

Policy bulletin

April 2009

EUROPEAN CITIES
AGAINST CHILD POVERTY



Tackling child poverty: preventing homelessness and poor housing conditions among families

European Cities Against Child Poverty is a network whose members exchange mutual learning among local and regional authorities, to form initiatives and policies



which will successfully reduce child poverty. London is the lead partner in the network, which is comprised of five core partners (London, Milan, Helsinki, Amsterdam and Budapest) and five associate partners (Copenhagen, Uppsala, Sollentuna, Solna and Västerås).

The lack of affordable housing and child poverty

Lack of affordable housing is a significant problem in several of our partner cities which is why it has been chosen as a key theme for our research. The well-being of children is closely related to the housing conditions in which they live. The children who suffer the most acute problems are those with no permanent home.

Homelessness does not solely include sleeping rough on the streets; it is a much more complex problem. Thousands of families and their children lose their homes every year and are being forced to spend long periods in bed and breakfast hotels or shelters and other forms of 'temporary' accommodation.

Temporary accommodation can take many forms but it is almost always insecure, often inadequate, of poor quality and over-crowded. While the quality of so much housing remains poor and children suffer the consequences, the shortage of good quality, affordable housing has now reached crisis point in many areas of the EU. Findings from research carried out by each of our partner cities is shown overleaf.

In this issue

- The lack of affordable housing and child poverty
- Common challenges and strengths
- Policy workshop: improving housing conditions for families
- Study visit to Shelter for Families in Budapest
- How do projects in EU cities prevent homelessness and improve families' homes?

Contact us

againstchildpoverty@gle.co.uk

t: +44 20 7940 1522

www.againstchildpoverty.com

GLE



Mutual Learning on Social Protection and Social Inclusion



This newsletter is supported by the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (2007-2013).

Ethnicity, poor housing and child poverty

In **Amsterdam**, most of the large families belong to an ethnic minority group. The majority of the large families have a Moroccan identity which means the housing problems of large families is also an ethnic problem. Families with an ethnic background moreover, have a lower income compared with native families.

Problems of housing in **Milan**, especially in younger families, affect Third-Country nationals, with 52% of the 15,000+ social-housing applications originating from this group.

Ethnic minority families and social housing tenants are especially likely to be living in overcrowded accommodation. While only 2% of white families in **London** live in overcrowded conditions, for ethnic minorities this figure is over 14% and is as high as 25% amongst Asian groups. Overcrowding, therefore, particularly affects children, who are already more likely to be disadvantaged.

The number of refugee homeless in **Sollentuna** increased almost four-fold from 2007 to 2008 following changes in immigration laws. The city has also seen a 93% increase in the number of homeless people since 2004.

Impact of poor social housing and homelessness

The participation of 15-64 year olds in the labour market is around 10% lower among social-housing tenants than other **Helsinki** residents.

The UK Census 2001 shows that 45.2% of lone parents and their families live in social housing in **London** and a total of 23% of these live in overcrowded conditions.

86% of the overcrowded families in **Amsterdam** live in social housing and nine out of 10 families facing multiple problems live in overcrowded conditions.

Homelessness is a major cause of poor pupil mobility in **London** which, in turn, causes them to fall behind at school. They are twice as likely to have learning disabilities and three times as likely to suffer emotional problems that affect their learning. The average amount of school time missed by an individual child in temporary accommodation is 55 days.

Poor mental health and sleeping rough

There are roughly 3 000 rough sleepers in **Budapest** out of 25,000 – 30,000 registered homeless. In **Solna**, 15% of the total number of homeless are rough sleepers.

In **Uppsala**, one of the largest demographic of the homeless population is those with mental-health issues, at 80 people.

Lone parents and homelessness

One in six applications for social housing in **Milan** is made by women-led, lone-parent families with small children. In addition, there is a shortage of beds in hostels for homeless women.

In **Helsinki**, on the whole, the review of housing costs and incomes shows that the situation of people living in rented housing and of women-led single-parent families has deteriorated.

Although the estimated number of homeless in **Västerås** is estimated at around 50, if the definition of homelessness were widened to include people temporarily staying with friends or relatives, the number of homeless increases to c. 300.

Demand for housing outweighs supply

In **Milan**, there are 220 beds available for families seeking social housing. However, seeing as young families are 52.5% of the 12,820 eligible applications, the number of applicants vastly outweighs the number of beds. In addition, 50% of the families awaiting social housing in **Lombardy** are in need of “emergency housing” following eviction orders. There is a shortage of housing for regular social housing clients which results in never-ending waiting lists.

