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Gender mainstreaming in housing policies: the pioneer case of the Region of Valencia

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This article discusses the implementation of gender mainstreaming in public housing policies in the Region of Valencia, Spain. As a relatively advanced case of gender mainstreaming, the text illustrates the complexity of the processes, some possible stages to take into account, and the diversity of initiatives and actions that can be implemented. The Valencian case is of particular interest because it exemplifies a comprehensive approach to gender mainstreaming in housing policies, which facilitated the development of initiatives aimed at addressing both socioeconomic and spatial gender-based inequalities. The article demonstrates the advantages of combining political determination, favorable regulatory frameworks, and the help of expert knowledge, as evidenced by the experience of collaborations between the Generalitat Valenciana and the UNESCO Chair on Gender of the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid. The process of gender mainstreaming of housing policies in the Valencian region has had a significant impact on various regulations, including the mandatory technical standards on residential building design. This exceptional and relatively pioneering step is developed in the article, which also includes a description of a pilot building that shows the results of integrating gender criteria for the design of residential buildings. The aforementioned case study illuminates the vulnerability inherent in gender mainstreaming initiatives within public policy, emphasizing the necessity of meticulous progression toward the realization of gender equality.

KEYWORDS

housing policies, gender mainstreaming, residential architecture, gender in housing, gender equality, gender in spatial planning, public housing, design criteria

1 Introduction

The gender perspective has been a part of urban planning and architecture research and theory for half a century. Initially emerging in the Anglo-Saxon context and within the humanities and social sciences, the first practical applications began to be developed in the latter half of the 1980s (Fainstein and Servon, 2005; Roberts, 2013; Damyanovic and Zibell, 2019; Sánchez de Madariaga and Neuman, 2020). However, the majority of these pioneering initiatives were constrained to local contexts and were subject to changing circumstances, such as the will and capacity of diverse groups of feminist women or the greater or lesser complicity of the socio-political context. Consequently, the process of gender mainstreaming in urban planning has been marked by significant regional variations worldwide. Even within Europe, considerable disparities exist between countries regarding the trajectory and current state of gender mainstreaming in urban planning (Tuggener and Zibell, 2019).

Pioneering countries, including the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and the Nordic countries, have witnessed periods where the integration of a gender perspective within public

policies concerning spatial planning has stagnated, and even regressed (Berglund and Wallace, 2013; Tummers and Denèfle, 2019; Roberts, 2022). Conversely, countries that initiated their engagement with gender studies at a comparatively late stage, particularly in relation to spatial planning and design, have experienced relatively rapid processes and are now considered reference cases. Spain, in particular, has garnered recognition for its over three decades of experience in integrating gender perspectives within urban planning and architectural domains. In recent two decades, Spain has achieved a notable level of systematization in the implementation of gender mainstreaming policies across various sectors (Mahaney, 2024), including urban planning, spatial planning, and housing policies (Sánchez de Madariaga and Novella Abril, 2020; Sánchez de Madariaga, 2020).

The literature review¹ indicates that the majority of scientific literature addressing the relationship between gender and housing focuses on two thematic areas. Firstly, the exploration and description of gender dimensions in housing in a cross-cutting sense. Early research determined that these dimensions can be divided into two broad areas: socioeconomic and spatial (Hayden, 1982; Birch, 1985). Secondly, the presentation and, in some cases, evaluation of practical experiences of applying a gender perspective to housing policies. The majority of this second type of scientific literature is limited to socioeconomic dimensions, collecting measures to facilitate access to decent housing for women or female-headed households.² However, with the exception of the city of Vienna (Irschik and Kail, 2013; Ullmann, 2013, 2020), no scientific publications have been found that present cases of gender mainstreaming in public housing policies corresponding to a public administration with broad sectoral competences on the issue. One of the contributions of this article is precisely to address this gap in academic research by presenting a case that attempts to address the two spheres of gender dimensions in housing identified by the scientific literature.

The present article focuses on the specific case of the beginning of gender mainstreaming in a Spanish region—the Region of Valencia, otherwise referred to as the Comunitat Valenciana—and in a specific sectoral policy, namely housing. The case study is noteworthy as it illustrates the diverse methodologies through which gender can be integrated within these domains of public policy. The case study reveals a range of actions and initiatives tailored to varying stages of gender mainstreaming development, objectives, and specific housing policy areas. The range of actions encompasses awareness-raising initiatives, which are pertinent in the nascent stages of mainstreaming

development, and actions of a technical and normative nature, which are more appropriate when the issue has reached a relatively advanced stage or when consolidation is sought.

The advances in gender mainstreaming in public policies related to housing in the Region of Valencia are relevant (Observatorio del Hábitat y la Segregación Urbana, 2023; Sánchez de Madariaga, 2023), but it is important to provide the context and the antecedents from which they arose in order to highlight the transversal nature of the process and the need to establish priorities and strategies in the short, medium and long term. In light of this, the article provides a synopsis of the process of gender mainstreaming in the domains of special planning in the Spanish and Valencian context up to the legislature between 2019 and 2023, wherein the experiences that the article describes in greater detail are cultivated. These experiences correspond to the series of collaborations of strategic expert advice that the UNESCO Chair on Gender³ of the Polytechnic University of Madrid carried out for the Second Vice-Presidency and *Conselleria* of Housing and Bioclimatic Architecture of the Generalitat Valenciana. The combination of expert knowledge and political determination—within a favorable socio-political framework and with certain antecedents—enabled the advancement of gender mainstreaming in housing design and planning policies in Valencia, achieving a precise and transformative outcome.

The article concludes with a description of a real case study: one of the first housing buildings in the Region of Valencia whose design is the result of several of the public policies described in the text. It is a publicly owned building for affordable rental housing. Its design demonstrates the value of integrating gender perspective as a fundamental principle of innovation in the domains of planning and special design.

2 The beginning of gender mainstreaming in public policies on urban planning and architecture in Spain

The integration of a gendered perspective within the realms of architecture and urban planning in Spain commenced in the mid-1990s. During this initial decade, the majority of initiatives were promoted and led by groups of women belonging to the academic world, feminist movements and progressive political parties, collectively termed “femocrats”. Through various forms of academic

1 This literature review encompasses not only the one conducted for the present article, but also those undertaken for earlier research in which the author has participated. For instance, the research carried out for the Spanish Government in 2019 as part of the technical consultations for what would later become the Spanish Housing Law (Law 12/2023), included in section 4.2.2 of this article.

2 These research projects are frequently embedded in broader themes that address different inequalities and gaps with regard to residential exclusion. Gender is one of the variables under study, with a focus on single-mother households, women who are victims of gender-based violence, and other groups of women affected by factors that increase their risk of residential exclusion.

3 Although it was officially established in 2016, the UNESCO Chair on Gender Equality Policies in Science, Technology, and Innovation draws on over 25 years of experience in gender mainstreaming. The Chair has two main objectives: First, enhancing women’s participation and leadership in STEAM, while promoting structural changes in organizations to achieve this goal. Second, integrating gender perspectives into R&D and higher education curricula in technological fields such as engineering, planning, and architecture. It collaborates with universities, research institutions, intergovernmental and multilateral organizations, public administrations, non-profit institutions, and private companies to incorporate gender perspectives into their activities and equality policies. Further information can be found on: <https://www.gendersteunescochair.com> (Accessed April 15, 2025).

and political engagement, including assemblies, meetings, and conferences, knowledge was exchanged, strategic alliances were forged, and the first writings of both an academic and advocacy nature were produced (Loboreiro Amaro, 2008).

In the 2000s, a series of confluences took place that accelerated and, above all, exceptionally consolidated the advance of gender mainstreaming in public policies in Spain. The European Commission's commitment to developing policies in favor of equal opportunities between women and men coincided with the entry into office of a new socialist government in 2004, which placed significant emphasis on gender equality as a priority and a transversal line of action for all areas of government. During this period, a significant body of legislative and symbolic measures pertaining to gender equality was developed. Of these, the 2007 Organic Law on Equality⁴ (Ley Orgánica 3/2007) was the most significant due to its far-reaching nature and subsequent capacity to influence diverse areas of public policy and regional and local administrations (Sánchez de Madariaga, 2013).

