# A new systems perspective to ending homelessness

DEMOS HELSINKI

Housing First Europe Hub

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# Foreword

Homelessness is caused by a complex set of interrelated issues, ranging from lack of affordable housing and poverty to mental health and addiction[1]. Housing First (HF) is a unique model that aims to tackle homelessness at a large scale by combining two types of interventions: unconditional rehousing, and adequate provision of non-mandatory support services.

The HF model has over time gained ground around Europe, showing to have the potential to successfully tackle homelessness in a variety of different contexts[2]. However, this has not been the case everywhere. There are contexts in which, despite the deployment of HF, we have seen an increase in homelessness[3]. Homelessness has been on the rise in most of the European Union for a decade. Based on the few estimates available, +700,000 homeless people were counted in the European Union before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic – a number which would represent a 70% increase in ten years[4].

Achieving a successful decrease in homelessness – as well as preventing it from happening in the first place – would require structural and operational changes in the systems surrounding homeless people. Yet, in many of the countries where HF has been deployed so far, the pace of change within homelessness policies have not always been capable of keeping up with the growing need of new solutions in face of great societal challenges – such as mass migration and increased inequalities.

While HF holds great potential to enable systems change in homelessness, it also comes with a risk of being interpreted and deployed simply as a mere housing management tool[5]. With this think piece, we aim to contrast this narrow view with a new perspective – one aiming to shift the debate on HF from *whether* it works, to *how* it can enable wider change.

Grounding our analysis in systems thinking, we engaged decision-makers, advocates, experts and practitioners of HF through interviews and workshops in search of meaningful ways to do so. As a result, this think piece aims to uncover and illustrate how seeing HF through the lens of governance – rather than policy – can provide us with a compass to navigate the complexity of homelessness, and learn how to advance the ambitious goal of *eliminating* it regardless of the situation a country may face.

While the journey towards systems change may be long, we believe that through this approach much more can be done to better leverage HF and make *ungoverned* homelessness a *governed* phenomenon.

Juha Kaakinen, Y Foundation

[1] Baptista, I. & Marlier, I. (2019). *Fighting homelessness and housing exclusion in Europe: A study of national policies.* European Social Policy Network, Publications Office of the EU. Link

[2] Raitakari, S. & Juhila, K. (2015). *Housing First literature: Different orientations and political-practical arguments*. European Journal of Homelessness, 9(1), 145-189. Link

[3] See, e.g., the case of Denmark in Benjaminsen, L. (2013). *Policy review up-date: Results from the Housing First based Danish homelessness strategy*. European Journal of Homelessness, 7(2), 109–131. Link

[4] Fondation Abbé Pierre, FEANTSA (2020). *Fifth overview of housing exclusion in Europe 2020.* Link

[5] Turner, A. (2014). *Beyond Housing First: Essential elements of a systems-planning approach to ending homelessness*. University of Calgary, SPP Research Papers, 7(30). Link

# 1. Housing First is not a map - it's a compass

When it comes to today's complex societal problems, it is clear that our governments and societies are in dire need of new tools. Homelessness is one of these complex challenges that cannot be solved by simple top-down deployment of traditional policy instruments. It is affected by a wide set of interrelated phenomena, ranging from migration and housing market dynamics, to social exclusion and mental health. On one hand, the Housing First model addresses this complexity by identifying a relatively simple solution to the homelessness challenge: *homelessness can be ended by providing housing and adequate support*. On the other hand, this simplicity at times might lead to HF being misinterpreted as a one-size-fits-all solution to an inherently complex issue.

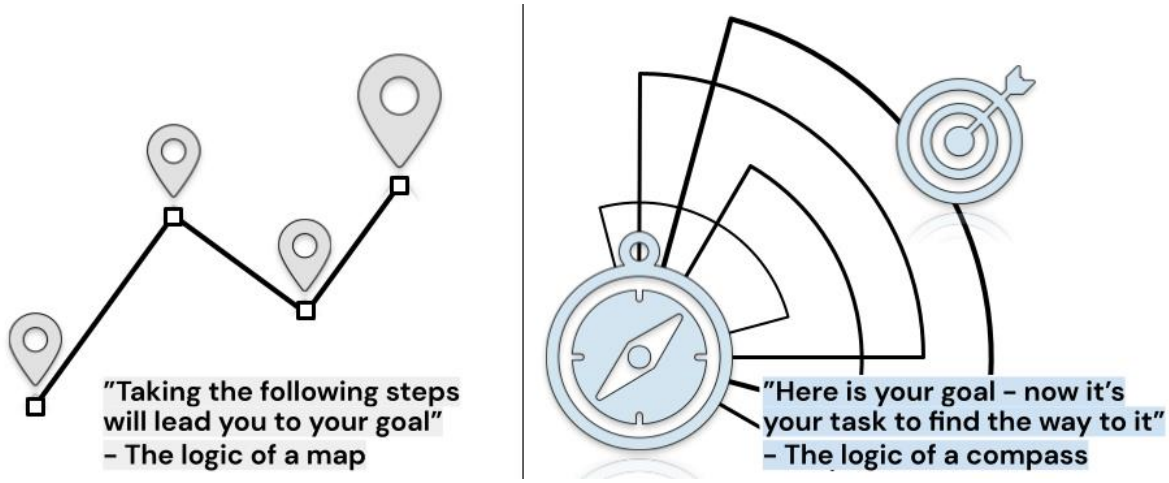


***Figure 1.*** *Housing First as a map VS. as a compass*

**In other words, HF is at times interpreted as a map that illustrates a well-known territory and a clear path to solving a substantial problem.** Yet, maps don't work in ever changing environments. Detailed maps, mostly known as policy *roadmaps* in the language of policy design, usually result in rigid and unrealistic processes that clash with the twists and turns faced by real-life practitioners who test their way forward in unexplored territory. Moreover, the preparation of maps often takes a long time, which in turn channels resources towards slow preparatory analysis, instead of towards action and learning by doing.

**Instead of being seen as a map, HF can provide governments and practitioners with a compass, allowing them to chart their own journey through the challenge of homelessness.** The HF model comes with a set of principles, a selection of which may function as the compass' cardinal directions – such as housing as a human right; separation of housing and treatment; choice and control for users; and active engagement without coercion – and leave ample room for flexible implementation[6]. As a result, this shift in perspective would entail moving away from seeing HF as a *policy* roadmap aimed to ensure the perfect implementation of a given operating model, and a new approach to HF as a *governance* model – one serving as a broad baseline for ending homelessness.

[6] FEANTSA (2018). *Core principles of Housing First*. Link

With this think piece, we hope to contribute to the debate on HF and systems change by highlighting the potential for HF to be seen, conceived, and deployed in an innovative way: as a compass that can help policymakers, HF advocates and practitioners alike navigate through a collective journey towards the goal of *eliminating* rather than simply *managing* homelessness.

# 2. A Systems Perspective to Ending Homelessness

The complexity of contemporary societal phenomena has become apparent to policy makers, practitioners, and citizens. As a result, the adoption of a *systems perspective* to urgent policy issues has become increasingly widespread. At its simplest, systems thinking means that in order to understand what gives rise to a certain phenomenon, one must examine it holistically. One must look at the patterns of behavior of a system to examine the relationships and interconnections between actors and elements that shape it[7]. Systems thinking has been used as a lens to better understand and diagnose what the conditions are that hold complex policy problems in place - ranging from climate change to inequality.

Systems thinking matters in the context on homelessness, because of the inherent complexity that concerns both its root causes, and the factors promoting (or hindering) the effectiveness of policies tackling it. As evidence shows, different approaches to HF implementation have displayed varying results in different contexts[8]. Moreover, a recent report from the Canada-based Systems Planning Collective highlights how the homelessness phenomenon is deeply rooted in cultural, political, and socio-economic conditions that cannot be overlooked if homelessness policy aims to be truly effective[9]. However, the report also acknowledges that there lacks a clear definition of what systems change in the field of homelessness may look like – a major obstacle to establishing a common vision for the future development of homelessness policy.

## Defining systems change in the context of homelessness

To develop an understanding of what systems change might entail in the field of homelessness, we must first define it. One prominent definition by Foster-Fishman, Nowell & Yang (2007) defines systems change as a process where the form and function of a specific system is altered through a deliberate process, and that can be either sudden or gradual, and incremental or radical.

According to Donella Meadows (1999), the most substantial shift in a system is achieved if the *goal* of this system is shifted[10]. The goal of the system can be defined as the key objective that underlies the aspirations, motivations, and relations between the stakeholders that compose the system – all variables which in turn determine whether change is actively promoted or hindered.

Current literature on the linkage between HF and systems change highlights how the former can help achieve the latter by fostering not only a more effective operational model, but also by increasing the degree of coordination between policy sectors, funding sources, and key stakeholders[11]. Yet, to truly appreciate the potential of analysing homelessness through systems thinking, one should avoid interpreting insights like this within the narrow terms of policy analysis, and ask instead *why* they might show promising ways for propelling a substantial shift in how homelessness systems work.

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[7] Foster-Fishman, P. G., Nowell, B. & Yang, H. (2007). *Putting the system back into systems change: A framework for understanding and changing organizational and community systems*. American Journal of Community Psychology, 39, 197–215. Link

[8] Pleace, N., Baptista, I. & Knutagard, M. (2019). *Housing First in Europe. An overview of implementation, strategy and fidelity*. Housing First Europe Hub. Link

[9] Buchnea, A. & Morton, E. (2021). *The state of systems approach to preventing and ending homelessness in Canada: A preliminary report & framework for systems transformation*. Link

[10] Meadows, D.H. (1999). *Leverage points: Places to intervene in a system*. Sustainability Institute. Link

[11] Worton, S.K. (2020). *Understanding the role of networks in building capacity for systems change: A case study of two Canadian networks implementing Housing First*. Link

A homelessness system can be defined as the combination of three things; actors, processes and core values[12]. Actors can be national or local policymakers, housing or service providers, foundations, civic associations, researchers, practitioners such as activists or volunteers, and homeless people. Processes refer to those specific policies and programmes that are adopted at the national or local level. Core values point to cultural, political and operational assumptions that might affect the perception and interpretation of the homelessness phenomenon at large.

