

habitact news

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European seminar 2012 on funding strategies – Registrations open

This year, our annual seminar (co-hosted with FEANTSA and the EU Committee of the Regions) will take place on Friday 8 June 2012, and focus on funding strategies and building the case for homelessness. Themes discussed will include:

1. Planning and budgeting: How to prioritise? This session will include presentations on rethinking service provision, areas to make savings, and how to budget a local homeless strategy
2. Diversification of funding sources: This session will look at the different ways of funding homeless policy such as sharing the costs with other authorities (between cities), organising business groups into policy goals, and the potential of social impact bonds.
3. Cost-effectiveness: This session will look at how to ensure efficiency of spending on homelessness such as testing innovative approaches before mainstreaming them, using cost-benefit analyses, and showing social return on investment.

The full programme is available [online](#).

Registrations are now open – contact information@feantsa.org to receive a registration form.

HABITACT steering group – 7 June 2012

The steering group will meet the day before the seminar at the Atlas Hotel from 3.00-5.00pm. A number of issues will be discussed including project development (updates on Housing First Europe, and other European projects submitted in cooperation with HABITACT), peer reviews (evaluation of the 2010-2012 peer review series and proposals for the 2013 peer review), and a general brainstorm on emerging homelessness trends and how to face new challenges.

Housing First Europe website

The Housing First Europe partnership website is now available! www.housingfirsteurope.eu

HABITACT Peer Review 2012 in Ghent (Belgium)

The 2012 HABITACT Peer Review took place in the [City of Ghent](#) (Belgium) on 8-9 March 2012.

This included a presentation of Ghent's homeless policy, with a special focus on the housing dimensions of the policy. This was supported by site visits to see the policy in practice and a panel discussion about social rental agencies with the presence of a landlord, a tenant, and a housing advisor.

As well as the peer participation of local policymakers in 14 different cities (Amsterdam, Antwerp, Baerum, Brussels, Dudley, Esch-sur-Alzette, Gothenburg, Lucca, Kortrijk, Odense, Sandefjord, Stockholm, Tartu, Verona), the European discussions included a closer look at the work of the Fondazione Casa in Lucca (Italy) with the private rental market, the homelessness prevention work of Dudley local council (UK), the legal work of the AIRE centre (London) on access to social and housing assistance for EU migrants, a reflection from Esch-sur-Alzette local council (Luxembourg) on de-institutionalisation of homelessness services, homelessness mapping methods in Gothenburg city (Sweden), and the potential of reconverting empty housing estates into social housing for vulnerable groups in Ireland.

All documents related to the meeting, including podcasts of the Ghent presentations, are available in the members' area of the HABITACT website.

The discussion paper for the Ghent peer review can be ordered, together with the other discussion papers in the HABITACT peer review series. More [here](#).

HABITACT Partner Cities:

Amsterdam (NL), Århus (DK), Athens (GR), Bærum (NO), Copenhagen (DK), Dublin (IE), Esch-sur-Alzette (LU), Ghent (BE), Gothenburg (SE), Madrid (ES), Odense (DK), Sandefjord (NO), Venice (IT), Vitoria-Gasteiz (ES)

Go to the [website](#) for more info.

Local news

“Better life for the family and better coexistence within society” – Programme for Social inclusion in Ostrava

From 1 February 2012 the city of Ostrava (Czech Republic) initiated a Programme for Social inclusion 2011-2020 called “Better life for the family and better coexistence within society”. The programme is comprised of 12 integrated projects that are linked together, covering all the required areas of public intervention in three major fields: Education and employment; Housing, social policy, and health; Safety and crime prevention. The programme is dedicated to people living in excluded localities, unemployed people and homeless people, with a particular focus on Roma. Contact info@habitact.eu to see the full report.

