

REPURPOSING VACANT SPACES INTO HOMES

COLLECTION OF BEST PRACTICES



Laudes —
— Foundation



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REPURPOSING VACANT SPACES INTO HOMES: BEST PRACTICES

While the **construction sector contributes to approximately 9% of the EU's annual greenhouse gas emissions**, it faces increasing pressure to operate within planetary boundaries. **Simultaneously, the ongoing housing and homelessness crises calls for providing more adequate homes.**

Transitioning towards a more sustainable construction sector involves considering alternatives such as repurposing and reusing existing buildings.

However, a question arises: **to what extent can the existing built stock effectively address unmet housing needs?**

This new series of presentations will showcase **inspiring case studies of transforming vacant spaces into affordable housing solutions** to inspire stakeholders and promote the replication of successful solutions.

These examples highlight:



**IMPACTFUL
PROJECTS**



**RELEVANT
POLICIES**

Ultimately, these insights will be **compiled into a comprehensive report**, demonstrating how **sustainability and housing needs can be addressed together.**

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REPURPOSING VACANT SPACES INTO HOMES: **BEST PRACTICE N°1: ST-MÉDARD**

Where?

St-Médard-en-Jalles

What?

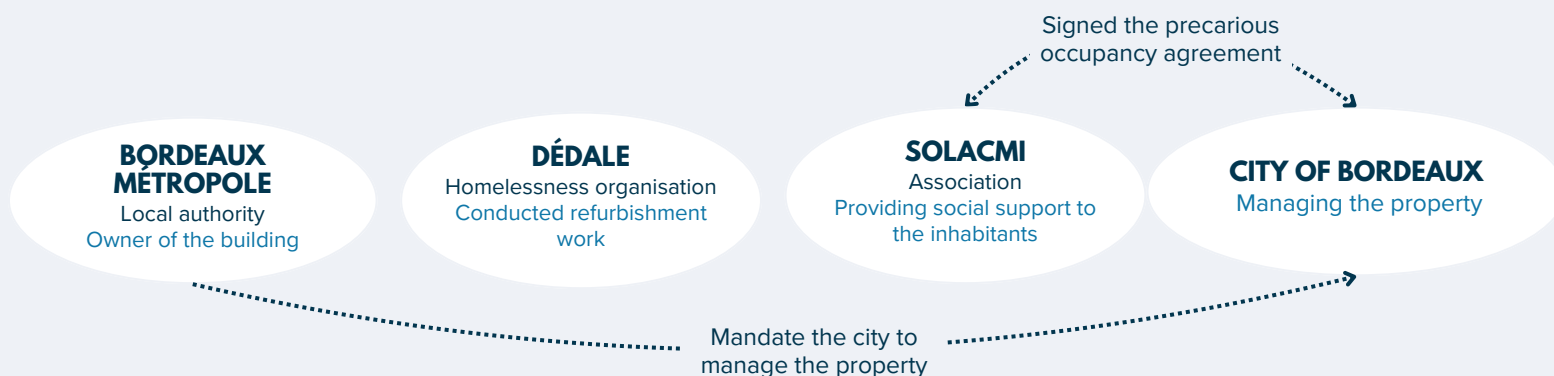
The territory of Gironde is particularly affected by inadequate housing. According to the Fondation pour le Logement des Défavorisés association, 4,850 people do not have access to a proper ‘home’ (and live in squats, emergency shelters or on the street). That probably explains why Gironde is also one of France’s departments with the highest number of squats, with about 1,000 sites on average at the same time.

One of these squats is located in the city of St-Médard-en-Jalles, in a very dilapidated house owned by Bordeaux Métropole (greater Bordeaux area). The association SOLACMI asked Dédale to **secure living conditions in this squat**. Dédale worked several times on the site, as well as on other sites located in the same city, and launched a discussion with the local authorities. Once living conditions were secured, a **legal framework to safeguard the site has been discussed**. Bordeaux Métropole agreed to mandate the city’s authorities to manage the property. The municipality then signed a **precarious occupancy agreement with Solacmi association**.

Fight against homelessness and housing exclusion

As emergency shelter systems are structurally under-sized, the family was living on the street before they sought refuge in this vacant building. The city’s social services supported the family, but did not have any housing solution to provide them. Refurbishing the house allowed to find a solution for a minimum amount of expenses that Dédale could support.

Who?



Outcomes

A couple with a young child, who used to be homeless, has been living in the house since November 2023. Besides, this project helped Bordeaux Métropole keep its property without having to pay for insurance or guarding, while they think about the future of the site.

Key success factor

- The political support from the City's elected officials helped secure the occupancy of the site
- Stakeholders' complementarity (occupation agreement signed by Solacmi, refurbishment work conducted by Dédale).

Challenges and lessons learned

This project required to have a **pragmatic outlook** because the usual reaction from owners of squatted buildings is to automatically initiate an eviction procedure. **The stakeholders needed to consider the benefits/risks ratio, to objectively determine that it was more appropriate for everyone not to evict.**

This project could have had an even greater impact if it had urged Bordeaux Métropole to review and reflect on the management of its vacant properties (in which people live without being entitled to do so).

To learn more about this project:

Morgan Garcia, coordinator
morgan.garcia@dedale33.org
<https://www.dedale33.org>

REPURPOSING VACANT SPACES INTO HOMES: **BEST PRACTICE N°2: REGIONAL VACANT HOUSING SERVICE**

Where?

Brussels Capital Region, Belgium

When?

- **2003:** Adoption of the first Brussels Housing Code

Introduction of the **Right of Public Management** (*Droit de Gestion Publique*) **allowing public real estate operator to take over the management of a vacant dwelling**, renovate it and rent it out for a period of nine years.
- **2009:** Addition of an **administrative fine** for unoccupied housing and the action for injunction
- **2012:** Creation of a special regional unit responsible for monitoring the fine and the right to public management with local authorities

What?

