

EVALUATION OF ATTITUDES OF STAKEHOLDERS TOWARDS THE HOUSING FIRST CONCEPT IN POLAND

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INTRODUCTION – SEMINARS OF STAKEHOLDERS OF HOMELESSNESS

The concept of seminars for stakeholders of homelessness was initiated in 2012 in the 'Advocacy Programme: knowledge, cooperation, and transparency' implemented in the Camillian Mission for Social Aid in 2012-14. The first seminar took place in Warsaw (December 2012), the next ones in Pomiechówek (October 2013), and in Płock (November 2013). *Stakeholder* is a key word for improvement of the support system for the people who are homeless or subject to housing exclusion in Poland. In the context of social policy, homelessness is a very complex phenomenon, including many aspects, e.g. physical and mental health, shelter, family situation, education, social capital, employment, which are addressed by many institutions. Not all of the institutions are aware of it, often classifying homelessness as an issue for somebody else, from another institution. The seminars for stakeholders were aimed to change such attitudes by means of sharing a conviction that their participation is needed in actions intended to change the situation. National and European

experiences and practice, confirmed by scientific evidence, indicate that effectiveness of the measures against homelessness and housing exclusion greatly depends on the activity of stakeholders. Their passive approach may be fatal, and the role of their cooperation is not to be underestimated.

The first condition of a successful seminar is encouragement of all the stakeholders from the given region to participate. A key to their selection is the European Typology of Housing and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS), listing 13 housing situations that indicate homelessness or housing exclusion. It is a continuum covering all the shades of homelessness in its current definitions. Each situation is connected with an institution, e.g. 'housing in a public space' involves the actions of municipal police, street outreach workers, and rescue service, while living in a homeless shelter or another homeless service site involves the activity of NGOs and social welfare centres, whereas an eviction sentence requires the action of the court of justice

and court bailiff, etc. This key is a basis for engagement of representatives of institutions to participate in the seminars. The second condition is the transmission of knowledge to the seminar participants (which can inspire them and help to initiate changes, and creation of a space for discussion of the presented ideas.

The concept of the seminars as tools to engage the stakeholders in changing the public policy against homelessness as well as to inspire debate was next transferred to the project 'Housing First: evidence-based advocacy' (Polish: *Najpierw Mieszkanie – rzecznictwo oparte na dowodach*, NMROD), implemented from April 2014 to March 2016 by the Ius Medicinae Foundation in cooperation with its partner, the Camillian Mission for Social Assistance. The NMROD project included 4 seminars: in Radom (May 2014), Ostrołęka (October 2014), Pruszków (April 2015), and Warsaw (October 2015), and additionally a summarizing conference (February 2016), organized according to a similar scheme. The seminars were local, while the conference was national, or in fact even international. One of the subjects of each seminar was the Housing First (HF) programme.

EVALUATION

This report presents results of an evaluation of attitudes towards the HF concept among participants of the seminars for stakeholders and of the summarizing conference organized within the NMROD project "Housing First – Evidence based Advocacy" www.czynajpierwmieszkanie.pl/en.

The seminars being part of the NMROD project and the summarizing conference were subject to external evaluation, aimed to evaluate the events, reception of the presentations, and the level of knowledge and attitudes towards the HF concept. The research questions concerning this issue were as follows:

- What is the attitude towards HF programmes?
- Has the seminar/conference enriched the participants' knowledge about the HF concept?

- Has the seminar/conference contributed to convincing the participants about the need to implement HF programmes in Poland?

The evaluation was based on anonymous printed questionnaires, distributed at the beginning and collected immediately after the events. During the conference an English version of the questionnaire was used, too. The questionnaire included both closed and open questions, which slightly differed depending on the type of the event. Additionally, to evaluate the summarizing conference, we used results of a short online survey, as its completion was required when registering for the conference. The mean response rate among participants was 68% (Table 1).

