

habitact news

HABITACT peer review of Amsterdam homeless policy 4th - 5th March 2010

A HABITACT peer review of Amsterdam homeless policy will take place on the 4th and 5th March 2010. In the first stage of its strategy Amsterdam used an individualised approach based on co-operation, mutual trust and a solution-orientated work attitude. Individualised treatment is shaped by creating a phased programme in which personal aims are included in the areas of housing, care, income and daily occupation for each person in the target group (roofless and houseless people). In the second phase of the strategy, Amsterdam are developing policies for people at risk of homelessness (prevention and recovery).

The methodology to be used in HABITACT peer reviews is an adaptation of the peer review methodology already established by the PROGRESS Programme to increase co-operation on combating social exclusion. The aim is to create a dynamic and motivating process from which both the host and the peers can benefit. The peer review is designed to deliver the following outputs:

1. To identify, evaluate and disseminate good practice on Amsterdam homeless policy;
2. To look at the implementation of policy on a practical level;
3. To assess whether and how good practice can be effectively transferred to other local authorities;
4. To provide a learning opportunity for cities throughout Europe about the implementation process or policy approaches and programmes in Amsterdam.

See more in the [members' section](#) of the HABITACT website.

HABITACT is a European exchange forum on local homeless strategies. It was launched with the support of FEANTSA in June 2009 by a core group of cities to develop European cooperation between local social policy administrations on tackling homelessness.

It is open to all local practitioners in Europe who are working in the area of homelessness.

Reconfiguration of Dublin homeless services follows new national homeless strategy

Implementation of Ireland's national homeless strategy, *A Way Home*, will be carried out through local homeless action plans. Following amendments to the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2008, adopted in July 2009, local authorities in Ireland now have a statutory duty to develop local homeless strategies.

The National Implementation Plan provides a national framework to guide the action required to address homelessness in each local area. It sets out a sequence of priority actions and indicates appropriate lead roles, timelines, key performance indicators and links to local action.

Priority areas highlighted in the National Implementation Plan, particularly focused on the elimination of long-term dependence on emergency homeless services include:

- Action to provide effective long-term solutions for people leaving homelessness, including development and implementation of the Support to Live Independently (SLI) scheme and new leasing arrangements delivered through the Social Housing Investment Programme.
- Re-orientation of investment to support significant increase in suitable accommodation and support for people leaving homelessness.

Pathway to Home, a model of homeless and housing support services was put in place in Dublin by the Homeless Agency to implement *The Way Home 2008-2013* and realise the 2010 vision of the Homeless Agency Partnership's Action Plan on Homelessness in Dublin, *A Key to the Door 2007-2010*.

Currently, homeless services in Dublin are being reconfigured to ensure an increase in the number of people who can gain access to long-term housing with supports provided in their own home (as required) and to minimise the time that people are staying in an emergency situation without access to appropriate support or housing options.

Further Reading:

- *Evaluation of Homeless Services 2008 Series;*
- *Review of Finances and Expenditure for Homeless Services in Dublin,*
- *Counted In, 2008*

local news

Nine new ideas for supporting homeless people in Paris

On the 9th December 2009, the city of Paris, the French State and the Ile-de-France region announced the creation of 250 new accommodation places in Paris for homeless people thanks to a competition to design new ways to provide for the city's homeless population. The new projects aim to prevent street homelessness among young people, people with addictions, older homeless people or people for whom conventional accommodation places are inappropriate. This will be done using projects such as alternative housing solutions, "stabilization centres" for people with addiction problems, acute health problems and mental health needs, and low-threshold, participatory support services. Nine projects were selected out of 59 cases studied. Those chosen are different from traditional emergency accommodation institutions in Paris. Read more about the 9 projects [here](#) (in French).

The inspiration behind this initiative was a joint reflection between local authorities and non-governmental organisations, which aimed to develop new specific emergency shelter structures, to encourage the most marginal members of the homeless population to accept accommodation, taking into account roaming and the more than 150 people living in the forest of Vincennes. Project funding will be provided by the French State, the Ile-de-France region and Paris municipality. The state will monitor the working of the projects.

