Introducing the Housing First Model in Spain: First Results of the Habitat Programme

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❯ **Abstract_** *The Habitat programme launched in August 2014 is the first systematic implementation of the Housing First (HF) model in Spain. This article presents its first steps and the difficulties experienced during the kick-off process. The processes of defining profiles and deciding on the selection of users, the referral of users and their placement into the programme and the delivery of services have raised some challenges from which the Habitat teams have drawn some relevant learnings. This article also presents the methodology and the first findings of Habitat's rigorous evaluation. The objective of the evaluation is to produce evidence on the efficiency of the HF model for the Spanish context and to identify difficulties or drivers for its success. A fidelity assessment to the HF model has been done, which shows good loyalty of Habitat to the HF principles. The results of the programme for users at 6 months are very positive and similar to those of other international experiences. The housing retention rate is 100 percent and improvements have been observed in the areas of security, family relations and economic situation. The traditional intervention on the control group has produced little or no improvement on the control group participants.*

❯ **Keywords_** *Housing First, Fidelity Assessment, homelessness, evaluation, social experimentation*

Introduction

The dissemination of the results of the evaluation and research projects on Housing First (HF) programmes to support homeless people has been a key driver of the model's expansion in the last decade. Since the first research publications on the *Pathways to Housing* programme in the late 1990s (Tsemberis and Asmussen, 1999; Tsemberis and Elfenbein, 1999), the number of studies on the Housing First model and programme evaluation reports has notably increased. Among others, studies in the USA (Tsemberis *et al.*, 2012), Canada (Aubry *et al.*, 2015), Australia (Johnson *et al.*, 2012) and in several European countries (Busch-Geertsema, 2014) have tackled some common and also some specific findings of the model implementation.

Despite some failings and methodological concerns, this research has so far provided solid evidence on the effectiveness of the HF model for housing sustainment among programme users and also for other areas, such as substance abuse, quality of life and hospitalizations (Waegemakers *et al.*, 2012; Groton, 2013). All this evidence has fostered the introduction of the HF model in the Spanish context, if only in recent years.

With the launch of the Habitat project in 2014, RAIS Fundación[1] is the first organization to start the systematic implementation of a Housing First programme in Spain. Since then, at least one other project based on the Housing First model has been launched in Spain[2] and there is increasing attention from municipalities and other public bodies with regard to the model and its implementation.

Being the first systematic HF implementation in Spain, the Habitat programme has faced some challenges at different levels. These relate to strategic issues, such as changing the mindsets of practitioners and decision-makers in relation to the ground-breaking model, but also to operative issues, such as not having previous implementation experience in the field.

The aim of this article is to present the implementation experience of the Habitat programme for the support of homeless people in Spain, its evaluation methodology and the most relevant initial results extracted from it. It also pinpoints some of the challenges in the introduction of the HF model in a new context, which may be interesting for organisations willing to start HF projects in countries where little or no implementation experience exists.

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[1]   More information at https://www.raisfundacion.org/en/what_we_do/habitat

[2]   The project *Primer la llar* by the municipality of Barcelona was launched in the first semester of 2015 as a public tender for a 2-year period. There are also other initiatives based on the Housing First model by Arrels Fundació (Barcelona), Cruz Roja (Palma de Mallorca) and Asociación Zubietxe (Basque Country).

The Context of Homelessness in Spain

Following the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which in article 25 states that everyone should be able to have an adequate standard of living that guarantees housing, the Spanish Constitution states in article 47 that: "All Spaniards have the right to a dignified and adequate home. Public powers will promote the conditions needed and establish the pertinent ruling for this right to be effective (…)". However, the figures show that there is a group of people systematically excluded from access to housing in Spain, and that this is one of the key factors in their high vulnerability and, in some cases, chronic exclusion and homelessness.

Homelessness policies in Spain have traditionally addressed emergency situations, meeting the basic needs of homeless people but without tackling structural measures that could end homelessness. The vast majority of existing resources for homeless people in Spain (from outreach teams or soup kitchens to day centres, emergency shelters, pensions or shared apartments) still follow the staircase model and do not propose long-term responses to homelessness. According to the 2014 National Statistics Institute survey on resources for homeless people, there were 794 shelters in Spain (7.7 percent more than in 2012), 17,572 people working within these resources (8.8 percent more than in 2012) and an average of 16,687 beds offered daily. Yet, the average occupancy rate for these resources was 81.8 percent (4.8 percent *less* than in 2012). So, something must not be working efficiently.

Conscious of this, some social organizations started advocating for long-term solutions for the most chronically homeless people, for whom traditional resources were not providing real solutions. This advocacy work had its impact on the National Strategy for Homeless People 2015-2020, [3] approved by the Ministries Council 6 November 2015. The Strategy proposes a progressive implementation of the HF model in Spain, along with the parallel development of other resources for homeless people, as expressed in Strategic Line 7 of the document.

The National Strategy acknowledges the existence of 33,275 homeless people in Spain, and an increase of 4.7 percent in the number of people using the centres in the homelessness networks between 2005 and 2012. Of the 33,275 homeless people, over 23,000 are using any of the existing resources for homeless people, and the other 10,000 are sleeping rough, identified during the night counts that many municipalities and social organizations do in cities across the country. In the case of the three cities in which Habitat is being implemented, there are 1,905

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[3]   'Estrategia nacional integral para personas sin hogar 2015-2020', Ministerio de Sanidad, Servicios Sociales e Igualdad, http://www.msssi.gob.es/ssi/familiasInfancia/inclusionSocial/docs/ENIPSH.pdf

homeless people in Madrid (1,141 in shelters and 764 sleeping rough), 2,933 in Barcelona (1,468 in shelters and 1,465 sleeping rough) and 366 in Málaga (260 in shelters and 106 sleeping rough).

Along with these figures, the National Strategy signals the increasingly chronic nature of homelessness in the country and some changes in the profile of homeless people over the last number of years (such as more young people, more old people and more women using the networks). The Strategy recognizes that further work should be done to protect people's rights, including housing rights and the rights to security, health and social support – especially for those people facing the consequences of poverty and extreme social exclusion. The Housing First model is seen as an efficient solution – among others – to tackling these issues, particularly for chronically homeless people and homeless people with deteriorating physical or mental conditions.