Glasgow is on target to meet a commitment to end homelessness by the end of the year

Legislation passed by Holyrood (Scottish parliament) in 2003 changes the current social housing system, where only homeless people classed as being in priority need have the right to a home. By the end of 2012 all unintentionally homeless people will have a right to settled accommodation. The city of Glasgow is close to fulfilling obligations under the new law. In March 2011, a total of 2217 households in Glasgow were living in temporary accommodation and 7397 households were homeless. But the city is leading the way with 92% of its homeless applications being classed as priority need. However, local authorities still have work to do to end homelessness. Shelter Scotland head of communications and policy Gordon MacRae said: “We know times are tough and local authorities are under increasing pressure but meeting the 2012 commitment is not a choice. It is a legislative requirement that cannot be shirked.” “It marks a new beginning for Scotland’s homelessness services where we hope all local authorities will strive to deliver the best possible service to homeless people.” More [here](#)

Brussels – Information platform for the Emergency Winter Plan

Last Winter in the Brussels Capital Region an information platform was created - “La Plate-forme Informativ de la Strada” (PILS). PILS is a tool that was developed in the framework of the Winter Plan in Brussels in order to provide better communication and dissemination of information among all entities and individuals interested in the problem of homelessness.

The platform includes information on winter facilities like location and opening hours of buildings adapted to receiving homeless people during the winter or about important events. Several partners are involved in generating the contents of the platform: Centre Ariane, SNCB Holding (Belgian railway company), Pierre d'Angle, Diogenes, etc. They can write, edit or delete the information that is published on the platform. PILS is available via the website of the *Centre d'appui au secteur bruxellois d'aide aux sans-abri*. See more [here](#) in French and Dutch.

A new initiative in Limoges – workshops on the right to housing

The Collective "Draw me a home", an initiative from Limoges, is keen to establish "Atelier DALO" in 2012, a series of workshops which will provide information and support to people working in the field of housing. A working group was formed on 28 March and the Collective will start its work in September 2012. The Collective would like to link up with all people interested in its initiative in France and beyond. At the same time it is searching for leading practitioners who are experienced in similar actions and who would like to share their knowledge. For more information please contact Stéphanie Favre-Ledoux: marauade.limoges@yahoo.fr

Italy: Homeless people are likely to pay a fine for not filling in the Census 2011 form

In Italy, homeless people are likely to pay a fine for not filling in the Census 2011 form. The National Institute for Statistics sent the forms to “conventional” addresses, usually used by municipalities to provide homeless people with an official address. However, homeless people who do not live under the official address do not receive the 2011 Census forms. As a result they may be punished by a fine under the law. A civil rights organisation “Equality Italia” urged the municipalities to take action to enable homeless people to fulfill the legal obligation to fill in the Census form. See more [here](#) in Italian.

Norway: Municipalities Want Autonomy and Competence on Homeless Policy

Norwegian local authorities have expressed their wish to be given autonomy in terms of homeless policy. They say that to initiate and implement social housing policy effectively, municipalities must be allowed to make the decisions. These are the results of a government consultation to which 38 municipalities replied. They say that strengthening municipal competence in social housing gives greater room for manoeuvre and increases the likelihood that financial instruments will be used effectively. More [here](#) in Norwegian.

More than 750 volunteers gathered in Barcelona to count the homeless population

On 9 November 2011 a census of homeless people took place in Barcelona. This action was initiated by 27 social organisations and the municipality of Barcelona and engaged 750 volunteers who walked around 10 districts of the city and interviewed homeless people. Volunteers tried to avoid disturbing people who were asleep, so for people sleeping on the streets only visualised data were noted. The study was conducted in order to better understand profiles of the homeless population, and to adapt the services and social support accordingly, but also in order to raise awareness about social exclusion. More [here](#) in Spanish.

news from europe

Danish EU Presidency

The Danish Presidency of the European Union began on 1 January 2012. Its [website](#) has information about the Presidency and its priorities for 2012, a calendar of Presidency meetings and events, and the latest news. Amongst other events, the Danish presidency will host the annual meeting of people experiencing poverty on 10-11 May 2012 in Brussels, bringing together more than 200 participants from across Europe, and this year the focus of the meeting will be on homelessness and housing rights.

