

## habitact news

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### **HABITACT-FEANTSA seminar 2013: registrations open!**

On Wednesday 12 June 2013, FEANTSA and HABITACT are co-organising their annual European seminar in Amsterdam on the theme of tackling homelessness as a social investment, examining key tools to show the value (social, economic, innovative) of homelessness services.

This will be a 1-day seminar with 100 participants to exchange information and practical tools. Registrations are now open, and all information can be found on the FEANTSA website [here](#).

### **« Action » research on evaluation methods**

In the current economic and political context, many social policies are being revisited (including homelessness policies) and budgets allocated to social policies are decreasing in some countries hence placing pressure on local policy-makers to ensure greater policy and service effectiveness.

The first piece of action-research commissioned by HABITACT (from the University of York) is therefore an overview of some frameworks used in EU countries to evaluate homelessness policies and services, which can hopefully help understand the weaknesses and strengths of policies, and lead to solid arguments for sustained funding.

The full report "Evaluating homelessness services and strategies: A Review (March 2013)" is available on the HABITACT [website](#).

### **KEY 2013 DATES**

Dublin, 4-5 April  
Amsterdam, 12 June  
Amsterdam, 13-14 June

### **Housing First Europe**

Many HABITACT cities are part of the European social experimentation project called Housing First Europe. On Thursday 13 and Friday 14 June 2013, in Amsterdam, will be the final conference of the project where the partnership will present the results of the experiments and discuss recommendations for local, regional, national and EU levels. This will be a 1,5-day seminar with 200 participants (key Housing First players in Europe) exchanging practices in relation to Housing First policies. Registrations will open early April. If you would like to receive an email about the registration, contact [info@habitact.eu](mailto:info@habitact.eu)

### **2013 HABITACT Peer Review**

Not long to go before peers meet in Dublin to examine the local homelessness strategy there. We will have participants from the following cities: Amsterdam, Bergamo, Bolzano, Bucharest, Edinburgh, Espoo, Galicia (region), Ghent, Gothenburg, Limerick, and Odense. See peer review discussion paper [here](#).

### **Response to PROGRESS call for proposals**

A HABITACT member (city of Amsterdam) responded to the EU call for social policy experimentations, with a policy experimentation to test new measures targeting young people (between 18 and 27 years) who are furthest from the labour market, not always able to take up regular jobs, and with multiple needs (psychological or mental disorders, homelessness, early school dropouts).

The experimentation would be supported by a European partnership of practitioners in 8 cities, and with a steering committee of key EU organisations. Results of the application should be available before the summer.

### **HABITACT Partner Cities:**

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

## local news

### **Local governments in Hungary given power to fine people for being homeless**

In 2010, the Hungarian Law on Constructions was amended to give local governments greater powers to regulate the “proper uses” of public space. As stated in the original proposal, one of the main aims of the amendment was to empower municipalities to ban homeless people from public spaces. The Municipality of Budapest was the first to take advantage of this opportunity and passed a local regulation, which basically prohibited homelessness in public space. The initiative was then followed by regulations in other districts and municipalities. In 2011, the first homeless shelter housing a jail and police station was opened in Budapest (so far the jail has not been used for detention). Local organisations in Budapest condemn this and call for an integrated approach to solve homelessness which includes measures such as developing a network of social housing, raising housing subsidies, enacting an enforceable right to housing, and reforming homelessness services in a way that does not conserve homelessness, but strives to achieve housing solutions for its clients. However, the Hungarian government adopted a new Constitution on 11 March 2013 which allows for the criminalisation of homelessness. The European Commission and other international bodies have reacted to this. More [here](#)

### **6 Italian regions examine EU opportunities to support fight against homelessness**

The regions of Campania, Calabria, Sicilia, Puglia, Basilicata, and Molise will organise workshops over the next year to 1. Discuss the opportunities which can be provided at EU level to support their work in the fight against homelessness 2. Examine the future political framework of the EU under the new financial period 2014-2020 3. Reflect together with all relevant stakeholders on the integration of projects to reduce homelessness and promote social housing within the future European Social Fund and European Regional Development fund.

### **Belgian organisations fighting homelessness submit common project proposal to test Housing First**

Local organisations in Antwerp, Charleroi, Brussels, Ghent, and Liège have developed a common project proposal to test Housing First in Belgium through five test sites aiming to provide support in permanent housing to chronically homeless people with complex and multiple needs. Different approaches to homelessness can be found in these five cities, yet there is a willingness from local organisations (a mix of public and not-for-profit) to coordinate efforts to test new and innovative approaches to address long-term homelessness.