Table 1. Participation in the evaluation

	Radom May'14	Ostrołęka Oct'14	Pruszków Apr'15	Warsaw Oct'15	Conference Feb'16
Participants	45	43	53	47	79
Questionnaires filled in	30	34	39	28	48
Proportion of filled in	67%	79%	74%	60%	61%

PARTICIPANTS – STAKEHOLDERS

The seminars of the NMROD project were attended by 47 people on average, and the attendance was the highest in Pruszków in April 2015. The total number was 139 stakeholders (and 13 stakeholders who organized the meetings), who attended on average 1.11 seminar (Tables 2 and 3). The conference was attended by 79 people.

Table 2. Participation in seminars

	Seminars of NMROD project (4)	All seminars (7)
Mean number of seminar participants	47	-
Number of unique seminar participants	152	191
Number of unique seminar participants, excluding those who organized seminars	139	177
Number of seminars per participant, excluding those who organized seminars	1.11	1.19

The participants worked primarily in social welfare centres (35%) and in NGOs (24%). Occasionally, also representatives of local authorities attended the meetings (10%), e.g. a mayor, municipal councillor, or head of a department. Participants also included representatives of the police and municipal police, less frequently of hospitals, universities, courts of justice, or government departments. Presence of the last mentioned group was particularly conspicuous during individual seminars, depending on their subject and cooperation network of the co-organizer of the meeting (Table 3).

Table 3. Types of institutions of seminar participants of the NMROD project

Institution	%
Social welfare centre	35
NGO	24
Local government	10
Family aid centre	8
Police/municipal police	8
Others	3
Hospital	3
University	2
Expert	1.6
Governmental department	1.1
Court of justice	1.1
Other: Public nursing home	3
Total	100

On average, 32% of seminar participants took place in one or more of the earlier seminars. During the conference the proportion was much higher: more than half of the participants (57%) attended at least one of the seminars (Table 4).

Table 4. Did you participate in previous seminars for homelessness stakeholders?

	Radom May'14	Ostrołęka Oct'14	Pruszków Apr'15	Warsaw Oct'15	Conferen ce Feb'16
Yes	50%	32%	23%	21%	57%
No	50%	62%	77%	79%	43%

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE HF PROGRAMME

At the beginning of NMROD project implementation we assumed that the HF programme, as originating from abroad, never before implemented in Poland and described primarily in English, is familiar to only few stakeholders, persons who participate in international networks of experts and practitioners, e.g. FEANTSA. We assumed that most of the local stakeholders, especially the passive ones, i.e. those who are not aware of being stakeholders of social policy against homelessness, knew very little about the programme.

Actually, 37-53% of seminar participants got to know about the HF programme for the first time during the NMROD seminar. Another 38-60% heard about it before, but nobody declared that he/she knows the programme well. The situation markedly improved during the summarizing conference, as 57% of its participants attended one or several seminars (Table 4). The proportion of participants who heard about the programme for the first time was much lower (10%), whereas as many as 44% declared that they know the program well, and the others heard about it before (46%) (Figure 5).

Participants of three seminars evaluated the level of their knowledge about the programme. A vast majority scored it as narrow (on average 74%), on average 14% as sufficient, and 7% (probably organizers) as broad (Figure 6).

Improvement of knowledge about HF thanks to participation in an NMROD event was evaluated based on direct questions to participants of the last seminar in Warsaw in October 2015 (where principles of the HF programme were presented) and results of 2 experts' evaluations of the project, concerning the possibility of flat acquisition and ensuring specialized support according to the principles of NM, as well as of the summarizing conference in February 2015, which was also rich in presentations about the programme itself and its perspectives described in the NMROD project. A vast majority declared a slight increase or a substantial increase in their knowledge of this subject: after the seminar, 21% slightly and 68% substantially; after the conference, 64% slightly and 24% substantially (Table 7).

