Opengela: Supporting Integrated Housing Renovation in Basque Country

Submitted By: Departmen of Housing and Urban Agenda, Basque Government



Organization Profile

Organization Name: Department of Housing and Urban Agenda, Basque Government

Organization Type: Subnational government

Website: https://www.euskadi.eus/gobierno-vasco/departamento-medio-ambiente-politica-territorial/inicio/

Practice Details

Country(ies): Spain

City(ies): Several cities in the Basque Country

Start Year: 2019 **Ongoing:** Yes **End Year:** N/A

Main Adequate Housing Components:



Housing Thematic Areas:

- Housing Affordability & Financing
- Housing Rights & Social Inclusion
- Housing & Climate Mitigation
- Technology & Digital Solutions in Housing

Relevant SDGs:



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Problem & Context

OPENGELA programme is the Basque service designed to support integrated housing renovation and urban regeneration in vulnerable neighbourhoods in the region.

OPENGELA was launched to implement a massive house renovation model for private residential buildings in vulnerable areas, where energy poverty, ageing housing stock and social exclusion are the main challenges addressed.

Firstly, the Basque region is a densely populated area with Spain`s oldest building stock, mostly multi-family buildings, with low level of accessibility, very energy inefficient and in need of urgent renovations.

Secondly, the programme focuses in vulnerable areas which results in other challenges, such as the lack of access to finance, low priority for building owners and technical difficulties.

One of the main barriers to building renovation is multiple ownership, which means that decisions regarding the works must be taken by majority vote, requiring agreements in order to undertake this type of work.

Solution Developed

1) OPENGELA implements physical one-stop-shop (OSS) which offer technical, financial, legal and social support for the renovation journey, tailored to the specific needs of the community of owners in each neighbourhood. In addition, the OSS is the space for homeowners` and neighbours` active participation and engagement in the process of urban regeneration.

2) Objectives:

- Holistic approach to renovation, focusing on energy efficiency, nature-based solutions and accessibility-improvement in private buildings and public spaces at a neighbourhood level.
- Stimulate energy-efficient home renovations in vulnerable areas.

3) OPENGELA`s innovative approach includes:

- Integration of technical innovation, such as industrialised renovation solutions and digital building tools (Building Renovation Passport) to reduce the costs and facilitate a step-by-step renovation.
- A strong social dimension based in participatory governance, with the aim to foster social cohesion leaving no one behind.
- Multi-level governance and collaboration: Coordinated by the Basque Government, OPENGELA involves close collaboration between multi-level public institutions, private companies, and civil society.

Implementation

1) The overall programme framework is based on the “Diagnosis of the needs for intervention in the Basque Region’s building stock” (Basque Government, 2012 & 2020) which analized 65 indicators on socio-demographic, socio-economic, habitability, accessibility, stability and energy efficiency dimensions. The diagnosis defines the high or very high vulnerability areas in the Basque Region.

2) Municipalities and the Basque Government's Directorate set an action plan for the neighbourhood, which starts with the opening and management of a physical OSS, conducting diagnosis of targeted buildings (technically, socially and financially) and engaging and supporting neighbours through the renovation journey.

OPENGELA is managed by the Basque Government and linked with local authorities, ensuring alignment with housing and energy policies. Through each OSS engages with homeowners, architects and construction companies fostering a closer collaboration between stakeholders. Active participation and governance is ensured with the collaboration of neighbourhood and civil society associations, fostering among stakeholders a sense of shared responsibility, commitment and collective action.

3) The programme started with two pilot OSSs and has extended gradually to it’s current 22 OSSs. Renovation works are being carried out in 2788 dwellings and expected to finish through 2026. That has resulted in an important mobilisation of funds, both public, via grants, and private, made by homeowners.

Enablers & Obstacles

1) For the implementation and funding of the programme the Basque Government's leadership has been key, establishing urban regeneration as one of its priorities through its legislative and strategic initiatives.

Participative gobernance is also a fundamental principle of OPENGELA ensuring that the programme effectively meets the community's needs and expectations. This includes participation of homeowners, local communities, municipal authorities, professionals and enterprises and civil society organisations.

2) One key obstacle has been the lack of interest for renovation works, especially those related to energy-efficiency. It was addressed engaging homeowners trough accessibility improvement renovations, public grants and active communication.

Also, the building industry has experienced significant ups and downs, resulting in a shortage of skilled labour, qualified professionals and number of companies. This has been addressed with training courses.

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Results & Impact

1) OPENGELA programme is designed to achieve long term impacts on the clean energy transition and social equality and justice.

In relation to the transition to cleaner energy, renovation works have been conducted in 22 neighbourhoods and 2788 dwellings in order to reduce primary energy consume, GHG emissions and energy demand. With the energy savings certificates of the projects has been assessed that the primary energy savings and reduction of energy demand have achieved over 60%.

2) OPENGELA programme framework is based on the “Diagnosis of the needs for intervention in the Basque Region’s building stock” which defines the high or very high vulnerability areas in the Basque Region which need priority in urban regeneration policies. Over the last five years, the programme has extended to 25 neighbourhoods in the Basque Country where building renovation and urban regeneration projects are being undertaken, resulting in significant impacts, from improvements in the comfort and accessibility of homes and public spaces, and other actions, such as, shared self-consumption communities, digitalisation and landscape interventions. This holistic approach at the neighbourhood level results on a greater impact over the citizens` lives.

3) In the longer term, OPENGELA is expected to extend to many neighbourhoods in the Basque Region, as the building stock is one of the oldest in South Europe, in need of urgent renovation works to actively collaborate into the cleaner energy transition.

Replication & Scale Up

1) The direct impact on a very sensitive and widespread issue in many cities in the Basque Country: the improvement of old housing stock in vulnerable neighborhoods, generating more adequate and affordable housing.

2) The participatory and community-oriented model proposed by the project, involving all relevant stakeholders in the process with offices located in the neighborhood.

3) The determined support and cooperation between administrations, particularly between the Basque government and the municipalities where the renovation projects are implemented.

OPENGELA has already begun to scale in several cities in the Basque Country. Three key elements to ensure the future success of its expansion are:

1) Provision of public funding: although a significant portion of the investment for renovation projects comes from the homes themselves, the model includes significant public investment in subsidies and loans.

2) Innovate in construction techniques and materials for building renovation, as well as train local construction workers and companies in new techniques.

3) Improve communication and promote it in different cities in the Basque Country.

Policy Uptake

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

Following its piloting phase, the OPENGELA model has been adopted as one of the Basque Government's official urban regeneration and housing programs. It has also been incorporated as one of the flagship projects of the Basque Country Urban Agenda 2050. This ensures the continuity of the participatory urban renewal model in vulnerable neighborhoods for the coming years.

Lessons & Takeaways

1) Better approach to simplify and extend the renovation journey facilitating a step-by-step renovation to make it more affordable for all type of households.. Furthermore, industrialized solutions to the renovations need to be incorporated.

2) New ways of communication are needed to bring the rehabilitation process closer to property owners. Continue working towards more participatory and inclusive governance that integrates citizens into urban regeneration processes, encouraging their commitment.

3) Need of more efficient coordination among different stakeholders during the process