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. Moving from this premise, we hence provide a definition of homelessness systems change as follow:

> **A structural and operational shift in the *governance* of homelessness…**
> **…from a system that *manages* homelessness to one that aims to eliminate it.**

The latter part of the definition clearly identifies the contrast between an old and a new goal of the system. Currently, many homelessness systems are based on the (very often implicit) goal of keeping the amount of homeless people at an "acceptable" level: the incentives of politicians and service providers follow this logic, creating what is often called a "culture of homelessness". Several reasons might explain this outcome: a lack of attention to homelessness in the public debate relative to other issues; the inertial persistence of old ways of implementing homelessness policy and its related services; or even the existence of perverse economic incentives for housing providers to operate through ineffective temporary housing or shelter-based solutions.

The Finnish case study (see chapter 3) illustrates such a shift quite well. After being promised quick and economically viable results in a one mandate period, politicians were incentivized to work towards ending homelessness. As a result, decision-makers committed to changing the overall policy and regulatory framework for homelessness and housing stakeholders so as to encourage the provision of permanent housing solutions relative to traditional temporary ones. Whatever the roots behind the persistence of a "culture of homelessness" in any given context, this example showcases how effectively systems change can happen when the *goal* of a system shifts. Any actor that truly aims to push systems change towards *eliminating* rather than *managing* homelessness should focus on realising this: that systems change stems, first and foremost, from the establishment and enforcement of a new goal.

Meadows herself highlighted how – in homelessness as in any other policy field – one cannot design *in advance* one single way out of the problem, but should rather devote energy to actively search and try solutions that may lead towards the desired result while learning along the way[13]. But how to harness the potential for change provided by HF in such a complex operating environment?

The first part of the systems change definition proposed above («a structural and operational shift in the *governance* of homelessness...») identifies the key tool that can provide the means needed to effectively push such a shift in the goal of the system: an apt governance model.

[12] Nelson, G. et al. (2018). *Systems change in the context of an initiative to scale up Housing First in Canada*. Journal of Community Psychology, 47(1), 7–20. Link

[13] «Magical leverage points are not easily accessible, even if we know where they are and which direction to push on them. There are no cheap tickets to mastery. You have to work at it [...]». Meadows, D.H. (1999). *Leverage points: Places to intervene in a system*. Sustainability Institute, p.21. Link

## Housing First: from policy roadmap to governance model

HF provides a new goal for homelessness policy – *eliminating* rather than *managing* homelessness. Yet, to steer systems towards such an objective, it is not enough to spell out eight principles and use them as a guide for finding the optimal way of implementing a desired policy. Instead, ways must be found that enable the new goal to be established for the system as its own key direction. According to this perspective, total fidelity to the HF principles should not be a goal in itself; rather, the most important and substantive priority should be that of finding ways to set a new goal – that is, *eliminating* homelessness – for the whole of the system.

> **Our suggestion is that we can set a new goal for the system by looking at HF from a rather different perspective than that of policy design: namely, that of governance.**

Among the manifold definitions provided in the literature, we follow Keohane & Nye (2000) in defining governance as the set of processes, structures and institutions that guide and restrain the collective activities of a group[14]. Governance is not necessarily about governments. Governance is a matter of how the interconnections between *all the involved actors* work. When we talk about governance in the context of homelessness, we talk about every stakeholder involved in the field on homelessness - and the ways in which they work and the directions that they are working towards.

The Scottish case study (see chapter 3) properly illustrates such an understanding of homelessness governance and what it entails. In this case , with the establishment of the Pathfinders initiative, a charity called Homeless Network Scotland (HNS) leveraged HF to bottom up nurture an alliance between local housing and service providers, social businesses, foundations and researchers across the country to concentrate resources and scope how to scale up HF at a national level. The strength of the alliance eventually enabled not only the establishment of a new governance for a phenomenon that was previously almost ungoverned, but also resulted in funding support from the Government and a new vision for the future of homelessness.

Overall, a governance perspective on systems change in homelessness helps us identify a new way to perceive HF. At its core, HF already *is* a brand new model for the governance of homelessness: one based on a number of key principles[15]. It is around these key principles that practitioners and governments alike may convene and commit to redesign existing structures and processes in the field of homelessness policy to meet the goal of *eliminating* rather than merely *managing* it. However, to grasp such a potential, HF advocates should not focus on designing a perfect roadmap for the implementation of HF – as if HF is a goal in itself or a one-size-fits-all policy. Instead, they should work to ensure that *ungoverned* homelessness phenomena become *governed*, and provide critical assistance to decision-makers, committed organizations, and groundwork practitioners in crafting processes that can help them govern. This would entail the *shifts* presented below:

| HF as policy | HF as governance |
|---|---|

[14] Keohane, R.O. & Nye, J.S. (2000). *Governance in a globalizing world*. In *Power and Governance in a partially globalized world*, 193–218. Link

[15] FEANTSA (2018). *Core principles of Housing First*. Link

| | |
|---|---|
| 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 |

***Table 1.*** *HF as policy VS. as governance*

## Key governance processes for homelessness systems change

What does such a shift from the *policy* to the *governance* perspective on homelessness mean in practice? Our analysis shows that three governance processes can be identified that are key to leverage systems change in the field of homelessness:

- **Directionality**: nurturing long-term political and societal commitment that can provide the incentives needed to get key stakeholders to work towards eliminating homelessness;
- **Capacity building**: connecting with those stakeholders that, by providing the needed flow of human and financial resources, allow to overcome such bottlenecks; and
- **Learning**: establishing processes that, while allowing for failure, are able to identify key bottlenecks that prevent continuous improvement and scale-up of HF implementation.

The above processes should not be seen neither as if there was any pre-established order for tackling them nor as if one was a precondition for acting on another. This is shown also through the case studies presented below, highlighting different experiences about how one can act on any of these processes in different moments and at different levels: political, organizational, and operational.

In the next chapter, we aim to shed light on how governance analysis can bring new perspectives to the very *actions* through which groundwork and advocacy for HF can help systems change work towards eliminating homelessness. By doing so, in the last chapter, we advance the three processes outlined above as a new call to action – in contrast with one focused on narrow policy change – to help HF fully exploit its potential as a tool for advancing systems change.

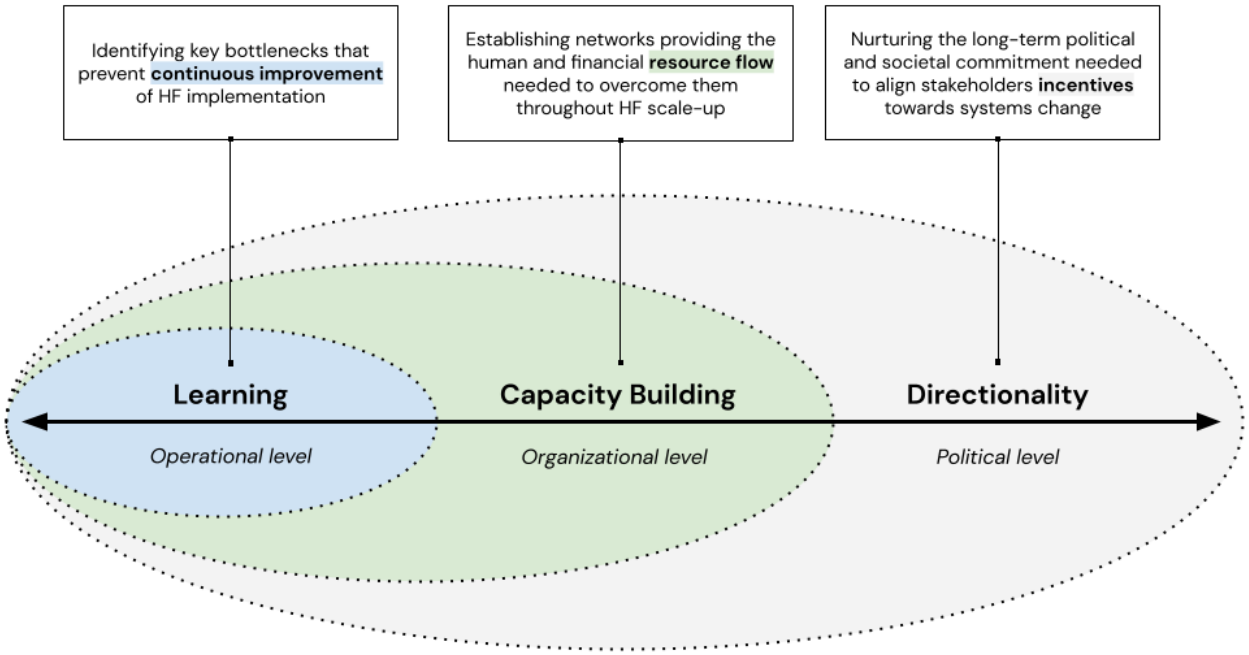



***Figure 2.*** *Key governance processes for homelessness systems change*

# 3. Housing First Governance in Practice

Based on a comparative analysis of four countries that have applied HF in different ways, this section highlights how the success of HF in furthering systems change depends greatly on whether and how homelessness is governed. By analysing these four case studies as *journeys* – that is, as four quests towards systems change – we stress both the distinctive role played by HF-savvy advocates as active protagonists, and the diversity of the strategies deployed by them in order to pave new ways through complex operating environments. To do so, we complement short synopsis of each journey with a visual timeline that highlights their ability to reshape the three key governance processes noted above: directionality, capacity building, and learning[16].

In order to maximise the variance between our case studies, they have been chosen to span two dimensions: (i) the size of the country under study (small VS. large); and (ii) the characteristics of the deployment strategy adopted by national HF advocates (top-down VS. bottom-up). Moreover, their selection helps us cover the variance between models of welfare state – that is, socio-democratic (Finland), liberal (Scotland), mediterranean (Spain), and corporatist (France)[17] – and thus investigate the capacity of HF to foster systems change *across* them.

