

**Building Solid Ground  
for a transformative DEAR program:**

**Lessons learned from European  
engagement on critical urban issues**

**Policy Discussion Brief**

**by Habitat for Humanity International**



This project is funded by  
the European Union

## **Author**

Andreia Oliveira, International development consultant

## **HFHI Editorial Board**

Alexandra Molnarova, Consortium Project Officer, Build Solid Ground, HFHI/EMEA

Alzbeta Kerekes, Volunteer Programs Specialist, HFHI/EMEA

Anne Shaffer Myers, Senior Director, Advocacy Campaigns, HFHI

Danica Dubrava Viznerova, Grants Portfolio Manager, HFHI/EMEA

Dina Hashem, Associate Director, Foundations Organizations and Institutions, HFHI

Gyorgy Sumeghy, Associate Director, Policy and Advocacy, HFHI/EMEA

Katerina Bezgachina, Communications Director, HFHI/EMEA

Rhoda Goremuचेche, Project MEAL Specialist, HFHI/EMEA

Zuzana Matusova, Development Specialist, Foundations, Organizations, Institutions, HFHI

**March 2021**

## Contents

1.	Introduction.....	4
2.	What DEAR is about.....	4
	2.1. Contributing to change.....	4
	2.2. Global areas of focus and synergies.....	5
3.	How DEAR can be transformative.....	7
	3.1. Engaging with multi-stakeholders.....	7
	3.2. The needed coordination for mutual learning.....	8
4.	A more efficient DEAR.....	9
	4.1. The need for adequate funding.....	9
	4.2. More robust assessment systems.....	9
	4.3. An efficient administrative model.....	9

## 1. Introduction

By 2050, the world's urban population is expected to double, making urbanization one of the most transformative trends of the 21st century. If managed well, cities can be a powerful tool for economic and inclusive development. 14 partners from seven European countries came together under the DEAR project '[Build Solid Ground](#)' (BSG) to educate and motivate Europeans for action targeting critical urban issues, such as land rights, gender equality, urbanization and slum upgrading. The project has delivered a wide range of outputs and led to remarkably high results for reach and impressions on awareness-raising, advocacy and volunteering work.

Lessons learned from this three-year 'Development Education and Awareness Raising' (DEAR) initiative inform the recommendations outlined in this paper.

## 2. What DEAR is about

### 2.1. Contributing to change

DEAR is the EU's flagship program to increase knowledge, competencies and engagement of European citizens on global development issues. By targeting these two components of 'learning' and 'doing', the DEAR program can be a transformative tool to ensure European citizens both understand their role as contributors to sustainable development and act upon it. Because education systems rarely integrate such transformative approaches, the DEAR program should remain a flagship initiative under the new EU multiannual budget.

Because we live in an interdependent world, it is important to advance the understanding of and invest in both global citizenship education and education for sustainable development, as mutually reinforcing approaches. This new DEAR generation should thus avoid being about awareness of development cooperation efforts, but rather increase competencies and trigger action for a peaceful and sustainable world<sup>1</sup>.

Housing poverty is a global development challenge that exists both in Europe and globally, with millions of people at risk of eviction or with their right of access to essential services hampered by lack of proof of residency. This is a reality that affects different regions, and it would be key to explore it from different angles. Addressing critical urban issues is a great example that can be served by both global citizenship education and education for sustainable development.

People everywhere can play an active role to advance sustainable development. The DEAR program must aim at triggering critical and strategic thinking for problem-

---

<sup>1</sup> Global citizenship education strives for a peaceful world, while education for sustainable development is focused on sustainability.

solving. For this reason, it would be important to ensure that the new DEAR links education with campaigning and advocacy. For example, this new DEAR generation could support the piloting of initiatives strengthening the links between formal and informal educational settings. Projects would encourage action through the systematic promotion of opportunities for involvement on the issue at hand, for example, through the inclusion of calls to action. By ensuring this two-folded approach, DEAR projects could always contribute to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicator 4.7.1<sup>2</sup> and to the advancement of the SDGs overall.