### **Review of service provision for women in Dublin**

The review will include the following components;

- A mapping exercise which will document the range and types of accommodation available to homeless women in the Dublin region.
- The preparation of a research paper addressing the issue of women's interactions with homeless services. This paper will draw on data from an existing qualitative study of homeless women in Ireland (Mayock & Sheridan, 2012a, Mayock & Sheridan, 2012b, Mayock et al., 2012).
- Consultation with the newly-established Women's Homelessness in Europe Network, which will provide commentary and feedback on the findings of both the mapping exercise and the research paper on women's interactions with services.

The review of service provision to women is expected to conclude by April 2013. More [here](#)

### **Municipalities supported by Swedish government to tackle homelessness**

The Swedish government homelessness coordinator (Michael Anefur) and his Special adviser (Maria Boustedt) have visited over the last year approximately 45 municipalities in Sweden, in order to discuss their homelessness approaches, working methods and challenges, as well as their housing market situations. It has been a mutual learning process which has led to a number of agreements with the local authorities on how to improve their work in the future. From May 2013, the coordinator will return to all of the 45 municipalities for a follow-up visit. In order to support local authorities, he has launched a [conference series](#) between the Ministry of health and social affairs and county administrative boards, on a number of themes including promoting access to housing, prevention of evictions, innovative work methods like Housing First, and more. He also published [guidelines](#) on first steps for developing local homelessness policies.

### **Liverpool council selling empty homes for £1**

Under the new programme [Homes for a pound](#), Liverpool City Council is planning to offer 20 properties for sale for £1 each as part of a pilot 'homesteading' scheme. Homesteading is where a property is sold to an owner occupier to refurbish. Houses will be sold with a condition that the new owners renovate the houses to a decent homes standard. The homes were originally included in the housing market renewal programme, and were going to be demolished or renovated by the city council. But the ending of government grants that supported the programme has cause Liverpool council to rethink their plans.

# news from europe

## EU Roundtable of Ministers responsible for homelessness – 1 March 2013

The Irish Presidency of the EU hosted a [Roundtable](#) of EU Ministers with responsibility for homelessness on 1st March at the Irish College in Leuven, Belgium. The purpose of this roundtable discussion was to bring added focus to the EU's involvement in the area of homelessness, to identify, evaluate and build upon common areas of interest and to discuss issues of possible future cooperation among Member States towards addressing and tackling the issue of homelessness. The Ministers agreed on six [principles](#) to inform EU policy. EU Social Affairs Commissioner, László Andor, made a [speech](#) on homelessness and the Social Investment Package.

## EU publishes Social Investment Package

The European Commission presented a [Communication](#) on a "Social Investment Package for Growth and Cohesion" (SIP) on the 20th February 2013. The [SIP](#) analyses the social situation in Europe and sets out social priorities for the EU and European Member States. The [package](#) calls on Member States to prioritise social investment and to modernise their welfare states, and offers guidance to Member States on how best to use EU financial support, especially from the European Social Fund, to implement the outlined objectives. It emphasises homelessness as a priority for smart social investment and includes a recommendation for Member States to develop housing-led strategies to combat homelessness. This new policy framework should stimulate Member States to do better on homelessness and reinforce the EU's support and co-ordination in this area, which could pave the way for an EU strategy on homelessness.

## Homelessness and EU social security coordination

The Tri-city project « Special Non-contributory Benefits for EU Migrants» had its final conference in London in February 2013 hosted by the AIRE Centre, in partnership with the Free Legal Advice Centre (FLAC), in the form of workshops on EU law rights to claim social welfare benefits. The project published its [final report](#) providing analyses of the EU law rights of EU migrants in accessing welfare benefits - particularly special non-contributory benefits. They have also launched a new, interactive welfare benefits advice [website](#) to help individuals, benefits advisers and other representatives understand entitlement to welfare benefits. It provides a questionnaire which can be used by individuals and their representatives to determine the individual's eligibility for welfare benefits. They hope this tool will prove useful in improving EU migrant access to benefits.

## EU social innovation guide

The European Commission regional and social affairs directorates have published a joint guide on social innovation. Social innovations are considered as new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs (care, education, employment, work organisation, urban, environment) more effectively than alternatives and create new social relationships or collaborations. Social innovations are social in both their ends and their means (user-driven, co-creation, civil society involvement, ...). They are innovations that are not only good for society but also enhance society's capacity to act.

