



ROOF Integrated Action Plan – City of Ghent (BE)

Part 1 - Presentation of context and process

a) City context and definition of the initial problem/ policy challenge

Ghent is a historical city with over 260,000 inhabitants. It is the 2nd largest city of the Flemish Region and has an excellent reputation as a city of knowledge and culture, accessible to anyone. Over 75,000 students are registered in schools of higher education. Ghent has a strong scientific reputation in the field of biotechnology, bioenergy and ICT and has become the driving force behind 'Flanders Biotech Valley'.

The attractiveness of the city and its growth, combined with macro-economic evolutions, have over the past 15 years resulted in a real housing crisis: both the prices to rent and to buy have risen extensively over the past decade, making housing unaffordable for a lot of citizens. 4 out of 10 of the people who rent, only have one income and have to spend over 30% on rent and housing costs.

Ghent has more social housing than most Flemish cities in Belgium but still too little to cover the needs. Ghent has a stock of 15,000 social houses whereas some 10,000 households are still on the waiting list since many years. Consequently, more and more households rent cheap, unhealthy, unsafe private houses or end up in barracks/caravans/cars or on the



streets. The Task Force Housing and Shelter was founded in 2017 to tackle the growing Housing Crisis together with all local stakeholders.

b) Focus

Through the ROOF project, Ghent takes the ambition to end homelessness for legal residents by 2040. The Integrated Action Plan is a long term policy plan that describes the vision, the model and the necessary actions to reach the goal of Functional Zero by 2040.

During the ROOF project, the King Baldwin Foundation and the Catholic University Leuven supported Ghent to organise a point-in-time homeless count. By doing this we were instantly able to reach our goal on the topic of data collection. More than 35 organisations counted by the EGHOS Light definition. Ghent counted and profiled 932 homeless households with legal residence. The count will be repeated each three years.

In Ghent, homelessness is managed by three methods: prevention, crisis management (shelter and temporary housing) and permanent housing with support. Our future strategy is to invest more in prevention and permanent housing with support, so that we are able to minimize crisis management. By maximizing prevention and permanent housing with support, we can end homelessness. This strategy is directly informed through the ROOF exchanges with our partners and their connected network of cities throughout Europe.

Extensive research and practices around the world show that housing with support (Housing First, Rapid Rehousing...) helps to end homelessness. Moreover, it helps ex-homeless people to reach more positive outcomes in terms of well-being, social integration, health and other life domains.



This plan has its main focus on creating a systemic model for housing with support in Ghent. The model will be explained further. The model has been set-up by evaluating and learning from different approaches throughout Europe. We have learned that there are several good practices and that we need to re-adjust them based on our own homeless population profiles. Different methods are suited to house different profiles of homeless people.

c) Description of the process

The integrated action plan has been created by the city services in close collaboration with the Deputy Mayors and the URBACT Local Group (ULG) that was set up by different members of the local Taskforce Housing and Shelter. We collaborated with different societal stakeholders like the centre for social welfare, poverty organisations, homeless shelter sector, housing actors, academics, etc.

The plan was built through several stages and within different working groups. The overall ULG came together periodically to discuss the vision, the model and the actions. In between different working meetings were held with different thematic subgroups. Next to this a lot of bilateral adjustments were made.

The draft plan was discussed at a lot of different policy platforms to make sure that the vision, model and actions are supported by all actors, including all relevant political representatives.



Part 2 - Action Plan

a) Vision and strategy

The overall vision is that homelessness is an inhumane condition and that we must stop managing it and start ending it. We want to end homelessness because we see what complex problems it creates for the individuals and for society as a whole. The right to housing is unfulfilled and people start living from a survival mode with negative effects on their physical and mental health, well-being, integration and their lives in general.

The lack of sustainable solutions also puts a strain on several societal services which are not suited to solve homelessness.

The overall strategy is that we want to invest maximally in prevention in the first place, so that we keep people from becoming homeless. Apart from that we want to invest a maximum in housing with support so that we are able to house the people that are homeless. If prevention and housing with support are maximised, we are able to end homelessness and to minimize crisis management.



b) Model for housing with support

The model for housing and support focusses on permanent housing.

Shelter and temporary housing solutions will be a reality as long as we cannot deliver sufficient permanent housing solutions, but they are not part of the plan and the here presented model.

