28-29 MARCH 2022

Report

An End to Homelessness: Unlocking System Change with Housing First conference

Housing First Nederland

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Foreword

Melanie Schmit   **Anke Jansen**

For years we have been implementing Housing First in the Netherlands as a model, as a supplement to the existing aid offerings in municipalities. Mostly for the most vulnerable group of homeless people who found themselves in the most difficult position of all. Those who had been homeless longer, struggled with problems in multiple areas of life and felt abandoned by the system. A government that should have constitutionally protected them from this violation of their rights and the infringement on their dignity. For them, Housing First's unconditional approach proved revolutionary. For many, having their own home was still only a distant dream, but against all odds, Housing First brought the chance to get out of the vicious cycle. This shift in thinking has dramatically changed the lives of these people. And with the extensive experience of implementing 50 Housing First practices, a lot of knowledge has been developed in the last fifteen years.

The congress in Madrid is a tipping point for us. Where up until now we have been adding Housing First practices, and providing housing for more people experiencing homelessness, we are now having the conversation about how Housing First can be used more broadly to end homelessness and be given a full place in a national strategy. An approach that keeps the practical successes of Housing First, but also applies those lessons to address the structural factors of how people (are at risk of) becoming homeless. That the conversation about this can now be had is the result of years of effort and involvement of Housing First as a social movement. As the network of Housing First in the Netherlands we are incredibly proud of this achievement!

In other countries we see that taking Housing First as the basis of the strategy for combating homelessness leads to good results. Finland is a great example, as they

are the only country in Europe where homelessness is decreasing. Therefore, the use of Housing First as the basis of the national strategy is also increasing in Europe. In the Demos Helsinki report and the supplementary report of the Housing First Europe Hub (available for download here), you can read more about the potential for Housing First to enable systemic change and how countries across Europe are looking for meaningful ways to put the proven success of Housing First at the center of eliminating homelessness. To move from managing homelessness to actually preventing and ending it, regardless of the situation and context a country faces. Also in the Netherlands there is support to have this conversation and subsidy from the European Union will become available.

Housing First Netherlands has been a driving force in this process, and once again we want to lead the way in translating this vision into practice. This involves a broad application of the Housing First principles and the underlying human rights approach. Housing First ends homelessness by first realizing the right to housing and self-determination unconditionally and offering person-centered support to people who are experiencing homelessness. In the context of prevention, this would also mean, ensuring housing preservation when homelessness is at risk.

Solving homelessness is too complex for a one size fits all approach. There will be different ways in different contexts, but with Housing First as a compass, we have a clear vision of our destination and a clear set of principles
to guide this:

1. Respect for autonomy and one's own choice in type of housing and support
2. Immediate and unconditional access to permanent housing
3. Unconditional access to care and support as much and as long as needed
4. Equality, empowerment and humanity
5. Equal citizenship and social inclusion

Housing First Netherlands is an initiator, innovator and knowledge provider in the field of Housing First. Based on gained practical, experiential and scientific knowledge we give evidence based direction to the homelessness approach. And we contribute to further development through research, advocacy, knowledge transfer and advice, and our involvement in European developments.

In the coming years we would like to continue this development together with our partners in a process of learning and experimenting. As Housing First Netherlands we are also exploring how the principles of Housing First can be applied to the entire system. It starts with ambitious goals and a long-term commitment, we are convinced that this is how we will arrive at the right approach. That together we will develop resources to overcome obstacles. We start right away, and learn as we go, because with so many people without homes, we have no time to waste! Let this report be an inspiration for everyone working to end homelessness in the Netherlands, the

the beginning of a tipping point for systemic change and for refuting blame. Because when someone has become homeless, the system fails, not the individual citizen.

Our intention is to give an objective representation of the texts, as spoken during the conference. Because of occasional difficulties in understanding or translating, we take no responsibility for the complete accuracy of this report as intended by the speakers.

Kind regards,
Melanie Schmit and Anke Jansen

Co-founders Housing First Netherlands

Welcoming address

Raquel Sánchez Jiménes
Spanish Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda

''A rental home is a basic human right. Temporary shelter made homelessness chronic. We need to make public housing stock in order to give permanent housing. This can only been done if all the authorities take their responsibility. If even one or two people sleep on the street tonight, we have failed as a society.''

- An estimate of 500 million euros will be used by the Spanish government to end homelessness
- We will focus on converting vacant buildings to houses
- This budget should be spend between 2022 and 2025. All should be spend before 2026
- Our aim is to build 55.000 houses before 2026

Samara Jones
Programme Coordinator – Housing First Europe Hub

''We have to start managing homelessness. We need to take a step back and think about the bigger picture and think about how homelessness starts. Since the growth of the Finnish approach, we saw a big decline in homelessness (in Finland). The Demos Helsinki report and the Finnish achievements gives us a framework how to end homelessness. The guide will be the basis of how we approach this conference.

We hope that the keynote speakers inspire you and give you food for thought. The workshops are ment to learn from eachother and share best practices. The objective of the conference is: ''how can we put Housing First to practice.''... We should stop thinking too much and start doing.''

Marian Juste Picon
President Fundación Hogar Sí

"We have all been working for years to eradicate homelessness. There is a keyword to describe housing First Hub Europe: systemic change. However we have a hard job ahead of us. Homelessness increased the last years, We don't know the effect of the pandemic on homelessness yet. Ukraine adds a new challenge and now ending homelessness is more needed then ever.

