

This third component of Lyon's policy is particularly important in the context of this article. To properly achieve the ambition of transforming the sector, Lyon focused on a policy supporting change among local stakeholders. Embedding HF's model of a new paradigm for social intervention thus called for a systematic approach to change that it calls MAPLA.

⁵ And the Y Foundation definition: 'an unconditional rehousing, and adequate provision on non-mandatory support services', Juha Kaakinen in the introduction of the Demos Helsinki report.

⁶ These are places where people who have been given direct access to housing can meet in a convivial space and thus avoid becoming socially isolated.

MAPLA – Permanent Improvement Mechanism for Housing First

MAPLA (in French, *Mécanisme d'amélioration permanente du logement d'abord*) covers a wide range of projects simultaneously. Lyon Metropolitan Area supports the development of introductory and continuous training aimed at HF operators which is currently addressing needs on the ground. For example, at the initiative of local stakeholders, a HF academic course was created and has been on offer for the last two years at Lumière University Lyon 2.⁷ To date this is the only such university course in Europe that we are aware of; it enables students to better understand the HF model in light of their own professional experience, and aims to establish a community of HF-oriented practices. MAPLA also supports academic research and evaluations that document the transformation from one model to another, evaluates methods, and provides local and national partners with thoughtful input and knowledge. Currently, the PUBLICS⁸ Chair of social policy (University of Grenoble) is completing qualitative research for the Lyon Metropolitan Area that aims to follow up on two cohorts of 40 HF beneficiaries over three years, mainly focussing on the individuals' own reported experiences. Similarly, it supports a research programme managed by CAPDROITS⁹, in which people affected by the issue work toward changing their environment, in a housing inclusive way. The Lyon Metropolitan Area believes that those directly affected by the issue have a vital role to play in transforming the social intervention model from a paternalistic one to an emancipatory one, with HF fully integrated. With this in mind, it is also funding a peer-work resource centre to support stakeholders looking for – or interested in – experiential knowledge.

Furthermore, Lyon believes strongly in creating a lively network of local partners through organising various opportunities to interact (such as seminars, conferences, on-site visits, etc.) and taking part in national and European HF networks. This led, for example, to a delegation of shelter operators from Lyon being invited to Helsinki in June 2022 to learn about the Finnish HF model, with the aim of convincing them of the merits of this approach and encouraging its deployment in Lyon. Furthermore, Lyon Metropolitan Area wanted to develop its evaluation tools to better understand housing exclusion and to measure the impact of its policies. It used the ETHOS typology (FEANTSA, 2005) to create this analytical tool and has thus had reliable and local data at its disposal since 2019. We can thus state that the number of people experiencing homelessness sleeping on the street has fallen by half since HF was put in place! Similarly, we have specific indicators for pilot

⁷ <https://www.orspere-samdarra.com/evenements-et-formations/diplomes-universitaires/du-logement-dabord/>

⁸ <https://www.pacte-grenoble.fr/en/projects/chaire-publics-des-politiques-sociales>

⁹ <https://confcap-capdroits.org/>

projects that enable quantitative evaluation of these actions. The Lyon Metropolitan Area also works on a future-oriented basis. It solicited FAS (France's Federation of Solidarity Actors) to carry out a survey on how shelter operators were planning for the decade ahead, particularly with regard to establishing the HF model in France. It was clear from this survey, unfortunately, that there is still a lot to do to ensure that these actors assimilate deployment of the HF model into their institutional plans. Lastly, Lyon remains proactive in finding new funding sources, mainly at the European level. For example, an ongoing HF project for young people was recently selected for EaSI¹⁰ programme funding. It is through these projects that the Lyon Metropolitan Area supports local actors in the change of paradigm required for establishing the HF model. Once again, it is vital to avoid the pitfall of creating simplistic measures but rather the model should be seen as a systemic change.

The Coming Challenges: It's Not a Map, It's a Compass

In its adoption of HF, the Lyon Metropolitan Area has not escaped the downsides of the French model:

... [t]he experimentalist approach promoted by the government has resulted in a paradox: that of achieving sustained success of HF in different cities – most notably, through continuous learning and positive feedback loops between the national and local levels – but failing to crowd out the old shelter-based model and change citizens' mindset towards the issue. (Demos Helsinki, 2022, p.15)

For all that, as a local public authority, we are making HF a long-term element of our governance. We fully endorse the idea, described by HELMOS HELSINKI, of a HF approach as governance built around directionality, capacity building, and supporting the transformation process. The Lyon Metropolitan Area is in the process of changing from planning mode ('HF as a map') to structural establishment of the model ('the logic of a compass'). Deployment of HF is still, however, being hampered by at least two significant issues.

1. It is difficult to access extra funds to adequately roll out the adapted support structures; how the State and associations divide competencies causes financing problems for these actions. The issue here is to ensure that the associations are not weakened by the funding process, but also to measure the financial impact of moving from a shelter-based model to a housing-based model (where one depends on the State and the other on associations).

¹⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1081>.

2. It is difficult to actually reduce shelter provision when a significant proportion of those accommodated cannot access housing due to current French laws. It is therefore not clear whether accommodation provision can be scaled down without public authorities changing their position towards rejected asylum seekers, and migrants in general, with regard to the criteria for accessing social housing.

Mission: eradication of homelessness

Despite the severe housing shortage hampering the achievement of this ambition, the eradication of homelessness by 2030 has become our political purpose – in line with the 2021 Lisbon Declaration on Combatting Homelessness – and HF is one of the technical means of achieving this goal. This mission, namely eliminating rather than managing homelessness, was set by the Lyon Metropolitan Area and its Vice-President for housing and habitat, Mr Renaud Payre. It now considers the HF model as the main axis for all local housing policies, bringing together all stakeholders in the local ecosystem. Achieving this mission involves carefully examining all public policies and programming from a HF perspective to ensure that due consideration is given to transforming the model in all ensuing actions. It will focus in particular on transforming shelters into the necessary affordable housing units, enabling “unconditional access to housing with, if needed, adapted social supports.”

Providing adequate resources to meet need

Answering calls for expressions of interest will no longer be enough to definitively change the model and we would like to see a ‘ringfencing’ of DIHAL credits to continue the process undertaken by territories to accelerate implementation of HF. Making such funding sacrosanct would give a sense of security to HF operators who have been weakened by the current financing model, i.e., annual funding via calls for proposals. Furthermore, the Lyon Metropolitan Area is working on creating a real-estate company, financed by solidarity investment funds and European funds, to enable it to buy housing on the private market and transform them into affordable social housing. Similarly, they have called on European bodies to contribute financially to local policies, for example during the conference that took place in Lyon on 1 March 2022 as part of the French Presidency of the European Union (‘La lutte contre le sans-abrisme: la parole aux territoires’ [The fight against homelessness: let’s hear from the regions]). Today, European structural support is a necessity. Lyon is thus working toward securing this.

Change management: MAPLA

By continuing its efforts to support paradigm change, it hopes to ultimately create a community of practice, within a HF-oriented learning environment. What is most important is getting all stakeholders on board and convincing those who are most reluctant to adopt the HF model. The latter are increasingly rare but as long as the

paternalistic model remains dominant in the French shelter sector, it will be difficult to convert all parties. It is often necessary to remind some partners that contrary to what they believe, HF is in fact not a specific measure but rather a wide-reaching policy, and Lyon is one of the territories undertaking its 'accelerated implementation'.

While there remain several weak points in Lyon's deployment of the HF model, the territory has been committed for a number of years already to this structural transformation with the ultimate goal of eradicating homelessness in the coming 10 to 15 years. With regard to changing the traditional paternalistic model, it is not easy. However, eradicating homelessness is now an achievable goal, not a fantasy. The transformation is ongoing and Lyon Metropolitan Area is working at its own pace. Slowly, but surely.

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Housing First and Structural Change in Ireland

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Introduction

Looked at from the perspective of an NGO committed to delivering Housing First and to ending homelessness, the development of Housing First in Ireland is something of a paradox. In one way of looking at it, Ireland has one of the better developed and systemic Housing First programmes, with Housing First named in the national strategies on housing and homelessness for almost a decade, along with ambitious growth targets. A state agency provides a National Director for Housing First along with a resourced and well-regarded National Office. Ireland is now well into its second National Implementation Plan and, as of mid-2023, 923 Housing First tenancies and an 86% success rate of providing homes for people with long histories of homelessness and street-based sleeping, strongly rooted in the Pathways Model (Housing Agency, 2023).

On the other hand, Ireland has one of the highest and fastest growing levels of homelessness, as measured by current emergency accommodation usage, in Europe, with single persons' homelessness increasing by nearly 69% since the first national Housing First Implementation Plan was published in September 2018. During that time, for every person who left homelessness through a Housing First tenancy, three new adults became homeless. Access to Housing First is largely restricted to adults over 24 living in one-bedroom units and, while there are pilot programmes to support families and under 24-year-olds with complex support needs, they are not formally part of the Housing First programme. While housing is recognised as a right within the Housing First programme, the existence of such a right for the wider population is contested politically and is to be the subject of a long-promised, but currently unscheduled, national referendum to establish a right to housing.

In short, Ireland has a successful, ambitious, but closely targeted, Housing First programme which has high levels of 'fidelity' (Greenwood et al, 2022) and is firmly embedded in the State housing policy system, while at the same time, the principles and practice of Housing First remain relatively isolated within the programme with, as yet, limited impact on wider social housing and homelessness practice or policy.

To a significant extent, this paradoxical situation can be understood as arising from the policy trade-offs which have been required to obtain and mobilise the cross department/agency collaboration needed to deliver the programme.

A short history of Housing First in Ireland

The first Housing First project in Ireland was a Dublin City Council based 'demonstration project' which created its first tenancy in April 2011. The project grew from a 2010 conference convened by the Homeless Agency¹, but also involved collaboration with several NGOs, including Focus Ireland, the Peter McVerry Trust, Dublin Simon, and an Approved Housing Body (AHB) (Greenwood, 2015).

While this Housing First Demonstration Project was preparing to provide its first tenancy, a new Government was elected and its Programme for Government, published in February 2011, included the first national policy commitment to introduce a Housing First approach to "alleviate the problem of long-term homelessness" (Government of Ireland, 2011, p.15).

Toward the end of 2012, the demonstration project ran into difficulties and was restructured in March 2013 after an extensive mid-term review (O'Donogue Hynes and Butler, 2016; Greenwood, 2015). By 2014, the project had identified and supported 23 individuals who had a long-term experience of homelessness and street-based sleeping and was deemed to have demonstrated that Housing First could be applied successfully in an Irish context.

In October 2014, the programme was expanded across the broader Dublin region following a tender process. The Dublin Region Housing First Service, jointly operated by Focus Ireland and the Peter McVerry Trust, delivered the service from 2014-2018. The target at this stage was to provide Housing First tenancies for the up to 100 people who were habitually sleeping on the street in Dublin. While an evaluation had been an integral part of the demonstration project (Greenwood, 2015), evaluation was not included in the tender for the 2014 service and was not subsequently funded.

Housing First targets and success in Ireland have been largely focused on the number of Housing First tenancies established. The target for Housing First tenancies in Dublin from 2014-2018 was set at 100 tenancies, this was later expanded to 300 in 2016 following the publication of a new national housing strategy, *Rebuilding Ireland*. The increased targets widened eligibility for the

¹ The Homeless Agency was then the statutory body responsible for tackling homelessness in Dublin, and has since been succeeded by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE). The Homeless Agency is entirely distinct from the Housing Agency where the National Housing First office is now situated.

programme to long-term shelter users with complex needs, as most of those who were habitually sleeping on the street had already been housed. By 2018, 250 Housing First tenancies had been established in Dublin.

A National Director of Housing First was appointed in February 2018, and by September that year, the first Housing First National Implementation Plan 2018-2021 (Government of Ireland, 2018) was published jointly by the Minister for Housing and Minister for Health. Through an analysis of case notes on the national homeless database, PASS, this Implementation Plan identified 737 adults who had an experience of homelessness which indicated that they should be targeted for Housing First. The plan proposed to create 663 new Housing First tenancies between 2018-2021, on top of the 250 that already existed in Dublin, with tenancy targets to be set for each of the 31 local authorities.

Until this point Housing First had been led and delivered almost exclusively by agencies responsible for housing: The Department of Housing and Local Authorities. While SafetyNet, a medical charity providing health care to marginalised people, was an active partner in Dublin Housing First from 2014, the engagement with the broader health service was on an *ad hoc* basis. Under the first National Implementation plan, the Department of Health and the Health Services Executive (HSE) were to provide funding for physical health, addiction, and mental health supports for people on the Housing First programme. National funding was also made available by the Department of Housing to each region to deliver the housing in accordance with the Housing First model and a national tendering process to choose an NGO or NGOs to lead the delivery of Housing First across each region was to be rolled out by the end of 2018. Housing for the programme was to be provided both from local authorities' own social housing stock and by Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs). The NGOs tendering for the service in each region were also to commit to supply a certain proportion of the housing units needed.

As the First Implementation Plan came to an end, Housing First was expanded to every region in Ireland and 722 tenancies were created as part of this Plan with 560 individuals in a current Housing First tenancy by the end of 2021.

In the meantime, the political landscape shifted, and a new coalition Government was formed in 2020 with a new housing strategy – *Housing for All* – published in late 2021. This new housing strategy reaffirmed a commitment to Housing First for individuals with both a history of street-based sleeping/long-term use of emergency homeless accommodation, as well as complex needs. It was soon followed by the second National Implementation Plan from 2022 to 2026.

The Second National Implementation Plan largely seeks to build on the previous plan, to deepen the engagement with the health system, concentrate on the same target group (single adults over 25, with complex support needs), and focus on expanding the number of Housing First tenancies across each local authority area. This plan also continued the strong alignment with the Pathways model, with Sam Tsemberis commissioned to draft the Irish Housing First manual and also a frequent speaker at launches and training events organised by the National Office.

A target of 1 319 new Housing First tenancies was set under the new Plan. By mid- 2023, 372 new tenancies had been established and, including the tenancies from earlier phases, a total of 923 individuals were living in a Housing First tenancy. The Minister for Housing has made clear that the current target of 1 319 tenancies could and should be surpassed, but when it is achieved there will be some 1 800 Housing First tenancies in Ireland. Ireland is a relatively small country, so by way of perspective it is useful to note there are around 185,00 social homes (approx. 140 000 owned by local authorities and the balance by AHBs), so that at this point 1% of all social housing would be occupied by Housing First tenants. It is also worth noting that the vast majority of Housing First tenancies in Ireland are social housing tenancies, with over 90% of tenancies analysed for the national evaluation of the programme in 2022 provided by either local authorities, NGOs, or Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) (Greenwood et al, 2022).