We want to deliver 3 different types of housing solutions in the future, with which we are able to deliver a suitable solution for all types of homeless people:

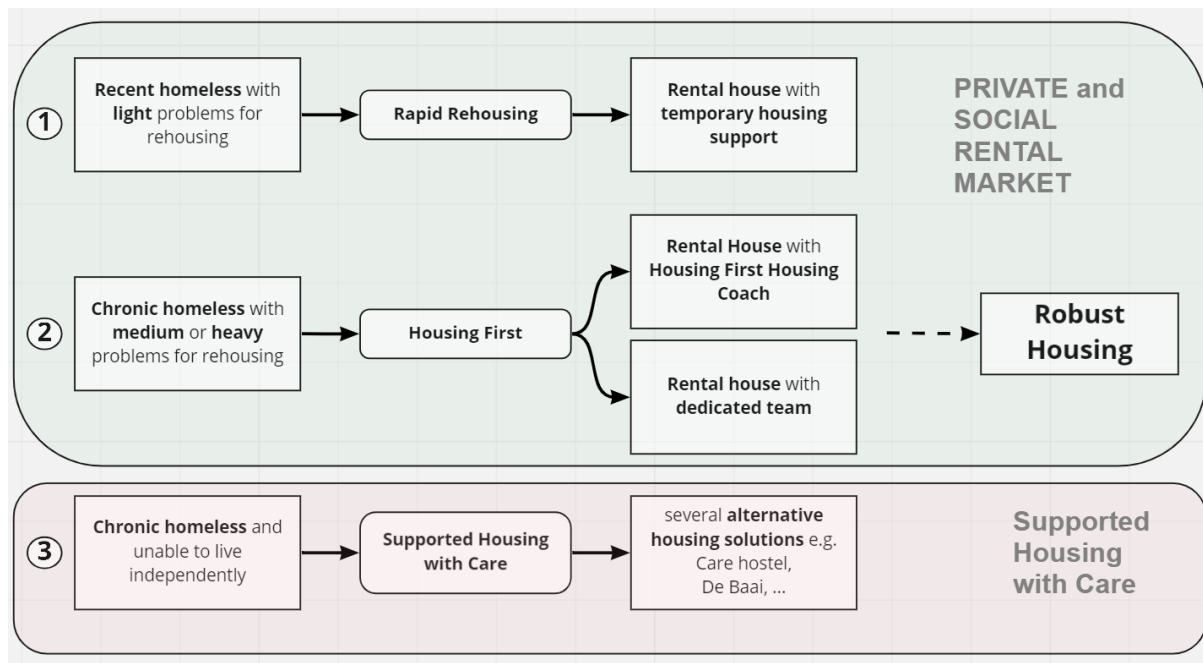
- **The first type of solution is Rapid Rehousing.** This contains a regular rental house (social or private) with temporary support for an average of one year. This solution is aimed at those households that recently became homeless (less than one year, or less than two years without substantial problems to be rehoused). We aim here at those households that are able to live stable in their house with a



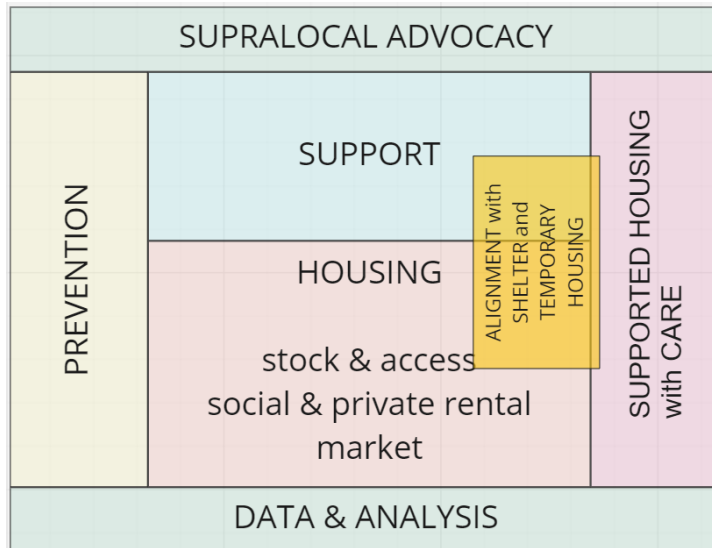
temporary support to make sure that income, children's education, network, etc... gets back on the rails.

- **The second type of solution is Housing First.** This contains a regular rental house (social or private) with support as long as needed. We divide here into two types of support: Housing Coaching for those with medium needs, and a Dedicated Team for those with heavy or complex needs. We invest in an alternative solution of Robust Houses for those that cannot live in socially stressful environments like regular social housing blocks. The robust houses are delivering a stress free environment, not directly connected to neighbours, with intensive multidisciplinary support.