Implementing Housing First in Spain: The Habitat Programme

The Habitat programme was launched by RAIS Fundación in August 2014 as the first systematic experience of the Housing First model implementation in Spain. There was, however, preparatory work being done since 2012 in order to ensure resources and the political will to launch the programme. In Spain, regional and local governments are responsible for homelessness service provision, and this is an added difficulty for advocacy at the national level, since it must address 19 different regional governments. In the conversations that RAIS Fundación had with many of those governments, decision-makers seemed interested in the model, but there was a demand for evidence of its performance in the Spanish homelessness context, and also recurring arguments as to the sustainability of the model. The main obstacles could be summarized as:

- homelessness and homeless people – as a group of people experiencing social exclusion – are not on the political agenda in Spain,

- a shortage of affordable housing, especially in the context of a high rate of evictions in the country, made the issue a political one, with other collectives also needing housing solutions,

- reluctance to commit politically to some of HF's principles, such as providing support for as long as needed,

- difficulties in funding a housing-led programme, both for RAIS Fundación and for public administrations, since some of the core principles of the Housing First model did not match available funding sources, such as EU structural funds,

- the networks of homelessness resources in most municipalities are based on the 'staircase approach' and on 'homeless buildings', mainly shelters, which require people to adapt to them,

- feelings among professionals, both from the public homelessness services and from social organizations, that the HF model "had come to invalidate" all other kinds of homelessness services,

- difficulties among some professionals in accepting the capacity of users for choice and control,

- a complete lack of data, studies or research on homelessness issues which generates a very subjective technical discussion and decision-making.

So in this context, and building on the successful Housing First experimentations in Canada and France, RAIS Fundación decided to work on the implementation of a pilot project that would produce convincing evidence and arguments for the introduction of the Housing First model in Spain. Finding the resources to do so also involved hard work, and that is why Habitat was launched with the support of a mix of public-private resources, including:

- funding from the Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality, which mainly goes to service provision and the evaluation of results for clients,

- support from the municipalities where the programme is implemented, which provides either social housing or economic support for service provision,

- the Bank Foundation *La Caixa,* which supports the economic and cost-efficiency evaluation carried out by *Economics Research Centre Tomillo,*

- other private companies and individuals,

- the contribution of up to the 30 percent of the income, if any, of Habitat users (the overall contribution remains irrelevant to Habitat's funding structure).

With these resources, Habitat is being implemented today as a state-level pilot project in three Spanish cities: Madrid, Barcelona and Malaga, with at least five other cities opening services in 2016. It started with an initial group of 28 users in 2014, with 10 new users incorporated in 2015, and the expectation of reaching a number of at least 200 users by 2017. In order to make evidence available, the programme was launched along with a rigorous evaluation model based on a longitudinal random assignment methodology, which assesses changes in Habitat users and in an equivalent control group. In this article, we will refer to the ensemble of people in both groups as 'Habitat participants'.

Habitat aims to offer permanent solutions to the most complex and chronic home-lessness situations. Following the HF model, Habitat specifically addresses the needs of those people who, due to the complexity of their exclusion, do not access the traditional support services for homeless people (also known as the staircase system). Habitat users are provided with immediate access to housing, not subject to housing-readiness conditions and with a wide array of services delivered based on the consumer´s choice and self-determination (see HF princi-ples in Tsemberis, 2010).

Profile of Habitat participants

At the time of joining the programme, participants in both the experimentation and control groups met the inclusion criteria that define the target population:

1. Being older than 18 years old;

2. Being in a roofless situation at the time of entering the programme (ETHOS[4] 1 or 2);

3. Having a long homelessness trajectory (3 years in ETHOS 1, 2 or 3; or more than 1 year in ETHOS 1 or 2);

4. Having one or many of the following exclusion factors in addition to the homeless situation: mental health problem, substance abuse problem and/or a disability.

This inclusion profile was determined taking into account previous HF implementa-tion experiences, especially those in the European context that had been analysed as part of the *Housing First Europe* project (Busch-Geertsema, 2014). In these experiences, participants had either a mental health and/or a substance abuse issue. Disability was also introduced as an inclusion criterion for Habitat since it was identified as a relevant but generally hidden exclusion factor within the homeless population.[5] With a mean age among evaluation participants of 48 years and a mean trajectory in a roofless situation of 9.5 years, the prevalence of these other exclusion factors can be seen below.

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[4]   ETHOS is the *European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion* by FEANTSA (2005)
      http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?article120&lang=en

[5]   Research carried out by RAIS Fundación in 2013 showed that although 12 percent of homeless
      people in Spain had a disability certificate, at least 23 percent of homeless people had a disability
      based on the assessments of professionals and participants (Panadero and Pérez-Lozao, 2014).

Table 1. Added Exclusion Factors* of Habitat Participants at Time of Entry

	Habitat group		Control group	
	n		n	
Added exclusion factors				
Mental health problem	9	32.14 percent	26	44.82 percent
Substance abuse problem	23	82.14 percent	39	67.24 percent
Disability	6	21.42 percent	19	32.75 percent

*The three factors occur together in a total of 28 Habitat and 58 control participants

Referring participants to Habitat

To identify people who met the criteria for participation in the Habitat programme, RAIS Fundación contacted the homeless municipal networks in Madrid, Barcelona and Malaga. Different public and private organizations working with homeless people – especially those providing outreach or emergency services – were asked to refer users who met the access profile. The reference professionals filled out a form with a short explanation of the user's current situation and with some key questions on the profile criteria. In all, 250 forms were sent to the programme evaluation team, along with other relevant documents that could evidence meeting the criteria (such as social histories or disability certificates). Details were cross-checked with the reference professionals when there were doubts as to whether criteria were being met. A final list of 192 cases was agreed, and this served as a waiting list for access to the programme. From it, random assignment was done both for the experimentation group (Habitat users) and for the control group (users of the alternative traditional services). The rest of the referred cases were kept as a waiting list for future participation.

Placing participants in Habitat

All Habitat participants assigned a housing unit were provided with sufficient information to facilitate the placement process. The HF teams in each site carried out several placement interviews, including a detailed explanation of the four commitments that Habitat users undertook when participating in the programme:

1. To accept at least one weekly visit of the HF team, as indicated by the model and as in most of the programmes in Housing First Europe

2. To provide a maximum of 30 percent of their income (if any). Otherwise, the programme would cover rent and basic needs (supplies, food and hygiene).