Structural Change – Institutional Levels

The appointment of the first National Director of Housing First in February 2018 was shortly followed by the establishment of a National Implementation Group which included representatives from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (now the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage), the Department of Health, the National Health Service (HSE), Local Authorities, and the newly appointed National Director of Housing First. A representative from the criminal justice sector, representing both the Probation Service and the Irish Prison Service, later joined the Group in September 2021. The Group has been meeting bi-monthly since January 2019, and is the key operational driver and oversight body of the programme.

The publication of the Second Implementation Plan was accompanied by several significant structural changes to the management of the Housing First programme. The National Director, who had been based in the offices of the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive, despite having a national remit, was relocated to the Housing Agency, a national state agency with a wide range of functions related to state housing policy, and a new National Housing First Office was established.

These structures represent a high level of structural integration across government functions, and a successful attempt to establish a single centralised point of state authority. However, it is also notable that the implementation group does not include any representation from the NGOs who are delivering the Housing First services. Input from these services is gathered through a range of consultative and discursive interactions and, during the first implementation plan, an ‘action research’ strand.

Structural Change – The Health Service

Since the Housing Act, 1988 transferred lead responsibility for responding to homelessness from the health to the housing system, the health system gradually disengaged from a role in responding to homelessness. While health services in some areas had much higher ambitions, the annual health strategy set its annual objectives solely in terms of the percentage of individuals experiencing homelessness who had their health needs assessed within two weeks of entering emergency accommodation (HSE, 2015). Both Implementation Plans exhibit a strong emphasis on reversing this trend and fully engaging the health services as a partner – and part funder – of the Housing First programmes.

While some aspects of the Irish health service are highly centralised, there is considerable regional autonomy as to how some services are structured and delivered. As a result, there is considerable regional variation in the extent and mechanism of health service involvement in Housing First teams. For instance, in some areas the local HSE provides funding for a mental health expert to be recruited as an integral part of the team, while in other regions the mental health professional remains part of a health team and works with Housing First for a period each week. In other areas, the local HSE effectively provides very limited dedicated mental health resources to the Housing First project. While there has been an evaluation of the programme over the period of the first Implementation Plan (Greenwood et al, 2022), there is no evaluation of the impact of these different delivery models on tenants.

The engagement with the health system is also evidenced by the roll-out of a health monitoring tool which aims to provide an evidence base for identifying – and filling – gaps between health needs and provision. These efforts to draw health resources into the Housing First programme has been a major pre-occupation of the State, with ministers in the different departments taking a very visible lead through press events involving several ministers and publications with multiple forwards and ministerial signatures. This commitment was met with some significant success, as reflected in the HSE National Service Plan for 2023 which, in contrast to plans of a decade ago, include as its second key objective: “Improve and enhance access to

healthcare services for people who are homeless and other social inclusion groups...” (2023, p.42) along with commitment to “wrap-around health supports for an additional 269 homeless people in Housing First tenancies” (2023, p.42). Importantly, this engagement has also carried through into budgetary commitments, with the Minister of State for Health noting that the Department of Health contributed “an additional €11million in 2021 and €10 million in 2022” toward “the health needs of people who are homeless”(Government of Ireland, 2022, p.3), although the amount of this dedicated to Housing First as such is less clear.

Structural Change – Principles and Practice

In many ways the adoption of Housing First as national government policy has happened rather rapidly in Ireland compared to other European countries where Housing First programmes have been implemented more at local and municipality level. Government policy has made Housing First a main component of its response to homelessness. Housing First exists in every area of the country and local targets are set nationally for every region. As noted above, a particular success has been that, since the first National Implementation Plan, health and social care supports have been funded as part an all-government approach.

However, the expansion and adoption of Housing First nationwide has happened in the shadows of a housing and homelessness crisis that started around 2014. While the Housing First programme has been protected and grown, the policy response to rising homelessness has been largely unaffected by the lessons of Housing First and has largely comprised of opening new homeless emergency beds. Since the first Implementation Plan was published in 2018, three new emergency homeless beds have been opened for every Housing First tenancy established.

While Housing First in Ireland has retained tight eligibility in terms of single adults aged over 24, it has been accessible – and frequently proactive – to specific vulnerable groups within this demographic: people with a chronic history of street-based sleeping, those institutionalised in emergency accommodation, members of the Traveller Community, young adults between 25-35, and people being discharged from prison, acute care, or mental health facilities.

Family homelessness has increased by 450% since July 2014, and there are now families who have been long-term homeless with complex support needs which was almost unimaginable when Housing First was first conceived in Ireland in 2011. While there is no reliable estimate of the extent, NGOs working in the area report that a small proportion of homeless families have complex support needs and require a similar level of multi-disciplinary team support if they are to successfully

sustain a tenancy and integrate into their neighbourhood (Magee and O’Kane, 2023). While ‘Housing For All’ includes provision for pilot programmes to support these families, they are not included within the Housing First programme.

Similarly, the number of young people (18-24yrs) experiencing homelessness increased over 260% during the same period. Despite this increase and the international evidence supporting the benefits of Housing First for Youth for those who have high support needs, the National Youth Homeless Strategy (2022) includes a commitment to a pilot Supported Housing for Youth project, which is also not included within the Housing First programme.

As well as targeting who Housing First is for, there has been a tight focus in the types of homes that can be used. There has largely been a strict requirement that only properties with one-bedroom are used for Housing First, although a few two-bedroom properties have been approved in some areas. In the First Implementation Plan in 2018, it was highlighted that ensuring an adequate supply of one-bedroom units would be central to the successful implementation of Housing First. While in principle there is nothing wrong with focusing on using one-bedroom units for the Housing First programme, the policy ignores the reality that, while there is limited availability of all forms of housing in Ireland at present, one-bed units are the most limited: few local authority units are one-beds and these tend to be allocated to older persons, and the majority (55%) of local authority housing stock nationwide are three-bedroom houses (Norris and Hayden, 2018). Developers consider one-bed room units uneconomical to build (arguing that two-bedroom units have the same construction costs but have higher market value). While there has been a strong policy push to increase the number of one-bedroom apartments constructed, even if successful, this will take many years to have an impact. The outcome can be seen as making the success of Housing First contingent on one of the most challenging strands of housing policy rather than the policy priority in its own right that it has claimed to be.

The voluntary/NGO sector has been a strong advocate of Housing First from the beginning and at every stage since. While providing unfunded support to the ‘Dublin Demonstration Project’, the sector successfully lobbied for the Government formed in 2012 to adopt the policy and provide national leadership for the programme. However, the success of these campaigns in convincing successive governments to adopt Housing First, and funding it has had the paradoxical outcome of reducing the influence of the sector on the shape and priorities of the programme. While most of the organisations delivering Housing First make efforts to bring its practices into all their own services, the model for delivering Housing First involves them periodically competing against each other for contracts to deliver the programme.

The relationship between NGOs operating in the homeless sector and the State in Ireland is complex. At one level, NGOs are seen as partners. They participate in the National Homeless Action Committee (NHAC), a governance and oversight committee chaired by the Minister of Housing focused on delivering policy measures and actions to address homelessness, on statutory Regional Homeless Forums, and they have ready access to consultation processes. However, in relation to specific services, including Housing First, they are regarded as specialist services which have been contracted by the State rather than partners in delivery. The reasons and implications of this are beyond this paper, but in any case, NGOs delivering Housing First are not represented in the 'Implementation Group' or other formal decision-making processes which would enable the systematic adoption of Housing First approaches.

The Strange Case of 'The Right To Housing'

While the core principles of Housing First vary to some extent in different jurisdictions, the idea that 'housing is a right' is included in virtually every example, including the Irish iteration. However, the idea that 'housing is a right' for people on the Housing First programme lives uneasily alongside an ambiguous – and sometimes even hostile – attitude to a right to housing in the broader system. The Irish Constitution includes the recognition of the 'right to property', but no recognition of the right to housing. Property rights are, to some extent, balanced against ideas of the common good, but in practice government ministers have repeatedly rejected proposals for greater tenants' rights or homeless prevention measures by declaring that they are 'unconstitutional' (Keyes, 2019). The most extreme example of the resistance to the right to housing – outside of the Housing First programme – is seen in Ireland's continued refusal to sign Article 31 of the European Social Charter (ESC) because the ESC commitment on the right to housing is regarded as in conflict with the Irish Constitution (European Committee on Social Rights, 2021).

Equally, while 'choice' is recognised as a core principle of Housing First and one of the foundations of its success, and while 'choice-based lettings' have been introduced by local authorities, the prospect of other social housing tenants exercising choice over the homes they are offered continues to excite considerable media and political controversy (Gataveckaite, 2023; Crosbie, 2023), with the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) attributing part of the rise in homelessness to households making such choices (Omorodion, 2023).

Conclusions

Housing First in Ireland exhibits many of the features which the European Housing First Hub has identified as required for 'systemic' Housing First. Successive Governments of different political perspectives have made Housing First a flagship programme, named it in their Housing and Homelessness strategies, and guaranteed funding. The funding is understood to be on-going, and while providers may change due to periodic tendering processes, it would be unthinkable that any government in the foreseeable future would seek to remove funding from supports for existing tenancies. The Central Government has set targets for local government to deliver and funded a national director and national office to drive and support the local delivery of these targets. Considerable political effort has been expended at a national level to reverse the disengagement of health services from homeless service provision and overcome the strongly compartmentalised nature of Irish public service delivery. While there is still much to be done, particularly in some regions, much has been achieved in just a few years.

It may be the case that this success could not have been achieved without holding the Housing First programme to a focus on single mature adults. Broadening it to encompass, for instance, young adults and families would have required bringing in an ever-increasing number of agencies and departments, making it much harder to deliver the political and organisational common purpose required for the progress that has been achieved. Delivering and imbedding such an innovative programme in a short period of time will always require policy trade-offs. The Irish case is notable for not trading off fidelity principles, quality of housing, or security of tenure. Trading-off the narrowness of focus in order to deliver an ambitious, cross functional national programme in a few years may seem reasonable in the context.

The development of Housing First in Ireland can be seen as a paradox. Ireland rapidly built up a substantial number of Housing First tenancies through ambitious targets and delivered high levels of fidelity to the Pathways model, with high success rates and strong cross-departmental political commitment. At the same time, homelessness has grown rapidly, with three emergency homeless beds being opened for every Housing First tenancy created. There has been a reluctance to broaden access to adults under 24 or to families with complex needs, and Housing First principles are rarely deployed across the wider housing and homelessness system. It is suggested that the relative narrowness of focus in the Irish Housing First programme has been a successful policy trade-off required to achieve the level of cross-departmental engagement and resources. The big question for Housing First in Ireland is whether the nature of these policy trade-offs has created a 'path dependency' which will compartmentalise the programme into



the future, or whether, having established such a level of success and large number of tenancies, a momentum has been created which can break out of the single programme approach and influence the wider housing and homelessness system.

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The Possibilities of a Housing First Paradigm Shift in Hungary

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Introduction

This paper offers a short overview of the system of homelessness services in Hungary, as well as several examples of housing led and Housing First initiatives, making use of both national as well as EU funding. It will describe the strengths and weaknesses of these projects and shall offer some suggestions to make their results sustainable. Housing First has proven to be effective in Hungary, but time-limited projects cannot enable all people with complex needs to become self-sufficient within two or three years. A paradigm shift and adjusted financing is needed to provide personalised, long-lasting, and dignified housing solutions as opposed to shelters for people experiencing homelessness with complex needs in the mainstream homeless service system. The proposals for strategies on how to achieve this are available, but they are still waiting for action to take place.

Homelessness Services in Hungary

The Hungarian system of service provision is traditionally based on the provision of mainstream services, as defined by the Social Act of 1993: III. Local authorities are responsible for offering services to those in need. In the case of people experiencing homelessness, these are soup kitchens, day centres, night shelters, temporary hostels, rehabilitation hostels, and permanent hostels for the elderly. Temporary homes for families are available for families with children experiencing homelessness. These services have to conform to the rules and regulations defined by the Act as well as the decree 1/2000 (I.7. SZCSM) (regarding the physical space, the type of support to be provided, the qualification of staff, etc.) (Pleace et al., 2019). Local authorities can manage services themselves or contract them out to NGOs or church-based organisations. These services receive statutory funding

from the State based on the number of users or beds. Local authorities can offer additional financial support to the NGOs or church-based organisations they ask to run these services. In 2021, the State funding could cover about 60-70% of the costs of the services (Pleace et al., 2021) – since the crisis with the rise of energy prices, organisations might have to pay 7-8 times what they used to for gas and electricity, causing a significant burden. In some cases, the price of energy during the winter is more than what they receive from the State as normative funding (Fehér, 2022).¹ Outreach teams are supported by separate contracts from the Ministry. In larger cities, 24-hour medical centres (GP offices + convalescence wards) are also available.

The Hungarian system of service provision is a traditional staircase model. However, it is a dead-end staircase, with sporadic supported move-out options. Due to a general shortage of social housing, as well as the extreme low level of social and housing benefits available to people with low income, affordable housing is scarce. Some organisations own a few apartments, others have an agreement with the local authorities to house a few people exiting shelters each year, with the homeless service provider offering some sort of floating support – not funded by the State. However, these are only available for a selected few, usually on a short-term basis (see Fehér et al., 2011).

Hungary has no officially adapted national strategy for ending homelessness. Two proposals for a national strategy have been developed by experts from the field, all pressing for affordable housing options, and housing-led as well as Housing First programmes, but none have been picked up by the Government. Budapest City, the capital, has recently passed its own Local Strategy, with a strong focus on housing solutions and ways out of homelessness, calling for the Government to become an ally, with no response as of yet.

Housing First in Hungary, Possibilities and Challenges

In the last 15 years, street-based sleepers have become the target of several local and national interventions. Changes in the legislative framework have been of a criminalising nature, the most extreme step being the inclusion of the ban of street-based sleeping in the Constitution (for the various steps of criminalisation, see Missetics, 2013). Most of these, however, although still there, are not really applied in practice (any more). Although major changes did not occur on the policy level, various national and European funding possibilities opened for projects helping street-based sleepers move away from sleeping outdoors.

