Housing Improvement

Submitted By: Distrito Especial Industrial y Portuario de Barranquilla



Organization Profile

Organization Name: Barranquilla Special Industrial and Port District

Organization Type: Subnational government

Website: www.barranquilla.gov.co

Practice Details

Country(ies): Colombia

City(ies): Barranquilla

Start Year: 2016

Ongoing: Yes

End Year: N/A

Main Adequate Housing Components:



Housing Thematic Areas:

- Housing Rights & Social Inclusion
- Housing & Climate Mitigation
- Housing Policy, Legislation & Governance

Relevant SDGs:



UN-HABITAT

Problem & Context

In Barranquilla, there is a housing deficit affecting 220,000 households, of which 20.9% corresponds to qualitative deficit and 5.1% to quantitative deficit. This challenge emerges in a national context where 30% of households face housing shortages and is aggravated locally by rapid urbanization, informal settlements, and overcrowding in areas such as Suroccidente and Metropolitana. The situation is compounded by an adverse macroeconomic context, with a 5.9% contraction in the construction sector (2022–2023), rising input costs, more expensive mortgage credit, and reduced national housing subsidies. Key policy gaps include the insufficient focus of national instruments on addressing the qualitative housing deficit (home improvements), limited coordination between institutions, and the lack of strategies for strengthening human capital to meet the growing demand for sustainable and climate-resilient housing.

Solution Developed

The Housing Improvement Program has proven effective by combining technical, social and institutional approaches, but several lessons emerged. In retrospect, processes such as household documentation and response times should be improved to accelerate interventions. Household co-design ensures relevance and satisfaction, while standardized specifications guarantee quality at scale. The experience showed that accessibility must become a rule, not an exception, and that early risk screening prevents exclusions. Social pedagogy and community workshops foster ownership and sustain results over time. Clear communication, satisfaction surveys and case-by-case support strengthen trust and continuous improvement. Training and outreach materials developed during implementation capture these learnings, providing inputs for replication and policy integration in other urban contexts, reinforcing Barranquilla's role as a benchmark in inclusive, resilient housing.

Implementation

The Housing Improvement Program in Barranquilla is implemented through an integrated and transparent process that ensures efficiency. Key actions include household registration, documentary checks, social and technical surveys, vulnerability-based prioritization, tailored designs and budgets, community and individual workshops, execution of works in kitchens, bathrooms, electrical, hydraulic and sanitary networks, floors, doors and windows, plus accessibility adaptations for older adults and persons with disabilities. The process ends with formal delivery through subsidy agreements and satisfaction surveys that provide feedback for continuous improvement. Main actors are the Special, Industrial and Port District of Barranquilla through the Secretariat of Public Works (leader), the Secretariat of Planning (risk and land use validation), and the Secretariat of Communications (outreach). EDUBAR S.A. serves as project manager, with contractors and external supervisors ensuring quality control. Funded entirely with district resources, the program has consolidated a progressive housing policy since 2008,

evolving with regulatory reforms (Decrees 0516/2016 and 0811/2020). To date it has improved more than 15,000 homes and aims to reach 20,000 by 2027, strengthening social inclusion, local economy and climate resilience, and positioning Barranquilla as a national benchmark aligned with the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda.

Enablers & Obstacles

The Housing Improvement Program relied on key facilitators: anchoring in the District Development Plan and regulatory framework, use of standardized technical specifications, dedicated management by EDUBAR S.A., clear prioritization criteria for vulnerable households, community pedagogy, and lot-based contracting that enabled scaling and efficiency. Strong political and institutional support, 100% district funding, and coordination with contractors and supervisors ensured quality and control.

Main obstacles included incomplete household documentation, dwellings in risk or non-legalized areas, supply scheduling challenges, structural limitations of some homes, and occasional resistance from beneficiaries regarding timelines or scope. These were mitigated through possession declarations, early risk validation, bundled works, clear socialization processes, satisfaction surveys, and tailored support to critical cases, ensuring continuity, citizen trust, and effective program delivery.

Results & Impact

The Program has benefited more than 15,000 households (2008–2025), with a projection of 20,000 by 2027. In the current period (2024–2027), 9,947 improvements have been contracted, financed with district resources exceeding COP 322 billion.

Results:

- Health: 70% of households report better well-being and fewer gastrointestinal/respiratory diseases.
- Accessibility: 1,000+ homes adapted with ramps, expanded bathrooms, or support bars.
- Economy: repair costs fell 20–25%; property values rose 15–20%.
- Environment: 8–10% less water and 6–8% less energy use thanks to efficient fixtures.
- Community: 80% of beneficiaries note stronger cohesion, pride, and coexistence.
- Vulnerable groups: Prioritized are low-income families, women heads of household, victims of conflict, ethnic communities, older adults, and persons with disabilities.

Long-term impacts: The Program enhances living conditions, local job creation, and supply chains, strengthens urban resilience with sustainability criteria, and provides a replicable model for other cities. Evidence is documented in the Barranquilla Development Plan 2024–2027 and reports from the District Secretariat of Public Works.

Replication & Scale Up

The practice has not yet been formally replicated but is highly replicable in cities facing qualitative housing deficits. The model, applied citywide in Barranquilla, combines standardized processes with tailored designs per household. It is transferable thanks to a solid regulatory framework, modular technical specifications, and a clear social-technical workflow. Scalability is ensured through lot-based contracting, dedicated management, and defined budget caps, making it adaptable in similar urban contexts.

Scaling up the Housing Improvement Program requires combining standardized processes with household co-design to ensure relevance. Expansion is enabled by lot-based contracting, modular technical specifications, and a dedicated manager for quality and transparency. Broader reach can be achieved through co-financing with national, international, and private actors, while community pedagogy and clear regulations ensure ownership, sustainability, and replicability in other urban contexts.

Policy Uptake

This housing practice has been fully adopted into formal policy frameworks and legislation, and is being implemented at scale with institutional support.

he Housing Improvement Program, initially an innovative practice, has been fully integrated into Barranquilla's policy framework through decrees (0516/2016, 0811/2020, 0461/2025) and the 2024–2027 Development Plan, ensuring continuity and scale. It is implemented with 100% district resources, institutional support, and a clear regulatory framework. To strengthen national adoption, it is recommended to embed this approach into urban housing policy, scale modular technical standards, and replicate the social-technical management model.

Lessons & Takeaways

The program consolidated an efficient model linking planning, targeting, and technical execution. In retrospect, response times and handling of incomplete documentation could improve. Household co-design ensures relevance and satisfaction, while standard specifications guarantee quality at scale. Accessibility must be the rule, not the exception. Early risk screening prevents exclusions and social pedagogy ensures sustainability beyond construction, supported by training materials that strengthen ownership and replicability.