Antwerp social housing body exposed by applicants denied social housing

Letters from the Antwerp Social Housing authority refusing social housing for formerly homeless people have been leaked to the press. The reason given for refusal was that the people's previous experiences of homelessness apparently did not make them eligible for social rented housing. The leaking of these letters in late November 2009 caused an outcry against the apparent message given out by the city that anyone who has ever been homeless may not rely on social housing.

The letter said: "Given your past as a homeless person, we fear that you may directly or indirectly cause problems. (...) The experiences we have had with homeless people are unfortunately not positive. We note that this group rely on each other, and rightly so, for help, but this often creates serious problems when homeless people want to occupy the same residence." The social housing company justified the refusal to grant the housing on the basis of article 22 of the Flemish framework for social housing which states that "social housing may be refused if there is a serious threat to people's physical or mental integrity".

"This letter, with this formulation, should never have been sent," said Leen Verbist, deputy mayor in charge of housing and housing companies in Antwerp. However, she supports the decision, saying that there was enough evidence to maintain the position.

The letter has been condemned by the Belgian Secretary of State for the Fight against Poverty, Philippe Courard. He qualified the exclusion of applicants who have a history of homelessness as "discriminatory". "Applicants who have been homeless are all the more deserving of support to facilitate their integration into society. Social housing companies should play a pioneering role in this area," he said.

The full article is available [in Flemish](#) and [in French](#).

Graz launches action plan against poverty

The "Graz Action Plan against Poverty 2009", launched in March 2009, will implement an action plan with concrete recommendations for measures to fight poverty in the city of Graz, Austria. It is a guide for Graz policy-makers encouraging them to establish a closer-knit social network in Graz. Implementation of the measures requires a willingness to recognise the fight against poverty as an interlinked theme and to give it priority in local policy-making.

NGOs, projects, administrators, experts and people affected by poverty have been involved in developing this programme. Over 60 action areas have been identified, including: the cost of living; employment and education; income and debt; children and young people; social participation; health; access to information; services and administration; structural policy.

Homelessness and housing exclusion will be addressed under 'living costs'. There is a lack of affordable and adequate housing in Graz. In this context, the building of social housing by the local government is the most important issue. Furthermore, the allocation of council flats is organised by a "points-system" first established in the 1970s which needs to be adapted to new circumstances and challenges. Further topics are improving the quality of social housing and equipping it with adequate amenities. The working group also identified a need to improve the information system on social assistance, to establish an early warning system on fuel poverty and to develop mobile care for specific target groups.

Click [here](#) for more information (in German) on the Graz Action Plan Against Poverty.

Stockholm to test new Housing First method to tackle homelessness

Following an initiative shared by Stockholm's City Mission, the Mayor of Stockholm and Lund University, a Housing First approach to homelessness will be tested in Stockholm from 2010 onwards. The theory behind this model is that the best way to address homelessness is to start by finding stable housing for homeless people. In Stockholm, it is believed by many people to be a better model than the one currently used, called the "step" model, which offers accommodation in different stages.

In the "step" model, it often takes a long time from the beginning of this process until the person has the opportunity to live in his or her own apartment. In Stockholm this can take between three and seven years. The Housing First model offers people direct access to a home where they can expect to stay indefinitely. In an initial phase, starting from 2010, 10 homes will be offered as part of the project. The first three years will be used to test the model. It will not replace the "step" model, however, as it is believed that both routes are needed to be able to provide for those who would need support to live in independent accommodation.

Stockholm wants to try this model because it has the largest proportion of homeless people in Sweden, and solutions are needed. Stockholm also offers an opportunity to test various models, because it has a broad group of people experiencing homelessness, with differing needs.

Click [here](#) for more information.

Brighton & Hove unveils new strategy to tackle single homelessness

A plan to stop homelessness, revealed in November 2009, will provide education and training for rough sleepers inside hostels in Brighton and Hove, UK.

The council [plan to reduce rough sleeping](#) to “as near zero as possible” by identifying people sleeping rough sooner. The [new strategy](#) aims to deliver the right support at the right time to prevent difficult housing situations getting worse and vulnerable residents, young or old, ending up on the streets or in hospital. The council will work with the job centre (national employment advice service) to put employment services, education and training in homeless hostels. People living at the hostels will also be given access to mental health, alcohol and substance misuse services.

Cádiz to prepare homelessness plan

The [Provincial Commission on Homelessness](#) in Cádiz Province, Spain, agreed in November 2009 to prepare a Plan on Homelessness, the first such plan in Andalucía.