¹ Until now (December 2022), the State has not come up with a solution to this problem.

Several of these refer to 'Housing First' and 'Housing-Led', with the assumption that any project offering housing with some sort of support to (former) street-based sleepers belong to these categories.

Small scale housing-led approaches, funded from the national budget

Balogi and Fehér (2013) describe a project funded from the national budget, where a forest company around the capital area sought the support of the Ministry of Social Affairs in "clearing the forest" of people experiencing homelessness and illegally disposed garbage. Funding became available through the Public Foundation for the Homeless who supported outreach teams to make individual plans with street-based sleepers in the area who are willing to move out of the forest. Seven organisations responded, involving 152 people experiencing homelessness, about two-thirds of them couples. "Long-term housing stability was not an explicit goal of the project and several characteristics of the project made this difficult, including the shortage of working hours of staff, lack of professional guidance and a lack of a stable and sufficient income of clients" (2013, p.70).

Currently, the city of Budapest funds initiatives that make shelters more welcoming to street-based sleepers or that support individuals in leaving homelessness (Menhely, 2022). Housing support can be offered to people experiencing homelessness with a regular income, who are willing to contribute to the costs of housing, with a priority to those with mental health issues, moving to an apartment with others and who are likely to sustain their accommodation after the duration of the support. Funding includes allocation for the staff costs of floating support. In 2021, 61 people were housed with the use of the support via eight organisations, and 300 street-based sleepers could access accommodation services that were willing to lower their thresholds (Menhely, 2021).

Some NGOs (Habitat for Humanity in Hungary; Utcáról Lakásba Egyesület – ULE) manage(d) longer-term Housing First projects independently of these funding opportunities, raising funds directly for their programmes. ULE operate their programme in 24 social housing units leased by three municipalities in Budapest, offering supported housing to 45 adults² formerly living in huts in the forests of the city. Tenants participate in the renovation of the usually extremely run-down apartments together with volunteers, and receive intense social support as long as it is needed. The first tenants moved in 2014, they have been supported since to varying intensity (ULE, 2021). Habitat for Humanity first contracted out its project to outreach teams, with local authorities offering social housing, and support work gradually being shifted from outreach teams to professionals working in the local authority's social centre (for general population in need). However, after the first

² Four children could be reunited with their families due to permanent housing.

year they had to realise that mainstream social services did not adopt the vision of Housing First, and offered their support to people formerly experiencing homelessness on the same basis as anyone else (going as far as sending them invitations to meetings through registered mail), resulting in a high rate of non-engagement. In the second phase of the project, an individual case worker was hired to support the people housed, offering the service as long as funding allowed for it, with the intention of enabling tenants to sustain their housing permanently (Balogi and Fehér, 2017).

Housing First project using EU co-funding

The first, officially declared Housing First programme was launched in 2018, funded from the EU financed Human Development Operational Programme. Although prior to this programme there had been several schemes targeting housing people experiencing homelessness, they were of short term, less than one year, and/or focused on the improvement of employment situation of the people experiencing homelessness. The call of the Housing First programme partly reflected the original Housing First principles, as it targeted those people experiencing homelessness who stayed outside the homeless accommodation institutions, required immediate placement to housing after the recruitment, provided the possibility to implement a wide range of services individually tailored to the needs of clients, and did not required clients to take part in any services except for the regular contact with social workers. Nevertheless, the broader welfare policy context in which the programme was implemented was not in line with the Housing First principles, mainly because rent subsidies were only provided during the project implementation period. When the projects ended, tenants could no longer access adequate subsidies to cover their housing costs, simply because these did not exist. Moreover, those who retained their housing were not eligible anymore to rely on the homeless service provision system, while the local social support system has no capacity to provide the needed floating support. Another difference from the original Housing First programmes was that the call did not require the project implementers to include only people experiencing homelessness with high support needs, but instead had a broader target group, including even the possibility of rapid rehousing.

Altogether 17 projects were implemented, with a total of 280-300 participants. Outcome evaluation research (Somogyi et al., 2021) was carried out to examine the main results of the programme by selecting nine out of the 17 projects with 187 users. The research looked at the composition of users, the structure of the provided services, and the main housing and employment outcomes. The average length of the projects was 2-3 years while the call allowed for a maximum imple-

mentation period of four years. The shorter projects were justified by the substantial administrative and capacity burden on the organisations, as well as methodological challenges, that they could not take on in the longer term.

Project implementers followed various patterns in selecting participants to their Housing First projects. Being aware of the structural barriers to Housing First (mainly the lack of rent subsidy), some of them deliberately selected people that they believed had a higher chance to become self-sustaining by the end of the project in terms of regular income. The majority of implementers sought to exclude people with serious problems, but some (three out of nine) implementers approved all applicants who met the basic condition for cooperation regardless their mental condition. Altogether, the proportion of clients who complied with the original Housing First target groups was almost one-third (31%), they had mental problems or problematic substance use, and at the same time, they were street-based sleepers or stayed in shacks right before entering the project.

The lack of affordable housing meant a serious challenge to find housing, therefore several projects engaged couples rather than single people and used co-habitation as a solution to high rents. Only one out of the nine projects could entirely rely on affordable municipal housing, and another one could use a mix of private and municipal housing, while two projects could ensure few municipal flats for participants who saved the required deposit after the project ended. Nevertheless, it was surprising that despite the call allowing for the renovation of municipal flats, only one project used this possibility. The reason for this was that organisations saw the related process as too risky as they had to include the municipality (the owner of the flats) as a consortium partner, who would implement the investment.

As a consequence, during the projects the majority of clients were placed in the private rental sector (68%), and only 16% in the municipal housing sector, while the others stayed in workers' hostels and other forms of accommodation (8% each). Right after the support ended, 54% could retain their independent housing (out of which 61% stayed in private and 33% in municipal rentals). Some (25%) could not retain their independent housing, but did not return into institutional accommodation or street homelessness (stayed in workers' hostels or moved to their families). Another 14% became homeless again (institution or the street), and 3% died or otherwise disappeared. A clear finding was that those who were housed in the municipal sector with lower than market rent were more likely to retain their housing than those who were housed in the private rental sector. Furthermore, tenants with high support needs (having mental or addiction problems) had lower chances of retaining their independent housing situation and improve their position in the labour market.

Regarding the organisation of support services for users, all projects used the intensive case management models, although three of them incorporated some elements of the assertive community treatment model into their service structure. This meant that the support team of the project closely and regularly worked together with psychologists, psychiatrists, or other mental health professionals, which both increased the uptake of mental health support among participants and enabled mental health professionals to help social workers provide recovery-oriented support for clients. In the projects that lacked such cooperation, the engagement of tenants in mental health support was much lower. However, implementers referred to the insufficient capacity and knowledge of the mental health support system as a general problem: there were not enough professionals and they generally lacked experience in working with people from the most marginalised groups. The interviews revealed that social workers also lacked the professional knowledge to effectively engage clients to use mental health services.

Other important elements of the support services were regular visits in the tenants' home, basic social and conflict resolution competence development trainings, assistance in job search, and community integration. The implementer organisations had experiences in such activities. What was new for organisations in the Housing First programme was that they could not, in theory, define obligatory activities for their clients. This was only partially fulfilled, as most of them defined the participation in training as quasi-mandatory for the clients, although they made exemptions in cases when, for example, somebody had a job. Social workers strongly encouraged participants to regularly save money as this was very essential to sustain their housing after the support period. Regarding employment, tenants were stimulated to find jobs in the open labour market, however, many suffered from bad health which proved to be an important barrier. Helping rebuild family relationships and new social networks, and break out of toxic relationships, was also seen as key interventions in order to break or prevent isolation, and falling back to homelessness.

Another important characteristic of service delivery was that the majority of the projects did not hire additional human resources, but relied on existing staff who worked on a part-time contract basis in the projects. This had the consequence that social workers worked according to two different methods, the traditional staircase model in which they set requirements to users to gain access to several services, and Housing First, in which they should have stimulated participants to engage in services. However, on the longer-run, it could mean that the new approach of the Housing First programme gradually changes the mainstream operation of the organisation.

A main deficiency of the programme was that it did not provide training and methodological support to the project implementers. The organisations had to make the methodological preparation by themselves using the Housing First manual (Pleace, 2016) (available in Hungarian) and the tutorial videos. While some of the organisations actively used these resources and tried to adapt the Housing First approach in their projects as much as their circumstances allowed, others did not see too many differences between previous and the so-called Housing First programmes.

In summary, the implemented projects did not comply with the Housing First principles primarily because the rent support as well as floating support could be ensured only during the project duration and because the projects included a mixed target group and not only people with high support needs. Moreover, there were significant gaps in providing recovery-oriented social work and sufficient mental health support to tenants with high support needs, leading to a lower housing retention rate. Consequently, projects were implemented rather with the housing-led than the classical Housing First approach. Nevertheless, despite all the difficulties and shortcomings, the organisations gathered important new experiences and learned new ways of working with people experiencing homelessness that can be fed into the mainstream provision system.

Conclusion

In the last 15 years several programmes were implemented that provide housing, even if temporary, to various groups of people experiencing homelessness. These have gradually become more complex by providing a broad range of individually tailored services and including people experiencing homelessness with more complex needs, namely street-based sleepers and people with mental health and problematic substance use.

By now, the experiences of such programmes enabled the service provision system to mainstream the housing-led approach through which a more rapid exit from homelessness could be ensured by separating the housing provision and rent support from the support services. However, there are significant structural barriers that impede such mainstreaming. On the one hand, only the municipal housing sector offers affordable housing in Hungary, the size of which is minimal (1.5%) and has been decreasing for decades. In addition, rent subsidies are not available for those low income people who are forced to rent housing in the private rental market. On the other hand, the mental health related services struggle with financial and human resources problems, and generally are not to treat the most marginalised people. Homelessness services receive their steady (though not adequate) govern-

ment funding for operating shelters and day centres. Floating support has to be financed from outside sources, which makes it difficult to offer those in a reliable way in the long-term.

As structural changes in the mainstream housing and health policies cannot be anticipated in the near future, it would be important that EU funds create the possibilities of a long-term programme with less administrative burden and less stress on 'success', which can be built in the general operation of the homeless service providers. It would be also important that service providers can rely on the municipal housing sector more, and use the available resources also to renovate vacant municipal flats. Housing First programmes should be designed separately from other housing-led programmes, in order to ensure that they are actually tailored to people experiencing homelessness with the highest support needs.

Hungary has no shortage of highly articulate proposals for a national strategy to eradicate homelessness – however, as long as the Government chooses to emphasise punitive measures and the individual responsibility in making a living for oneself, those that are the most vulnerable will be left to rely on shelters instead of housing. Hungary needs a steady shift of paradigm to replace the focus of offering and financing shelters to creating real options for affordable housing, as well as making the support available to sustain those.

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Support Processes in the Housing First Approach – a Paradigm Shift in Social Work?

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► **Abstract_** *In the context of Housing First, there is often talk of a paradigm shift in policy. In this article, I put the thesis up for debate, that Housing First also triggers a paradigm shift in social work through its basic principles: Social workers must adapt their professional understandings, especially in contact with their users. This also has an impact on other services for people experiencing homelessness via the debates in the field. The discourse about the paradigm shift described in the article has reached not only the professionals but also the users. Two model project evaluations from Berlin/Germany show that the latter also perceive the different approach in the support process and can also name it in interviews. In order to enforce these changes with the payers, social workers must actively exercise their so-called political mandate.*

► **Keywords_** *Housing First, Social Work*

Introduction

In the context of Housing First, there is often talk of a paradigm shift. Benjaminsen (2018, p.327), for example, speaks of a “paradigm shift... regarding the understanding of homelessness interventions in recent years as Housing First – early access to permanent housing in combination with intensive social support.” Padgett et al. (2016, p.3) state with regard to the Pathways model (PHF) that the individual components of the approach would also have existed earlier, but “[t]he synergy of these four essential but disparate components endowed PHF with a unique purpose and approach to housing and services, one that required a sea change in the organizational culture of existing programs serving homeless“(Padgett et al., 2016, p.4).

Although Pathways/Sam Tsemberis, according to Pleace and Bretherton (2012, p.12), would insist that “there is only one form of service that can be called Housing First, which is the PHF model”, more and more services are emerging that invoke the basic principles of Housing First. Even if they are not 100% faithful to the programme (e.g., by offering all flats centrally in one and the same building or no separation of housing and treatment), in my view, Housing First triggers a paradigm shift in social work through the basic principles specifically regarding the way the support process works with Housing First: Social workers have to reorientate themselves and, if necessary, rethink their understanding of their profession and realign it with the Housing First principles. If they succeed in doing so, this will be noticed by the users and also commented on, for example, in evaluations of the services.

I will examine this specific paradigm shift in social work in more detail below. If the perspective of this article is also a pan-European one, some arguments are substantiated using the example of social work in Germany. This is because the different national practices have not yet been considered systematically and in a differentiated way.

In this article, I will first present professional understandings of social work and then discuss Housing First principles that specifically relate to the support process there. Subsequently, both topics will be brought together, supported by the evaluation results of two Housing-First model projects in Berlin/Germany. The article ends with short conclusions regarding the thesis of a necessary paradigm shift in social work in the context of the Housing First approach.

Professional Understandings of Social Work

Social work has historically developed from the church-based care of the poor in the Middle Ages and, centuries later, public welfare. The history of its professionalisation is strongly linked to the commitment of the first women’s movement at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century – and to women like Alice Salomon from Germany and Mary Richmond from the USA, who are considered pioneers of social work. At the end of the 1960s, social work also became an academic discipline with the introduction of corresponding courses of study.

A global definition of a modern understanding of social work has been developed by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW, 2014): “Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for

diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.”

So, on the one hand, scientific knowledge is a prerequisite for professional action. Doel and Shardlow therefore name “research mindedness” (2005, p.185) as an important requirement for social workers. However, on the other hand, the above definition of the IFSW already makes it clear that in the practice of social work, classical purposive knowledge must be supplemented with the discursive knowledge of a ‘reflective practitioner’ (Schön, 1983). That means, a constant theory-practice and practice-theory transfer must take place to be able to act professionally. Doing this, social work is constantly creating new models and methods, which in turn generate new expertise.

