



Action Plan for Housing First: A key policy action for the EU's European Pillar of Social Rights as part of a European Collaboration Platform on Homelessness

Background – The Housing First Europe Hub

The Housing First Europe Hub is a network of organisations, government ministries, cities, housing providers, foundations and researchers dedicated to promoting and supporting the scaling up of Housing First as a means to ending homelessness in Europe.

This joint-venture was started in 2016 by FEANTSA (the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless) and the Y-Foundation (Finland); it is a collaboration of 15 founding partners and over 15 associates from across the EU. We coordinate training, advocacy, research and sharing of practice on Housing First for frontline workers, local, regional and national governments, as well as housing providers and others active in delivering and scaling up Housing First.

The input that follows focuses specifically on how a European Collaboration Platform could help to scale Housing First up across Europe and is complementary to FEANTSA's overall response to this consultation.

Housing First as a framework for delivering on Priority 19 of the European Pillar of Social Rights

The European Pillar of Social Rights sets out the priority areas in which the EU will help to ensure that citizens have access to and can enjoy effective rights. For people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, Priority 19 is crucial as it references the rights to accessing housing and assistance.

Housing First is a philosophy and a programme that prioritizes access to housing for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness as the first step in responding to their needs. In Housing First, a home is the starting point rather than an end goal. In Housing First, policies and practices are designed to keep people in existing ordinary housing if they are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. As the name suggests, a Housing First service provides housing as soon as possible.

Housing First – a successful and solution-oriented response

Housing First is a common-sense approach which provides for people who are often in situations of extreme social exclusion to be supported in their own homes. **Housing First** has been proven to be successful for 80% of participants in studies in Europe and North America¹. Support for and implementation of Housing First programmes is growing across Europe; several countries have already developed national Housing First policies (Finland, Belgium, France, Portugal, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden), whilst other countries are actively using European structural funds to develop projects that aim to prompt governments to develop more robust strategies (Italy,

¹ 2019 Housing First in Europe : An Overview of Implementation, Strategy and Fidelity, Housing First Europe Hub https://housingfirsteurope.eu/assets/files/2019/10/2019-10-10-HFinEurope_Report2019_Summary.pdf



Poland, Czechia); some Member States are new to Housing First and keen to rapidly increase its use (Germany).

Housing First can prompt significant and helpful shifts in how homelessness is tackled, and can be an important aspect of policies and strategies that aim to reduce and end homelessness. Finland has taken the lead in Europe and has almost completely eradicated rough sleeping by using Housing First as a cornerstone of its systemic approach.

Housing First is rights-based and enables people to access their rights to housing and social integration. Developing and implementing Housing First in homelessness strategies means that governments will help citizens access their right to housing and housing assistance under Priority 19², as well as ensuring access to essential services, as outlined in Priority 20 of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Multi-annual action plan on Housing First

In order to develop a successful Housing First programme, Member States must establish training, research and sharing of knowledge and learning in national and regional networks on Housing First. A multi-annual framework or action plan at EU level would ensure that existing knowledge on Housing First is effectively shared, and new and pertinent research is conducted and disseminated. A multi-annual action plan for Housing First should therefore be an important component of a European Cooperation Platform on Homelessness as part of the action plan to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights.

This summer, European Commissioner Schmit published a joint opinion article with Ana Mendes Godinho, Minister of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security in Portugal and Yves Leterme, Goodwill Ambassador for the Fight against Homelessness in Europe, on the topic of homelessness³. They pointed out that homelessness can no longer be accepted as a “fact of life” in the EU; and that the forthcoming Action Plan on the European Pillar of Social Rights presents a “unique opportunity to strengthen the EU’s role in the fight against homelessness”. They proposed “a European collaboration platform as of 2021”. This kind of Platform would be an opportunity for the EU’s Member States to exchange ideas and practices as they work to develop and implement national strategies to reduce and end homelessness. One very important action under the Platform could be to develop an action plan to support the scale up of Housing First, as an evidence-based practice, within the EU.

² 19. Housing and assistance for the homeless

- a. Access to social housing or housing assistance of good quality shall be provided for those in need.
- b. Vulnerable people have the right to appropriate assistance and protection against forced eviction.
- c. Adequate shelter and services shall be provided to the homeless in order to promote their social inclusion.

Priority 20 - Access to essential services - Everyone has the right to access essential services of good quality, including water, sanitation, energy, transport, financial services and digital communications. Support for access to such services shall be available for those in need

³ <https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/opinion/homelessness-cannot-be-just-another-fact-of-life-in-the-eu/>



The Housing First Europe Hub, led by the Y-Foundation and FEANTSA, is available to help the European Commission and Member States in developing and delivering a multi-annual action plan on Housing First to support the work on Priorities 19 and 20 of the European Social Pillar.

Our network has developed training tools, research and communities of interest to share practice at all levels (from frontline workers to managers to governments). There is growing support across all sectors in most Member States for Housing First; the European Union can play a key role in helping to share learning and build capacity so that key stakeholders such as the NGO homeless service sector, public authorities, the research community, neighbouring sectors etc., can successfully support and implement Housing First for those people who need it. Such work would help a European Platform on Homelessness to deliver practical impact on the ground.

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