An important caveat related to this point concerns the normative implication of this comparative analysis. Whereas different countries have so far achieved varying degrees of success towards enabling systems change, our analysis does not aim to identify the "best" governance model. Rather, we aim to highlight (i) the diversity of the governance models resulting from different strategies; and (ii) the capacity of each to reshape – in different order and to different degrees of effectiveness – the three governance processes noted above.

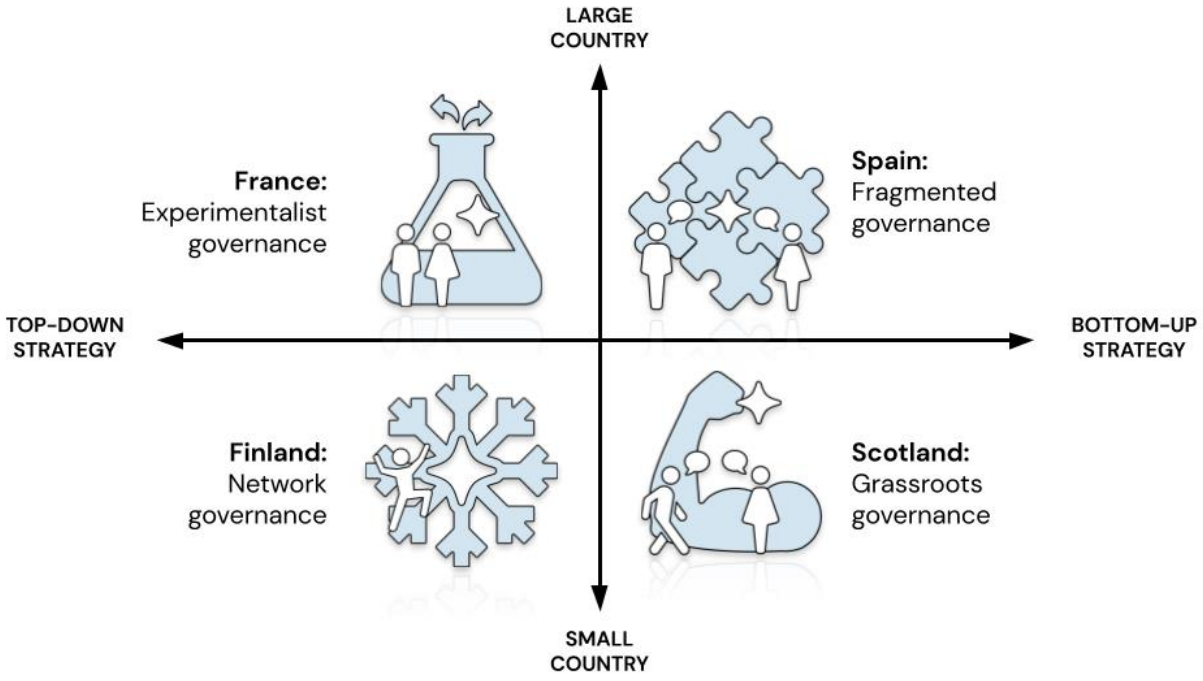



***Figure 3:*** *Variance across the four selected cases*

[16] Extended case studies available in appendix.

[17] Hoekstra, J. (2003). *Housing and the welfare state in the Netherlands: An application of Esping-Andersen's typology*. Housing, Theory and Society, 20(2), 58–71. Link

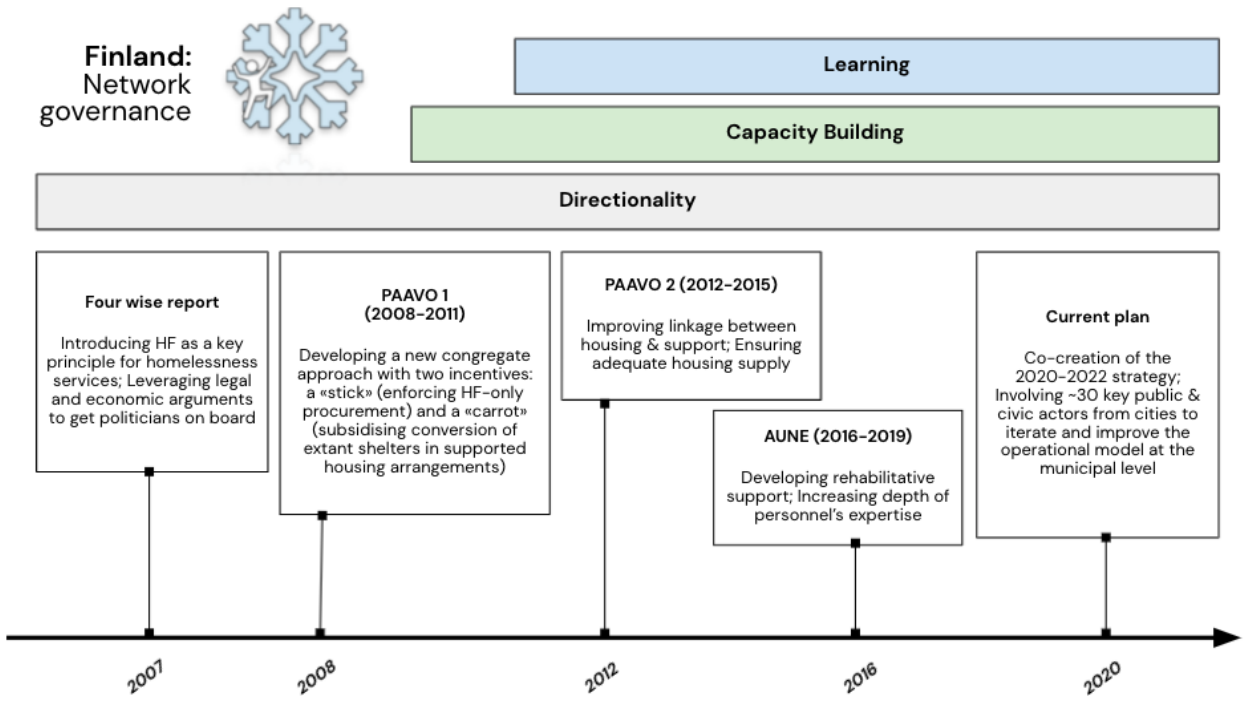
## A. Finland: Network governance

Over the last 15 years, Finland's implementation of the Housing First model has led the country to become an international benchmark in the fight against homelessness. Finland developed its strategy through 3 consecutive programmes and is now implementing its fourth one (2020-2022) with the explicit aim of ending homelessness by 2027. In the meanwhile, the number of homeless people had a significant decrease from 8300 in 2008 to 4341 in 2021[18] – with the Finnish case of 'HF policy' being reported in media outlets around the world as a best practice.

Key to success was first the capacity of the Y-Foundation to get the national government on board through use of economic evidence (i.e., proving its cost-effectiveness), legal argumentation (i.e., privacy as a constitutional right) and promising quick wins. By seizing political support from the Ministry of Environment, the incentives faced by the established legacy of housing service providers were changed towards large-scale adoption of HF. In turn, as a result of substantial public investment and sustained political guidance from the Ministry of Environment, this strategy not only succeeded in swiftly crowding out temporary housing services, but also nurtured a participatory and inclusive approach to continuous learning and adaptation by steering the emergence and development of HF-based networks.

Eventually, the effort promoted by the Ministry of Environment and the Y-Foundation led to the entrenchment of HF principles in the Finnish national housing strategy – one which persistently engaged public, private and civic stakeholders to co-operate in networks and exchange their learning for better adaptation of HF in local contexts. This journey resulted in the emergence of a **network governance model**: one in which strong and sustained political commitment to HF by one key ministry, enabled the change of incentives faced by the system as a whole – therefore steering local networks of equal partners from managing towards eliminating homelessness.

[18] ARA (2021). *Report 2021: Homelessness in Finland 2020*. Link




## B. Scotland: Grassroots governance

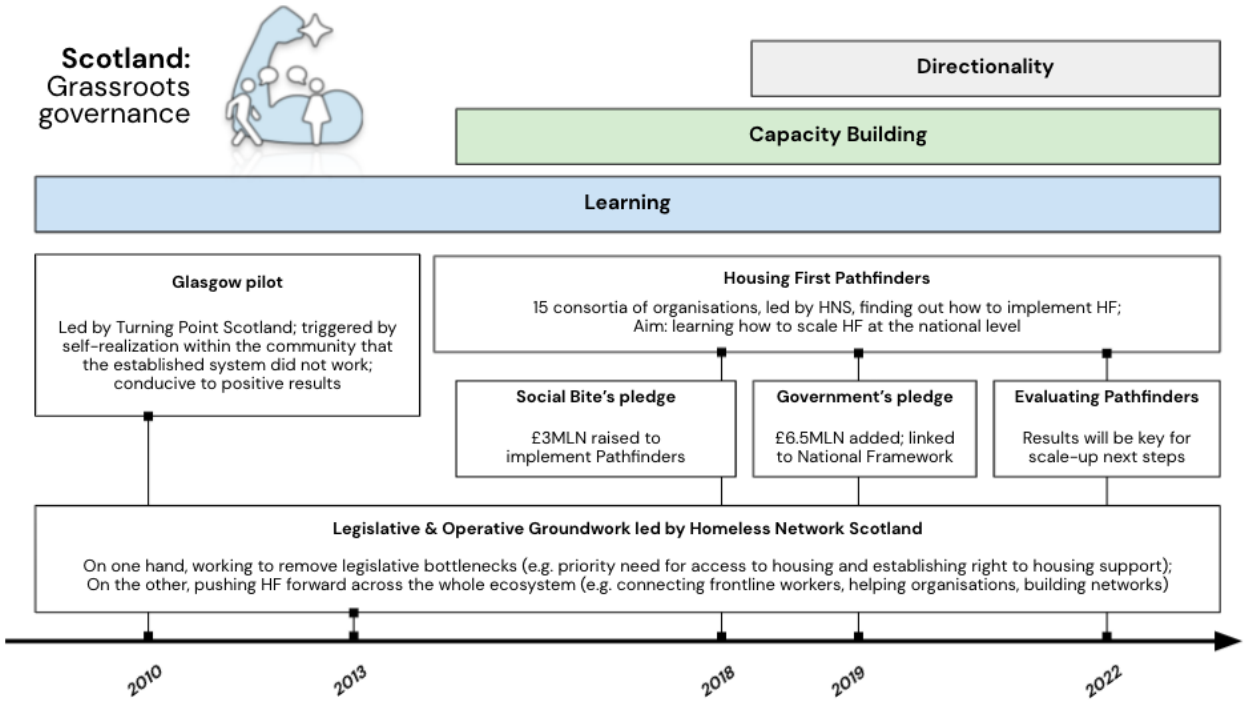
Over the last three years, Scotland has been characterised by a strong and unexpectedly fast diffusion of HF. This has been mostly been following the rise of the HF Pathfinder project (2019-2022) which has established 6 cross-sectoral partnerships in 5 cities to provide a blueprint for how HF could become a default model for homeless people with complex needs; urged 22 more local authorities to begin their own implementation of the programme; and eventually committed the Government to become the primary funder of the initiative. Starting from 2016 onwards, and as of May 2021, the number of HF tenancies was up to 519 and evidence of tenancy sustainment was persistently high[19].

