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habitact news

HABITACT steering group – 7 June 2012

The steering group met on 7 June to discuss various issues including: European project development (updates on Housing First Europe, and other European projects submitted in cooperation with HABITACT), the HABITACT peer review series and the selection of the 2013 peer review city, discussion on EU developments related to homelessness, and priority areas to work on (meaningful occupation, social work methods, Housing First, integration of Eastern European migrants, prevention of homelessness).

The next steering group meeting will take place in Barcelona on 15 November 2012 alongside the FEANTSA annual conference on migration and homelessness.

HABITACT online policy bank goes public

For the last 3 years, HABITACT has built up an online resource for members which gives an overview of different local homeless policies across Europe.

After discussions in Brussels last week, HABITACT members decided to make the policy bank public so that other local authorities can benefit from this HABITACT resource which currently contains entries for more than 80 cities. It will go public on 2nd of July 2012.

The policy bank entries contain basic information on local homeless policies such as policy objectives, homelessness services, key weblinks, and contact persons.

If you would like us to add an entry for your local authority, you can contact us here for a form: info@habitact.eu

European seminar 2012 on funding strategies

This year, our annual seminar (co-hosted with FEANTSA and the EU Committee of the Regions) took place on Friday 8 June 2012, and focused on funding strategies and building the case for homelessness. Themes discussed included: 1. Planning and budgeting: How to prioritise? (rethinking service provision, areas to make savings, and how to budget a local homeless strategy), 2. Cost-effectiveness (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), 3. Diversification of funding sources (sharing the costs with other authorities (between cities, organising business groups into policy goals, and the potential of social impact bonds. All presentations are available [online](#).

Housing First Europe - Budapest In September

Housing First Europe research coordinator, Volker Busch-Geertsema, presented some preliminary observations from the test site evaluation – see HABITACT website members' area for detailed information.

The next meeting of the Housing First Europe partnership will take place in Budapest on 13 and 14 September 2012, with all 5 test sites, 5 peer sites and steering group members present. The meeting is for Housing First Europe partners only, but HABITACT members will receive a report of the Budapest meeting. Questions? info@habitact.eu

HABITACT Partner Cities:

Amsterdam (NL), Åahus (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

Testing Housing First in Nowe municipality

An experimental project “Z ulicy do domu” (From street to home) started in April 2012 in the Municipality of Nowe (Poland) through a local partnership with services (Partnerstwo Lokalne w Gminie Nowe). The Housing First model will be tested for 18 months. One homeless person will be housed in an independent studio from the municipal housing stock. The apartment will be furnished from funds of the Municipal Social Assistance Centre. The beneficiary will get constant support from a social worker. If the programme meets the needs of the beneficiary, the Housing First approach might be tested in other parts of Poland. More information about the project will be available [here](#).

Reminder: the concept of Housing First is an alternative to a staircase system which requires of homeless people to go through several different stages in order to ‘prepare’ to live independently. The Housing First scheme moves homeless people immediately from the streets or homeless shelters into their own apartments. In this approach, housing is a prerequisite for social inclusion. Rather than requiring the beneficiary to adjust and meet the criteria of the structure, the professionals adapt to the beneficiary’s situation.

Brittany uses ERDF to house marginalised communities

As of May 2010 (with the adoption of EU regulation [437/2010](#)), projects for marginalised communities and integration through housing may be co-financed from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). In Brittany (France), €2 million will be allocated to support projects like the renovation of uninhabitable housing, renovation of social housing units and multi-family housing, renovation and change of use of existing buildings owned by public authorities or non-profit organisations working with low-income households or people with special needs. Target groups include homeless people or people in poor housing, people leaving prison or the justice system, people with mental health disorders, travellers (especially Roma), working migrants, and young people suffering from social exclusion.

