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# RECOMMENDATIONS ON NATIONAL COORDINATION OF HOUSING FIRST





## The Housing First Europe Hub

The Housing First Europe Hub was founded in 2016 by the Y-Foundation (Finland) and FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless, together with more than 15 partners.

Since then, the Hub has grown into a broad coalition of over 45 organisations, including cities, government ministries, housing providers, and researchers across 15 countries.

The Hub exists to make Housing First the default approach to homelessness in Europe. It promotes this shift through advocacy, training, research, communication, and support to practitioners. Its mission is clear: to end and prevent homelessness by driving a systems change rooted in Housing First principles.

Together, the Housing First Europe Hub and FEANTSA are at the forefront of a growing movement to make housing a right, not a reward, and to shift European homelessness policy toward evidence-based solutions that work.

# BACKGROUND

## National Coordination: the cornerstone of effective Housing First implementation

Every country that commits to implementing Housing First should establish a national coordination structure. This should not be a secondary consideration - it is a crucial foundation for the successful implementation of Housing First. Without a clear, dedicated office, agency or team to support, guide, and align efforts, the promise of Housing First to have impact risks being diluted or derailed. Of course, it must be acknowledged that countries are at different stages in terms of implementing Housing First, and national coordination must evolve accordingly. This discrepancy is often due to the lack of national coordination, which is indispensable to realise the greater ambition of Housing First rather than letting it develop only gradually.

**This national coordination of Housing First is not a luxury, it is a necessity.** It plays a critical role in supporting the policies and practices that drive Housing First forward. From strategic alignment to operational consistency, national coordination ensures that Housing First is more than an isolated practice. Housing First can become a system-wide approach rooted in shared values, clear methodologies, and measurable outcomes. National coordination provides the connective tissue between government policy, frontline services, research, and people who have lived experience of homelessness. National coordination plays an essential role to foster coherence across regions, encourage fidelity to the Housing First model, enable rapid learning and adaptation, all of which contribute to the impact and success of Housing First.

National coordination can be:

- Government-led (BE, IE, FR);
- Organised by NGOs (DE, SE);
- Organised by independent NGOs dedicated solely to Housing First (NL);
- Embedded within umbrella organisations (Wales, IT);
- A partnership between government and not-for-profit organisations (AT).

To ensure effective national coordination of Housing First, countries must commit to meeting some essential conditions :

### 1. Establish a coordination structure that is efficient and adapted to the country's specific context.

Our experience and evidence from across Europe demonstrates that there is no single model - national Housing First coordination must reflect national realities, including the structure of governance, the maturity of programmes, and existing partnerships. Whether housed within government, an NGO, or an umbrella organisation, the Housing First coordination body must be empowered, visible, and capable of bringing stakeholders together. The coordination also requires a certain degree of freedom and autonomy, given the nature of the work: driving system change.

### 2. Sufficient and stable funding must be allocated to cover an efficient coordination.

Countries must **allocate the necessary human resources**. National Housing First coordination will not be successful if it is one of many tasks in someone's job description. It requires a dedicated team with the time, expertise, and mandate to drive national consistency, to monitor and evaluate implementation, to support local actors and promote fidelity to the Housing First principles. Based on experience and research, and on different national contexts, successful national coordination teams/offices require **at least 2 to 4 full-time equivalent staff on a permanent basis**.

### 3. Staff must be supported with clear mandates, and the authority to convene stakeholders and help to shape policy.

**Partners** must also be clearly defined - including public authorities and service providers, housing providers and people with lived experience of homelessness.

### 4. Clarity of purpose is essential.

National Housing First coordination must be guided by **concrete, transparent objectives**, and function following a **clear and structured strategy**. Only then can it act as the engine that drives the growth, quality, and impact of Housing First.

Without these basic foundations - a relevant structure, adequate funding and staffing, clear mandates, partners and concrete objectives - national Housing First coordination is at risk of becoming symbolic rather than strategic.

But when done right, it becomes a powerful driver for change, ensuring Housing First is delivered effectively, consistently, and with lasting impact, allowing governments to live up to their commitments to Housing First.

The following recommendations outline the key benefits of establishing and supporting national coordination structures for Housing First. They are based on shared experiences and lessons from countries across Europe and aim to guide governments and stakeholders to strengthen systemic implementation of Housing First. These recommendations highlight how national coordination contributes to more effective, integrated, and sustainable Housing First delivery.

# OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1. Enhancing stakeholder engagement and cross-sector collaboration

- ✓ **Effective national coordination brings together actors from across sectors and government departments**, including Health, Housing, Justice, Social Care, Youth and Family Services, Addiction Treatment, and Mental Health, ensuring that Housing First is a truly integrated approach. National Housing First coordination fosters the necessary **mutual understanding and cross-sector buy-in**, breaking down silos that often hinder progress. Through **regular stakeholder engagement** (for example, Ireland's regional quarterly meetings), this structured coordination builds trust, alignment, and a shared ownership of Housing First goals.
- ✓ National coordination plays a pivotal role in ensuring **consistency in service provision and the integration of wraparound supports**. It **reinforces strategic partnerships with housing providers and other key partners** and **enables effective multi-agency collaboration**, ensuring coherent Housing First management and delivery across sectors.
- ✓ National Housing First coordination **creates a place for open dialogue** for everyone involved in designing and delivering Housing First to share challenges and successes, while **fostering networking, community-building, and shared celebration** through events and conferences.
- ✓ National coordination enables the **pooling of resources**, strengthening collective capacity and impact. By aligning efforts and clarifying roles, national Housing First coordination also **prevents duplication of work, and avoiding (unintentionally) undermining each other's efforts**.

## 2. Supporting policy alignment, strategic management and system change

- ✓ National Housing First coordination **supports collaboration between ministries and governmental agencies**, ensuring a unified approach to Housing First. It **provides a platform for coordination staff to inform decision-making**, including responding to parliamentary questions or policy consultations. As a **policy intermediary**, it ensures that insights from practice directly shape and improve national strategies. It allows to take action in the political arena to influence policy.
- ✓ National coordination **aligns national efforts with broader EU and UN goals**, reinforcing international commitments to ending homelessness. It also **facilitates communication and advocacy across national and European levels**, enabling stronger collaboration with platforms like the Housing First Europe Hub and amplifying the country's voice in shaping policy and practice.
- ✓ National coordination **gives visibility to Housing First achievements**, both nationally and internationally, highlighting impact and progress. It also **enables the start-up and effective management of new Housing First programmes**, ensuring they are supported, aligned, and set up for long-term success.
- ✓ National coordination plays a key role in **shifting from fragmented or localised implementation to a coherent, system-wide Housing First approach**. By operating independently yet in close partnership with stakeholders, it helps overcome institutional silos, challenge entrenched practices, and **build the structural conditions necessary for Housing First to become the default model across sectors and regions**.

### 3. Establishing knowledge, learning systems, and advocacy

- ✓ National Housing First coordination means that **training needs** are quickly identified and stakeholders can be connected to existing or newly developed training opportunities. It ensures **high-quality, consistent training** for all Housing First actors — from frontline staff to housing providers and policy makers.
- ✓ Beyond technical skills, national Housing First coordination supports crucial **staff development** through supervision, burnout prevention, fair wages, and career progression. Initiatives like **HF Italia's programme**, the **University Diploma from the University of Lyon in France**, and **micro-credentials (e.g. England)** are powerful examples of this in action. Ongoing learning and knowledge sharing for all types of actors leads to improved outcomes for Housing First - national Housing First coordination is best placed to ensure this happens in a consistent and useful manner (e.g. training programme with Hogeschool Utrecht).
- ✓ National coordination **builds strong Communities of Practice**, both nationally and across Europe, which foster peer learning and shared innovation. It also **supports evaluation and quality control** of Housing First programmes, ensuring fidelity to core principles - as seen in initiatives like **Wales' accreditation programme** - and driving continuous improvement. National coordination helps not just the homelessness sector to ensure high quality Housing First services; benefits go beyond homelessness - they strengthen the entire system and society as a whole.
- ✓ National Housing First coordination **serves as a resource hub for advocacy and external communication** about Housing First and its impact, providing clear messaging, pertinent information for the media, and responses to enquiries or parliamentary questions. It **influences stakeholders at all levels** - from shaping government strategies and funding to guiding service delivery - and plays a key role in '**making the case**' for **scaling up high-fidelity Housing First** that is grounded in evidence and has impact, and using it as a set of principles to inform system change.
- ✓ National coordination plays a crucial role in both **building and sharing the evidence base for Housing First**. It collects and disseminates data, statistics, and identifies research gaps, ensuring continuous learning and innovation. This includes promoting emerging practices like Housing First for Youth, gender-specific approaches, and helping the whole sector evolve together.

### 4. Securing long-term and effective funding for the development of Housing First

- ✓ National Housing First coordination enables the **economic optimisation of public resources** by reducing duplication and ensuring more efficient use of existing funding. It also **supports long-term planning** by demonstrating the value and impact of Housing First through **evaluations and strong economic arguments**, making the case for sustained investment in effective, evidence-based solutions.
- ✓ National Housing First coordination should serve as an **information hub for all stakeholders to learn about existing funding calls and opportunities**. It can also create space to discuss potential funding sources that service providers might not know about. By doing so, it helps secure sustainable and ongoing financial flows - including exploring passive income streams where feasible.



Housing First Europe Hub  
194 Chaussée de Louvain, 1210 Brussels, Belgium  
samara.jones@housingfirsteurope.eu  
<https://housingfirsteurope.eu/>

