



Habitat
for Humanity®

**Empty Spaces
to Homes**

Empty Spaces to Homes Third Progress Report

Reporting Period April – June 2025

Habitat for Humanity International, Europe and the Middle East
July 31, 2025

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



Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Progress Since Our Last Update	4
3. What is Ahead of Us?	13

1. Introduction

This is the third report we are presenting to share with you some of the key updates on the progress of our work, through which we aim to build new lives in empty buildings.

In the following pages, you will find insights into the progress we have made and the contributions your support is helping to create.

We hope this report not only informs you but also inspires, as we work together toward a more inclusive and sustainable future.

From Vision to Action: Evolving the Empty Spaces to Homes Programmatic Strategy

While the **ESTHer project** continues to serve as a testing ground - piloting our approach in Poland and the UK - we are now preparing to take this work to the next level. The broader **Empty Spaces 50 Cities Vision** is designed to scale these lessons, methods, and ambitions across Europe through a more formalized and widespread programmatic effort.

In our previous report, we introduced the ESTHer project and this broader vision. As you may recall, our goal is to scale the initiative across multiple countries and secure commitments from at least **50 European cities** to take concrete steps - through policies and actions - to convert empty spaces into affordable, energy-efficient homes.

Since then, we have taken meaningful steps to evolve this vision into a scalable and strategic framework.

Over the past months, we've built a clearer pathway for replication and geographic expansion, grounded in the learnings and structures developed through ESTHer. This includes defining a set of core activities that can be tailored and implemented in diverse national and city contexts. We have also identified a set of priority countries that offer strong foundations for future work.

As we continue shaping the 50 Cities Vision, our next steps will focus on **laying the groundwork for active city engagement**. Although the full engagement strategy is still in development, we have already committed to begin with our **Community of Practice (CoP) on Affordable Housing**. An online meeting is planned for this autumn to introduce the concept, align on shared priorities, and begin building momentum.

Looking further ahead, we are preparing a **policy conference in 2026**, where **city representatives** will be invited to engage formally with the initiative, share experiences, and explore how they can support the reuse of vacant spaces in their local contexts.

2. Progress Since Our Last Update

In our previous reports, we shared the progress of core ESTHer activities already underway – research and data collection, advocacy planning and coalitions building, early-stage demonstration builds and our communication efforts. Since then, we have made significant strides in these areas: completing work that had begun, deepening our advocacy work and reach, and transitioning several activities from planning to implementation.

Here is how the work has evolved over the past quarter:

Building Knowledge for Change: Our Research Deliverables Take Shape

As shared in our previous updates, **three major research efforts** have shaped our knowledge base:

- One focused on the social housing landscape and the potential for reusing vacant buildings in our target countries (Croatia, Hungary, Great Britain, Poland);
- A second exploring the environmental impacts of conversions;
- And a third developing a Life Cycle Carbon Assessment (LCA) tool to quantify the carbon savings achieved through adaptive reuse.

Since then, progress has varied across different strands:

- The carbon assessment methodology has been successfully completed and is now in use. As reported previously, a practical, Excel-based tool is now being applied to our demonstration builds to measure avoided carbon emissions - a key advocacy and impact metric going forward.
- The social housing landscape research, conducted in Croatia and Hungary, has also been finalized (for the key findings, feel free to read our previous report or find the research papers here: [How Hungary's Empty Spaces Could Become the Future of Affordable Housing | Habitat For Humanity](#) & [Unlocking the Potential of Empty Spaces in Croatia | Habitat For Humanity](#)).
- The other two major research efforts are nearing completion:
 - In **Great Britain**, a comprehensive study by the **Empty Homes Network** has mapped out the opportunity for conversion across all UK regions, while a second study led by the **London School of Economics** is evaluating the environmental case for conversions. Both reports are in their final stages, with policy-focused dissemination planned for Autumn 2025.
 - In **Poland**, research on lessons learned from converting office buildings into temporary shelter for Ukrainian refugees is being finalized. The report also includes recommendations on how temporary legal flexibilities used in crisis response could be translated into lasting housing policy change.

These research activities not only deepen our understanding of the landscape but also directly inform our advocacy and communications - ensuring our recommendations are evidence-based and policy-relevant.

Driving Policy Change: From Strategy to Influence

Since developing the advocacy strategy, and following the launch of our Advocacy Action Plan earlier this year, both country teams and the Habitat International team have deepened engagement with policymakers and other key stakeholders on national (UK, Poland) and European (EU) levels.