ERDF funds in Brittany will be used to co-finance up to 38% of costs of the projects. Public authorities and social landlords, as well as NGOs from the Brittany region can apply for the ERDF subsidies. See more [here](#) in French

Westminster City Council develops literacy toolkit for homeless people

Poor literacy can leave people without the basic skills needed to maintain accommodation. Improving literacy skills can therefore be a crucial step in supporting people to secure and sustain a permanent exit from homelessness. Westminster City Council has developed a toolkit to support homeless organisations in maximising

opportunities to address literacy and other basic skills needs. The toolkit draws upon a pilot literacy strategy, run during 2011 in Westminster. In this pilot scheme individuals can be helped to learn by their peers in a setting in which they are comfortable. This toolkit aims to provide similar agencies with examples of how the scheme could be adapted to other settings, and how it can be tailored to match the individual’s needs. The toolkit can be downloaded [here](#).

Czech municipalities abuse housing subsidy

Several towns in the Czech Republic are abusing State housing subsidies by establishing and running residential hotels that charge high rents to people in material distress. The municipality covers the families’ housing costs through State housing subsidies that are sent directly to the municipality.

"This mechanism has been abused by towns for many years, but at present this often concerns a targeted strategy on the part of municipalities. In some cases it has even emerged that the towns themselves are establishing these residential hotels," authors from the Demographic Information Centre say in the analysis commissioned by the Czech Labour Ministry.

Moreover, in privately-owned residential hotels, rents are also higher than private apartments. According to the analysis, they are three times higher in Kladno, 2.5 times higher in Sokolov, and up to 4 times higher in Větrní. All or most of these costs are paid by the municipality through the housing subsidy. "This approach motivates owners of the residential hotels to keep raising rents. This creates a parasitic mechanism, which is very costly," the analysis says. More [here](#).

Zagreb launches free legal advice for homeless people

The Law Centre of the Law Faculty in Zagreb (Croatia), in cooperation with City Libraries, has started a new project targeting the homeless population and people working in the field of homelessness. The initiative aims to provide legal advice to homeless people and educate them about their rights. In the framework of the project, a series of presentations covering issues like social rights, health insurance, residence, and veterans’ rights will be given by students of the Zagreb Law Faculty. People in need of legal advice will be encouraged to bring relevant documents to the meetings so that students can evaluate their legal status.

The project is based on a diagnosis of rights/legal areas where homeless people most often encounter problems. The diagnosis was prepared by students and a part of City Libraries staff which works with the homeless population on a daily basis. The organisers of the project are considering expanding the initiative to other bigger cities in Croatia.

For more information contact info@habitact.eu

news from europe

European campaign—Poverty is not a crime!

FEANTSA and Housing Rights Watch Campaign - Poverty is Not a Crime! - was launched on 8th June 2012 in several cities, to raise awareness on the criminalisation and penalisation of homelessness and poverty in Europe. Local campaigns on criminalisation are underway in the following cities: Athens, Brussels, Budapest, Grenoble, Lyon, and Thessaloniki. More [here](#).

Member of European Parliament makes link between local authorities and Europe on homelessness

Nicoló Rinaldi, Member of European Parliament, has published a note with his Italian political party (Italia dei Valori) which includes good practice guidelines for developing local homeless strategies. He actively lobbies at EU level to make tools and funding available for local administrations in Italy working to prevent and tackle homelessness.

He presented the document to a delegation of 50+ local authorities in Brussels on 8 June 2012 calling for them, inter alia, to use the EU structural funds, to develop local round tables with all relevant stakeholders, to map the phenomenon of homelessness in their local area, to develop quality services, to create an emergency helpline, raising awareness of the general public on the need for greater solidarity, to develop strategies to prevent homelessness, to link up with European networks where possible. More [here](#) (in Italian)

EU public procurement—special regime for social services

Social Services Europe members have examined new proposals of the European Commission to revise EU legislation on public procurement (COM)2011/896), and welcomes the Commission's recognition of the specific characteristics of social services in the proposal, and the special regime that follows from this recognition (Title III: Particular procurement regimes; CHAPTER I Social and other specific services). Social Services Europe agrees that "social, health and education services have specific characteristics which make them inappropriate for the application of the regular procedures for the award of public service contracts" (Explanatory Memorandum). These special characteristics include that they are delivered directly to the person, need to be tailor-made to the individual, are generally not cross-border in nature but rather linked to a local community. More [here](#).

