



Habitat
for Humanity®

**Empty Spaces
to Homes**

Empty Spaces to Homes Quarterly Report

Reporting Period October - December 2025

Habitat for Humanity International, Europe and the Middle East
January 30, 2026

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



Introduction

This report provides a quarterly update on the Empty Spaces to Homes (ESTHer) initiative, building on progress shared previously.

During the October - December 2025 reporting period, ESTHer partners advanced work across several interconnected areas.

Activities focused on deepening understanding of how the conversion of vacant buildings into affordable homes can be financed, progressing national financial models in Poland and Great Britain, and moving forward with preparatory work for demonstration conversion projects in GB.

In parallel, partners strengthened coalition engagement and stakeholder dialogue at national and European levels, while continuing communications and dissemination efforts to ensure that project outputs and learning reach relevant audiences.

Key focus areas this quarter (October - December 2025)

- 1. Understanding what financing instruments and models exist in Europe for converting vacant buildings** – NHFHI is advancing EU-level research mapping financial instruments and models that can support the renovation and conversion of vacant buildings into affordable housing.
- 2. Making conversion of empty spaces into affordable homes financially workable** – in addition to research, ESTHer partners HFH PL and HFH GB are developing financial models on the ground to support adaptive reuse, each tailored to national contexts. In Poland, work focuses on designing a revolving fund mechanism to complement existing grant schemes, while in Great Britain, efforts center on preparing a dedicated investment fund model to finance future conversion projects.
- 3. Using project evidence to inform European Affordable Housing Plan, National Coalitions, regional CoP on Affordable Housing, and wider stakeholder discussions** – HFH PL convened an in-person meeting of the National Coalition of Partners as part of the Europe Housing Forum, while NHFHI organized an online meeting of the Community of Practice on Affordable Housing, bringing together the most important stakeholders to exchange evidence and practical experience related to vacant-building conversion.
- 4. Preparing for demonstration builds in Great Britain** – HFH GB is continuing preparatory work on demonstration conversion projects, focusing on site assessment, feasibility considerations, and funding options.
- 5. Ensuring project outputs reach relevant audiences** – Partners undertake communications and dissemination activities to share research findings, project outputs, and practical learning with policymakers, practitioners, and the wider public.

1. Understanding what financing instruments and models exist in Europe for converting vacant buildings

NHFHI continued advancing its **EU-level research on financial instruments supporting the renovation and conversion of vacant buildings into affordable housing**. During this period, the research moved into a structured analytical phase, systematically mapping public, blended, and mission-oriented financial instruments that are currently used to bring vacant and underutilized buildings back into use.

The study now covers EU-level mechanisms as well as national, regional, and city-level instruments across selected focus countries and role-model contexts. It examines grants, subsidized loans, revolving funds, urban development funds, guarantee schemes, and investment vehicles that are relevant for adaptive reuse, with particular attention to how these instruments address affordability and social inclusion.

Building on this mapping, the research has established a detailed stakeholder interview framework to assess how these instruments function in practice, what barriers limit their use, and which approaches show the greatest potential for scaling the conversion of vacant buildings into affordable homes. The next phase will draw on these interviews and selected case examples to inform practical recommendations.

The next phase of the research will deepen the analysis through country-level case studies and stakeholder interviews, leading to a synthesis of findings and practical recommendations on viable financial models for converting vacant buildings into affordable homes across the EU.

As part of this work, NHFHI participated in the **3rd European Responsible Housing and Finance event**, which brought together financial institutions, policymakers, and housing practitioners from across Europe. Discussions at the event focused predominantly on financing new-build housing, with **limited attention given to the renovation and reuse of vacant buildings**. This observation provided an important point of reference for the research, confirming that financial instruments tailored specifically to adaptive reuse remain underrepresented in current housing finance debates and reinforcing the relevance of ESTHer's analytical focus.



2. Making conversion of empty spaces into affordable homes financially workable!

At the national level, partners progressed work on developing financial models tailored to their respective contexts, with the shared aim of enabling the practical conversion of vacant buildings into affordable housing.

In Poland, HFH PL continued developing and testing a concrete financial model focused on closing financing gaps faced by municipalities when adapting vacant buildings. Work centred on the design of a revolving fund mechanism intended to complement existing grant schemes, particularly where public funding covers only part of the eligible costs. The analysis explored institutional roles, financing flows, and regulatory constraints, and prepared the ground for validation with key actors through a dedicated focus group.

