

**9th meeting of the Thematic Network on Inclusion
27-28 February 2019, Brno, Czech Republic
Minutes of the meeting**

Summary

The 9th meeting of the ESF Transnational Thematic Network on Inclusion was held on 27th and 28th February 2019 in Brno, Czech Republic, and was hosted by Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The meeting addressed the topic of social housing and the Housing First approach within the overarching theme of homelessness, poverty and social exclusion.

Participants - the European Social Fund (ESF) Managing Authorities (MAs), representatives of national ministries and organisations working on homelessness – could learn about the context of social housing and Housing First in the Czech Republic and particularly in the municipality of Brno. It was highlighted that the ESF plays a crucial role in providing social housing to people at risk of homelessness and social exclusion in the Czech Republic. The municipalities of Brno and Ostrava are examples of successful project implementation that provide social housing based on the Housing First approach to a number of individuals and families. The Social Housing project, Housing First for Families and Housing First for Individuals are projects based on partnership (between municipalities, NGOs and universities) and integrated services (combination of person-centered social work and housing support). The testimonies of two beneficiaries of the Housing First projects in Brno demonstrated the research findings of FEANTSA (European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless) and the University of Ostrava on the positive aspects of the Housing First approach: Housing First prevents homelessness, it helps to improve the mental and physical well-being of beneficiaries, and it is cost-efficient for public authorities in a long-run.

An exchange of national realities among participants of the meeting showed that many countries still face challenges in implementing and promoting the Housing First approach. The lack of social housing stock and high share of private housing were highlighted as one of the main barriers for the Housing First approach across Europe.

The Thematic Network on Inclusion will meet again in May to discuss the topic of active inclusion and in to discuss deinstitutionalisation.

Agenda of the meeting: https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot_download/2694/2178
(copy the link to browser)

1. Opening session

Jitka Modlitbová, Deputy Head of the Unit of Social Housing and Social Inclusion at the Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, explained that the Social Housing Bill was presented 4 years ago for the first time. Even though it still has not been adopted, it remains on the agenda of the Ministry.

She stressed that the European Social Fund plays a crucial role in the Czech Republic in providing social housing and that integrated social services are key to combating homelessness and social exclusion.

Daniel Janeček from the Social Inclusion Department of the Brno Municipality highlighted that the Czech Republic is implementing the ESF funded projects under the coordinated approach focusing on 6 areas.

In 2016, the city of Brno decided to address social exclusion, focusing particularly on low income families,, children, national minorities, and other vulnerable groups. Pilot projects are being implemented in Brno including one on Housing First for Individuals, and a second on Housing First for Families.

2. Introduction of Housing First Methodology

Ruth Owen, Policy Coordinator at FEANTSA, began her presentation by highlighting the fact that the Brno Housing First Project won [2017 FEANTSA's Ending Homelessness Award](#) (Ending Family Homelessness through Housing First in Brno: A Randomised Control - implemented by the City of Brno).

She then explained the basic concept of the Housing First Model which entails two elements: 1. Immediate access to housing; 2. Person-centered and flexible support. FEANTSA has developed [a Guide to Housing First](#).

The core principles of the Housing First approach are: 1. Human rights; 2. Choice and control for service users (self-determination); 3. Separation of Housing and Treatment (housing should not be taken away based on behavioral issues); 4. Recovery orientation (focus on mental and physical help); 5. Harm reduction; 6. Active engagement without coercion (consistency in offering help in a flexible way); 7. Person-centered planning; 8. Flexible support as long as requested.

The state of play in terms of Housing First in Europe: Housing First as 'good standard', but currently in different stages of implementation (e.g. national policy in Finland, scaled up in France and in the Czech Republic). In most countries Housing First is not implemented in a systematic programme but through local initiatives. In most of Europe temporary accommodation is a common response to homelessness.

Results of the Housing First approach: 1. Reducing homelessness; 2. High level of House retention; 3. Positive social and health impact; 4. No evidence that outcomes are any worse compared to traditional services; 5. Cost-effective.

The role of the EU in promoting and implementing Housing First: 1. Policy framework: In the past there was the Social Investment Package, today there is the European Pillar of Social Rights; 2. Funds: the ESF, the European Regional Development fund (used for infrastructure) and the European Fund for Strategic Investment as a new initiative.

The Czech Republic is a leader in using the ESF for scaling up Housing First Model.

Presentation: https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot_download/2694/2175 (copy the link to browser)

3. Presenting/Introducing Social Housing System in Czech Republic

Jitka Modlitbová, Deputy Head of the Department of Social Housing and Social Inclusion at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, gave an overview of the social housing situation in Czech Republic.

In the Czech Republic there has been a big decrease in the number of publicly owned homes in the period 2001 to 2011 (only 15,5% in 2011). (Czech statistic office)

In Eastern Europe most housing is occupied by owners (Eurostat 2015).