While entrepreneurial and political support has been key to shift the pace of change from slow to very rapid, the capacity needed to scale HF up was prepared over a decade of groundwork by Homeless Network Scotland (HNS) and a small number of committed service providers. The process gave birth to a bottom-up strategy, in which willing consortia of local stakeholders are the real propellers aiming to prove the feasibility of a national HF-based approach. At the local level, this nurtured the capacity of frontline workers and service providers to embed the HF mindset in their everyday operations. At the national level, it helped achieve the political buy-in of both social enterprises (such as Social Bite) and the government, hence providing HF projects with even more funding and visibility through the establishment of the Pathfinder initiative.

While the issue of long-term funding still looms ahead of the next decade, the positive outlook on the persistence of political support to HF should provide room to nurture systemic change further successfully in the next few years. Overall,

[19] HNS (2021). *HF Scotland Monthly Tracker – Progress to May 2021*. Link

this journey shows the emergence of a distinctively **grassroots governance model**: one in which HNS nurtured a fertile ground for HF well before they could seize the opportunities for scale-up provided by social entrepreneurs and the government, hence securing the capabilities needed to advance systemic change.



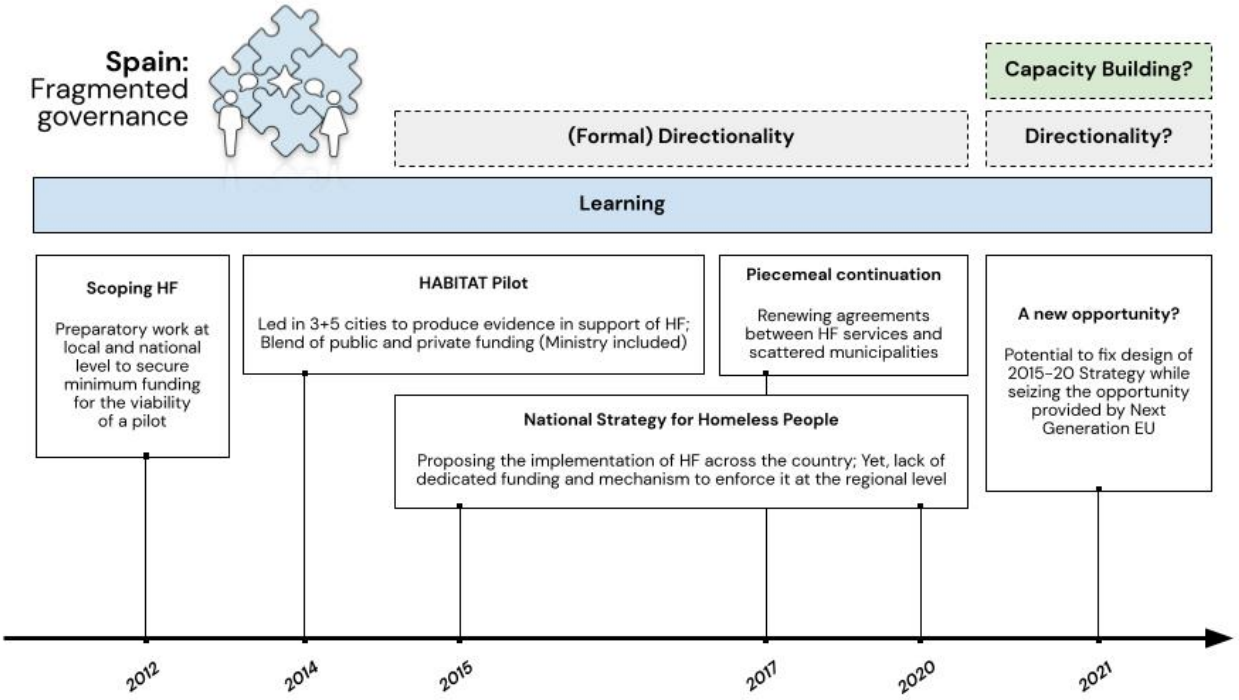

## C. Spain: Fragmented governance

Over the last seven years, Spain has seen HF rise from the status of a pilot project to being the main pillar defining the homelessness strategies across national and local policy makers. As a result, HF is currently used in big cities such as Madrid, Barcelona, Seville, and Mallorca. Drawing on the positive results of a first pilot launched in 2014 (the Habitat project), the number of units scaled from a few dozens (28 in Habitat) to several hundreds (500 as of first half of 2021, with an expected rise to 950 before end of 2021)[20].

Yet, this did not catalyse systemic change: conversely, the lack of institutional capacity at the regional level in coordinating funding as well as of operational capacity at the local level hindered the efforts of HF advocates, such as HOGAR SÍ. On the one hand, HF has been recognised as a key policy pillar at the national level and capacity for its deployment has been nurtured in some key cities. On the other, the overall lack of capabilities to ensure coordination at the regional level severely hindered systemic change – most notably, through the lack of proper binding mechanisms for securing the local adoption of HF.

[20] Data reported in expert interview.

All things considered, while the path towards systemic change is still uncertain, the ongoing process of cultural change and the opportunity provided by new sources of funding from the EU might nonetheless provide the momentum needed to expand HF to a point of no return. What can be agreed so far, is that the combination of the above with the need of HF advocates to pave their way through a bottom-up approach resulted in a **fragmented governance model**: one where the lack of capabilities needed to move systemic change across different parts of the country relegated HF to a low number of successful case studies.




## D. France: Experimentalist governance

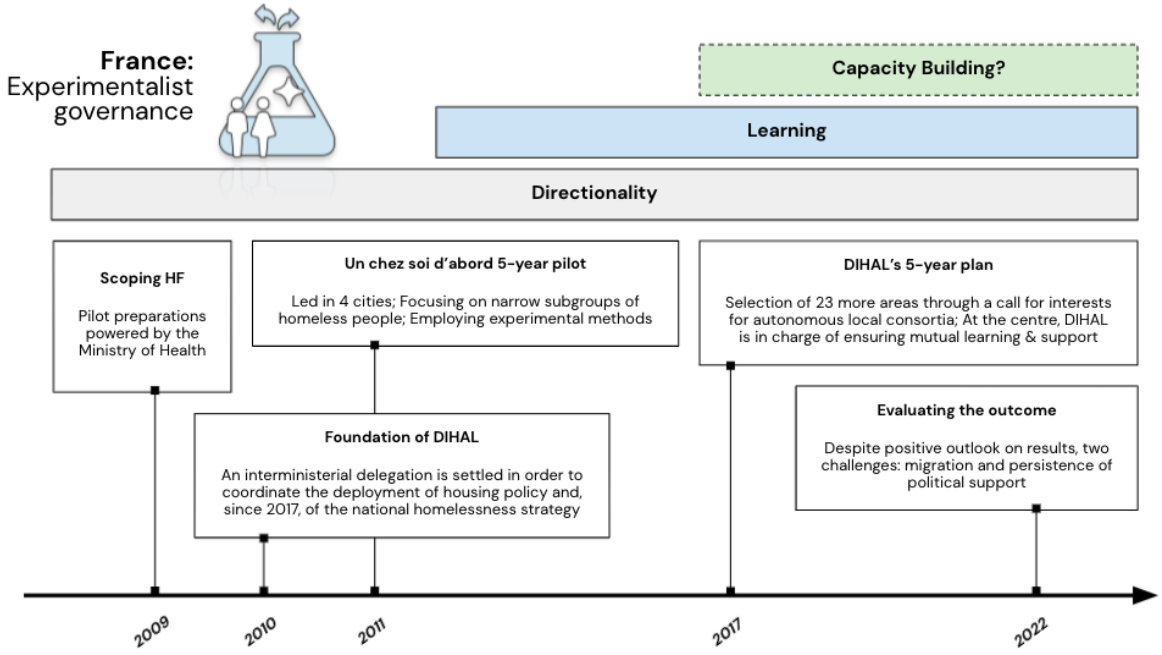
Over the last 12 years, France has steadily invested in assessing, improving, and scaling up HF through the country in order to deal with an ever growing and heterogeneous homeless population. Following the successful pilot of Housing First (Un chez soi d'abord) in four big cities – possibly the largest trial conducted in Europe so far – in 2017 HF has been expanded to 12 more cities. Overall, this brought +2,000 places over the course of 2018-2022, with additional support to develop HF and housing-led services in another 24 cities[21].