3. To adhere to basic rules of coexistence in the community, like any other citizen.

4. To attend an evaluation interview every six months for the programme evaluation.

The initial 28 Habitat users moved to their homes between August 2014 and January 2015. This progressive incorporation of the users into the houses allowed the teams to dedicate sufficient time to each placement process. One of the challenges identified in this process, as also outlined in the *Housing First Europe* project, has been ensuring fast access to housing provision. In fact, we want the user to be able to choose from a range of dwellings, but then time is also needed to obtain supplies and to condition and furbish the housing unit. A quick response to this was harder to achieve in the placement of the first 28 Habitat users, and in some cases there was a lapse of up to 1.5 months between notification of the assignment of a housing unit and the entry of the user in his/her home. Nevertheless, the learning from this initial process was very valuable in ensuring a quicker placement process for the second group of Habitat users in 2015.

Also in this initial process, seven people did not incorporate into the programme (see Figure 2). In most cases this was due to the reluctance of people experiencing complex social exclusion and/or severe mental illness issues. To handle this, the teams extended the inclusion process to up to four months, during which time they constantly visited the people and their reference professionals. In the case of severe mental illness, it was eventually considered and agreed with the reference professionals that the Habitat's ICM teams would have difficulties in delivering adequate support to these users. In the cases of extreme social exclusion (one of the users had a street trajectory of 45 years), it was the users who eventually renounced participation with the agreement of the reference professionals and the Habitat teams. These cases were further analysed and learnings incorporated, since we understand that these fit the target profile of Housing First programmes.

Finding and fitting out housing units

The configuration of the housing market is one of the contextual particularities that may have an impact in the adaptation of the HF model in Spain. Only 1.1 percent of Europe's social housing is in Spain and there are disparities in the number of social housing units between regions and municipalities. On the other hand, due to the construction boom of the last few decades, 30 percent of the empty dwellings in Europe are in Spain.[6] All of this is relevant to the future development of the model in the country. The characteristics defined for the Habitat housing units, which have been met in all cases, were:

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6   For further information, see Amnesty International, 'Derechos desalojados', Madrid, 2015. https:// grupos.es.amnesty.org/uploads/media/informe_vivienda_jun_15_Derechos_desalojados.pdf

- Individual dwellings, most of them with one bedroom, some of them with two.

- Scattered housing, located in different neighbourhoods within each city.

- Integrated into housing blocks in residential areas with access to basic services and public transport.

- Sufficient basic equipment, including hot water, heating, furniture, bedding and bath towelling, kitchen appliances and utensils.

The housing units were eventually obtained in the private rental market (10 units in Barcelona and 7 in Malaga) and in the public market (10 through the *Empresa Municipal de Vivienda y Suelo* from the municipality of Madrid and 1 in Malaga, through the *Sociedad Municipal de la Vivienda*).

Due to the structure of the programme and the available resources, the procurement of housing units was done by RAIS Fundación. The implementation experiences in other countries suggest that the independent management of housing provision and service delivery can be positive in many ways. This is the case for the French programme, *Un chez soi d'abord* [7] in which existing specialized housing organizations manage this strand. This was not an easy option in the Spanish context, since not many social organisations work directly in housing provision or management.[8] The decision for RAIS Fundación to manage both housing and support services in the Habitat programme was also due to the fact that the rental agreements fall under RAIS Fundación. In any case, this has not caused any conflict so far.

Delivering services to Habitat users

Habitat provides its programme users with the supports needed and at the appropriate intensity. Given the relatively strong welfare system in Spain, the intervention model chosen for the Habitat project is based on the *Intensive Case Management (ICM)*. This is also the support modality that has been used in many European HF programmes (Busch-Geertsema, 2014). General and specific housing support is provided in the context of the user's home, and the specialized support required (such as for health, addictions, employment, etc.) is provided through standard social and health services networks. The use of existing networks is adopted as another communitarian integration method, since it builds or rebuilds broken links of the user with the society.

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[7]   For further information, see the *Un chez soi d'abord* brochure: http://www.gouvernement.fr/sites/default/files/contenu/piece-jointe/2014/10/dihal_-_plaquette_gd_public_ucsdb_ecran.pdf

[8]   A Housing First alliance was launched in April 2016 between RAIS Fundación and Asociación Provivienda, an organization specialized in housing provision for vulnerable collectives.

The programme currently has a relatively high ratio of professionals to users, albeit with differences between the three sites: 1: 8 in Malaga, 1: 5 in Barcelona and 1: 10 in Madrid.

The array of services provided to Habitat users is quite wide: from general neighbourhood information and support in various administrative areas, to home care and accompaniment, emotional support, financial support and mediation. During the first implementation period, service delivery in Habitat materialized in the following ways, among others:

- **Regular follow up visits.** The HF teams paid at least one weekly visit to every Habitat user. The date and time of the visits were agreed in advance with the users. This support was more intense during the incorporation of users to their homes, and was delivered not only physically but also via telephone. These modalities allow for the provision of support at any time of the day and with different intensities. They allow flexibility for the professionals and at the same time they work with the concepts of urgency, emergency and relevance. The services requested during this initial period focused on housing and administrative arrangements (census registration, access to social resources and benefits, etc.).

- **Coverage of basic needs.** From the moment of entry to the dwelling, the programme covered all the basic needs of the users. Financial grants could include rent, basic supplies, food, medicines, transport, etc. Fifty percent of users at the time of entry were supported by a grant of €25-30 per week to cover food expenses. This decreased to 25 percent after the first six months.

- **Support in basic activities of daily living.** Support provided for daily living has been delivered as requested in relation to basic activities such as doing the shopping, designing weekly menus, housing management, the use and operation of electronic appliances, personal hygiene and house cleaning.

- **Neighbourhood and communitarian mediation.** Regaining or improving contact with family and mediating with neighbours or dwelling owners were common requests among users. Habitat has prioritized the direct relationship of programme users with other people as a driver for personal autonomy and strengthening the sense of identity and ownership of the home. In conflict resolution, the professionals only intervene when other autonomous means have been explored and it is considered necessary.

After one year of programme implementation, we know from qualitative information provided by the HF teams that, in general, the intensity of support has been maintained over that time, although there is a greater degree of autonomy among participants. Current supports are more focused on deeper processes linked, explicitly or otherwise, to emotional support, the need to share personal processes and self-listening.

Evaluation of the Habitat Programme

Objectives

Rigorous evaluation was considered a key element in the design of the Habitat programme, since Housing First was a new model of which there was no previous experience in the Spanish context. The evaluation would allow assessment of the results achieved by the programme and production of the relevant evidence for policy-making. It would also accompany the planning and implementation of the project, through the identification of any deviation from the original HF model and the detection of drivers and obstacles in its implementation. All this provided decision-makers with information about the performance of the HF model as adapted to the Spanish context.