In addition to the political will and the context of opportunity that had been created, it was essential to incorporate into key positions people (mostly women) who, in combination with being feminists, had expertise in the respective area of public policy. Consequently, the process of gender mainstreaming in the domains of architecture and urban planning at the national level was led by the Ministry of Housing, where the involvement of the architect Inés Sánchez de Madariaga, first as a advisor and later as Deputy Director General of Architecture, was fundamental. The initiatives that were developed addressed two complementary approaches; firstly, the promotion, visibility and recognition of women in these fields and, secondly, the integration of gender in the sectoral agendas and programs of architecture and urban planning. The majority of the actions centered on the integration of the gender perspective in the initiatives overseen by the Subdirector General for Housing (awards, publications, exhibitions, congresses, competitions, commissions and juries, etc.), as these mechanisms traditionally control access to economic and reputational resources in the field of architecture and urbanism in Spain (Gutiérrez-Mozo et al., 2021).

A strategic action aimed at empowering women in these fields and enhancing their visibility involved a shift in perspective, perceiving urbanism and architecture not as the outcome of an individualistic action by a "genius creator" but as processes of multidisciplinary and collective creation. This shift in focus on the nature and practice of spatial planning not only led to a greater visibility of women in architecture and urbanism, but also accelerated the process of gender mainstreaming by bringing about profound changes in government action in these disciplines. In short, greater attention was paid to the urban scale as opposed to the prominence of the building as an "object"; recognition was given to the work of collectives and profiles far removed from the "star architect" and, perhaps most significantly, it inaugurated a process of rediscovery of the transformative role of

architecture and urbanism that has persisted to the present day (Sánchez de Madariaga and Novella Abril, 2023).

As a direct consequence of these changes, there was a growing interest in the Spanish architecture and urbanism scene in those buildings and spaces that support the everyday life of the population, opening up a way to deepen and develop gender mainstreaming in these disciplines. Consequently, in this rediscovery of the transformative role of architecture and urban planning, projects focused on fundamental facilities and community public spaces gained prominence and recognition, as well as urban regeneration plans and projects, landscape design focused on wellbeing and the fight against climate change, and, of course, housing, which is the focus of this manuscript.⁵ It is important to note that all of these issues are relevant from a gender perspective and, by their very nature, correspond, within the disciplines of spatial planning and design, to the types of initiatives, plans and projects that require a high level of public policy involvement in order to be further developed and implemented at the level of professional practice.

In Spain, the majority of legislative competences in the areas of urban planning and architecture are devolved to the regional governments (*Comunidades Autónomas*, in Spanish), leaving the central government with a more strategic role as a generator of broad frameworks and guidelines (Castellà Andreu, 2012; Farinós et al., 2017). The Spanish State is comprised of 17 *Comunidades Autónomas* and 2 *Ciudades Autónomas*,⁶ resulting in 19 distinct realities concerning public policies on both spatial planning and gender equality (Figure 1). Consequently, the level of development and consolidation of gender mainstreaming exhibits significant heterogeneity, with considerable variations across different regions (Alonso Álvarez et al., 2022). Prior to an exposition of the gender mainstreaming process in public housing policies in the Region of Valencia, a summary of the most relevant actions carried out by the Spanish government in the second half of the 2000s will be presented in the following paragraphs. The actions selected were those that were instrumental in promoting gender mainstreaming in public housing and urban planning policies, which were subsequently implemented by the regional governments, as well as in consolidating those that had already been developed by the most advanced regions in this field.

As Sánchez de Madariaga (2013) explains, the Spanish Architectural Biennial (now, BEAU) and the Ibero-American Architecture Biennial (now, BIAU) modified their names and content to include urbanism. This ostensibly trivial modification subsequently

4 Organic Law 3/2007, of March 22, for Effective Equality of Women and Men [Ley Orgánica 3/2007, de 22 de marzo, para la igualdad efectiva de mujeres y hombres], BOE No. 73 (March 23, 2007), available online at: <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/lo/2007/03/22/3>.

5 This trend reached its culmination in 2022 with the approval of Law 9/2022, of June 14, on the Quality of Architecture (Ley 9/2022, de 14 de junio, de Calidad de la Arquitectura), BOE no.142, June 15, 2022, available online at: <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/l/2022/06/14/9/con>. This national legislation incorporates gender as a perspective that must be considered in contemporary architecture and urban planning to address the challenges facing Spanish society. The law incorporates a gender perspective across various sections, including the preamble and objectives.

6 Spain has two Autonomous Cities (*Ciudades Autónomas*): Ceuta and Melilla. These cities, located in North Africa, possess the same level of autonomy as the 17 Autonomous Communities (*Comunidades Autónomas*) within Spain. They are unique in that they hold both the powers of autonomous communities and also the powers of provinces and municipalities.

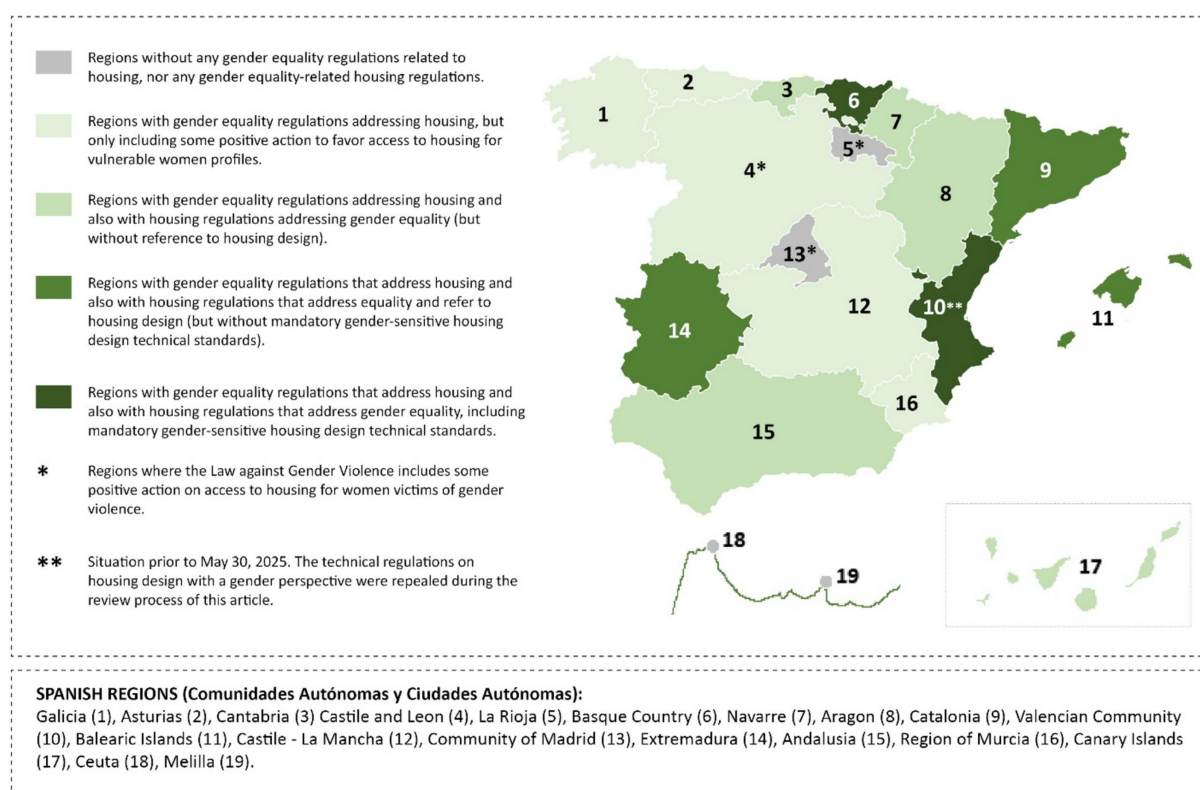


FIGURE 1

The map of Spain illustrating the classification of its regions according to the degree of linkage between gender equality regulations and housing regulations. Source: Original elaboration based on data extracted from [Alonso Álvarez et al. \(2022\)](#), and updated by the author with data up to May 2023.

paved the way for more substantial modifications. For instance, exhibitions and events concerning urban matters were incorporated into the program of both biennials, and the National Housing Awards and the National Urbanism Awards were added to the existing Spanish National Award for Architecture. The calls for exhibitions were widely open to the public, promoting the involvement of groups and collective works rather than prioritizing individual approaches. The commitment to collective candidatures resulted in a notable increase in the number of women participating in these calls for entries. This development, in turn, initiated a process of normalizing and consolidating the presence of women in these prominent events within the Spanish architectural scene.

