



Habitat
for Humanity®

**Empty Spaces
to Homes**

Empty Spaces to Homes Fourth Progress Report

Reporting Period July – September 2025

Habitat for Humanity International, Europe and the Middle East
November 28, 2025

[habitat.org](https://www.habitat.org)



Introduction

We are pleased to share the fourth progress report of 2025, covering progress made between July and September as part of our regional initiative Empty Spaces to Homes (ESTHer). With the generous support of our partners, we continue advancing our mission to transform unused buildings into affordable, energy-efficient, and healthy homes while aiming to contribute to systemic changes that will deliver better housing systems across Europe.

This quarter was defined by meaningful progress - expanding research outputs, achieving significant communication and visibility gains, strengthening policy influence, deepening national and EU-level coalitions, and advancing the understanding of effective financial models for converting empty spaces into affordable homes. Your support plays a central role in driving both concrete, on-the-ground solutions and long-term systemic change.



Figure 1 ESTHer project team at the recent in-person project meeting organized in Bratislava, Slovakia (September 10-11, 2025)

Top 5 Achievements (July – September 2025)

- 1. New research publications in the UK and Poland** – HFH GB released a comprehensive analysis of publicly owned vacant buildings across England, Scotland, and Wales. HFH PL completed a national research study.
- 2. Significant communications and visibility gains** – updated web platforms, national media coverage, social media engagement, and a donated £40,000 billboard campaign in London.
- 3. Strong EU-level advocacy momentum** – NHFHI deepened engagement with the European Commission and key housing networks, influencing the Affordable Housing Plan and EPBD implementation discussions.
- 4. Growing National Coalitions and cross-European collaboration** – including UK Coalition expansion and NHFHI's Community of Practice members' collaboration on new project proposals (EUKI, Horizon).
- 5. Research on financial models for conversion of empty spaces into affordable homes** – NHFHI rolled out research to analyze working financial models for conversions across the EU.

1. New research by HFH GB & HFH PL

Our partner HFH GB released the landmark report *Repurposing Empty Spaces: Addressing the Housing Crisis Across England, Scotland, and Wales*. According to the research, there has been a nearly **30% increase in publicly owned vacant buildings**, and converting these spaces could yield **up to 25,000 new homes**. This evidence positions adaptive reuse not as a niche intervention, but as a scalable solution backed by a strong evidence base. The report calls for a **national, publicly owned vacancy dataset**, alongside **dedicated funding and strategic interventions** to unlock adaptive reuse at scale.

Research is available [under this link](#).

Key findings include:

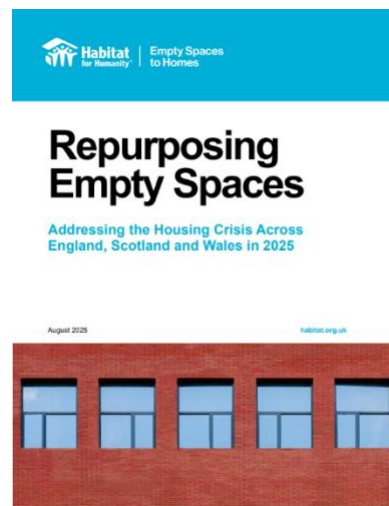
- The number of vacant local authority-owned properties rose from **6,324 to 8,242** in recent years - a nearly **30% increase**.
- The study estimates that around **25,000 new homes** could be created by converting publicly owned vacant buildings across the UK.
- Since 2021, the number of buildings empty for more than a year increased by: **44% in Wales, 30% in England**, and **18% in Scotland**.
- Many empty buildings are **well-located** (near transport hubs and employment centres), are structurally sound, and therefore suitable candidates for conversion.
- Researchers estimate around **175,000 privately owned non-residential empty buildings** in the UK, which could potentially yield **over 500,000 homes** if repurposed.

HFH Poland completed and published its study *Empty buildings, great potential: directions and recommendations for the development of sustainable social housing through the adaptation of non-residential stock in Polish municipalities*. The research demonstrates that Poland holds substantial untapped potential for adaptive reuse, particularly within public and social infrastructure. It highlights how better data, integrated policy strategies, and more coherent financing tools are needed to unlock large-scale conversions. The publication provides evidence-based recommendations to support municipalities in turning vacant buildings into sustainable and socially inclusive housing.

Research is available [under this link](#).

Key findings include:

- *Public and social infrastructure holds high adaptive potential* - schools, offices, hospitals, and dormitories offer layouts and locations ideal for affordable-housing conversions.