While actively supported by the national government agency DIHAL – which provides guidance towards its broader adoption, the scale needed to deal with France's growing concerns about its homeless population has not been reached yet. Rather, the 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

[21] Data reported in expert interview.

between the national and local level – but failing to crowd out the old shelter-based model and change citizens' mindset towards the issue.

Overall, while France seems to be on the right track in working towards the piecemeal and incremental creation of local capacity for HF adoption, the path towards systemic change still seems to be long. Despite the success of DIHAL in scaling up HF through smart coordination with selected local consortia, the incrementalist approach is making positive change less visible to citizens compared to the scale of the more pressing issue of migration – therefore resulting in an **experimentalist governance model** which, while promising, will require sustained, long-term political commitment in order to effectively achieve systemic change.




## Comparing the four journeys

As evident from the diversity depicted in the four case studies above, a comparative analysis highlights a first conclusion: there is no definitive policy roadmap nor governance model that can be designed in advance that can ensure that HF will achieve systems change. Rather, what we see is different patterns of strategic action, represented by key pivot organisations.

Pivot organizations have in their context identified very different ways to restructure the governance of homelessness systems – hence the definition of different governance models: network, grassroots, fragmented, and experimentalist. Pivot organisations are different in nature. However, whether they are governmental agencies (France's DIHAL), foundations (Finland's Y-Foundation or Spain's HOGAR SÍ) or even charities (Scotland's HNS), they all share at least three common features.

- First, the pivot organisations work hard towards the establishment of an aligned vision and strategic direction for homelessness stakeholders by setting and clarifying new goals – thus providing **directionality** to the homelessness governance system. A clear example here is that of Finland, where the capacity of the Y-Foundation to secure sustained political commitment across several political mandates helped consolidate HF deployment.

- Second, the pivot organisations create connections with stakeholders across different policy sectors or levels of government based on mutual goals – hence securing the **capacity building** needed for an effective homelessness governance system. Here, contrasting examples are offered: on one hand, by Scotland's HNS's ability to secure Social Bite's pledge, which enabled them to scale HF through Pathfinders; and, on the other, by the difficulty met by Spain's HOGAR SÍ in ensuring coordination and HF take-up across regions.

- Third, pivot organisations serve as a common infrastructure for shared learning and meaningful dialogue among practitioners – therefore fostering mutual **learning** across the whole of the homelessness governance system. Here, the case of France's DIHAL represents a clear example of how a centralized agency can leverage the autonomy of local consortia to collect best practices and detect implementation challenges from a variety of perspectives, and use these insights to improve HF implementation overtime.

To sum up, we see that pivot organisations deploy HF as a means to advance a brand new goal - *eliminating* rather than *managing* homelessness - by fundamentally reshaping three governance processes that are key to leverage systems change in homelessness: providing directionality; ensuring capacity building; and fostering learning.

Obviously, the diversity in the contexts where pivot organisations attempt to reshape these processes is such that their ability to foster change in one process faster than in the other two is highly variable and country-specific: hence the difference in the deployment strategies highlighted above.

Yet, it is worth noting that – regardless of these notable differences – the core contribution of these organisations is in their capacity to interpret and deploy HF not as a rigid, one-size-fits-all *policy roadmap*; but as a model for *governing* homelessness. A model whose actual success eventually bears on their capacity to deploy HF as a means to an end; *eliminating*, rather than *managing* homelessness.

| Country | Finland | Scotland | Spain | France |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| HF Governance Model | Network | Grassroots | Fragmented | Experimentalist |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Directionality** | Sustained political support achieved ever since the start of HF deployment | The Government funds HF programmes and sets the agenda for HF next steps | Despite formal support to HF as a principle, there is a lack of enforcement at the regional level | The Government guides scale-up process through a number of experiments |
| **Capacity Building** | Y-Foundation responsible for facilitating tight coordination across the whole system | HNS nurtures the links between service providers, social businesses, and policymakers | A lack of funding coordination at the regional level prevents HF from scaling up | DIHAL engages with consortia in selected areas, but leaves out large parts of the country |
| **Learning** | Consecutive policy programmes ensure that implementation improves over time | HNS ensures mutual support across local stakeholders by providing them room for dialogue | HOGAR SÍ keeps nurturing HF in the municipalities where it has already been tested | DIHAL collects and defines new best practices from the consortia own experience |

***Table 2.*** *Comparing the four journeys*

# 4. Call to action

Ending homelessness in a complex and ever changing operating environment is all but an easy task. There is evidence that the HF model holds potential to provide governments with a clear answer to the complex problem of homelessness: housing and adequate support.

However, one should not overestimate the capacity of HF alone to enable systems change *by design*. We cannot *in advance* design a way out of complex problems. The great difference between the four journeys in the previous chapter shows how each pathway towards systems change must be charted and discovered along the way, based on the peculiarities of each context.

Based on this reasoning we argue that in order to truly leverage the potential of HF towards systems change, HF should not be seen as a *policy roadmap* aimed to ensure the perfect implementation of a rigid set of principles. Instead, HF should be viewed as a *governance* model for making an often ungoverned system governed.

What does this mean in practice to those operating in homelessness systems?

HF advocates around Europe tend to focus on crafting and refining relatively detailed roadmaps for governments and practitioners, for example through research. Yet, having seen how attempts to design in advance systems change might not offer much help, one can grasp the fragilities of this approach and thus advance a new proposal for the role of HF and its community.

**We argue that, instead of being seen as a map, HF could be interpreted and advocated for as a compass: one that allows governments and practitioners alike to chart their own journey through the homelessness crisis based on a narrow number of key cardinal directions.**

In this approach, the HF community would act as their sherpas: that is, trained and experienced professionals hired to walk them through the twists and turns of homelessness systems change. Sherpas would then help them reach the top of systems change (i.e., *eliminating* homelessness) by assisting them in critical decisions, such as;

- scoping and identifying the fastest pathways to the top e.g., by adapting HF operational model to the specificity of each local context;
- helping them avoid potential dead ends e.g., by helping solve key implementation bottlenecks – such as a streamlining of funding, or a lack of incentives for traditional service providers to change in their operational practices;
- and prompting them not to lose sight of the final destination e.g., by nurturing political and societal commitment.

However, such a shift in perspective would also entail that the HF community embraces a brand new agenda for systems change – one that focuses on HF as a model for *governing* homelessness, rather than as a policy roadmap. This agenda would then be linked to the three key governance processes outlined earlier – learning, capacity building, and directionality – and result in the following longlist of actions aimed at securing them:

- To ensure directionality...
    - Believe it when you say it: homelessness can be ended.

- Secure high-level political commitment for ending homelessness by building incentives & pressure for decision-makers.
- Ensure political will to adjust the incentives for the previous legacy of service providers, to ensure that: (i) moving from shelter-based to permanent housing pays off for them as well; and (ii) public funding is effectively oriented toward person-centred planning and support.

- To ensure capacity building...
  - Prevent fragmentation and isolation of HF initiatives by governing networks of actors committed to ending homelessness - and not just stakeholders committed to HF.
  - Provide practitioners and groundworkers involved in different initiatives with the training and peer learning opportunities needed.
  - Engage with all stakeholders that may help securing human or financial resources.

- To ensure learning...
  - Commit to action rather than detailed *ex ante* planning.
  - Direct research resources into *ex post* evaluations to strengthen the knowledge base, and hence incentivize the system.
  - Balance autonomy of local networks with centralized collection and brokering of best practices, insights, and lessons learnt – e.g., by means of a pivot organisation such as the ones described above.
  - Create broader appetite for HF philosophy by promotion of a captivating narrative.

Taking stock of these actions, we hope that practitioners, advocates and governments alike may better appreciate the potential of HF as a model for governing homelessness and steer its associated systems from *managing* to *eliminating* homelessness. In this governance perspective, there is a role for every actor - and housing first advocates can help identify these roles by providing the actors with a new goal and purpose, and by helping them navigate their way towards its fulfillment.

# Appendix: Extended case studies

## A. Finland: Network governance

Since 2008, Housing First has been the cornerstone of Finland's response to homelessness. Together with the adoption of an integrated national strategy which placed the goal of ending homelessness at the highest level of the government's political agenda, Finland developed its strategy through three consecutive programmes and is now implementing its fourth one (2020-2022) with the aim of eventually ending homelessness by 2027. In the meanwhile, the number of homeless people had a significant decrease from 8300 in 2008 to 4341 in 2021[22], with the Finnish case of 'HF policy' being reported in media outlets as a best practice.

### Who deployed Housing First?

1. Founded in 1985 by a group of municipalities and NGOs working for feasible solutions to a looming housing shortage, the Y-Foundation has been one of the key national advocates and developers of the HF operating model in Finland – providing both direct policy advice to governments and coordination of NGOs and municipalities that carried out the programme throughout successive government terms. Moreover, the Y-Foundation played a relevant role both as a key housing provider and as an HF advocate capable of securing sustained political commitment ever since the onset of the new homelessness strategy.
2. Building on the pivotal role played by the Y-Foundation, the network of public and private stakeholders involved in debating, implementing and expanding Housing First constantly grew. At the national level, the Ministry of Environment provided the convening power needed to design and coordinate increasingly ambitious strategies – e.g., through the organisation of roundtables involving key ministries and agencies to co-design updated strategies. At the local level, the country's main municipalities and largest NGOs took a direct role in developing implementation strategies apt to each specific context and inducing co-operation between all key service providers.

### How has Housing First been deployed?

1. In 2007, the report developed by the so-called "four wise" expert group (with current Y-Foundation CEO Juha Kaakinen acting as its secretary) introduced Housing First as a key principle to reboot provision of homelessness services. Crucially, this was done on the basis of both socio-economic considerations (e.g., cost-saving benefits) and ethical-legal ones (e.g., housing as a basic need and privacy as a constitutional right). In this way, political commitment to HF was secured.
2. As of 2008, HF was rapidly deployed using a mixed approach of congregate and scattered housing, leading to the conversion of existing large shelters into dedicated apartment blocks and offering homeless people regular tenancies. In most of the municipalities, this was done by tackling and targeting the historical legacy of shelter-based service providers with two sets of incentives: a «stick» (i.e., compelling public authorities to procure

[22] ARA (2021). *Report 2021: Homelessness in Finland 2020*. Link

housing services only from HF-compliant providers) and a «carrot» (i.e., providing service providers with financial subsidies for converting available housing stocks to this purpose).