Hogar sí is an organisation of around 300 people and still growing and we believe ending homelessness is possible. We need to understand what's being done in other countries. We want to eradicate homelessness by 2030. We need to focus on two pillars:

1. Alliances. We have to create alliances with the right focusses, like today. Particularly in housing and creating jobs. All constitutional rights derive from housing. ... We need to create engagement. We have been doing a good job by persuading Spanish authorities to adopt housing first model. ... We speak of homelessness as a phenomenon and not about homeless people, because homelessness is not an individual problem but a systemic problem. But now no more. We won't take it anymore.

2. Innovation. Some people say: watch how society treats their most vulnerable people and you see how the humanity of the country is. Most of the key players to make change are here and for the first time of history in Spain, homelessness is explicitly mentioned in an agenda of the government. Homelessness is a shared responsibility. We also count on the private sector to help us bring the policies to fruition. ... Madrid is not afraid to experiment."

- There is a homelessness strategy / roadmad on national level where we aim that no citizens have to sleep rough by 2030 (in Spain).
- There is a lot of funding becoming available.
- Madrid is an example of how to battle homelessness.
- Madrid has now 200 Housing First houses.

Keynote speech

Matt Downie
CEO of Crisis UK / Housing First Europe Hub

''Why now is the time to apply Housing First? Why is it needed, how is it different and how can we work together to make a difference? We have to move on from the discussion whether or not Housing First works or not. This is not the place to discuss this. Here we will discuss how we can apply Housing First.

There are 272.000 homeless people in the UK. It is going up to 350.000 by 2041 if we don't intervene. The pandemic exposed the risks of homelessness. It reinforced social care and made people aware that homelessness is not just sleeping rough.

There is a point where we stop pulling people out of the river, We have to go upstream and see why they fall in.

If you prevent homelessness, there is less need for Housing First. We could wait for Boris Johnson to come with a strategy, but then we can wait a long time. We have to get on with it, even if it's not perfect yet. Leadership is about having a vision and taking people with you along that vision. The important thing is not to wait for others and start imperfectly. Speak up and back yourself. Ask the system: Why do we have a readiness level for housing? Who decides when they are ready? How are people who are about to lose their home, being heard? The Finnish approach works for Finland, what is your card? Answering these questions gives you an idea what you need in your situation.

200 years ago, homelessness was criminalized. 50 years ago, anti-homelessness focused on treatment. Now, people are being seen and treated as equals.''

Yves Leterme
Chair, European Platform on Combatting Homelessness

''We have to solve the unfairness of homelessness. Combatting homelessness is just as combatting extreme poverty just as combatting exclusion. Rooflessness, homelessness, extreme exclusion were or even still are a problem. They are not a focus of political attention and action. It is perfectly right to consider that the best level of tackling homelessness is local actions and politics. We can even say it's the task of civil society and NGO responsibility. Right now there is a lack of efficiency and public action. Only last year we saw the action plan of social rights when the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness was founded.

Agreements with stakeholders:
- Funding to support the effort in the cities where homelessness happens.
- Additionality. We will not replace tasks of national governments.
- Decreasing bureaucracy. We will focus on a goals oriented approach.
- Flexibility.
- Ownership. It's crucial of all stages of policy making and policy implementation.
- Efficiency. We have to take into consideration the intersections and causes of homelessness.

Agreement on workplan and governance. First of all, we have to take into consideration three concrete streams:
- Common definitions and common counting exercised. We have to give an answer to what is is homelessness, from Dublin to Helsinki. Starting from that common definition we have to work out how many people exactly are homeless.
- Increase number of opportunities of exchanging best practices and knowledge sharing, training and learning opportunities as a supplemental (additionality) approach.
- Underpromise and over deliver. How to facilitate access to homelessness organisations to funding. A fair share of this money should go to this unfairness. The entire sector doesn't ask for much. A little bit of money can make a lot of difference. It's not only about money but also about focus and access.

Since one and a half year I haven't seen a better example of anti-homelessness then Housing First. It's the most effective, most effective budget-wise and most holistic approach to anti-homelessness. Housing First should be a corner stone. I take it as a task to put this on the table. Not to impose on all member states but to showcase and promote it in a horizontal way that Housing First is the approach to combat homelessness.''