In 2006, the Spanish National Prize for Architecture was awarded to a woman for the first time, namely Matilde Ucelay Maórtua (1912–2008), who was the first woman to graduate as an architect in Spain. Ucelay's personal and professional trajectory embodies many of the gender inequalities that are common in liberal professions such as architecture, including an exemplary punishment by the Franco regime that limited her work throughout her professional life ([Vilchez Luzón, 2013](#); [Sánchez de Madariaga, 2022](#)). The conferring of the highest architecture prize in Spain to this pioneering woman architect was also a strategic action to develop gender mainstreaming in these disciplines and raise awareness of the gender inequalities rooted in the profession. It is also noteworthy that the main award of the BEAU was first won by women in two subsequent editions, Benedetta Tagliabue in 2005, and Carme Pinós in 2007. During this period, the newly

established National Urbanism Award and the National Housing Award both featured women among their recipients. The former was awarded to urbanist Maria Rubert de Ventós in the 2004 edition, while the latter was granted in 2006 to mixed teams, comprising Judith Leclerc in the category of public housing and Liliana Obal in the category of private housing. Furthermore, a significant number of women were appointed to various roles, including juries, curators, speakers, coordinators, and directors, in relation to both Biennials and their associated subprograms.

Conversely, in addition to promoting the presence of women in architectural fields, gender-relevant issues were incorporated into the quality criteria used for the selection of projects and proposals in specific exhibitions within the call for both BEAU and BIAU programs. The Cities and Spaces for Equality Prize acknowledged contributions from Spanish local administrations across two distinct categories: accessibility and gender. The prize recognized best practices in the mainstreaming of gender issues in both urban planning and architecture policies. Notable among these initiatives was an exclusive women-centric exhibition, entitled *España, f. Nosotras, las Ciudades*, which represented Spain in the 2006 Venice Biennial. This exhibition provided a platform for the showcasing of the work of female architects from very different areas and approaches within the profession, as well as the contribution of women from other fields to the everyday life of cities, such as the judiciary, the arts, the security forces, public transport, public health or the business world ([Blanco Lage, 2006](#)). The competition Ibero-American Women Architects and

Planners was included for the first time in the Lisbon Biennial of 2008 with the name “Windows open to the World,” addressing both gender equality and the inclusion of gender in architectural contents.

As is customary in the processes of gender mainstreaming in public policies, all these measures of awareness-raising were intended, in the medium and long term, to pave the way for more in-depth measures at the legislative level (European Commission, 2012). A series of pivotal national legislative acts incorporated gender and equality principles into their respective texts, impacting on education, practice and regulation in the field of spatial planning. Specifically, the National Housing Plan of 2005 (*Plan Estatal de Vivienda 2005–2008*)⁷ incorporated specific provisions for women victims of gender-based violence and female-headed households. The new Organic Law of Universities (*Ley Orgánica 4/2007, de 12 de abril, de Universidades*)⁸ required the integration of gender mainstreaming in curricula in all areas of higher education. Among the pre-normative initiatives, the Ministry of Education organized in 2006 the first conference on the integration of gender into higher education curricula, including a specific working group on engineering and architecture (*Instituto de la Mujer, 2006*). The Spanish Land Use Act of 2007 (*Ley 8/2007, de 28 de mayo, de suelo*)⁹ included a reference to gender. Lastly, the Organic Law for Gender Equality (*Ley Orgánica 3/2007, del 22 de marzo, para la Igualdad Efectiva de Mujeres y Hombres*) included three articles on urban and housing policy.

Following a period of two decades, this concise and abridged overview of the most relevant actions taken by the Spanish government in the second half of the 2000s can be interpreted in several ways. The most immediate reading underscores the capacity for agency that *femocrats* exhibited when conditions were conducive to the mainstreaming of gender (Mahaney, 2024). This, in turn, emphasizes the importance of appointing feminists with extensive expertise in specific policy domains to decision-making roles during the initial stages of the gender mainstream process.

A more thorough reading of the legislative advances reveals some of the resistance that had to be overcome and confirms that the process of gender mainstreaming in public policies on architecture and urban planning in Spain was indeed at an initial stage. For instance, it is noteworthy that the legal stipulations for incorporating gender considerations into urban and housing policies are elaborated further in the Organic Law for Gender Equality (*Ley 8/2007*) compared to the Land Use Act (*Ley 8/2007*), which is the specific and sectoral legislation. A second example is the manner in which the

National Housing Plan of 2005 addresses gender issues. The Plan conceptualizes women as either victims or as a group at risk of social exclusion, yet it fails to adopt a more comprehensive approach to the gender dimensions of housing planning and design, an approach that had already been identified in the existing literature at the time. These constitute the substantial differences between the initial experiences in the 2000s and those undertaken by the regional governments at the end of the following decade. This second generation of initiatives will contribute to the mainstreaming of gender by reinforcing this approach from within the sectoral policies and regulations themselves, as well as from a broader perspective. (Sánchez de Madariaga, 2013).

In conclusion, these initial experiences of gender mainstreaming in urban planning and architecture should be regarded primarily as strategic and transformative, given that they have been successful in both the short and long term. In the short term, these initiatives had a significant impact, enhancing the visibility of exceptional female architects and urban planners and thereby raising awareness of women in architecture. Furthermore, these initiatives constituted the genesis of the subsequent evolution of gender mainstreaming in public policies concerning architecture and urbanism. Indeed, in the long term, the efforts made can now be seen in a more mainstream discourse on the need to implement gender equality policies in architectural fields and institutions in most of Spanish regions. From the second half of the 2010s, various local and regional governments have been incorporating gender mainstreaming into their spatial planning policies, encompassing regulations and public procurement processes. The housing policies of the Region of Valencia, on which this article focuses, are a case in point.

The integration of a gender perspective within the domains of architecture and urban planning has been consolidated beyond the competences of the regional governments. Various provinces, which occupy an intermediate rank between the regional governments and the municipalities, have deployed a variety of initiatives to incorporate gender in the management of the spatial planning policies within the territory for which they are responsible (Novella Abril and Sánchez de Madariaga, 2025). Of these, Gipuzkoa in the Basque Country merits particular attention. In addition, municipalities have initiated various programs with the objective of integrating the gender perspective within their urban planning, mobility, and the design of public spaces. Notable cities that have demonstrated a commitment to this approach include San Sebastian, Irun, Barcelona, Santa Coloma de Gramanet and Valencia (Vives Urbieta and Galarraga Aiestaran, 2013; Leturiondo-Aranzamendi, 2020; Muxi-Martínez, 2020).

The incorporation of gender perspective in architecture and urban planning is also being consolidated in the field of professional practice. The Higher Council of Professional Associations of Architects of Spain (CSCAE), the most relevant professional body of the architectural profession, is working on gender mainstreaming its both internal and external activities (Sánchez de Madariaga et al., 2022). A number of regional Architects' Associations are also addressing the issue by implementing various strategies, including training, dissemination activities and internal policy initiatives (Acasuso and Burgués, 2024). In the domain of urban planning and architecture education, a notable advancement is the integration of equality plans in numerous universities with architecture schools. At the research level, there are some groups and networks of unequal relevance and trajectory. However, these are currently the only means of introducing the gender perspective into the official contents for the training of future architects and town planners.