Therefore, the specific objectives of the evaluation were:

• To identify possible difficulties or problems during the launch and implementa-tion of the programme, as well as any deviation from the original model.

• To compare the results of the programme with traditional interventions for homeless people.

This article presents the main results related to these objectives at six months of the implementation; these were also presented at an international conference held in Madrid in October 2015.[9] An additional economic evaluation of the Habitat programme compared to traditional treatment alternatives is being carried out. It will produce evidence on the costs of the programmes and the cost and efficiency of the use of social, health and judicial resources. Results on this economic evalu-ation will be presented in the future, although we can say in advance that the mean cost of Habitat per user/per day is €34.01. This cost varies between the programme sites, depending mainly on the availability of social housing, being €28.61 in Madrid, €31.22 in Malaga and €42.21 in Barcelona. In any case, the cost of the Habitat programme is similar to the cost of existing resources in the staircase system. This information is relevant when analysing the results of participants in the different interventions (Housing First or traditional alternative).

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[9] www.raisfundacion.org/en/what_we_do/conferenceHabitat. All presentations (in Spanish) can be found here: http://issuu.com/rais_fundacion/docs/presentaciones_habitathf_web?e=5650917/30872088

Assessment of fidelity to the Housing First model: methodology

In recent years, some research has been developed in relation to the assessment of fidelity to the Housing First model of different HF programmes. In particular, some studies developed fidelity assessment instruments (Gilmer *et al.*, 2013; Stefancic *et al.*, 2013; Watson *et al.*, 2013) and have prepared the way for the application of a fidelity evaluation in other HF programmes. The fidelity evaluation is important in terms of the programme outcomes of its target beneficiaries since it may help in determining whether the HF model (and not a different intervention) is responsible for the outcomes observed.

In the case of Habitat's evaluation, it was decided to adapt the methodology used in different programmes in the US and Canada (Goering *et al.*, 2014; McNaughton *et al.*, 2015). This would not only allow assessment of Habitat's fidelity and identification of possible contextual modifications from the original model, but it would also provide comparable inputs for other international HF projects.

The US and Canadian fidelity assessments responded to very different realities, both in relation to context (national services networks, social services configurations, etc.) and the programme itself (user profile, number of users and resources, etc.). Nevertheless, it was considered that the assessment model used in those programmes could be interesting for creating a common framework for fidelity to the model internationally. Dr. Tim Aubry, lead researcher from the *At Home/ Chez Soi* Canadian HF programme, provided key support for the adaptation of the fidelity assessment methodology and tools to the evaluation methodology of the Habitat programme.

The assessment methodology uses a combination of quantitative strategies (to examine the adjustment of the Habitat programme to the HF model) and qualitative ones, aimed primarily at identifying barriers and facilitators of programme implementation. This combination can help in deepening the assessment process, in minimizing slants in each of the methods and in favouring the extraction of convergent information.

In terms of the quantitative strategy, the first step was the translation and adaptation of the *Pathways HF Fidelity Self-Assessment Scale* (Stefancic *et al.*, 2013). The scale is composed of 38 items grouped into five areas:

1. Process and housing structure

2. Housing and services

3. Service philosophy

4. Services offered

5. Structure of the team / human resources.

The scale was blind-translated into Spanish independently by three social services professionals. Those three versions were discussed in reaching a first Spanish version of the scale, which was reviewed by two other social services professionals, and a final version was agreed. The final version was administered in August 2015, that is, 10 to 12 months after the launch of the project. The HF teams in each of the cities – one or two professionals in each case – completed a survey of their site. Difficulties or doubts that had been raised by professionals were collected and considered in the analysis of the self-assessment results.

Following the completion of questionnaires by the HF teams, in-depth interviews were carried out individually with the programme coordinators from the three sites, using the Interview Guide for key informants used in the evaluation of the *At Home / Chez Soi* programme. After this interview, a discussion group was organized with the participation of the three site coordinators and the national Habitat coordinator. The focus of this group was to analyse deviations from the model that had been detected, contextual features that required adaptation, difficulties experienced during implementation, and ways to go forward with implementation.

Preliminary results of the fidelity evaluation

The results presented in Figure 1 relate to the quantitative information extracted from the pilot administration of the *Pathways HF Fidelity Self-assessment survey*.[10] These results should be used with caution, because some difficulties in the clarification of terms in the Spanish version and the equivalence of some items in the Spanish context have been identified. The co-leadership of Habitat in ongoing cross-country fidelity assessment research led by Dr. Tim Aubry will help validate the instrument for the Spanish context. Taking this into account, the fidelity survey results suggest that the Habitat programme presents significant fidelity to the original model, especially in the areas of 'housing process and structure' and 'service philosophy'.

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[10] The *Pathways HF Fidelity Self-assessment survey* assesses the fidelity of a programme to the core principles of the HF model through 38 items divided in 5 domains. Each domain has a minimum and a maximum scoring, which ranges from 6 to 46 and gives a total scoring range of 37-174. For the Fidelity assessment presented in this article, Habitat used the 2013 self-assessment survey. The survey has been revised and there is a new 2015 version, which is being used for the cross-country research.

Figure 1. Results of Habitat's Self-assessment Survey of Fidelity to the Housing First Model
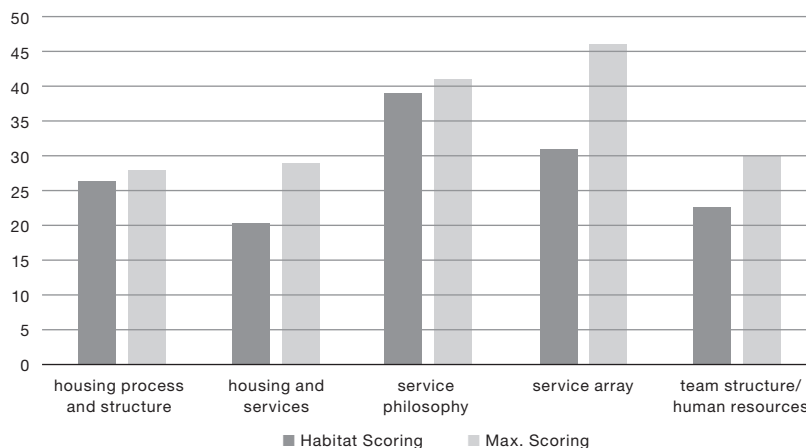
On the other hand, the qualitative information gathered during the interviews with site-coordinators and the discussion group facilitated the detection of differences between the three programme sites. Most of these adaptation differences were contextual and related to existing social services resources in the region or the type of housing available (social or private market), and there were also some slight differences in the ways of working, such as the time of incorporation to the dwellings. The whole process has allowed a reflective exercise on the experience after the first few months of implementation and has helped identify areas for improvement.