In this way, different professional understandings of social work have emerged in recent decades, some complementary, others irreconcilably opposed: There is a difference between my self-attribution as an ‘advocate’ and ‘lobbyist’ for socially disadvantaged and marginalised people or understanding myself as a ‘facilitator’ and ‘co-producer’ in the sense of a partner of my clients, users, and addressees. These understandings of roles give rise to many theories and approaches: In an anthology published by my university in Berlin/Germany on the professional understandings of social work, 14 different approaches have been outlined (Völter et al., 2020). They are as diverse as ‘Clinical Social Work’ (diagnosis and treatment) and ‘Social Work as a Human Rights Profession’ (referring to human rights). In the field of homelessness, Zuffery (2017, p.147) proposes an intersectional approach that “is consistent with social work ethics and values about social change and working to upholding social justice and human rights.” One condition for this is the so-called political mandate as a third mandate of social work. According to Silvia Staub-Bernasconi (2008), the originator of the idea of a triple mandate, social workers have a third mandate in addition to the mandates of their clients (help) and society (control), which arises from the profession itself and is based on scientific knowledge and the professional ethos. The basis of a binding professional code is human rights (Staub-Bernasconi, 2008). Social work is thus “(also) a political profession”¹ (Gerull and Lehnert, 2020).

The initiative ‘Grand Challenges for Social Work’ (2020) also shows the importance of the role of social work in ending homelessness through 17 essays by authors from NGOs and universities, interest groups, and umbrella organisations. However, they also note that the system of assistance often does not take sufficient account of the needs of those affected. Using positive examples, several essays show the attitude of social workers needed to ensure successful and, above all, sustainable

¹ Own translation from German.

housing provision for people experiencing homelessness. Therefore, in the following, the Housing First principles are briefly presented in the context of the support process, to then come back to the paradigm shift necessary for this, which makes its implementation possible in the first place.

Housing First Principles in the Context of the Support Process

As a kind of guiding principle for the support process in the PHF, Tsemberis (2010, p.31) describes the necessary basic attitude of the staff: "It is crucial to establish reciprocal, trusting relationships in which clients are treated and respected, dignified individuals who deserve warmth and compassion. (...) Services are formulated and directed by a client's self-identified goals." The resulting attitude of the staff is one of questioning: "How can I help?" (Tsemberis, 2010, p.45). For the European region, Pleace (2016) has set out and elaborated the principles of Housing First established by PHF in a total of eight 'core principles' of Housing First. These were developed with the support of an advisory board, of which Tsemberis was a member.

According to this (Pleace, 2016, p.29-36), the core principles are:

1. Housing is a Human Right
2. Choice and Control for Service Users
3. Separation of Housing and Treatment
4. Recovery Orientation
5. Harm Reduction
6. Active Engagement without Coercion
7. Person-Centred Planning
8. Flexible Support for as Long as is Required

The eight core principles are not strictly distinct, they refer to each other and are even partly dependent on each other. For example, the reference to the human right to housing not only means that people experiencing homelessness do not have to earn this right, but also that users with mental illness or addiction do not have to undergo psychiatric treatment or be sober while in Housing First services (cf. Tsemberis, 2010).

The latter is closely linked to the accepting approach of 'harm reduction' and this in turn to the specific target group of Housing First, namely "clients [who] have either been unable to gain access to traditional services, or traditional services have not proven effective for them" (Tsemberis, 2010, p.45). In this context Pleace (2016, p.34) emphasises that "services requiring abstinence, or detoxification, do not work

well for many homeless people.” The support of the professionals in general consists in actively pointing out alternatives and in the form of offers. This is not coercive and does not have negative consequences for the users if they do not make use of it. The support should therefore be appreciative, encouraging, and empowering, without sanctions or threats of sanctions. (Pleace, 2016). The services provided by Housing First are not standardised but are tailored to the respective users and their needs (Pleace, 2016). The eighth principle is based on the first, namely the human right to housing: Users who lose their housing, e.g., due to rent arrears, will continue to be supported by the Housing First offer if they so wish. However, a new offer of housing is also possible. (Pleace, 2016).

Housing First and Social Work Approaches

Housing First support should be provided in multi-professional teams (cf. Pleace, 2016). So social work is not solely responsible for the support process in Housing First services, but it is always a part of it (or at least it should be). In Germany, too, some Housing First teams work together in a combination of, for example, social workers, social assistants, and psychologists. A recommendation for the Housing First approach of the ‘Deutscher Verein für öffentliche und private Fürsorge’ [German Association for Public and Private Welfare] also advocates “the use of multi-professional teams in which different professions, methodological approaches, skills and experiences complement each other”² (DV, 2022, p.8). Also, peers should be able to contribute their own perspectives and make alternative relationship offers (DV, 2022). This alone is a challenge, because, at least in Germany, multi-professional teams are not yet standard in social work. Due to the strong pillarisation of the help system, the responsibilities of the respective help offer are often very strictly regulated; for example, psychologists or medical staff cannot be financed without further ado in homeless care.

If multi-professional teams are formed despite these difficulties, the question of power often arises immediately. Since social workers are often at the bottom of the hierarchy, especially in the health care system, conflicts cannot be ruled out and are sometimes carried out on the backs of the users (cf. for Germany, Geißler-Piltz and Gerull, 2009). An even greater challenge for social workers is the surrender of power to their users when working under Housing First principles. The idea of “Choice and Control for Service Users” (point two in Pleace’s core principles) as well as participation and empowerment approaches can be incorporated quite quickly into written social work concepts. Padgett et al. (2016, p.IX), however, note that “[t]he consumer choice ethos... was not an incremental change, a softening of

² Own translation from German.

demands. It was a reversal of fortune, something completely different.” In a study on the fidelity of Housing First programmes in several European and North American countries, Greenwood et al. (2018) found that commitment to the values and principles of Housing First led to important organisational facilitation. But they also describe the scepticism of practitioners when, for example, professionals from external services are quoted: “Well, then if there are no requirements for clients, what will you do with them?” (Greenwood et al., 2018, p.289). In the current discussion about the implementation of Housing First approaches in Germany, this very question is often raised by social workers from the field of homeless assistance. The particularly vulnerable target group of Housing First, namely people experiencing homelessness with “severe mental illness or other disabilities” (Tsemberis, 2010, p.45), is often exposed to rather paternalistic and caring practices by social workers. Participation in the sense of decision-making is often only implemented where it is enshrined in law, and even there rather hesitantly. A classic ‘caring’ argument is that people experiencing homelessness are overwhelmed with the demand for freedom of choice and decision-making (cf. Gerull, 2018 for Germany).³

But why the loss of power embedded in Housing First principles through the transfer of decision-making power to the users can be threatening for social workers? If their clients have their own tenancy agreement, professionals can ‘only’ make offers and/or point out alternative courses of action. However, the so-called motivational interviewing has long been established as a professional interviewing method that fits perfectly with the Housing First approach. The basic principles are: Resist the righting reflex, understand the patient’s own motivations, listen with empathy, and empower the patient. (Cf. Rollnick et al., 2008). According to Hall et al. (2012, p.664), “[t]he righting reflex describes the tendency of health professionals to advise patients about the right path for good health. This can often have a paradoxical effect in practice, inadvertently reinforcing the argument to maintain the status quo.” Thus, social workers do not become vicarious agents of their users, and their professional scientific and experiential knowledge is still needed.

However, social workers are not the only ones who decide how the support process should be conducted. Harm reduction instead of abstinence must also be communicated as an approach to the public payers of assistance. Even “flexible support for as long as is required” may be gladly offered by social workers, but not always financed by the payers. This is what the German Association for Public and Private Welfare states in its above-mentioned recommendation: “In the Housing First concept, the structures follow the needs and requirements of the addressees. This

³ Of course, there are also many social workers who, for example, work with a human rights-based understanding of the profession and belong to the ‘facilitators’ rather than the people who presume to speak for others or ‘give a voice’ to their clients.

excludes paternalistic attitudes and sanctioning elements in the assistance process. From the point of view of the German Association, this places special demands on the financing bases to be created for the assistance offered by Housing First...”⁴ (DV, 2022, p.5) Thus, on the one hand, some of the Housing First principles cannot easily be implemented within the framework of existing standard assistance in Germany – at least not given the evolved approval practices of some authorities. On the other hand, the evaluations of the two model projects in Berlin show the positive effects that can be achieved by implementing Housing First principles in the support process as outlined below.

“... you now have the possibility to create your own life again”

From 01.10.2018 – 30.09.2021, two Housing First offers were funded as model projects in Berlin/Germany. A total of 78 apartments were brokered as part of the offer, more than half of these to women. Both model projects worked very closely to the eight Housing First principles according to the Housing First Guide Europe (Pleace, 2016). Housing stability during the three-year model phase was 97.3% (HFB, gender mixed) and 100% (HFFB, only for women). This is largely due to the user satisfaction with the support provided in the multi-professional teams, composed of social workers, so-called social assistants, as well as a psychologist and a staff member for housing acquisition and public relations each. According to the two evaluation studies (Gerull, 2021a; 2021b), 85.3% (HFB) and 85.7% (HFFB) respectively were very satisfied with the support they received, and the rest were satisfied (recorded at the end of the model period).

In the problem-centred interviews with users of both projects, they confirmed (in response to the open question about the support offered) the unconditional availability of the support offer, their own choice and control of the support process, and the accepting and empowering approach. One user from HFB summarised what other interviewees also reported through their longer narratives in the interviews: “... you now have the possibility to create your own life again” (user quote in Gerull, 2021a, p.82)⁵. However, the users reacted sensitively when the control of the help process promised to them was thwarted by paternalistic interventions by the social workers. For example, one user reported how his social worker tried to talk to him about his alcohol consumption against his will one time. His reaction in the interview: “If I need support, I’ll ask for it”⁶ (Gerull, 2021a, p.58).

⁴ Own translation from German.

⁵ Own translation from German.

⁶ Analogous translation from German.

In the interviews, both the social workers and the other staff members expressed their satisfaction with the possibility of being able to offer a support concept at eye level in the model projects, but also emphasised the challenging process of getting used to what this meant for them (cf. Gerull, 2021b). Above all, however, the users themselves often described the offer of help as distinct from the support they had received in the past. One user, for example, reported on his previous attempt to be admitted to a project for assisted single living: "... I auditioned there [at the social psychiatric service, SG], and the doctor and the person who did these interviews kept asking me, yeah,... why do you want to go to assisted living, you need to detox. I say, well, excuse me, will you listen to *me*, what do *I* actually want?"⁷ (user quote in Gerull, 2021a, p.60).

One user of the women's model project reported receiving warnings and sanctions at a previous facility when she did not keep appointments with the social workers or wanted to postpone them. Later, she had to leave the facility because the social welfare office did not want to continue financing the help. She was told "that all the help I have received so far has not been effective, and that is why they no longer want to support me..."⁸ (user quote in Gerull, 2021b, p.63).

Conclusions

Matoušek (2018, p.178) emphasises for the Czech Republic that the "[p]aradigm change towards 'ending homelessness' includes a shift in minds of social workers" and that is exactly what underpins the thesis I put forward in the introduction to this article: Housing First is a paradigm shift of two kinds. In addition to understanding that no one has to earn their right to housing (paradigm shift in policy), it provides a support service that also accepts the 'stubbornness' of formerly homeless people and grants them control over the assistance process (paradigm shift in social work). According to Pleace (2016, p.30), in other words, "people using the service should be listened to and their opinions should be respected."

Through the professional discourse on the approach – which is still quite controversial in Germany, for example – this also has an impact on other support services for people experiencing homelessness. It is about making offers and accepting that the client does not always choose the offer that makes the most sense from (my) social work perspective. It is not about giving up on the client, nor is it about doing what the client tells me to do: It is about being at eye level, about enduring regression, about offering proactive support even after extended breaks in contact. Or,

⁷ Own translation from German.

⁸ Own translation from German.

as one user of the Berlin women's model project put it: "[I]t's in the back of my mind that I know I have someone I can call who will then support me"⁹ (user quote in Gerull, 2021b, p.60).

⁹ Own translation from German.

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Home – Ending Homelessness by 2027

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Introduction

This article is a summary of the report commissioned by the Ministry of Environment of Finland in October 2022. The report was handed over to Minister Dr. Maria Ohisalo at the end of January. After the parliamentary election in April, and after rather long negotiations, a new right-wing Government led by PM Petteri Orpo was installed in June. The programme of the new government includes a national programme to end long-term homelessness by 2027, with special emphasis on preventing youth homelessness. The programme states that this national programme will be implemented ‘immediately’. However, the whole programme of the Government includes several controversial, and even contradictory, measures that, if fully implemented, will seriously endanger reaching zero homelessness and will also eventually increase the risk of homelessness.

The task of the study was to identify how the objective of ending homelessness by 2027 can be achieved, what concrete measures are required to end homelessness, and what the role of the different actors responsible for achieving this objective is. In line with the terms of reference, the study has made use of available data from public authorities and research. Around 100 experts working on homelessness were interviewed or took part in discussions on the theme of the report.

The report describes the current state of homelessness and homelessness work in Finland, the starting points, and conditions for ending homelessness. It also presents concrete measures and recommendations for ending homelessness. The full version of the report in English has been translated and published by Y-Säätiö.¹

¹ <https://ysaatio.fi/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Kotiin-Kaakinen-2023-en-final.pdf>

Trends in Homelessness

In the light of the statistics, homelessness in Finland has decreased continuously and significantly in recent years. Over the period 2008-2022, the number of people experiencing homelessness living alone has decreased by 54% and the number of long-term people experiencing homelessness by 68%, according to statistics from the Housing Finance and Development Centre ARA.² The decrease in homelessness in Helsinki is the main explanation for the trend in the country. The number of both people experiencing homelessness living alone and people experiencing homelessness in the long-term in Helsinki has decreased by 72%.

So, what explains the fall in homelessness? A structural factor is the supply of rental housing and the changes in supply and rent levels across localities. The long-term work supported by national programmes to develop homelessness services and the expansion of preventive activities, particularly housing advice, also explain the decline. The importance of the establishment of individual Housing First units and the acquisition of supportive housing can also be seen in the development of localities.