- **The third type of solution** is a collection of different type of housing solutions that are aimed at the homeless who are not able to live in a regular rental house, mostly due to different types of health problems, physically or mentally. We name this group of solutions as **supported housing with care**. Different projects are set up from different sectors e.g. mental health sector, disability sector and elderly care.



c) Actions



Data & Analysis

Action 1: Data and analysis: organising a homeless count every three years and setting up a homelessness monitoring dashboard that bundles local data on homelessness.

As a basis for a phased long-term policy, it is crucial to be able to work in an evidence-based manner. That is why we are committed to systematically collecting scientifically validated data. In this way, the preventive and housing-oriented policy can always be adjusted in function of ending homelessness by 2040.

Prevention

Action 2: Scale-up prevention of homelessness

In addition to the current focus on prevention, further efforts will be made to find ways to prevent homelessness even better. The better we manage to prevent homelessness, the faster we can tackle homelessness. To this end,



we are focusing on an urban working group that detects the gaps in the current offer and responds with new actions.

Housing

Action 3: Inclusion of homeless people into social housing and elaboration of the local allocation rules

Social housing can be a major structural lever to end homelessness. We aim to achieve sufficient access for homeless people within the new allocation regulations for social housing from 2023. This access is shaped in relation to other precarious groups.

Action 4: Clinging sign-up of homeless people on the waiting list for social housing

There is an option for homeless people to join the regular waiting list for social housing. We want to maximize that opportunity. Experience shows that it is more difficult for homeless people to get or keep them registered. That is why a clinging approach is proposed here. Through continuous registration on the waiting list we maximize regular access to social housing and the right to the Flemish rental premium is better exhausted.

Action 5: Realization of a supply expansion of 2,500 new social houses by 2030

Achieving growth in the number of social housing is one of the most essential actions in tackling the housing crisis, and in particular in tackling homelessness. Several of the projects to reach 2500 new social houses by 2030 are already planned. Plans have yet to be drawn up for some of them.

Action 6: Realization of robust houses + trajectory for supply expansion



We are realizing 11 robust homes with suitable guidance in Hogeweg 96 in Sint-Amandsberg. In addition, in the next legislature we will look for possibilities to expand this housing model with 25 housing units at one or more sites in Ghent.

Action 7: Business case for a new business vehicle that gathers real estate to house homeless people.

Based on the establishment of the Finnish U-Foundation we are investigating whether such an operation can also be set up in Ghent (or more broadly in Flanders/Belgium). This concerns the set-up of a legal entity that purchases/acquires real estate and specifically rents it out to homeless households. Financing this can be done in various ways (private funds, social investors, philanthropy, social impact bond,...) and is further elaborated in the business case. Ideally, the Ghent homes are rented out through the social housing company of Ghent. In the realization of this, larger players in the private housing market are also being looked at as potential partners.

Action 8: Scaling-up the model of leasehold renovation/new construction

The city offers land where private project developers can build on. The housing units are to be rent out socially for a fixed price and timing. Private homes have a social purpose and the private market has a share in the growth of the social patrimony (Social Rental Agency model - SRA). New specifications are currently being prepared to add 17 homes to the SRA patrimony in this way. In addition, the procedure for 40 homes (new construction) is underway and, finally, 6 homes are currently being renovated in this context. If the evaluation is positive, we want to scale up this system further.



Action 9: Exploring Social Impact Bond to house homeless people

The government and private partner(s) enter into a result commitment. The private partner then provides for the construction/management of the homes. The non-profit partner provides the guidance. It is possible that innovative ways of expanding the range of products can be realized in this way. This can also be linked to the idea of establishing a type U- Foundation legal form (see action 7).

Action 10: Sliding rental contracts

We are investigating whether we can install the system of sliding rental contracts. Inspiration can be found at CAW and vzw Thope. Both organizations first rent from a private owner themselves and sublet to the vulnerable tenant. Over time, the lease is transferred to the effective tenant. This instrument can be linked to action 11: cooperation with real estate agencies.

Action 11: Collaboration with real estate agencies

There are good examples of letting through a real estate agency that lead to more lettings to vulnerable target groups. More guarantees can be given on the basis of agreements made with a guidance organization regarding compliance with the tenant obligations. In this way, the lack of access for the homeless can be overcome to a great extent. Such cooperation can be scaled up in phases.