Evaluation of results for participants: methodology

The Habitat's evaluation methodology for results on participants was developed taking into account the previous evaluation experiences of other Housing First programmes, especially those of the *At Home / Chez Soi* and the *Housing First Europe* projects. An experimental design was chosen, with an experimental group and an equivalent control group participating in a longitudinal trial. Pre-test and post-test measures are applied to both groups in a 24-month period, as well as follow-up measures being administered every six months.

Habitat evaluation sample definition

As already mentioned, the evaluation sample consists of two groups of participants who met the access criteria to the programme at the time of entry.

The size of the experimental group is limited by the number of places available in Habitat. The number of housing units available at the launch of the programme was 28.
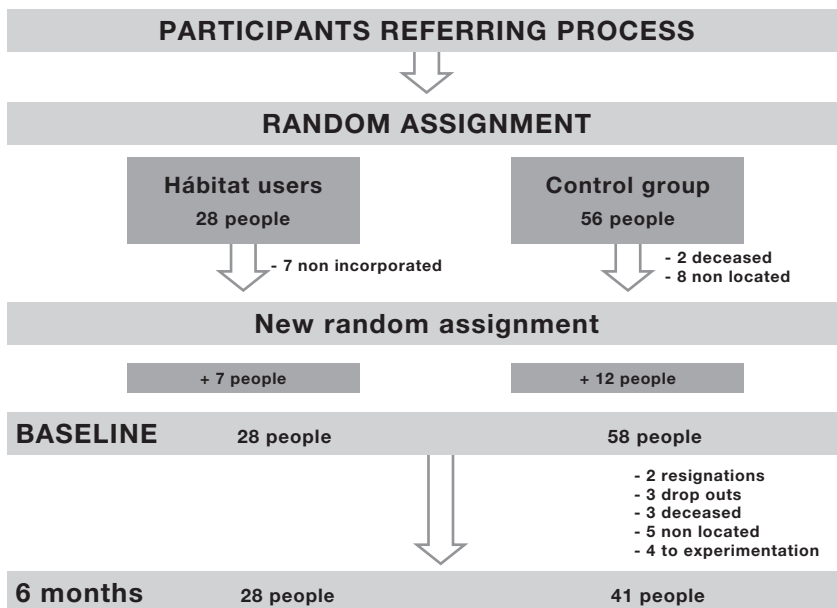
The number of places available also determines the size of the control group (twice the number of available places). The reason for doubling the number of participants in the control group comes from considering some of the characteristics of the homeless population. As most existing studies in the field have signalled, one of the greatest obstacles to assessing the results of interventions aimed at the homeless population is the difficulty in tracking users over time.

The location of homeless people or people with serious problems of social exclusion is especially complicated due to the high mobility and instability of this group. There have been very few longitudinal studies in Spain, most likely because of these difficulties, which also increase the cost of this type of research. Specifically, participation in follow-up evaluations has ranged from 27 percent between 11 and 24 months (Muñoz *et al*., 2003) to 42 percent at 12 months (Panadero, 2004). Other international studies acknowledge similar rates (Nuttbrock *et al.*, 1999; Tsemberis *et al.*, 2003). In anticipation of a similar significant loss of participants during follow-up, the number of participants in the initial control group was set at a minimum of 56 people (double the number of places in the Habitat programme).

After the verification of access criteria for the potential users referred and the elimination of profiles that did not meet the criteria, random assignment for each of the sites was organised. The procedure used was a proportional stratified random assignment that took the gender of participants into consideration; that is, the selection of men and women was done separately. Considering the ratio of homeless men to women in Spain (Panadero and Vazquez, 2013), approximately 15-20 percent of participants in the experimentation and the control groups were women, and 80-85 percent were men. Several of those chosen did not join the programme or control group, necessitating a new random assignment procedure.

After the whole process, detailed in Figure 2, the initial interview (M0) was held with 28 Habitat programme users and 58 participants in the control group (traditional alternative intervention).

Figure 2. Sample Definition and 6M Evaluation Process

PARTICIPANTS REFERRING PROCESS

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RANDOM ASSIGNMENT

Hábitat users	Control group
28 people	56 people

⇩ - 7 non incorporated   ⇩ - 2 deceased
                                              - 8 non located

New random assignment

+ 7 people	+ 12 people

BASELINE	28 people	58 people

- 2 resignations
- 3 drop outs
- 3 deceased
- 5 non located
- 4 to experimentation

⇩

6 months	28 people	41 people

The sociodemographic characteristics of both groups were compared after the M0 interview (baseline). As can be seen in Table 2, the two groups were equivalent in all sociodemographic variables considered: age, nationality and level of education.

The initial equivalence between the two groups in other areas such as health, employment, housing or homeless history was also analysed. No statistically significant difference in subjective quality of life, homeless history, income or administrative situation was found.

Statistically significant differences were only found between Habitat and traditional alternative intervention users in some related variables:

• Social support: a higher percentage of users in the control group responded affirmatively to the question "Is there someone you are sure you could count on in case of trouble or need?" (61 percent v. 36 percent).

• Employment history: participants in the control group had longer unemployment histories (112.30 months (SD = 115.231) vs 70.42 months (SD = 39.388).

• Health: a small percentage of users in the group of traditional alternative care responded affirmatively to the question about having told a doctor that you have a chronic (57 percent vs 30 percent) or serious illness.

Table 2. Socio-demographic Characteristics of Participants in the Habitat Programme: Evaluation at Baseline

	Hábitat group n		Control group n		$t/x\,2(1)$
Gender					,005
Male	23	82.1 percent	48	82.8 percent	
Female	5	17.9 percent	10	17.2 percent	
Age (Mean (SD))	28	46.86 (8,601)	58	49.33 (10,570)	-1,076
Nationality					
Spanish	17	60.7 percent	36	62.1 percent	
Non Spanish	11	39.3 percent	22	37.9 percent	
Education level					7,213
No studies/ unfinished primary studies	7	25.0 percent	8	13.8 percent	
Primary studies (up to 10 years)	5	17.9 percent	14	24.1 percent	
Secondary studies / first degree (up to 14 years)	6	21.4 percent	17	29.3 percent	
Secondary studies / second degree (up to 18 years)	8	28.6 percent	7	12.1 percent	
University studies	2	7.1 percent	12	20.7 percent	

Six months after the initial interview, the first follow-up evaluations were administered to both groups. As can be seen in Figure 2, 28 people in the Habitat group but only 41 people in the control group were interviewed, after 17 losses and drop-outs.