The Brussels Housing Code makes it an **offence** to keep a **dwelling vacant** for **more than 12 consecutive month**

Offenders therefore face an **administrative fine** if they fail to justify the vacancy with legitimate grounds or force majeure, calculated as follows:

€500.00 x length of building's longest façade (in meters)
x number of vacant floors in the building
x number of years the building has been vacant
(from the date of the initial observation)
x index

Fight against homelessness and housing exclusion

This project is aimed at people experiencing housing-related exclusion : those **living in inadequate housing or in unfit housing (ETHOS category 12)**.

In order to make housing affordable for these people, **the regulations stipulate that the rents offered be the same as those offered by social housing agencies when the occupant's income does not exceed the threshold for admission to social housing.**


Outcomes

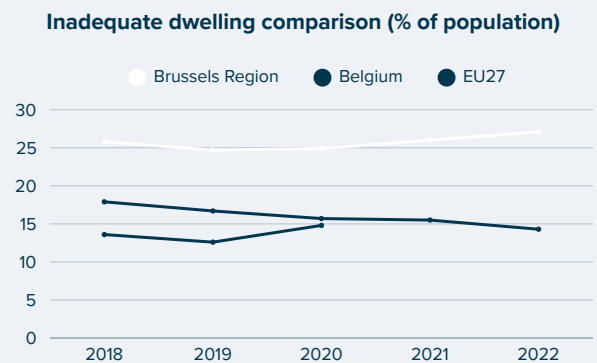
In 2023, **24 addresses** were the subject of a request to visit their owners as part of the right of public management.

12 visits were then carried out.

3 of the buildings visited were the subject of a **proposal to their owners for management** to be taken over (two by local authorities and another by the Region).

For each planned project, the regional support service prepares a visit report, a list of required works, and a cost estimate. This proposal also includes an estimate of the management takeover duration, based on the work costs and expected rental income.

 In 2022, **27,1%** of the population in Brussels Capital Region were living in inadequate housing. From 2019 to 2022, we observe an average growth rate of 3,1.



Source: [Federal Planning Bureau](#)

Stakeholders involved

Brussels Housing regional service was enhanced to cater to vacant housing through their regeneration unit. They offer support to public operators to help them manage identified empty housing.

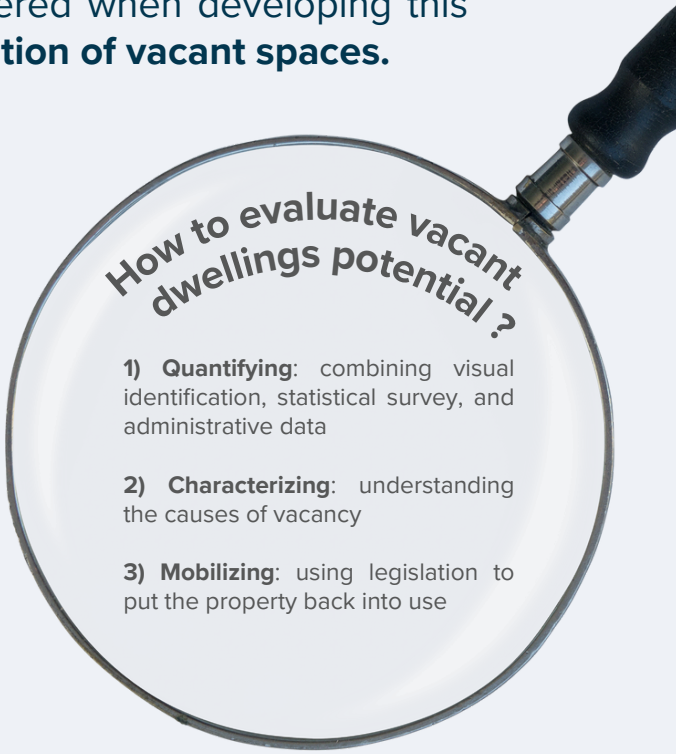
Key success factor

- **Assessment of existing policies and needs** expressed by local authorities to effectively reform the legislation and regulations.
- **Allocation of human resources to implement the policy**

The **main challenge** than can be encountered when developing this kind of projects is in the **accurate identification of vacant spaces**.

To learn more about this policy:

Fabien Champigny, coordinator of the regional service for vacant housing,
fchampigny@sprb.brussels



How to evaluate vacant dwellings potential ?

- 1) **Quantifying:** combining visual identification, statistical survey, and administrative data
- 2) **Characterizing:** understanding the causes of vacancy
- 3) **Mobilizing:** using legislation to put the property back into use

REPURPOSING VACANT SPACES INTO HOMES: **BEST PRACTICE N°3: LIVE AND WORK**

Where?

West Lothian, Scotland

What?

The Live and Work project was **launched in April 2023** by **Rock Trust** in partnership with Almond Housing Association, the Hugh Fraser Foundation and other funders

This project involved **transforming a derelict care home** into **two shared flats**, with **individual rooms** and **communal spaces** for **7 young people**, as well as an **on-site office for the project's staff team**.

Who?



Outcomes

One year into the project, **12** young people were housed. They were aged from 16 to 23.

72% were already employed but reported two or more barriers to sustain employment.

28% entered the project as unemployed, citing difficulties in finding work or education due to their living situations

The tailored support helped ensure that **100%** of the young people involved in the project were employed, in education or undergoing training for over half of their time in occupancy.

18% secured permanent employment, moving on from the 0-hour contracts they were on prior to support.

One young person has put a deposit down for a mortgage and has moved into her own flat.

Fight against homelessness and housing exclusion

West Lothian presents a **high rate of youth homelessness**, for reference, **25% of young people aged between 16-25 applied for homelessness support** compared to 22% nationally. This growing national crisis means that large numbers of young people experiencing homelessness are forced to stay in unsuitable accommodation for far too long.

The tenants for Live & Work are identified and referred by West Lothian Council, West Lothian College, 3rd sector organisations and local employers. The Live & Work team then provide trauma-informed and person-centered support, helping each young person to grow their independent living skills and pursue or maintain employment or educational goals.