⁷ Royal Decree 801/2005 of July 1, approving the 2005–2008 State Plan to promote citizens' access to housing. (Real Decreto 801/2005, de 1 de julio, por el que se aprueba el Plan Estatal 2005–2008, para favorecer el acceso de los ciudadanos a la vivienda), BOE no. 166, July 13, 2005, 24941–24968, available online at: <https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-2005-12049>.

⁸ Organic Law 4/2007, of 12 April, which amends Organic Law 6/2001, of 21 December, on Universities. (Ley Orgánica 4/2007, de 12 de abril, por la que se modifica la Ley Orgánica 6/2001, de 21 de diciembre, de Universidades), BOE no.89, April 13, 2007, available online at: <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/lo/2007/04/12/4/con>.

⁹ Act 8/2007 of 29 May, on Land Use (Ley 8/2007, de 28 de mayo, de suelo), BOE no.128, May 29, 2007, 23266–23284. Available online at: <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/l/2007/05/28/8>.

The integration of a gender perspective within teaching programs remains practically non-existent, being confined to select optional subjects in a limited number of institutions.

3 Gender mainstreaming in housing public policies in the region of Valencia

The mainstreaming of the gender perspective in spatial planning and design policies in the Region of Valencia began to be consolidated in 2015, coinciding with the arrival of a new progressive regional government (Serrano Lanzarote et al., 2017). Despite the differences in its composition and structure, this government remained in power for two consecutive legislative periods: from 2015 to 2019, and from 2019 to 2023. The gender mainstreaming in public housing policies discussed in this article corresponds to the second of these legislatures, when the development of gender mainstreaming reached sufficient maturity to implement more specific actions and to act at different levels in different sub-areas within the housing issue.

However, as is often the case in gender mainstreaming processes, the actions of the second legislature built on or developed earlier actions carried out during the previous term of the Valencian government. For this reason, the section is divided into two parts: the first part provides a summary of the main actions of the Generalitat Valenciana in the area of gender and spatial planning between 2015 and 2019, and the second part provides detailed information on specific and advanced actions in the area of housing between 2019 and 2023.

3.1 2015–2019: raising awareness, creating structures and developing regulatory frameworks

During the initial legislature, the spatial planning and design policies were concentrated in a single department, the Conselleria¹⁰ of Housing, Public Works and Regional Development (CVOPVT) (In Spanish, *Conselleria de Vivienda, Obras Públicas y Vertebración del Territorio*), which was headed by a woman. As the name of the department suggests, it brought together regional public policies on territorial planning, mobility and infrastructure, urban planning, architecture and housing. A categorization of gender mainstreaming actions in this period can be made, which divides them into three categories: the creation of structures, awareness-raising and dissemination actions, and legislative measures (Antequera Verdeguer, 2020).

10 The *conselleria* is defined as one of the regional ministries or departments of the government of the Generalitat Valenciana. The *conselleries* can be regarded as the equivalent of ministries in the state government, with each being headed by a *conseller* or *consellera* who is charged with executive functions within the area of responsibility assigned to them. The term “conselleria” is the official form in Valencian, while in Spanish “consejería” is used.

The subsequent paragraphs offer a concise overview of the most impactful actions undertaken during this first phase of consolidating the gender perspective in urban planning and architecture in the Comunitat Valenciana. The selection of actions has been made with the intention of highlighting those that have had the most significant impact in establishing the necessary framework, thus paving the way for the implementation of housing-focused measures that occurred in the second legislature. The purpose of this description of the background, previously made of the national context and now of the regional context, is to highlight the need to act in an orderly and strategic way in the processes of gender mainstreaming in public policies, especially in fields such as urban planning and architecture that still have little tradition and experience in this matter.

The creation of specific support structures for gender equality initiatives within institutions is one of the first steps in the gender mainstreaming process (EIGE, 2016). The CVOPVT established its two primary gender structures in 2015: the Gender Equality Board (*Mesa de Género*) and the Gender Equality Unit¹¹ (*Unidad de Igualdad*). The former comprised a diverse group of women in positions of responsibility in regional public entities related to urban planning and architecture. The function of the Gender Equality Board was to promote awareness-raising actions, carry out a diagnosis of the situation in order to identify ways to develop gender mainstreaming, initiate legislative reforms and encourage the implementation of pilot projects. The Gender Equality Unit functioned as a strategic and transversal tool within the administration's own system, serving as a link between the political management and the technical structure of the *Conselleria* (Antequera Verdeguer, 2020).

The CVOPVT's activities centered on the dissemination and awareness-raising of gender dimensions in urban planning and architecture exhibited a broad scope, aiming to engage all sectors involved in these fields. In order to inform and train professionals from both the private sector and public administrations, technical conferences were convened (Serrano Lanzarote et al., 2017) and a concise practical guide, entitled the “Set”,¹² was produced (Azara Escrivá and Gil Vila, 2017). Moreover, as a pilot project, a urban design competition was launched for the remodeling of a relevant public space in the city of Valencia, in which the gender perspective

11 The establishment of structures for the advancement of gender mainstreaming within public institutions, such as the Equality Units, is stipulated in the regulations on gender equality at both the state level (Organic Law 3/2007) and the regional level (Law 9/2003) (Antequera Verdeguer, 2020).

12 The complete title of this basic manual is “Set para introducir la perspectiva de género en el proceso urbano. Recopilación de información en materia de arquitectura y urbanismo desde la perspectiva de género” (“Set for introducing a gender perspective in the urban process. Compilation of information on architecture and urban planning from a gender perspective”). The term “set,” besides being a word adopted from English and meaning a collection of implements, containers, or other objects customarily used together, means in Valencian “seven”, the number of thematic areas into which this publication is divided. The document can be downloaded from: https://mediambient.gva.es/documents/168489756/0/SET_cas_link.pdf/0cf2c19d-e679-4c10-810a-fea0dd4fb484 (Accessed April 25, 2025).

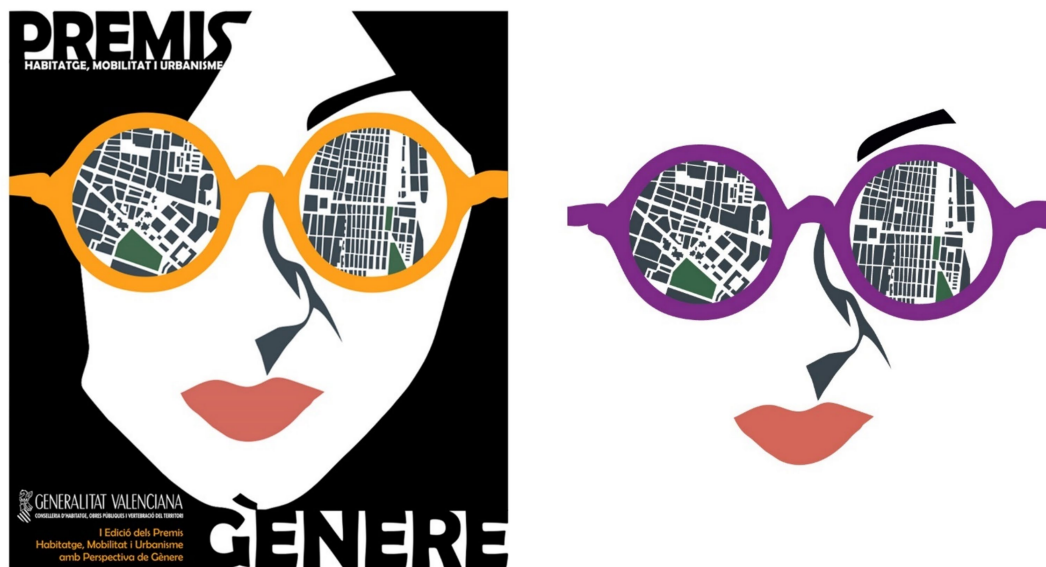


FIGURE 2
Poster announcing the first edition of the awards for urban planning and architecture with gender perspective (left), and the logo version that was later used in different awareness-raising campaigns (right). Source: Generalitat Valenciana.

was one of the evaluation criteria.¹³ On the other hand, the establishment of the Awards for Housing, Mobility and Urban Planning with a Gender Perspective (*Premios de Vivienda, Movilidad y Urbanismo con Perspectiva de Género*)¹⁴ constituted an initiative that sought to encourage both professionals and municipalities to incorporate the gender perspective in their projects, plans or actions related to spatial planning and design (Figure 2).

