

habitact news

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HABITACT Policy bank update – entries accepted until 30 September 2012.

We started to review the online policy bank entries in July 2012, and will accept new entries until 30 September 2012. The entries will then be reviewed and updated in January 2013, which will be an opportunity to integrate new local entries.

Feel free to send your comments about the online policy bank to info@habitact.eu

Save the dates - 12/13/14 June 2013

Two European conferences on homelessness will be held back to back in Amsterdam in June 2013.

On Wednesday 12 June, we will host the annual HABITACT/FEANTSA seminar on social investment in homelessness and key tools to show the value of homelessness policies. This seminar usually takes place in [Brussels](#), but this year will take place exceptionally in Amsterdam, the day preceding the final conference of the Housing First Europe partnership on 13 and 14 June in Amsterdam. This conference will be an opportunity to gather information on the impact of Housing First policies on tackling homelessness.

It will be a busy week and we invite you already to put the dates in your diary!

HABITACT Partner Cities:

Amsterdam (NL), Åhus (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.

Third Housing First Europe meeting in Budapest – September 2012

The Housing First Europe partnership met in Budapest on 13 and 14 September 2012 with a packed agenda as the full partnership was there (test sites, peer sites and steering group) to discuss the interim evaluations of the five Housing First test sites in Amsterdam, Budapest, Copenhagen, Glasgow and Lisbon.

The interim reports of the five test sites are available and were examined in detail by the partnership.

We also had the opportunity to discuss Housing First evaluations in other countries (Sweden, Norway, France, Finland), as well as different forms of support in housing such as peer support, assertive community treatment, and intensive housing management.

HABITACT steering group meeting in Barcelona – 15 November 2012

HABITACT cities will have the opportunity to meet the day preceding FEANTSA's 2012 annual conference taking place in Barcelona on 16 November on the condition of homeless migrants.

We will start by a visit of local projects, followed by a presentation by delegates from Barcelona local council about their approach to homelessness, and finally we will discuss progress and activities of the HABITACT network as well as plans for 2013 (peer review, conferences, new European projects).

If you are attending the FEANTSA conference and are not a HABITACT member yet, you may wish to meet other local policy-makers like yourself.

If so, you can contact us to receive the agenda for the meeting (info@habitact.eu)

local news

Riga Considers Reducing Comfort in Night Shelters

Riga City Council welfare department is considering the possibility of reducing comfort in night shelters “so that homeless people have less wish to stay in them, especially young homeless people”, according to the belief that special services should only be provided to people with a short experience of homelessness so that they do not get used to life as a homeless person. Statistics show that the number of visitors at shelters has risen by at least one third since 2008 - from 1,949 people in 2008 to 3,289 people in 2011. The number of young people staying in shelters is also rising. ([More here](#))

Glasgow Housing First Evaluation - Interim Report Available

Turning Point Scotland's Housing First project is a three-year pilot, in Glasgow, providing housing and support to 18 individuals who are homeless and actively involved in substance misuse. It is modelled on the 'Housing First' approach which was developed in the United States, and was the first project of its kind to be developed in the UK. The pilot is funded by Turning Point Scotland, the Big Lottery Fund, and Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board. It began in October 2010, will run until September 2013, and is being independently evaluated by Heriot-Watt University. This interim report provides an overview of the project's operational features, service user characteristics, and 'lessons learned' during early stages of operation (see full report [here](#)). The Glasgow project is also part of the Housing First Europe partnership (www.housingfirsteurope.eu).

Munich: German Administrative Court Supports Municipality's Decision to Refuse Migrants Emergency Accommodation

The German Administrative Court said that the city of Munich has the right to refuse shelter to a Romanian mother who applied for emergency accommodation. Although the Court admitted that fighting homelessness is one of the municipality's obligations, the jury came to the conclusion that the family had abused the social security system. The Romanian family applied for emergency accommodation in spite of owning a house in Romania and having stayed in Munich for less than 6 months. The Court emphasized that the right to free movement was not guaranteed without reservations and social support from public authorities does not apply because the family deliberately made themselves homeless by moving to Germany without the appropriate resources. (Sven Loerzer, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 7 August 2012)

Budapest: Fundamental Rights Commissioner Condemns Authorities for Destroying Homeless Settlement

Hungary's Commissioner for Fundamental Rights has criticised Budapest authorities for having violated the basic rights of homeless people by demolishing a settlement in a wooded area. The municipality pulled down the makeshift structures without warning and failed to provide alternative accommodation, thereby seriously harming the homeless people's right to human dignity, the Commissioner said in a statement. He called on the municipality to hold an investigation into its action and find a solution to homelessness ([More here](#))