For the purposes of this report, the situation in November 2022 is provisional. It shows that there were 3686 people experiencing homelessness living alone and 1133 people experiencing homelessness in the long-term in Finland. The number of people experiencing homelessness decreased from 2021, with 262 fewer unhoused people living alone and 185 fewer long-term unhoused people than in the previous year. The number of families and couples experiencing homelessness was 155, which is 10 fewer than in 2021.

More critical to the objective of ending homelessness than the quantitative change is the change in the nature and target group of homelessness. When The Finnish National Programme to reduce long-term homelessness was launched in 2008, its key target group was people experiencing homelessness with multiple problems living outside and in hostels, whose main substance use was alcohol. The image of homelessness has changed rapidly in recent years. Now the hard core of homelessness is made up of severely marginalised people with multiple problems who are on the margins of or outside the service system. The average age of people experiencing homelessness has also fallen. The service system has not been able to respond adequately to this change in homelessness.

² Every year, ARA collects cross-sectional data from municipalities on the situation on 15 November. The data is mainly collected from the registers of the social welfare and housing service registers and from the registers of applicants for housing of the municipal rental housing companies. The definition of homelessness in Finland is based on the broad pan-European Ethos light classification.

What Does it Mean to End Homelessness?

In the report, the starting point for the proposed measures is the following definition of ending homelessness:

Homelessness has been effectively eliminated in Finland, with the annual cross-sectional statistics showing fewer than 300 homeless people. Of this number, no more than 100 in temporary accommodation (lasting less than one month) and no more than 200 temporarily living with relatives or acquaintances due to forced circumstances (lack of own accommodation).

By definition, there are no longer people living outside in Finland in this situation and no one is discharged from institutions as homeless. In addition, the period of residence in any temporary housing solution, including existing emergency shelters, emergency accommodation, dormitories or on the basis of fixed-term tenancy agreements, is limited to one month, after which a permanent housing solution must be provided (p.7).

For critical target groups, such as those living outside and those discharged from institutions, real-time, individual-level monitoring is needed; cross-sectional statistics are not sufficient. Therefore, in the future, once homelessness is eradicated, the most important issue to monitor will be real-time, monthly reporting of data on persons in temporary housing solutions (less than 1 month).

Changes in the operating environment

Launched in 2008, the PAAVO programme aimed at a systemic change in homelessness policy and eradication of homelessness to a service system based on a permanent housing solution following Housing First principles instead of a step-by-step model based on temporary housing solutions. Although systemic change is still underway and elements of the staircase model are visible locally, a similar need for systemic change is not apparent. The 'Housing First' model as such needs updating, and this work has already been done with the 'Housing First 2.0' model.

Tackling homelessness is part of a policy to combat exclusion and reduce inequalities. The central premise of this report is to understand homelessness as a finite, societal problem with a permanent solution. The aim is therefore not to build a permanent, specialised service system for homelessness. Instead, a strong structural homelessness prevention package is needed.

The elimination target cannot be achieved by simply increasing the same, i.e., by resource increases alone. So, what are the drivers of change on which to build the necessary transformation in a situation where the welfare reform has rearranged the key 'building blocks' of the homelessness eradication ecosystem?

The eradication of homelessness is a social objective, the ownership of which is unequivocally in the hands of the public authorities. This ownership is already defined in legislation, but it has become particularly pronounced with the funding of wellbeing services counties³ established in Finland at the beginning of 2023.

Ownership is also a crucial steering power for achieving the objective. Government ownership and control in this project can take the form of both legislation and resource management. In the context of previous reduction programmes, the emphasis on governance has been strongly on resource management and the financial incentives that go with it. The only real exception is the new pilot legislation on housing advice, but even this includes financial support as an important element.

State control of the wellbeing services counties is based on existing legislation and resource management. From the perspective of the objective of ending homelessness, resource management through financial incentives remains the preferred and most effective option. Financial incentives need to be sufficiently targeted and impact-based rather than performance-based. The need for more binding legislation should only be assessed if the measures currently proposed prove insufficient.

Wellbeing services counties are becoming a key element in the fight against homelessness. Homelessness can only be eliminated through permanent housing solutions, and housing remains of course the responsibility of municipalities. Yes, but people experiencing homelessness, especially those most in need of support and services, are totally dependent on the services provided by wellbeing services counties.

Housing First 2.0 as a basis for work to end homelessness

The Finnish Housing First model can be briefly summarised as follows:

The right to housing and the necessary support is part of a decent life and a fundamental right. The resolution of social and health problems is not a precondition for the provision of housing, but housing is a condition that also enables the resolution of other problems of a person experiencing homelessness. The starting point is, therefore, the allocation of housing to a person experiencing homelessness based on an own tenancy agreement of indefinite duration, without any preconditions. Housing should always be accompanied by the necessary support. The model emphasises the individual's right to self-determination and voluntariness; no change of lifestyle is required, but the approach is rehabilitative and support services must be actively offered to those who need them. However, housing and services are separated and living in the same dwelling can continue even if the need for support ends.

³ <https://stm.fi/en/wellbeing-services-counties>

In the Finnish model, the Housing First principle has been seen as a model to be developed and evolved, which must respond to changes in homelessness and the environment. To address the problems identified by experts and practitioners, the Housing First model was updated in Autumn 2019 as a result of a change laboratory facilitated by researchers at the University of Tampere and involving 30 experts.

The Housing First 2.0 model has identified the changing profile of homelessness, the need for more intensive support for clients and the need to better integrate social services into the work of the Housing First model. Of particular importance are all low-threshold services aimed at reaching and helping the most vulnerable and marginalised, as well as multi-professional outreach and mobile support.

The Nopsajalka⁴ model of mobile support is a perfect example of this new Housing First 2.0 philosophy and its practical implementation. It also shows how multiprofessional support can be mobilised in a cost-effective way. The Nopsajalka model was created in 2019 in a Change Laboratory at the University of Tampere, which involved representatives from the City of Tampere's social and health services, housing services, and major third sector service provider organisations, and also drew on the experiences of Liitu activities in Pori. The Nopsajalka model has been further developed in Jyväskylä in a project launched in Autumn 2020. Professor Annalisa Sannino's working group's modelling is based in particular on Jyväskylä's Nopsajalka experience.

Proposals for action and recommendations

The report proposes a new national programme to end homelessness in its current form by 2027 and to build an effective prevention entity. The programme includes the allocation of 3600 dwellings for people experiencing homelessness or people at risk of homelessness.

With targeted measures, the total number of people experiencing homelessness in 2027 will not exceed 300, of whom no more than 100 will be in temporary accommodation and no more than 200 will be temporarily staying with relatives and acquaintances while awaiting a permanent housing solution. The numbers refer to a real-time situation reported on a monthly basis. The programme aims not only to eradicate homelessness, but also to better integrate people experiencing homelessness into society through rehabilitation services and job opportunities.

⁴ <https://www.tuni.fi/en/news/nopsajalka-team-new-way-overcome-homelessness>

Building a service system that protects against homelessness

Ending up homeless is most often the result of a failure of the service system or the service system not reaching a person at risk of homelessness in time. A cross-sectoral prevention package will be built into the service system, including service coordination and an alert system to enable early identification of the risk of homelessness and the provision of assistance to prevent homelessness.

Funding for the programme comes from several sources

An additional €36 million in targeted funding for the implementation of the programme will be allocated to the wellbeing services counties for the programming period. Funding will be granted on the basis of applications and will be conditional on the wellbeing services counties, together with the municipalities in the area, having drawn up an implementation plan to eradicate homelessness. The amount of funding granted is linked to the commitment of the wellbeing services county and its municipalities to provide housing for the long-term homeless.

The funding may be used for outreach work and mobile support, as well as for support for permanent housing under the Housing First model, among other things. Funding can also be allocated to the recruitment of people with lived experience for the tasks described above, including housing support for released prisoners. Funding cannot be used for temporary accommodation.

Measures needed to end homelessness

Restrictions on temporary housing

During the programme period, temporary housing will not be increased, and its use will be limited to a maximum of one month. Temporary housing here refers to emergency shelter, emergency accommodation, crisis housing, temporary rental accommodation for the homeless, and 'evaluative housing'.

Existing emergency shelters will be replaced by emergency housing services

The use of dormitories with 'shared air' will be discontinued and replaced by facilities that provide adequate privacy. The shelter is not intended for long-term occupation. In the emergency housing service, the client's situation will be assessed and a housing solution will be found that meets the client's needs.

The rapid re-housing model will be introduced nationwide

The model of rapid re-housing has been tested in Espoo for people experiencing homelessness who can be referred to scattered housing. The model is based on a contractual cooperation with landlords, where the housing provided as quickly as possible is accompanied by a fixed-term (12 months) support to secure housing. Limiting temporary housing to one month requires mainstreaming this model and extending it to all permanent housing solutions.

Introducing and consolidating multi-professional mobile support in wellbeing services counties

As a joint process between the participating wellbeing services counties and the Housing First Development Network, a comprehensive description of alternative approaches to multi-professional mobile support will be produced. The development work is based on the Nopsajalka modelling by Professor Sannino's research group. The regionally applicable models of multidisciplinary mobile support created as a result of the development work will be established in the wellbeing services counties.

Permanent housing solutions

For permanent housing solutions, the starting point is primarily the use of the existing housing and property stock, where necessary through renovation. The use of the existing housing stock is justified both by the timetable for implementing the programme and by climate considerations. Any new construction should be primarily in the form of wood construction or energy-efficient low-carbon projects.

The individual dwellings required will be sourced from the following sources:

- ARA dwellings of municipal rental housing corporations and non-profit rental housing corporations,
- Dwellings of private institutional rental housing owners (direct and sub-rentals), or
- Dwellings of private landlords (direct and intermediate rentals).

For supported housing units under the Housing First principle, there is an additional need for groups in need of intensive support, such as people experiencing homelessness who use drugs or elderly people experiencing homelessness in the long-term. In the case of stand-alone units, the maximum number of dwellings will be 30. The preferred option is to implement the units as integrated units with other housing or as hybrid projects.

Housing advice

The pilot legislation on housing advice came into force at the beginning of 2023. The pilot legislation extended housing advice to all forms of housing. The State subsidy for housing advice, granted by ARA, is now channelled to municipalities, which can also obtain the service from other providers.

Housing advice is also provided by NGOs and foundations as a STEA-funded activity. Housing advice is closely linked to social work, so it is also conceivable that the wellbeing services counties provides housing advice to the city. During the programming period, legislation will be prepared to safeguard the current multi-channel funding and delivery of housing advice.

Recommendations for regional action plans and further work

The eradication of homelessness is entirely dependent on the work of the wellbeing services counties in partnership with the municipalities. More detailed plans must therefore be drawn up in the regions where there is the best expertise on regional needs. The national programme will create the conditions for the implementation of regional plans.

Ending homelessness requires the provision of effective housing and support solutions for critical client groups such as people experiencing homelessness using drugs, criminal justice clients, young people, and people using multiple services.

Discussion

Now, writing this in October 2023, the Government has published its proposal for the Budget of 2024. As expected, it includes several direct cuts in welfare benefits, including housing benefits. According to the estimates of the Ministry of Social Welfare and Health, the total impact of different cuts will hit young people in the age group 18-24 years and single parent families the hardest. Welfare cuts will also increase child poverty.

As the present government has the majority in the Parliament, most of the proposals for cuts will be implemented, although some of the proposals are likely to face constitutional problems in the Parliament. The Finnish economy is currently entering recession, which, according to economists, will probably be short-lived. However, the rapidly worsening crisis in the construction industry has already forced the Government to amend their planned measures to decrease affordable social housing production.

In the budget for 2024, there is an unspecified amount of funds reserved for ending long-term homelessness. The grants reserved in the State budget will be allocated by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. To which organisations and to which purpose these grants will be allocated is not clear yet. At the same time, the welfare agencies are struggling with serious underfunding from the State and a worsening lack of professionally qualified staff in many services. It remains to be seen if these grants will have the intended incentivising impact in welfare counties for necessary measures to end homelessness.

The next four years will be a real test for the sustainability of the systemic change in Finnish homelessness services. Although the institutional support seems to be waning, there are also some more hopeful signs. There has been very active development work going on in several cities and through the Housing First Development Network. A growing number of highly motivated and committed professionals on

the grassroots level are creating more bottom-up pressure in political decision making. The example of Nopsajalka mobile support can also trigger new activities in the welfare counties as they are desperately seeking new cost-effective models to rearrange their services.

With the present knowledge, it can be predicted that homelessness in Finland will still decrease for a couple of years. This happens mainly because the City of Helsinki is committed to implement their own plan to end long-term homelessness by 2025, and they are making clear progress with their targets. But after that, if all the measures the Government is planning are implemented, there is a highly elevated risk for the increase of homelessness, including family homelessness.

Housing First as a System Approach: What Does This Require from the Netherlands?

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Introduction

According to conservative figures, almost 40 000 people in the Netherlands are homeless. In december 2022, the Dutch Government launched a new National Actionplan on Homelessness based on Housing First principles¹. Housing First is an evidence-based approach to successfully support people experiencing homelessness by providing stable and independent housing and intensive personalised case management. The innovative policy taken by the Government focuses on citizens who are experiencing homelessness, or who are at risk of this due to eviction or leaving institutions and is a response to the sharp increase in homelessness in the past 10 years. The current policy programme is based on the success of local Housing First programmes, which until now have not had the national attention from the Government they required.

There are currently 47 Housing First practices in 93 municipalities. This represents a cautious starting point for national coverage, which is critical for the national roll out of the programme. People experiencing homelessness in the Netherlands currently have an estimated 10% chance of access to Housing First. The current system is relatively expensive and ineffective (Boesveldt, 2015; van Everdingen et al., 2021) and lacks a coordinated government-led approach. Much of the help provided for people experiencing homelessness concerns temporary options, with no prospect of a sustainable solution.

Based on the eight core principles of Housing First, this paper describes the status quo and the necessary development for a successful system approach to Housing First in the Netherlands.

¹ <https://www.iedereenondereendak.nl/documenten/publicaties/2023/4/13/housing-first-engels>

1. Housing as a Human Right

This highlights two points: the lack of available, affordable housing and the unconditional access to housing. The Dutch Government undertake a 'best efforts obligation' to achieve sufficient housing, but no legal right to a home can be claimed. Yet, unlike other European countries, the Netherlands has a large social housing stock. However, this is shrinking, and private rent is unachievable for many. Municipalities are responsible for planning sufficient social housing (a current bill sets a target of 30% per municipality), but they provide insufficient social housing stock under pressure from various interests.

