

## habitact news

### UWIS-H project proposal submitted

Under the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Commission, the Verwey-Joncker Institute and MOVISIE (both Dutch research bodies) submitted a proposal for a three-year research project on local welfare systems and homelessness called UWIS-H (Urban social Welfare and Inclusion Strategies - the case of Homelessness). This proposal was developed with the support of FEANTSA and HABITACT cities. This project aims to support the policy work of HABITACT cities and the scientific findings will be tested in peer review sessions.

The UWIS-H partnership is made up of research bodies from 10 countries, and cities from 10 countries: Belgium (Ghent, Brussels), Czech Republic (Ostrava, Prague), Denmark (Odense, Copenhagen), Greece (Thessaloniki, Athens), Hungary (Nyíregyháza, Budapest), Ireland (Cork, Dublin), Lithuania (Panevezys, Vilnius), Luxembourg (Esch-sur-Alzette, Luxembourg), Netherlands ('s-Hertogenbosch, Amsterdam), Portugal (Coimbra, Lisbon).

The results of the application should be out in July 2010. Fingers crossed! HABITACT members can see the final proposal [here](#).

*HABITACT is a European exchange forum on local homeless strategies. It is open to all local practitioners in Europe who are working in the area of homelessness.*

#### Partner cities:

Amsterdam (NL)	Esch-sur-Alzette (LU)
Aarhus (DK) - <b>NEW!</b>	Ghent (BE)
Athens (GR)	Madrid (ES)
Bærum (NO) - <b>NEW!</b>	Odense (DK)
Dublin (IE)	Vitoria-Gasteiz (ES)

For more information about HABITACT partner cities, go to the [website](#).

### HABITACT Peer Review on Amsterdam Homelessness Policies

The first HABITACT Peer Review was held in Amsterdam on 4-5 March 2010. The participants came from peer cities Athens, Esch-sur-Alzette, Ghent, Gothenburg and Helsinki. Hosted by Amsterdam city council, the delegates had an opportunity to experience first hand the Amsterdam approach to homelessness, to discuss different aspects of the Amsterdam approach, to discuss key questions in relation to homeless policy making, such as the resettlement of homeless people, homelessness prevention, definitions of homelessness, relations with service providers, hard-to-reach groups such as undocumented migrants, keeping the political momentum on homelessness. The transferability of the Amsterdam approach to other local contexts was also discussed.

A meeting report will be available over the next few weeks, so that other HABITACT cities may benefit from the peer review discussions.

The participants expressed the desire to have similar peer reviews in the future, with the city of Gothenburg proposing to host the next peer review.

### HABITACT in official EU document

The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) launched a discussion paper on "Combating homelessness" (see e-bulletin section on News from Europe). This paper briefly refers both to the work of FEANTSA and to HABITACT. The document is the basis for discussions between CoR elected representatives on combating homelessness, which should lead to the adoption of an official CoR opinion at the end of 2010. See discussion paper (available in several European languages) [here](#).

## local news

### Homeless people to be added to citizen's register in Palermo

On the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2010, the City Council in Palermo, Italy, approved a motion committing the Mayor to introduce a citizens' register for homeless people, with the aim of combating their social marginalization.

The motion passed provides for the establishment of a registered address for homeless people who ask to take up residence in the city, directly managed by the local authority, so that they may be guaranteed all civil and individual rights and have access to all social and health services. The document also calls for equal opportunities for homeless people, free access to some services and the same assistance provided by central and local government to the other citizens experiencing social exclusion, as well as interventions to prevent homelessness and social policy aimed at providing employment and social integration for homeless and disadvantaged citizens, with special attention to young people at risk of delinquency, drug users and people with mental health problems.

The concept of residence stated in established case law and most recently by the Regional Administrative Court of Piedmont in ruling filed on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1991, is based on the usual residence of the subject throughout the municipality. A register for homeless people would therefore allow access to rights that are denied them because of their lack of fixed abode.

Read the article in Italian [here](#).

### Aubervilliers: homeless people visited daily thanks to map system

A map created by social workers in Aubervilliers, France, means that homeless people are visited by outreach workers several times a day. The map, an experiment that has been running since winter 2008, pinpoints the habitual location of the city's homeless people, which makes finding them a simpler task. Information on the age and a description of the person is also used, to assist in their identification. This information is not used to categorise the homeless people, nor to have a record of 'mug shots' for judicial purposes, it is merely a measure that makes it easier to identify them and provide them with assistance as quickly and efficiently as possible. The information can also be shared with other homeless support organisations. Social workers use the map to fulfil the requirement to visit each person every day. The visits take place at regular times, early in the morning and late at night, and other daily outreach programmes circulate during the day. Thus, each homeless person is visited three or four times daily.