In Great Britain, HFH GB progressed preparatory work on a different financing approach, centred on the development of a dedicated investment fund model to support future adaptive reuse projects. This included engagement with potential investors and financial partners, early-stage financial modelling, and exploration of how such a fund could operate as a delivery vehicle for conversion projects. This work remains at a preparatory and design stage, aimed at testing feasibility and defining suitable structures rather than implementation.

Together, these activities reflect parallel efforts to develop usable financial models adapted to national policy and market conditions, while contributing to the project's broader understanding of how adaptive reuse can be financed in practice.

3. Using project evidence to inform the European Affordable Housing Plan, National Empty Spaces Coalitions of Partners, CoP on Affordable Housing, and wider stakeholder discussions

During the reporting period, partners continued using ESTHer's research and practical experience to inform dialogue within national coalitions, the Community of Practice on Affordable Housing, as well as broader stakeholder forums.

Poland: Europe Housing Forum and National Coalition meeting

The **Europe Housing Forum**, held in November 2025, convened representatives of local and national authorities, public institutions, European bodies, financial organizations, civil society, and the private sector. The Forum focused on housing affordability, vacancy, and sustainable housing solutions, providing a platform for policy-oriented discussion and exchange on the reuse of empty and underused buildings.

A series of facilitated panel discussions and moderated exchanges addressed topics directly aligned with ESTHer’s objectives, including:



- *“Building Better Lives. New Life for Empty Spaces: Housing Solutions for a Fair and Climate-Resilient Future”*
- *“Europe Facing Social and Housing Challenges – New Priorities of EU Policies”*

These sessions enabled participants to share experiences, discuss policy and financing challenges, and reflect on practical approaches to addressing housing shortages through renovation-based solutions that integrate social and climate considerations.

As part of the Forum program, HFH PL hosted a regular meeting of the **National Empty Spaces Coalition**, bringing together coalition members from civil society organizations, local authorities, housing practitioners, architects, and urban planners. The Coalition meeting focused on vacant buildings, adaptive reuse, renovation processes, and policy-related challenges, drawing on practical examples from ongoing and completed projects.

Representatives from the **City of Bytom**, a partner in ESTHer demo build led by HFH PL, participated in the meeting, and the Bytom project was used as a concrete case to facilitate exchange on implementation challenges, lessons learned, and effective cooperation between municipalities and non-governmental organizations. The in-person format supported in-depth discussion, peer-to-peer learning, and strengthened cooperation within the coalition.

Through these activities, ESTHer contributed to situating empty spaces conversion as an affordable housing solutions within broader policy and professional debates, strengthening stakeholder capacity and reinforcing the National Coalition of Partners as a platform for continued coordination, dialogue, and creating solutions.

NHFHI: EU-level Advocacy on Affordable Housing and Vacant Building Conversion

At the regional level, NHFHI used project-generated evidence on vacant building conversion to actively contribute to European policy discussions on affordable housing, with a particular focus on informing the **European Affordable Housing Plan (EAHP)** and convened an **online meeting of the Community of Practice on Affordable Housing focusing on vacant building conversion on 5 December 2025**.

All NHFHI advocacy efforts at the EU level related to vacant building conversion were focused on the upcoming European Affordable Housing Plan. During this period, NHFHI prepared and submitted a new policy paper, responses to the European Commission’s public survey accompanied by a summary document of NHFHI research on this topic, a summary of best practices on definitions and mapping of vacant buildings prepared at the direct request of the European Commission Housing Task Force, an amendment proposal to the European Parliament report on housing, and a joint paper developed together with peer organizations, including members of the Community of Practice. These documents were shared broadly with members of the European Commission Housing Task Force and Members of the European Parliament. NHFHI also held in-person meetings in Brussels with representatives of city networks, members of the Housing Task Force, and parliamentary staff. Following the publication of the European Affordable Housing Plan on 16 December, NHFHI published a short public reaction on LinkedIn.

In parallel, NHFHI convened an online meeting of the Community of Practice on Affordable Housing on 5 December 2025, focusing on vacant building conversion. The meeting brought together **24 participants representing 17 different organizations**, including Europe Investment Bank (EIB), city representatives (Eurocities, Energy Cities, ICLEI), research institutions and housing practitioners as well as 3 HFH National Organizations (GB, Poland, and Ukraine).

The agenda focused on sharing recent research and practical experience related to vacant-building conversion across Europe. Contributions included presentations on office-to-housing conversion, European-level data and practices on vacancy reuse, recent research from Great Britain, and a roundtable discussion with city representatives on bottlenecks, capacity gaps and good practices for converting vacant buildings into affordable housing. The exchange enabled participants to reflect on common challenges, policy conditions and implementation approaches, while situating national experiences within a broader European context.