Action 12: Exhaust the application for Flemish rental subsidy

We are committed to exhausting the use of the Flemish rental subsidy. Various social services are introducing a reflex to forward to the housing



guides, whereby people who can take the step from not living to living are systematically supported in applying for housing subsidy.

Support

Action 13: Creating an offer of tailor-made support

We strive to realize an offer from the City together with our (civil society) partners that is fully tailored to the residents in terms of sustainable living and well-being. To this end, we follow the proposed model of Rapid Rehousing and Housing First.

Supported housing with care

Action 14: direction, overview and alignment of alternative forms of supported housing with care (mental health sector, disability sector, elderly care, etcetera). This in function of both maximum housing if relevant and filling any gaps in the offer.

The city wants to create an overview of the various alternative forms of housing with care and support. We want to gain insight into the supply and criteria so that it becomes clear to what extent which homeless households can be housed sustainably here. The city also wants to investigate whether there are certain gaps in the offer in order to address these in consultation with the sector.

Action 15: Creation of a care hostel for homeless people with multiple diagnosis and chronic addiction.

In Ghent there is currently a specific target group of homeless people that falls in between all forms of housing. It concerns homeless people with legal



residence and at least a chronic addiction problem, who are no longer able to live independently and who show no intention to phase out their use. It usually concerns people with double or multiple diagnosis in which psychiatric vulnerability and a disability are the most common. The care hostel is a permanent housing solution for this specific group. It concerns living on a site with various specialized assistance and 24/7 support. The concept starts from Harm Reduction (= limiting the damage as a primary objective = aimed at stabilizing the home) and tries to link the residents, in addition to stabilization, to meaningful daytime activities, in whatever form.



Alignment

Action 16: Realizing sufficient alignment between shelter, temporary housing and permanent housing, regarding access criteria, admission process and general offer.

The action plan provides for a gradual build-up to sustainable living for all homeless people. During this build-up, shelter and temporary housing will always be used as a necessary and complementary offer. Coordination between these various solutions is important in order to arrive at a well-integrated and conclusive whole.

Supra-local advocacy

Action 17: Creation of a strategy for supralocal advocacy

In order to be able to realize the Ghent integrated plan, there are various preconditions that are regulated from supra-local policy levels. That is why a strategy will be set up to systematically look after these conditions with a view to realizing more prevention, housing solutions and guidance for the homeless, both in Ghent and more broadly for the entire Flemish/Belgian society.

d) Small Scale Action (SSA) : Testing the use of Open

Dialogue as a guidance method for residents in Robust Housing.

Context

Ghent is building 11 Robust Houses, partly based on the concept of the Danish Skaeve Huse. The target audience criteria are:

- chronic homelessness



- complex multi-problems that make it difficult to function in (existing) regular housing solutions for the homeless
- a history of unsuccessful housing experiences (nuisance, eviction,...) because of his/her complex problems.
- difficult connection within the existing supply-driven support system. An alternative demand-driven approach makes sense.
- can function at least independently, possibly in combination with ambulatory care, and does not pose a direct danger to himself or the surrounding residents

In the search for the right form of guidance for future residents, the professional network that is already involved with this target group came up with the unanimous vision: start from a network that already has a mandate with the target group, rather than introduce new guidance. With this target group, everything stands or falls by focusing on the needs and questions of the target group, working on the basis of equality and trust and working at the client's pace.

Starting from these basic principles, the methodology of **open dialogue** was presented to us. This method has already shown its effectiveness in projects in Denmark, among others, in organizing network and care for people with complex problems and is also applied there in the context of alternative forms of living/Housing First.

Open Dialogue is a goal-oriented approach to psychiatric care and treatment, which seeks connection and dialogue with all those involved as quickly as possible, by listening openly to different experiences and perspectives in broad conversations. This goal-oriented Open Dialogue approach is based on 30 years of international practical research and is characterized by 7 core principles, continuously attuned to the people and situation involved:

- immediate help: response within 24 hours of the first contact
- social network perspective: the patient's social network is mapped and all relevant persons are involved in the dialogue



- flexibility and mobility: care providers adapt to the changing needs of the patient and his environment and ideally an Open Dialogue meeting takes place in the home context
- responsibility: the first professional contacted, organizes the first meeting with the patient, the family and other involved parties:
- psychological continuity: an integrated network consisting of all necessary disciplines and specializations continues to work with the patient and the family for as long as necessary
- tolerance of uncertainty: open listening and searching together are central, without the agenda and the outcome of a conversation being fixed in advance
- dialogism and polyphony: creating a dialogic environment in which all experiences and perspectives are listened very respectfully in the quest to better understand the situation

Small scale action Ghent

We organise 3 pilot projects: the network of housing counsellors and outreachers searched for 3 clients who recently received social housing and who meet the robust housing target group criteria. With the client's consent, an Open dialogue process was started with the client's network involved, each time supervised by 2 process counsellors from the local Centre for Mental Health 'Ge Gek!'