European Report on Quality in Homeless Services

The “European Report in Quality on Social Services from the Perspective of Services Working with Homeless People”, produced in the framework of FEANTSA’s 2011 Annual Theme on Quality, is now available in English and French. See [here](#).

New Signatories Sign European Charter for the Development of Social and Societal Initiatives in Train Stations

Representatives of the following seven railway companies recently signed the European Charter for the development of social and societal initiatives in train stations: ČD (Czech Republic), CFR SA (Romania), CP (Portugal), DSB (Denmark), NRIC (Bulgaria), NSB (Norway) and SŽ (Slovenia). This brings the total number of signatory companies to 12. The original signatories are: CFL (Luxembourg), FS (Italy), PKP (Poland), SNCB/NMBS-Holding (Belgium), and SNCF (France).

The network’s activities are based on a desire to work together to develop successful social policies regarding homeless people who take shelter in stations. Supported by the European Commission, the signatory companies agree to share the values of their social commitment and to meet periodically to share opinions and experiences. European Commissioner László Andor, responsible for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, was present at the official signing ceremony. More [here](#).

Council of Europe: Most EU Member States Do Not Ensure the Right to Housing

The Council of Europe’s European Committee on Social Rights (ECSR) released its annual conclusions at the end of January 2012. This year they looked at whether countries live up to their responsibilities to ensure the right to housing. Six of the eight EU Member States that are bound to deliver on this fundamental right, failed to do so - France, Italy, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Portugal and Slovenia. Only Finland and Sweden met the requirements. Read FEANTSA’s [Press Release](#) in EN, FR and ES.

Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2011

The European Commission has published a review of employment and social developments in Europe in 2011, which gives a comprehensive analysis of challenges facing the EU in the areas of both employment and social policy. The 2011 edition focuses on changes in Europe’s employment structure, recent increases in income inequality, the varying patterns of poverty and social exclusion, the problem of in-work poverty and challenges and measures in the area of active ageing. It also provides an updated analysis of intra-EU labour mobility. More [here](#)

European Commission hosts meeting with stakeholders on the European Platform against Poverty

On 6 February 2012, the European Commission invited all relevant European stakeholders to discuss the priorities for the European Platform against poverty with a focus on preparing the next annual European convention on poverty and social exclusion (Brussels 5-7 December 2012), on the preparation of the European Commission report on the implementation of the active inclusion recommendation published in 2008, and finally on the issues of social innovation and social experimentation in the fields of poverty and social exclusion. To find out more, contact info@habitact.eu.

Commission paves the way for the better combination of EU funds for 2014-2020

Following the [Cohesion Policy proposals](#) of 6 October 2011, and to help Member States prepare for the next programming period, the Commission presented on 14 March 2012 the "Common Strategic Framework" (CSF). It is intended to help set strategic direction for the next financial planning period from 2014 to 2020 in Member States and their regions. It will enable a far better combining of various funds to maximise the impact of EU investments. National and regional authorities will use this framework as the basis for drafting their 'Partnership Contracts' with the Commission, committing themselves to meeting Europe’s growth and jobs targets for 2020. The CSF recommends that ERDF measures cover both housing investment in the framework of deinstitutionalisation and marginalised communities. For the ESF, homeless services are specifically mentioned. We encourage all local authorities active in the fight against homelessness to ensure that the ERDF/ESF operational programmes for their country or region include these references in order to open up funding for tackling homelessness under the future 2014-2020 programming period. More [here](#).

local trends

Homelessness in Poland – some trends in local strategies

The report “Problem of homelessness in Poland” includes a section on local strategies to tackle homelessness. Maciej Dębski (member of the research team) analysed 10 local authorities from each Polish province, namely focusing on the importance of the problem of homelessness in local documents. The main findings of the study are:

- Many local strategies targeting social phenomena do not consider the question of homelessness or treat it rather on an ad hoc basis. This is true especially of small and medium local authorities whose authorities believe that homelessness is a marginal problem.
- Many local social strategies lack a clear diagnosis of the extent of homelessness in their area. This applies in particular to small and medium local authorities. An accurate understanding of the problem is especially present in strategies developed by Province capitals, particularly those which have dynamic NGOs providing support to homeless people.
- A longitudinal diagnosis of homelessness at local level does not exist. The analysis of the local social strategies shows that no research was carried out in the field of homelessness over a number of years, and the scale of this problem was rather evaluated on the basis of research conducted within one calendar year preceding development of a local strategy.
- Homelessness is mostly mentioned in the context of service provision. Many local social strategies present homelessness in the context of support provided to homeless people by a number of different organisations. This problem is rarely seen through the prism of prevention and integration of homeless people. More [here](#) in English.

France - Third Evaluation of 115 Emergency Number Activity

FNARS (French platform of homeless service providers) has released the results of its third evaluation of answers to calls made to the emergency number for homeless people, 115, which analyses the data for January 2012 and compares them with the figures for November and December 2011.

The results show a small increase in the number of callers not receiving accommodation after calling the number (the total is 53 %).

In order to measure the effect on figures of the “*Plan grand froid*” (winter emergency plan), launched at the end of January, FNARS paid special attention to the week beginning on 30 January.

The results, available on the FNARS website, show that the progressive opening of extra spaces throughout the week meant that more callers were found accommodation as a result of their call.

However, even if most requests were met with accommodation solutions in the majority of French *départements* (provinces), in four of them the lack of available places resulted in rejecting quite a big number of applications: over 50% of requests in *Loire and Rhone*, 43% in the *Loire Atlantique* and 38% in the *Val d'Oise* did not receive a positive response. On the other hand, in 11 *départements* (*Ardennes, Bouches-du-Rhône, Côtes-d'Armor, Doubs, Drôme, Finistère, Jura, Mayenne, Orne, Haute-Savoie, Pyrénées- Orientales, Saône-et Loire*) the rate of negative responses was below 10 %. See more [here](#) in French.

Sweden – Fewer people sleep rough but more stay in emergency housing solutions

Figures from the 2011 national survey of homelessness in Sweden carried out by the National Board of Health and Welfare show that housing exclusion has increased since the last mapping in 2005.

It is estimated that there are about 34 000 people who are beyond the ordinary housing market and 280 of them sleep rough. This is a decrease in rough sleeping since 2005 when the number of rough sleepers was estimated to be 950. However, it is impossible to fully understand trends of homelessness over time since the 2011 survey was based on a different definition of homelessness than the 2005 survey.

The survey shows that the majority of homeless people are men but the proportion of women has increased. There is also an upward trend in homelessness of migrants but in the group of homeless people there is now a lower proportion of abuse and dependency problems and mental disorders.

Homelessness exists in all Swedish provinces, and in 288 of the 290 municipalities. There are most homeless people in big cities like Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö.

There are noticeable differences between the big cities. Malmö, for example, has a higher proportion of people living in apartments rented by the social services and a higher proportion of people born outside Sweden than Stockholm and Gothenburg.

The study also suggests that greater flexibility of landlords could prevent homelessness among families. Only in 13 municipalities do landlords accept social benefits as rent income. If the demands of landlords were less rigorous, more families would be able to obtain accommodation.

See the full report [here](#) in Swedish.

Focus: EU migration

The European Union is currently experiencing important migration waves mostly as a result of EU free movement policy and the current economic crisis. Many European citizens successfully work and live abroad. But there are many for whom mobility has become a poverty trap. For the latter group, migration is the result of poor socio-economic conditions in certain parts of Europe. With hope of a better future, many citizens move to another EU country in search of employment and better living conditions for their families. Many come with valuable skills to offer but when they don't succeed in entering the labour market or lose their job, they find themselves falling outside the social protection of the welfare system as in many European countries social security is linked to employment in the labour market. The responsibility for the future of the migrants is a great challenge for the host countries and countries of origin, and can affect the work of local authorities who often have to deal with the consequences of migration policy. [FEANTSA](#) has already taken position on this issue.