Presentation of main result and case studies of the report
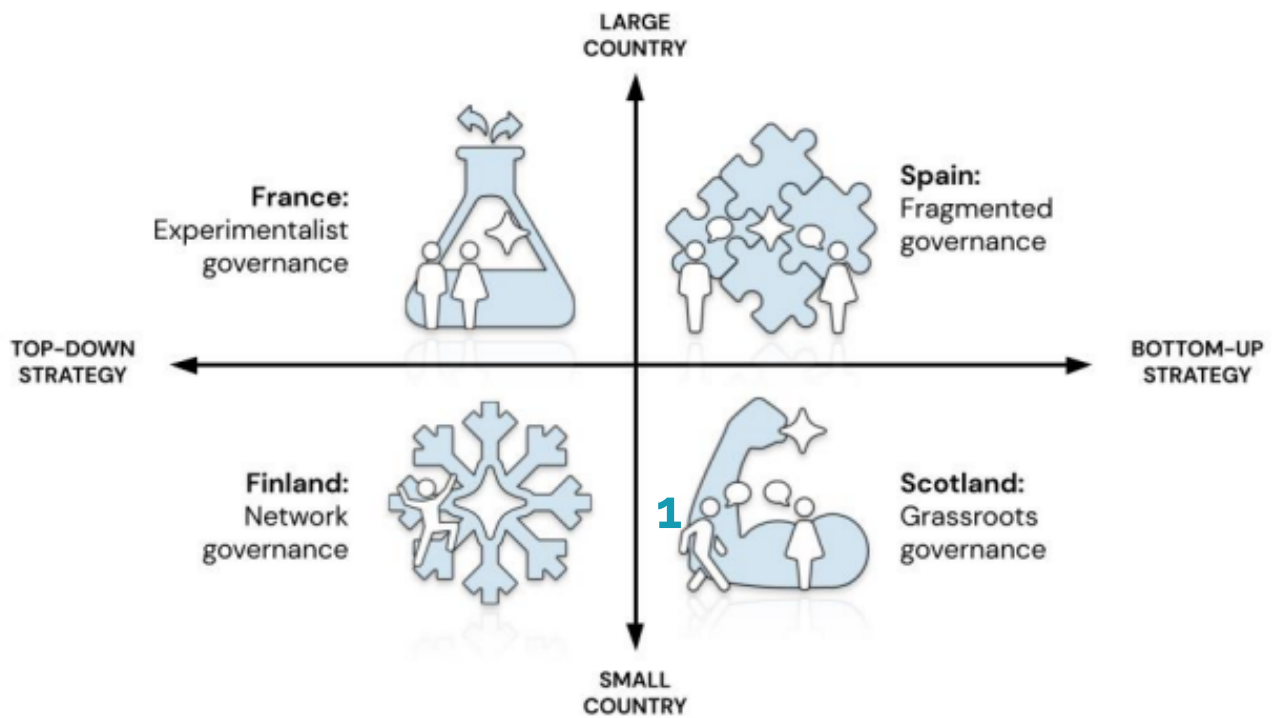
Juha Leppänen
Chief executive, Demos Helsinki

''Covid-19 has been only the harbinger of many foreseeable disruptions: it's the beginning of a century of transformations, including for homelessness. Now more than ever, we must equip purpose-driven change makers with apt tools that can achieve systemic change. Because homelessness is also a systemic problem. So how can Housing First be a tool for systemic change?

- It's about governance. Governance is not only about governments. It's about shared goals & collective action
- To seize it's potential, advocates should not focus on designing a perfect roadmap or blueprint for it implementation – as if Housing First is not a goal in itself, or a one-size-fits-all-policy.

At its core, Housing First is a new model for the governance of homelessness characterised by a radical goal: ''Eliminating, rather than just managing homelessness.'' Instead, they can work to ensure that **ungoverned** homelessness phenomena become **governed**.''
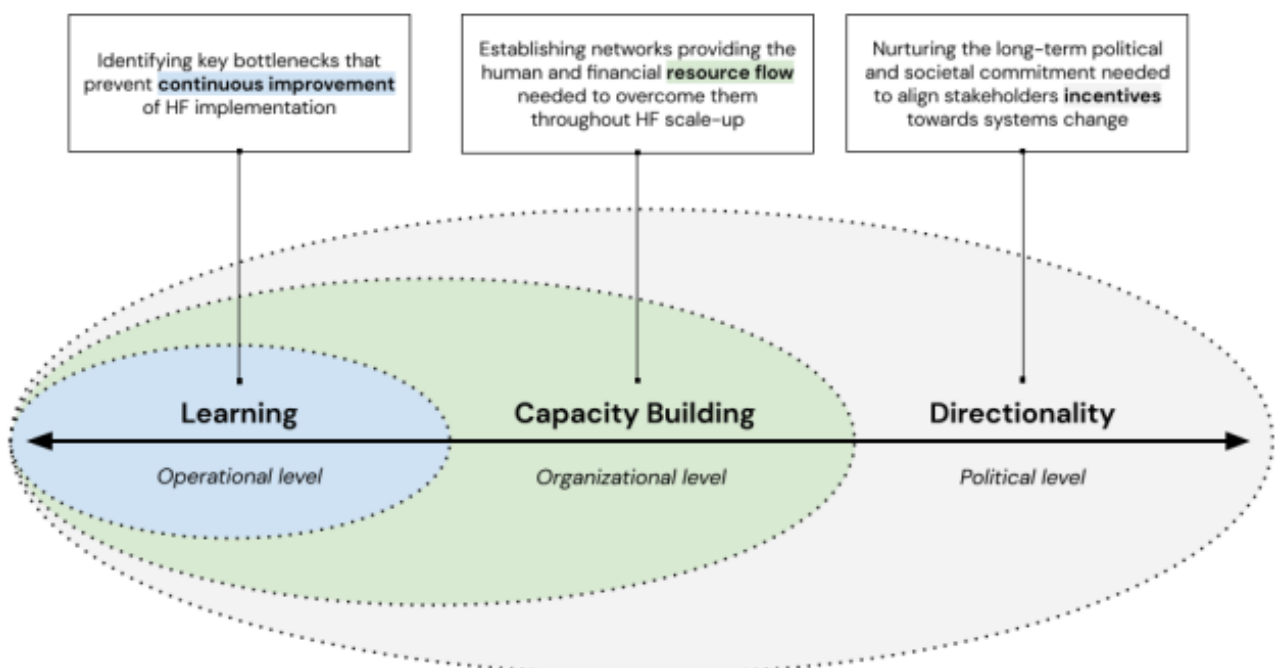
Housing First as a policy vs Housing First as governence