Awareness-raising actions¹⁵ also addressed the symbolic dimension, as evidenced by the change of name of part of the public housing estates belonging to the Generalitat Valenciana. A considerable proportion of these residential projects retained nomenclature associated with the Francoist regime, being replaced by names of notable women or with names of historical milestones, practices or concepts bearing relevance to the history of women and feminism (EVHA, 2019). Finally, with the aim of raising awareness among future generations of architects, the

Gender Equality Board promoted a competition on innovation in housing aimed at architecture students. The objective of this competition was to identify projects that demonstrated an integration of gender-based criteria within the context of public housing. The scope of the competition encompassed the rehabilitation of existing buildings and the conception of innovative residential typologies. The overarching ambition of this initiative was to facilitate the development of pilot projects that would serve as catalysts for the adaptation of public housing stock to contemporary housing models and societal requirements (Antequera Verdeguez, 2020).

Between the years 2015 and 2019, there was an opportunity to promote gender mainstreaming through legislative measures of varying depth and focus in the domains of mobility, territorial planning, urban planning and housing. Of these, two are worthy of particular attention: the Law on the Social Function of Housing (Law 2/2017 on the Social Function of Housing) and the new Law on Territory, Urban Planning and Landscape (LOTUP) (Law 1/2019, of 5 February). The former concentrated on the vulnerability and high risk of residential exclusion of women victims of gender-based violence. Conditions were established with the aim of facilitating access to adequate housing, preventing evictions and expanding the regional government's capacity to allocate rental aid for this particular group of women (Peris García, 2021; Such Palomares, 2021).

Consequently, the LOTUP evolved into one of the most advanced spatial planning regulations in Spain with respect to gender mainstreaming (Sánchez de Madariaga, 2023). This legislative framework incorporates a gender perspective in a relatively cross-cutting manner, formally recognizing it as a fundamental principle of the novel territorial and urban planning model across various sections and, most notably, devoting an entire annex to this subject. When considered in conjunction with the aforementioned regulation at both the national and regional levels, the LOTUP will establish a robust and conducive framework for the subsequent development of gender mainstreaming initiatives in more specific areas of spatial planning. Consequently,

13 The competition called for proposals on the renovation of the urban space surrounding the Central Market in the city of Valencia. The winning project was proposed by the architects Bet Quintana and Blanca Peñín, with the assistance of a multidisciplinary team, in which the UNESCO Chair was responsible for incorporating the gender perspective.

14 From 2020, corresponding to their fourth edition, these awards changed their name to Urban Planning, Mobility, Landscape, Housing and Architecture with a Gender Perspective Awards. The latest call for these awards was made in 2022, marking the sixth edition. Since the entry of a new conservative regional government in 2023, these awards have not been issued again. The complete list of awards is available on the website of the current Conselleria de Medioambiente, Infraestructuras y Territorio: <https://mediambient.gva.es/es/web/perspectiva-de-genero/convocatorias> (Accessed April 25, 2025).

15 For a significant number of the awareness-raising and dissemination initiatives of this legislature, a common logo was utilised to reinforce the concept of transversalisation and coordination, thereby preventing the perception of isolated and unconnected actions. Referring to Figure 2.

during the second legislature (2019–2023), there was an increase in the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in more technical regulations, real projects or plans, and other types of activities typical of the administrative and professional practice of the architectural fields.

Despite the fact that they do not explicitly address actions associated with gender mainstreaming, it is nevertheless worth mentioning two initiatives of interest that were carried out by the CVOPVT in the field of housing during this initial legislative period. Firstly, the publication “El Libro Blanco de la Vivienda. Comunitat Valenciana.” The book, published in 2018, undertakes a comprehensive and meticulous evaluation of the housing problem in the Valencian Region, encompassing both socio-economic and spatial planning dimensions. The publication proposes a strategic framework within which the concept of “Housing Equity” (*Equidad Habitacional*, in Spanish)¹⁶ is introduced, considering the gender perspective as a tool for innovation and progress in housing policies. Within the range of strategies delineating this framework, there were several proposals that had a direct or indirect relation to the gender perspective. The significance of this publication is rooted in the fact that the approach and guidelines it proposes will serve as a preliminary foundation for the formulation of public policies on housing in the forthcoming legislative term (2019–2023) (*Instituto Valenciano de la Edificación*, 2018; *Observatorio del Hábitat y la Segregación Urbana*, 2023).

Secondly, the establishment of the Chair for Housing Innovation (*Cátedra de Innovación en Vivienda*) through an agreement with the *Universitat Politècnica de València* (2018).¹⁷ The Chair has been engaged in a series of activities related to new housing strategies, with the objective of promoting innovation in the field. These activities have focused on emerging housing needs and have included training, dissemination and knowledge transfer. This Chair will not address the gender perspective in a monographic way during the term of office between 2019 and 2023. Rather, it will incorporate it in a transversal way as a variable of interest within innovation in housing. In this manner, the Chair for Housing Innovation has contributed to the normalization of this approach within the field of housing and residential architecture.

3.2 2019–2023: consolidation, advancement and diversification of gender mainstreaming in specific areas of housing policy

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the gender mainstreaming actions in housing policy that were implemented by

the Generalitat Valenciana between 2019 and 2023. Due to its length, the text has been divided into subsections according to groups of initiatives with similar approaches or objectives. This classification of actions aims to organize the information and facilitate understanding of the process of gender mainstreaming in housing policies.