In cooperation with some CoP members, NHFHI also jointly developed project proposals under the EUKI and Horizon Europe programmes in this period.



Community of Practice on Affordable Housing focusing on vacant building conversion

Online Meeting
December 5, 2025 - 10:00 -12:30

Agenda

10:00 – 10:10	Welcome	Gyuri Sumeghy, HFHI
10:10 – 10:30	Tour de online table All participants give short updates	All participants
10:30 – 10:50	Presentation 1: Conversion of offices into affordable housing – insights from the forthcoming European Commission report – followed by Q&A	Zsolt Toth, BPIE
10:50 – 11:10	Presentation 2: Summary of research findings on vacant building conversion data and practices at European level – followed by Q&A	Andrew Cartwright, CEU
11:10 – 11:30	Presentation 3: Recent research on vacant building conversion in the UK – followed by Q&A	Guy Parker, HFH Great Britain
11:30 – 11:40	Break	
11:40 – 11:55	Habitat for Humanity’s 50 cities vision	Zuzana Matlonova, HFHI
11:55 – 12:25	Roundtable with cities’ representatives on bottlenecks, capacity gaps, good practices for vacant building conversion for affordable housing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Michaela Kauer, City of Vienna/Eurocities • Melanie Bourgeois, Energy Cities • Benedetta Buccolini, ICLEI 	Moderated by Gyuri Sumeghy
12:25-12:30	Wrapping up and next steps for cooperation	Gyuri Sumeghy

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Figure 1 Agenda of the CoP on Affordable Housing online meeting

NHFHI also contributed to wider stakeholder discussions by presenting project-related evidence at external events. This included a presentation at Renovate Europe Day, a high-level EU event organised by Efficient Buildings Europe in Copenhagen, and a presentation delivered as part of a webinar organised by the Urban Land Institute under the C Change for Housing platform.

4. Preparing for demonstration builds in Great Britain



Figure 2 Potential demo build site in GB 1

HFH GB continued preparatory work on future demonstration conversion projects in Great Britain, focusing on identifying viable sites, assessing feasibility, and exploring early-stage funding options.

During the reporting period, HFH GB progressed work on a potential demonstration project in **Greater Manchester**, where two vacant high-street buildings were identified for possible conversion into affordable housing with complementary community or commercial uses. Initial feasibility work was undertaken in partnership with local community organizations and public-sector stakeholders.

As part of this process, HFH GB submitted an **Expression of Interest** for external project funding, which progressed to a second stage by the end of the reporting period, with a funding decision expected in early 2026.



Figure 3 Potential demo build site in GB 2

In parallel, HFH GB continued exploratory discussions on additional potential demonstration projects in other locations, engaging with local authorities, housing charities and specialist organizations to assess suitability, delivery models and alignment with emerging financing approaches. This preparatory work is helping to build a pipeline of potential demonstration projects and to inform future decision-making on viable conversion opportunities.

5. Ensuring project outputs reach relevant audiences

Partners undertook communications and dissemination activities to ensure that ESTHer outputs and learning reach relevant audiences, including policymakers, practitioners, and the wider public. These activities focused on sharing research findings, project materials, and practical insights through digital channels, publications, and targeted outreach.

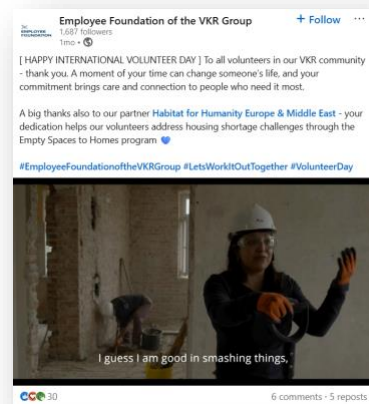
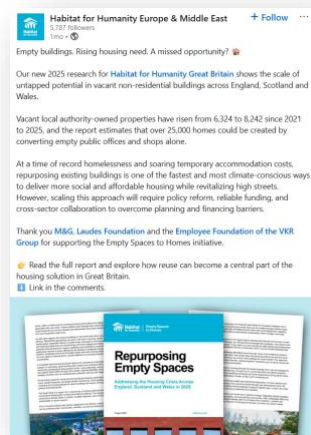
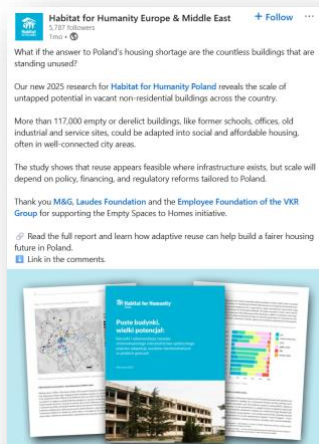
Habitat for Humanity International