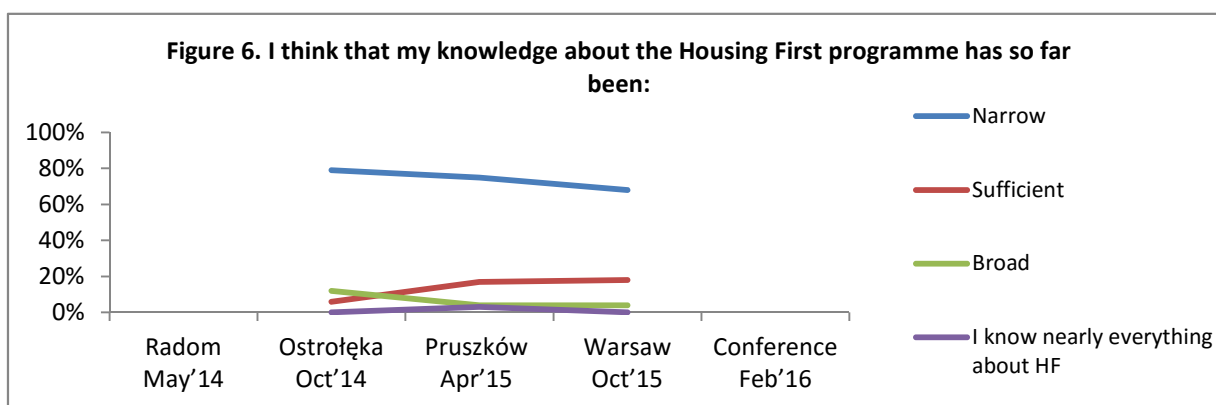
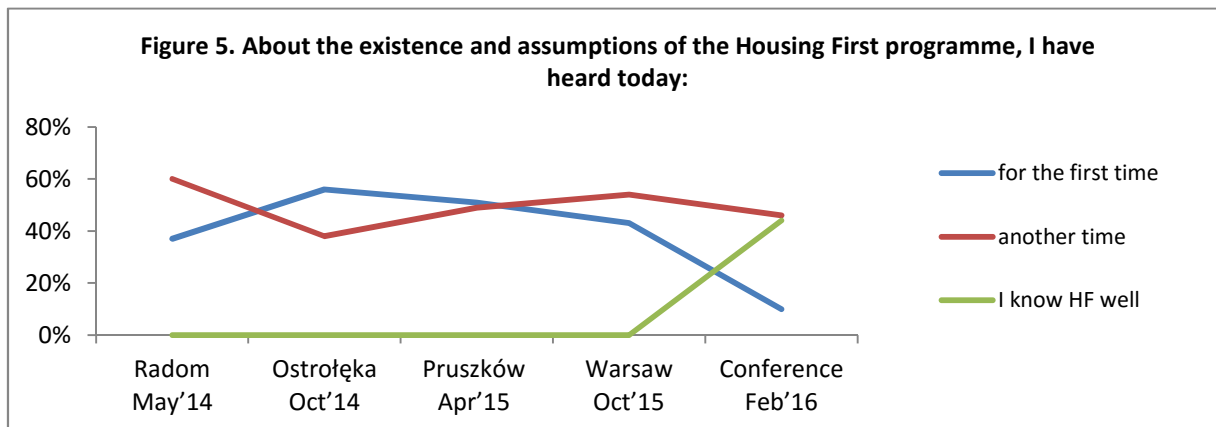


Table 7. As a result of the seminar/conference, my knowledge about the Housing First programme:

	Warsaw Oct'15	Conference Feb'16
has not changed	7%	11%
has increased slightly	21%	64%
has increased substantially	68%	24%

Slightly more details about the knowledge of the HF programme, especially on sources of the knowledge, were acquired from the people who registered for the summarizing conference (by means of a questionnaire in Polish) and those participating in it. The results are presented in Table 8 (several answers could be ticked). 83% of the persons who registered for the conference had read short information about the HF programme, and the same was declared by nearly all the conference participants (98%). The longer text 'Housing first' had been read by nearly 1/2 of the people who registered and by 2/3 of participants. Interestingly, 56% of the registered persons and 67% of

participants considered implementation of HF in Poland.