3.2.1 A new administrative structure for housing policies

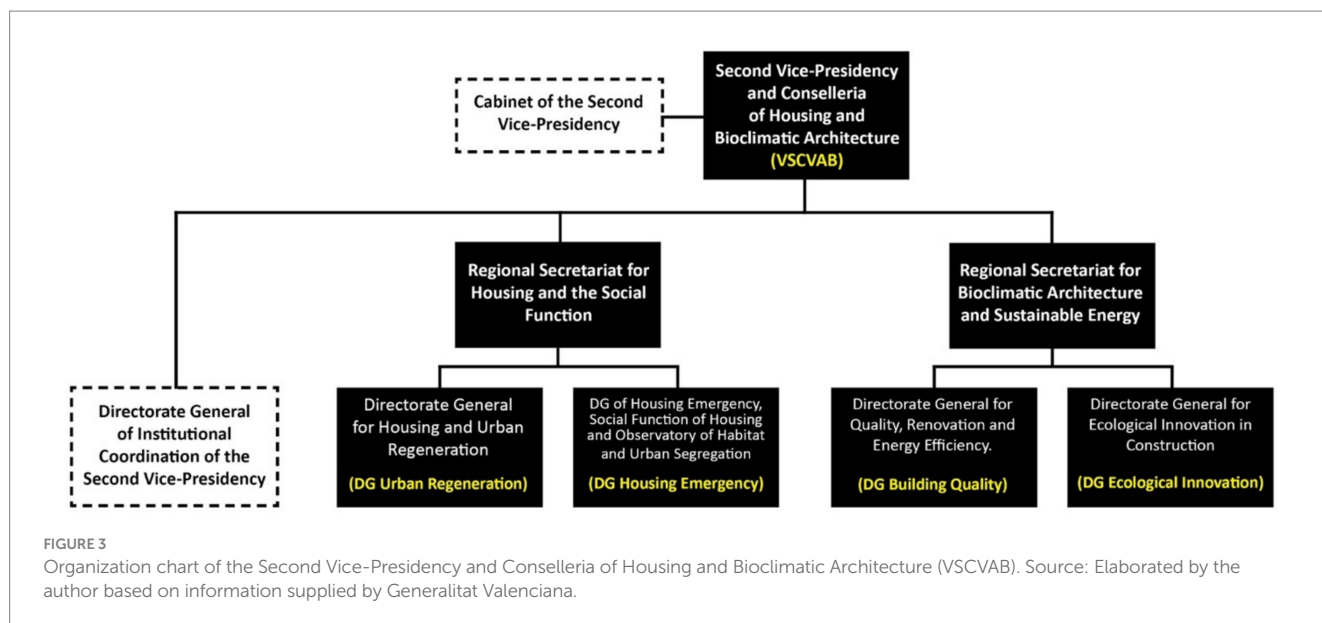
Following the regional and municipal elections of May 2019, there was a change in the composition of the government of the Generalitat Valenciana. Despite the fact that the coalition of parties that governed in the previous legislature (2015–2019) remained in power, it was necessary for a third party to join in order to retain the regional government. Among the various changes implemented was a reconfiguration of the regional government structure, characterized by an augmentation in the number of *conselleries* (regional ministries) and vice-presidencies. In the initial legislature, the office of the president was accompanied by nine *conselleries*, one of which (the Vice-Presidency and Regional Ministry of Equality and Inclusive Policies or, in Spanish, *Vicepresidencia y Conselleria de Igualdad y Políticas Inclusivas*) also held the rank of vice-presidency. In the second legislature, two of the initial *conselleries* were divided, resulting in a total of 11 *conselleries*, two of which held the rank of vice-presidency.

Indeed, one of the *conselleries* that was divided was the aforementioned *Conselleria of Housing, Public Works and Regional Development* (CVOPVT), the department that had been responsible for initiating gender mainstreaming in a relatively systematic way in public policies related to spatial planning in the Valencia region. During this subsequent period, spanning from 2019 to 2023, its competences were subdivided into two new regional ministries. Within the ambit of spatial planning, these ministries addressed diverse planning scales and substantive issues, whilst also employing a differentiated approach to gender mainstreaming. The *Conselleria of Regional Policy, Public Works and Transport* (In Spanish, *Conselleria de Política Territorial, Obras Públicas y Movilidad*, CPTOPM) dealt with the territorial scale of planning and held competences in infrastructure, mobility and transport. The Second Vice-Presidency and *Conselleria of Housing and Bioclimatic Architecture* (In Spanish, *Vicepresidencia Segunda y Conselleria de Vivienda y Arquitectura Bioclimática*, VSCVAB), which concurrently acquired the rank of vice-presidency, retained certain competencies in the domain of urban regeneration, albeit with a predominant focus on the building scale, accompanied by a pronounced interest in housing (Figure 3).

In relation to the mainstreaming of a gender perspective within the domains of architecture and urban planning, both *conselleries* persisted in their promotion of initiatives, albeit from a divergent standpoint. The Regional Ministry of Territorial Policy (CPTOPM) adopted a more continuist approach, opting for initiatives aimed at consolidating the progress made in the previous legislature. From 2019 to 2023, the CPTOPM undertook three significant initiatives pertaining to the dissemination and awareness-raising of gender issues within the context of urban planning. The first such event was held in 2021 and comprised the international meeting “Gender and Sustainable Urban Development in the Post-Pandemic”, as well as the annual working meeting of AGGI (the UN-Habitat Executive Director’s Gender Advisory Group). The outcome of this meeting was the “Valencia Declaration on Gender Equality, Women’s Empowerment, and Urban Sustainable Development in the

¹⁶ The concept of “Housing Equity” (*Equidad Habitacional*) is developed in “Libro Blanco de La Vivienda – Comunitat Valenciana” (*Instituto Valenciano de la Edificación*, 2018). In summary, the concept responds to reflections on housing in everyday life, rights, and justice. To this end, two complementary approaches to housing policies are proposed. First, policies should be centered on meeting households’ tangible needs. Second, the transformative capacity of architecture and urban planning should be recognized as a vehicle for implementing a comprehensive public policy agenda that promotes equality and sustainability. The “Housing Equity” concept addresses three main thematic axes: flexibility, diversity, and solidarity.

¹⁷ Further information on this Chair can be found on: <https://www.upv.es/contenidos/CHABITAT/> (Accessed April 21, 2025).



Post-Pandemic Future”¹⁸ (Boccia and Sánchez de Madariaga, 2022). In 2022, the CPTOPM produced a practical guide aimed at professionals and municipalities to facilitate gender mainstreaming in urban planning, in response to the requirements of the aforementioned LOTUP Act (Álvarez Isidro and Gómez Alfonso, 2022). In that same year, the Regional Ministry entered into an agreement with the Universitat Politècnica de València for the establishment of a chair at the Valencia School of Architecture. This chair is responsible for the organization of training and dissemination events, primarily targeted towards students.

Despite the absence of an organizational gender equality structure,¹⁹ the Second Vice-Presidency and *Conselleria* of Housing and Bioclimatic Architecture (VSCVAB) developed a more advanced approach to gender mainstreaming. The initial conditions of this *conselleria* were both a limitation and an opportunity, and in part determined the way in which gender mainstreaming was deployed in public housing policies in the Comunitat Valenciana during the 2019–2023 legislature. The VSCVAB was a recently established *Conselleria*, characterized by a streamlined administrative structure and budget allocation when compared to other regional government departments. Its competences were specifically focused on the issue of housing, but from a broad angle of the problem. Within the same *conselleria*, public housing policies of

a socio-economic nature coexisted with those of a purely spatial and technical nature; similarly, housing was approached from both the urban scale and the scale of architectural and typological design.²⁰

The competences of the VSCVAB Ministry were distributed among two Regional Secretariats, each comprising two Directorates General. From the perspective of gender mainstreaming, it is noteworthy that all of these departments addressed a shared and cross-cutting issue: housing. This facilitated the coordination of strategies; however, the implementation of specific actions was conducted within the respective domains of each Directorate General. Consequently, this approach enabled the precise specification of the implemented actions, enhancing their effectiveness.

The Regional Secretariat for Housing and Social Function was in charge of housing policies from the perspective of their social function. It was in charge of emergency housing policies, urban regeneration policies and the management of public housing assets (Article 48, Decree 105/2019, of 5 July, of the Consell).²¹ The

18 The “Valencia Declaration on Gender and Sustainable Development in the Post-pandemic” was issued by AGGI as a result of an Expert Group Meeting sponsored by the Generalitat Valenciana. This Declaration is a development of the four Reports that AGGI produced during the height of the pandemic, in 2020, for and Expert Group organized by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva. The Declaration presents a comprehensive vision for a gender equality and women’s empowerment agenda, accompanied by a series of priority solutions and recommendations (Boccia and Sánchez de Madariaga, 2022).

19 The Equality Unit was retained within the CPTOPM. However, it collaborated with the VSCVAB on specific actions, such as the coordination of the forementioned awards.

20 The structure and competences of the VSCVAB were regulated by Decree 105/2019 of 5 July, of the Consell, and Decree 240/2019 of 25 October, of the Consell, approving the organic and functional regulations of the second vice-presidency and Conselleria of housing and bioclimatic architecture (Decreto 240/2019, de 25 de octubre, del Consell, de aprobación del Reglamento orgánico y funcional de la Vicepresidència segona i Conselleria de Vivienda y Arquitectura Bioclimática). DOGV no.8671, November 6, 2019, 46704–46709, available online at: https://dogv.gva.es/datos/2019/11/06/pdf/2019_10515.pdf. The latter was subsequently developed by Order 2/2002, of 3 October, of the Second Vice-presidency and Conselleria of Housing and Bioclimatic Architecture.