This initiative is a first step in providing individualised support to homeless people but some commentators have warned that it is insufficient. It is useful for supporting homeless people who remain in the same place but not so for those who move around.

Read the article in French [here](#).

### Alcobendas regeneration plan includes targets for social inclusion of homeless people

Plans published on the 17<sup>th</sup> December 2009 for a three-year regeneration project for the centre of Alcobendas, Spain, include

measures that support social inclusion, and the plan will provide guidance and training facilities focusing on employment opportunities and new technologies specifically aimed at homeless people, people with disabilities and immigrants.

The main areas of activity outlined in the plan are directed at accessibility, economic development, improvement and development of infrastructure, improving the urban environment and waste reduction, use of information technology and promoting social integration and equal opportunities. Incorporating the improvement of public spaces and streets, building facilities for sports, arts and new technologies, innovation, and combating social exclusion, the plan is one of the most ambitious plans in the history of the city, currently home to more than 45,000 people. 15,404,516 euros will be invested between 2010 and 2013, of which half will be contributed by the Municipality of Alcobendas and the other half by the European Regional Development Fund.

Read the article in Spanish [here](#).

### 'Gatekeeping' casts doubts on UK local homelessness data

UK homelessness figures released in December 2009 indicate a 24% fall in the number of people making applications to their local council for help with homelessness and a 28% fall in the number of applications accepted by councils from July to September 2009 (compared with the same period in 2008.) However, research by [Crisis](#), a UK charity for single homeless people, indicates that some local councils are 'gatekeeping' - preventing people approaching them for help in making an application, so artificially keeping the number of applications low. In an undercover investigation, Crisis employees posed as people asking for help with homelessness and made 45 visits to councils to test their responses. The results were published in their *No one's priority* report. 13 participants were turned away by receptionists and told that they were 'not a priority' before even speaking to a housing officer. Only nine were allowed to make a homelessness application or told that this might happen.

In a similar complaint, a Liverpool solicitor has spoken out following claims from her clients that they had been turned away by the local council when attempting to register as homeless. Local council staff have been reported to have told claimants to come back with proof of ID, address and national insurance before receiving assistance. However, the law says that this should come later. The first thing to be assessed is whether the person is in a vulnerable position and whether they need support. In response, a City Council spokesperson said: "The Housing Options service has received more than 3,500 referrals since February. We aim to find people stable, permanent accommodation, rather than placing them in temporary housing. "

Read the full article [here](#).

### Toulouse agrees to house people experiencing housing exclusion temporarily in vacant apartments

On 4<sup>th</sup> January 2010, following a meeting with [Les Enfants de Don Quichotte](#), French pressure group promoting the rights of people experiencing housing exclusion, the Mayor's social policy assistant in Toulouse, France, agreed to follow the idea presented by the pressure group - using empty apartments awaiting demolition to

house people living with housing exclusion. This measure would provide temporary housing solutions to homeless people and families living in hotel rooms until a permanent solution could be found. The Mayor's assistant confirmed that she would catalogue all the apartments that can be used in this way and would give the responsibility of looking after them to NGOs with experience of working with disadvantaged groups. She also supports creating a social rental agency which would mediate between people on low income and private landlords who are generally unwilling to rent to people in this group. Similar agencies have already proved successful in Rennes and Lyon, according to a *Les Enfants* spokesperson.

### Hungarian survey of homeless people in 18 cities

A working group, named "3<sup>rd</sup> February" started working in Budapest in 1998. The working group consisting of a few independent experts and social workers is an independent voluntary research team which collects a complete range of data for research purposes from the users of homeless care service providers on 3<sup>rd</sup> February each year. This year the survey was carried out in 18 cities and towns with the participation of 178 services, some smaller, with only 10 beds, and some larger, with several hundred beds. Around 250 social workers took part. The survey was to be filled out individually, so the social workers only helped people if they needed assistance, and were responsible for the distribution of the survey. When the survey was brought to rough sleepers, the questions were asked by the social worker.