Evaluation instruments and areas evaluated

The areas to be analysed in the Habitat evaluation were defined taking into account the results and consistency of different research studies on HF carried out and presented in different reviews (e.g., Waegemakers *et al.*, 2012; Groton, 2013). The areas measured in the *Housing First Europe* project (Busch-Geertsema, 2014) were especially considered in order to facilitate the comparison of results in the European context. As can be seen in Table 3, in addition to sociodemographic characteristics, several other areas were considered, such as housing situation, health, social support, community integration or access, and use of services.

To measure these areas in the Habitat evaluation, standardized instruments were preferred to non-standardized ones when available. When this was not possible, recommendations from the publication *Social Experimentation: A Methodological Guide for Policy Makers* (J-Pal Europe, 2011) were followed. This European Commission guide recommends the use of "questions from existing surveys which have already been administered to large population and not [the] design [of] one's own questions" (p.22). Consequently, many of the questions on variables for which standardized instruments could not be found were selected from different surveys used by the Spanish National Institute of Statistics (INE), such as the *Survey of Homeless People* (INE, 2005; 2012) or the *National Health Survey* (INE, 2011-12).

These areas are for both the experimentation and control groups, except for 'satisfaction with the programme', which only applies to Habitat users. As a result, the evaluation instruments were designed as follows:

• In the case of participants in the experimental and the control groups, a structured interview is carried out to facilitate the understanding of participants. The 'satisfaction with the programme' survey is provided to programme users twice a year, to be completed anonymously.

• In the case of professionals, a self-administered form is provided for the initial assessment (GENCAT). Information in other areas is compiled as a final part of the structured interview with users and through other specific tools in the case of support needs and provision, community integration and use of resources.

Table 3. Areas Evaluated and Instruments Used in the Evaluation of the Habitat programme

Areas	Instruments	Information source
Sociodemographic characteristics	Survey of homeless people (INE, 2012)	Participants Registries
Substance abuse	EuropASI (Kokkevi and Hartgers, 1995)	Participants Professionals
Health	GHQ-28 (Goldberg, 1996)	Participants
Support needs	Questions based on HF Europe or Camberwell Assessment of Need survey	Participants Professionals
Support provided	Questions based on HF Europe	Participants Professionals
Satisfaction with the programme	Satisfaction survey used by RAIS Fundación, with some questions adapted to the programme features	Participants
Quality and conditions of life	GENCAT (Verdugo *et al.*, 2008) QoLI (Lehman, 1988)	Participants Professionals
Housing retention	Defined as in HF Europe	Participants Professionals
Social Support	Questions based on previous research (Muñoz *et al.*, 2003; Panadero *et al.*, 2013)	Participants
Community integration and conflicts	Questions from QoLI or EuropAsi Other questions	Participants Professionals
Access and use of resources (social, health, judiciary services)	Survey of homeless people (INE, 2012)	Participants Professionals

As to how often the evaluation is to be carried out, there will be five measurement moments:

1. For Habitat users: an initial interview is held prior to incorporation into the programme and then every six months for at least 24 months or until completion of the intervention.

2. For the control group: an initial interview is held at the time of assignment to the control group and then every six months for 24 months.

3. Habitat professionals: a first assessment (GENCAT) is completed at the time of the user's incorporation into the programme and then every six months for at least 24 months or until completion of the intervention.

Data processing and analysis

The data obtained for each measurement are incorporated into a database designed specifically for the programme evaluation. The aims of data analysis, for which a system of statistical analysis and SPSS data management are used, are:

- To analyse the characteristics of the sample at the different points of evaluation in which descriptive analysis is conducted: frequency analysis, mean, median, etc., depending on the type of variable.

- To identify possible differences between the experimental group and the control group:

  – For nominal variables the chi-square statistic is used.

  – For continuous variables 't' student tests for independent samples are applied.

- To analyse the change during the first six months, both for the experimentation and control groups, the following tests were used:

  – 't' test was used for continuous variables in related samples

  – For dichotomous variables: McNemar

 – For the rest of categorical variables (ordinal): Willcoxon

First results of the Habitat programme for participants: situation of programme users at 6M

The results presented in this section refer to those of the initial interview (M0) and the first follow-up (M6) to the initial experimentation group.

The first result to highlight from the Habitat programme six months after its launch, is the large housing retention rate: 100 percent of users in the Habitat programme continued in their homes six months later, with only one rehousing having occurred. Although this successful result is in line with the high retention rates of other HF programmes (80 to 95 percent in most of them), we might expect a drop in future follow-up measures.

In addition to the stability of the housing, other aspects were considered, including the perception of users of different areas of their life. Figures 3 and 4 show the perception of change in the quality of life of Habitat users and control group at M0 and M6. Statistically significant improvements were found in various areas in the Habitat group, separate from the housing situation, including in the economic situation, leisure, security and family relations. On the other hand, no changes were observed in the opinion of users about their social relations or health.

Figure 3. Changes Perceived by Habitat Users in Quality of Life (QoLI)
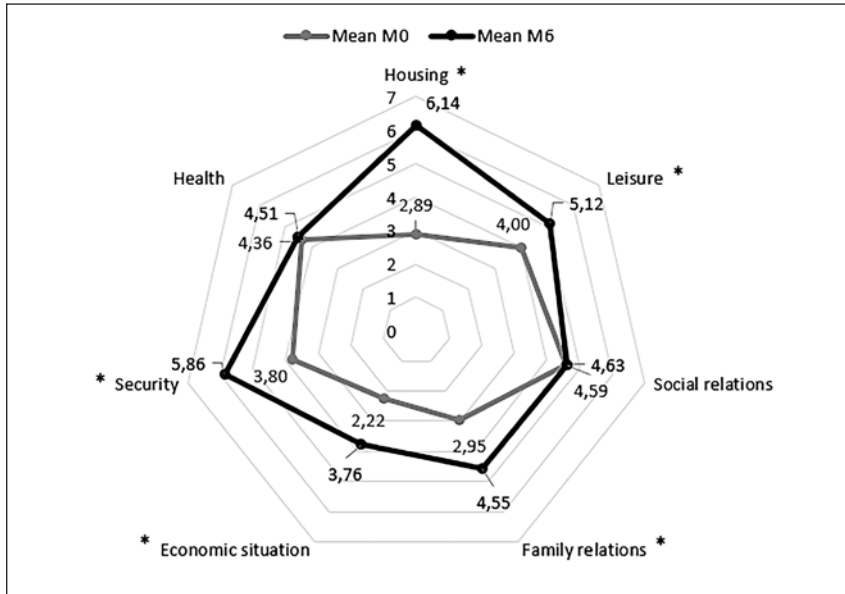
* Statistically significant; 't' test applied