Prague Calls On Local Councils To Co-finance Homeless Programme in the Capital

Around 4,000 homeless people live in Prague. Every year, the Czech capital spends 9 million euros on grants for organisations working with homeless people and another 1.1 million euros on field services and immediate assistance for vulnerable people. It is estimated that two out of three homeless people in Prague are not originally from the capital. The Municipality of Prague suggested changes to the law which would oblige other local councils to contribute to the costs of supporting homeless people who live in the capital. Opponents of this proposed solution point out that it is very difficult to determine where homeless people come from and which councils should bear the costs of the help. ([More here](#))

The Hague: Homeless People Encouraged to Vote

Homeless people have the right to vote, but it could be much easier for them to be included on the electoral roll than it currently is. That is the message given by an initiative run by The Hague city authorities, who have put an explanation of how homeless people can register to vote on their website ([More here](#))

Iceland: City Wardens Assist Homeless People in Reykjavík

According to estimates, there are currently around 120 people living on the streets of Reykjavík. Three so-called *borgarvörður*, or city wardens, assumed their duties on 1st June 2012 to assist these people. It is a one-year experimental project. One warden is a police officer, the two others are employees of Reykjavík City authorities. The city wardens are on duty from noon until the evening, taking homeless people to shelters. The project led to a call for projects called City Solidarity. A first meeting of the group took place on 2nd of July 2012. ([More here](#))

news from europe

Renewed calls for concerted action on homelessness

In its [Conclusions](#) on "Responding to demographic challenges through enhanced participation in the labour market and society by all", the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs (EPSCO) Council of the European Union (bringing together Social Affairs Ministers from all EU Member States) called on 21 June 2012 for EU Member States and the European Commission to "develop and promote adequate schemes for persons who are homeless".

Appropriate measures should be taken by the Commission in the framework of the European Platform against Poverty.

European pilot project on protecting the right to housing

The European Parliament has called on the European Commission to fund a pilot project to support prevention and reduction of homelessness.

The project would analyse the impact of existing provisions and laws to protect low-income families from repossessions and evictions, in line with the right to housing assistance, as recognised by Article 34(3) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. The pilot project would also examine the possibility of establishing a common minimum framework in this field. More [here](#).

Europeanisation of homelessness policy

FEANTSA has published an EU policy paper on the Europeanisation of homelessness policy, highlighting the increasing interplay between national and EU policy discourse, instruments, actors and resources in homelessness policy-making. The paper argues that the extent of Europeanisation is such that a cross-national cluster of countries on homelessness is emerging, which requires a strategic EU framework to allow a willing countries to move forward together on this specific issue. The EU social policy architecture therefore needs to be flexible enough to accommodate new policy needs and support clusters of national Member States on common issues of interest, rather than wait for consensus from all 27 countries.

This is not only essential in order to respond to (sub-) national demands (for support, expertise building) during the economic crisis, but also to strengthen EU social policy in the wider economic and employment context.

The paper will be on the soon-to-be launched new FEANTSA website.

EU structural funds in the future

Ministers are currently in negotiations on the Multi-annual Financial Framework, which is the EU's proposed budget for actions from 2014-2020. The budget is organised according to specific sectors including agriculture, education, justice, research, statistics, cohesion, etc.

Cohesion refers to actions in the social policy field such as job creation, tackling poverty, supporting regional development, etc. A cluster of countries are currently proposing to significantly reduce the cohesion budget, which would have an impact on the budgets of the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund, both funds which are used to fund homelessness projects.

We are following this closely and trying to draw attention to the need to keep important budgets to meet the social objectives of the EU (social cohesion, tackling poverty, promoting access to rights, anti-discrimination, etc). The budget should be adopted early 2013.

Quarterly review of the social situation in Europe – special focus on homelessness

The European Commission publishes quarterly reviews of the employment and social situation in Europe. The June 2012 Review has a special focus on homelessness, highlighting that homelessness is on the increase. According to the review, unfavourable labour market conditions, especially for some population segments, as well as insufficient social protection expenditure, have aggravated social challenges for households.

Among indicators of this are worsening household financial situations, material deprivation, homelessness, and forced south-north mobility. It also says that homelessness has grown across the EU as many people experienced a sudden job loss or income drop in the recession. Young people and foreign nationals have been disproportionately affected.

More [here](#).