Steering group: in addition to the individual client networks, a steering group was started, a learning network that meets every three months to discuss success factors and bottlenecks in the process.

Objective: in the course of the trajectories we want to see what added value the use of the open dialogue method has in the context of good care and guidance for the client and in the context of sustainable living quality for the client and his environment.

Successes

- openness and willingness of the target group to participate in the process



- very high level of support and enthusiasm among professional network partners; indicate that this way of talking *with* instead of *about* clients ensures that people feel heard
- finding that this way of working means that the target group feels heard and often puts and discusses matters on the agenda that would otherwise remain untouched.

Bottlenecks

- housing situation is not ideal, target group is not in the most suitable form of housing, so that conflict and housing pressure are greater than they would be in robust housing (pressure from the environment to intervene).
- target group with which it is very difficult to reach agreements – difficulty in coordinating this with structured agendas of partner organizations
- target group where continuity of care is necessary vs part of the supporting network that can only provide guidance temporarily (e.g. as long as the lease is running): need and flexibility in roles and room to colour outside the lines
- not all parties involved in the network agree with the vision of Open Dialogue, e.g. the housing company has a different vision and wants problems to be tackled and resolved as quickly as possible.

Actions for the near future

- networks around the clients continue to work with the methodology and process guidance.
- first information sessions about Open Dialogue are organized with the aim of getting more care providers to participate in this way of working.

e) Framework for delivery



Implementation of the Ghent Integrated Action Plan to End Homelessness for Legal Residents by 2040 will be coordinated by the local Department of Welfare and Society in close collaboration with all relevant stakeholders:

- the city services of all relevant departments, especially Health and Care and Urban Development.
- the members of the Taskforce Housing and Shelter, which is a representation of the broad group of relevant civil society actors, academics and private partners.
- the cities political board and relevant political platforms
- supralocal governments where relevant

The URBACT Local Group (ULG) will continue to work on the implementation of the action plan in its current form as a subgroup of the Taskforce Housing and Shelter.



f) Resourcing

The action plan has no financial implications for the current legislature. Several of the actions in the plan are already ongoing and financed, e.g. the extra social houses and 11 robust houses. Other actions are already being set up or prepared. Different actions don't have an extra cost, besides the regular staff cost in the city services.

For the next legislature (2025-2030) we foresee different actions that will need serious financial investments. We are looking into different financial resources, mainly European, National and Regional Funds, and local investments where possible. The biggest financial needs will be:

- care hostel (5 million)
- scaling up prevention
- scaling up housing support and the creation of a dedicated team (+16F76€)
- scaling up robust houses (6 million)
- set up a U-Foundation type of organisation

Local funds

Housing is a priority in the multi-annual policy framework of the City of Ghent. In the budget 90 million euro are foreseen to invest in affordable housing for all Ghentians.

As for the most vulnerable amongst them, the ROOF project made a counting of homeless people possible for the first time. This has been a first important step in measuring the challenge, so that appropriate solutions could follow.

Due to the different profiles of homeless people there is no one size fits all solution, hence, different actions need different types of funding with various departments and stakeholders involved. The ROOF integrated action plan has been another important step to list these actions and get an overview of what the challenges are and where the solutions lie. For some of the actions a budget has been dedicated for the next few years, so here we can take steps forward (e.g. Robust Houses, parts of the support, more social housing, and others). For other actions funding is not yet



allocated and additional sources of funding from higher authorities, i.e. national, regional or European, will be explored in the following months to see whether funding opportunities will occur.

Regional funds

At the regional level, the City of Ghent is collaborating closely with the Flemish government on several topics that indirectly or more directly support the intersectional approach needed to guarantee affordable housing in Ghent, and as part of it the prevention, crisis support and permanent accompanied housing for homeless people. A very interesting dedicated project that is currently being co-financed by the Flemish government and the Province of Eastern Flanders is the project "Robust Housing", working on an innovative solution for chronicle homeless people with complex problems.

