

habitact news

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European seminar 2012 — SAVE THE DATE

The Committee of the Regions, HABITACT and FEANTSA will host the 2012 seminar on local homeless strategies in Brussels on **Friday 8 June 2012**. Be sure to save the date! The theme of the seminar will focus on the financing of local homeless strategies at different levels (EU, national, regional, local). A programme will be available in the March 2012 e-bulletin issue. This will also be an opportunity for cities to learn more about the reform of the EU structural funds and the use of the funds from 2014 to 2020. For more information, contact info@habitact.eu

Ghent Peer Review — Housing dimensions of homeless policy

The next HABITACT Peer Review will be hosted by the [City of Ghent](#) (Belgium) on 8-9 March 2011. A presentation of Ghent's homeless policy and various site visits, during which participants can see the strategy in practice, will serve as basis for common ("peer") exchange on local homeless strategies, cities' challenges and best practices. The peer review will focus on housing dimensions of Ghent homeless policy, such as social rental agencies. The event is for HABITACT cities only, but a delegation of cities external to HABITACT will also be able to attend in order to meet the cities and see how the network works. For practical information on the Ghent Peer Review and registrations, contact info@habitact.eu.

HABITACT involved in two EU social experimentation bids

Under PROGRESS (the EU funding programme on employment and social solidarity), a call for proposals on social experimentation was published earlier this year targeting financial support at countries embarking on welfare reforms. The funds of this call will enable countries to experiment policy changes in the social field before implementing them, if successful, on a wider scale. HABITACT is

involved in two bids, one submitted by the French government and one submitted by the Municipality of Amsterdam, both testing policies in the area of homelessness and active inclusion of vulnerable groups. See more [here](#) about the PROGRESS call.

Housing First Europe — update

The Housing First Europe project, set up by the [Danish National Board of Social Services](#) and the German research institute [GISS](#) with the help of [FEANTSA](#), is currently testing and evaluate socially innovative Housing First projects in five cities from a European perspective: Amsterdam, Budapest, Copenhagen, Glasgow and Lisbon. Five "peer sites" (Dublin, Gent, Gothenburg, Helsinki and Vienna) are taking part in three of the five project meetings.

A number of HABITACT cities are part of the HFE consortium.

Two meetings have been organised so far:

1. A kick-off meeting in Copenhagen on 6-7 October 2011 looking at the background of Housing First, the aims of the European project, short presentations of the test and peer sites and an in-depth presentation of the Copenhagen project.
2. A meeting in Lisbon on 24-25 November 2011 of the five test sites (Amsterdam, Budapest, Copenhagen, Glasgow and Lisbon) to discuss key questions for the test site evaluations.

Now the phase of collection of information and test site evaluation will start, with a meeting planned in September 2012 with all project partners (test sites, peer sites, and steering group) to discuss the intermediate results of the evaluation. For more information, please contact info@habitact.eu.

HABITACT Partner Cities:

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

Go to the [website](#) for more info.

local news

Warsaw report on setting up homelessness registration system

Julia Wygnanska (Polish independent researcher and former European Observatory on Homelessness researcher) has published a guide for developing homelessness registration systems, based on a pilot project looking at 6 Warsaw-based social services. The methodology includes the use of MS ACCESS, and EU references such as [ETHOS](#) (for the definition of homelessness) and [MPHASIS](#) (for the choice of core variables to integrate in the database). So far about 10 shelters use the database, and other services have shown interest such as one of the Warsaw municipal hospitals which will include new variables in their patient database such as living situation on night before entering hospital, duration of homelessness, and the living situation after discharge from hospital. This guide could be the basis for a "standard on data collection in homelessness" in local homeless services across the country. To see the full report in Polish, contact info@habitact.eu.