21 Decree 105/2019, of 5 July, of the Consell, establishing the basic organic structure of the Presidency and the conselleries of the Generalitat. (Decreto 105/2019, de 5 de julio, del Consell, por el que establece la estructura orgánica básica de la Presidencia y de las consellerías de la Generalitat). DOGV no.8590, September 12, 2019, 4180–4192. Available online at: https://dogv.gva.es/datos/consolidacion/2019/D_2019_105_ca_D_2022_189.pdf.

Directorate General for Housing and Urban Regeneration (hereafter, DG Urban Regeneration) was in charge of public policies aimed at strengthening the public housing stock through urban regeneration actions and land promotion. In addition, the Valencian Land and Housing Authority (EVha)²² was attached to DG Urban Generation, which served as another instrument for the development of housing policies. The Directorate General for Housing Emergencies, the Social Function of Housing and the Observatory of Habitat and Urban Segregation (hereafter, DG Housing Emergency) was responsible for dealing with housing emergencies, managing rental subsidies and carrying out studies on the housing situation in the Region of Valencia.

The Regional Secretariat for Bioclimatic Architecture and Sustainability dealt with issues closer to the spatial dimension of housing. The general focus of this department was on the quality of buildings, mainly from the point of view of sustainability and the use of innovation (Article 51, Decree 105/2019, of 5 July, of the Consell). Although not exclusively, the public action of the two Directorates General that made up this regional secretariat focused on residential architecture. The Directorate General for Quality, Rehabilitation and Energy Efficiency (hereafter DG Building Quality) was responsible for developing policies to promote the quality and sustainability of buildings and to encourage rehabilitation. The Directorate-General for Ecological Innovation in Construction (hereafter DG Ecological Innovation) was responsible for introducing ecological and environmental criteria in the management and public procurement of the construction sector.

As elucidated by Peris García (2023),²³ who served as the Director General of Housing Emergency from 2019 to 2023, the various departments of the VSCVAB were unified in their approach to housing as a public policy, centered on a shared conceptualization of its significance. This concept was termed the “Valencian Housing Model” (*Model Valencià d’Habitatge* in Catalan), which posited housing as a pivotal component of the welfare state, serving as a central axis around which multiple sectoral public policies could be articulated. The model was grounded in four principles (Figure 4).

1. The concept of housing is understood as a physical and architectural space that is in a state of constant evolution. This necessitates a comprehensive review of residential typologies and models.

2. Housing is understood as a space for socializing, and it is also the gateway to other basic rights.
3. Housing should be considered as part of a whole, with consideration given to both the urban scale (spatial dimension) and the community scale (social dimension).
4. The utilization of housing as a means to contribute to the challenge of sustainability, encompassing practices such as green building and energy efficiency.

This breadth in the public policy approach to housing, combining socio-economic and spatial aspects, is fully in line with the gender perspective approach to housing. The specialized bibliography distinguishes two major gender dimensions with respect to housing. Firstly, the increased risk of residential exclusion of women. Secondly, there is an absence of adaptation of residential typologies to the reality of women, which is characterized by two aspects: a greater dedication to care tasks and a greater sensitivity to the perception of security (Birch, 1985; Fainstein and Servon, 2005; Sánchez de Madariaga and Novella Abril, 2024). This parallelism was another aspect that favored gender mainstreaming in this *conselleria*. Conversely, the absence of an inherent gender equality framework was addressed through three complementary mechanisms. Firstly, by actually implementing the broad existing regulatory framework on gender equality in public policies on urban planning and architecture at regional and state level, as described in the sections above. Secondly, the appointment of four Directors General from the professional and academic fields of architecture, urban planning and law who, although not experts in the gender perspective, demonstrated an awareness of this approach and integrated it in a transversal manner in the specific initiatives of their department. This was pivotal in achieving a capillarization of gender mainstreaming through the implementation of highly specific actions, which were characterized by a considerable transformative capacity. Thirdly, as with other specific or relatively innovative issues in the field of spatial planning and design, the different departments relied on external expertise, especially when seeking to develop gender mainstreaming in more technical or less explored areas.

For a significant proportion of its efforts to promote gender mainstreaming in housing policies, the VSCVAB was supported by the UNESCO Chair on Gender from the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (hereafter UNESCO Chair). Whilst it was not officially designated as a single cross-cutting consultancy, throughout the four-year period of the legislature, the UNESCO Chair collaborated in various ways with the four General Directorates of the *Conselleria*, as well as with the Cabinet of the Vice-President. Consequently, from a pragmatic standpoint, the Chair played a pivotal role in promoting and consolidating the mainstreaming of gender in housing policies in the Valencian Region. The subsequent section delineates these collaborative endeavors between the UNESCO Chair and the VSCVAB. However, to reflect the breadth of initiatives promoting gender mainstreaming in housing policies, it also encompasses other pertinent initiatives undertaken by the Regional Ministry, either autonomously or with the assistance of external experts.

3.2.2 Consolidating gender mainstreaming: expert advice and coordination of specific and diverse actions

The UNESCO Chair in Gender at the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid has a long-standing track record in the application of gender and equality principles to the disciplines of spatial planning and

22 The Entitat Valenciana d’Habitatge i Sòl (EVha) is a public entity. It is the instrument of the Generalitat Valenciana to develop housing policies and manage a public housing stock consisting of over 14,000 dwellings located in different municipalities of the Comunitat Valenciana. The organization’s activities are focused on the following objectives: firstly, the reinforcement of the social function of housing; secondly, the promotion and management of public housing; and thirdly, the participation in urban development and remodeling processes in neighborhoods where there is the greatest need. Furthermore, EVha also participates in the management of residential and industrial-logistical land.

23 Purificación Peris “The integration of the gender perspective within public policies to promote the social function of housing and the regeneration of residential areas. The Valencian Housing Model”, presented at the Conference “Habitatge i Inclusió. Jornades de Noves Politiques,” Maó, 27 January 2023, 2:16:12, available online at: https://youtu.be/NDsL__clUel?t=8167 (Accessed April 25, 2025).

GENERALITAT VALENCIANA (2015-2023)

THE VALENCIAN HOUSING MODEL



01

A PHYSICAL SPACE IN CONSTANT EVOLUTION

The concept of housing is understood as a physical and architectural space that is in a state of constant evolution. This necessitates a comprehensive review of residential typologies and models.

02

A GATEWAY TO SOCIALIZATION AND BASIC RIGHTS

Housing is understood as a space for socialising, and it is also the gateway to other basic rights.

03

A PART OF THE CITY AND THE COMMUNITY

Housing should be considered as part of a whole, with consideration given to both the urban scale (spatial dimension) and the community scale (social dimension).

04

A SUPPORT FOR GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY

The utilisation of housing as a means to contribute to the challenge of sustainability, encompassing practices such as green building and energy efficiency.

FIGURE 4

The "Valencian Housing Model," 2015–2023. Source: Elaborated by the author based on information from [Peris García \(2023\)](#).

design. The scope of the UNESCO Chair's expertise encompasses both academic domains, including teaching, research, and dissemination, and the realm of consultancy and technical advice for both public bodies and private entities. The gender perspective with regard to the planning and design of residential areas and buildings is one of the main lines of work of the UNESCO Chair. Prior to the collaboration with the VSCVAB, the UNESCO Chair had provided technical advice on gender and public housing policies to other public administrations. Of these prior experiences, it is noteworthy to mention two that addressed issues highly analogous to those subsequently developed in Valencia. A study was conducted for the Spanish Government on gender and housing, and advice was provided to the Basque Government on the incorporation of the gender perspective in the technical regulations for the design of residential buildings.