Table 8. Sources of knowledge about Housing First among persons registering for the summarizing conference and participating in it

	Registration		Conference	
	(N) Yes	% Yes	(N) Yes	% Yes
I have read notes/posts/short articles about the HF, I roughly know what it is	55	83%	45	98%
I have read a book/report/article about the HF, I know its principles and how it works	32	48%	31	66%
I consider implementation of the HF programme	37	56%	30	67%
I have implemented the HF programme	3	5%	4	9%
I have participated in the HF programme	4	6%	4	9%

The collected data confirm the initial assumptions that the stakeholders initially had a narrow knowledge about HF, and suggested that the

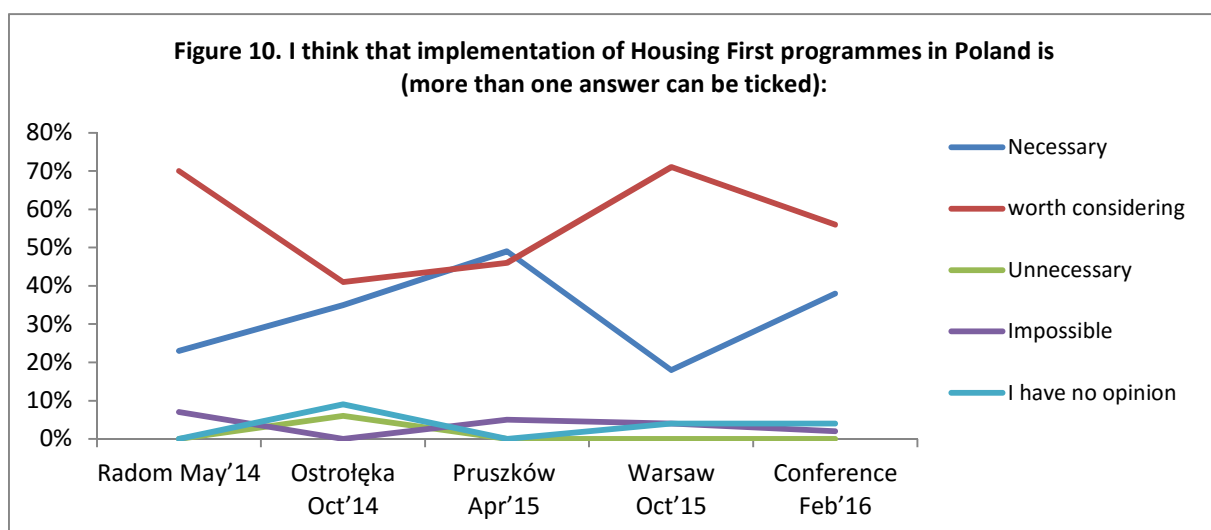
NMROD project activities, i.e. the seminars for stakeholders and the summarizing conference, have fulfilled their goals, i.e. promoted this concept among the stakeholders.

THE NEED TO IMPLEMENT HF IN POLAND

Participants of the seminars and conferences were asked about their opinions on the need to implement in Poland HF programmes. The initial conviction of the implementers was that among the local stakeholders their programme can be controversial because of its principles, e.g. allowing homeless people to live in an independent flat since the very beginning of the programme, almost directly from the street, and for the same reason (though not only) it can be regarded as impossible to implement in Poland. It is common belief that there is a dramatic shortage of flats for homeless people, even for those who conscientiously and painstakingly implemented the traditional

programme of moving out of homelessness, from the street to the night shelter and homeless shelter. Potential clients of HF are chronically homeless people, who do not follow such a programme.

Attitudes of over ¾ of the participants have improved: they have declared that thanks to the seminar they are now significantly more convinced about the need to implement HF in Poland (on average 54%) or slightly more convinced (22%). In 13% of participants, on average, the attitude has not changed, but this can mean that they are either unconvinced or their opinion is positive but stable, and the seminar did not affect it. After the summarizing conference, a much larger proportion of participants fell into this category: 41% declared that their attitude has not changed (i.e. they were neither encouraged nor discouraged), while all the others were more convinced about the need for HF, either slightly (37%) or substantially (22%) (Figure 9).



More than half of the participants (on average 57%) concluded that implementation of HF in Poland is worth considering, and **33% that it is necessary**. Very few persons considered it unnecessary (1%) or impossible (4%) (Figure 10).