In Brno in 2016 there were 29.100 municipal apartments, which means one apartment for every 13 citizens.

The legislative situation in relation to social housing in the Czech Republic: the Act on Municipalities (Act no. 128/2000 Sb.) assigns the responsibility to provide housing to municipalities (but does not define what kind of actions this entails); the housing benefits specifications are defined by the Act on Aid in Material Need (Act no. 111/2006 Sb.) and the Act on State Social Welfare (Act no. 117/1995 Sb.)

The [Social Housing Concept in the Czech Republic for the period 2015-2025](#): This is a non-legislative document according to which social housing has to be affordable and provided in adequate spaces in combination with other social services if needed. It is the sole government document addressing social housing in the Czech Republic.

In September 2018, at a high-level political Roundtable on Housing, Poverty and Socially Excluded Localities, 15 suggestions for combating poverty and social exclusion were formulated (such as revising the welfare system: considering merging housing related subsidies, placing a ceiling on subsidies as per the price map, ensuring that subsidies reach the people in question, reducing the category of cohabitants and revising energy subsidies). The Social Housing Act was proposed by the Ministry for Regional Development in 2018.

The Czech Ministry of Regional Development is responsible for housing policy, while the Czech Ministry of Labour for social work and social benefits.

The European Regional Development fund is not as successful as the ESF in project implementation of Housing First.

Presentation: https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot_download/2694/2176 (copy link to browser)

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4. Exchange of good practices in Social Housing projects in the Czech Republic

Barbora Špicarová Stašková from the Department of Social Housing and Social Inclusion at the Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, presented the project [Social Housing Support – Methodological and Information Support in Social Agendas](#). The project started in 2016 and monitors local social housing systems in the cities of the Czech Republic. The project is implemented in cooperation with 16 cities.

In the project there are expert groups made up of different actors (NGOs, universities, social workers) that are responsible for the preparation of guidebooks and analyses.

The information will be used for training cities and labour office employees. The objective is to reach out to vulnerable groups and bring them to social housing.

467 flats in all cities together should support 1281 clients.

Michal Ďord' from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs presented the project Contact Cente, which is part of the Social Housing Support Project.

Contact Center provides social housing support to cities, consulting services and advice.

Cities implement their social housing projects and Contact Center provides facilitation in cooperation among cities. This is made through working groups and focus groups (focus groups are made up of people experiencing homelessness). Cities produce analyses and local social housing strategies.

The objective is to increase the availability and affordability of housing, increase social work and also to improve cooperation with NGOs (renting public housing to NGOs).

In the contact center, one person is responsible for transnational cooperation.

Examples of good practices of local social housing strategies: No deposit requirements for social housing users; notary clause for helping the users; social support units are provided with the list of newly indebted households; contracts between users, city and energy companies; social housing agents for vulnerable groups; establishing emergency accommodation; furniture charity; Point based systems for housing need assessment (also creating database and forming expert panel groups for assessment of social housing applicants).

The project is financed by the Ministry of Local Development (responsible for apartments) through the National Fund for Housing Development (SFRB) and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (responsible for social work/services) through grants for social work and the ESF.

Currently there are 7 ESF calls related to social work and social housing open in Czech Republic – e.g. ESF Housing First Support call and call on Social inclusion support in Socially Excluded Localities.

Presentation: https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot_download/2694/2169 (copy link to browser)

5. Conception of Social Housing and its pilot validation in the city of Ostrava

Zdeněk Živčák and Marek Mikulec presented the project Conception of Social Housing and its pilot validation in the city of Ostrava.

In Ostrava in 2011, there were 113.465 flats and 12.284 of these flats were social housing (9,2% of all housing).

The aim of the project is to ensure the availability of non-segregated standard housing (flats) for persons with housing needs.

In this project, 100 flats were given for 6 months with the possibility of extension. The project runs between 2016 and 2019 and it includes 9 social workers and a wide range of stakeholders (working groups).

The project follows an action plan for creating a housing system in Ostrava.

3 flats are reserved for emergency situations (in the Czech Republic allocations of social housing are made at political level, while social workers have the power to decide on allocations in case of emergencies) for periods of up to 6 months with the possibility of an extension

The project won the [EU RegioStars Award in 2018](#).

Presentation: https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot_download/2694/2174 (copy the link to browser)

6. Housing First for Individuals

Jana Miholová from the Department of Social Care at Brno municipality, presented the project Housing First for Individuals.

This project has been running since 2017 in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour. The project is funded by the ESF.

The target of the project is to offer housing to 65 individuals (50 adults and 15 young adults) that have lived in Brno for at least 2 years and have social and/or health issues. Participants in the project are selected by the expert team.

Social work in the project involves an individualised approach, monitoring of housing situation, support in managing the budget, counselling, harm reduction for alcohol users, etc. Social workers in the project are keeping close relationship with clients.