This focus section provides some examples of trends and challenges in relation to migration between EU countries, as well as relocation within a country (see example of Croydon), in order to contribute to the general reflection on the issue of internal EU migration.

Reflection on the profile of homeless Polish Migrants

Authors of the report “Problem of homelessness in Poland” (referred to in the local trends section) draft a profile of homeless Polish migrants and some of the causes of their homelessness.

The report points out that groups of Polish people experiencing homelessness abroad include students with or without scholarship or tourists facing a difficult financial situation.

Homelessness may be the result of accidents (natural or construction disasters) but most frequently it stems from the loss of family ties or inability to work due to alcohol or drug addiction. Migrants working illegally are a particularly vulnerable group, especially during the economic crisis that forces many companies to close down. Companies employing illegally tend to disappear overnight leaving their employees without any source of income.

According to the report, the specific position of homeless migrants from former Communist countries is related to the *homo-sovieticus syndrome*, which is a collection of norms and values that results in an antagonistic attitude towards authorities, service providers and public opinion. The report points out that despite being prone to *entering* a cycle of homelessness (due to structural causes and the uncertain social situation), the reverse process of *exiting* homelessness is hampered due to more subtle and deeper cultural aspects, and social services providers should be aware of the influence of the cultural factors. See full [report](#) in English.

EU homeless migrants in the UK — some trends

According to a new report “UK migrants and the private rented sector” from the Housing and Migration Network, most recent migrants live in the private rented sector (PRS), generally in poor quality housing and showing particular vulnerability to homelessness. Here below are some of the trends highlighted in relation to migrants and the PRS.

- Migrants who enter the PRS often make several employment-related ‘adjustment moves’ within their first few months in the UK. Migrant workers may have to change jobs frequently, which may cause problems with rent arrears. Those who lose their jobs may also lose their accommodation, becoming homeless and destitute. A proportion of those who arrive in the UK have social problems such as alcohol abuse and never succeed in finding work. As a result of these different factors, there has been a significant increase in rough sleeping by migrants in central London in particular, but also affecting many other areas.

- Evidence that migrants predominantly use the PRS is referred to in the report. Although the data from official national statistics is limited, it is supplemented by a range of one-off studies of new migrants which have used samples taken at national, regional or local levels. For example, a survey of recent migrants from the eight ‘accession states’ working in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham found that 92 per cent were living in the PRS.

- The report also highlights the fact that different types of migrants use the PRS in different ways. One assumption that appears to be borne out by local studies is that migrant workers on relatively low wages use the sector differently from skilled migrants and refugees and other migrants with longer-term intentions to stay. Of course, low-wage migrant workers may themselves attempt to stay in the UK and may then start to look for more secure, better quality accommodation.

- Migrant workers’ use of the PRS is often concentrated in certain neighbourhoods where employers, gang-masters or agents may place them in houses in multiple occupation (HMOs). Depending on the local economy and the transport links to places with cheaper accommodation available, a local PRS may develop in small towns where traditionally the sector has been minimal, if landlords find it profitable to buy larger, owner-occupied properties and convert them into HMOs. An example of this is Thetford in Norfolk where the number of HMOs grew from 40 to over 400 in only four years in response to the demand from EU accession state workers in the farming and food processing industries. See the [report](#).

Study of Homeless Women in Ireland

In February 2012 a research paper “Migrant Women and Homelessness: Key Findings from a Biographical Study of Homeless Women in Ireland” was published. The main finding of the study was that marginality within contexts of economic adversity was at the core of migrant women’s accounts of becoming homeless. The economic difficulties encountered by migrant women were related to a range of experiences including unemployment or job loss, their economic dependence on their partners, their immigration status, and their restricted access to welfare payments and affordable housing. A large number of the women reported intimate partner violence and many attributed their homelessness either directly or in part to intimate partner abuse. The experiences of women in domestic violence situations were exacerbated by their specific position as migrants, including their lack of English language proficiency, lack of access to the labour market, their uncertain legal statuses, and lack of knowledge about available services and supports. Migrant women were not well informed about homeless or domestic violence services and uncertain about the impact of their status as migrants on their eligibility for these supports. More [here](#).