Some participants of the seminars decided to elaborate and justify their opinion about implementation of HF in Poland:

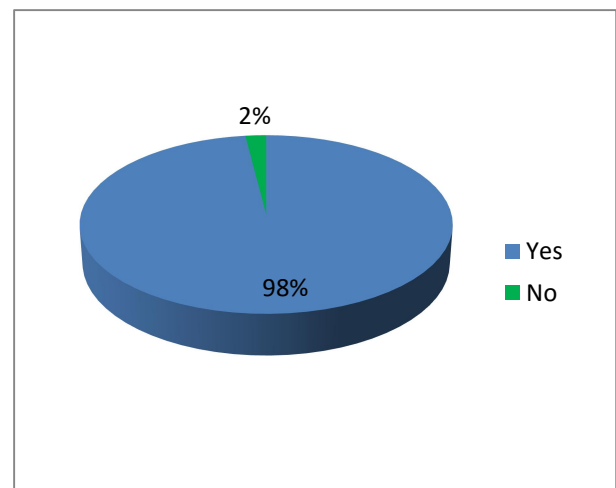
- It gives us a chance to decide independently about our life.
- It is worth considering, as it is an alternative to subsidized housing.
- HF is worth considering, as it increases the chances to secure shelters for singles or families.
- Homeless people will become more responsible and take life into their own hands, will learn to manage their own budget.
- Saving money, as compared to alternative solutions. It is profitable and effective.
- The programme offers new possibilities to help the people who do not make use of other forms of aid, because the latter are not adapted to them. It is a chance to provide institutional help to the people who are currently not receiving assistance.
- It is a chance of a better future for homeless people.
- Many people do not feel well in places where many people must coexist; this program is for them a chance to change their life.
- Reduction of the phenomenon of homelessness. It gives a chance to reduce the problem of homelessness.
- Return of the homeless person to life in the society and acceptance by the society (primarily by their close relatives).
- I think that e.g. a Work First programme would be more advisable. It seems justifiable to implement e.g. a Work First programme simultaneously.
- The lack of housing leads to an escalation of problems.
- Any action that will improve the conditions of functioning of homeless people is worthy of implementation.
- Basic need of life.

- Implementation of the programme is worth considering. In my opinion, it will be difficult to gain a positive public opinion.
- It will save people.
- Worth considering on condition that many institutions (not only NGOs) cooperate closely.
- It is a good programme.
- Please conduct more training, meetings, conferences in this field.
- A very good idea, but I think that it will be implemented on a very small scale.

During the summarizing conference, special attention was paid to chronic homelessness. This group of people includes potential clients of HF programmes in Poland. According to implementers of the project, their existence among social welfare clients is a significant argument for the need to implement such programmes in Poland. Nearly all the conference participants were convinced that the HF programme may contribute to reducing chronic homelessness in our country (Figure 11).

The HF programme is believed to be expensive (rightly), as its implementation indicates the necessity to secure independent flats to the participants, irrespective of their income, as well as support from many specialists, adapted to the clients' individual diagnoses. Nevertheless, the conference participants agreed that appropriate financial resources must be allotted for implementation of the programme (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Can Housing First programmes contribute to reducing chronic homelessness? and: Should financial resources be allocated to implementation of Housing First programmes?



CONCLUSIONS

Results of external evaluation indicate that the seminars and the summarizing conference have proved to be effective tools for popularization of knowledge about HF programmes and convincing the stakeholders about the need to implement such programmes in Poland.

Most of the 186 people who took part in the seminars and conference are convinced that HF needs to be implemented. They have access to additional materials prepared during implementation of the NMROD project, e.g. online and printed publications about the programme, experts' evaluations with practical comments on implementation. All the others can make use of the rich online library, including all the slides presented during the seminars and conference, and additionally the seminar proceedings. The seed has been sown and the ground has been prepared. For the time-being, it is 'on a shelf', but accessible at any time.

Stakeholder is any person, institution or organization whose activities affect social policy against a problem or on which the policy is dependent. Stakeholders include the people who are influenced by results of the policy, but also those having access to important information related to it, financial resources or legislative competences. A stakeholder can be anybody who affects or may affect the progress of events and the final result. Some stakeholders are passive, i.e. they do not undertake any activities although they are able to affect the situation.

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