Support for Technical Assistance for Social Housing (ATHIS)

Submitted By: Conselho de Arquitetura e Urbanismo do Brazil (CAU/BR)



Organization Profile

Organization Name: Conselho de Arquitetura e Urbanismo do Brazil (CAU/BR)

Organization Type: Civil society

Website: https://caubr.gov.br/

Practice Details

Country(ies): Brazil

City(ies): Several cities

Start Year: 2016

Ongoing: Yes

End Year: N/A

Main Adequate Housing Components:



Housing Thematic Areas:

- Housing Affordability & Financing
- Social Housing
- Housing Policy, Legislation & Governance

Relevant SDGs:



UN-HABITAT

Problem & Context

Technical Assistance for Social Housing (ATHIS), defined by Brazilian Federal Law No. 11,888/2008, guarantees free public technical assistance for low-income families. It is part of the constitutional right to housing and targets households earning up to three minimum wages. ATHIS includes all project, monitoring, and construction work by professionals in architecture, urban planning, and engineering for building, renovating, expanding, or regularizing homes. Despite being established as a legal right, ATHIS still faces significant challenges regarding effective implementation and institutional support. This housing policy lacks comprehensive recognition and budgetary priority as a central public policy at various levels of government. In view of this gap, since 2016 the Conselho de Arquitetura do Brazil (CAU/BR) and the CAU/UFs in 26 states of the country have allocated part of their revenue (2%, increased to 3% in 2023) in support for ATHIS.

Solution Developed

1) CAU's housing practice aims to address the qualitative and quantitative housing deficit affecting low-income populations by funding actions under the Technical Assistance for 1) Social Housing (ATHIS). Since 2016, CAU/Brazil and the CAU/UFs have allocated part of their revenue to projects providing free technical services in architecture and urban planning to vulnerable families, as established by Federal Law No. 11,888/2008. 2) Actions are implemented through public calls for proposals covering project design, renovations, housing improvements, urbanization of informal settlements, land regularization, and technical training, often in partnership with civil society organizations, universities, and social movements, including awareness campaigns and advocacy with all levels of government. Beneficiaries are families earning up to three minimum wages, living in precarious housing or social vulnerability, without access to qualified technical services. 3) By strengthening the social role of architecture, CAU contributes to the right to decent, safe, and climate-adapted housing, representing an institutional innovation that links professional practice with social responsibility.

Implementation

1) Actions under Support for Technical Assistance for Social Housing (ATHIS) include several projects in each region of Brazil, depending on the budget available in each state of the Conselho de Arquitetura e Urbanismo, which can be accessed on the "Observatório de ATHIS" platform, currently under development. 2) Initiatives range from housing improvements, urban projects, technical cooperation agreements, training, courses, guides, design competitions, partnerships, professional accreditation, manuals, books, digital media, and events, among others. Actors vary by location, with emphasis on Civil Society Organizations, NGOs, and governmental bodies providing institutional support for project implementation. 3) In the budget planning for the following year, the minimum investment percentage for ATHIS is approved in the document "Guidelines for the Preparation of the Action Plan and Budget of CAU." During the

current year, each CAU/UF implements the Action Plans and ATHIS projects, considering capacities, actors, arrangements, and local demands. Finally, actions are recorded on the "ATHIS Observatory" platform. 4) Resources correspond to 3% of the Conselho's Net Current Revenue (RCL), calculated from fees and annual dues of architecture and urbanism professionals, minus specific deductions. For 2025, an investment of 3.6% of the total budget of CAU/BR and CAU/UF is planned, amounting to approximately R$ 8.2 million. Partnerships are as mentioned in item 2.

Enablers & Obstacles

1) The main enablers of Support for ATHIS implementation were Federal Law No. 11,888/2008, which guarantees free technical assistance for social housing, and the decision of CAU/BR and CAU/UFs to allocate part of their revenue (2%, later 3%) to fund projects. Other drivers included engagement of civil society organizations, universities, and social movements; partnerships with local governments; creation of the ATHIS Observatory for data and transparency; and the institutional innovation of linking the architectural profession to its social role. 2) Main obstacles were lack of recognition and budgetary priority from different government levels, difficulty consolidating ATHIS as a national policy, and unequal institutional capacities across states. These were addressed through advocacy, mobilization of local partners, cooperation agreements, and dissemination of good practices to strengthen institutions and expand the reach of actions.

Results & Impact

1) Since 2016, the CAU has invested over BRL 35 million in Technical Assistance for Social Housing (ATHIS), funding hundreds of projects across all Brazilian states (657 mapped). Initiatives include housing improvements, urban upgrading of informal settlements, land regularization, technical training, publications, etc. Thousands of households have directly benefited from architectural and urban planning services, improving habitability, safety, and environmental conditions. The practice strengthened social participation, increased access to professional expertise for low-income families, and expanded knowledge on adequate housing solutions among communities and policymakers. 2) Impacts on vulnerable groups were significant: families earning up to three minimum wages gained dignified housing, often with essential infrastructure such as sanitation, ventilation, and safe construction. Partnerships with community organizations ensured active resident participation in planning, reinforcing local engagement and empowerment. 3) In the long term, ATHIS helps reduce housing inequality, promote healthier and safer living environments, and consolidate the social role of architecture. Dedicating a fixed share of professional council revenues creates a sustainable funding model, strengthens local economies, enhances community resilience, and supports climate-adapted housing. ATHIS has proven effective and complements broader mitigation and adaptation efforts in Brazilian urban contexts.

Replication & Scale Up

Support for Technical Assistance for Social Housing (ATHIS) has been replicated across all 26 Brazilian states and Federal District. Key factors enabling successful replication include the legal framework (Federal Law No. 11,888/2008), the institutional allocation of a dedicated budget from professional councils, partnerships with civil society organizations, universities, and local governments, and the dissemination of good practices via the ATHIS Observatory and awareness campaigns, which ensured adaptation to local contexts while maintaining the program's core objectives.

Support for ATHIS can be expanded by increasing state budget allocations, strengthening partnerships with local governments, civil society, and universities, and adapting projects to each state's context. Enhancing the "Observatório de ATHIS" to monitor outcomes, promoting community participation, and integrating it with state councils and government platforms can support broader national and local housing policies, benefiting more low-income families and improving social housing in Brazil.

Policy Uptake

This housing practice has informed or been partially integrated into policy discussions, strategies, or pilot-level policy instruments.

The Support for ATHIS of Conselho de Arquitetura e Urbanismo has been partially integrated into policy discussions, strategies, or pilot-level policy instruments in Brazil. For example, the "Nenhuma Casa Sem Banheiro" project in Rio Grande do Sul was implemented at scale by the state council and later transformed into a state-level policy, demonstrating how local initiatives can be formalized, replicated, and supported institutionally to ensure access to dignified housing across Brazil.

Lessons & Takeaways

The practice could be improved by creating indicators to monitor the implementation of the CAU budgetary guidelines, strengthening data collection on beneficiary households, enhancing coordination among state councils, and increasing community engagement from the planning stage. Expanding training for local partners and documenting lessons learned would improve replication, sustainability, and the overall impact on low-income families and local housing challenges.