Habitat Poland

- **In Poland**, Habitat has taken part in over 25 policy-focused events and meetings, with key ministries, EU Directorates-General, and city stakeholders. These engagements have helped raise the profile of the Empty Spaces approach within both national housing policy and EU-level discussions. The biggest achievements include:
 - Co-authoring a detailed **44-point policy recommendations** for the post-2027 EU Cohesion Policy;
 - Input into the draft **Social Climate Plan**; and
 - Organizing and contributing to workshops / sessions at major conferences including **International Social Housing Festival 2025**, the **C4E Forum**, and **Cities Forum** under **Poland's EU Council Presidency**.

Habitat Great Britain

- **In Great Britain**, findings from the research are being adapted into short, targeted **policy briefings** to share with local authorities and national government. Advocacy activities now include preparations for **three high-level roundtables in Autumn 2025** (in London, Cardiff, and Edinburgh), aimed at aligning the final environmental recommendations with each policy context.
 - Habitat GB were also proud to take part in several housing sector events. At one of the most transformational panel discussions, **Housing 2025 – Europe's largest housing festival**, HFH GB's National Director Dr Henrietta Blackmore joined a vital panel discussion on the human cost of the housing crisis. She brought international insights from HFHI and highlighted a practical, often overlooked solution to the UK's housing challenge: transforming empty buildings into safe, long-term homes. You can read more here: [Empty Spaces, Hidden Potential - Habitat for Humanity GB](#).



Henrietta Blackmore, HFH GB National Director at Europe's largest housing festival – Housing 2025

- Further advocacy engagements have helped to broaden the reach of the ESTHer message at both national and international levels. These include appearances at events such as the NACCOM Annual Conference, the International Social Housing Festival in Dublin, the Future of Housing Conference in Salford, the ACAN Hug the Building event in London, the Locality Conference in Leeds, the launch of the Temporary Accommodation Network in London, the Empty Homes Network Conference in Birmingham, and the World Habitat Conference in London. Through these platforms, ESTHer has continued to build momentum and visibility within the housing sector.
- As part of its coalition-building efforts, HFH GB convened a dedicated ES2H **coalition meeting** in April to share emerging findings from two key research projects and gather feedback from members to inform the final outputs. In addition, one-to-one engagement with prospective partners has expanded the coalition's reach. New discussions have taken place with organisations including Evidence First, Bioregional, Blue Triangle, Rochdale Boroughwide Housing, Housing Justice Cymru, Social Bite, Campbell Tickell, Centre Think Tank, and NACCOM.
- Looking ahead, a key priority for the second half of the year is to build further momentum for the coalition by developing focused areas of collaborative work and establishing a more formal structure to guide its activities. These efforts will be supported by the newly appointed ES2H Programme Manager.
- HFH GB also continues to engage with key policymakers and sector stakeholders to advance the ES2H agenda. In addition to the coalition and demonstrator project-related engagements, HFH GB has held strategic meetings with representatives from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, EBRD, International Institute for Environment and Development, John Laing Foundation, Lloyds Bank Foundation, HOPE Worldwide, Rochdale Council, UN-Habitat, The Big Issue, Kingfisher, Nationwide, Rock Trust, University College London, Scottish Empty Homes Partnership, London Councils, Urban Land Institute, and Lewisham Council.

Habitat International

- At EU level, **Habitat International** developed and shared policy paper with key EU stakeholders and peers. Notably, HFHI submitted policy paper to the EU consultation process aiming to influence the first-ever **European Affordable Housing Plan** – a European Commission’s initiative to tackle the growing housing crisis. Our message is clear: renovate more, build less. It’s smarter, greener, and more cost-effective.
- We actively advocate for the core messages and other policy positions, promote and discuss them at various key international events. The last quarter, they included:
 - **UN-ECE Sustainable Development Goals Forum**
 - **JUSTEM project – Final Conference**
 - **C4E Forum**
 - **International Social Housing Festival**
 - **European Sustainable Energy Week 2025 (EUSEW)**
- HFHI also maintained active bilateral engagement with EU institutions and key stakeholders. Highlights included:
 - **Participation in the European Housing Forum** meeting alongside Matthew Baldwin (DG MOVE)
 - **OECD Forum presentation** by CEO Jonathan Reckford, also alongside Baldwin
 - **Bilateral meetings with European Parliament and European Commission’s members and key stakeholders**, including: CAN Europe, Renovate Europe, City of Vienna, FEANTSA, Housing Europe, Community Land Trust Brussels.



Panel discussion on what is the intersection of Just Transition and housing affordability at the JUSTEM project Final Conference.