From focusing on developing a "one-size-fits-all" blueprint...	...to ensuring that practitioners can learn by doing how to solve implementation problems
From focusing on the assessment of resources needed for implementing HF...	...to actively bringing key stakeholders (local and national) on board
From supplying valuable but resource-intensive policy ideas...	...to fostering the long-term commitment of politics towards *eliminating* homelessness

Key takeaways:

- **No roadmap or singular model** can ensure that Housing First will achieve systemic change.
- **Progress is non-linear**: the job of systemic change is never done.
- **What matters is the framework** behind the transformative action.
1. Fostering continuous and **mutual learning**
2. Supporting each other through **capacity building**
3. Committing to and providing systems with a clear **direction forward**.

How can Housing First be a tool for systemic change?

Instead of being seen as a blueprint, Housing First can provide governments and practitioners with a compass allowing them to chart their own journey through homelessness.

Housing First advocates acts as sherpas of systemic change in homelessness.

1. Scoping and identifying the fastest pathways forward (by adapting Housing First to the specificity of each local context).
2. Helping them avoid potential dead ends (by solving key implementation bottlenecks).
3. Prompting them not to lose sight of the final destination (by nurturing political and societal commitment).

Workshop 1: Housing stock and access to it

Housing shortage is one of the greatest challenges faced by those who wish to engage in Housing First, housing-led or re-housing programmes for homeless populations. How do you encourage and support NGOs in acquiring scatteredsite housing? And most importantly, how do you advocate for better housing policies that push funding towards the construction of more social housing? These are some of the guiding questions for this session.

Main takeaways of this workshop:

- Data is key.
- Build on coalitions for systemic change with Housing First.
- Funding is crucial.
- Framing and communication. What is your communication strategy? How are you being framed in the media?
- Could systemic change be experimental?
- Systemic change = learning, education, value building.
- Converting existing homeless shelters, like in Finland.
- Private housing as an addition to the solutions.
- No housing led system functions without a social housing stock.

Workshop 2: Structures and policies for systemic change

Structures and policies for systemic change Plans to end homelessness – at national, regional or city level – can be important catalysts for structural and policy change. Finland is a well-known example of designing a successful homelessness strategy that drives systemic change. A national Housing First network has been instrumental in this achievement. This workshop highlights the impact and opportunities of policies and plans to end homelessness, as well as an understanding of how to build and maintain such a Housing First network, bringing together a multitude of actors and working towards shared objectives.

Main takeaways of this workshop:

- When lobbying with politicians, all political levels are important. From local to national.
- In countries with a decentralized system, local approaches can be more effective.
- Housing First got a boost because of covid-19. In many countries there was a rule introduced that nobody could be sleeping on the street.
- When introducing Housing First, you can use both a top-down and a bottom-up approach.
- Try to collaborate with housing associations.
- In research for Housing First, both quantitative and qualitative date is valuable. Don't only focus on quantitative data.
- It's equally important to learn from when things didn't go right. Plan evaluations to what could have been done differently.
- An homelessness-prevention hotline in Finland prevented 5000 evictions. When homelessness is prevented, there is less need for Housing First.
- There need to be a shift from "managing homelessness" to "ending homelessness".
- You have to spend money to save money. That's also why research that focuses on long-term impact is important..

Presentatie: Housing First Nederland

Anke Jansen
Co-founder Housing First Nederland

"The Housing First Netherlands network began in 2013 as a small team of enthusiastic project managers from across the country, facilitated by Professor Judith Wolf. The current Housing First Netherlands is a relaunch of that network, which stopped after five years due to lack of financial support. We shared knowledge, especially in the start-up of new practices. We grew from seven projects to 20 and now about 50 Housing First practices . At that time we guided about 100 participants annually to now we guide about 1000 participants per year.

We exchange knowledge, provide training, lobby and have now developed into an autonomous and independent knowledge organisation. With the funding we receive we conduct research into the quality, sustainability, impact and financial added value of Housing First. This research is very valuable in our discussions with municipalities and for the further development of Housing First.

We started talking more about Housing First Netherlands and more and more people became interested. We have translated the Canadian Housing First Youth into Dutch and seven Housing First Youth practices have already started in the Netherlands. In the near future we will continue to lobby for new practices, research, share knowledge and work with practices, housing associations and the government for the broad implementation of Housing First in combating homelessness.

This conference is a dream come true. It is no longer about starting Housing First practices as an addition to the existing care system: it is now about how to end homelessness with Housing First. We desperately need each other and collaboration is key to success, both locally and nationally.

It's not about us, it's about people experiencing homelessness who deserve a dignified life, their loved ones, family members, their children or partners. That's what I've been working for all these years and will continue to do."