FEANTSA annual conference on the conditions of homeless migrants – registrations open

FEANTSA will host its annual conference on 16 November 2012, with around 300 participants expected. The [conference](#) will take place in Barcelona (Spain) on the following theme: "Existing in Limbo: the conditions of homeless migrants in the EU". The programme is [available](#) and [registrations](#) are open.

local trends

Fewer Rough Sleepers In Biggest Dutch Cities

Last Winter, around 250 homeless people slept outside on an average night. That number is lower than the previous year, when Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht had around 290 rough sleepers. These are the [results](#) of [research](#) (information in English [here](#)) into the number of homeless people in the four biggest Dutch cities during the last Winter period. Almost three-quarters of the homeless people who sleep rough have no access to public assistance structures because they have not been in the town for long enough, or have not stayed there officially, or because they do not meet the access criteria for homeless shelters.

Increasing Proportion of Homeless Migrants In European Cities

In 2010, approximately 63% of all people registered with homeless services in Spain were immigrants. Data from numerous Spanish cities (including Madrid, Barcelona, Llieda Castilla, Leon, Salamanca, Segovia and Soria) indicate a high and increasing proportion of homeless foreigners over recent years. Rough sleeper counts between 2006 and 2008 in Barcelona, Madrid and Lleida indicated that immigrants made up 50-75% of rough sleepers. In Italy, surveys also indicate that migrants represent a high and growing share of homeless service users. The number of homeless people doubled in Pisa between 2000 and 2009 and between 2006 and 2009, the number of foreign nationals among them increased by 55% as against a rise of 27% for Italian nationals. At present, 77% of homeless people are foreign nationals in Naples and 73% in Bologna. In the UK, the Department of Communities and Local Government's latest rough sleeping figures reveal that 52% of people sleeping on the streets of London are foreign nationals, and 28% are from within the EU. In Luxembourg, a national expert referred to increasing diversity in the nationality of service users. Looking at accommodation for young homeless people in Luxembourg City, he reported a majority of Luxembourgers (45% of residents); 32% nationals of another EU Member State; 18% third country nationals and 5% unknown. (FEANTSA Monitoring Report on Homelessness and Homeless Policies in Europe, 2012 forthcoming).

Portugal; Number of Homeless Asking For Help with Substance Abuse Has Fallen by 25%

According to a report by rehabilitation teams of the Portuguese *Instituto da Droga e da Toxicoddependência*, 473 homeless people asked for support in 2011. This represents a 25 % reduction compared with the previous year. In 315 cases, the homelessness was related to substance abuse. The biggest number of homeless clients was noted in the North region (48%) and the Lisbon and Tagus Valley region (29%).

The report also examined the housing problems experienced by 17,186 users of the Institute's services. 1359 of substance users lack proper housing; the biggest demand was noted in the North region (37%) and the Central region (34%). Also, 406 persons with alcohol problems lack adequate housing, mostly in the North, Lisbon and Tagus Valley (48% and 25%, respectively). ([More here](#))

Youth Homelessness is Increasing in Major Cities

Over the last year, the composition the homeless population has been changing with young people representing a larger proportion than in the past. This tendency has been noted in many European cities. In [Cork](#) (IE) long-term homelessness among young people has increased four-fold since 2008. Out of a total number of 411 people stayed in the emergency shelter, 34% were under 26 years of age. Out of the 38 people recorded sleeping rough on at least one night in 2011, 24% were under 26. In [Munich](#) (DE), among the 3000 registered homeless, 800 are children. In [Barcelona](#) (ES) in November 2011, out of 838 noted rough sleepers, 63 were below 25 years of age. The same year, in Bilbao (ES), there were 225 rough sleepers and 59% of them were aged between 18 and 34. In [Brussels](#) (BE), in November 2010, there were 1,944 homeless people in total. 381 of them (19.6%) were children. More about these trends here about youth homelessness, see [here](#).

Homeless Persons in Ireland - 2011 Census

A report from a census of the homeless population in Ireland was recently published. The study is a part of the 2011 Population Census which took place on 10 April 2011. On Census Night, 3,808 were identified as homeless. Over 60 % (2,375) of the persons enumerated as part of the homeless count were in the Dublin region. The next largest region was the South East (403) and South West (301). ([More here](#))

Focus: Sustainability and Homelessness

Sustainable and inclusive growth are priorities for the EU, but to what extent are these two priorities complementary? To what extent can sustainability contribute to reducing homelessness, and to what extent can homelessness policy contribute to sustainability? Ways of living more sustainably can take many forms including responsible management of resources, using transport with a low impact on the environment, waste prevention and recycling, sustainable design, etc – elements which are mostly covered by the EU's [sustainability objectives](#). This focus aims to stimulate reflection on this issue by picking out some existing examples of practices where social objectives can meet sustainability objectives, namely the emergence of energy-efficient accommodation design, sustainable social enterprises, and recycling of existing products and buildings. Some of these examples already exist while other examples promote new ideas which are currently harder to implement.