ETHOS now available in 23 languages

The European Typology of Homelessness and housing exclusion (ETHOS) is now available in the following languages: Czech, Danish, Dutch (Belgium), Dutch (The Netherlands), English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German (Austria), German (Germany), Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Lithuanian, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovenian, Spanish, Swedish, Ukrainian. More [here](#)

European Parliament questions on homelessness: European Commission responds

The European Parliament is keeping up pressure on the European Commission to take action on homelessness, by sending regular written questions. Here below are some of these questions, as well as answers from the European Commissioner responsible for homelessness affairs, László Andor.

- Funding for homeless people > [here](#)
- Homelessness in Greece > [here](#)
- Foreign homeless people > [here](#)
- On Structural Funds > [here](#)
- On deaths caused by the cold > [here](#)
- On the new homeless > [here](#)

Key messages from 11th European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty

On 10 and 11 May 2012 the 11th European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty took place in Brussels. The topic of the meeting was "Homelessness and Housing Rights in the Context of the Crisis." The meeting brought together over 150 people with direct experience of poverty and homelessness. The delegates from 30 European countries exchanged views on questions related to poverty and homelessness with EU and national decision-makers. During the meeting, the issues like good and bad practices in relation to addressing homelessness and housing rights, developing policies that are adapted to different needs and realities and equality in access to homeless services and housing rights were discussed. At the Opening session of the Meeting the delegates showed a red card to EU leaders to protest against current EU austerity measures in response to the crisis. More [here](#)

Europe2020 strategy and Homelessness

Europe has set a target to lift at least 20 million people out of poverty by 2020. The poverty target is one of [five key targets](#) set in 2010 as part of the European Union's economic and employment strategy for this decade, a strategy referred to as "Europe2020" to be delivered through annual National Reform Programmes (NRPs) which are based on [10 broad guidelines](#) for economic and employment policies. There is a guideline on promoting social inclusion and combating poverty. After assessment of the 2012 NRPs, it seems homelessness is a priority in the NRPs for the following countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Finland, Hungary, Greece, Luxembourg, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden and the UK. More [here](#).

local trends

Number of homeless people in Barcelona increasing

A report from a census of the homeless population in Barcelona was published in March 2012. The study was carried out by the Network of Care for the Homeless. According to the research, 2 791 people were homeless in Barcelona on 8th of November 2011. Among them, 838 people were sleeping rough on the streets of Barcelona, 695 persons resided in makeshift settlements and 1 258 people stayed in one of the facilities of the institutions of the Network of Care for the Homeless (RAPH). The study doesn't take into account people living in refugee centres or shelters for women victims of domestic violence (ETHOS typology categories 4 and 5). Figures show that the number of homeless people is increasing. In 2008, there were between 634 and 658 people sleeping rough on the streets of Barcelona and in 2011 there were 838. The full report (in Spanish) is available [here](#).

Exporting homelessness from one city to another in the UK – the government recognises the problem

Some London boroughs are attempting to find private landlords to take their homeless cases in other areas of the UK. The London Borough of Newham is seeking private landlords in Stoke (about 130 miles away) to take Newhams' homeless cases. Newham offered private landlords in Stoke 90% of the local housing allowance plus £60 per week. That means that a private landlord in Stoke now receives about £90 in Local Housing Allowance for a local resident but would receive £142 to take a London homeless family in a 2-bed property. There is a possibility that Stoke private landlords faced with this potential 56% increase in income will evict existing Stoke tenants to take advantage of this new opportunity. Hence for each homeless family exported from London to Stoke, a new homeless family in Stoke will emerge.