Planning will include analysis of the current situation, the principles guiding the actions that are carried out, the legal framework for action, goals, concrete measures to achieve them and indicators for evaluating results. The provincial delegate of the regional government, said that they must create “a feasible and realistic plan, that goes beyond good intentions.”

Click [here](#) for more information (in Spanish).

Local council in Rome launches programme to promote employment of homeless people

The social services of a local council in Rome (Municipio XIII) intend to promote labour-market integration of homeless people. They are using two main channels to achieve this objective. The first is the AISF (Agenzia di Integrazione Sociale per le Famiglie), a project which has been up-and-running for 2 years which aims to create links between people looking for work and people offering work. The second is the project “Percorso di orientamento e inserimento lavorativo per persone senza dimora”, a project which promotes social inclusion of people who, for economic or social reasons, need support and training to enter the labour market.

The promotion of employment opportunities would be put into practice through internships, hopefully leading to permanent jobs.

The local council explains the advantages for potential employers:

- No costs for the employment: The intern would receive an income directly from the social services of the city
- No bureaucracy: this will be dealt with by the social services
- The workers will be selected on the basis of their professional skills which meet the needs of the employer
- Through these internships, the employer will get to know the professional skills available on the labour market
- The interns will be accompanied by a “tutor” in their work

The local council invited all interested employers and members of the local community to find out more about the opportunities at a meeting on 15 December 2009.

Tallinn introduces economic recession assistance package

In April 2009, the City of Tallinn launched an Economic Recession Assistance Package, which aims to help citizens overcome difficult times. The package includes provision for people experiencing homelessness and housing exclusion, such as allocating additional funds to meal centres, increasing places in homeless shelters, opening new social accommodation units and launching a “Caring Official” programme involving the collection of clothes and household commodities for homeless and less privileged people. In addition, a number of support measures will be introduced for people in financial difficulty, such as putting a proposal to the Government of the Republic of Estonia to increase the national subsistence level from 1,000 to 1,200 Estonian kroons, providing a debt counselling service and decreasing housing expenses, with measures that include compensating the increase of heating and water prices for the less privileged population.

The package document is available in the [members' section](#) of the HABITACT website.

UK cities given rough sleepers champion status

The “Rough Sleepers Champions” scheme, run by the Department for Communities and Local Government in the UK, awards cities that have shown good practice in preventing rough sleeping. In July 2009, 15 cities were given the award for 2009/2010, which examines each city’s strengths and areas of expertise with regards to strategies and services designed to reduce rough sleeping.

Winners of the award (“champions”) will run conferences, provide advice, information and support through seminars and workshops, host visits to their services, share policies and procedures and undertake peer audits and reviews in order to share their good practices and policy ideas with other local authorities. These initiatives will be funded by the UK government, as part of its rough sleeping strategy, [No one left out](#), which will involve working with partners to end rough sleeping by 2012.

Examples of good practice recognized by the award are:

- Strategy and partnerships
- Early intervention and prevention
- Accommodation and support pathways
- Specialist interventions—including alcohol/drug dependency, health, skills and employment

The award also takes into account that cities have different contexts and priorities, so the chosen “champions” come from a range of different localities – to represent successful approaches to preventing and tackling rough sleeping in large conurbations, market towns, seaside towns and rural areas.

The resettlement services manager at York council, one of the champions, said: ‘Sharing good practice is something we’re always happy to do on a local and national level, and it is great to be recognised by the government as champions for our innovative approach to tackling rough sleeping.’

A document on the context and strategies of each champion is available in the [members' section](#) of the HABITACT website.

news from europe

Ratification of the Lisbon Treaty: more influence for regions and cities

The entering into force of the Lisbon Treaty on the 1st December 2009 will [improve the standing of regions and cities](#) in the European Union (EU)'s political system, and boost the role of their representative body in Brussels, the Committee of the Regions (CoR). Regions and local authorities are now able not only to be consulted earlier in the legislative process but also refer matters to the European Court of Justice if they think the EU lacks the competence to propose new laws.

CoR President Luc Van den Brande declared that "with the Lisbon Treaty, European legislation will be adopted more democratically in future, with a stronger Parliament and a Commission which listens to the people, is sensitive to the regional and local impact of European initiatives and is committed to respecting the subsidiarity principle. In addition, the Lisbon Treaty gives territorial cohesion, which is the cornerstone of future regional policy, a fundamental legal basis."