3. Since then, Finnish governments developed its response to homelessness through 4 consecutive policy programmes – the current covering the period from 2020 to 2022 – powered by substantial national funding. As the evidence base and local experience with HF programmes matured overtime, wider programmes of newbuilt and scattered housing services followed throughout the country, with the spread of HF and, more generally, housing-led approaches leading eventually to a vast expansion of the strategy. Crucially, this has been done through the active involvement of the municipalities and NGOs in charge for the rollout of the programmes, hence providing room for the co-creation and local adaptation of the strategy – as well as for nation-wide capacity building and collective learning.

## What are the achievements and challenges that have been identified?

Achievements

1. **Crowding out temporary housing services**: Through the design of apt regulatory and financial incentives, the previous legacy of service providers was brought on board to be part of the new strategy. The programmes funded through the strategy helped cities and organisations rapidly shift their operational model, hence swiftly replacing temporary housing services with permanent housing solutions. The state's guidance turned the reduction of homelessness into a goal shared across the whole of the system, providing the scale needed to tackle the challenge effectively.
2. **Entrenching HF principles in national housing response**: Notwithstanding the change in governments, HF has gradually become a cornerstone of Finnish homelessness policy. Building on the common recognition of housing as a basic need and privacy as a constitutional right which could not be respected by temporary accommodation, the perseverance of national governments consolidated the acquisition and implementation of the HF philosophy among all stakeholders.
3. **Ensuring cross-sectoral co-operation and continuous learning**: In turn, the continuity in efforts turned into a strong mandate for municipalities and NGOs to continuously improve their housing and service models. Through the convening power provided by the Ministry of Environment, this feeded in the development of local actors' operating models both through better integration of housing, social, and health services, and through exchange of best practices.

Current challenges

1. **Strengthening implementation at the municipal level**: As of 2019, celebration of good results was accompanied by recognition of the need to improve how both housing and service models were delivered across different municipalities. In this perspective, the co-creation of the 2020-2022 strategy consciously involved around 30 key public and civic actors from cities to reflect and design new iterations of the model. This is expected to solve implementation challenges emerging in different contexts as well as to share best practices across them.
2. **Reaching out to new social groups at risk**: As the groups at risk of homelessness have become more and more heterogeneous, the current strategy aims to adapt to the new context by reaching out to new social groups – such as people with financial difficulties, young people at risk of exclusion, or people with immigrant backgrounds. In this perspective, the adoption by part of the Ministry of Environment of a broad definition of

homelessness enabled all the actors concerned by the phenomenon to take part in prevention strategies, and provided room for monitoring all of the old and new pathways that may lead individuals to homelessness.

| Key achievements | Current challenges |
|---|---|
| Crowding out temporary housing services | Strengthening implementation at local level |
| Entrenching HF in national strategy | Reaching out to new social groups at risk |
| Ensuring cooperation and learning | |

## Has Housing First been capable of achieving systemic change?

Current status and outlook on the future

By using a Housing First approach as a core principle for service design, to be implemented in flexible ways according to local contexts, Finland has been able to cut the number of homeless people by 18% from 2009 to 2016. In the meanwhile, Finland has also become a benchmark country for other countries interested in transforming housing policy, becoming a main source of reference about the capacity of HF to tackle homelessness exactly when homelessness was on the rise in the rest of Europe. Despite the social and economic strain posed by the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, Finland seems to stand among the most well positioned countries across Europe to deal with its consequences effectively.

Lessons learnt from this case

Since the onset of HF deployment in Finland, the Y-Foundation has been able to achieve political buy-in at the highest political level on the basis of both practical (e.g. cost savings) and ethical (e.g. housing as a right) considerations. This effort, then taken up by the Ministry of Environment, led to the entrenchment of HF principles in the national housing strategy, which persistently engaged public, private and civic stakeholders to co-operate and exchange their learning for better adaptation of HF in different local contexts. A key achievement was the crowding out of shelters as well as temporary housing solutions through the active engagement of service providers and the redesign of the operational incentives faced by them in keeping old habits and strategies.

# B. Scotland: Grassroots governance

In 10 years, Scotland has seen Housing First scale up from being a narrow pilot experiment – led by a small group of NGOs in Glasgow – to becoming the Parliament's and Government's policy objective as a systemic response to homelessness through the next decade. Now, the HF Pathfinder project (2019-2022) has established 6 cross-sectoral partnerships in 5 cities to provide a blueprint for how HF could become a default model for homeless people with complex needs – urging 22 more local authorities to begin their own implementation of the programme through Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans (RRTPs), and committing the Government to become the primary funder of the initiative. As of May 2021, the number of HF tenancies was up to 519 and evidence of tenancy sustainment was persistently high[23].

## Who deployed Housing First?

1. Throughout the last decade, Homeless Network Scotland played a pivotal role in the advancement of HF in the Scottish system. HNS is an organisation born to bring together key stakeholders to figure out how to retain a long-view on the overarching goal of ending homelessness. As a result, it does not deliver services, nor does it get involved in distributing funding for service providers: rather, it plays a convening and facilitative role for the whole community of change makers, service providers, social workers, and volunteers that are involved in tackling homelessness, hence ensuring trust-building and learning processes across the whole of the network. Currently, HNS also monitors and ensures the development of HF in Scotland by leading the Pathfinder project funded also by the Government.
2. Beyond the pivotal role played by HNS, the Scottish model includes the involvement of three other sets of actors: 1) service providers, among which the most relevant are Turning Point Scotland (who first led the Glasgow pilot back in 2010) and the other 5 local consortia of NGOs-public authorities involved in the Pathfinder project; 2) the national Government, which stands out as main funder of the Pathfinders, owner of the national strategy and ultimately accountable for the protection of housing rights; and 3) a number of supporting organisations, among which the most relevant are the social enterprise Social Bite (critical fundraiser and catalyst of change for enabling the rollout of Pathfinder) and Corra Foundation (managing its funding mechanisms).

## How has Housing First been deployed?

1. In Scotland, the first case of HF deployment goes back to the Glasgow pilot that took place between 2010 and 2013. The pilot was developed by Turning Point Scotland – Scotland's largest service provider in the field – mostly triggered by evidence of high levels of repeat homelessness amongst people with substance misuse problems. However, the beginning of the pilot feeded into ongoing concerns about the effectiveness of the homelessness system as a whole. As a result, HNS moved in two directions. On one hand, HNS achieved broader access to housing by contributing to the legislative removal of housing rationing based on the priority need – then phased out in 2012. This result had been possible thanks to the massive endeavor of multiple stakeholders, ranging from housing providers and NGOs such as Turning Point Scotland to early local adopters. On the other hand, it helped members of the network to acknowledge the fact that the established temporary housing system was failing to bring out of hardship a large part of its beneficiaries, and keeping them in the loop of long-term

[23] HNS (2021). *HF Scotland Monthly Tracker – Progress to May 2021*. Link

homelessness. Eventually, the realisation that the network was part of the problem itself paved the way for new solutions to be sourced, scoped and analysed.

2. The success of the 2010-2013 Glasgow pilot and the compelling international evidence led HNS to build on the proactivity of enthusiast early adopters and housing providers to actively promote the HF concept across the whole of the homelessness network. While continuing to foster an improved and simplified legislative framework – leading, in 2016, to the enshrining in legislation of the right to housing support – HF was therefore pushed forward across the system: from individual frontline workers who had to understand its operative model, to organisations needing to restructure their business models; from connecting with citizens to lobbying in the right rooms. At this stage, only a few local projects were established: no more than 100 tenancies started before 2015. Yet, early adopter local authorities (such as Renfrewshire and West Lothian) kept developing the model on the ground. HNS' vision was one of creating the time and space to allow all the components of the systems to build from these experiences in order to let them envision the potential of HF: no shortcut was expected towards systemic change.
3. A major window of opportunity for change opened in 2017 and 2018, when increased concerns of national politicians about the lack of improvement in the homelessness system performance and the risk of not meeting the rights granted by the legislation led to initiatives – both from the Parliament and the Government – identifying HF as a cornerstone recommendation for a new strategy aiming to end homelessness. On the one hand, this led to the introduction by part of the Scottish Government of Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans (RRTPs): 5-year strategies designed by each of the 32 Local Authorities to implement a rapid rehousing approach (of which HF formed a smaller component) within their communities. On the other, in light of the widespread need and appetite for HF in Scotland's main cities, the social enterprise Social Bite decided to invest a fundraising quota of £3MLN in the creation of HF Pathfinders: 5 consortia of organisations that were willing to be first in finding out how to implement HF in different cities on a 3-year horizon (2019-2022) and at an unprecedented scale. The project was designed with the purpose of matching adherence to HF principles with the room for flexibility that was needed to develop an approach apt to each context.
4. The momentum generated by the HF Pathfinder project created an opportunity for the government to tap in through four ways: by linking the initiative to the national policy objective of ending homelessness; by providing additional funding (£6.5MLN); by appointing the Corra Foundation as fund manager to avoid lengthy procurement channels and embed the HF principles as prerequisites for money; and by linking the next update of the National Framework for homelessness policy on the basis of the independent Pathfinder evaluation that the Heriot-Watt University will lead relative to four assessment areas (process, fidelity, economic, and outcomes). As of April 2021, the number of HF tenancies was up to 507, and evidence of success – despite some challenges in shortening time to re-housing – persistently high.