- *Data systems are fragmented* - national databases (BDOT, CEEB, SEIZBIL) provide only partial pictures of vacancy, limiting planning and investment decisions.
- *Adaptive reuse is more climate-friendly than new-builds* - yet circular-economy principles and carbon documentation are minimally reflected in national policy frameworks.
- *Financing tools exist but are difficult to use* - programs through BGK, NFOŚiGW and EU funds are often fragmented, unpredictable, and insufficiently monitored, hindering municipalities' ability to plan renovation pipelines.
- *Legal and administrative barriers slow down projects* - especially change-of-use procedures and regulations related to historic buildings.
- *Mismatch between housing standards and available stock* - stricter legal requirements since 2019 improved the quality but increased vacancy of substandard municipal units.
- *Local conditions vary significantly* - with some cities facing extensive post-industrial vacancy while others, driven by strong private demand, show almost none.

2. Significant communications and visibility gains

Communications play an important role in the ESTHer initiative because our ambition is not only to implement individual building conversions, but to catalyze systemic change in how Europe approaches vacancy, housing supply, and carbon footprints. Achieving this requires more than technical solutions – it requires shifting public awareness, influencing policy narratives, and equipping stakeholders with actionable knowledge. Below are highlighted key communications gains achieved by HFH GB and NHFHI.

Driven largely by the publication of the new research, *Repurposing Empty Spaces*, HFH GB delivered substantial communications gains this quarter. Activities helped raise the profile of adaptive reuse and positioned ESTHer as a credible voice in the UK housing debate. Key gains included:

- **Local and national media coverage** of the new research, which elevated public awareness of the scale of vacant buildings and the potential for their conversion, including coverage in Big Issue, Inside Housing, and Scottish Housing News
- **Active online promotion** of the research and updated ESTHer webpages through HFH GB's website and social media channels.
- **Strong online engagement** related to the LSE roundtable reached more than 2,300 impressions, demonstrating growing interest in the initiative.

Figure 1

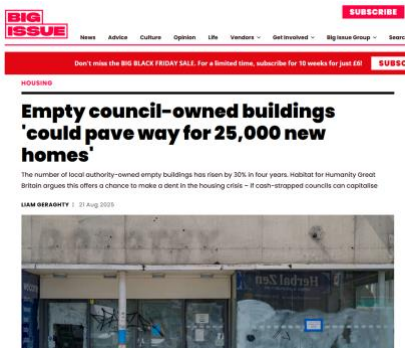


Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

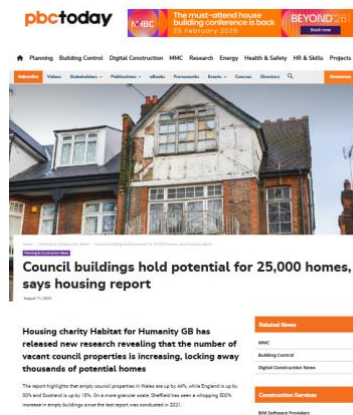


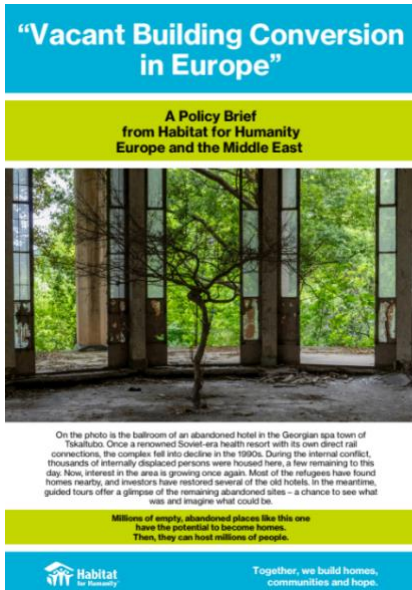
Figure 6



- Figure 1 – Coverage by Big Issue - [Empty council-owned buildings 'could pave way for 25,000 new homes' - Big Issue](#)
- Figure 2 – Coverage by Inside Housing - [Inside Housing - Home - Vacant properties could be turned into 25,000 new homes, report finds](#)
- Figure 3 – Coverage by Scottish Housing News - [Call for local authorities to convert empty buildings into homes amid new research | Scottish Housing News](#)
- Figure 4 – Coverage by LocalGov - [Vacant property numbers up despite housing shortage | LocalGov](#)
- Figure 5 – Coverage by PBCtoday - [Council buildings hold potential for 25,000 homes, says housing report](#)
- Figure 6 – Coverage by Centre Think Tank - [A pragmatic solution to homelessness in the UK | Centre Think Tank](#)

At the European level, NHFHI enhanced ESTHer’s visibility and strengthened its policy influence through strategic communications and thought-leadership outputs. NHFHI developed two key policy briefs:

- *The City is Already Built: The Potential of vacant Buildings for Affordable Housing in Europe*
- *Vacant Building Conversion in Europe – A Policy Brief*



Both papers were published online through Habitat’s global platform and shared with several key EU stakeholders – including policy and decision-makers, advocacy coalitions, sector NGOs, research institutions, or wider public. They also informed our recommendations in the EU public consultation process on the Affordable Housing Plan and joint statements of key sector stakeholders.