There are over 61,000 families waiting for social housing in **London** in need of a home with three or more bedrooms. The supply of new larger homes in London, however, is not sufficient to tackle London’s high levels of overcrowding. The great majority of new homes built in London in 2006/07 were one or two bedroom properties, most of them flats.

Focus on common strengths and challenges

Common challenges faced by our cities

- Shortage of suitable accommodation for families – expensive, cramped;
- Lack of coordination between the different services;
- Lack of data recording the whole picture;
- Increasing segregation between different communities in residential districts;
- Poor mobility between types of tenure ;
- Struggle to secure funding; and
- Economic downturn
 - Reduction in construction,
 - More unemployment
 - Risk of more evictions
 - Other groups are suffering e.g. home owners with mortgages.

Common strengths in our cities' approach to these challenges

- Our understanding of the range of issues;
- Efforts to combine services e.g. housing advisers, social workers;
- Good intentions to improve conditions for families and children;
- Commitment to addressing people and the property;
- Involvement of the Third Sector – hostels, advice, support; and
- Range of pilot projects, successful initiatives.

Third policy workshop: Budapest, 26th February 2009

The impact of poor housing and homelessness on children

The network held its third policy workshop in Budapest. Representatives from London, Amsterdam, Helsinki, Milan, Budapest, Solna, Uppsala, Sollentuna and Västerås attended.

The workshop involved presentations of four successful projects. The first two from Uppsala and Helsinki worked to prevent homelessness and evictions among families; the remaining two examples from Budapest and Amsterdam both work to improve housing conditions for families. These projects are summarised below.



The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission

Delegates were then given the opportunity to discuss the case studies with reference to their own experiences in their cities, as practitioners and policy makers.



Study visit to district family care centre in Budapest

Whilst in Budapest, delegates attending the policy workshop got the chance to participate in a Study Visit to the city's District Family Care Centre, a shelter for families facing homelessness.

The centre was the first shelter of its kind in Hungary. It was established in 1993 and has been run ever since by the Local Municipalities of the district.

The shelter, which receives homeless families from all over Hungary, can accommodate up to 45 people. There are currently 40 people living there and 40 on the waiting list. Residents are selected by the votes of the Centre's decision-making body.

Each family has one room and free use of the kitchen and other shared facilities. The residing families do not have to pay any rent but they are expected to start a savings account and to transfer a set amount of money monthly. This means that they become accustomed to putting away money regularly and budgeting for their family. The shelter also offers cleaning, washing and household supplies.

Each family is entitled to stay 12 months in the shelter, this can be extended by six months but only once. The family can then join the housing programme of the shelter, which means that they can be temporarily accommodated in one of the two "stepping stone" flats that belong to the shelter, or can apply for help from the Shelter to find a suitable rented flat.

How can projects run in European cities improve children's housing conditions and help them and their families to find a proper home?

When it comes to child poverty caused by housing issues, supporting children by supporting their parents is a common strategy. Many successful interventions to improve children's housing conditions therefore concentrate on adults rather than children. Representatives from seven partner cities who took part in the workshop identified the following interventions as successful methods to help children and their families to find a proper home:

The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission

○ Supporting clients to live independently

Some groups of people are particularly vulnerable to homelessness. For example, those with addiction or mental health problems are particularly prone to facing homelessness, as are young people making the transition from a childhood in foster care to adulthood. What these two groups have in common is that they can both benefit from training and support aimed at helping them to live independently and to take control of managing their own lives.

Case study: The Housing Chain – Solna

Since 1994, the Social Services Administration in Solna has been running a time-limited housing programme for people suffering from substance abuse or other psychosocial problems. The aim of the programme – in which clients live in training apartments and receive support from treatment assistants – is to change the clients' life situation for the better, to help clients into independent housing and to promote social inclusion.

The first step in the Housing Chain programme is the plan of action, which is drawn up between the client and a social welfare worker. It consists of long and short term goals and highlights the issues with which the client needs particular help and support. A review of the plan of action takes place with the responsible treatment assistant prior to the client moving in.

Training residence generally lasts for around 18 months. During this period, clients learn to cope increasingly independently with day-to-day activities and housing requirements. The client is also encouraged to actively look for independent accommodation, either on his or her own or with the support of a contact person.

The Housing Chain makes use of some 30 apartments at the disposal of the City of Solna's Social Services Administration. The number of clients totals around 40, since contact is maintained with clients with a social contract for some time after training residence. The programme is funded by the Municipality of Solna.

Case study: supported housing for child welfare clients – Helsinki

The supported housing programme was set up in order to prevent homelessness amongst young people (aged 17 to 20) who have been in foster care. Reasons for homelessness amongst this target group include the inability of the clients' parents to provide a stable home and experiences of losing childhood homes.