Graphic 4. Changes Perceived by Participants in Control Group in Quality of Life (QoLI)
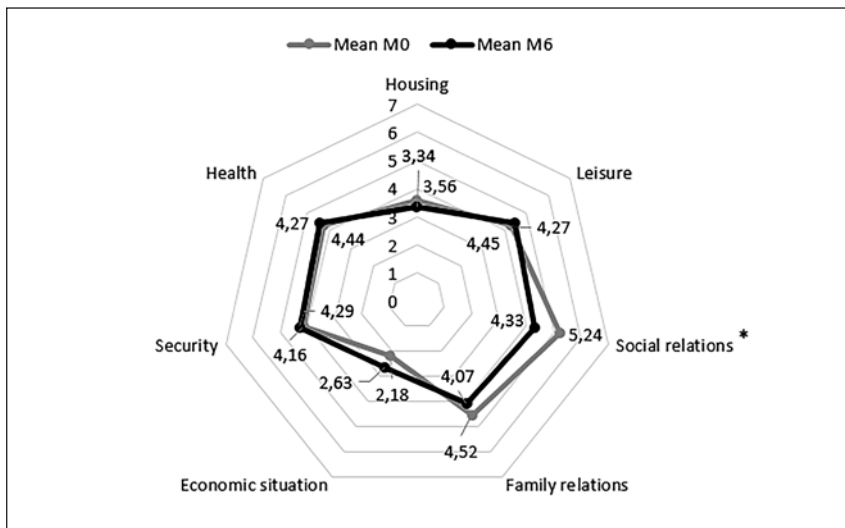
* Statistically significant; 't' test applied

In addition to participants' feedback on these aspects of their lives, information about their living conditions was also analysed. As shown in Table 4, changes also appeared in the most diverse variables. Regarding the coverage of basic needs such as food, there was a significant reduction in the percentage of people who had not made a meal for one day in the week prior to the interview (from more than half of the users at M0, to less than 15 percent at M6).

Some changes were also found in the economic situation of the Habitat programme users. Although the amount of money they possessed had not changed significantly during the first six months, the type of income had: there was a reduction in the percentage of people begging (39.3 percent to 17.9 percent) and there was a significant increase in the percentage of users receiving a minimum insertion income. On the other hand, there was no statistically significant change in the economic situation of the control group participants during the same period.

Regarding the vulnerability of the participants in Habitat to different juridical offenses, in all cases there were reductions in the rate of victimization, though this was only statistically significant in the case of insults or threats. While 36 percent of users had suffered insults or threats in the last six months at the time of joining the programme, this dropped to 7 percent at M6. In the case of the control group users, statistically significant changes were not observed in the area of victimization during the first six months.

Discrimination perceived by programme users had also fallen during the first six months of their participation in the programme: at M0, 43 percent of participants felt they had not been discriminated against in the previous six months; at M6 this percentage increased to 68 percent. Regarding the control group, a similar but smaller improvement was observed for the same period.

As can be seen in Table 5, and in contrast to the findings for the control group, the results on the family relationships of programme users indicate a significant increase in frequency of contact. This occurred for both contact options: the percentage of people who never spoke with their family by telephone dropped from 50 percent to 32 percent; and the people who never met their family physically dropped from 89 percent to 64 percent.

The results also suggest a reduction in the feelings of loneliness among Habitat users during the first six months of the programme. The percentage of those who did not feel alone or abandoned at all doubled during this period (from 25 percent to 50 percent). The evaluations of other HF programmes have identified higher loneliness feelings in HF users due to moving to individual housing and breaking with previous social relations (Busch-Geertsema, 2014).

Table 4. Changes Perceived by Habitat Participants in Living Conditions

	Habitat users M0 (n=28)	Habitat users M6 (n=28)	(1)	Control group M0 (n=58)	Control group M6 (n=41)	(1)
Basic needs: Food						
During the last week, did you skip any meal?	53.6 percent	14.3 percent	*	43.1 percent	48.8 percent	
Economic situation						
In the last month you…						
Received a minimum insertion income	17.9 percent	28.6 percent	*	17.2 percent	17.2 percent	
Begged	39.3 percent	17.9 percent	*	27.6 percent	19 percent	
How much money did you get last month? (Mean (SD))	373.31 (298.57)	360.95 (188.74)	.201	316.68 (169.26)	365.55 (179.84)	
Leisure and free time						
Did you do some hobby in the last month?	35.7 percent	60.7 percent	*	41.4 percent	35.0 percent	*
Security and victimization						
Have you been beaten in the last 6 months?	14.3 percent	7.1 percent		15.5 percent	8.6 percent	
Were you robbed of money, personal belongings or documents in the last 6 months?	28.6 percent	7.1 percent		31.0 percent	13.8 percent	
Did you suffer from sexual harassment in the last 6 months?	3.6 percent	0 percent		1.7 percent	1.7 percent	
Were you cheated in the last 6 months?	7.1 percent	3.6 percent		12.1 percent	6.9 percent	
Were you insulted or threatened in the last 6 months?	35.7 percent	7.1 percent	*	32.8 percent	17.2 percent	
Discrimination						
Did you feel discriminated against in the last 6 months?			-2,463*			-2,149*
Never	42.9 percent	67.9 percent		43.1 percent	61.0 percent	
Sometimes	17.9 percent	25.0 percent		17.2 percent	14.6 percent	
Many times	14.3 percent	0 percent		8.6 percent	7.3 percent	
Constantly	17.9 percent	3.6 percent		19.0 percent	12.2 percent	
N/A	7.1 percent	3.6 percent		12.1 percent	4.9 percent	