While every year the survey asks general questions such as the age of the person, how long he or she has been homeless, how much money the person spent on the day prior to the survey, there is always a special theme. The questions of this year's survey focused on employment, such as:

- Is there anything that hinders you in finding employment?
- Do you have a job? What is it? / What was your last job?
- How long have you been employed?/When did you last work?
- How much do you earn in your current job in a month? /
- How much did you earn in your last job in a month?
- How did you find this job? / How did you find your last job?
- Do/Did you have a written or an oral contract?
- Would you like to work?
- Are you looking for work?
- What kind of work would you like to do?
- How long do you think it would take you to find such a job?

Preliminary results are due to be announced in Spring 2010.

### New directions for Copenhagen homelessness strategy

In 2010, Copenhagen will introduce new measures in compliance with the Danish Government's newest [homelessness strategy](#).

One of the challenges for the future includes offering places in assisted living programmes adapted for the needs of service users to homeless people with health care needs. Mainstream care homes are often unable to accommodate homeless people because they cannot meet their specific needs. Therefore, a minimum of 20 new, alternative residential care places are planned in the municipality, with the first 6 places to be ready by late 2010. The municipality will also provide more alternative nursing home places by changing some existing dwellings.

Another objective is improving options for rough sleepers. The municipality has introduced a so-called 'advanced handling' procedure for finding solutions for rough sleepers. One street outreach worker and one caseworker will work with citizens' problems at the point of contact rather than sending them to accommodation and therefore making them enter the 'system'. Plans are also underway to introduce sleeping "cabins" for homeless people who are not accepted in hostels for various reasons, such as drug or alcohol use. This emergency accommodation idea originates from Japan, where office workers use sleeping cabins when they are unable to get home at night.

Another crisis-management project is to improve 'night cafés', to counteract vulnerable people's unwillingness to use them because they do not feel safe. The municipality has a budget to change the physical environment of these cafés, and may include separate areas for men and women and more attractive decor.

Another of the four Government objectives states that 'No young person should stay in care homes, and should be offered other solutions.' Copenhagen wants to overcome this by reserving some of the municipal 'specialised housing' for young people.

Read this information in Danish [here](#).

### Success and extension of Doetinchem homeless policy

Doetinchem is a city of 55.000 inhabitants in the Netherlands. Since the start of the new Doetinchem homeless policy in 2008, 24 homeless people have moved into appropriate and sometimes independent accommodation, according to a report published on the 6th January 2010. This was made possible by the creation of the 'Social Pension' (supported accommodation) in June 2008 and by extending temporary reception at the Youth Shelter Foundation. In addition, thanks to individual 'pathway' working, 45 homeless people are on the way to getting out of homelessness, and 20 homeless people are involved in an employment programme.

Doetinchem's homeless policy exists since 2008 as part of the 'Route out of Homelessness for the Achterhoek Region'. It aims to prevent homelessness and promote getting out of homelessness, in order to have reduced homelessness by 75% by 2013 (in comparison with 2007 figures). Indeed, the number of homeless people looks set to fall by 87% (from 2007 to 2013). The region employs a comprehensive approach, so can help homeless people directly and avoid gaps in services. This approach looks for combined solutions to people's problems, instead of viewing them as separate - either homelessness or debt, for example. The town has also focused on improving the quality of homeless services, notably improving the homeless shelter's facilities, and launching special programs aimed at setting up daytime activities and providing support structures according to age.

Plans for extending the policy in 2010 include building another hostel and increasing places in the Social Pension from 8 to 12. Another facility will also be opened – the 'Domus' project will provide housing for people with multiple needs who are not in residential or other care facilities. Finally, the city wants to study alternative housing solutions for people who would benefit from being accommodated in structures other than mainstream accommodation structures.

Read the full article [here](#) (in Dutch).

## news from europe

### European seminar : Homelessness in public and private spaces: Mind the policy gap! – Brussels - 4th June 2010

On Friday 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: "Homelessness in public and private spaces: Mind the policy gap! Local strategies to address the different faces of homelessness." The phenomenon of homelessness is often associated with rough sleepers who live in public spaces, yet this is often only the tip of the homelessness iceberg. Homelessness can also manifest itself in private spaces (from a "domestic" space to a private space in institutions). The aim of the seminar is to provide practical information on challenges and opportunities for effective local policy-making on homelessness in public and private spaces, and will be an opportunity to network and meet people working on the design and implementation of homeless policies. It is open to local practitioners in Europe who work on tackling and preventing homelessness in their towns.