This guide contains: (i) practical examples; (ii) a 10 step model for methods that help developing and scaling up of social innovations, and (iii) information on European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund (and Programme for Social Change and Innovation) support possibilities that can be seized in the forthcoming programming period. There are interesting references to social policy experimentation (p.18) and a list of social innovation incubators in Europe (p.41). See guide [here](#).

## European Journal of Homelessness—call for papers

The Journal Editors welcome contributions that analyse and interpret aspects of policy and practice in relation to homelessness and housing exclusion in Europe. Articles that explicitly address cross-national issues are particularly welcome. Papers must be submitted to Dr. Eoin O'Sullivan ([tosullvn@tcd.ie](mailto:tosullvn@tcd.ie)) before 6th April 2013. More [here](#). Please note there will also be a special section of volume 7 issue 2 on homelessness in EU candidate countries (papers to be submitted to Dr O'Sullivan by 21 June 2013).

## EU discussions on new proposed Fund for European aid to the most deprived

The European Commission has proposed to set up a Fund to help the most deprived persons in the EU (to replace the EU food distribution programme).

The Fund amounts to a total budget of 2,5 billion of the ESF for 2014-2020. The Commission's proposal is currently being examined by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers. The Fund could be a positive EU contribution to tackle emergency social needs (helping people move out of shelters with the support of starter packs), while the European Social Fund is used for social and professional inclusion of vulnerable groups. More [here](#)

The Fund should be operational from 2014 onwards.

## local trends

### Families in Gloucestershire increasingly at risk of homelessness

Difficulty in accessing the private rent sector and changes to the benefit system are forcing homelessness on more families with young children in Gloucestershire, UK. The latest statistics for a three month period in 2012 show that compared to the same period last year there has been a drastic increase in households with young people who have experienced statutory homelessness. Statutory homelessness is defined as where a household is defined as homeless by a local authority and the council will have a duty to find accommodation for them as long as their need is a 'priority' and they are not 'intentionally' without a home. End of September 2012 there were 168 households in the county in this situation compared to 119 in September 2011, which means an extra 49 households were struggling to find a roof to go over their heads. According to the County Council the increase 'would suggest that impact following changes to the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) is now being felt'. LHA dictates how much money a claimant can receive in housing benefit and it is now directly related to how many bedrooms you are entitled to, rather than how big your actual house is. There is also a limit on how much a person can receive depending on where they live. This has caused problems for some families who simply cannot afford to stay in their home. And this has been compounded by the challenge of a private rental sector which is often reluctant to accept tenants who are on benefits. According to the council it is not alone in this problem with authorities across the land also experiencing difficulty. More [here](#)

### Steady decrease in youth homelessness in Utrecht

In the city of Utrecht, there are about 135 young people who have no shelter. Two years ago there were nearly 150 young homeless people, and in 2008 there were 236. The decrease in the number of homeless youth is due to intensive outreach care of workers, however the approach is apparently reaching its limits according to local councilor Victor Eberhardt. Since youth programmes are undergoing a number of changes this year, Utrecht policy-makers are considering changing their approach to youth homelessness as well. The emphasis will be on preventing young people running away from their homes, and the care provided would be less intensive. At present, three quarters of homeless people in Utrecht are under 23 years, 20 percent are 24 or 25 years and 5 percent are 26 or 27.

More [here](#)

### More than 600 homeless children in Hamburg

At least 607 children in Hamburg are living in temporary accommodation (hostels or hotels). 370 of them are of school age. They live in a total of 280 families (142 two-parent households and 138 single-parent households). There are concerns about the impact of these living circumstances on the children, especially as the temporary accommodation involves sharing facilities like bathrooms and kitchens. The main cause of this increase in family homelessness is understood to be the housing shortage in the city. More [here](#)

### 2013 figures on homelessness in Hungarian cities: first results

On 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2013, 9751 homeless individuals volunteered to take part in the annual survey carried out in 233 homeless services in Hungary. 3087 people were sleeping rough at the time, while the others responded in some type of shelter (whether night shelter, a homelessness health ward, a permanent dwelling for elderly homeless people, or some type of temporary accommodation).

4223 homeless individuals spent the night in Budapest, the capital of Hungary, while the others were all based in smaller towns in other regions. The survey managed to reach 64% of all users of accommodation services in Budapest, and 74% of those in the countryside (70% on the national level).

The survey shows that the number of respondents who are sleeping rough are about the same from year to year in Budapest (1000-1200), while the number of similar respondents in the countryside has been growing.

