

BRIEF 3

HOUSING FIRST AUSTRIA - ARRIVING HOME (hfö) BAWO

Austria, nationwide

INSPIRING PRACTICE

ID CARD



PROJECT TITLE.

Housing First Austria – Arriving Home (hfö)

MAIN OBJECTIVE.

To sustainably end homelessness by scaling up Housing First across Austria.

TARGET AUDIENCE.

People experiencing or at risk of homelessness, as defined by ETHOS.

IN NUMBERS.

2000

individuals housed between May 2021 and September 2024.

68%

of people registered as homeless in Austria are men, while 60% of hfö's adult beneficiaries were women

€11.8M

total **funding** from the Austrian Federal Ministry for Social Affairs

SUMMARY.

Housing First Austria – Arriving Home (hfö) housed 2,000 people from 2021 to 2024 through a nation-wide NGO network and partnerships with the limited-profit housing sector. Fully funded by the Austrian government, the project's success led to the creation of a national Housing First programme in 2024. This marks a transition from emergency response to sustainable housing policy.



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Project description

From Emergency Response to Structural Change

Initially funded as a Covid-19 emergency response, the project targeted those newly homeless due to the pandemic. The scale of need and impact led to its extension with regular funding, demonstrating governmental commitment to long-term homelessness solutions.

Flexible Implementation and coordinated Governance

The initiative was implemented by 26 NGOs across seven federal states, with BAWO coordinating nationally. Each organisation adapted the implementation of the project to local contexts, supported by shared learning activities. A majority of funds went directly to housing costs and support services.

Structured Impact and a Scalable Model

Hfö produced consistent outcomes across regions, with hundreds stably housed and support systems formalised. The project also created a strong operational backbone—training tools, shared quality standards, data reporting protocols—allowing for harmonised practices among diverse NGOs.

By fostering a robust ecosystem of practitioners and consolidating institutional knowledge, the project set a precedent for structurally embedding Housing First into Austria's homelessness response.

TIMELINE

May 2021

Launch of Housing First Austria with emergency pandemic funding.

2023

Transition to regular government funding as demand persists.

September 2024

Official end of the project after housing 2,000 people.

October 2024

Government launches WOHN SCHIRM Housing First national programme.

End 2026

Target to house 2,500 people under the new national scheme.

Inspiration note

From Local Pilots to National Standards

The success of “Housing First Austria – Arriving Home” accelerated the integration of Housing First into national policy. While Housing First had been implemented on local levels before 2021, this project enabled structural change on a national level. It brought visibility to a method once seen as marginal and laid the foundation for a comprehensive federal strategy. Today, Housing First is no longer an innovation—it is a recognised standard in Austria’s social policy toolbox.

Making It Work at Scale

A key lesson is that scaling up requires not just funding, but trust in civil society. By empowering NGOs to lead implementation, the Austrian government ensured responsiveness to local needs while maintaining consistency through national coordination. This model helped secure buy-in across sectors, from housing providers to public institutions. It also contributed to professionalising support teams, which continue to work within the new national programme.

Embedding Housing First in the Long Term

The launch of the WOHN SCHIRM Housing First in October 2024 marks the start of a new chapter. The goal: house 2,500 people by the end of 2026. Lessons from hfö now inform programme design, with Austria’s Ministry of Social Affairs coordinating the program and bringing NGO partners on board. WOHN SCHIRM is not limited to Housing First: it also includes eviction prevention and protection from energy supply cuts due to delayed payments, forming a comprehensive social safety net. Though BAWO no longer leads implementation, it remains a key advocate. Austria’s trajectory shows that with political will and shared vision, Housing First can become a lasting solution—not just a temporary fix.

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Birthe Povlsen
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This serves as a strong illustration of how strategic partnerships between non-governmental organisations operating in the housing and social welfare sectors—supported through public funding—can deliver effective outcomes for society’s most vulnerable populations. It further underscores that the successful implementation and scaling of the evidence-based Housing First model is contingent upon sustained, coordinated collaboration between public authorities and civil society actors across the housing and social policy domains, ultimately improving the lives of individuals experiencing homelessness.

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