(1) "t" test was applied to repeated measures in continuous variables, McNemar to dichotomic variables and Wilcoxon to the rest of categorical variables. *p ≤.05; **p ≤.01; ***p ≤.001

Table 5. Changes Perceived by Habitat Participants in Family Relations

	Habitat users M0 (n=28)	Habitat users M6 (n=28)	(1)	Control group M0 (n=58)	Control group M6 (n=41)	(1)
During the last month, how frequently did you speak on the phone with someone from your family?			-3,209**			-, 530
Never	50.0 percent	32.1 percent		49.1 percent	50.0 percent	
Less than once a month	21.4 percent	3.6 percent		23.6 percent	10.5 percent	
At least once a month	17.9 percent	7.1 percent		5.5 percent	13.2 percent	
At least once a week	3.6 percent	32.1 percent		20.0 percent	18.4 percent	
At least once a day	3.6 percent	17.9 percent		1.8 percent	7.9 percent	
During the last month, how frequently did you meet someone from your family?			-2,217*			-, 776
Never	89.3 percent	64.3 percent		74.5 percent	76.3 percent	
Less than once a month	3.6 percent	0 percent		10.9 percent	7.9 percent	
At least once a month	0 percent	10.7 percent		9.1 percent	7.9 percent	
At least once a week	0 percent	14.3 percent		1.8 percent	5.3 percent	
At least once a day	3.6 percent	3.6 percent		3.6 percent	2.6 percent	
To what extent do you feel alone or abandoned			2,124*			-, 746
Not at all	25.0 percent	50.0 percent		26.8 percent	28.9 percent	
A little	42.9 percent	28.6 percent		30.4 percent	21.1 percent	
Quite a lot	3.6 percent	7.1 percent		12.5 percent	21.1 percent	
Very	25.0 percent	10.7 percent		30.4 percent	28.9 percent	

(1) McNemar was applied to dichotomic variables and Wilcoxon to the rest of categorical variables

*p ≤.05; **p ≤.01; ***p ≤.001

Changes in health and substance abuse in Habitat programme users during the first six months were more limited. Improvements were observed in the GHQ scale of anxiety and insomnia, when using dichotomized scorings. Scores dropped significantly from 2.7 (SD = 2.01) to 1.43 (SD = 1.95) (t=2.982; p<0.01). No significant changes in any of the GHQ scales were observed in the control group.

Regarding alcohol and drug use, no significant changes were found in any of the aspects considered (consumed amount, use frequency or money spent on buying substances). This is also observed for the control group.

Conclusion

The Habitat programme is the first systematic experience of the Housing First model implementation in Spain. RAIS Fundación has faced two main challenges in this process: changing the mindsets of professionals and decision-makers in relation to the ground-breaking and innovative HF model, and operating a method-ology with no previous implementation experience in the country. A 'didactic' approach has been essential for the introduction of the model in this new context.

In this sense, one of the key success factors has been the identification of programme implementation milestones where information can be provided to different stakeholders and the definition of the information that should be delivered. The referral processes into Habitat and the access of participants to the programme were key moments for the communication of the HF model to homelessness organi-zations and users, and for their understanding of the model.

On the other hand, as has occurred in other European HF implementation experi-ences, the particularities of the Spanish context – especially the Social Services and Health networks that support homeless people in Spain, and the housing market configuration – have determined some of the adaptations to the model. In the case of Habitat, and unlike other governmental HF programmes in other EU countries, there were also some constraints linked to the resources that RAIS Fundación could obtain.

The solid evaluation framework created for Habitat has definitely helped in the 'didactic' approach, by providing evidence of the efficiency of the HF model for professionals and decision-makers, and by helping to identify drivers and difficul-ties in its adaptation to the Spanish context, as well as ways forward. The evaluation outputs also helped to avoid objections to the introduction of the model, many of those objections based on fears of breaking the status quo of the existing networks.

The strict profile of programme participants has been assured by following a rigorous profile check and random assignment to an experimentation group and a control group. This has also been a key element in demonstrating the efficiency of the HF model for this specific profile of homeless people with high support needs.

The HF Fidelity assessment that was carried out is also useful in demonstrating that the results of the Habitat programme on participants are due to the HF intervention. This is seen as especially relevant for countries where the introduction or the future development of the Housing First model will be most probably done by numerous regional or local organizations. Different configurations of the model as adapted by these organizations could lead to varying levels of success and could introduce doubts as to the efficiency of the HF model.

Using a mix of validated quantitative and qualitative methods for the fidelity assessment has shown good loyalty of the Habitat programme to HF principles. Results of the assessment also suggest that further analysis should be done in areas such as service array or human resources, which could be influenced by the Spanish context and/or the programme configuration. Although needing further validation, the translation and adaptation to the Spanish context of the fidelity assessment tool, which was developed for the original Pathways to Housing programme, also fosters comparability and knowledge exchange between international HF programmes.

The same comparability principle was used in the design of the evaluation methodology. This was designed taking into account previous HF evaluation experiences and using standardized instruments for the areas where they were available. Otherwise, questions and items from existing surveys or scales were adapted to the Habitat and the Spanish contexts.

The first results of the Habitat evaluation on participants after six months of programme implementation are in line with the main results observed in other evaluation projects. The housing retention rate at 6 months in the Habitat programme is 100 percent, which is the main goal of the HF model and the Habitat programme: ending street homelessness. Connected with this successful housing stability, security – both subjective and objective – is one of the areas where greater improvements have been observed. Existing research has also made a point on housing as the base for *ontological security*, which would enable the "basis for constancy, daily routines, privacy and identity construction, and a stable platform for a less stigmatized and more normalized life" (Busch-Geertsema, 2014, p.21). These two findings alone suggest that the HF model is an efficient method to tackle homelessness for homeless people with a long street trajectory and high support needs.

Other improvements in areas such as family relations, economic situations and leisure have been observed to a lesser extent in the experimentation group. In the areas of social relations and health, almost no improvements have been observed in the Habitat group. Existing research has also signalled limited changes in both of these areas, and where they were observed, they occurred at a later point in time.

Comparing these results to those of the control group, the evaluation of Habitat confirms again the efficacy of the HF model, since there is little or no improvement observed in most of the variables analysed for the control group.

The analysis of the follow-up measures of the Habitat programme will enable tracking the evolution of both groups and will provide further evidence to the existing corpus of international research on Housing First. The evaluation of Habitat will also accompany the development of the Housing First model in Spain, which has already gotten the attention of the national government, regional and local administrations and homelessness organisations.

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