Key success factor

➤ Affordable & high-quality housing

The Live & Work model provides high quality and affordable housing. Our rent is low, so it makes it a lot easier for young people to pursue a career or education of their choice, whilst being able to cover housing and other living costs.

➤ The right support at the right time

The Live & Work team provide tailored support which is trauma-informed and person-centered. They work with each young person individually, supporting them to live independently and maintain their tenancy, and pursue or maintain employment or educational opportunities.



"(Live and Work) is my first place to rest my head, my own bed and a shower with warmth and consistency, after being homeless for periods of time."

Alice, 19

Challenges and lessons learned

The main challenge encountered was the limited time allocated to thoroughly introduce the project to the tenants before they move in. This time is crucial to ensure that they understand the expectations when joining the project and facilitate their installation.

It was a million times better than living in homeless hotels which cost an absolute fortune. I was made homeless through no fault of my own and I felt I was being penalised. I was so relieved to get into the Live and Work program because it took the pressure of me financially."

James, 20

To learn more about this project:

Lara Balkwill, Policy and Public Affairs Officer
lara.balkwill@rocktrust.org

What?

Direct social reuse of assets is the process whereby the authorities **provide confiscated assets for public use** whereas **indirect social reuse** is when the proceeds of a crime are **distributed through special funds** to compensate victims.

The disposal of confiscated physical assets can go two ways: either through its sale, destruction or reuse. **The reuse of confiscated assets for social purposes concerns a few of European countries. In the case of real estate assets, they can comprise land and/or properties.**

Outcomes

Italy was the first country to put in application this policy in 1996. A national agency “Agenzia nazionale per l'amministrazione e la destinazione dei beni sequestrati e confiscati alla criminalità organizzata (ANBSC)” was then established in 2010.

In France, a law was voted in 2022 to reuse confiscated properties at reasonable prices for social purposes (i.e housing, social community center...). Despite pressure from the Finance ministry to make the seized properties available to auction, the National Assembly voted to broaden the **attribution of properties to cooperatives and social housing organisation.**

Multiple organisations took upon themselves the objective to create individual housing units such as Habitat et Humanisme (FR), Le Nid (FR) or Homes4All (IT)

Crim' Halt is one of the European organisations **actively advocating for the social reuse of confiscated assets**. The organisation managed to secure Erasmus+ fundings to **bring together professionals from the social housing sector to understand how to create housing in confiscated properties through study visits in Italy**.

One of the key takeaways from those study visits is that **working in synergy with social services and housing sector can help create housing solutions in the spirit of Housing First**.

Challenges encountered

There is **no European lobbying on this topic** and there is not a lot of MEPs that are sensitized to at this point, but, some links can be made through:

- **DG Justice Commission**
- **European directives**, the main issue being that they aren't restrictive enough, reusing the seized properties for social use is only a recommendation so there is no obligation to implement it.

To learn more about this policy:

Libera, The Social Re-use of Confiscated Assets in Europe a First Mapping, 2021
Center for Study of Democracy, Disposal of Confiscated Assets in the EU Member States – Laws and Practices, 2014

REPURPOSING VACANT SPACES INTO HOMES: BEST PRACTICE N°5 : EMIL



Where?

Anderlecht, Belgium

What?

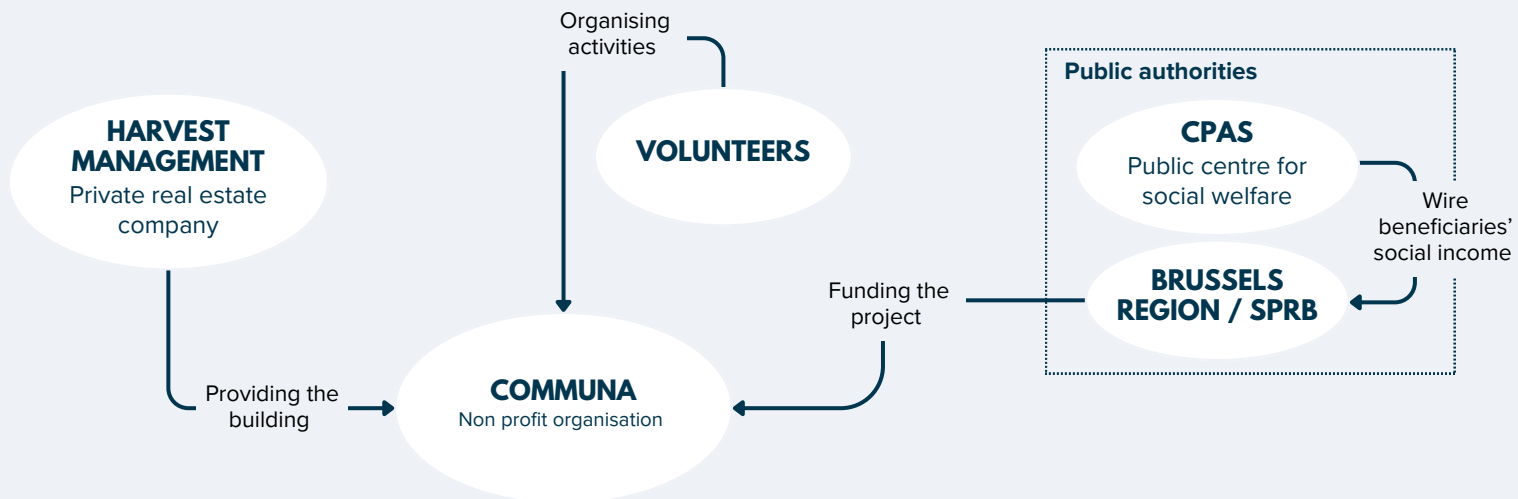
Under "Brussels Helps Ukraine" program, fundings were used to accommodate Ukrainian refugees in an empty building that used to be the head office of Delhaize, a multinational retail company.