The national government has recognised the problem and has issued proposals that would restrict the ability of local authorities to place homeless people in private accommodation outside their area. The Communities and Local Government department has published a consultation on an order governing the standards to be met in private sector homes where homeless people are placed. The Localism Act has strengthened the ability of local authorities to place homeless people in private-sector accommodation, and the new government order has been issued to safeguard the standard of this provision. The order covers standards the accommodation must meet, such as having a gas safety record, an energy performance certificate, and a written tenancy agreement. A second section also considers the location of the accommodation where households can be placed. This would require local authorities to take into account the distance of a placement from previous accommodation, access to transport, and links with

employment, schools and key services. More [here](#) and [here](#).

Shortage of temporary accommodation for homeless people in Slovenian Municipalities

A report "Estimating extent of visible and hidden homelessness in Slovenia" analyses availability of temporary housing solutions in Slovenia. According to the study, temporary housing units are available in three Slovenian cities: Ljubljana, Maribor and Celje. In Slovenia there are 287 temporary housing units in which 610 people live. Even though the biggest stock of temporary housing units is available in Ljubljana, homeless people still have to wait for a place in temporary accommodation. In the capital, there are 179 temporary housing units in which 486 people live. But there are 258 people on a waiting list and some of them will have to wait even up to four years for getting access to temporary accommodation. In 2010, 66 people were waiting for a temporary housing unit for one person and they suffered the longest waiting period. At the same time seventeen families or households were waiting for a housing unit for four people, 16 for a housing unit for three people, 24 couples were waiting for a housing unit for two people.

In the city of Maribor, there are 56 temporary housing units in which 78 people live but there are still 54 people on a waiting list. In Celje there are 52 units and 46 people live in them. There is no waiting period in Celje. In other municipalities in Slovenia, there are no temporary accommodation solutions. In Kranj and Slovenj Gradec only night shelters are available. In Ptuj there is no official accommodation for homeless people except a squat without sanitation that is situated in the city centre. To receive the full report contact info@habitact.eu

Changing profiles of homelessness in Athens

According to the Praksis charity, around 13 000 people are homeless in Athens. In the Greek capital of over four million, around 11 500 people squat abandoned buildings and another 1,500 people live on the streets. Most of these 1,500 rough sleepers are unemployed or substance abusers left behind after the shutdown of rehabilitation centres due to lack of funds. Most of the 11 500 squatters are undocumented migrants and they live squeezed in groups of 15 or 20 in flats in the city centre.

There are no accurate statistics on the number of homeless people in Greece but it is noticeable that the profile of the homeless population has changed. Previously homelessness was confined to substance abusers and migrants, but now there are more and more middle-aged people who have lost their jobs or are unable to pay their rent or support their families. More [here](#).

Focus: Web Applications

We are in the midst of a technology revolution. More and more people use new media, and mobile technologies constantly develop. As more people have access to the Internet and mobile phones (including smartphones), these communication channels are becoming important platforms to reach out to the general public. Not surprisingly, social media has rapidly become the new force on the Internet and mobile applications are flooding the market at a dizzying rate. Along with those trends, the use of new media technologies to advance social change is very much a work in progress. Also in the field of homelessness, there have been several attempts to innovate through the use of social media, namely through the creation of Smartphone applications (Apps). Some of them are really useful, others are rather controversial but they can all be inspiring examples of the use of new technology in initiating social change and policy implementation.

A smartphone game to raise awareness and funds

iHobo is an iPhone application. It is a destitute, virtual homeless person — sort of like a Tamagotchi. For three days, a user attends to all of iHobo's needs, whether it is food, shelter, or emotional comfort via the touch of the screen. Like any video game where survival is the goal, a player can monitor his health to adapt the strategy as new problems arise. The app was created by Depaul UK, a London-based charity and its aim is to educate the public on the complexities of street life, and encourage donations amongst young people. More [here](#).

An App that helps homeless people find support

Amber Homeless Helper is an App that helps people who are homeless to find support and resources within a chosen radius of their location in the United Kingdom. This App allows the user to choose what sort of assistance to search for, then shows where help can be found on a map of the given area. One can even get navigation instructions to find the way there by car, bus or walking. Furthermore, the App allows donations for the Amber Foundation which works with homeless people. More [here](#).