EU and international funds

The City of Ghent has a strong track record of collaborating in EU-funded projects, both as a partner in national and international consortia as well as being in the lead. Within the new EU programming period 2021-2027 the City is currently exploring future funding opportunities at EU level that could support the implementation of the multi-annual policy framework. The actions laid out in the ROOF Integrated Action Plan need a specific type of funding support that allows for implementation on the ground rather than more research (e.g. Horizon Europe) or exchange of knowledge (e.g. URBACT).

The City of Ghent is, hence, looking into operational programmes under the Cohesion policy like ERDF, ESF+, Interreg and the European Urban Initiative (UIA). For the ongoing period 2021-2027, the five policy objectives of the Cohesion Policy focus on a smarter, greener, more connected and more social Europe, as well as Europe closer to citizens.

The City of Ghent is currently monitoring the calls being launched for these programmes:



- For ERDF and ESF+ the operational programme is still being negotiated between the EU and the Belgian government with different managing authorities at regional levels, which takes time. We hope that once we get the official details about what is in the operational programmes for ESF+ and ERDF, for Ghent managed by the region of Flanders, we can find funding opportunities that match some or several of the actions described in the ROOF IAP.
- For Interreg the City of Ghent has been engaged in the past in several interregional partnerships: Interreg Flanders-Netherlands, Interreg France-Wallonia-Flanders, Interreg North Sea region, Interreg Northwest Europe, Interreg Europe. Although the main focus in these programmes is on green and digital, some of them also support social issues, although for programmes managed by Flanders often very closely linked to access to the labour market. Only very recently some of the Interreg programmes have launched calls for proposals, but for the moment there have been no opportunities yet both in terms of topics as in terms of potential interregional partnerships to submit one of the actions of the IAP. Since not all Interreg programmes have been finalised for now and new calls will be launched, we will closely monitor these programmes and calls for the future.
- The UIA programme has been very interesting in the past. The City of Ghent is one of the few cities in Europe that managed to get 3 UIA projects funded in the previous programme period. Very interesting to mention in the context of supporting the ROOF IAP is the UIA project "ICCARus" or "Gent knapt op", improving housing conditions for captive residents in Ghent. With this project, the City renovated the houses of 100 households in Ghent. Candidates were unburdened and supported technically, financially, administrative and socially. Due to the renovations, the general quality of living of the households and of the neighbourhoods in our city improved. By using a recurring fund, the public finance was not only used for a limited group, but could be used over and over again to fight this main urban challenge. In the new programming period the European Urban Initiative (EUI) will be an interesting program to look for funding.



The next call is to be launched in the third quarter of 2022, so we are waiting for more details to see whether this could be interesting in terms of funding (actions under) the IAP.

Finally, the City of Ghent has been thinking out of the box of regular EU grant mechanisms, looking into alternative financing mechanisms like introduced by the EIB and InvestEU. With access to interesting interest rates at regular banks in Belgium, the City has currently not been able to identify an investment yet that is interesting enough to implement through EIB or InvestEU, but we will be looking into this further in the future. We also are looking beyond the EU into funding opportunities for cities worldwide, like the Bloomberg Global Mayors Challenge. In 2021 the City of Ghent submitted a proposal to fight homelessness: "From Street Lockdown to a Roof above your Head", which was unfortunately not selected. We will continue to look into these EU and global opportunities in the future to make sure the IAP will be implemented.

g) Risk analysis

The further implementation of the Integrated Action Plan involves several risks:

Politically

The plan is very much dependent on the political will to support the further implementation. The plan has a long term perspective (2023-2040) and depends on the democratically chosen political board that changes each 6 years.

Besides the local political changes, a huge risk contains the supralocal policy on housing and wellbeing. So far, the Flemish housing policy is not able to cope with the existing and growing housing crisis. Also the supralocal collaboration between housing, health and wellbeing is particularly important to be able to grow systemic efficient systems of prevention, housing and support for homeless people.



Financially

The plan is dependent on certain financial investments. Partly one time investments, partly structural ongoing financial investments. The amount of funds available from European, national and regional actors will be very determinative for the tempo of implementation of the plan.

Organisational

The URBACT Local Group is a catalyst for the current collaborative approach of the problem of homelessness. It takes a firm investment in time and resources from the city to keep this type of close collaboration alive. It is a risk that a less collaborative approach leads to more fragmentation of different projects that lack integration on a city level.

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This plan has been officially approved by the Council of the City of Ghent on 24 May 2022.

Thank you to Steven and to all stakeholders who put time and effort into preparing this plan and who will do so again for the implementation. Also thank you to URBACT and our Lead Expert Liat Rogel and Programme Expert Laura Colini for all their support and guidance.

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