The survey shows clearly that homelessness is not the problem of Budapest in itself – in the countryside there is an even bigger shortage of accommodation than in the capital. While in Budapest one in every four homeless people sleeps rough, in certain other smaller towns there are more people sleeping rough than there are beds available in services.

In 2013, the survey included questions about the sources of income, any debts, spending, work possibilities. Because of the recent wave of criminalization of homeless people in Hungary, some questions focused on legal offenses and fines, as well as what alternatives homeless people think they have ("If you could not sleep in the same place tomorrow because of police action, where would you go?").

A detailed analysis of the results is expected by late spring.

# Focus: Microcredit and homelessness

According to the European Microfinance Network, “Microfinance means offering financially excluded people (on low incomes) and micro-entrepreneurs basic financial services, like credit, savings and insurance. These services give people an opportunity to protect their families against financial risks and invest in new or existing economic initiatives. Such services are provided by specialised institutions that can be classified as banks (cooperative, commercial, microfinance or savings banks) and non-banks (financial cooperatives, non-profit companies and NGOs).” **Microcredit** (one of many microfinance services) has been used over the last few decades as a tool to reduce poverty in developing countries, but is also increasingly common in Europe and has been highlighted by the European Commission as a key tool to address unemployment in [Europe](#) as part of a proposal to set up a European Progress Microfinance Facility. Microcredit for socially vulnerable groups is offered in a number of EU countries and beyond, including in some cases to people who are homeless. This focus is a brief reflection on the perceived pros and cons of using microcredit to assist transitions out of homelessness, using some existing examples

## Direct and indirect support to homeless people

The cooperative [CREDAL](#) in Belgium provides microcredit to organisations working in the social economy (which target vulnerable groups), to entrepreneurs, and to people who are financially excluded (including homeless people). The [last category](#) refers to people who are on social benefits or with very low incomes, which is the case of many homeless people. Lending to homeless people with no form of income can be extremely risky especially if they are pushed further into debt and poverty as a result of a loan they cannot repay. However, the success rates of the CREDAL in this area are quite high and will be discussed in greater detail at the FEANTSA-HABITACT [seminar](#) taking place on 12 June in Amsterdam.

## Empowerment and microcredit

An evaluation carried out in 2010 of microfinance services for homeless people in North Carolina (US), namely a Community Empowerment Fund (CEF) set up in the town of Chapel Hill in order to address the systemic financial barriers faced by homeless people and working poor in the United States, provides some indication of the first short-term impacts of using microfinance. It argues that microfinance can be a feasible and valuable answer to the needs of homeless people and at-risk populations in the United States in terms of personal empowerment and community development.

Some limitations highlighted by the evaluation include the expense of time dedicated to case management and community development efforts, the need for targeted face-to-face outreach, the potential for situational client instability, and the complexity of both personal and systemic issues associated with the homeless population. Indeed the evaluation emphasises that microcredit can only ever be a *part* of the answer to homelessness in order to create avenues for upward mobility. It argues that in order to be successful, microcredit services for homeless people need to have an important personal dimension where loan officers as individuals build relationships that go deeper than credit only. More [here](#)

## Microcredit and the right to Housing in Africa

Access to or improvement of housing is not usually traditionally associated with micro-credit practices (usually linked to micro-entrepreneurship, used to create transitions out of poverty). However, in order to improve the living conditions of families (considered fundamental for the development of local communities), Indlu Finance decided in 2010 to propose microcredit to families at risk of poverty in rural areas South Africa, aiming to help families buy, repair or improve the physical quality of their housing. This allows them to secure their capital or even in some cases to find an additional source of income by renting out a room. See more on p.11 of this [report](#) by CCFD-Terre Solidaire, a French development NGO which supports solidarity initiatives across the world (60 countries in 2010), and which believes microfinance for excluded groups remains marginal as a model of finance, whereas they believe it could actually provide basic principles for a new economic model which is more social and sustainable. More [here](#)

## Using microcredit to overcome educational barriers to entrepreneurship

The French organisation ADIE (Association pour le Droit à l'Initiative Economique) aims to make entrepreneurship opportunities accessible to all, including to people who are unemployed, on income support, or with very low educational qualifications. They are trying to ensure a separation in French law between fields which require professional qualifications and areas of work which cover more simple tasks (e.g. bike repairs, tap repairs, etc) so that people with fewer qualifications can still be in a position to set up their own business. They support people traditionally excluded from entrepreneurship to set up their own business and fulfill their full potential despite their low education qualifications and reduced work experience. More [here](#)