Camden equality fund to tackle homelessness

Despite being hit hard by budget cuts, Camden Council (Greater London, UK), has introduced a new equality and cohesion fund to tackle homelessness. In order to counterbalance the budgetary gap of almost £100 million the local authority reviewed its funding methods for the voluntary and community sector (VCS). The aim of the new fund is to distribute the available money to projects likely to provide the best outcomes for Camden residents. 35 Camden-based non-for-profit organisations have successfully set up projects that will be financed by the new fund from January 2012 onwards. The organisations have secured £37.5 million of funding as part of the "Homelessness Change Programme".

For more information, click [here](#).

Stockholm organises information and support for foreign EU migrants

In March 1st this year the doors opened to the new advice and support centre "Crossroads - Information and support for foreign EU migrants" within the scope of the Project EU citizens. The project is a unique collaboration between the Public Employment Service, City Church, Salvation Army, Doctors of the World, New Community, the Red Cross, St. Clara Church, the City of Stockholm and Stockholm City Mission co-financed by the European Social Fund. Activities include promoting labour market integration by setting up specific meetings with staffing agencies, facilitating a "women's group" to encourage more women to get into the labour market and meet their specific needs, and providing multilingual information on the labour market (there are currently 18 different language versions of the Crossroads' information website). See more [here](#).

Ghent city holds round table on homelessness

Key stakeholders on homelessness in Ghent met on 1 December 2011 to agree on key actions on homelessness over the next two years, to highlight the key challenges for implementing key actions, and how ambitious their policy goals should be. The discussions were based on Ghent's [social policy goals](#) for 2011-2013, which includes definitions of homelessness, relevant figures, a list of key stakeholders, clear policy priorities in the area of homelessness, and finally some challenges (mainly housing-related) for the future. See more [here](#) about the meeting in Dutch.

Brussels calls for common EU action on migration of destitute EU citizens

For the last 9 months a group of 60 Czech and Slovak Roma are in urgent need of housing, but the Brussels authorities are not sure how to qualify their legal status. "They are European citizens" says Cédric Chaidron from *O Sundal* (local NGO). For the first three months of their stay in Brussels, they could have been considered as tourists. However after the three months, unless they show they have a minimum income to live on or a job, their legal status is very unclear. The Brussels region municipalities urge the Federal government to take more action in this area. "These people come from other EU countries where they are poorly treated" explains the Mayor of Ixelles Willy Decourty. "The 19 municipalities of Brussels must find a decent solution to this problem, but should not be left alone to tackle this problem. Other Belgian authorities should take common action at European level, otherwise this problem will never be solved and countries will forever pass on the problem to other countries." More [here](#) in the *Vif Express*.

Cardiff reforms social housing allocation

Sweeping changes have been proposed to the way social housing is allocated in Cardiff after an explosion in the number of people on the waiting list. More than 12,000 applicants are waiting for social housing in the city, compared with about 6,500 two years ago. Hundreds more are joining the list each week. By law, anybody can apply for low-rent social housing, but Cardiff council says 43% of people on the ever-expanding list have "no definable housing need". The authority has unveiled proposed changes to its housing allocation scheme, designed to ensure those with the greatest needs are given the highest priority. A higher priority will be given to applicants who have a "local connection" to Cardiff and refusal of two "reasonable offers" will result in removal from the list for one year. The changes were drawn up in consultation with Cardiff's 10 social housing associations, which will be expected to adopt the new scheme. See more [here](#)

news from europe

EU Annual Growth Survey highlights increase of homelessness as a social consequence of the crisis

The [Annual Growth Survey](#) published by the European Commission on 23 November 2011 confirms that homelessness has increased in some Member States as a result of the crisis. “The crisis has disproportionately hit those who were already vulnerable and has created new categories of people at risk of poverty. There are also clear signs of increases in the number of people at risk of income poverty, notably child poverty, and social exclusion, with acute health problems and homelessness in the most extreme cases.” The European Commission therefore calls on Member States to “implement active inclusion strategies...to prevent marginalisation of vulnerable groups”.