## What are the achievements and challenges that have been identified?

Achievements

1. **Nurturing a fertile ground for HF**: The capacity of HNS to foster a cultural mindshift throughout the whole of the network and to support local authorities in the drafting of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans helped promote an ambition for change among most practitioners across the country. Moreover, the provision of spaces for community building and sharing of learnings both between local stakeholders and between the local authorities and national government nurtured an environment which eventually proved fertile for the launch of the

Pathfinder initiative as part of HF scale-up. As a result, when political buy-in showed up, the homelessness community was ready.

2. **Building a high-level coalition of stakeholders**: HNS was key in directing Social Bite's fundraising capacities towards HF, hence enabling that organisation to become a key catalyst of change. Indeed, not only Social Bite started the first Pathfinders, but also helped HNS in promoting HF and its principles to the government to the point that the executive tapped in as well. As a result of entrepreneurial and political buy-in, HF reached an unprecedented scale in a very short amount of time – from 100 to 500 tenancies in around 2 years and a half – relative to the pace seen from 2010 to 2018.
3. **Developing a clear scale-up strategy for the HF community**: Analysed in retrospect, Scotland's adoption of HF has been characterised by a persistent commitment to ensure the alignment and the preparedness of all stakeholders involved as a key to secure its feasibility. Overtime, this process allowed the consolidation of a strategy which, based on constant data collection and independent evaluation of projects, has been (and might be again) key to ensure the sustainable scalability of HF.

Current challenges

1. **Ensuring long-term funding**: With the pledge provided by Social Bite and the government, HF has been guaranteed three years of funding: yet, this has not solved how to ensure that consortia will be able to sustain themselves after the end of the Pathfinder project. Moreover, the issue of funding feeds in two other related issues: 1) the risk that the persistent allocation of responsibility to local authorities may lead to a fragmented system of homelessness policy; and 2) the risk that budgets now devoted to funding key elements of HF operating model – such as the homelessness budget, the drugs budget, the mental health budget, etc. – might remain relatively siloed. In line with the rules of competitive procurement, some local authorities may end up costing HF at a level that could make it difficult for providers to maintain the level of human resources needed to insure its success and secure systems fidelity.
2. **Overcoming the pressure induced by scale-up**: Despite the attention paid by HNS and other key stakeholders in ensuring a balanced scale-up process, the accelerated pace of change and the rise in public scrutiny felt from 2018 onwards brought the homelessness community in a completely different operational context. For the first time, frontline workers and service providers operated under the pressure of learning fast how to adapt their practices to a new model while proving effective in tackling homelessness. With respect to this issue, the possibility provided by HNS to let them voice their concerns in spaces for community-building has played an important role in ensuring them the presence of peer exchange and support.
3. **Ensuring the success of the 3-year long Pathfinders**: A full evaluation of HF Pathfinder projects will be published in 2023, with an interim report due in 2022. The results will provide key information to local authorities and national policymakers about the capacity of the homelessness system to adopt HF at a full national scale, and hence will be critical to the successful consolidation of the HF scale-up process. Issues such as the need to shorten time to re-housing; to strike the right balance between fidelity and flexibility; and to solve persistent legislative bottlenecks are therefore reflected in the effort made by actors as HNS and local NGOs to do their best in tackling them towards this important end goal.

| Key achievements | Current challenges |
|---|---|

| | |
|---|---|
| Nurturing a fertile ground | Ensuring long-term funding |
| Building a high-level coalition | Overcoming scale-up pressure |
| Developing a scale-up strategy | Ensuring the success of Pathfinders |

## Has Housing First been capable of achieving systemic change?

Current status and outlook on the future

With the Pathfinder project slightly more than halfway, in just a few years Scotland assisted to an important and rapid growth in the diffusion of HF. On the one hand, issues such as the lack of long-term funding, the risk of local fragmentation after the end of the initiative, and continuing operational challenges show that change is still yet to be consolidated. On the other hand, the support provided by a consolidated network of committed stakeholders and a positive outlook on the persistence of political buy-in seem to provide room for growth in the coming years to the seeds of systemic change sowed during the last 10 years.

Lessons learnt from this case

HNS and Pathfinder's 15 consortia did and do not promote HF for the sake of HF: rather, they leveraged evidence of failure in the well-established temporary housing system and proof of success in HF pilots to craft and mobilise a high-level coalition of key stakeholders from the bottom-up. This coalition enabled: at the local level, to nurture the capacity of frontline workers and service providers to embed the HF mindset in their everyday operations; and, at the national level, to achieve the political buy-in of the government, hence providing HF with even more funding and visibility. While long-term sustainability is a persistent issue, the capacity of local homelessness actors to coalesce, learn, and adapt fast has therefore been certainly key to the rise of HF across the country.

## C. Spain: Fragmented governance

In Spain, Housing First is now used in big cities such as Madrid, Barcelona, Seville, and Mallorca among many other areas. Drawing on the positive results of a first pilot launched in 2014, the number of units scaled from a few dozens (28 in the Habitat project) to several hundreds (500 as of first half of 2021, with an expected rise to 950 before end of 2021)[24]. However, the funding structure for the development of HF programmes involved a diverse range of funds which so far tended to present high instability: for example, regional or local tenders, grants from national, regional, or local administrations, NGOs member fees, and private donations. As a result, fragmentation in funding distribution and governance of the programme severely hindered the further deployment of HF throughout the country..

### Who deployed Housing First?

1. The first organisation to start advancing HF in Spain was HOGAR SÍ, who has played a key role both in leading advocacy work and in assisting those municipalities interested in developing HF-based solutions along with local NGOs. As of 2017, HOGAR SÍ eventually launched an alliance with The Housing Association Provivienda to develop the HF model in Spain.
2. Whereas the Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030 is in charge of developing the national strategy and providing funding, the implementation phase is almost completely delegated to regional and local authorities. As direct recipients of governmental funding, regional governments distribute them either to social services agencies at the regional or municipal level; to local municipalities; or to local NGOs that deliver services to homeless people. As this funding often comes with no strings attached, the implementation of HF-based solutions is thus left to the free choice of local networks of stakeholders. This resulted in a fragmented system where only a low number of key organisations (such as HOGAR SÍ, Provivienda, Sat Joan de Deu, and Suara-Sant Pere Claver) provide a HF model. In this perspective, a major source of supplemental funding comes from the own budget of those largest municipalities that have been interested in testing HF – e.g., Madrid, Barcelona and the Consell of Mallorca.

### How has Housing First been deployed?

1. In 2014, the RAIS Fundacion launched Habitat as the first systematic implementation of the HF model in Spain. Drawing on the support of public and private resources – among which funding also from the Ministry of Health, Social Services & Equality – Habitat was conducted first in three major cities (Madrid, Barcelona, and Malaga) and then in five more cities. The aim was that of producing convincing evidence towards the introduction of the HF model at a national scale.
2. Notwithstanding the recent start of the project, advocacy work resulted in a new National Comprehensive Homelessness Strategy (2015-2020). The Strategy represented an important milestone for the country, proposing the progressive implementation of both HF and housing-led approaches. However, while an important milestone for the country, the Strategy was not provided with an own budget – nor the standard model of funding distribution was questioned.

[24] Data reported in expert interview.

3. As no binding mechanism to enforce implementation or ensure funding directionality was set, most of the new National Strategy remained on paper. As a result, the established housing governance model kept its inertia. On one hand, regional governments continued distributing funding without ensuring that the delegated actors were delivering services according to HF principles. On the other hand, local NGOs already providing traditional shelter-based services continued working according to their consolidated operational routines.
4. In 2017, HOGAR SÍ agreed with the Housing Association Provivienda on a new Alliance for developing HF in Spain. Through this joint venture, the partners ensured the development of separate housing and treatment principles. However, the relevant discrepancy between the principles inspiring the National Strategy and their actual implementation led to a paradox. Despite the absence of any actual opposition to the HF model, the success of those cities which adopted the model, and the change in how homelessness is narrated through the country, the diffusion of HF is currently limited to a narrow number of cities. In each of these, agreements between HOGAR SÍ and local authorities were mostly renewed or even scaled up. Meanwhile, the overwhelming majority of Spain's remaining +8000 municipalities persisted in their use of shelter-based solutions.

## What are the achievements and challenges that have been identified?

Achievements

1. **Kick starting a process of cultural change**: HOGAR SÍ was able to initiate a mindshift in the Spanish context by pushing and promoting the core philosophy of the HF model. On the one hand, this resulted in the rebranding of National Strategy from talking of «homeless people» (a view focusing on individual pathways) to «homelessness» (stressing the structural roots as well as the societal implications and relevance of this issue). On the other hand, it generated a broad interest into the concept both from national and (mostly) local policy makers and social workers. However, while testifying the increased popularity of HF, later adopters included a number of NGOs that decided to use its name despite being not capable of actually implementing HF. This might pose clear risks of watering down HF principles and jeopardising its potential to create systems change.
2. **Mobilizing policy makers at the national and local level**: Thanks to the advocacy work led by HOGAR SÍ and the limited number of NGOs that committed to implement HF. For example, new connections at the national level have been settled between those departments that, despite their responsibilities in addressing homelessness in different policy areas, were not coordinating with each other (e.g., Department of Social Policy and that of Housing in the Ministry of Social Rights).
3. **Making a case for HF effectiveness in Spain**: The evidence produced during the first pilot of the HF programme enabled a number of key policy makers at both the national and local level to buy in the HF model. Despite the lack of a proper external evaluation, this allowed to build a case for the introduction of HF at a larger scale and, hence, nurture broader interest in the programme. Overall, the satisfaction of a non neglectable number of local policy makers who first tested HF in their context compelled them to make HF their main response to this issue. As a result, many of them eventually committed to scale the model up.

Current challenges

1. **Widening the HF providers network**: Currently, most of the groundwork related to the implementation of the HF model relies on the effort of a small number of committed NGOs that are active both in different parts of the country (as HOGAR SÍ or Sant Joan de Deu). Yet, a large majority of NGOs spread all over the +8000 municipalities of Spain – often active at a local scale and linked to religious organisations – have no clear set of

incentives to commit to substantive change in their ways of working. As these NGOs provide around 65% of beds for the homeless people (the remaining 35% being in the hands of public services), bringing them on board will be key for the diffusion and consolidation of HF in Spain.