NHFHI team enhanced ESTHer’s visibility also through its participation in annual conference of the European Network of Housing Research (ENHR) in Paris, where the team presented key insights from ESTHer research mapping vacant buildings and social housing landscapes in Hungary and Croatia.

According monitoring conducted for VELUX, over **460 publications** referencing “VELUX” and “Empty Spaces” were recorded, reaching an estimated audience of nearly **10 million people**, with the total reach likely even higher due to additional coverage not mentioning the brand directly. to media

Habitat for Humanity and the Employee Foundation also shared related posts across their social media channels, further amplifying the story’s reach and reinforcing the impact of their shared mission to transform vacant spaces into homes. The successful volunteer event and communications campaign strengthened the visibility of the partnership and showcased the tangible results of joint action in promoting sustainable, inclusive housing solutions across Europe.

Here are some links to the most popular articles and media coverage on the topic:

- [NGO.pl,](#)
- [Nasze Piaseczno,](#)
- [Newseria,](#)
- [TVP3 - Dziennik Regionów](#) where you can watch a segment on the topic from 7:18–9:09, and [TVP3 - KKurier Mazowiecki,](#) where you can watch from 7:12–8:47.

HFH Poland delivered large-scale public communications and media visibility this quarter, achieving really strong reach. The team generated **432 media publications** with a combined **reach of more than 6.2 million people**, including coverage across major national outlets such as TVN24, Polskie Radio, RMF FM, TOK FM, Rzeczpospolita, Gazeta Wyborcza, Business Insider Polska and Onet.pl.

The campaign drove **12,646 visits to the project subpage**, significantly boosting public awareness of the vacant-buildings issue.

On social media, HFH PL achieved a paid **Facebook campaign reach of 376,635**, complemented by **nine organic posts reaching 14,155 users** and **eight Instagram posts reaching 4,693**. These communication activities supported both the national housing report and the vacant-buildings narrative, ensuring wide public engagement and message consistency.

HFH PL also strengthened collaboration with national partners and climate networks, including launching a new phase of cooperation with CAN Europe, further amplifying the visibility of the initiative.

3. Strong EU-level advocacy momentum

NHFHI deepened its engagement with the European Commission's Housing Task Force and several key European housing coalitions, feeding ESTHer evidence into the development of the EU Affordable Housing Plan and ongoing EPBD implementation discussions. Through bilateral exchanges with Commission officials, participation in networks such as Right to Energy, JUST BE, and the Affordable Housing Plan peer group, and preparation of a high-level European Parliament roundtable, NHFHI helped ensure that adaptive reuse and vacant-building conversion remain visible priorities in EU-level policy debates.

4. Growing national coalitions and cross-European collaboration

HFH GB reactivated and expanded the UK Empty Spaces Coalition, sharing new research with partners, hosting the LSE roundtable, and developing new Coalition communications and events. At the same time, NHFHI deepened cross-European collaboration within the Community of Practice on Affordable Housing, focusing on vacant buildings conversion, with some of its members jointly applying for an EUKI grant and co-developing a Horizon/NEB proposal.

5. Research on financial models for the conversion of empty spaces into affordable homes

NHFHI continues advancing a multi-country study on financial instruments for the renovation and conversion of vacant buildings into affordable housing. The research maps existing and emerging financial tools across Europe and assesses how these mechanisms can enable scalable adaptive reuse. In the next phase, NHFHI will deepen the analysis through country-level case studies and stakeholder interviews, which will inform a final set of recommendations on developing viable financial models for converting vacant spaces into affordable homes across the EU.

This initiative is made possible thanks to the support of its partners, whose contributions help drive systemic change in housing solutions. This support enables work addressing the urgent challenges of affordability, sustainability, and inclusivity, creating impacts that millions of people can benefit from.

Thanks to their generosity and shared vision, we are not only addressing immediate housing needs but also building a foundation for long-term, scalable solutions that contribute to a fairer and more sustainable future.

Our partners inspire us to continue striving for meaningful change, and we are deeply honoured to have them as allies in this journey. Thank you for making this critical work possible.



Thank You!

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