In April 2022, the empty offices are identified by companies located in the same vicinity. They were then used to accommodate about 50 persons.

Further renovation works made possible the transformation of:

- small desk offices into bedrooms, increasing the capacity of the centre to 180 persons,
- business canteens into shower rooms
- and of open spaces into community shared kitchens.

Who?



Fight against homelessness and housing exclusion

People arrive from Ukraine, where they fled the war and present themselves to the Foreign Office. They are then dispatched to the refugee centre that suits best their condition by Bruss'help (public authority serving the Brussels Region for people experiencing homelessness).



“ Beyond offering immediate accommodation solutions to people fleeing the war in Ukraine, the objective of this project is to profile structural responses for providing accommodation of everyone experiencing unfit living conditions in Brussels (homeless people, undocumented migrants, asylum seekers...)

- Emil project presentation on Communa website

Outcomes

74 bedrooms were created, accommodating 1 to 6 people each.

Over time, tenants have improved their French language skills, which is crucial for job opportunities and integration into Belgian society. This progress results from a concerted two-year effort.

Key success factor

- **Linked with the local environment:** involving a wide array of stakeholders from public authority to social services or even local schools, mutual insurance company, banks and supermarkets. Volunteers contribute by offering French lessons, sports classes, craft workshops, and psychological support.
- **Semi-autonomous organisation:** the community actively participates in the centre's management, including cleaning, reporting issues, organizing events, and suggesting improvements, which fosters a **sense of responsibility** and **self-management among residents**.

Challenges encountered

The project faces several challenges, including limited funding. This restricts the team size and prevents additional support services, leading to potential burnout for the staff.

The saturated social rental market further complicates the process of finding affordable housing to enable refugees to move out of the accommodation centre.

To learn more about this project

[Email project presentation \(in French\)](#)

Where?

Karlsruhe, Germany

What?

The project starts with the **acquisition of the right to occupancy of empty dwellings from public or private owners**. If necessary, **renovation work** is carried out with the **costs covered by the city of Karlsruhe**.

In return, **owners agree to rent the renovated apartments to socially disadvantaged people** for ten years at a rent aligned with the "Hartz IV level".

The local authority makes an agreement with the dwelling owners to initially house homeless persons for one year. During this year, admitted persons receive social work support. If no issues arise, they are given their own tenancy agreement.

The acquisition of housing saves the city a "considerable amount," said Steffen Schäfer, head of the housing acquisition department.

”

Fight against homelessness and housing exclusion

The project was initiated to address the housing needs of socially disadvantaged people by acquiring and renovating vacant apartments, thereby providing affordable housing options and reducing city costs for temporary shelter solutions.

Key success factor

- Strong cooperation between property owners, the city, and renovation teams
- Employment opportunities for socially disadvantaged individuals in renovation work
- Significant cost savings for the city in comparison to temporary shelter solutions

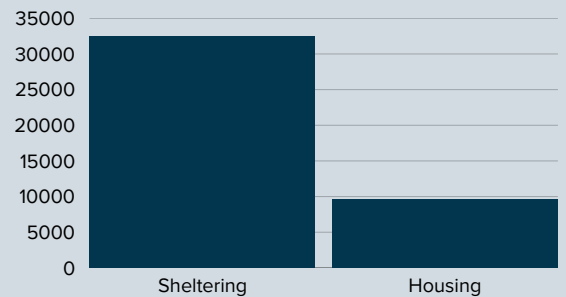
Outcomes

Since the start in 2005 until May 2024,

1338 apartments have been acquired

3211 people have been provided with housing.

Costs comparison between sheltering and housing a family of four people in 2022 (per year)



After acquiring the empty Paracelsus Clinic that had filled for bankruptcy, Immoba, a real estate company decided to cooperate with the housing acquisition department of the city of Karlsruhe.

Therefore 100 residential units were created for the “Haus Turmbergblick” project, housing people with lower income or on welfare benefits. Among them, some had experienced homelessness.



The “Haus Turmbergblick”

Source: [Durlacher](#)

REPURPOSING VACANT SPACES INTO HOMES: **BEST PRACTICE N°7 : A TEMPORARY ROOF**

Where?

Amsterdam and surroundings, The Netherlands

What?

“A Temporary Roof” is a project temporarily houses homeless people in units slated for renovation or demolition. The aim is to provide a safe and secure place to stay for the duration of a year preventing the worsening of homelessness and giving residents time to find a more permanent solution.

Fight against homelessness and housing exclusion

The project offers **a secure, temporary residence for up to a year**, which helps to avert the escalation of homelessness and related issues such as job loss and family disruption. The project ensures affordability with a **capped rent of €450 per month**, which remains **accessible for those receiving social assistance**.

This approach addresses the immediate need for shelter and mitigates the long-term effects of housing instability, but, **a permanent housing solution is always required**.

Who?



Outcomes

From the beginning of the project until the end of 2023, **around 130 people were applying monthly.**

462 people were housed.

66% of them found a more sustainable housing solution during or after their temporary stay.

Key success factor

- A successful collaboration between a coalition of social housing organizations, the city of Amsterdam, and De Regenboog Groep
- Strong established network within local welfare organizations, ensuring the project's visibility and effective targeting of individuals in need.
- Provision of personal assistance to prevent worsening of homelessness and ongoing support to help tenants transition to more permanent housing solutions

Challenges encountered

- Some tenants had issues beyond homelessness, such as severe mental health problems that made it challenging for them to share apartments and adhere to agreements, leading to unsafe situations. To address this, a professional intake process by a social worker was introduced.
- The finding of suitable tenants and ensuring all administrative details were in order took time, occasionally leading to unoccupied apartments and lost rent.
- Diminution of renovation and demolition activities, due to factors such as rising costs, resulted in fewer available apartments.

To learn more about this project:

Tamara Kuschel
Temporary housing project manager
tkuschel@deregenboog.org

REPURPOSING VACANT SPACES INTO HOMES: **BEST PRACTICE N°8 : FROM HUTS TO HOMES**

Where?