For the first time, the EU explicitly recognises "territorial cohesion" as a fundamental objective in addition to economic and social cohesion.

EU peer review in Vienna on counting homeless people and improving assistance planning

On the 12th and 13th of November 2009, the city of Vienna, together with the European Commission, hosted a [European peer review](#) in the framework of the PROGRESS programme, focusing on methods to improve homelessness measurement and monitoring as a basis for planning policy and services.

Assistance to the Homeless in Vienna has improved in quality and in quantity. However, despite a social housing programme, accommodation and rent subsidies, eviction prevention and a focus on integration, the number of homeless people has risen. Action points therefore need to be identified and strategies and measures developed to combat this trend.

This peer review exercise brought together representatives of national social affairs ministries from nine countries (Austria, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Slovenia, and Sweden) to examine homelessness measurement and policy planning methods used in Vienna. The discussions were linked to other EU initiatives on homelessness measurement funded under the PROGRESS programme, including the MPHASIS project (Mutual Progress on Homelessness through Advancing and Strengthening Information Systems) which spanned across 20 countries.

CEMR survey reveals increased demand for public services in towns and regions

Published on the 12th November 2009, the results of the second Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) survey on the impact of the crisis on Europe's towns and regions, compiled from the data provided by 32 national associations of local and regional government, predict that 2010 will be as difficult as 2009 or even worse for Europe's local and regional authorities.

According to the survey, local and regional governments find themselves caught between decreasing budget income and increased demand for expenditure. Local and regional authorities in countries covering 49% of Europe's population, have faced increased demand for public services. In all, 80 % of the population covered live in towns or regions that have had to adapt the volume and range of public services they provide. Higher demand is concentrated around social services, such as social and welfare allowances, housing support, support for unemployed and homeless persons, financial or debt advisory services, and mental health services.

See more about the CEMR survey [here](#).

Europe for Citizens Programme - open call!

Another funding opportunity has come up for European project proposals. The Europe for Citizens Programme funds networks of twinned towns in different thematic areas including "social cohesion and sustainable development", which would cover initiatives on homelessness and housing exclusion. Funding can be obtained for various activities and for up to 24 months. The deadline for submission of projects is the 1st February 2010.

A description of the call and the type of project is available in the [members' section](#) of the HABITACT website.

European seminar on local homeless strategies - save the date!

On Friday the 4th June 2010 in Brussels, the European Committee of the Regions (together with FEANTSA and HABITACT) will host a European seminar on local homeless strategies. As in [previous years](#), this seminar will be open to local practitioners from across Europe who work on tackling and preventing homelessness in their towns. The aim of the seminar is to provide practical information on challenges and opportunities for effective local policy-making on homelessness, and will be an opportunity to network and meet people working on the design and implementation of homeless policies. More information will be available soon on the FEANTSA website: www.feantsa.org

toolkits

PrOMPT

On the 1st December 2009, a system called [PrOMPT](#) (Prevention Opportunities Mapping and Planning Tool), was issued to all UK local authorities. It was developed by [Homeless Link](#), on behalf of UK Communities and Local Government department (CLG), which

committed to produce toolkits that will help local authorities meet the aims of the new UK rough sleeping strategy. It is hoped that by better understanding the causes of rough sleeping and the ways people become rough sleepers, rooflessness can be prevented amongst more adults.

local trends

Mapping of homelessness in Milan

The results of an extensive and representative [survey](#) of homeless people in Milan, Italy, are now available (in English). The survey took place on the night of the 14th January 2008, using the so called “S-Night” approach in a whole metropolitan area, meaning counting all homeless people in a single night. The survey covered a population of 3860 homeless people: 408 unsheltered homeless people, 1152 sheltered homeless people and about 2300 adults in slums.

Some findings:

Gender - The majority of homeless people in Milan were middle-aged males. Women represent 27.6% of the sample but the gender composition varies significantly among the three groups.

Reasons for homelessness - The main reasons for homelessness are unemployment and family relationship breakdown. Immigration is also a cause of homelessness. The survey results show that for many immigrants, homelessness is an essential step between the country of origin and the destination country.