1. Energy-efficiency

Eco-friendly services for homeless people have emerged in some parts of the world. In 2008 'Crossroads', a 125 bed eco-friendly shelter, was opened in Oakland (California) with a commitment to living green. Its green amenities include the use of non-toxic paint, hydronic heating, furniture made from pressed wheat, and a solar-paneled roof (see [here](#)). More recently in Liverpool (UK), Liverpool Mutual Homes redeveloped a former 19th century convent into a modern and sustainable centre for families needing temporary emergency accommodation. The centre has been fitted with solar panels to provide electricity. It also has flat-plate solar collectors and heat pumps to convert hot air into energy and provide hot water (see [here](#)). **Sustainable housing design** aiming to reduce energy costs in the long run is also spreading. Examples have been floated by a number of architects in the US which are being used for people with special needs, low incomes or to re-dynamise local neighbourhoods (see [here](#)). In Vienna they are testing the use of ecologically resourced apartment complexes for a better handling of natural resources. Vienna housing authorities believe the first multi-storey timber buildings (Mühlweg by Dietrich I Untertrifaller, Riess, Kaufmann and Kaufmann) and passive energy apartment buildings, such as the Molkereistrasse dormitory (Baumschlager&Eberle) mark new ways forward for the future of subsidised housing (see [here](#)). While sustainable housing design is interesting for stimulating debate on housing forms with more affordable running costs, these types of housing are still far from mainstream and generally more expensive to build than regular housing.

The extent to which these different projects have been successful is not entirely clear, however they show a genuine will to meet the needs of homeless or low-income households by providing (temporary) housing solutions which aim to reduce energy costs and promote renewable energy forms.

2. Sustainable living and communities through social enterprise

Social farms can be found in different parts of Europe where people both work and live as a community. In Barka's Eco-

farm in Chudobczyce (Poland), 50 formerly homeless people live and work together where they are employed and where they develop skills related to organic farming, protection of biodiversity by breeding rare species, use of renewable energy and recycling (through a second-hand shop in order to reduce the waste) – see [here](#) in Polish. The Cyrenians Farm just west of Edinburgh (Scotland) is a Social Enterprise which produces organic fruit and vegetables, and is also home to a community of vulnerable young people, many with backgrounds of homelessness. The Farm grows food and provides a range of opportunities for individuals, including young trainees, to develop skills and confidence as a step towards a settled lifestyle (see [here](#)). In Serravalle Pistoiese (Italy), a project aims to bring homeless people into employment. The farm provides jobs and accommodation for 12 formerly homeless people. They work at the farm on a one-year contract where they receive 650 euros per month and free accommodation. The farm buildings are surrounded by 67 square metres of land where the residents can grow vegetables. (see [here](#)). These projects not only provide opportunities for employment, community-building and resettlement of homeless people but also promote sustainable ways of living and producing.

3. Recycling and re-use

The recycling of material to create new buildings for homeless people shows sustainable thinking in developing homelessness services. In 2010, participants of an architecture competition were asked to design a new health care clinic for homeless people in Florida (US). A design by graduates rose to the challenge with a design using recycled shipping containers to construct a simple campus-like clinic. The proposal was unique from other projects submitted in that it was considered affordable, mobile and sustainable (see [here](#)). **The re-use of vacant buildings** to create new forms of housing is already well established through squatters movements. Claudio Cattaneo (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona) analyses squatting from an environmental perspective. He claims that the squat community contributes positively to sustainable housing both from the social and particularly from the environmental perspective. According to Cattaneo, squatting constitutes the re-use of abandoned buildings which would otherwise be left abandoned, or destroyed. From an environmental point of view it avoids the energy and material costs associated with the provision of new or re-furnished dwellings. Squatting can therefore be seen as an immediate housing action with very little overhead costs and the potential to become more environmentally efficient in the medium long term (more [here](#)). In January 2012 a report by a grassroots US advocacy group 'Picture the Homeless' was published on homelessness and real estate speculation in New York City (US). The group surveyed vacant buildings and properties in NYC finding enough space to house nearly 200,000 people – four times the homeless population of the city (see [here](#)). According to studies like the one published in January 2012 by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the reuse of buildings almost always has less of an impact on the environment than new construction (see [here](#)). It is considered a waste (of time, money, energy, and resources) to build entirely new structures when there are already existing