During this reporting period, Habitat for Humanity International published two recent research outputs focusing on the repurposing of vacant and underused spaces to address housing shortages on their website:

- [New housing research. Repurposing Empty Spaces to Address the Housing Crisis in Great Britain | Habitat For Humanity](#)
- [New housing research. Turning Vacant Spaces into Social Housing in Poland | Habitat For Humanity](#)

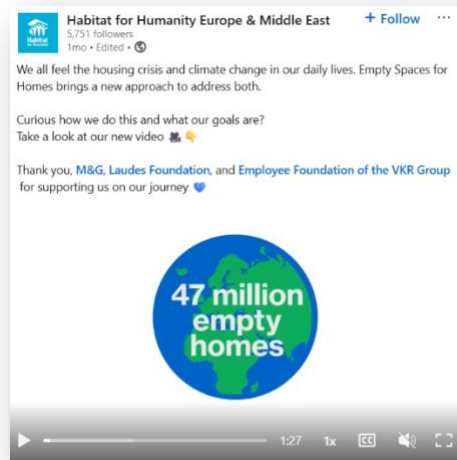
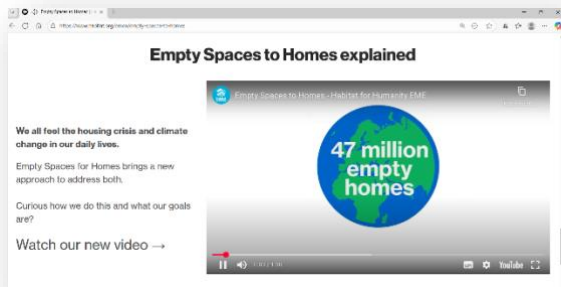
Both publications contribute to the growing evidence base on adaptive reuse and vacant-building conversion, translating ESTHer-related research into accessible, country-specific insights for policymakers, practitioners, and the wider public. Each research release was accompanied by a short article to maximize accessibility and outreach.

To support the uptake of the new research, HFHI shared dedicated LinkedIn posts highlighting key findings and policy relevance of the publications.



To complement ongoing communications efforts, HFHI published a short video showcasing the “Empty Spaces to Homes” initiative. The video presents the core concept of the initiative - transforming vacant

spaces into affordable housing - and illustrates the impact of the partnership in an accessible and compelling format.

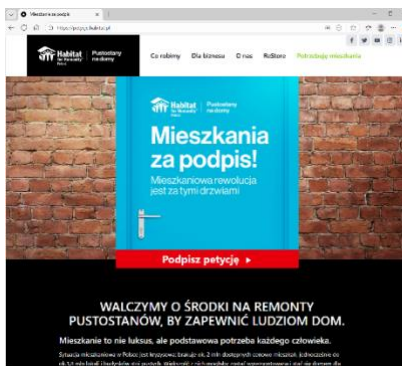


<https://www.habitat.org/emea/empty-spaces-to-homes>

Habitat for Humanity Great Britain

During Q4, Habitat for Humanity Great Britain published [a Partnerships Guide](#) and supporting webpage outlining its partnership offer, target partners, and collaboration process to deliver affordable housing across Great Britain. The resource supports outreach to new potential partners and provides clarity on Empty Spaces to Homes objectives, helping position the initiative for future growth and replication beyond the current project period.

Habitat for Humanity Poland



During the reporting period, HFH PL implemented communication and dissemination activities in line with their project Communication Strategy, resulting in significant media visibility and audience engagement. These efforts generated an estimated **total media reach of approximately 1.4 million recipients**, with **588 media publications** across leading national outlets, including nationwide radio stations, television broadcasters, press agencies, online news portals, and sector-specific platforms.

These communication activities also supported HFH PL's **public petition campaign "Pustostany na domy" ("Vacant Buildings as Homes")**, which calls for system-level action to address Poland's housing crisis by investing in the renovation of vacant buildings so they can become affordable homes. The petition highlights the contradiction between a shortage of affordable housing and a high level of unused properties and urges policymakers to prioritize renovation of such spaces for people in housing need.

As of the end of the reporting period, the petition had received 2,507 signatures.

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!

Habitat for Humanity International
Quarterly Report 2025
November 28, 2025

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