Economic status - 30% of the respondents were working and about 33% had completed compulsory education. Before ending up on the street, people were mainly employed in low skilled sectors, in particular, homeless were mainly employed as factory workers, bricklayers, carpenters, electricians, plumbers, cooks and waiters.

Numbers of rough sleepers in London, UK

Broadway, a voluntary organisation, manages the Combined Homelessness and Information System ([CHAIN](#)), which collects information about rough sleeping and the use of homeless services in London. Annual and quarterly *Street to Home* reports based on CHAIN data are available [here](#). The CHAIN database records information about contacts with rough sleepers made by outreach and Building Based Services (BBS) teams and other actions including accessing and departing from hostels and other short-term accommodation. Rough sleeping figures presented reflect people sleeping rough on the streets of London contacted by outreach teams i.e. ‘verified rough sleepers’. They do not cover ‘hidden homeless’ groups such as those who are squatting or staying in places which are inaccessible to outreach workers.

The “Street to Home Quarterly Report 1st July to 30th September 2009” is now available. 2313 verified rough sleepers were contacted by services in London during the quarter. This is an increase from 2073 last quarter. This Quarterly report includes profile data on London rough sleepers including data on street activity, service use, arrival to and departure from the street, support needs, and institutional history.

Hamburg – Survey reveals homelessness rate decreasing

A [survey](#) carried out in March 2009 reveals that there are 20% fewer homeless people in Hamburg, Germany, than in 2002.

The survey also shows that around 12% of all homeless people living in Hamburg are under 25 years old. The number of homeless young people is slightly lower than last year, but the proportions remain the same. This is also the case with the proportion of homeless young women (22%), but total numbers are declining.

The city of Hamburg appears to be good at preventing homelessness, and in particular long-term homelessness among young people, but young people are becoming homeless younger. In 2002, 7.9 % of all homeless people were aged between 10 and 19 years; that figure is not less than 10.3 % today. A new outreach project, “[Sidewalk](#)”, aims to prevent this.

Review of homeless support structures in Charleroi

An extensive review of the structure and operation of homeless services in Charleroi, Belgium, was published on the 1st December 2009. Several observations have been made in the study and recommendations have been given to the [Relais Social du pays de Charleroi](#), who supported the review.

This report reveals a number of trends including the disparity between men and women’s use of support structures in Charleroi (the night shelters are mostly frequented by men, and the day centres by women); people using emergency accommodation services often have just been discharged from institutions (prison, hospitals, state care for young people); difficult access to social housing for people experiencing homelessness; homeless people are not always ready to live in “traditional” forms of housing, which has led to debates on the need to develop “alternative” forms of housing.

More than 80 recommendations were formulated on the basis of this review. General recommendations include the adoption of a regional homelessness action plan in Wallonia to better coordinate homeless services between Walloon local authorities. This plan should also encourage all local authorities to set up services for people experiencing homelessness, or would at least encourage local authorities to contribute financially to the efforts of other Walloon cities with established services. The review, commissioned by the Walloon Ministry of Social Action, is available [here](#).

Latest homelessness trends in Gothenburg

The results of the latest surveys of homelessness and housing exclusion in Gothenburg, Sweden, were posted online in December 2009 (see [www.boendeportalen.goteborg.se](#) – two reports in Swedish under “Aktuellt”). These surveys were conducted through the “Accommodation Portal” in Gothenburg (set up in 2003). This Portal, used by administrators and social workers to find information about local accommodation opportunities for people in contact with social services, is used to conduct web surveys 2-4 times/year of people at a disadvantage in the housing market (including homeless people). The findings are compiled into reports which continuously provide an evidence base for local homeless policy-making and monitoring.

Some recent homelessness profile trends in Gothenburg:

- The number of households have decreased from the start of the surveys in 2003 from 1850 to about 1100 households in the survey of 2009. The number of households with children has decreased;
- The number of inhabitants who are roofless have also decreased from 200 in the year of 2003 to 90 persons in 2009. A special unit in Gothenburg works with this group of people and small flats are built for them as a result of the surveys;
- Every survey shows that approx. 75% of the households have debts, which is the main reason why landlords often do not accept these households as tenants;
- many of these households need support from social services in their apartment to prevent falling into homelessness (through eviction, etc)

Recent supply trends indicate that a further 300 apartments have been made available by the municipal housing companies and about 150 apartments were built for this target group. Every night there are now approximately 100 available beds for people who are homeless.

focus: united states

USA: Ten-year local plans on ending homelessness

The development of local ten-year plans in the US began in 2000 when the National Alliance to End Homelessness announced “A Plan, Not A Dream: How to End Homelessness in Ten Years.” Since then, the concept of local planning to end homelessness has taken root and hundreds of communities have committed to ending homelessness (especially chronic homelessness) by dramatically transforming their homeless assistance systems. A list of all existing ten-year local plans is available [here](#).