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7. Housing First for Families (Rapid Re-housing Project)

Adam Fialík and Jan Milota from IQ Roma Servis presented the project Housing First for Families.

The project presentation started with testimonies from project beneficiaries.

In this project, there are 50 flats around the city of Brno. Each neighborhood has 5 flats available.

Rehousing is offered to people with housing needs for a one year period with the possibility of prolongation.

The project started in 2016 with a partnership between Brno Municipality, the University of Ostrava and HVO Querido (Netherlands).

The project, which works in cooperation with 'peer workers' who have experience with homelessness, focuses on families with children in sub-standard housing.

50 families were chosen by lottery from 421 applicants. After families were chosen they were given a questionnaire about housing wishes (how the apartment should look like, in which neighborhood, etc). The families could also choose a social worker for IQ Roma Servis based on the methodology of 'ideal types of social workers'. 48 of those families got their lease extended.

Presentation: https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot_download/2694/2170 (copy link to browser)

8. Possibilities of Financing Social Housing with the ESF

Iva Hlaváčková from the Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs gave an overview of funding opportunities for projects addressing social housing in the Czech Republic. In the Czech Republic, social housing is addressed under the Operational Programme on Employment and supported under Priority Axis 2 Social Inclusion and Combating Poverty and Priority Axis 3 Social Innovation and Transnational Cooperation.

Ms **Hlaváčková** also gave a detailed overview of existing calls and approved projects addressing social inclusion and/or social housing (calls for systemic projects implemented by the Ministry of Labour and open calls for projects). Here is a selection of a few (for a more detailed list with descriptions of calls and projects see the presentation):

- Call 17 with The Social Housing Project - methodical and informational support in the area of social agenda
- Call 128 - Pilot verification of the Ministry of Labour concept on social work and social housing at municipal level (this call has 8 approved projects)
- Calls within Coordinated approach for socially excluded localities (1st call with with 6 approved projects focusing on housing and 2nd call with 7 approved projects focusing on housing)
- Calls within Coordinated approach for Social Inclusion Support in Socially Excluded Localities (with 19 approved projects focusing on housing)
- Housing First Support Call (Call 108) that is open until end of May 2019.

Presentation: https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot_download/2694/2171 (copy the link to browser)

9. Randomised Controlled Trial of Housing First for Families in Brno

Stepan Ripka from the University of Ostrava presented the Randomized Controlled Trial of Housing First for Families in Brno. Ostrava University was collecting data on homeless families in Brno in April 2016. The research gathered data from 50 families that were included in the Housing First Programme and from a control group of 100 families that were not included in the Housing First for Families programme in a period of 12 months after the start of the programme.

The research used 3 sets of indicators: 1. Entry threshold (who is eligible to apply for social housing); 2. Independent housing attainment rate (how many people get into housing); 3. Housing retention rate after 12 months of being assigned a housing.

The primary outcomes that are visible 12 months after the start of the research are: Housing retention rate of participants involved in the Housing First programme is 96% (48 families out of 50 stayed in the housing). Secondary outcomes demonstrate that Housing First improves health and quality of life of families, it has a beneficial affect on the reunification of families (Housing First reduces the risk of institutionalisation or foster care for children), and it makes savings in public spending (1.573,850 CZK out of the total spending for a homeless family for a year were saved by using Housing First)

The Action Plan to end Family Homelessness in Brno 2018-2025 is awaiting approval by the city council. The Plan sets up an integrated system for ending homelessness, including social housing.

The ESF call on Housing First projects was launched in December 2018 with a budget of of €6 million. IT foresees to support 30-50 projects and 500-750 households by 2021.

Stepan Ripka concluded that Housing First needs to be part of an integrated system of services for ending homelessness in order to be successful and therefore an action plan prioritising homeless families is needed.

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10. Reflections

Participants of the meeting were asked to share reflections on their national situations concerning social housing.

- Germany: there are discussions about Housing First but it is mostly not implemented.
- Hungary: little housing stock (2-3%); in discussions there are some misunderstanding of the Housing First approach (not necessarily related to housing, but to institutionalisation); 14 ESF funded projects are implementing Housing First approach.
- Italy: Italy has advanced a lot, but considering the political situation the trend could take a reverse turn.
- Poland: only 5-6% public housing stock; there is housing allowance, but it has a lot of rules; the ESF call on preventing homelessness and domestic violence resulted in application of 11 projects with Transnational partners that are now in the process of evaluation.
- Portugal: there are national strategies on homelessness, but the ESF is not used for implementation; discussion about Housing First is not a national discussion.
- Romania: very limited housing stock; housing allowance that are based on contracts including the rental price.
- Sweden: a lot of talk on Housing First, but no scaling up.

Participants were asked to answer on a question *‘What can I do to advance Housing First in my country?’* Three main answers were given:

- By focusing on municipalities (rather than on national strategies);
- Working on changing public opinion;
- European standards on Housing First should be developed at the level of the EU.