Q&A Housing First Nederland

Melanie Schmit
Co-founder Housing First Nederland

1. How did you set up a national network and recruit partners to it?

''We moved towards the national platform as it is today in 2018. Before then it was a platform where project coordinators met in the early days of Housing First development in the Netherlands. When this wasn't facilitated anymore, some of the regular attendees, among which myself, made a new start. A number of them found support for this from their employers, which are support providers. In the spring of 2020, we entered a partnership with the national federation working on homelessness in the Netherlands called Valente (although working autonomously and independent). The Housing First practices, professionals and participants are our constituency.

Our network organisation is the knowledge, experience, creativity and energy of everyone involved in Housing First. Our initial aim was to bring all these valuable things together in order to make more impact. Housing First Netherlands has developed organically from this starting point. The strength and success is in the people.

Within this platform multiple Housing First practices are active, trying to influence politics, policy and research nationwide. The ultimate goal being a national Housing First policy and governance approach, in which the core principles remain leading. Our focus for the coming years is to broaden our National Housing First Network to all actors, not merely support providers, such as (national and local) policy makers, housing associations, researchers, interest groups, experts by experience, funders etc. We want to create a more ambitious agenda and a long term commitment to ending homelessness in the Netherlands.''

2. How did you get Housing First to become a part of your national strategy to end homelessness?

''Remarkably, the number of Housing First tenancies in the Netherlands (last count was 1400 in 2020) is often higher than the countries referred to in around Housing First in Europe How can that be explained? I guess we can say that the growth (bottom up) has been successful here. That is why 42 Housing First Practices, in 79 municipalities, are now operational. However, the homelessness rates are not declining. What I think we lack is a coordinated approach (top down) aimed at a (true) sustainable end to homelessness, as is the case in the examples referred to as

governance-based Housing First in Finland and Scotland.

Only recently a call for a more centralized steering approach in tackling the issue of homelessness has found its way up to the national government. The Dutch Government vouched for an overarching plan of action to tackle the homelessness crisis in 2019. The main point made by the institute is that any aid trajectory should start with providing a house. One of their main inspirational examples being Housing First. Ofcourse that was a victory for us, and acknowledgement for the work Housing First Nederland and all her partners have been doing.

But, the fact that Housing First has been recognized as an important policy pillar in that government policy (Brede Aanpak) and that cities have received additional resources for this has -so far- not been a catalyst for systemic change in our country. There is a lack of coordination and good binding mechanisms to ensure the local adoption and scaling up of Housing First. And so Housing First remains to be occasionally deployed at municipal level. The extent and way Housing First is used is variable. And it is often organized as a supplement to the existing care offer.

There are 3 cities in the Netherlands that are taking some of the principles of Housing First as the basis of their local policy: Amsterdam, Utrecht and Eindhoven. These are fairly recent developments.

The new coalition agreement asserts that the broad approach to homelessness will become structural, additional resources will be made available every year and the Minister for Spatial Planning and Housing returns. The policy that refers to Housing First was a first step in the right direction, but we still have a lot of work ahead of us to achieve a sustainable end to homelessness in the Netherlands.

Housing First Netherlands initiated a research to find out how Housing First is implemented in other European countries and what can be identified as the driving force behind it. With those valuable lessons we can make an analysis of the Netherlands and what is needed for us as an organisation to play a good role in further institutionalizing Housing First in national policy and governance."

3. How has the national network helped you to achieve impact?
"Our network provides an opportunity to work at both the local and national levels, and both the strategic and operational level, to develop, nurture and drive Housing First. A high degree of knowledge, expertise and more than a decade of experience has been combined through Housing First Netherlands. This feeds the knowledge and quality development. It is decisive for the impact that Housing First Netherlands was able to make. It gives legitimacy and credibility.

To be quite specific: when we started in 2018 there were 17 Housing First practices,

now there are 42. And there was 1 Housing First for Youth practice, now there are 7.

The national network continuously creates opportunities for dialogue and learning together and create mutual commitment to the long term. Facilitating the connectedness of people with the same goals and mindset, helps to keep on working energetically on improving and
upscaling Housing First. But also bringing expertise to all stakeholders that play a essential role in the upscaling of Housing First.

Everything we develop is available to everyone, the platform meetings are accessible free of charge and everyone who is doing or wants to do Housing First is welcome. This approach has proven to be a success factor.

It's about continuous development and improvement of Housing First implementation. And providing resources through the network to overcome difficulties during the scaling up of Housing First. Over the years, bit by bit, we've established a framework, a common starting point, for Housing First in the Netherlands. For example, through the guide, but also the model fidelity scale, which is both directional and also evaluates the quality of practices. Furthermore we conduct experiments, projects and research that pave the way for organizations to move forward with Housing First and provide direction to policy makers, the most demonstrable result of that is the recent national homelessness policy."

Workshop 3: Long- term and sufficient funding

Sustainable and predictable funding for the housing and support services in Housing First is crucial for success. The next step is to ensure these resources are used properly, guiding systemic change and supporting Housing First programmes for as long as needed. In the EU, the 'Next Generation EU' or Recovery Fund programme provides an unprecedented opportunity to access an important amount of funding for homelessness-related projects, including Housing First. This workshop provides the opportunity to discuss how different funding and financing streams can be adapted and created to support a systemic change toward a Housing First approach.

