

# Project Housing First for Families in Brno: A Randomized Control Trial

*The project provides a municipal flat and intensive housing first case management for 50 families who were previously living in private hostels, shelters or other forms of homelessness (ETHOS). The service provider is award winning local pro-Roma NGO IQ Roma Servis, trained by pioneers of housing first in Europe, HVO Querido. The impact of the project is measured by a Randomized Control Trial, counterfactual design, which allows it to isolate outside factors by comparing the treatment and control group. The first families moved in in September 2016 and by May 2017 all 50 families were housed. 37 out of 38 families who have already been housed for one year remain housed in January 2018. One family moved to a shelter. Housing retention rate for randomly selected homeless family is therefore 97%.*



## Housing first showcase for the Czech Republic

The project aims at rigorously testing and showcasing whether family homelessness of both Roma and non-Roma families can be ended through a housing first approach in the Czech Republic. The expectation is that families who have been stabilized in housing will reunify with their institutionalized children, family well-being and social inclusion will improve, and at the same time public expenditures for those families will decrease.

## Family homelessness in Brno

A family homelessness registry week was conducted in Brno in April 2016, and 421 families living in private hostels, shelters or other forms of homelessness (ETHOS) were registered. Experiencing a first housing crisis has been shown to be a path to long-term homelessness for two thirds of families in Brno, 92% of homeless families experienced long-term (more than six months) homelessness in their life for a median period of eight years (Registry week Brno 2016). Two thirds of these families are Roma. Once homeless, these families are typically considered not fit for housing by both private and public landlords, and have little access to housing.

## What is the city planning to do?

The City of Brno (pop 400 000), which owns and controls access to 29 000 flats, approved a strategy to end family homelessness: to make it rare, short and non-recurring. Since 2016 various traditional and experimental approaches have been tested for outcomes. Among them, the housing first approach seemed very promising, so 50 municipal flats were dedicated to showcase housing first in Brno and measure its impact through randomized control trial.

Between September 2016 and May 2017 fifty families out of the total population of 421 were randomly assigned to housing first program through a lottery organized by City Council for Health and Social Affairs. Only one family turned the offer down, partly because they did not want to work with Roma NGO service provider, and generally they were not interested in receiving any support.

## We evaluate the pilot with a Randomized control trial

The project is accompanied by a rigorous counterfactual impact evaluation, a randomized control trial, performed by the University of Ostrava. The control group, against which the impact of the project will be measured, consists of additional 100 randomly assigned families. Both treatment and control groups are surveyed at baseline, and after six and twelve months after move-in within this project. At the end of the 12-months, impact of housing first program on the families will be evaluated.

The project is run by Brno municipality, which is not only the owner of the 50 non-segregated apartments but also provides overall coordination of local partners including Department of Social and Legal Protection of Children, Labour Office, Department of Education etc. Brno municipality is acting as the lead for the program to also test that a local authority partnering with local actors is best placed to be responsible for ending homelessness and further integration of its marginalised citizens.

**Lead:** [Statutory city of Brno](#)

**Partners:** [IQ Roma Servis, z. s.](#); [Ostrava University](#)

## CONTRIBUTION TO ENDING HOMELESSNESS

Due to local control of municipal flats across the country, the success of this project has the **potential to dramatically impact how homelessness is addressed for all populations**. Previous laws and practices have excluded people with past housing debts or evictions. This has made regaining housing for homeless families very challenging even in publically-owned units. On top of that, for Roma families, assumptions about their behaviors in housing make access to the housing market very difficult, effectively precluding many of these families from re-entering the housing market. If this project is successful in showcasing that any homeless family can be housed and retain the housing if given proper support, this could be a breakthrough evidence for change, because there are enough vacant flats in the Czech Republic to end homelessness altogether.

The project was able to reframe the so called “Gypsy problem” to problem of family homelessness, which has a possible solutions that can be tested and evaluated. **It moves from a vaguely defined disincentive to address the problem based on assumptions about the population to actionable strategy of solution, an attainable goal of municipal and state policy.** To date, no media, political or public opposition has used racist discourse to undermine the project.

Randomized control trial is being used for the first time in the Czech Republic to gather evidence on impact of social projects or policy. The accountability of programs that tackle homelessness has already been increased due to the focus that the project puts on evidence and outcomes.

The project was referred to as a best practice example by the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs in public, and also in documents supporting government social housing bill. Evidence from the project will help inform government policies through involvement of government representatives in advisory board of the project.

The project implementation and results are being watched closely by media, elected officials and experts from all over the country. If the implementation proves successful, there is a realistic expectation that this approach to homelessness will be adopted by other municipalities and national actors. Representatives of several towns (Kadaň, Liberec, Vsetín, Chomutov, Ostrava) have already visited this project in Brno in order to learn lessons from this approach.

## EXPECTED 12-MONTHS IMPACT ON HOMELESS FAMILIES

The main expected outcome is that 80% of the treatment families will retain their housing after 12 months, i. e. they will fulfill their duties as tenants. The project's expected impact which is measured at 6 and 12 months after moving in on the lives of the treatment families compared to control group is:

1. Families will have **higher family reunification rate in household**. 41% of homeless families in Brno live separated from some nuclear family member, in many cases due to lack of housing. Children are placed in institutional care and foster care or juvenile justice, 23% of the parents cannot live together in a household. Allocation of housing and case management is expected to change this situation.
2. **School attendance of children will improve in short term** and school attainments will improve in medium-term. Children in homeless families have poor school attendance and subsequently poor grades due to high rates of illness, cost of transport, lack of resources and other reasons connected to exclusion from housing.
3. **Both physical and psychological health of the families will improve**. 39% of surveyed mothers have very high rates of psychological distress (score in Kessler K-6 scale that indicates severe mental illness) which makes it difficult for them to focus on nurturing. After moving in, the psychological distress should decrease, as well as prevalence of diseases connected to inadequate housing - asthma, chronic cough, hepatitis.
4. **Family budgets will be more predictable**, and overall finance management will improve in the treatment group. Only 20% of homeless families are left with subsistence money at the end of the month, 35% lack subsistence money for one week each month, 28% lack money between 1-2 weeks each month.
5. The **quality of life will improve** with treatment families.
6. **Anomia will decrease** with treatment families.
7. Average **public expenditures towards the treatment families will be lower** than those of the control group families.