1. Panel discussion at the EUSEW 2025 (10–12 June) titled: “The missing piece: How sufficiency complements EU goals”, where ESTHer was featured as a best practice example.
2. Urban Future Week in Łódź (21–23 May) – where ESTHer took centre stage while we raised awareness about urgent housing challenges and the potential of vacant buildings.



Demonstration Builds

We previously shared plans for demonstration builds in Poland and the UK. We are pleased to now report concrete progress on both fronts:

- **In Poland**, an earlier phase of the project in **Dąbrowa Górnicza** involved the refurbishment of 19 previously uninhabited municipal flats. These were modernized and allocated through Habitat Poland’s Social Rental Agency (SRA) to vulnerable groups, including large families, individuals with disabilities, repatriates, and refugees from Ukraine.
- **In Great Britain**, the pilot project in Barking and Dagenham successfully converted derelict commercial and residential units into transitional housing for young care leavers, in collaboration with the local council. The initiative demonstrated both social impact and cost savings - saving the local authority £900 per bedspace, per week in temporary accommodation costs - and provided key insights into effective retrofit and partnership models.

Building on these earlier successes, we are pleased to now report concrete progress on the current demonstration builds:

- **In Poland**, the Bytom demonstration project is now fully complete (see the Spotlight below). The renovated tenement building has been handed over to the city of Bytom to increase the stock of affordable social and municipal housing. The previously empty spaces now house 14 people, including three Ukrainian families and one large family who had been on the social housing waiting list.
- **In Great Britain**, HFH GB progresses with potential build sites. Notably, in Tyldesley (Greater Manchester) and Carlisle, and in Scotland, sites have been identified, and site assessments are being held.
 - In Tyldesley, a vacant retail unit may be converted into a community space and two affordable flats.

- In Carlisle, a city-owned lodge could be transformed into respite housing and a training café, offering social and economic value to the local community.
- Projects in Scotland are also in discussion - three demonstration projects are currently under review in partnership with LAR Housing Trust, a Scottish housing charity operating across 10 local authority areas. One proposed site is the redevelopment of a historic WWI naval barracks near Port Edgar Marina in South Queensferry. The plan envisions transforming the site into affordable housing with integrated community amenities, such as a café, in a waterfront regeneration area.

Spotlight: Bytom – Giving New Life to Vacant Buildings

The Bytom project stands as a flagship example of what the **Empty Spaces to Homes** model can achieve in practice. For years, the building at **Piekarska 40** stood unoccupied - until Habitat for Humanity Poland, in partnership with the municipality of Bytom and a range of business and institutional supporters, transformed it into a vibrant, livable space.

What makes this project remarkable is not just the physical renovation, but the **multi-sector collaboration** that made it possible. It was supported by the **Rapid Response Fund (RRF)** under the Swiss Programme, corporate partners like **Saint-Gobain**, and the engagement of local volunteers. The completed flats are now **fully furnished** and officially form part of the city's social housing stock.

The project was celebrated at a **press conference** in May 2025 attended by city officials, media, and partners. The mayor of Bytom, **Mariusz Wołosz**, praised the initiative as a model of effective cooperation between civil society and government:

“This is one of the most interesting housing investments in our city—because it's driven by



*a social mission and care for the community,”
he said.*

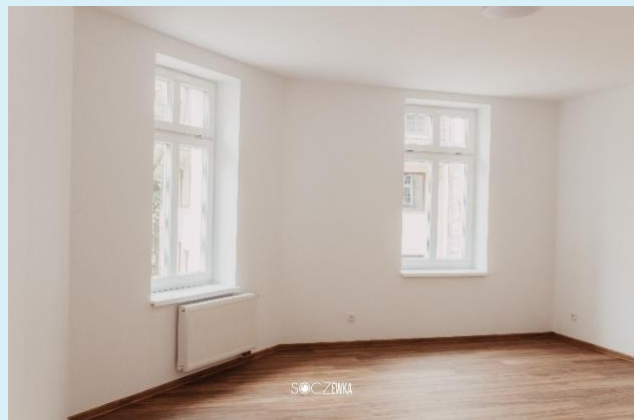
*“We’re using every opportunity to improve the
housing situation in Bytom.”*

The completion of the Bytom demo build also marked the launch of Habitat Poland's **national awareness campaign**, *“Pustostany na Domy. Dość Kryzysu Mieszkaniowego”* (Empty Spaces to Homes: Enough of the Housing Crisis). This effort includes a petition to the national government calling for stronger support for the adaptive reuse of empty buildings—a message made all the more powerful by the success of the Bytom project.