Main takeaways of this workshop:

- Member states are now finishing prioritising the plans for the next 7 years.
- A good communication strategy is key for structural private funding.
- Case studies are a good way of showing the impact of Housing First. A good way to build a case study is to run a double research. You can then compare the impact of the conventional way and the Housing First way.
- If you create new houses or convert existing empty buildings, you don't compete with other people who are looking for a house.
- When applying for funding, aim for the best possible scenario. For example: Czech Republic aimed to build 5.000 new houses with their funding, but eventually build 2.200. If the aim was 2.200, there would have been built less then 2.200 houses.
- Housing First Europe Hub is working on a guide how to get structural funding.
- When applying for European grant, you get minimal 40% funding and maximal 100%. Keep this in mind when you apply.
- At the high-level conference in Lisbon co-organised by the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU on 21 June 2021, the European Commission and the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), national ministers as well as representatives of EU institutions, civil society organisations, social partners and cities signed the Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness and launched the European Platform On Combatting Homelessness. Download the decleration here.
- As a result of this declaration, the European Union is making 500 million euros available for funding to combat homelessness. You can find more information here.

Workshop 4: Transition support

Having a system in place certainly helps, however, ensuring a cultural shift and supporting a rightful and just transition is essential when driving systemic change. This includes, for instance, a transition of the shelter sector that reduces the number of shelter beds while promoting more Housing First
units. Another example is ensuring that all actors understand how Housing First works and why it should be used as a tool to reduce, end and prevent homelessness. Join this workshop to learn from experiences in other countries about the promotion of this double transition.

Main takeaways of this workshop:

- Homelessness shelters can be converted into Housing First units. This is not scatteredsite living, but not all Housing First participants might want to live independently. Converting a shelter into Housing First units is a win-win: you scale down conventional homelessness management and scale up Housing First.
- When a homelessness shelter converts into Housing First houses, a lot of things are still the same. The architecture is the same, the staff is the same, the target group is the same. So what can you do to facilitate this transition on all levels?
  1. . Transitions are not always physical. Make a strategy and training plan for the transition. It's a transition for the staff as well.
  2. Think out of the box. For example: if you own the land that the shelter is on, you can demolish the building and start building Housing First houses on the same land. You could sell the land to a developer and then buy it back when the houses are build.
- When Housing First scales up, there will eventually be less demand for people who work in homeless shelters. This doesn't mean that there will be less jobs - just different jobs. There will be more need for social workers and peer supporters.
- Temporary accommodation providers get structural funding. Long term accommodation providers get short, usually yearly, funding.
- How do you convince outsiders and decision makers of Housing First?
  1. Identify their objective and interest.
  2. Stop convincing - the evidence for Housing First is already
  3. Use your research to lobby for Housing First.

Perspectives on systemic change

Mikko Aaltonen
Tampere City Council / European Committee of the Regions

"We need to move from homelessness management to actions to promote the eradication of homelessness. Homelessness is still a reality in many European countries. Homelessness is answered with temporary housing and there are no services to find permanent housing. Finland's successes in reducing homelessness are relevant to the Housing First principle, which has been successfully implemented. Both the public sector and NGO's at the local level are important in eradicating homelessness.

Member states funding on national level and EU funding is essential. Otherwise you have a good plan and a good strategy but nothing much will happen. NGO's often lack the knowledge and expertise to apply for each grant. And therefore, we should ensure that the funding models are such models that could be accessible for local and regional authorities and NGO's."

Renaud Payre
Vice President, Lyon Metropolitan Area

''We put together a proposal that was accepted and Métropole de Lyon is playing a leading role. We also have stakeholders. That means local funding authorities, social and private lenders. But what are we doing? We wanted an implementation of Housing First based on three pillars.

1. Globalisation of unaffordable housing supply , which reprised the monetisation of social members. So that's a real issue in Lyon, because this is an attractive city. And we have a real social housing issue.
2. The second pillar is to support associations and NGO's. Without association and NGO's, we cannot do anything. So that's why we are supporting association NGO's for the deployment of new support services based on the principle of our centers, We have to support local actors in changing the social intervention model. That means the permanent improvement and transformation of our corporate professional practices. To do this, we renewed our evaluation and monitoring process. We have created continuing education to a new diploma, the first housing, university diploma,
3. Little by little Housing First has changed our conception of housing. Housing First is a means - it is not an end. We need to get involved in private housing, we need to convince private landlords. We also need to address the housing shortage bias to use of modular units.