EU Cohesion Policy 2014-2020

The European Commission has published a package of EU legislation to reinforce the strategic dimension of Cohesion Policy from 2014 to 2020, by aligning it with the new long-term objectives of the EU2020 strategy to promote jobs and growth. According to the European Commission's proposals, the long-term EU2020 objective of reducing poverty will be supported by a number of financial instruments including the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), and the EU Programme for Social Change and Innovation (PSCI). These funds will be crucial for implementing evidence-based local strategies to reduce homelessness. The different EU institutions are now responding to the package with amendments, and in 2012 the Member States will agree on national Partnership Contracts with the European Commission defining the priority areas for funding at national and regional level. See more [here](#), as well as FEANTSA's [response](#) to the package.

Committee of the Regions issues opinions

The Committee of the Regions (advisory body of the EU representing local and regional authorities) has adopted two relevant opinions, and is working on other opinions which are related to the fight against homelessness. At its Plenary Session of 10-12 October 2011, the Committee of the Regions, following the request of the Polish Presidency of the EU, adopted an [opinion](#) on “The role of local and regional authorities in achieving the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy.” Another [opinion](#) “Towards a European Agenda for Social Housing” adopted at the same plenary “welcomes the Resolution of the European Parliament on *An EU Homelessness Strategy* and calls on the Commission to implement this without delay”. More opinions are expected early next year on the future of the structural funds namely looking at the role of the European Social Fund, the European Regional Development Fund, and the Programme for Social Change and Innovation.

3rd URBACT Call for Proposals for the Creation of Thematic Networks – Homelessness in the list of priorities

On 9 December 2011, the URBACT programme (an EU programme which funds transnational exchanges between cities) published a third and last URBACT Call for Proposals for the creation of up to 19 new Thematic Networks. One of the 8 priorities is the following: “Promoting the active inclusion of specific groups (e.g. young people, the elderly, immigrants, women, homeless people, etc). The deadline for submitting projects is 15 March 2012. If a HABITACT city is familiar with the URBACT programme and wishes to set up a project with other partners, please contact us at info@habitact.eu. More information about the call is available [here](#)

Housing-led Policy Approaches: Social Innovation to End Homelessness in Europe

Social innovation is an increasingly central area of European policy. This FEANTSA [paper](#) makes proposals about how social innovation can be used to enhance progress in the fight against homelessness in the EU. The paper first defines the concept of social innovation before summarising the current EU policy context regarding both social innovation and homelessness. Housing-led approaches are then presented as an evidence-based social innovation with great potential to enhance progress in the fight against homelessness in Europe. Finally, FEANTSA puts forward concrete proposals on how the EU can promote housing-led approaches to homelessness in the framework of its work on social innovation.

Launch of Social Services Europe

Seven European networks of social service providers (CEDAG, EASPD, EPR, Eurodiaconia, FEANTSA, Solidar, and Workability Europe) launched a new European platform in December 2011 called Social Services Europe. The overall aim of the organisation is to strengthen the profile and position of social services, and to promote the role of not-for-profit social service providers throughout Europe. Social Services Europe will develop activities in the following areas: the impact of EU legislation on social services, working conditions in social services, social innovation, and the use of the structural funds to support the work of social services.

EU rethinks role of social housing

The latest issue of “Europolitics” takes a closer look at social housing in the EU. The issue looks at definitions of social housing, the impact of EU law on social housing, existing European jurisprudence on social housing, and new challenges and perspectives for social housing. See more [here](#)

local trends

Groningen: trends in homelessness 2003-2010

A recent study of the homeless population in the Dutch city and province of Groningen analyses the trends over 7 years (2003 to 2010).

The number of registered homeless people decreased from 769 in 2003 to 718 in 2005, only to increase again to 801 people in 2010 (see table 3.1). This concerns especially the short-term/actual (“feitelijk”) homeless from 577 in 2005 to 684 people in 2010. The long-term/residential (“residentieel”) homeless actually decreased from 178 people in 2005 to 156 in 2010.