*“Vacant buildings are not a problem - they’re a
solution waiting to be unlocked,”*

said Mateusz Piegza, Director of Development and Innovation at Habitat Poland.

*“We must turn empty buildings into much-
needed homes—for the people and for the
planet.”*



Interior of the flat in the tenement building before and after the renovation.



The entrance corridor of the tenement building – before.



The entrance corridor of the tenement building – after.

Amplifying Our Impact: Campaigns, Visibility, and Public Support

Communications and outreach continue to serve as essential tools – not only for raising awareness about the Empty Spaces to Homes approach and our activities, but also as a key lever in advancing our advocacy efforts and engaging a broad range of stakeholders. The successes of the past quarter demonstrate how effective communications can support our policy objectives by mobilizing support, shaping public opinion, and influencing decision-makers.

- **In Great Britain**, HFH GB revamped the Empty Spaces website content and launched a **social media advocacy campaign** encouraging both public supporters and policymakers to pledge their backing. A World Environment Day webinar, co-hosted with Laudes Foundation, also brought the environmental message of building reuse into focus.
- For more info, visit: [Policy and Advocacy - Habitat for Humanity GB](#)

Start an Empty Spaces to Homes Taskforce

The best solutions come when communities work with a shared focus. An ES2H taskforce can bring together key partners like the local authority, college, NHS, businesses and community representatives to identify underused buildings and create a plan for their transformation.

Habitat for Humanity GB can help you set up a taskforce. For more information please contact: es2h@habitatforhumanity.org.uk

Show your support

Whether you're an elected official, a home builder, a community group or a resident who believes we can make better use of empty buildings by turning them into affordable homes, there is action you can take today.



Write to your MP

Use our template letter to easily ask your local MP to support Empty Spaces to Homes.

[Read more](#)



Make a Commitment

Share your vision with your community, affordable homes in your area that protect the planet.

[Read more](#)

- **In Poland**, a highly successful **petition and awareness campaign** has gained real traction. The campaign used striking visuals (the symbolic "blue door") to convey the potential of vacant buildings, coupled with a petition to the Polish government. Results to date include:
 - Over **1,380 petition signatures**
 - Social media reach of more than **250,000**
 - Coverage in **40+ media outlets**, including national radio and top web portals
 - Ongoing influencer partnerships and presence at public events like the Open'er Festival
- For more info, visit: [Mieszkania za podpis](#)



 **Habitat for Humanity**
Polska

Pustostany na domy

Mieszkania za podpis!

Mieszkaniowa rewolucja jest za tymi drzwiami

- At the **international level**, **HFHI** continues to expand the visibility of the initiative through strategic storytelling and digital engagement:
 - Two editions of the **Habitat newsletter** featured the program in April 2025:
 - Featured article [“Turning Empty Spaces into Affordable, Sustainable Homes”](#) (article on how unused buildings are being repurposed into affordable housing projects).
 - Featured research-based article: [“How Hungary’s Empty Spaces Could Become the Future of Affordable Housing”](#) (research-based article exploring Hungarian vacancy statistics and policy implications)
- On social media, Habitat for Humanity International’s **LinkedIn (EMEA)** account highlighted key reports and findings from the program, including:
 - HFHI shared [a post exploring Hungary’s housing crisis through the lens of vacant properties](#). The piece highlights the Empty Spaces to Homes report, which outlines how reusing over 570,000 unused dwellings could help solve the crisis without new construction.
 - HFHI shared [a post about Croatia’s housing paradox](#), where a third of permanent homes are vacant amid rising housing insecurity. The post promotes a report from the Empty Spaces to Homes initiative, calling for policy reform and adaptive reuse of these spaces.
- In parallel, the **visual identity** for Empty Spaces to Homes has been fully finalized, with project templates, graphics, and brand assets in place. A **short project video** has been also finalized, currently waiting for the final approvals before publication.



Snapshots from our ESTHer promotional video that will be soon disseminated.

3. What is Ahead of Us?

Summary of our next plans

- Completing and disseminating key research outputs – on social housing landscapes and empty spaces conversion potential in target countries; environmental aspects of empty spaces conversions, scale of opportunity.
- Organizing online CoP on Affordable Housing meeting (Autumn 2025) and policy conference on EU level (Spring 2026)
- Developing tailored policy recommendations for local and national audiences in the UK.
- HFH GB organizing policy roundtables in London, Cardiff, and Edinburgh (September 2025)
- HFH PL organizing Housing Forum and 2nd Coalition Building (November 2025)
- Launching new studies to explore financial instruments for renovation of empty spaces in Europe.

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
July 31, 2025

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