To receive a registration form, contact [office@feantsa.org](mailto:office@feantsa.org) Forms should be sent by 10th May 2010. More information and programme is available on the [FEANTSA website](#).

### LifeLong Learning European Staff exchange programmes: Budapest study visit to Oslo and Stockholm

In October 2009, a group of 8 service leaders and social workers from BMSZKI, the Budapest Centre of Social Policy and Its Institutions visited homeless services for three days in Oslo and Stockholm. This type of exchange is facilitated by the LifeLong Learning (LLL) Programme, an EU-funded programme which publishes online calls every year. Under Leonardo mobility projects and Grundtvig mobility and partnership projects, local authorities can apply for funding for professionals to get work experience abroad on how other cities tackle homelessness.

Representatives from the city of Budapest visited a range of services and exchanged knowledge and practice on issues such as the role of case-management, collaborative and cross-sector approaches, and participatory practice. Transferable knowledge of particular interest to Budapest were the system of case managers which means that one social worker follows a homeless person throughout his or her journey, and the existence and practical application of quality assurance in many of the services visited. See [here](#) for a summary of the exchange written by BMSZKI.

More information on LLL programmes is available in the [members' section](#) of the HABITACT website.

### Committee of the Regions to adopt own-initiative opinion on homelessness

On 2 December 2009, the social affairs commission of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) appointed a rapporteur, Mr Tore Hult of the Alingsås Executive Committee

(Sweden), to work on a CoR own-initiative opinion on "Combating homelessness."

The CoR issues several opinions a year, within the frame of its consultative work, which provide a local and regional perspective to European debates. This opinion on combating homelessness will enable the elected local and regional representatives of the CoR from across Europe to discuss homelessness and provide a local and regional perspective on poverty in the framework of the European Year 2010 for combating poverty and social exclusion.

On the 24th February 2010, a hearing took place to exchange views with the Commission for Economic and Social policy in preparation for issuing the Opinion, of which the draft is due to be adopted in October 2010. The [working document](#) presented at the hearing is available in several European languages, and asks cities and regions in Europe to react on a number of key questions on homelessness.

### MPHASIS research on local homelessness monitoring online

The MPHASIS project (Mutual Progress on Homelessness through Advancing and Strengthening Information Systems) was a European transnational exchange project carried out in 2008-2009 to improve capacity for monitoring homelessness in twenty European countries. It was the first European partnership on homelessness monitoring systems. The outcomes of MPHASIS research are available on the [project website](#), including evaluations of local tools for measuring homelessness and recording information on service users in cities such as Amsterdam, Budapest, and Stockholm.

### European report recommends tackling homelessness locally

Two independent experts from the [network](#) of independent experts assisting the European Commission monitoring and evaluating the implementation of National Action Plans on Social Inclusion have produced a report summarising the main findings from an analysis undertaken in 2009. The report analyses the "social and economic inclusion of homeless people" and the "access to adequate housing" and covers the 27 EU countries. Drawing on national reports, it also puts forward 15 concrete suggestions for addressing the key barriers to making progress at both national and EU levels in the fight against homelessness and housing exclusion (HHE).

The report makes a number of specific observations and recommendations relating to homelessness at local level, particularly that EU Member States should promote partnerships at local level to ensure the coordinated and integrated delivery of policies and programmes on the ground in a flexible manner which is tailored to the needs of individuals, and ensure the allocation of sufficient resources to support the implementation of measures to tackle homelessness at local level, and that EU Structural Funds can play an increasingly important role in supporting efforts to address HHE in this regard.

Click [here](#) to access the report.

# local trends

## West Pomerania measures homelessness using ETHOS typology

In November 2009, members of staff of all 114 centres for social assistance in West Pomerania, Poland (1,693,533 inhabitants in 2006), determined, on the basis of estimates, the number of people in the community whose situation corresponded to the living situations given in ETHOS (European Typology on Homelessness and housing exclusion). The [ETHOS typology](#), together with an explanation of the concept, was distributed electronically in the form of a questionnaire to the social assistance centres. This survey was therefore designed to test the usefulness of ETHOS in the West Pomeranian context. Most of the questions were based on social welfare rather than on housing and concentrated on profiles of homeless people and not exclusively on figures.