Pin-pointing homeless veterans

Homeless Vet Patrol is a smartphone App designed to give power to everyday people to help local organisations bring care and hope to US homeless veterans. The software allows users to utilize the GPS function in their mobile phones to pin-point a homeless veteran and send that data to local shelters and programmes for homeless people. More [here](#).

Reporting empty houses via smartphone

EmptyHomesSpotter is an iPhone App that allows individuals to report empty houses to local authorities in the United Kingdom. This App was created as part of The Great British Property Scandal, a season of special programmes to investigate the housing crisis and consider possible solutions. A user of the App can locate the empty property on a map or input the address and then the details are sent directly to the relevant local authority. It is also possible to include a photo. The submissions aren't published but local authorities may get in touch with a person who has spotted an empty house to report any progress made. More [here](#).

An App connects low-income residents with essential resources

iFindIt Chicago is an Android App that is designed to help low-income and homeless residents connect with critical resources such as medical clinics, food pantries, shelters, etc. "If a mother with kids is at a bus station and needs to find a food pantry or a medical centre for the uninsured... this App can give [that information] to her," Elizabeth Park, founder of iFindIt says. In order to provide accurate information, the App uses more than 200 data sets provided by the City of Chicago, USA. The application is part of Apps for Metro Chicago, a competition for developers to create new applications that will service the city in a way that technology has not done previously. More [here](#).

European Health Insurance Card in your mobile phone

European Health Insurance Card App for smartphone is useful for European citizens travelling on the continent. It is a guide on how to use the European Health Insurance Card in the 27 EU countries, Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. It includes general information about the card, as well as basic healthcare information on each EU country such as emergency phone numbers, covered treatments and costs, how to claim reimbursement and who to contact when the card gets lost. The App is available in 24 languages with an easy option to switch from one language to another. Although not directly related to homelessness, this App can be useful to facilitate access to healthcare for EU citizens moving across borders. More [here](#).

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Recognising 'medically fragile' homeless people

Homeless Connector will allow ordinary Americans to identify people most at risk of dying on the street, and to find them help. The App is based on the research of Jim O'Connell, an internist with Boston's Health Care for the Homeless programme.

In the mid-2000s, Rebecca Kanis (director of the 100.000 Homes Campaign) used O'Connell's research to develop a questionnaire called the Vulnerability Index. The survey asks a homeless person about eight risk factors that lead to an elevated risk of dying: Are you 60 or older? Have you been hospitalised more than three times in the last year? Have you visited the emergency room more than three times in the last three months? Do you suffer from cirrhosis of the liver? End-stage renal disease? HIV/AIDS? Do you have any other chronic medical conditions combined with psychiatric and substance abuse problems? Do you have a history of hypothermia or frostbite?

People who answer 'yes' to any of these questions are considered medically fragile. Finding them housing fast can lengthen their lives. The mobile App is a version of the Vulnerability Index that, through the 100,000 Homes Campaign website, will be available to anyone with a tablet or a smartphone. Encountering a homeless person on the street, the volunteer electronically enters the survey answers and (with permission) snaps a mobile phone picture. The information (along with the homeless person's geographic coordinates, recorded via smartphone) is routed to the headquarters of the nearest community group participating in the 100,000 Homes Campaign. More [here](#).

Reducing food waste through a web platform

Zheroes plan is an interactive website that aims to reduce food waste in the United Kingdom and at the same time to help people suffering from food poverty. By clicking on the Zheroes map, a user can mark businesses which have a surplus food and link them with nearby charities that need food supplies. The Zheroes Plan was launched on the 15th February 2012 as part of the London Leaders programme at the City Hall in London. More [here](#).

WARNING: BAD APP!

HoboHunt is a controversial smartphone game that awards players for hunting down poor people and virtually killing them. Players first snap a photo of a homeless person, which is then uploaded to their phone, and then they choose from an arsenal of weapons to shoot the image. This is a shocking use of technology which degrades the image of people living on the streets, and has been widely criticised even though according to the HoboHunt website a portion of App profits go to helping homeless people. More [here](#).



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