2. **Ensuring an own budget for shelters removal & housing provision**: Despite its mention of HF as key operational principle, the previous National Strategy did not provide an own budget for its implementation. Feeding into the strengthening of an established funding model based on the pivotal role of regional governments, this resulted both in excessive fragmentation of operational strategies and lack of sufficient resources for the scale-up of HF. Achieving an own budget targeting HF development; reforming the ways through which funding is channeled from regional to local authorities; and devolving equal amounts of cash both to the removal of the old shelter infrastructure and to the restoration of needed housing supply would be hence paramount.
3. **Providing effective training to social workers and practitioners involved**: Finally, there is another reason behind the paradox of HF finding great interest also among social workers but limited diffusion: the lack of training. In this perspective, the worrying lack of institutional capacity outlined with respect to the region-based governance model is mirrored at the level of groundwork by the difficulties of implementing HF without strong guidance by those organisations accustomed to the HF operating model. This resulted in many NGOs rebranding their model as based on HF despite making little or no change in how they operate. Providing means for social workers to unlearn old habits and re-learn new practices will be hence key.

| Key achievements | Current challenges |
|---|---|
| Kick starting a process of cultural change | Widening the HF providers network |
| Mobilizing policy makers ar nat'l/ local level | Ensuring an own budget for the transition |
| Making a case for HF effectiveness in Spain | Providing effective training to social workers |

## Has Housing First been capable of achieving systemic change?

Current status and outlook on the future

Overall, the Spanish story is not (yet) one of systemic change. The diffusion of the HF model is still too scattered and relying on the commitment of a very limited number of key actors compared to the vastness of the country. Moreover, the implementation of the principles outlined in the National Strategy have been hindered by a fragmented governance model and the lack of capacity on the ground. Yet, the future seems wealthy with opportunities: the interest in HF is now consolidated and ever increasing, and the availability of new funding through the Next Generation EU scheme is providing

national political authorities with a new chance to tackle homelessness while learning from the pitfalls of the 2015-20 Strategy. 2021 is hence a critical year to see whether HF has a real opportunity to scale up and reach a point of no return. On this point, the outlook of HF advocates is optimistic.

Lessons learnt from this case

On the one hand, the Spanish case shows that the role played by committed HF advocates in matching advocacy work at the political level and policy work at the operational level can be key in kick starting important processes of cultural change – even when a low number of economic and human resources might be a relevant obstacle. On the other hand, this case shows that systemic change cannot be achieved without a governance structure capable of bringing all the relevant stakeholders on board of the transition towards HF and ensuring the enforcement of the chosen principles; and that, in turn, such governance structure cannot be forged without a real – and not only rhetorical – political commitment to HF.

# D. France: Experimentalist governance

Following the successful pilot of Housing First (Un chez soi d'abord) in four big cities – being the largest, most robust trial conducted in Europe so far – in 2017 HF has been expanded to 12 more cities. This brought +2,000 places over the course of 2018-2022, with additional support to develop HF and housing-led services in another 24 cities[25]. Within the five-year plan from 2018-2022, specific provision for technical and financial support to develop HF services at local level has been secured. Additionally, the scale-up of the programme provided room to enlarge the original focus of the pilot from exclusively targeting homeless people with a psychiatric diagnosis to a wider focus across different kinds of homelessness (people with financial difficulties, young people, immigrants, etc.).

## Who deployed Housing First?

1. In France, the history of HF began in 2009, when the government decided to experiment with it for the first time through the funding and supervision provided by the Ministry of Health. Following the positive results of the pilot and a change in government, 2017 saw the scale-up of the housing-led strategy by means of the «inter-ministerial delegation for accommodation and access to housing»: DIHAL. Founded in 2010, the delegation nurtured coordination and partnerships between ministries such as Housing, the Interior, Health, Employment, Education, and Justice, to secure the success of the national strategy envisioned by the government.
2. Whereas the central government has been put in charge of running the programme through DIHAL and monitoring its results through the Ministry for Territorial Development, the implementation of the programme has been left to selected networks of local authorities (which can be composed either by regions, departments, and/or cities), service providers and civic associations. Crucially, networks were selected according to the interest and preparedness of local authorities and stakeholders to work with DIHAL on the HF operational model, whose principles were therefore embedded in the selection process operated by the agency.

## How has Housing First been deployed?

1. At the beginning, HF was implemented in the form of a pilot project to be rolled out across 5 years (2011-2016) in 4 cities – Lille, Marseille, Paris, and Toulouse – and were targeting a narrow social group among homeless people: that of single adults with severe mental illnesses and addictions. The pilots were closely evaluated through rigorous experimental methods: as a result, evidence of a decrease in long-term homelessness among those that benefited from the programme created an interest among policy-makers for continuation of the programme. Moreover, this allowed DIHAL not to start from scratch and rather, to draw on the previous experience and constant progress of those social workers involved in the pilots.
2. As a result of the new government's increased commitment to tackle homelessness and the approval of a new five-year plan (2017-2022), DIHAL opened 2 calls for expression of interest through which it selected 23 areas covering 20% of the mainland population and involving most of its major cities. An agreement was then developed with the selected authorities and the local implementers of programmes to define with them key operational principles and indicators of success that were in line with the HF core philosophy.

[25] Data reported in expert interview.

3. In order to steer such newly established networks which were being involved both in the provision of traditional housing services and in the rollout of the new programme, the strategy was based on a blend of top-down coordination provided by DIHAL (e.g., through the promotion of shared principles and provision of operational support where most needed) mixed with bottom-up implementation led by local networks of municipalities and civic stakeholders (e.g., through DIHAL providing them with the autonomy to figure out how to best respond to specific local needs, coordinate services, and adapt the programme to meet the objectives agreed with it).
4. Overtime, DIHAL leveraged its relationships with such local networks of practitioners to develop an overarching view of which solutions work best and in which contexts. This allowed DIHAL to learn along with implementers how to advance the principles of HF through adaptation of the housing programme – both through collecting and sharing best practices across the practitioners' network, and through developing in a longer term new "harmonized" guidelines for its operational implementation.

## What are the achievements and challenges that have been identified?

Achievements

1. **Sustained political buy-in**: Notwithstanding the changes in government that took place through these 10 years, HF became a gold standard in tackling homelessness in the view of a large number of national- and, in certain parts of the country, local-level policy makers. While the new government's commitment to the fight against homelessness provided momentum for the consolidation of HF in the country, the evidence of previous pilots' effectiveness played an important role in the persistence of the programme against the succession of governments with different political views. This resulted in a strong mandate for DIHAL to work towards the improvement of the programme in both the short and long term.
2. **The establishment of a new governance model**: Based on an intelligent mixture of top-down coordination provided by DIHAL and bottom-up adaptation provided by municipalities and local service providers, the governance model that resulted from this allocation of responsibilities is providing room for continuous improvement both at the policy level (e.g., in terms of how social housing policy is coordinated with homelessness policy and health policy) and at the operational level (e.g., in terms of how the network of local organisations involved in implementation is steered towards increased ownership and better understanding of HF principles).
3. **Achieving persistent success across local programmes**: Defining a set of indicators consistent with the programme principles (e.g., raising the number of homelessness people applying and obtaining a place in social housing) provided an objective to practitioners that was easy to understand while, at the same time, left them room to adapt their response to local circumstances. This provided good results, leading to scale-up of the programme and further investments.

Current challenges

1. **Despite success, results were not perceived by citizens**: Even if the programme has proved effective in a few cities, overall, citizens did not grasp its value in terms of how changes are actually reflected at the street level. Often, this reinforced the perception that the state and municipalities are not doing that much to solve the problem, hence reinforcing the call for conventional, well-known responses to the homelessness challenge – such as temporary shelter solutions.

2. **Difficulties in inter-policy coordination**: Despite the political commitment to better policy coordination and continuous learning, siloed departments persist and prevent the consolidation of a systemic response to homelessness. A major consequence of this gap is that access to housing remains substantially difficult for most of the homeless population – such as with asylum seekers or undocumented migrats, who are not eligible yet for housing benefits and rental intermediation. As a result, coordination between migration policy and housing policy proved to be an enduring and increasingly urgent challenge.
3. **Persistence of «contradictory lobbying»**: Despite the gradual advancement and good results of HF, both traditional service providers and the majority of citizens are still instinctively clinging onto shelter-based housing as the straightforward response to the issue of homelessness. Arguably, this might also be due to the fact that, despite the most recent scale-up of the programme, the traditional shelter-based sector is persisting in most of the country – thus slowing down a nation-wide process of cultural change that, apparently, is still well behind to be completed.

| Key achievements | Current challenges |
|---|---|
| Political buy-in for a new long-term vision | Lack of tangible results for wider public |
| Establishment of a new governance model | Difficulties in inter-policy coordination |
| Persistent success across programmes | Persistence of «contradictory» lobbying |

## Has Housing First been capable of achieving systemic change?

Current status and outlook on the future

Given the size of the country, as well as the painstaking variety of practices adopted across different municipalities, systemic change is yet to come – particularly on the cultural level. However, despite this being still a long journey to be pursued (in the order of 10 to 15 years), the job is led by an agency equipped with a strategic vision which is currently gaining ground across the country and constantly improving on the basis of continuous learning at the national and local level: a vision which now needs to be acted with a strong focus on permanent housing.

Lessons learnt from this case

DIHAL is simultaneously promoting the use of HF principles both at the level of programme implementation and at the level of wider systemic change. Despite persisting challenges on both grounds – e.g., fragmented success and lack of

coordination across policy silos – the presence of a strong political coalition committed to work towards the end of homelessness in the country helps DIHAL to plan long-term efforts towards both diffusion and increasing harmonisation of best practices across France and deeper, stronger cultural change across ministerial silos and the general public. The persistence of such support will arguably play a critical role in its continuation.

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