The number of users of supported housing (“begeleid wonen”) has doubled between 2003 and 2010, from 87 in 2003 to 217 people in 2010.

The number of evictions has generally decreased in Groningen and nearby municipalities over the years (see table 2.1), with the main reasons for eviction still being rent arrears and anti-social behaviour. Of the 1901 persons evicted in Groningen between 2003 and 2009, 136 of them used a homeless service within a year of being evicted.

See more [here](#)

Tabel 3.1 Aantal geregistreerde feitelijk en residentieel daklozen en deelnemers aan begeleid wonen in de provincie Groningen, in de periode 2003-2010

Aantal unieke personen	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Feitelijk daklozen	659	656	577	627	650	671	688	684
Residentieel daklozen	135	151	178	180	154	149	160	156
<i>Totaal daklozen</i>	<i>769</i>	<i>765</i>	<i>718</i>	<i>762</i>	<i>773</i>	<i>790</i>	<i>805</i>	<i>801</i>
Deelnemers begeleid wonen	87	82	81	101	147	214	193	217

Tabel 2.1 Aantal personen dat uit huis is gezet in de stad Groningen en de provincie Groningen, in de periode 2002-2010

Corporatie	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Stad Groningen	173	172	151	155	185	134	146	148	122
Provincie Groningen:									
Acantus	82	77	61	50	44	40	64	50	52
Lefier*	16	22	40	61	46	38	45	30	14
Marenland	6	5	6	6	4	4	7	4	1
Wierden en Borgen	8	7	16	11	12	13	8	6	6
Wold en Waard	16	11	10	14	13	13	9	13	13
Woonborg	4	4	1	0	4	1	2	2	1
Totaal	305	298	285	297	308	243	281	253	209

Survey of homeless support services in 158 Italian cities

The results of the first national research on services for homeless people were presented on 3 November 2011 in Rome during a joint initiative of fioPSD, ISTAT (Italian statistical office), the Ministry of labour and social affairs, and Caritas Italy. The report highlights different trends in service use and availability.

Services in the regions of Lombardy and Lazio make up, together, nearly 40% of all available services (respectively 20% and 17%). The city of Milan provides support to 63% of service users in Lombardy while Rome provides 91% of services in the Lazio region.

Florence, Genoa, Milan and Rome are the cities with most services available (100, 113, 311 and 171 respectively). However, the ratio of services to users appears to be lowest in Rome and Naples.

The cities of Naples, Bologna and Catania have about the

same number of services (74, 74 and 77 respectively), but the population of service users in Naples (188.033) is more than twice the populations in Bologna and Catania (53.132 and 76.138 respectively).

See more [here](#).

Tables 11. Organizations, services and users by municipality with more than 250 thousands inhabitants. Year 2010 (absolute values and percentage compositions)

	Organizations	Services	Users
Bari	12	23	28.677
Bologna	23	74	53.132
Catania	12	77	76.138
Firenze	27	100	46.140
Genova	24	113	42.803
Milano	53	311	325.440
Napoli	19	74	188.033
Palermo	10	55	24.884
Roma	42	171	407.423
Torino	16	59	87.992
Venezia	18	61	22.979
Verona	13	33	21.322

focus: criminalisation and homelessness

Some EU cities use the criminal justice system to punish people living on the street for doing things they need to do to survive - this includes activities such as sleeping/camping, eating, looking through bins, and begging in public spaces - with the aim of putting people out of sight. Yet becoming a "criminal" makes the streets more sticky for anyone trying to get off them. Aside from the employment, housing, and social problems that people with a criminal record may face, organising documents, meetings and contacts with no stable place to live becomes a huge challenge. The selection of articles below illustrates recent trends in the use of repressive approaches to people using public spaces to survive, some of the challenges these cities are faced with, and the consequences of these actions leading to the criminalisation of the most vulnerable in our society.