Equally, all citizens have co-responsibilities to advance the implementation of the New Urban Agenda (NUA), an international commitment to be intertwined with the 2030 Agenda, as reinstated by the EU Consensus on Development (2017). As it can be read in paragraph 10, *'The New Urban Agenda acknowledges that culture and cultural diversity are sources of enrichment for humankind and provide an important contribution to the sustainable development of cities, human settlements and citizens, empowering them to play an active and unique role in development initiatives'*. Together with the SDGs, the NUA offers a collective blueprint for policy makers, donors and citizens alike and outlines the broad contours for sustainable urban development for decades to come. Explaining why housing poverty is a challenge is a first step for this participative process. The DEAR program should seek to have a more action-oriented approach to ensure ownership for pursuing and applying solutions. This could potentially imply favoring quality of actions over quantity of numbers. The BSG project showed increased appetite for engagement in volunteering opportunities, following educational sessions. Although this mobilization was halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it provides a good example of how 'learning' could lead to 'doing'.

## 2.2. Global areas of focus and synergies

The alignment of the new DEAR program with the identified priorities for EU International Partnerships is welcome, as it would ensure consistency for the EU approach. These include the Green Deal, Digitalization, Growth and Jobs, Migration, as well as Governance, Peace and Security and Human Development. The housing sector and urban renewal can both contribute to and benefit from investments in all these key areas.

Access to adequate housing is an imperative for human development and to forge a path out of poverty. Being a pre-condition for better educational, health and livelihoods outcomes, an adequate home can have transformational impact on individuals and communities and mitigate inequalities. Investments in innovative, sustainable and adequate housing can contribute to an effective green transition, responsible consumption and production, while promoting a circular economy.

---

<sup>2</sup> 4.7.1: Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development, including gender equality and human rights, are mainstreamed at all levels in: (a) national education policies, (b) curricula, (c) teacher education and (d) student assessment.

Habitat for Humanity International's Terwilliger Center for Innovation in Shelter has proved that such approaches can be successful. The digitalization of land information management systems can also ensure efficient and accountable service delivery. Moreover, the job creation and economic growth potential brought in by the housing sector is immense; in fact, this has the potential to become a cornerstone of recovery in the post-pandemic efforts<sup>3</sup>. Access to adequate housing can also be a pivotal component to improve public responsibility, strengthen institutions and update management systems that contribute to human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Finally, the absence of adequate and affordable housing, including quality basic services and land tenure security, may turn into root causes of migration.

But for the DEAR program to be truly transformative, it should also safeguard flexibility. Policy coherence for sustainable development, development effectiveness and human rights-based approaches should remain the priority and not so much the topic itself. To cement the program in those five EU priorities could put at risk the desired critical thinking and citizen engagement on global issues, making the DEAR program a flagship for awareness raising only.

Flexibility should be ensured both in terms of themes and actions. As above-mentioned, education, campaigning and advocacy should be kept as workstreams. These should not always be necessarily combined, as smaller projects could focus only in one. But DEAR could also support the piloting of some initiatives. For example, there are some theoretical approaches on how to implement global citizenship education on formal educational curricula. The program could support a pilot initiative for validation that could then be scaled up. The addition of development education initiatives to the national curricula could become a flagship of the DEAR program, where proved relevant. The frequent rigidity of formal curricula makes it difficult to bring in innovative approaches. This has been shown in the context of the pandemic, when online and remote learning environments proved challenging and undeviating. The DEAR program hence has the potential to become an innovative tool to test these approaches.

The DEAR program could also support existing practices at Member State level, including under other EU programs, leading to the identification of best practices and exchange. This would be in line with the need to mitigate compartmentalization, as envisioned by the new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). For example, some EU countries have national operational programs under the European Social Fund linking the importance of housing with social rights. A DEAR project could potentially contribute to the development and dissemination of good practices entailing citizens' engagement in such approach.

---

<sup>3</sup> Habitat for Humanity International, 2020. "Cornerstone of Recovery. How housing can help emerging market economies rebound from COVID-19". [https://www.habitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/Cornerstone-of-Recovery\\_Oct2020.pdf](https://www.habitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/Cornerstone-of-Recovery_Oct2020.pdf).