According to the latest figures, there are 234 completed plans and over 130 plans in development. In September 2009, the National Alliance to End Homelessness published an update on the ten-year plans entitled: “A Shifting Focus: What’s New in Community Plans to End Homelessness”. This Data Update provides an updated content analysis of the 234 completed community plans to end homelessness. In addition to illustrating the growth of ten-year plans, this update compares the content of earlier (first 90 plans) and later plans (144). As the data show, changes in homeless service trends have directly affected the content of ten-year plans. Finally, this Data Update provides a qualitative analysis of factors identified by the National Alliance that are most likely to lead to implementation. This map below highlights existing “completed” ten-year plans in the US.



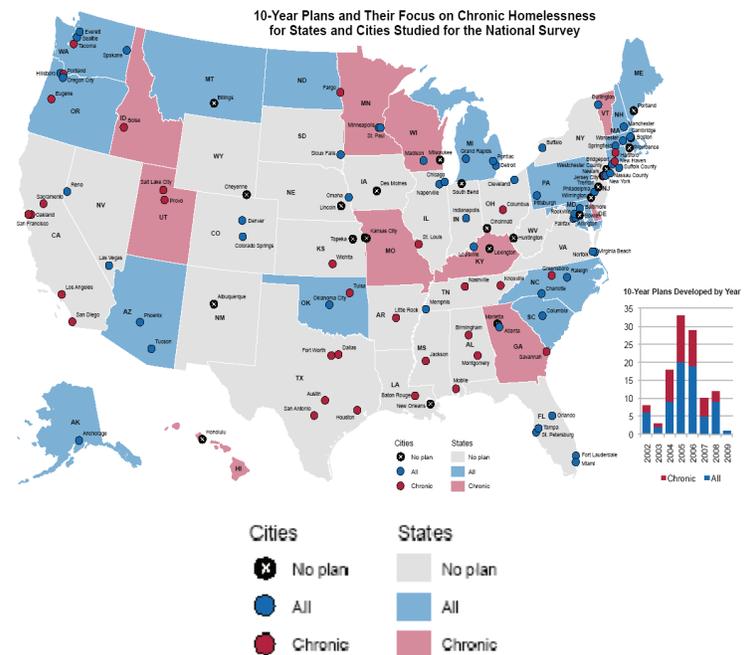
Source: National Alliance to End Homelessness

As a response to the economic downturn, President Obama introduced the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, which included \$1.5 billion for a Homelessness Prevention Fund, referred to as the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP). The National Alliance is currently assessing the impact of the recession and the 2009 Recovery Act funds on 10-year homelessness plans.

National Survey of Programmes and Services for Homeless Families

The Institute for Children and Poverty in the US (ICP) are currently completing a National Survey of Programmes and Services for Homeless Families, more than a years’ worth of research and data collection on programmes and services available to homeless families. They have conducted this research in all 50 US states and more than 100 major cities. Part of this effort includes compiling information on the ten-year plans. The *National Survey* may be accessed [here](#). This online resource maps state-level approaches to ending family homelessness and outlines governmental, nonprofit, and voluntary sector work in homeless issues, both at the national and local levels. The *National Survey* also compiles nationwide and local demographics of family homeless populations, tracks available funding sources for homeless services, and highlights community programs that serve homeless families. With consideration of the connections between state agencies and service providers, this guide illustrates how homeless families can access services in their localities. Navigating through the website, users of the *National Survey* gain perspective on the geographic variability of family homelessness in the United States.

The map below, compiled by ICP, shows many local plans to end homelessness. While it does not include all local plans, it differentiates their existence based upon a specific focus on chronically homeless single males and a focus on more than just chronic homelessness.



Source: Institute of Children and Poverty (ICP)



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