Budapest, Hungary

Why?

In Budapest, approximately 16% of housing units were uninhabited in 2022. Many publicly owned flats, primarily managed by municipalities, cannot be rented due to poor conditions, and municipalities lack the necessary funds for renovations.

This creates a paradox where the social housing sector fails to meet demand despite having many empty publicly owned flats.

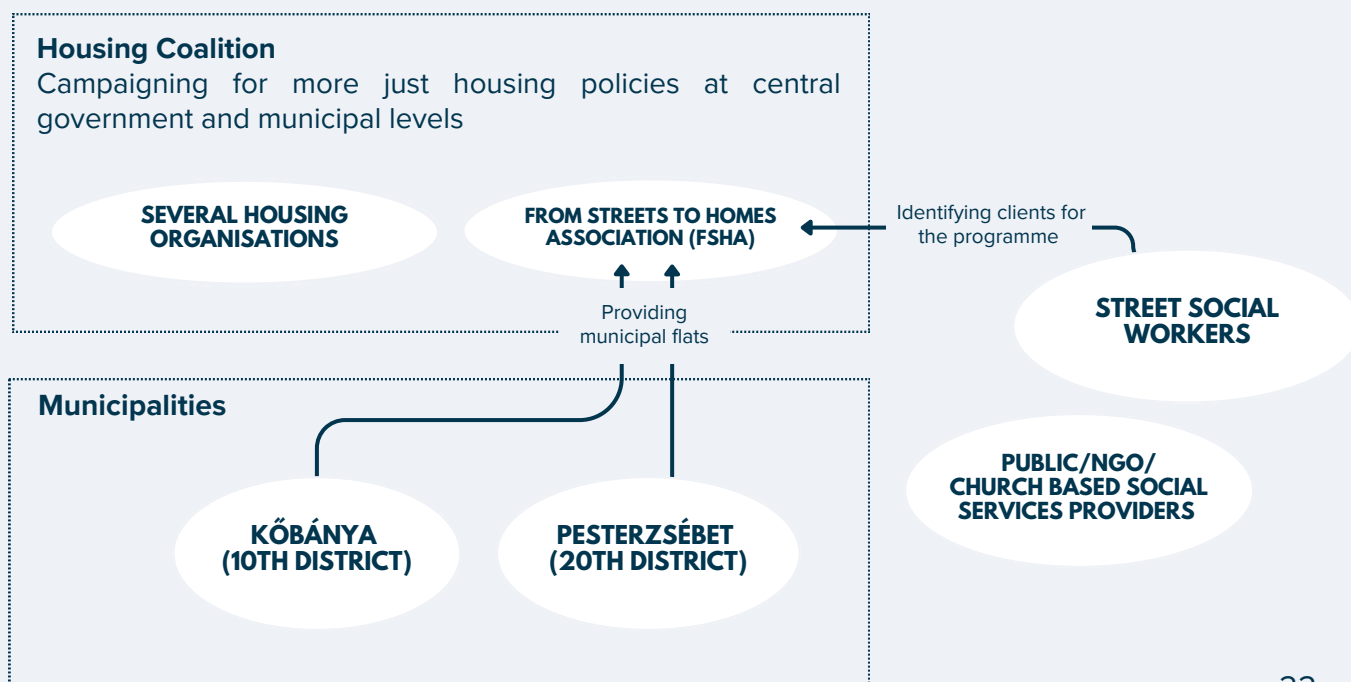
What?

In this context, the program aims to achieve two main goals:

helping homeless people escape homelessness and serving as a model for other NGOs and municipalities to start their own housing programs.

From Huts to Homes project is about **renovating empty run down municipality-owned apartments with the help of volunteers.**

Who?



Fight against homelessness and housing exclusion

"From Huts to Homes" helps homeless individuals transition to housing using the 'Housing First' model.

Each tenant receives personalized social work support, including help with job integration and administrative tasks.

Outcomes

Small housing units were created for couples or small families. Each containing a living room, kitchen and bathroom. These pre-WW1 working-class dwellings are **renovated to modern standards**, including built-in bathrooms and energy-efficient upgrades like new doors, windows, and appliances.

FSHA currently manages 63 flats including 28 for the From Huts to Homes programme and the remaining ones for the social housing agency.

Key success factor

- **Correct implementation of Housing First.**
- **Integrated services for clients and intensive social work** with individual case management provided as long as needed, often until the end of their lives;
- **Dedicated and professional staff** that are trauma-informed and treat clients as partners, avoiding hierarchical relationships.
- **Strong and predictable cooperation with municipalities.**





Challenges encountered

- FSHA **constantly needs additional funding** to support clients, especially during high inflation when financial help is crucial for affording essentials.
- Often, the apartments received are in poor condition, **requiring extensive and costly renovations** due to structural issues such as water damage and mold in buildings that are 50-100+ years old.
- Finding cooperative municipalities is challenging, as many are influenced by social prejudices against the homeless, driven by political propaganda and fake news. Despite these obstacles, FSHA maintains a strong partnership with Budapest's 10th district. However, there is a lack of understanding of the Housing First method, and the institutional service system, combined with political reasons, prevents FSHA from receiving state funding.