Netherlands - Utrecht to Allow Non-Dutch Homeless People in its Shelters

Homeless services in the city of Utrecht in the Netherlands are to begin accepting non-Dutch people and undocumented migrants in so-called “emergencies”. This means mainly families with young children and people with serious medical or legal problems. This follows news that there is a growing group of homeless people, mainly from Central and Eastern Europe, who are forced to sleep rough in the city. The city council is to vote on a plan that, if approved, would allow Utrecht to send undocumented migrants with mental health problems to a national assistance project in Amsterdam from next year onwards. Several special shelter places should also be created in Utrecht for families with small children. More [here](#).

Croydon Plans to Relocate Homeless People

Croydon council is planning to rehouse homeless people potentially hundreds of miles away. On 1 April 2012 local authorities will, via the Localism Act, have the power to ‘discharge’ their homelessness duty into the private sector. Previously they had to provide social housing or temporary accommodation until something became available. The new law is meant to ease the pressure on long social housing waiting lists. However, since private sector rents in London have remained high while housing benefit is being cut and capped, Croydon cannot afford to pay for homeless people to live in private housing nearby. The local authorities consider sending the homeless to places like Hull, where rents are cheaper. This idea is controversial because Hull is one of the cities that have been hardest hit by the recession and the labour market there is limited so it is likely that the homeless families and individuals who fail to find work will remain vulnerable. More [here](#).

Migrants searching for a better life in Norwegian towns end up homeless

Last year more and more Spaniards, Italians, Greeks and Romanians travelled to Norway and Bergen in search of jobs and a better life, but for many of them it is going from bad to worse and many have ended up sleeping rough. Neither the police nor local authorities nor the NAV (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Organisation) know how many there are. The Robin Hood House Foundation, a meeting place for poor people in Bergen has noted a large influx of Spanish migrant workers in the past year. The Foundation has given food to 250 unemployed Spaniards since March 2011. Migrants are asking the police and the NAV for help, but there are limits to what local institutions can do. At the same time, the Urban Environment Agency in Oslo fears that up to 2 000 homeless people from Eastern and Southern Europe will come to Oslo this Spring. According to the Agency, last year between 500 and 1 000 people slept rough in the Norwegian capital but due to the financial crisis this year an increase of people who go north to get a better life is expected. Now the Agency is working on a strategy to deal with the expected large influx of homeless people. It plans to involve the police, voluntary organisations and local authorities in the discussion on how to manage the situation. More [here](#) in Norwegian.

German care center refuses to pay for health treatment of homeless migrant

A paralysed Polish homeless man has been living for the last five years in a small care centre near Cologne, Germany. In 1996 he was found in serious health conditions in a derelict building. It is not known whether he was beaten, or had an accident. After a stay in hospital, he was placed in a care centre. Since he has never been insured, recently the care centre refused to incur the cost of his stay. The representatives of the Polish consular services have been notified. Ultimately the case went to the Municipal Social Welfare Centre in Zlotoryja, which is his last known place of residence. The Municipal Centre of Social Assistance asked the Polish National Health Fund for medical transport. However, the National Health Fund can not cover the costs of transporting the homeless man because he has no health insurance. Moreover, it is not known who should pay for his treatment in Poland. “A person who wants to benefit from any medical help must be insured” - stresses Joanna Mierzwińska, a spokeswoman of the NHF. The Municipal Centre of Social Assistance in Zlotoryja can decide to insure a homeless person but current regulations do not allow insurance of a person who is not on Polish territory. “At local level we are not able to solve this problem. There are no procedures that can be used in such a situation.” – says Bożena Durmaj, a director of The Municipal Centre of Social Assistance. More [here](#) in Polish.



For any reactions/comments/contributions to the e-bulletin, please contact us at info@habitact.eu