And if we want to make Housing First the general policy, we need to change the scale. The width is required major financial support, which in our view, my view implies the active participation of Europe.''
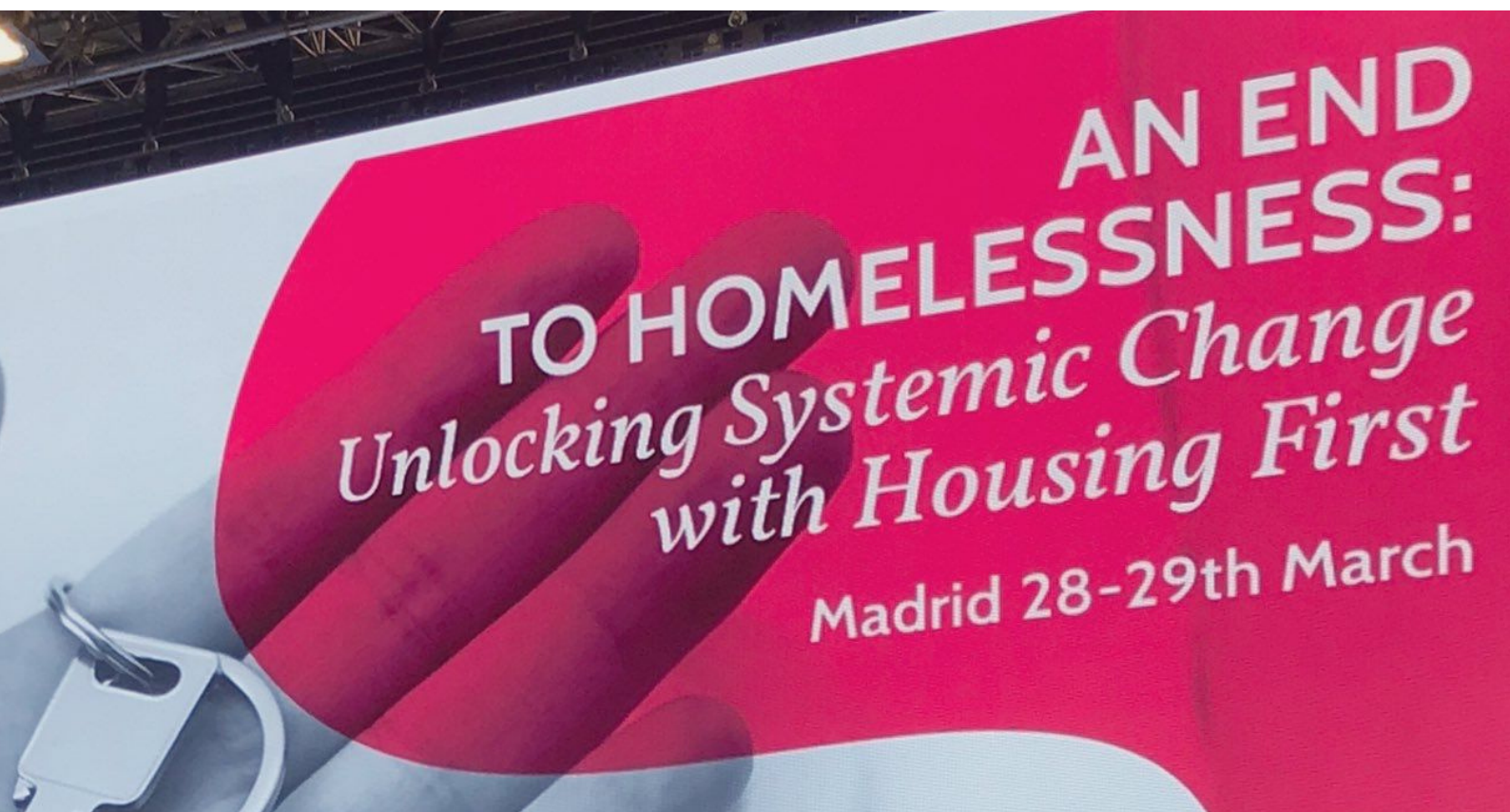
Meryama Kitir
Belgium Ministry of Development Cooperation and of Major Cities

"We are talking about people. A lot of people hear about the numbers, but behind each number there is a person. And behind each person there are their own struggles. Before I came here, I joined a sleepout. People were invited to sleep outside and still now, I'm searching for the words to explain what it is. I talked to a lot of homeless people. I understand now better when they are saying to me that you lose your whole dignity. Nobody sees you, everyone ignores you and you are suffering. It is cold and you don't have anything and anyone in your life. I think in a country like Belgium and Spain we must never allow the people to sleep outside.

It is a collective responsibility. And we need safe spaces for women. When I had to go to the toilet, I was lucky that I could go to the room that was next to us. If I would sleep on the street, I don't know what would happen to me, What struck me the most is the solidarity amongst the homeless people. Each of them have their own stories. But when I talked to them, they were all talking about collective solutions. Because they understand each others struggles ... I have a lot of respect for social workers. They have an enormous place in the lives of the homeless people. They are the only ones who care about them ... From the political side, it's important that the topic is not ignored and put on the public agenda. We have to stop blaming the people. It's a collective responsibility."

Manuel Pizarro
European Parliament

"The fact that there is extreme poverty should be the top priority of the EU. It is basically illegal, based on article 3 of the treaty of the European Union. It's our rule of law to combat social exclusion. We can't blame others for not following the rules when we don't even follow our own basic rules.

For instance, the European pillar of social rights, we should remember the planning principle, which states that the district's need for social housing or housing assistance of good quality for those in need, and shelter and services for people experiencing homelessness in order to promote their social inclusion. However, the present situation is dire. For decades, we were under the illusion that homelessness in the EU was the problem with an end in sight, even growing prosperity and broadening of social protection. But the reality is very different. Homelessness is increasing all over Europe. On top of that there is a lack of reliable data. Without reliable data it's difficult to put in place reliable policies. That something that they have to again demand from the new platform to combat homelessness. In each year, we should have a progression report with global data. Such a document will be very important with decision making and proposing solutions.