Data indicated that in West Pomerania:

- A total of 592 people were living in a public or external place, and 244 people were in night shelter accommodation.
- Facilities for homeless people accommodated a total of 971 people, including 908 people living in homeless hostels, 35 people in temporary accommodation, while 28 people have found transitional supported accommodation.
- 180 people were victims of domestic violence, often staying in shelters with their children.
- 100 people were due to be released from institutions, including 42 people in penal institutions, 18 people in medical institutions and 40 people were in children's institutions.
- 76 people were receiving permanent long-term support due to homelessness, including 48 people in nursing homes for the elderly and 28 recipients of the supported accommodation for formerly homeless people.
- The data available to social assistance centers shows that a total of 2 521 people were living in insecure accommodation, including 1300 living in conventional housing conditions but not permanently, 1189 people had no legal tenancy, and 32 people occupied the land they were on without any rights to it.
- In total 2289 people were threatened with eviction, and in 1979 cases the eviction order was carried out, and 310 people had received a repossession order.
- On the basis of police intervention 1295 persons were identified as being at risk of domestic violence.
- 912 people lived in temporary or non-conventional structures, including 24 in mobile homes, 106 in non-conventional buildings, and 782 people in temporary structures. 1445 people lived in dwellings unfit for habitation, and 3 661 in conditions of overcrowding.
- Most of the people living in public spaces were in Koszalin (101 people), Szczecin (80) and Świnoujście (45).
- Most people housed in homeless accommodation were located in the district of Cantonal Szczecin (442) including 43 persons accommodated in shelters for women and 72 accommodated in shelters

Like any first attempt, the test encountered difficulties. Although the survey included a description of each of the thirteen ETHOS living situations, each social worker may interpret them differently. However, the Western Pomeranian initiative is a very interesting project and an innovative approach to the question of measuring the scale and nature of the phenomenon of homelessness and housing exclusion in Poland.

Read more [here](#) (in Polish). Detailed results of the survey are available in this [document](#) (in Polish).

## Pilot survey in the French city of Toulouse

The French National Institute of Statistics (INSEE) is preparing the next national survey of homelessness in metropolitan France. This national survey will take place in 2012 and will be the second one, the first having been conducted in 2001.

In these surveys, street homeless people (rough sleepers) are defined as having spent the night before they were interviewed in a place not designed for habitation, including parks, car parks, cellars etc. The approach adopted is to reach and interview them when they use hot meal distribution facilities. In order to estimate the proportion of street homeless people not covered by this sample, a preliminary survey was conducted in January-February 2009 in the French city of Toulouse. This methodological survey of street homelessness (*étude méthodologique sur les sans-abri* or EMSA2009) interviewed the users of hot meal distribution facilities, breakfast distribution facilities, day centres (where users can shower, meet a social worker, wash their clothes, enjoy recreational activities such as board games, etc.), and those contacted by various mobile teams, which try to establish a relationship with those street homeless people who make little use of the other services. These results validate the approach which contacts street homeless people through hot meal distribution services: the survey shows that around 90% of the street homeless people interviewed used hot meal distribution facilities, and could have been reached by the sampling strategy used nationally, while about 40% of people in hot meal distribution sites and could not have been reached in day centres, breakfast distribution centres or while following mobile teams.

The EMSA2009 survey also gives results on the living conditions of all the service users interviewed. Besides street homeless people, users can live in shelters, be accommodated by family or friends, live in a squat or even rent or own their dwelling. Whatever their occupancy status, a majority has previously experienced homelessness and even street homelessness. The survey also asks where they store their belongings and receive their post, how they are covered for their health and what their income sources are.

A longer article (in French) will be available online in the 2010 *Travaux* of the [National Observatory of Poverty and Social Exclusion](#) (ONPES).

### Belgium: Report on homeless services and policies at local level

A study commissioned by the Federal Public Service for Social Integration assesses the organisation and instruments used by local government-run homeless support services (CPAS – “Centre Public d’Action Sociale”), the challenges faced by these services in providing adequate support, and structural policies in place designed to combat homelessness. It seems that CPAS provide different types of services (preventive, emergency, transitional) and use different types of federal financial instruments (income support or resettlement support), develop agreements with regional organisations (regional social service providers, social rental agencies, housing associations). A number of Walloon cities have set up local social networks (“relais sociaux”) which bring together local stakeholders from public and private organisations – these local social networks are used to coordinate responses to homelessness at local level.

The study gives recommendations and examples of good practice in the field. The report is available in [French](#) and [Flemish](#).