The current prioritised housing allocation to people experiencing homelessness demonstrates that they must 'compete' with other vulnerable, prioritised home seekers, such as refugees. Also, the homes required for outflow from institutions or shelters are not established as standard in local performance agreements between the municipality and housing associations.

For a successful system approach, public housing must become a national priority, and municipalities must provide sufficient social housing stock. The key is to steer toward the local realisation of nationally formulated goals.² Well-substantiated and enforceable performance agreements with people experiencing homelessness identified as a priority group are also conditional for this system approach. Varied housing offers should be included, aimed at permanent residence. Finally, an effective system of early prevention and appropriate support must be available as a general facility in every municipality. Part of this is to ensure that eviction only takes place with suitable resettlement and does not lead to homelessness.

In a Housing First system approach, there are no additional requirements for individuals to obtain a home. They do not need prove that they are 'ready' for housing. This unconditional access means a significant cultural change for the sector. Although there is already broader support for the idea, the tendency to assess who could live independently in the neighbourhood and thus gain access to housing remains ubiquitous.

² In the Netherlands, it is the task of the Senate and House of Representatives to assess whether laws are in conflict with the Constitution. Unlike many other European countries, the Netherlands does not have a constitutional court. Ministers use the statement that housing is a fundamental right, but do not make this explicit in government policy.

2. Choice and Control for Service Users

A proven effective principle of Housing First is autonomy as the starting point for recovery. The right to self-determination is central, and participants are asked how they want to lead their lives, what sort of housing they would like and what support they need. Housing First respects opinions and choices and works in a strength-oriented way so that a participant can build their life the way they want. In individual support, this means that people do not have decisions made for them. People who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless are citizens with rights, and they must be enabled to participate autonomously in the decision-making processes that affect them. The support worker no longer solves a participant's problems but supports them in their own solution.

Own choice and direction are in line with terminology in the Social Support Act and the Youth Act and are often applied to target groups such as young people, mental health clients, or older adults. While older people continue to live independently for longer, this is still too much of a wait in the homelessness sector.³ By applying the Housing First vision in this sector, there is also an important change for 'care as usual', which requires listening carefully, assuming trust, giving up the attitude of an expert, and at the same time not providing 'lazy' or passive support. Education around the proven and effective Housing First principles are prerequisites for an effective system approach.

3. Separation of Housing and Treatment

The prioritised allocation of social housing in the Netherlands often applies additional conditions regarding mandatory support or intermediate letting.⁴ As a result, there is no separation of housing and support. This established practice has not changed with the arrival of Housing First and broader outpatient policy has only intensified the practice.⁵

This intensification is explained by the lack of long-term, flexible, and appropriate support for these tenants. Housing associations indicate that they 'feel like crying in the desert' on weekends and evenings (Boesveldt, 2020). Which then gives rise to stigmatising conditions such as 'no addicts' and budget management require-

³ While at the end of the last century the elderly continued to live independently for longer, temporary shelter is being realised in vacant retirement homes.

⁴ Intermediate rental: the care provider initially rents the home and then rents it out to the participant. Good tenancy leads to conversion of the lease in the name of the participant. In this variant, rent and housing assistance are linked in a contract and the tenant loses rent protection.

⁵ Parallel to the arrival of Housing First, a broader outpatient policy has been implemented from 2015 onward. This has led to an increase in and variation in additional terms and conditions and leases.

ments. Stigmatising ideas about people experiencing homelessness among policymakers, social workers, housing associations, and administrators lead to and are fed by neighbourhoods that do not welcome the formerly homeless and neighbours who wrongly assume problems will be caused by 'that Housing First tenant'.

There are also opportunities. For example, in his recent policy intentions, the State Secretary refers to "a permanent home of his own, with a rental contract in his own name and appropriate tailor-made (outpatient) support" (Letter to Parliament, 2022). This is in line with the vision of care providers who want to normalise living. The current landlord structure saddles healthcare organisations with an unusual, substantive, and administrative burden, and a significant financial risk. For example, the dual role of landlord and support worker can be harmful to the relationship of trust with the participant, as the accompanying body can also evict the tenant.

Finally, the lack of continuous and appropriate support for tenants experienced by housing associations is related to municipal financing of local care providers. Improving this can potentially increase the willingness of housing associations to move away from the link between housing and support. Separating housing and care could lead to even more effective outcomes in the Netherlands.

4. Recovery Orientation

In addition to theoretical evidence (Devotta et al., 2016; Fortuna et al., 2022; Voronka, 2019), experts by experience are living proof that recovery is possible. An expert by experience helps people to continuously detect unconscious assumptions about recovery and raises awareness of self-stigmatisation and stigmatisation. The use of lived experience in the form of peer workers is an important part of the template and designs support based on principles of recovery, equality, and emancipation. When working with people who have experienced long periods of homelessness, peer workers can often relate best to the person's situation and gain deep trust. Connecting with people experiencing homelessness is vital. Teams are best able to do this when they are strengthened by different knowledge and experiences. However, this does not happen enough.

Dutch research and practice does not focus enough attention on lived experience. A strong boost is needed. In their forthcoming research, Jurgens and Boesveldt (2022) show that mental health clients only come into contact with peer workers at the end of their treatment process. The same study shows how a large proportion of mental health clients want to use their own experience to benefit others. This demonstrates the huge potential to train and deploy experts by experience. Other research (Boesveldt et al, 2019a) reveals a number of important barriers. Care organisations find it difficult to fill vacancies for peer workers, to position them in

teams, and ultimately retain them. Recovery academies have made a start to professionalise and normalise using experts by experience, and the future vision of mental health care is also paying attention to this.

5. Harm Reduction

Harm reduction is a relatively well-known concept for Housing First teams in the Netherlands. In harm reduction, the emphasis is on limiting the negative effects of substance use (and untreated psychiatric symptoms), without reducing the use itself. However, research among Housing First participants with problematic substance use and addiction care providers shows that addiction treatment in the Netherlands places a one-sided emphasis on the Minnesota 12-step plan and abstinence. The Minnesota approach does not accept substance use as self-medication.

One example is Ralph who is recovering from a crack addiction. He explains how smoking a couple of joints a day gives him the means to cope with a more devastating addiction. He says he would rather use weed than what he sees as legalised drugs from psychiatrists such as methadone, and he wants to work on his recovery at home. Ralph has been living in an independent home for over two years through Housing First. His support workers from Housing First and the addiction treatment provider visits at least five times a week. He is very satisfied with the security that the house offers him, recognising that the most vulnerable moment in addiction occurs when you return to your usual environment.

Sharing knowledge of how Housing First uses harm reduction is important for municipalities, housing associations, and care providers. General knowledge about this is also vital for a wider audience, especially to combat stigma.

6. Active Engagement without Coercion

While mainstream care is about managing, protecting, and mitigating risks, Housing First shifts the focus to hope, trust, and positivity. The focus is on what is possible and taking risks is part of this. Housing First requires the skills of support workers to use a positive approach to encourage people to accept the help they need. The contact is characterised by warmth, respect, and compassion. Hierarchical power relations are therefore avoided. A Housing First support worker is honest and assertive but never coercive.

Van Loenen et al. (2018) show how this attitude of support workers makes a big difference for Housing First participants compared to previous help. They speak about warm, loving contact, trust, and acceptance. They mention more freedom and less control, while at the same time they experience more involvement. The relationship between support worker and participant is the determining factor for the outcome of a positive trajectory.

We argue that the Housing First principles must be included in further education college and university curriculums explicitly and in relation to this target group. In addition, national open training days should be available for everyone who works with people experiencing homelessness.

7. Person-centred Planning

A person-centred trajectory is about organising support around an individual, according to their needs, and offering what they need to successfully live independently. The basic principle is that the support constantly adapts to the person and not the other way round. This means that people decide for themselves what support they want to receive, when, and from whom. While there have been good examples of this in the past⁶, an integral, person-oriented, suitable offer in various life domains is difficult to achieve. This is due to legislation and regulation barriers, a decentralised system, compartmentalisation, waiting lists, and the role perception of the support providers.

Budgets for care and support should be available for care organisations to use in a sustainable, adequate, and non-bureaucratic manner. This will allow care providers to realise person-centred planning and guarantee quality. A desirable system of 'high trust, high penalty' offers freedom from regulation and puts trust in professionals. It applies clear quality standards which are understood and adhered to by the healthcare organisation and its financier.

Research by the University of Amsterdam (not yet published) shows that when a municipality provides this free scope for regulation and budget for healthcare organisations, there are still institutional barriers within the organisation. This is

⁶ At the beginning of the millennium, there were people experiencing homelessness in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht who visibly stayed in public spaces in poor conditions for a long time and caused a nuisance. To solve this dire situation, the Central Government and the four major cities launched the *Plan of Approach for Social Relief in 2006*. Eight years of the Plan of Approach has shown that the most vulnerable citizens benefit most from individualised care and support that covers all areas of life. Important success factors for the Plan of Approach were a strong financial impulse, the urgency of the policy problem, and the willingness of various parties to cooperate (Tuytman and Planije, 2014).

partly due to a lack of accountability within the Dutch administrative culture⁷, as well as the absence of a Dutch Housing First quality standard. Monitoring and demonstrating the concept can increase the quality of the Housing First service for the funder and end user. The results and tools from the study by the National Institute for Mental Health and Addiction⁸ could be a starting point to establish a quality standard with relevant parties to embed quality, accountability, and the development of Housing First.

8. Flexible Support for as Long as is Required

A commitment to long-term involvement and flexibility ensures a sustainable effect in Housing First processes. Some participants may need support for a longer period to successfully live independently. This requires intensive support provision. In other cases, the intensity can vary with minimal or even no support needed.

Longitudinal research into repeated homelessness in collaboration with people formerly experiencing homelessness (Boesveldt et al, 2019b; 2020c) shows that when people did not wish to receive support after rehousing, this often led to vulnerable situations and that it is more difficult to seek help later. Moving is a complex process, and it can often be difficult to consider what help will be needed in the future. This study shows that it is important for individuals to settle in the new situation, and then agree on help with someone who they already have a good working relationship with. This support gives people the confidence to know there will always be somewhere for them to go, contributing to their recovery and stability.

The need for continuity and flexible support requires specific financing that continues for as long as is necessary, and which makes it possible to respond adequately daily. Housing First is so effective because support workers are easily available and are there when it counts.

It is therefore important that the intensity and duration of that support is not under constant pressure. Many municipalities are under financial pressure, leading to a focus on the shortest possible and most demand-oriented form of support in neighbourhood teams. This is a 'penny wise-pound foolish' response given the high risk of relapse into homelessness.

⁷ In the Netherlands, society and markets have developed the capacity to organise themselves and evade any attempt by the Government to control them (Pierre and Peters, 2000).

⁸ Housing First research model fidelity and effects – Trimbos Institute.
<https://www.trimbos.nl/kennis/zorg-en-participatie/maatschappelijke-opvang/housing-first-onderzoek-modelgetrouwheid-en-effecten/>

Conclusion

A Housing First system approach is possible in the Netherlands. This paper discusses the status quo and the challenge to change based on the eight core principles. To deal with the challenges people experiencing homelessness are facing, we need effective implementation and a national roll-out of the Housing First principles. This requires active efforts from the national and local government in the following areas:

1. To take notice of Housing First;
2. To take responsibility, ask for agreements and objectives, and provide preconditions and legal protection;
3. Undertake activities to combat prejudice and negative image; and
4. Cooperation and sharing available knowledge in education and the wider community.

Knowledge building, quality promotion, and cooperation are indispensable for a successful long-term strategy, at a regional, national, and executive level. This concerns interdepartmental cooperation, implementation power at municipalities, housing associations, and care providers; the equipment for applying the Housing First principles in daily practice. Housing First Netherlands contributes to this through training and education. It runs a Housing First Course at Hogeschool Utrecht, gives advice and support for local Housing First practice, undertakes research, and provides a network for learning and knowledge sharing. The University of Amsterdam Academy focuses on Housing First as part of their Executive Programme on policy of Social Relief and Protected Housing.

Achieving sufficient, appropriate, and affordable housing is an enormous and challenging task, but a precondition for the Housing First system approach. Effectively preventing and ending homelessness requires the explicit naming of rights, the establishment of legal protection systems and clear targets to hold politicians to account, and the development of low-threshold mechanisms for housing eligibility for people experiencing homelessness. People experiencing homelessness often face a stigma that makes it hard for them to integrate into their local community. We believe this stigma is one of the main inhibiting factors for solving homelessness in our country. There is a one-sided approach viewing the individual as failing when homelessness is actually about policy failure. This has far-reaching consequences and there is work to be done to change perceptions and public opinion. Housing First as a system approach is the way for the Netherlands to become a country free from homelessness, where everyone has a place to call home, and the support they need to keep it.

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A Systems Perspective for Ending Homelessness in Italy: A Needed Change in Policy Approach and Practice

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Introduction

During the last decade a growing interest on the analysis, policy intervention, and service provision on homelessness in Italy can be observed. The interest is also due to an increasing number of people 'on the streets', especially in large Italian cities. Unfortunately, however, the last official statistics still date back to 2014. The National Statistical Institute published the first national survey on people experiencing homelessness in 2011, and the aforementioned follow up in 2014, counting a total of 50 724 people experiencing homelessness (ISTAT, 2012; 2015). The National Federation on service for Homeless People (fio.PSD)¹ has gained more international visibility and a relevant role in the national public debate. It began the first, experimental Housing First approach in 2014.² Currently, this approach is known all over Italy and has become part of the national framework of policy intervention on homelessness.

It is nonetheless still difficult to provide a general overview of homelessness services actually available in Italy as local municipalities are responsible for planning and delivering services and the traditional approach, providing only emergency and/or temporary accommodation, still prevails (Pleace, 2018; Baptista and Marlier, 2019, p.83). At present, services and interventions aimed at tackling severe marginality are mostly provided by private voluntary organisations and vary greatly on the national territory, although housing led programmes and high intensity support services are increasingly being discussed and adopted in different cities and

¹ FIO.psd is composed of 146 members and involves organisations and operators working on homelessness in 17 out of 20 regions. See <https://www.fiopsd.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Infografiche-fio.PSD-2022.pdf>.