To learn more about this project:

Iván Merker, Fundraiser,
merker.ivan@utcarollakasba.hu

REPURPOSING VACANT SPACES INTO HOMES:
BEST PRACTICE N°9 : GRAND PARADE DEVELOPMENT

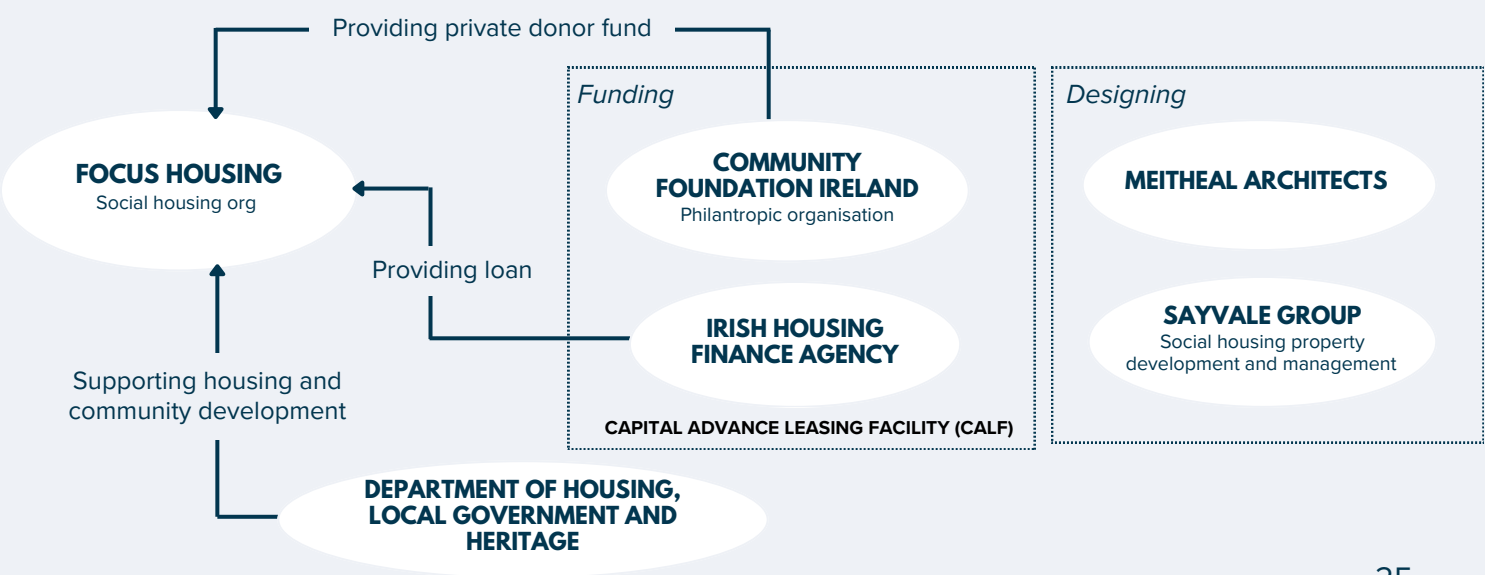
Where?
40-42 Grand Parade, Cork City, Ireland

What?
Prior to regeneration, Grand Parade building was a commercial building. It remained disused and vacant for many years before being transformed into **16 housing units**. Focus Ireland's office was implemented on the ground floor and offers tenants any support and guidance required.

Fight against homelessness and housing exclusion
The Cork City Council Housing Allocations Section manages housing provision for those eligible for social housing support. Eligible applicants are placed on the Council’s housing list based on their qualification date and priority status.

Focus Ireland's housing and service personnel worked closely with the Cork Local Authority throughout the allocation process.

Who?



Outcomes

Since October 2022, the Grand Parade development has housed 16 households.

Thanks to Focus Ireland's Meascan Model of intentional social mix, the project includes a wide array of households: young people leaving care, Housing First residents who experienced homelessness, older individuals, couples, single persons, and a small family, some with support needs and some without.

Key success factor

- All units are meeting standards for energy efficiency (part L thermal performances^[1])
- The development successfully houses a mix of tenants with diverse needs.
- The implementation of Focus Ireland's support hub on the ground floor made the project suitable for integrating vulnerable residents, enabling them to better settle into their new homes, knowing that support is close by if any issues arise.
- The central location maximizes residents' access to amenities and transportation, fundamentally improving their lives.



Challenges encountered and lessons learned

The main challenge was technical: adapting the historic building for universal accessibility while retaining its character.

Lessons learned in fire safety design, accessibility standards certification, waste management, passive surveillance, and acoustic attenuation can be applied to similar projects elsewhere providing the organisation with hands-on experience on the repurpose of empty spaces.

[1] UK GOVERNMENT "APPROVED DOCUMENT L: CONSERVATION OF FUEL AND POWER"

REPURPOSING VACANT SPACES INTO HOMES: **BEST PRACTICE N°10 : ZÉRO LOGEMENT VACANT**

Where?

France

What?

Launched in 2020, the **National Plan Against Vacant Housing** aims to address the issue of 1.1 million vacant homes in France. One of the **significant national concerns** is that with the **implementation of the revised thermal reglementation (RE 2020)**, **many energy-inefficient homes might become vacant** as they would lose their possibility of being rented out.

An **online “Zéro Logement Vacant” tool** has been designed to support territories (local authorities and state services/operators) in identifying and addressing vacant housing. It integrates **data from a national database of empty units based on owners’ fiscal declarations (LOVAC)** and includes energy efficiency labels (DPE) when available.

It features :

- **Identification and geographical mapping of vacancy:** Helps identify housing that has been vacant for over 2 years, complemented by DPE labels.
- **Operational facilitation:** Aids in preparing contact letters with guides and documentation based on behavioral sciences.
- **Housing “identity card”:** Authorities and operators using the tool can provide **detailed information on each property**, including follow-up status, blockages on the file, and reasons for vacancy. They can also add new vacant properties to the platform that they identified themselves through on-site inspections and proceed to the contact phase.

Fight against homelessness and housing exclusion

The "Zéro Logement Vacant" tool addresses housing exclusion and homelessness by helping **improving access to housing and tackling energy inefficiency**. With over one million vacant properties, it aims to bring these units back into use, providing a partial solution to the housing crisis.

Outcomes

Among the **886 structures that have created accounts**, 35.6% pertains to municipalities and 35.4% groupings of municipalities.