### Spanish survey assesses social spending in 18 cities

A [report](#) released on the 8th January 2010 analysed municipal initiatives against social exclusion in 18 regional Spanish [capitals](#). A questionnaire was sent to municipalities and the data provided in municipal social reports were also used. The study examined the social infrastructure available to vulnerable people, in terms of accommodation, food, hygiene, health care, psychological support, legal support, job training and financial support. Employment workshops, accommodation, financial support, soup kitchens were among the resources given special attention.

Main conclusions were that although there was heterogeneity in the results, municipalities have generally increased social spending for the poorest people compared with 2005, but social resources are still lacking.

Some findings: In A Coruña, of the 400 people who participated in workshops on employability, 132 found a stable job; Murcia is one of the cities with the most health care resources for the poorest people; compared with 2004 figures, San Sebastian had increased its social budget by 79%, Vitoria had increased its own by 55% and Bilbao’s had grown by 53% - with regard to 2008 figures, the increases were 10%, 9% and 8% respectively.

## focus: winter emergency plans

Winter plans are one part of a comprehensive [approach to combating homelessness](#), which includes policies on emergency services and resettlement of people who are homeless, and on the prevention of homelessness. In this focus section we have decided to give an overview of some of the different emergency approaches used by local authorities in Europe, namely constructing temporary accommodation structures in order to offer more spaces to homeless people, collaboration between specialised emergency services units and social workers on outreach work, opening metro stations at night, obliging homeless people to go into shelters, providing new and specialised services for particular groups, extending existing services, increasing social welfare support in winter and providing ‘survival packs’ to people staying outside.

### Carcassonne: homeless people receive survival kits

On the 24<sup>th</sup> December 2009, as part of its winter emergency plan, the municipal centre for social assistance (CIAS), in cooperation with the charity *Les Restos du Coeur*, distributed survival kits, including survival blankets, thermal clothing and gloves, to homeless people in Carcassonne, France.

Homeless people also benefited from a festive menu, accompanied by a band. This spirit of solidarity was marked by the presence of Marilynne Martinez, Deputy Mayor of Carcassonne and Daniel Iché, Vice-President of the CIAS. Iché said that offers of social assistance were currently piecemeal but that more targeted solutions were to be created in 2011-2012.

The association received 10% more requests for assistance than the previous winter.

Read the full article [here](#) (in French).

### Elbers opens heated tents for homeless people on banks of Rhine

On the 8<sup>th</sup> December 2009, the Mayor of Elbers, Germany, announced that, as during the previous winter, heated accommodation would be offered by the riverside to homeless people. Talks with the local rail service (the Rheinbahn) were to be held to negotiate opening metro stations, but it was thought that this would be [more difficult](#). Unlike last year, the tents were only open at night, from 7pm to 9am. They were manned by volunteers from the Red Cross.

Also provided were hot drinks and medical assistance, and help to find accommodation in one of the town’s shelters. However, the tent solution is seen as better than staying in shelters for some people, often because the shelter system is not adapted to their needs. Dog owners, for example, can not stay in the municipal shelters. A spokesperson for the tent project maintained that people’s reasons for refusing shelter could be many, but that the fact that they choose to stay elsewhere did not diminish social workers’ duty of care.

Read the whole article [here](#) (in German).

### Vienna winter fuel allowance increased this year

In the city of Vienna, Austria, 100,000 people receive income support. One type of support vulnerable people can receive is a fuel allowance, to prevent fuel poverty and make comfortable housing accessible to more people. This year, the fuel allowance has been increased to 200€, and is considerably higher than the 130€ available in other parts of Lower Austria

Read more about this and other initiatives in Vienna [here](#) (in German). Click [here](#) to go to the Vienna Health Authority fuel allowance page.

### **Valencia: Specialised police unit perform outreach work, accompany homeless people to shelters**

A specialized unit of the local Police force in Valencia, Spain, operates, in partnership with social workers, as part of 'Operation Cold'. They patrol the city at night in search of people sleeping on the street and offer them the opportunity to spend the night in one of the centres provided by the council and various organizations such as Caritas Diocesan or la Obra Mercenaria.

The patrol is aware of people sleeping on the street thanks to calls to the hotline '092' from concerned passers-by, through information from other police officers, or as a result of the search that they perform on any given night.