² <https://www.fiopsd.org/hfi-la-community-italiana-housing-first>.

regions. At the same time, there is a growing debate on the lack of affordable and public housing because of a consistent decline of the public housing system in the country in the last 20 years (Tosi, 2016; Filandri, 2015; Mugnano, 2017; Jessoula et al., 2019; Natili *et al.* 2021; Puccini, 2022). Given the increasing level of attention that homelessness has received in Italy, as well as the pressing debate on housing exclusion, this paper explores the conditions already at stake for a systemic change toward 'ending' homelessness.

Homelessness and Housing First Policy in Italy

In Italy, homelessness has received a higher level of attention in political debate and public policy over the last decades, and in recent times, more academic publications have been focused on this specific condition (Meo, 2000; Barnao, 2004; Consoli and Meo, 2020; Natili et al., 2021). Since the first studies on homelessness in Italy (Negri, 1990; Guidicini, 1991; Pellegrino and Verzieri, 1991), different definitions circulate the phenomenon connecting it to severe marginalisation and extreme poverty, but currently in Italy, it is closely identified with people living on the street, and the last available official statistics reinforced this definition, only referring to the first two concepts of the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS) classification, and specifically to Rooflessness and Houselessness (Pleace, 2016; Edgar, 2009).

As a matter of fact, the last national counting was based on data collected through a point in time survey in 158 big and medium-sized Italian cities. This count was done from 21 November to 21 December 2014 and recorded people using a night shelter or a soup kitchen in one of 768 homeless services available in the national territory. Despite the limits of the survey, the final count of 50 724 people experiencing homelessness in Italy is still the last official one, and it has been incorporated in the *National Guidelines for tackling severe adult marginality* adopted by the State-Regions conference from the Italian Government in 2015 (Ministry of Labor and Social Policies, 2015). The adoption of the Guidelines for tackling severe adult marginality represents the official implementation of the Housing First approach in Italy.

In the fragmented provision of welfare due to a lack of national policies and funds directed toward regulating services for people experiencing homelessness and to a missing political will to define and implement basic level of welfare to be granted nationwide, the attempt to define a policy and some common directions is highly

valuable.³ By giving priority to the “right to housing” over any other welfare or therapeutic interventions, this approach is innovative compared to the existing systems of provision of social and health services for people experiencing homelessness in Italy (Cortese and Zenarolla, 2016; Baptista and Marlier, 2019, p.58).

A crucial role for this result has been played by the National Federation of Organization of Services for Homeless People (fio.PSD⁴) which, since 2014, has launched experimental initiatives for the implementation of Housing First and played a fundamental role in supporting Housing First pilot programmes in many regions. The first pilot period, between 2014 and 2016, involved 35 projects in 10 regions and was implemented without national funding. It produced interesting results for the people entering the programme and also on the national debate offering evidence of the people’s well-being and experimental methods for monitoring Housing First and increasing the debate towards Housing First policies (Molinari and Zenarolla, 2018). Since then, a second wave was implemented and monitored, from 2017-2019, and the Italian community on housing first was institutionalised within the National Federation.⁵ Following the approval of the National Guidelines, a funding line (Public notice 4/2016) was financed through EU resources and was launched from 2016-2019. This included the aim to support homelessness services and integrate local policies. A first share of EU funding, 25 million euro, was allocated in 2016 and continued in the following year with the goal of tackling homelessness and promoting local initiatives by regional and local authorities (Prandini and Gaugi, 2021).

In the same period, Italy approved the Law Decree 147/2017 and finally introduced a national measure against poverty. It was first named *Reddito di Inserimento* (REI), but after one year was changed by the new government into *Citizenship’s Income* (RdC). Although the name suggests a universal, unconditional basic income, the Citizenship Income is actually a selective, means-tested measure, targeted at poor households, and is conditional on participation in job-search activities. Constraints of the measure have especially penalised foreigners and people experiencing homelessness, although thanks to the advocacy role of fio.PSD, the Government has recognised civil registration of individual residence as a subjective right for all people on the territory. The measure has undoubtedly played a homelessness prevention function in preventing people from losing their housing by providing an

³ The guidelines assume the house as the starting point for any social inclusion path for the homeless and recommend that the transition from the street to the apartment should be combined with local social services supporting people as long as necessary to achieve a state of well-being and social integration (Ministry on Labor and Social Policies, 2015).

⁴ www.fiopsd.org.

⁵ <https://www.fiopsd.org/hfi-la-community-italiana-housing-first>.

additional €280 to top up the monthly benefit for households who rent their accommodation (a €150 top-up is paid to beneficiaries who pay a mortgage) and this is independent of household size.

Lastly, the *Recovery and Resilience National Plan* is actually supporting interventions aimed at contrasting serious adult marginality and homelessness⁶ by proposing the implementation of temporary housing and access to low-threshold multifunctional centres aimed at building the 'infrastructure' of local services, especially in metropolitan areas.

In this general scenario, along which the Housing First approach and its principles have progressively taken part of the Italian public policy on homelessness, where the fio.PSD is playing a strategic role in supporting organisations, social workers, and local municipalities in experimenting housing first, there still persist some contrasting evidence of increasing numbers of people experiencing homelessness, and after COVID-19, the number of people experiencing housing distress has rapidly increased (Caritas, 2020).

First of all, notwithstanding the relevance of the National Guidelines for the national debate about extreme poverty and homelessness in Italy, the document could be interpreted as a list of principles as it has not provided adequate monitoring and evaluation. The implementation phase is delegated to regional and local authorities and therefore highly differentiated. The current pattern of services provision for people experiencing homelessness in Italy still reflects a predominantly staircase approach, even though an interesting shift is witnessed and especially supported by experimental Housing First programmes (Padgett *et al.* 2018; Pleace, 2019).

Secondly, it is nowadays well known that, in order to evaluate the responses offered to homelessness, a structured collection of data is necessary, including the 'hidden homeless', families, youth, women, migrants, and people leaving in insecure accommodation or inadequate housing. Homelessness measurements and counting are always widely debated, but are undoubtedly used for focusing public interventions on the phenomenon and supporting political decisions. Italy is still

⁶ Italy is the first beneficiary, in absolute value, of the two main instruments of the Next Generation EU: the Facility for Recovery and Resilience (RRF) and the Recovery Assistance Package for the Cohesion and Territories of Europe (REACT-EU). In relation to Housing First, 177.5 million Euros will have been provided in three years for implementing bespoke projects aimed at reaching a higher level of individual autonomy and empowerment of people experiencing homelessness while 275.5 million Euros have been devoted to Mailing Station to provide multifunctional centers offering low threshold services to people in need.

missing a regular and national counting and needs to implement a reliable data collection in order to re-construct and understand the dynamics on homelessness (O'Sullivan, 2020).⁷

Thirdly, what still seems to be lacking in Italy is the possibility to prevent 'falling into' homelessness. There is spread evidence that flexible services, integrated with homelessness, health, and housing, work best and should be the core of all homelessness strategies and policies (Pleace, 2018; Fitzpatrick, 2021). A very limited provision of preventative services are available now in Italy, and even if there are brilliant local experiences, there is no national strategy or funds allocated to preventative homeless policies.

Finally, connected to all previous points, in order to be effective, whatever strategic policy on homelessness should also include an intervention on housing. At present, Italy is witnessing an extremely low percentage of expenditure on housing per inhabitant, and one of the lowest stocks of social and public housing in Europe (see: Jessoula et al., 2019).

Challenges and Opportunities for a Systemic Change

The implementation of Housing First programmes has raised the attention on homelessness, and the increasing number of people on the street is pushing the debate about homelessness in Italy further. In a converging direction, there is also a growing understanding of housing distress and social housing spread all over Italy (Jessoula et al., 2019; Natili *et al*, 2021; Puccini, 2022). In 2022, a National alliance of active citizens' organisations and researchers published a position paper on Housing policies and social housing in Italy focusing on the missing 'right to housing', the lack of affordable and public housing, and a call for opening a public debate through the foundation of a National Observatory on housing policies and Urban regeneration.⁸

As a matter of fact, housing policies have never been considered as a pillar of the welfare system in Italy and progressively defined rather residual in the general structure of the public definition of well-being (Mugnano, 2017). After the post-war reconstructive phase of the 1950s (INA-casa), and some national plans in the 1970s

⁷ As underlined, point-in-time surveys are widely used to estimate the extent and characteristics of those experiencing homelessness are helpful for monitoring trends and identifying service needs but, as well described in the book, minimize the scale of homelessness.

⁸ The forum on inequality and diversity <https://www.forumdisuguaglianzediversita.org/our-project/> founded in 2022. The Osservatorio on Social housing and urban regeneration: <https://www.forumdisuguaglianzediversita.org/nasce-losservatorio-nazionale-sulle-politiche-abitative-e-di-rigenerazione-urbana-appuntamento-a-roma-il-14-luglio/>.

(GESCAL), the main aim of public housing policy has been to support the individual and family property. The 'right to housing' has been classified as a right to 'own a house' through loans and fiscal incentives (Filandri, 2015; Baldini and Pavolini, 2022). In recent years, to further mislead the effective understanding of the problem, the term 'social housing' has been improperly used in the public debate, basically financing access to housing only for specific groups of the impoverished Italian middle class (Bricocoli and Cucca, 2016). As a direct consequence of this approach to housing and given the territorial access of welfare rights, an increasing number of people are pushed into the streets, some are hosted by relatives or friends, others are already hosted by shelters or dormitories and others illegally occupy public and private houses.

In this general scenario, the Housing First Europe Hub has recently commissioned Demos Helsinki to undertake a study on the meaning of 'systemic change' in the context of homelessness in order to support a wider change to ensure ending homelessness as a part of a systemic solution (Demos Helsinki, 2022).

According to the aforementioned characteristics of the country and focusing on a possible systemic change, Italy can firstly be considered a similar case to Spain because of its Mediterranean welfare regime traits and its local and national governance that can be assimilated to a 'fragmented' one. Similar to Spain, Italy has also experienced a Housing First rise, both in terms of pilot projects and being recognised as a policy pillar in the recent policy guidelines and programmes. Finally, on the same line of analysis "the overall lack of capabilities to ensure coordination at the regional level severely hindered systemic change..." (Demos Helsinki, 2022, p.14). While the path toward systemic change is uncertain, the process of cultural change is already on the move and the opportunity provided by the EU funds can provide the right condition for the possibility to expand Housing First to a point of no return.

By focusing on the three keys identified to leverage change: Directionality, Capacity Building, and Learning, we can try to represent the actual Italian situation as follows:

Learning – Identification of the key bottlenecks that prevent continuous improvement on Housing First implementation. The fio.PSD has played a strategic role in promoting the Housing First approach and its inclusion in the National Guidelines and has also granted a national bottom-up network for sharing experiences and knowledge on its principles, evaluation's models, and monitoring. At present there is also a growing convergence in the political debate that a strong and persistent bottleneck is the linkage between housing exclusion, social housing, and homelessness. Policies at stake are not openly facing this challenge which requires long-term investment and clear political will toward the change.

Directionality – Establishment of a resource flow to support Housing First scale-up and nurturing the long-term political and societal commitments needed to align stakeholders' incentives toward system change. Even if Housing First is part of the National Guidelines and the direction of change is supported in the Recovery and Resilience Plan, homeless services in Italy are still based on an emergency and temporary approach, preventative policies are rare, and often the third sector and private organisations are the main actors in providing the (low-threshold) services. Still, a basic national level of local services is missing, determining a vast heterogeneity of the services provided according to local human and financial resources.

Capacity Building – Long-term commitment to align incentives toward systemic change have prevented establishing networks providing the human and financial resources needed to sustain a Housing First scaling-up. In Italy, there is a growing debate around the need for a structural change, but still the local and national governments do not seem to be engaged enough with a clear commitment toward Housing First and with a (different) investment in social housing.

It is now clear that a successful transition to a housing-led approach requires a change in culture and thinking, and in Italy the Fio.PSD has played a real strategic role in how people work. “The national federation was responsible for promoting initial bottom-up Housing First pilot projects in cities, eventually gaining the support of the central government which promoted the use of EU structural fund for housing first” (Jones et al., 2022, p.9). At the same time, “training has been an effective tool to raise awareness about housing first to a wide range of actors, including frontline workers and local authorities and has helped to drive a bottom -up approach to implement housing first across the country, supported by national policy and EU funding (Jones et al., 2022, p.11). Finally, “in Italian small cities, from 2016, EU funds brought financial incentive to many and promotes housing solutions and housing first in place of shelters. The funds could only be used towards more permanent housing solutions. Fio.PSD conducted crucial advocacy work in the territories working with local authorities to try and convince them to switch to housing-led approach. Fio.PSD also facilitated inter-territorial exchanges among local authorities and Italy successfully used the EU-led FEAD and ESF programmes to finance services for homeless people” (Jones et al., 2022, p.14).

Finally, in May 2022, the Fio.PSD organised a Consensus Conference at the end of a bottom-up process, which, during the previous months, involved more than 500 people working with people experiencing homelessness in 42 different Italian cities. The process was basically aimed at listening to the difficulties and priorities of people working in the territories and to identify the reasons why, notwithstanding their efforts, there are still people sleeping and dying on the street. In the first five months of 2022, Fio.PSD counted 141 people experiencing homelessness who died on the

Italian streets. The Consensus Conference was a call for a systemic change in the definition of homelessness and an effort was made to identify new meanings and words and 'give the change a home'. The Consensus Manifesto identifies seven challenges that, if faced and overcome, can generate the change: to develop systemic skills (change); to promote coordinated interventions for people experiencing homelessness (health); to look at all people's dimensions (intangible); to disseminate an evaluation practice (impact); to redefine the condition of being homeless (different equalities); to promote a national policy on (housing); and finally, to update the mandate of (social service) in order to respond to social and economic challenges.⁹

The Consensus Conference and its manifesto will surely be further developed by the fio.PSD, but it can certainly be considered as a public call for attention on homelessness and against the risk of being entrapped in cultural schemes reproducing need definition and pre-structured responses. Therefore, in Italy, change is undoubtedly on the move and the main gaps, as well as the priorities in the provision of services for people experiencing homelessness, have already been clearly stated¹⁰, but the systemic change will only be the result of long-term policy and an effective coordination of the different actors involved in its planning and implementation.