Westminster U-turn saves soup runs for homeless people

Westminster council had considered outlawing the service around Westminster Cathedral Piazza, saying that it makes residents' lives a misery. The proposed by-law would have made it a crime to give out a free cup of soup to homeless people in parts of Victoria. Human rights organisation Liberty had campaigned against the new law and branded the proposals "wholly unacceptable in a civilised society". According to Liberty, "The by-law would have criminalised acts of charity at a time of recession and at best merely shunted homeless people on to a different part of the capital. Thankfully following positive discussion and negotiation with homelessness charities, the council has recognised that it is not its place to tell us that we cannot give our food to the needy." The council conceded defeat but said that "feeding people on the streets is not a civilised way to help people in the 21st century", encouraging people to rather use the support services available indoors and off the streets. See more [here](#).

Bavarian cities' iron fist against begging

Unlike in other German and European cities, people begging in the streets are not a typical sight in Bavarian municipalities. Although forty years ago, the German Federal Constitutional Court had decided that "holding one's hands open and confronting passers-by with the sight of poverty" was not a crime, the City of Munich banned begging in the 1980s. Munich's route around the Federal Constitutional Court's decision was the following: Begging was regarded a "professional business" for which people had to obtain a licence. Since then, Munich has taken a hard line against people begging and other Bavarian cities followed. Everyone caught begging near the Munich Central Station or the Viktualienmarkt is fined and sent away, with organised professional beggars being specific targets. However, a Munich street paper (BISS) criticised the action of the Bavarian police, claiming it is extremely hard to distinguish between "traditional begging" and "organised professional begging". Read

more [here](#) (in German).

Ban on looking through bins in Nogent-sur-Marne

A fine of 38 euros is now applied to anyone who looks through bins placed outside shops and buildings in the Paris suburb of Nogent-sur-Marne, even for people who are looking for food. This ban issued by local mayor, Jacques J.P. Martin includes three main restrictions: 1. "in order to preserve public health...it is forbidden to look through bins", 2. "it is forbidden to take contents out of bins and empty the contents on the ground", 3 "it is forbidden to spit, urinate or defecate in public spaces". People found looking through bins can be taken to the police station and encouraged to use social support services. More [here](#).

Budapest district maintains ban on living in the street

The Mayor of the 8th District of Budapest stated in September 2011 that he will not withdraw a ban on rifling through rubbish bins and setting up residence in public areas. This ban had been introduced following the decision by parliament to authorise local councils to introduce regulations on the use of public areas. The ban was supported by local residents in a referendum (even though turnout was extremely low). The police and members of the public area supervisory authority monitor the streets around the clock to ensure that regulations are not violated. The situation has been exacerbated by the law voted on the 10th November by the Hungarian Parliament which allows for the imprisonment of those found "guilty" of rough sleeping twice in a six month period. See more [here](#).

Vilnius cracks down on begging and almsgivers

Lithuania's capital recently introduced a ban on almsgiving that not only punishes those who beg but also those who give, with fines of up to LTL 2,000 (EUR 580), the Associated Press reports. Outraged rights groups say the ban spells misery, as winter kicks in and economic turmoil spreads across the continent. Like other European Union nations, Lithuania has been implementing severe welfare cuts that promise to hit homeless people hard. The ban took effect last week, but local police in Vilnius are not issuing fines just yet. Instead they are handing out cards to beggars with addresses and phone numbers of charities and homeless shelters. Stricter enforcement is expected to begin in January 2012. See more [here](#).

The measures outlined above could not be further from the approach promoted by the HABITACT network, which aims to develop innovative, rights-based and long-term solutions to homelessness. Amongst other things, the HABITACT network supports cities to work on implementing more sustainable solutions which respect the rights of homeless people, rather than resort to short-term attempts at hiding homelessness without tackling the root causes of the problem. Comments and reactions at info@habitact.eu.