Other synergetic efforts that could be identified, particularly for the housing and urban renewal sector, include the European Climate Pact or the International Urban and Regional Cooperation. DEAR projects could also contribute to the ongoing Citizens Dialogues, ensuring a dialogue between both initiatives where relevant. The same could be applicable to the Conference on the future of Europe. The COVID-19 pandemic put a halt to the kick-start of this multiyear debate. With the resuming of this process, DEAR could become an ideal vehicle to consult the public and allow for correlation between the different processes. Ideally, the debate of the Conference could also be structured around more sectorial policies, such as sustainable urbanization, contributing to a stronger correlation between what the EU wishes to be and what it is doing.

### 3. How DEAR can be transformative

#### 3.1. Engaging with multi-stakeholders

The DEAR program is, understandably and commendably, focused on European citizens. While these should remain a priority focus, the next generation of projects should also consider other complementary targets.

In some European cities, migrant communities cannot access adequate and affordable housing. This challenge contributes to difficult economic integration, while it is also exacerbated by it. For this reason, it would be important to encourage the inclusion in planning and implementation of migrant communities in the EU. The BSG project included some [activities of the kind](#), contributing to the notion of an interdependent world.

Moreover, other non-EU nationalities should also be accounted for as targets. Given the cross-border character of the DEAR program, it is not always easy to surpass linguistic hurdles for the implementation of the project. One of the ways the BSG project sidetracked this difficulty was to also work with international schools. However, not all non-EU students could be accounted for in the DEAR M&E system, even though they live in EU countries and the program contributed to their civic agency on critical urban issues.

While the focus on youth is welcome, the DEAR program should target citizens in general, regardless of age or any other characteristic. Learning can take place during all life, at all times and in all places. The crucial role of lifelong learning should not be neglected, as it is directed towards providing for individual and community needs. Once again, the importance of non-formal and informal educational settings is illustrated. Habitat for Humanity has positive experience in the mobilization of adults as supporters, including for its volunteering activities.

Representativeness in the next DEAR generation consortia would also be encouraged. Broadening the profile of participant organizations would only enrich the output and outcomes of the program, even when areas for engagement could be more targeted. The program already includes separate lots for Eastern countries, which is welcome. But in addition to these, it would be useful to also allow for smaller and specific lots, that would remove the administrative burden for the applicant consortium and combine it with these geographies. HFH also believes that smaller consortia would enable improved accountability and oversight. Other relevant geographic would include partnership and neighborhood countries, in addition to other regions of the world.

Plus, it would be pertinent to consider associate partners, or some administrative status of the kind, from other non-EU regions in the world. This would allow, for example, to illustrate how housing poverty can impact populations across the globe, especially the most vulnerable, and how solutions can be identified collectively. The BSG allowed for such interaction, as it was possible to bring professionals from African partner countries to European conferences. This transcontinental knowledge exchange, albeit punctual, proved to be very enriching for educational outcomes and informed discussions. Such synergies, if undertaken in a more structured way, could lead to the development of specific outputs, such as case studies, to inform other EU programs. HFH recommends allowing non-EU actors to be implementing partners, as many international campaigns are developed together with organizations from partner countries and educational projects benefit from closer collaboration with other regions. This would be a great approach to forge and reinforce international partnerships.

### **3.2. The needed coordination for mutual learning**

The next DEAR should bet on reinforced coordination. Most important, horizontal-to-horizontal peer exchange should be encouraged at multiple levels. For example, discussing global urban challenges with the general public requires translating technicality into an effective storytelling for engagement. Exchanging practices on how communication for behavioural change can transform spectators into supporters and then innovators could only enrich the practitioners' pool of knowledge and lead to innovation and quality improvements.