Conclusion

The housing first approach and housing led policies are now part of the national debate on homelessness in Italy and we can observe that the cultural and policy framework on homelessness and extreme poverty in Italy is changing. All the funds and projects financed nationally and through the European Funds and by RRNP are oriented toward Housing-Led services, but in order to be effective, all these interventions have to be integrated within a national housing policy, which in recent years has been oriented toward privatisations with the result that Italy has the lowest rate of public housing of all European countries.

⁹ https://www.fiopsd.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Manifesto_ENG_CC_2022-scaled.jpg.

¹⁰ The main gaps in the provision of services for people experiencing homelessness in Italy are: 1. Endemic scarcity of public resources dedicated to the public housing and limited availability of public dwelling; 2. Geographical variance in the provision of services to tackle homelessness and this make it very difficult to fully develop a new strategy; 3. Not all individuals in absolute poverty are eligible for the minimum income scheme meaning that eligibility criteria may be too strict and the homeless may be excluded. The priorities: 1. Improve the overall governance of this policy field also developing a monitoring strategy; 2. Expand the stock of public and social housing; 3. Reinroduce a fund to support low-income tenants; 4. Invest adequate resources in hiring and training social workers; 5. Guarantee the access to anti-poverty monetary benefit- especially the minimum income scheme (Baptista and Marlier, 2019, pp.118-123).

Still, at present a very limited provision of preventative services are available in Italy and the idea that the provision of shelters can be the solution persists even though it is clear that granting affordable housing is the most crucial element in ending homelessness (O'Sullivan, 2020, p.10).

The possibility of these changes is also strongly connected to the skills and the competences of national and local administrations to sustain the direction of change and rethinking the *public* dimension of homelessness (Consoli and Meo, 2020; Stern, 1984; O'Sullivan, 2020). At present, homelessness is still perceived as an individual and private issue, not as an event that can affect people who experience housing instability and labour market precariousness.

Finally, in order to bring about a real change in the public policies on homelessness and housing exclusion, the first steps have to be connected with the empowerment and monitoring of national and local integrated planning and with the provision of an updated collection of data on homelessness and its drivers in Italy.

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Homelessness in Sweden

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Introduction

In 1980, Sweden was a leading welfare state in many ways and the word homeless or homelessness was seldom used among social workers. Sweden is governed by the government and parliament and is divided into 21 regions and 290 municipalities. The regions are responsible for health care and regional transport infrastructure, but otherwise the municipalities are largely self-governing. Homelessness is now a major social problem in Sweden, as in many other countries. A common denominator behind the causes of homelessness is poverty. In addition, the main cause of homelessness is a lack of housing, and in particular rental apartments with reasonable rents that allow people with low incomes to enter the rental market.

In 1993, the first national homelessness survey was conducted in Sweden, which now takes place every six years. In 2011, the mapping indicators were changed to be more harmonious with a simpler ETHOS version. The 2017 survey showed 33 000 people experiencing homelessness, excluding refugees, undocumented people, and the travelling people. Sweden has a higher proportion of people experiencing homelessness per thousand inhabitants compared to our Nordic neighbours. The research indicates that this may have to do with the development of the secondary housing market in Sweden. Of the total number of people experiencing homelessness in Sweden in April 2017, half were in this situation, according to the National Board of Health and Welfare.

No Housing First without houses, is a quote that has been used many times when Housing First is to be implemented in a municipality or district. It is a recurring problem, but not only in Sweden. One trend is that more and more people in the total homelessness population have no problems other than that they lack a home of their own. This is usually referred to as structural homelessness. Another trend is that the proportion of women and the share of people with a foreign background is increasing. The number of children affected by homelessness is also growing.

Sweden does not have a social housing sector. It is public housing, which is the rental properties owned by a municipality, that, via ownership directives, must ensure that socially excluded people still have somewhere to live. It worked quite well until 2011, when the EU gave new directives that all public housing should be conducted according to the articles of association (K(2011) 9380 (2012/21/EU)). For competition between private property owners and public housing to also be equal, municipalities could no longer subsidise rents. This, together with the fact that housing construction decreased, gradually created higher thresholds for entering the regular housing market.

Housing companies and other property owners determine in a rental policy who can be considered as their tenants. Municipalities can decide this for the housing companies they own. But reducing homelessness and providing apartments for people experiencing homelessness is unfortunately rarely the municipalities only priority. Often, the interest in preventing losses or increasing profits and tax revenues weighs more heavily. The main cause of homelessness is a lack of housing, i.e., affordable rental apartments that people with low incomes can pay. A strong contributing factor is the landlords demands for fixed income, references, and queue time. Of Sweden's 290 municipalities, 83% state that they have a lack of housing.

The Secondary Housing Market and Social Housing

The term secondary housing market (Sahlin, 2006) is often used in Sweden to describe the activities that offer homeless people various forms of housing with social contracts. Sometimes the purpose is for the tenant to take over the contract in the first place after a probationary period. It usually refers to means-tested and publicly subsidised housing, which is not integrated into ordinary residential buildings, but is concentrated in special residential buildings intended for low-income households. Tenants receive real leases that are not limited in time, and today it is increasingly common for these homes to be scattered in various ordinary apartment buildings. In Sweden, there has long been political opposition to social housing, as it has been considered category housing, which risks reinforcing social exclusion. However, it happens that social services rent entire properties and then rent out housing to people experiencing homelessness with social contracts, which never have the opportunity of being taken over.

To deal with homelessness, the staircase model has been generally the most widely used tool, like in many other European countries. It started with the closure of the major psychiatric institutions in the early nineties. The health service referred people to the municipality and said they were medically finished and that it was now the municipality's responsibility to resolve their accommodation. What

happened then was that municipalities built up smaller institution like housing, which we know today as the staircase model. When the second national survey was launched in 1999, the Government appointed a homelessness commission. The figures were considered alarming and the first official homelessness work in Sweden started with a number of projects. The most interesting thing was that in the Homelessness Commission's final report in 2001, it says that Housing First is the best tool to solve homelessness!

It is the municipalities that, through social services, are responsible for the social homelessness work in Sweden. Social Services cooperates with municipal housing companies, private landlords, and non-profit organisations and companies. Many municipalities have a local system for homelessness (Wirehag, 2019) and run their own homeless activities, such as assisted living, group homes, and emergency housing (shelters), as well as eviction prevention, housing counselling, and, in some cases, day care for the homeless. It is also common for municipalities to buy services from, for example, private companies, NGOs, and other private organisations, which run various types of housing for people experiencing homelessness.

The first Housing First operations started in Sweden in 2010 and since then there have been several attempts to implement the model in Sweden. In 2019, there were Housing First operations in 21 municipalities, which included a total of 600 apartments. The larger operations are located in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö, and Helsingborg. Several of the Swedish Housing First operations have been evaluated with promising results both in terms of retention levels and social integration. There are many housing-led initiatives, but without some key principles in Housing First, and it is estimated that there are around 37 000 different kinds of social rental contracts in Sweden.

People who are homeless are more severely affected by disease and ill health than other groups in society. There is an elevated mortality rate among people experiencing homelessness in comparison to other groups in society. Women experiencing homelessness are a particularly vulnerable group who are at risk of physical and sexual violence, among other things. In Sweden, homelessness is increasing among families with children. These families often have to move around between different temporary housing solutions, which risks having negative consequences for the children in terms of their schooling, mental, and physical health.

We are also seeing signs of a new housing market. In these instances, companies and individuals buy or rent houses and apartments that they then rent at higher rates and without legal consideration to households that fail to obtain housing by other means and that are rejected by the municipality's social services. An important trend in homelessness policy is the adoption of new municipal guide-

lines. This has been particularly evident in Gothenburg and Malmö. The new guidelines mean in these cities that the municipality makes a distinction between structurally and socially homeless.

People who are experiencing homelessness structurally are those people who have no needs other than lack of housing and who have become homeless due to absences in the housing and labour market. This is a group that has increased in number. People who are experiencing homelessness socially are judged to have other needs in addition to the lack of housing and special difficulties in obtaining housing. They are thus considered to belong to the target group of social services. The municipalities' new guidelines are based on the fact that those who are defined as structurally homeless are expected to solve their situation themselves, despite the fact that there is a shortage of cheap rental apartments and the newly produced apartments are too expensive for them. Since municipalities are legally responsible for ensuring that no one suffers distress, they conduct a so-called 'emergency test' that can result in structurally homeless households getting a roof over their heads for one night or at most a week. After that, the situation is reassessed. In practice, this can mean that a family with children is forced to live in overcrowded conditions with shared bathrooms and kitchens in emergency housing or hostels week after week or move between different similar accommodations. As these are new municipal guidelines, we do not have any research results yet, but an ongoing research project investigates the work with emergency testing of structurally homeless households in Skåne. One of the motives for the changed practice has been to motivate the homeless parents to seek housing more intensively and in all parts of the country. This has contributed to newly arrived refugees being forced to move to municipalities with a weak labour market. The consequences for the children experiencing homelessness are yet unknown.

Another worrying trend is an increased exclusion of immigrant households. The purpose of the Settlement Act was that newly arrived refugees should be given a good introduction and integration by being assigned to municipalities with a relatively good labour market that were obliged to arrange housing for them. But uncertainties in the law and reluctance in many municipalities have meant that designated new arrivals have often only been offered temporary housing of a low standard for a maximum of two years. After that, they are sent out into the regular housing market, where their 'merits' in the form of employment, education, Swedish-speaking, and previous housing references are mostly not at all sufficient for a first-hand contract.

What can NGOs do in Homelessness Work

Sweden has strong roots in social democracy and has been a robust welfare society that has taken care of socially excluded people, which means that there is a strong history in the municipalities of doing most of their social services in-house, so to speak. NGOs have therefore always been seen as a complement and not part of the solution.

Regardless of which government it is, City Missions has worked with poverty and homelessness. There are 10 local independent City Missions and Stockholm City Mission has been active since 1853. As recently as 2007, the umbrella organisation Swedish association of City Missions was formed. Throughout history, NGOs have performed some municipal social services such as shelters and mobile teams with simpler agreements. This has changed with the law on procurement, which was introduced in several social areas in Sweden in the mid-90s. This had the effect of the fact that many NGOs in Sweden have developed into hybrid organisations that not only work with fundraising but where they sell services as a business. Sweden has quite a huge proportion of procurement for school, elderly care, and social services compared to other Member States, and NGOs have a very small part of that private market, only around 3-4%.

An example of in-house action was when Stockholm's Stadsmission ran a five-year Housing First project in collaboration with the City of Stockholm, and when the project period was over, the City of Stockholm took over the project and now run Housing First on a permanent basis. Another example was when the City of Gothenburg cut the cooperation agreements Gothenburg City Mission had with eight out of 10 districts in Gothenburg as well as with public housing, which at the time were the largest Housing First businesses in Sweden, and instead they made a procurement where most of the apartments from the public housing went to the City of Gothenburg's own Housing First.

The Swedish Association of City Missions in Sweden have been doing a lot of advocacy on several social issues and especially homelessness. For more than a decade, with the help of annual homelessness reports, the issue of a national homelessness strategy has been pushed and punctured with several different proposals. There have been one-liners or key descriptions that we have deliberately and tirelessly put forward based on different themes. However, the focus has always been on the right to housing.

The Swedish Association of City Missions membership in FEANTSA has meant a lot, especially with the focus on Housing First. EPOCH has also already been of great importance and will play an important role both before, during, and after Sweden's presidency of the EU in 2023. The launch of the European Housing First

guide and the start of the European Housing First Hub was also an important event in Europe for the development and spreading of Housing First. The Swedish association of City Missions has been a partner in the Hub since the start. This gave the idea to develop a Swedish Housing First Hub, where they worked with the spreading of Housing First based on education, research, etc. in the same way as it has happened in the European Housing First Hub.

Swedish association of City missions also did a feasibility study “Housing first – from IF to HOW” in 2022.

On July 7, 2022, a Swedish homelessness strategy 2022-2026 finally came out, focusing on Housing first with a budget of four million euros per year.¹ The operational solution to homelessness in Sweden is for the most part a decentralised issue and the definitive responsibility and cost of doing so lies at municipal level. The cost of acquired housing in staircase-housing led / first models are closer to seven billion for the municipalities. However, other costs for municipal public initiatives such as other social services and health care are not included in it. Considering that there are 290 municipalities in Sweden, and the State grant of four million euros that becomes available for municipalities every year, it may sound like very little money to end homelessness, but maybe enough money to change the local homelessness systems towards housing-led strategies!

The four goals on which Sweden’s new homelessness strategy is based are:

1. Homelessness should be prevented;
2. No one should live or live on the street;
3. Housing First should be introduced nationally; and
4. The social perspective in community planning should be strengthened.

The Government has given the mission to fulfil the Swedish Strategy to the National health and welfare. They have created an expert group with key stakeholders from different sectors, including the national Municipality org, NGOs (City Mission), Universities, national public housing, and health. Some key issues around Housing First education, research, and system change toward Housing First would best be solved with partnership in the Swedish built Housing First Hub. It sounds simple but it takes a leap of faith!

¹ National Homelessness Strategy 2022 – 2026 (regeringen.se).

Finally, we just want to say that homelessness research is extensive, but there are knowledge gaps and new ones are constantly being created. As homelessness is linked to the housing market, urbanisation, and globalisation, its causes and solutions are changing. It is also desirable that more interdisciplinary research projects should be started. One such area is to intertwine research on migration and homelessness, another area concerns an urban perspective where increased polarisation and ever higher thresholds to the regular housing market also involve an increased risk that more groups will suffer from homelessness or exclusion from the housing market. We also see a need for homelessness research from a child's perspective. At the same time as the Convention on the Rights of the Child has become law in Sweden, we see tendencies that more and more families with children are defined as structurally homeless and thus excluded from the social authorities' auxiliary apparatus and housing resources.

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European Observatory on Homelessness

European Journal of Homelessness

The European Journal of Homelessness provides a critical analysis of policy and practice on homelessness in Europe for policy makers, practitioners, researchers and academics. The aim is to stimulate debate on homelessness and housing exclusion at the European level and to facilitate the development of a stronger evidential base for policy development and innovation. The journal seeks to give international exposure to significant national, regional and local developments and to provide a forum for comparative analysis of policy and practice in preventing and tackling homelessness in Europe. The journal will also assess the lessons for Europe which can be derived from policy, practice and research from elsewhere.

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