At a national level, **38% of inter-municipal cooperation entities (EPCI), 15% of municipalities, 73% of local authorities dealing with housing policies at a subregional level (DDT/DDTM), and 90% of metropolitan areas are covered.**

“Vacancy is a complex and multifactorial issue with many underlying causes, from legal constraints to financial challenges. Each property may have its own unique reasons for remaining vacant, so a one-size-fits-all approach simply won't work.”

– Édouard Duhamel, project officer in charge of deploying the Zéro Logement Vacant tool

Key success factor

➤ **Effective use of available data** has been key in making vacancy data more actionable. By ensuring that this information is accessible and can be exploited for planning and decision-making, authorities can target vacant properties more effectively.

➤ **The success of the initiative is also driven by ongoing communication and collaboration.** Regular monthly meetings allow stakeholders, including local authorities, to share experiences, strategies, and challenges;

Challenges encountered and lessons learned

Many local authorities face challenges in effectively managing vacant properties due to a lack of specialized knowledge and resources. Without the necessary skills, these authorities struggle to develop and implement strategies for tracking, managing, and repurposing vacant spaces.

In many cases, vacant housing is not considered a priority within political agendas. The absence of financial incentives or clear policies to reduce vacancy means that local governments may not focus enough on addressing the issue.

The quality and accuracy of data regarding vacant properties is also a major hurdle. **Incorrect vacancy declarations can skew statistics**, while tax data is only updated annually, leaving gaps in the real-time information needed to implement solutions.

In 2024, significant changes to the reporting of property occupancy will come into play with the introduction of “Gérer mes biens immobiliers” (GMBI), requiring property owners to declare occupancy directly on taxes filling website. This new mechanism is expected to lead to more accurate vacancy reporting by providing real-time occupancy data, in contrast to the historical data used by INSEE, which can vary from one to five years.

To learn more about this tool:

<https://zerologementvacant.beta.gouv.fr/>

<https://zerologementvacant.crisp.help/fr/>

Where?

Manresa (Barcelona), Catalonia, Spain

What?

The "Llar Sant Joan de Déu Manresa" project involves **adapting a former convent into temporary housing for refugees and individuals in need, along with providing social shower and laundry services.** The Brothers Hospitallers of Saint John of God entrusted the management of the former convent to the Brother Tomàs Canet Foundation. The building was previously used by the Sisters of the Poor to care for the elderly. Due to the advanced age of the sisters and economic issues, the building fell into disuse and parts had to be closed to cut costs.

The adaptation project includes **establishing a separate entrance for the shower service, renovating rooms to accommodate families with children, improving accessibility** for people with reduced mobility, and an adaption of the building to a residential care model focused on **promoting autonomy and skills for independent living.**

Who?

Brothers Hospitallers of Saint John of God

Brother Tomàs Canet Foundation (FGTC)

Department of Social Rights of the Government of Catalonia Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration of Spain

Private entities and donors

Local NGOs and social services (e.g., Càritas Manresa, Red Cross Manresa)

Volunteers

Outcomes

From the existing building, **13 housing units and 54 dormitory rooms were created**. Renovations transformed convent rooms into **family-sized accommodations** and **enhanced accessibility**.

Communal spaces were also created such as kitchens, self-service laundry facilities, classrooms, auditoriums or even hair salon.

Key success factor

➤ **Effective collaboration with social entities and public organizations to identify needs and share resources.**

➤ **Providing residential, social, inclusion, and support services** to address both **housing and social needs**.

➤ Adapting to a **residential care model** that focuses on **promoting autonomy and social integration**.

➤ Offering **accessible showers and laundry services without the need for referral**.

Challenges encountered and lessons learned

Securing funds for the construction phase remains a constant challenge, as these expenses often **cannot be covered by public financing and are limited in private grants**.

Once the project becomes operational, **ongoing support from both public and private funding sources is essential to ensure the continued provision of free services**.

Throughout the entire project, maintaining **effective partnerships and clear communication with various stakeholders** is crucial for overall success.

To learn more about this project:

<https://fundaciogermatomascanet.com/>

REPURPOSING VACANT SPACES INTO HOMES:

BEST PRACTICE N°12 : VACANT UNITS MANAGEMENT THROUGH A SOCIAL RENTAL AGENCY / PILOT SOCIAL HOUSING PROGRAMME FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS (RRF)

Where?

Thessaloniki, Greece

What?

Greece faces a **high vacancy rate in properties alongside high property prices, indicating a market failure in self-regulation**. In Thessaloniki this project aims to address these issues by **repurposing properties owned by public institutions and the wider public sector to provide longterm housing solutions**. Run by the Major Development Agency Thessaloniki with the Municipality of Thessaloniki, the pilot project is **expected to be completed by 2025**.

The goal is to **establish a framework** within public agencies to utilize underused spaces, **standardize legal and institutional procedures**, and **address the pressing need for affordable housing** and to **create a publicly owned social rental sector**, currently non-existent in Greece.

In **Athens**, a parallel initiative is underway in the framework of the same Pilot Programme **to target individual private owners by providing them with funds for necessary repairs to make vacant properties usable again**. Many owners lack the financial and administrative resources to renovate their properties. By offering a renovation grant this initiative aims to persuade owners to rent out their properties, even at reduced rates.

Fight against homelessness and housing exclusion

The project in Thessaloniki focuses on combatting housing exclusion by transforming public vacant properties into affordable housing units. **By engaging public and semi-public property owners, the initiative seeks to create a sustainable model for providing low-cost rental housing**.

The challenge lies in identifying potential beneficiaries, as Greece lacks a social housing market and therefore has no waiting lists. A social scoring matrix will be introduced in mid-2025 to match beneficiaries with properties, considering factors such as family size and location preferred. This process will be managed by a committee comprising the municipality, the Ministry of Family and Social Cohesion, and the Major Development Agency Thessaloniki.

Who?