During the programme, each client is provided with a flat (administered by the City of Helsinki) and is partnered with a social worker who meets with them once or twice a month. The worker supports and guides the client in relation to matters such as education, employment, relationships, health, finance and life management. The main goal of the project is for clients to integrate within their community once they have left the supported housing programme's care.

The project is delivered by social workers from family and social centres, by foster care instructors and by the Housing Office of the City of Helsinki. As well as the clients, they also engage with a range of other stakeholders such as local authorities, teachers, healthcare professionals, parents, guardians and relatives. For example, open information evenings are organised four to five times a year to provide parents/guardians with basic information about their service. Also, private group meetings are held for parents/guardians whose children are involved in the scheme.

The programme's total budget for last year was €1.2m. Over the last decade, the number of tenants making use of the service has risen year by year. For example, in 2007 the supported housing programme had 330 tenants and 225 flats. By 2008 they had 370 tenants and 278 flats.

Case study: Change of Fortune - Budapest

This project is run by the Foundation for the Future of Homeless People in Budapest which was founded in 2005 by ten Hungarian private companies. It operates in Budapest with two full-time employees and a voluntary worker.

The main aim of the project is to prevent the “revolving door effect” by offering families at risk of homelessness the opportunity to take responsibility for their own affairs. In order to achieve this, a social worker provides families with support (for example, through life management counselling and work skills training) and therapy, and helps them to work out a budget for their finances. The one-to-one, individual counselling and care enable the social worker to monitor all the needs of the family and to provide them with help on an everyday basis. Furthermore, families are offered financial support (1.5 - 2 million HUF) for the 18 month duration of the project.

So far, the project has supported a total of 12 families. There is a follow-up phase structured into the last six months of the project, which the first round of the project – terminating in June 2009 – is now undergoing. This will help to monitor the sustainability of the project.

O Creating space for larger families and reducing the impact of overcrowded conditions

A lack of suitable housing large enough to accommodate big families can cause situations of overcrowding. The strains and pressures that this puts on family life can, in some cases, lead to homelessness. That is to say, overcrowding is a wellbeing issue, not just a housing issue. Finding solutions to alleviate situations of overcrowding is therefore a key factor in reducing instances of homelessness and poor housing. Furthermore, reducing overcrowding also has an overall positive effect on the local community, as the following case studies illustrate.

Case study: Tackling overcrowding - London Borough of Camden

This project supports families living in overcrowded conditions to reduce the impact this has upon their lives. Research conducted at the beginning of the project highlighted the emotional and social pressures which arise from living in overcrowded accommodation. In this project, advisers visit the family home to identify specific issues and work jointly with the family to give tailored advice and agree upon actions to improve the quality of life.

There are three key activities delivered under this project:

1. To assist families living in overcrowded conditions to move to alternative larger accommodation;
2. To help tenants living in larger accommodation who may not need the space any longer to move to smaller homes; and
3. To help overcrowded families to improve the use of the space they currently have e.g. making practical changes to the home such as using space-saving furniture.

There are approximately 3,000 overcrowded families registered for re-housing in the borough. To date, the project has engaged with 539 families. Following work with the team:

- 169 families are actively considering or have pursued alternative housing options;
- 52 families have engaged with education, training or employment or other wellbeing activities;
- 138 homes have been identified for property improvements; and
- Small interventions have helped 52% of overcrowded tenants engaged in the project to consider alternative housing options and better manage their space.

The project is delivered by the Local Authority housing and adult social care directorate in association with the national department for Communities and Local Government, local education, training and employment agencies and local health care providers. Since its launch in 2007, it has secured over £1m of funding which will ensure delivery until 2011/12.

Case study: Make Room for Large Families – Amsterdam

The aim of this project is to create as many low rent, large dwellings as possible for large families in Amsterdam. There are a number of reasons for the creation of the “taskforce” behind this project:

- There is currently a lack of newly built large social houses with low rents;
- There is a discrepancy between demand and supply;
- There is a low turnover rate for large dwellings; and
- There are a significant number of large families with low incomes.

The specific goals for this year include ensuring that there is an individual responsible for the housing problems of large families within each Housing Association, using the financial crisis to transform large private houses into social housing, reducing the turnover rate of large social dwellings from 33 years and improving communication between the taskforce and the housing associations. There are a number of activities which are funded through this project:

- The housing association is responsible for creating new large houses;
- Large families are given rent discounts proportional to the number of children in the family;
- The taskforce works with residents of larger houses to try to encourage them to move to smaller dwellings; and
- Tracking systems have been introduced for families moving between districts which ensure their files are passed to the relevant social organisations.