Dialogue between DEAR policy makers and implementing consortia should also not be limited to administrative tasks. The European Commission (EC) could establish a learning forum from assessments of DEAR projects on a continuous basis. It would also be useful to engage with stakeholders of different natures. For instance, the private sector can positively contribute to securing adequate and affordable housing for all. Given their educational potential, this actor could be involved in some of the DEAR activities. Exchange with local authorities who implement DEAR projects

would also be valuable. Local governments have a key role to play in implementing the New Urban Agenda, justifying the need for further inclusion.

## **4. A more efficient DEAR**

### **4.1. The need for adequate funding**

As the new NDICI will mainly focus on geographic programs, there is a risk of curtailing the envelope for civil society organizations and, within it, for the DEAR program. While EU funding levels for this type of initiative should be at least kept at the same level, cross-sectoral funding schemes at national level could also be promoted. Moreover, EU Member States should also be encouraged to include co-funding schemes at national level.

The above-mentioned synergies with other EU programs, such as for example the European Climate Pact or the International Urban and Regional Cooperation, would also contribute for a more efficient use of resources.

### **4.2. More robust assessment systems**

DEAR projects should provide evidence of achieving adequate and lasting impact. The relevant SDG indicator 4.7.1 is not yet reported against in the EU SDG Results Framework. While efforts to advance this inclusion would be welcome, Habitat for Humanity strongly supports linking the outcomes of the projects with all SDGs and corresponding SDG indicators. For example, it would be useful to correlate the outcomes of the SBG project with the important SDG 11 and other associated Goals.

To advance proper monitoring, the DEAR EC team could also support a three-tier approach to M&E systems at the outcome level, including i) changes in knowledge about the topic, ii) changes in knowledge of opportunities for engagement and ii) changes in attitudes. DEAR projects could also include some level of follow-up mechanisms after the end of the project, to assess possible level of uptake. For example, once the post-pandemic phase allows for it, citizens involved in the BSG project and eager to voluntarily build or repair homes could still be accounted for as a follow-up of the consortium and EU efforts. This would be one way of reinforcing the needed link between 'learning' and 'doing' that the DEAR program can promote.

### **4.3. An efficient administrative model**

The new DEAR generation should ensure that, in case of any changes in the application or reporting processes during the implementation of the project, grantees are consulted. The full consortium should also be consulted in case of changes that affect all. The program should also allow for flexibility to renegotiate

activities, in case of delay in the inception phase. The possibility to submit an updated project activity plan and budget should also be granted by the time the contract with the EC is signed, as the period between the proposal submission, the contract and project set up may imply some adjustments.

Finally, and as above-mentioned, the new DEAR program should also be permissive of smaller consortia, allowing for higher accountability and better oversight.

## About Habitat for Humanity International

Driven by the vision that everyone needs a decent place to live, Habitat for Humanity began in 1976 as a grassroots effort on a community farm in southern Georgia. The Christian housing organization has since grown to become a leading global non-profit working in local communities across all 50 states in the U.S., and in more than 70 countries. Families and individuals in need of a hand up partner with Habitat for Humanity to build or improve a place they can call home. Habitat homeowners help build their own homes alongside volunteers and pay an affordable mortgage. Through financial support, volunteering or adding a voice to support affordable housing, everyone can help families achieve the strength, stability and self-reliance they need to build better lives for themselves. Through shelter, we empower.

To learn more, visit [www.habitat.org/emea](http://www.habitat.org/emea).

## About Build Solid Ground

Build Solid Ground is an awareness raising and citizenship engagement project funded by the European Union grant under the Development Education and Awareness Raising program. Over three years, 14 partners from seven EU countries have worked as a consortium to inform and educate young European on global development issues.

## Contact

Gyorgy Sumeghy, Associate Director, Policy and Advocacy, Habitat for Humanity International, Europe, Middle East and Africa  
Zochova 6-8, 811 03 Bratislava, Slovakia  
Cell: +421 911 045 814  
[gsumeghy@habitat.org](mailto:gsumeghy@habitat.org)

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY INTERNATIONAL  
EUROPE, MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA  
ZOCHOVA 6-8, 811 03 BRATISLAVA, SLOVAKIA

*This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of Habitat for Humanity and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.*



This project is funded by  
the European Union