When they meet homeless people, the police unit first check whether they need any kind of medical assistance, and then offer the possibility of being taken to a shelter. If they do not wish to stay in shelters, they are given blankets or sleeping bags. Finally, they are encouraged to come in the next few days to the Centre for Homeless Assistance where social workers can offer them solutions.

Read more [here](#) (in Spanish).

### **Berlin: On cold nights underground stations remain open**

On nights when temperatures fall below -3°C, three metro stations (Schillingstraße, Südsterm und Hansaplatz) open in Berlin, Germany. In addition, a so-called "Kältebus" (cold bus) run by the City Mission takes homeless people to warm sleeping quarters until 5.00am.

There has been high demand on homeless services this year in Berlin, where about 70 institutions offer their services - from emergency accommodation, day centres, night cafes and soup kitchens to homeless shelters and doctors' surgeries. Compared with last winter's 10 to 20% more people have sought help. Demand is particularly high on the city mission center at the main station. Here, 163 had sought refuge. Many are also in need of medical attention, often being treated for hypothermia and incipient pneumonia by city mission doctors.

Read the full article [here](#) (in German).

Click [here](#) to go to Berlin's "Kältehilfe" website.

### **Groningen: when temperatures reach -10°C, homeless people must go inside**

The municipality of Groningen, in the Netherlands, does not want people to sleep outside when it is colder than -10°C. To fulfil this requirement, homeless people are sent to reception centres, possibly using "gentle pressure". This operation is carried out in cooperation with the police. The plan began this year on the 5<sup>th</sup> January.

There is a scale of urgency which begins when temperatures reach -5°C. The number of beds is doubled from then on and day- and night care is coordinated so that there is always space to sleep. At 10 degrees below zero or colder a rescue team is deployed: employees of the Public Mental Health unit go in search of homeless people, telling them that it is obligatory to go inside.

According to a spokesperson, people almost never refuse. In this does happen, the unit can proceed to using "gentle pressure", as the requirement to go inside is not optional. If someone repeatedly refuses to go inside and is not a danger to his or her own health, then the law states that the mayor can sign an injunction.

Read more [here](#) (in Dutch).

### **Shelter for Roma children and their mothers in Geneva**

The City of Geneva, Switzerland, has opened a shelter this winter that is specially designed to accommodate Roma children and their mothers for overnight stays. The municipal shelter, available to Roma children and their mothers, was already full, so the structure was quickly under high demand, not least because word of mouth encouraged people to come from other towns as well to seek shelter there, even from neighbouring France.

Since opening on November 7, 2009, the special shelter, named "PC2" regularly provides shelter to 20 to 25 people, children and adults, according to figures from the Social Service of the City of Geneva. A peak was recorded the night of December 30, with 31 people including 23 children. These people are in addition to other Roma people without children, who were housed in the shelter of PCi Volandes with other homeless people. In all, 240 Roma people benefited from these structures between late November and December 2009, compared with 136 during the same period last year.

The Head of the Municipal Social Exclusion Sector, highlights two new phenomena. Firstly, children had never been present in such numbers. Secondly, Roma welcomed into the shelter do not come directly from Romania, but also from nearby cities, where they have settled permanently.

Because of this, the shelter has its critics: right-wing parties expressed their suspicions that its presence would encourage the newly-arrived Roma to stay in Geneva.

[Read more](#) (in French).

### **Riga shelters ready for cold weather**

On the 10<sup>th</sup> December 2009 shelters in Riga, Latvia, were declared prepared for cold weather and the reception of the homeless, by Riga City Council Welfare Department.

According to the Riga City Council's action plan "Assistance for the homeless in adverse weather conditions", opening hours for shelters and emergency accommodation are extended and the number of spaces available is increased, and they provide soup kitchen services. Outreach efforts are also increased.

Normal working hours are from 18.00 to 8.00. When night temperatures fall below -5°C, support structures will be open from 17.00 to 9.00, and when night temperatures are lower than -15°C, they will be open all day. During the winter, all but one of Riga's shelters accept persons having consumed small amounts of alcohol.

In November, Riga's shelters and services received an average of 550 people a day, an increase of 12% compared with this period last year. The total number of beds in shelters in Riga is 635.

Riga City Council Welfare Department asks residents to be responsive and call the emergency phone number 112 or the Riga municipal police, as well as to report to Riga outreach teams by telephone or by mobile telephone.

For the full article, including more information about Riga's homeless services, click [here](#).



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