The number of large families living in overcrowded houses has declined from 5,300 in 2005 to 4,062 in 2008. The taskforce expects that the project will have a positive effect on the atmosphere of the neighbourhoods involved including less vandalism and fewer young people hanging around in groups.

The Housing Associations and the local government have contributed €1.5m to the project. It is expected to be completed in December 2010.

○ Ensuring that children in foster care feel at home and part of a community

Such an approach allows for the successful integration and socialisation of children in care. When placing someone with a foster family, it is important to take into account the individual needs of each child. In other words, tailored approaches are normally more fruitful than one-size-fits-all programmes.

Case study: The ‘COMIN’ style: temporary care for minors – Milan

COMIN Temporary Care Homes are places where children are cared for in a social co-operative setting. The project targets children aged 5 to 18 who are unable to live with their parents for various reasons, such as inadequate housing or the inability of parents to care for them.

During the programme, each child is assigned a social worker who acts as their legal guardian and helps them to find a suitable foster family. Whilst enrolled in the COMIN project, the children are required to take part in various local activities (such as sports, scouts groups and arts clubs), whilst still maintaining healthy relationships with their families through the mediation of the COMIN team.

Due to the close bonds created by the COMIN Communities and the parents of the looked-after children, around 60% of the children are able to return to their families after their stay at COMIN. A substantial number of the beneficiaries of the programme go on to pursue post-secondary education following their stay at COMIN. Furthermore, many continue to receive assistance from COMIN whilst developing their professional careers.

Continued...

The project is managed by local authorities but involves social workers, a COMIN Co-operative team of educators, the Minors' Court, the municipality of Milan and the health authorities.

COMIN Communities have a 30 year long financial convention with the municipality of Milan. The convention is renewed every year and, for each minor, the municipality pays €66 per day. Another regional financial aid covers the remaining costs. Next year, the funding system will be re-arranged in accordance with new regional laws covering social services.

O Directly addressing the key causes of homelessness, such as unemployment

This is an effective strategy for promoting the integration of homeless people and families. Providing homeless people with complex help and services – for example, assistance and support with job seeking - encourages individual initiatives and promotes economic independency. This, in turn, helps to reduce homelessness.

Case Study: Holding You – Budapest

The delivery partners of this project (Public Foundation for Homeless People and the Unity Public Foundation) have identified unemployment as a key cause of homelessness and poor housing in their area. Therefore, the philosophy of the “Holding you” project is that by helping people to become economically independent, people will be better equipped to find their own way out of temporary accommodation.

During the programme, clients will be supported by a social worker through the following stages:

- Creating a CV;
- Selecting job adverts;
- Preparing for job interviews;
- Finding a room or apartment to rent;
- Registering for social and health services; and
- Follow-up.

The project will begin in 2010 and will run until 2013. The project has received funding of 2.7 billion HUF from the TAMOP (Social Renewal Operative Programme) framework, which is funded through the European Union.

Case study: The Right to Have a Place to Live – Uppsala

The main aim of this project is to prevent evictions of families with children who face losing their home either because they cannot pay their rent or because they are causing disturbances in the neighbourhood. The project also works with people with disabilities.

The project relies upon a link formed between housing companies and social services, whereby housing officers inform social workers of any families who cannot pay their rent. Indeed, in Sweden landlords are required by law to inform social services if tenants face eviction for not paying rent. Under this project, however, social workers are informed before the situation develops this far. They then visit the family in question and discuss how they might address the problems they are facing. One method used is the “motivational interview” which is designed to promote positive change by eliciting and strengthening a person’s own motivation for change.

The social worker acts as an intermediary between the landlord and the tenant to prevent homelessness. A clear example of this is the negotiation of month-long rolling contracts for tenants who need to be given a chance to live in a community in an independent home. Landlords are often less willing to lease properties to clients without a steady income, so this process gives them the opportunity to improve their relationship with the landlords in question.

It is a two-year long project and runs from October 2008-September 2010, funded by the Swedish government and the local authority in Uppsala.

Summary points

The following policy recommendations for improving housing conditions for families are based on the findings and discussions of representatives from our cities:

- Encourage tenants of larger properties to move to smaller homes, so that families with a greater need of a larger home can move;
- Develop complexes of social housing with a wider variety of sizes of homes – this will make it easier for tenants of larger properties to “downsize” as they will not be required to move out of the neighbourhood;
- Show families a “way out” of the cycle of

temporary housing – help families to help themselves, through motivational interviews, tailored support and more flexible services;

- Look for opportunities for early intervention, such as mediating between tenants and landlords before eviction notices are served; and
- Linking housing services with other services in order to help families address the range of causes of homelessness and disadvantage.

This publication is supported by the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (2007-2013.)