This declaration was associated with the launching of the new European platform on combating homelessness. ... That's a good step in the right direction, but we need more. We will have to have a new homelessness strategy that will help people experiencing homelessness to find a way out of that financial struggle.

We must not forget that there is a serious housing crisis. All over Europe, more and more people are unable to find the home in the private housing market. Even people of middle income families are being pushed out of the private housing sector due to the prices. Because by commodification of housing deregulation, mass tourism and financial capitalism there is a surge in demand for social housing in many countries. This puts the national authorities and public resources under pressure. In that situation, there is the risk that that homelessness is left behind. We need an integrated response at European level and we need for adequate housing for everyone. We also must take into consideration that homeless people should not be deprived of their rights. Public policies must encourage the full participation.

Ending homelessness is not a dream. We can end it, if we think about it as a collective mission."

Adam Zábranský
Councillor, City of Prague

''We've built a system. I'm not saying it's a perfect system, but it's a system. And it started when I became the councilor for housing. One of the first things I did when I came in office was to call the platform of social housing and offer them advisory positions. So one of the best things we did was to change the allocation rules for funds on housing. So it prioritizes people based on their comfort abilities and the need for stable housing. And one of the first things after that was that we did a pilot of Housing First. Because the purpose of the pilot was not to convince the politicians, it was more to introduce Housing First to local NGO's, which didn't have any experiences with Housing First.

So we partnered with several NGOs, who chose 10 to 20 homeless people who they thought were had the most risk of dying by life on the streets.

And I am happy to say that most of these 20 homeless people, today almost three years ago, are still in their house. Although many of them died during the tenancy - which shows us that they were really very vulnerable. Then we created a new team of 10 people within the housing department of the city with the help of funding. And this team is focusing on the building of social housing.

We created a new financing mechanism for the social workers. Now we are authorizing this 15 NGO's to employ social workers and focus on providing assistance to our tenants.''

Closing address

Nicolas Schmit
Commissioner, European Commission

''One year ago we decided that housing is not charity - it's a social right. The European Platform on Combatting Homelessness is a European initiative based on principle 19 ... Too many people become homeless. And there are many initiatives to end homelessness. But unfortunately, preventing homelessness is not working well enough in Europe.

We need collaborations between public authorities and social service providers. The commission has been supporting reforms and systemic change in the social policy field for years... There will be no systemic change if there will be no new investments in this sector. The bulk of these investments need to come from member states, regions, municipalities. And we have to start with affordable social housing. The European Social Fund in particular will have a strong focus on implementing of the principles of the European pillars of social rights. Housing is just the beginning. Having a roof to live is a right that should be secured to all individuals. But that's not enough. Alongside housing there should be access to healthcare and social services ... Housing First serves as an inspiration to all member states. That's why the Commission supports mutual learning and sharing best practices. Together we can be able to make concrete and visible progress towards our common objective: eradicating homelessness.''

Juha Kaakinen
Senior advisor, Y-Foundation / Housing First Europe Hub

"When you are young you have radical ideas because you don't know. When you are old, you have radical ideas because you know.

We need to do much more, much better, much faster. Homelessness crisis and refugee crisis, there is only an artificial difference. When we look into the future and the climate change, you see we need an integral approach. Wider systemic change is a wider movement on equality. Don't limit us to the homelessness sector.

We need to develop Housing First further so that it helps ending homelessness. It is necessary to update Housing First to modern times. If you are seriously want to end homelessness, you do not have the luxury of only scattered housing. Instead of one fixed housing model, also focus on other types of housing while holding on to the basic principles of Housing First, like permanent housing.

If you only rely on scattered housing it is a very slow process. Homeless people can't wait. We should work within a reasonable timeframe to get results. And some things can only be learned by doing it first.

A microscope is not the right tool when you want to see the stars."

"When you are young you have radical ideas because you don't know. When you are old, you have radical ideas because you know."

Conclusions and future commitments

Ione Belarra
Spanish Ministry for Social Affairs and Agenda 2030

''The best leverage is a solution. It's not just talk. Homes are the cornerstone - it protects someone's wellness. Homelessness is not being able to rest, heal and not having a place to enjoy intimacy.

Replacing the system by replacing the focus on human rights and people. Being optimistic is taking actions and to not making the same mistake again. For that reason the public sector should do more. We do whatever we can to create a protective system and a new strategy to end homelessness. It's a paradigm shift. We have to completely rethink policy to fight homelessness - without being condescending. When designing this new policies, we have to keep in mind the people that we have been ignoring. Disabled people, women, poor people, older people.

That's why we have to collaborate. Homelessness is not an individual problem, it affects us all. Homeless people are vulnerable victims of a model that treated homing as a business. People who make 1000,- euros a month can't afford homing.

The Spanish government is creating a new housing law. It will for the first time regulate rental homing and make a 30% reserve for social housing to create a housing stock. We have to raise the minimum wage to improve the quality of life in people - but we're aware that we didn't make enough progress.

This moment is a difficult moment for our country. We have to get access to EU funds. Too long people have been left in the cold for too long. We need a more just society.''

Contact details

Email	Housingfirstnederland@gmail.com
Website	www.housingfirstnederland.nl
Linkedin	www.linkedin.com/company/housing-first-nederland