- Major Development Agency Thessaloniki: main stakeholder, identifying properties, undertaking renovation and re-purposing and facilitating communication between owners and potential tenants
- Different types of owners:
 - 4 municipalities: including one rural that owned properties in Thessaloniki
 - Foundations: 2 public benefit foundations and 1 municipal foundation
 - Cultural institution: The Modern Art Museum that owns empty properties in Thessaloniki with 2 properties
- Public agencies: Working with multiple public and semi-public entities to facilitate the project's implementation through the Resilience and Recovery Fund.
- Technical team: The use of the RRF mandated that the selection of the organization managing the renovations be conducted through an international public tender.

Outcomes

The projected outcomes for this project include the introduction of **30 affordable rental units by 2026** with the **prospect to increase the number to 60**, priced **below market rates**, and an enhanced understanding and strategic use of vacant spaces for housing solutions. Additionally, the project aims to **develop a sustainable social housing model** through public-private partnerships and **shape housing policies and practices at both local and national levels**.

Key success factor

- **Strong backing from political and municipal leaders.**
- **Building trust and cooperation** with property owners and stakeholders.
- **Comprehensive data collection and transparency on property ownership to identify suitable properties.**
- Developing, within the public sector, **systems for transfer of rights of use and mechanisms of management and delivery of social housing properties.**

Challenges encountered and lessons learned

The project encountered challenges, including **difficulties in obtaining reliable property ownership data, reluctance from property owners due to financial concerns**, the gap between **high property prices and affordable housing needs**, and the **absence of a national strategy and regulatory framework to support social and affordable housing**.

From these challenges, key lessons emerged: continuous political and municipal support is crucial for success, stable institutional and financial frameworks are essential for sustainability, and a supportive regulatory environment with secured investments is needed to develop a robust social housing sector that meets population needs.

To learn more about this project:

The programme and housing initiatives at the city level in Thessaloniki: housing-thessaloniki.gr

For a comprehensive baseline study on social and affordable housing in Thessaloniki: http://housing-thessaloniki.gr/static/pdf/Affordable%20Housing_Full%20Report_ENG.pdf

For more information on the implementation of the pilot programme in Athens: <https://www.athenskatoikia.gr>

REPURPOSING VACANT SPACES INTO HOMES: **BEST PRACTICE N°13 : EMPTY SPACES TO HOMES**

Where?

United Kingdom (London Borough of Barking and Dagenham) and
Poland (City of Dąbrowa Górnicza)

What?

United Kingdom: The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (LBBD) owned a derelict interwar shopping parades with flats above, left unused. This space was identified for transformation to **support young care leavers under Children's Services**. The project involved converting the commercial properties into a **multi-occupancy residential unit**. The transformation included creating new bedrooms, en-suite bathrooms, and communal areas.

Poland: The City of Dąbrowa Górnicza had **19 uninhabited flats in the municipality's public housing stock, requiring general renovations**. These flats were targeted **for families and individuals at risk of homelessness**. The project focused on **upgrading the heating, electricity, water installations, plastering, window and door replacements, and new bathrooms**. The renovated flats were **managed by a Social Rental Agency (SRA)** under Habitat Poland, providing improved living conditions for vulnerable families and individuals

Who?

United Kingdom:

- London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (LBBD)
- Habitat for Humanity Great Britain (HFHGB)
- Philanthropic contributors and corporate partners
- REACH Programme (Educational and vocational training)

Poland:

- City of Dąbrowa Górnicza
- Habitat for Humanity Poland
- National Development Bank of Poland
- Local NGOs
- Social Rental Agency (SRA)

Fight against homelessness and housing exclusion

The project tackles housing exclusion by providing stable housing for vulnerable groups, such as care leavers in the UK and at-risk families in Poland, using vacant properties for affordable housing, and **partnering with local authorities to offer support services alongside housing provision.**

Outcomes

United Kingdom

- Conversion of commercial properties into a **shared residential unit for 4 young care leavers.**
- Access to **education and vocational training.**

Poland:

- **Renovation of 19 uninhabited flats** in different buildings.
- Provision of **improved living conditions** for families with multiple children, families with disabled members, individuals at risk of homelessness, and refugees.

Key success factor

United Kingdom

- Prior research on local authority-owned empty spaces ensured a **match between existing resource and targeting critical housing needs.**
- Collaboration with LBBD and community stakeholders ensured a cohesive approach to addressing the housing needs of young care leavers, combining **resources and expertise from multiple sectors.**
- HFHGB's experience ensured **high-quality renovations** to provide safe, and suitable housing for the beneficiaries.
- Strong financial backing from voluntary and philanthropic contributions was crucial in covering costs and ensuring the sustainability of the initiative.
- Comprehensive support including **job assistance, legal and social counseling, and vocational training were provided**

Poland:

- **Advocacy efforts have led to legislative changes in Poland that support the development of SRA model across the country**
- The initiative has positively impacted local authorities' ability to **secure funding for opening SRAs** and utilizing this model for effective empty spaces renovations to affordable housing.
- Successful advocacy has also enabled SRAs to **access funding from the National Development Bank of Poland** for renovating vacant premises.

Challenges encountered and lessons learned

	Challenges encountered	Lessons learned
United Kingdom	Unsustainable funding: Relying on voluntary income and philanthropic support is not sustainable for scaling the project. Diverse and stable financing modalities are needed.	Diversify funding sources: Seek long-term grants, public-private partnerships, and social impact investments.
	Cost perception of retrofit: Retrofitting is often viewed as more expensive than new builds, despite significant carbon savings. This perception challenges funding and policy support.	Advocate for retrofit benefits by engaging policymakers to highlight long-term economic and environmental advantages beyond initial costs.
Poland	Despite the existence of the statutory SRA model, there is still a need for stronger and permanently available support mechanisms for municipalities implementing the model and for the operators of SRAs themselves. Currently, approximately EUR 24 million has been allocated from the European Social Fund to support around 10 - 15 SRAs, however, this is a one-off competition.	
	Educating and consulting NGOs and municipalities on the introduction and running of SRAs. Habitat Poland is providing such a support for municipalities from 2023.	

To learn more about these projects:

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