In 2019, the Spanish Ministry of Public Works commissioned the UNESCO Chair to conduct a study on the gender dimensions of housing. This study formed part of the pre-normative consultations undertaken by the Government of Spain, with a view to establishing the foundations for the new National Housing Law²⁴ (Law 12/2023, of

24 May, for the right to housing). This study constituted a comprehensive mapping of the most relevant gender issues in the field of housing, addressing both aspects related to accessing and maintaining housing, as well as those related to spatial planning and design.

The study conducted a gender analysis of the Spanish context with respect to changes in household composition, economic conditions and lifestyles. The investigation focused on the gender dimensions of residential exclusion in Spain, with the objective of identifying those groups of women most at risk of residential exclusion. This analysis was conducted by examining sex-disaggregated data and gender indicators, which clearly confirmed the gender inequalities with respect to housing.²⁵ The collection of case studies, which were of international relevance, were meticulously categorized according to the specific gender dimensions to which they addressed. The selected

²⁴ The purpose of the law, which was passed in 2023, was to develop the right to decent housing, which is already enshrined in the Spanish Constitution, by focusing on existing problems regarding building quality and affordability, especially for those social groups most at risk of residential exclusion. Law 12/2023, of 24 May, for the right to housing (Ley 12/2023, de 24 de mayo, por el derecho a la Vivienda), BOE no.124, May 26, 2023, available online at: <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/l/2023/05/24/12/con>.

²⁵ The primary document of the statistical analysis was "La exclusión residencial en España, Documento de Trabajo 3.3" (Housing exclusion in Spain. Working Paper 3.3), which was prepared by [Arrondo Segovia and Bosch Meda \(2019\)](#). This document, published in 2019 as part of the VIII FOESSA Report, remains the most recent statistical study on housing and residential exclusion at the national scale, with a greater treatment of sex-disaggregated data. The FOESSA Reports (*Informes FOESSA*) are comprehensive studies that describe social development in Spain, studying social structure, inequalities, and poverty. The most recent FOESSA report, published in 2022, while addressing certain housing concerns, placed significant emphasis on the repercussions of the pandemic.

case studies encompassed residential architecture projects conceived to facilitate care and quotidian life, initiatives proposing novel forms of management and ownership from a gender and feminist perspective, along with broader policy proposals for deliberation by the drafters of the law.

A significant contribution of this study was the incorporation of a chapter that proposed gender-based criteria for the spatial design of housing, following an extensive bibliographical review. The findings of this research, particularly the section on design criteria, formed the foundation for the consultancy provided by the UNESCO Chair to the Basque Government, and subsequently informed several collaborative initiatives with the Generalitat Valenciana.

The Basque Country has been identified as the most advanced Spanish region in the gender mainstreaming of its public policies in spatial planning and design (Sánchez de Madariaga and Novella Abril, 2019; Leturiondo-Aranzamendi, 2020). In 2019, the regional government initiated the process of revising the technical regulations governing the design of residential buildings; namely, “Decree 80/2022, of 28 June, regulating the minimum conditions of habitability and design standards for dwellings and public housing of the Basque Country” (hereafter, Basque Habitability Decree).²⁶ The objective of this initiative was to adapt these regulations to the contemporary requirements of Basque society. The gender perspective was, among other issues, one of the innovative criteria that this new regulation sought to incorporate. The UNESCO Chair collaborated with the technical, legal and political staff of the Basque Government through working sessions, during which standards and recommendations addressing gender issues were drafted and given legal form.

The UNESCO Chair initiated a collaborative relationship with the VSCVAB in mid-2020 through the *Instituto Valenciano de la Edificación* (IVE).²⁷ At that time, the VSCVAB had entered into an agreement with the IVE, the general objective of which was the identification of strategies for the renovation and improvement of the built environment. In this line of work, the gender perspective was identified as a key priority area of interest for the VSCVAB, which requested that the IVE organize an introductory conference on gender and housing. In collaboration with the IVE and the Office of the



FIGURE 5
Poster announcing the conference “Género y Vivienda” in February 2021. Source: Instituto Valenciano de la Edificación.

Vice-President, the UNESCO Chair staff assumed responsibility for the organization of the conference and the subsequent coordination of the resulting publication²⁸ (Figure 5).

The objective of the conference was twofold: firstly, to raise awareness of the gender dimensions of housing in a cross-cutting manner and secondly, to provide insight into the state of the art. As an activity overseen directly by the Vice-Presidency, its aim was to address both the socio-economic aspects of housing and those related to design and spatial planning. The objective of the conference was to contribute to the consolidation and development of gender mainstreaming in the public policies being developed by all the departments of the VSCVAB.

The program, designed by the UNESCO Chair, was methodically divided into four thematic blocks. These were intended to address the diverse interests of the various departments of the VSCVAB, while also aiming to resonate with a broad public, encompassing academics, local administrations and professionals. The initial block adopted a comprehensive approach to the issue, delineating the state of the question and engaging national and international experts. The subsequent block focused on the socio-economic aspect of the gender

26 Decree 80/2022, of 28 June, regulating the minimum conditions of habitability and design standards for dwellings and housing facilities in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (Decreto 80/2022, de 28 de junio, de regulación de las condiciones mínimas de habitabilidad y normas de diseño de las viviendas y alojamientos dotacionales en la Comunidad Autónoma del País Vasco), BOPV no.168, September 1, 2022, available online at: <https://www.euskadi.eus/bopv2/datos/2022/09/2203803a.pdf>.

27 El Instituto Valenciano de la Edificación (IVE) is a private non-profit making foundation with public interest set up in October 1986. IVE is a research institute that seeks to improve the quality and sustainability in the construction process through the R&D in the building field. IVE board includes professionals, developers, building contractors, end-users, in order to provide a platform for ideas exchange, developments and knowledge in the different fields of construction. During 30 years of its existence the institute has remained very active in the drafting of technical documents to support the pre-normative research of building process and to spread of all the aspects related to the quality and sustainability in the design, construction and use of buildings. Source: <https://www.five.es/> (Accessed April 20, 2025).

28 “Género y Vivienda. Libro de Resúmenes” (*Gender and Housing. Book of Abstracts*) was edited by the Instituto Valenciano de la Edificación (IVE) and published in May 2021. The book can be downloaded free of charge at the following address: <https://productos.five.es/producto/genero-y-vivienda> (Accessed April 20, 2025).

dimensions of housing. This block comprised presentations that provided information on public policies aimed at combating the specific residential exclusion of women from an intersectional perspective.

The third block focused on showcasing some innovative initiatives undertaken by other Spanish regional governments in the area of gender and housing. In order to ensure the utility of the findings to all VSCVAB departments, two cases were selected for study, one addressing socio-economic dimensions and the other focusing on spatial design and planning issues. The case of Catalonia was examined, with statistical data highlighting gender inequalities in access to and maintenance of housing. Furthermore, the presentation included an overview of some of the region's initiatives to combat women's housing exclusion. The case of the Basque Country was presented by the UNESCO Chair itself and was devoted to explaining how the gender perspective had been incorporated into the aforementioned new technical regulations for the design of residential buildings.

The fourth and final block was dedicated to the presentation of gender-sensitive residential buildings. The objective of this block was to demonstrate the physical or spatial outcomes of incorporating gender-based criteria into housing design and planning.²⁹ Two case studies were presented, one from a public administration and the other from a users' cooperative, illustrating diverse approaches to housing management and promotion from a gender perspective. In the selection of these two real cases, efforts were made to ensure that the buildings in question had been designed by women or by professional collectives with a multidisciplinary and equal organizational structure.

The aforementioned presentations have been incorporated into the publication that was issued as a result of the conference. In addition to this, the publication contains an extensive bibliography, the purpose of which is to provide further information and demonstrate the breadth and depth of the gender dimensions of housing. This publication is part of the catalogue of publications of the *Instituto Valenciano de la Edificación*, and it is available to download free of charge from the institution's website (Guamán Hernández, 2021).

The UNESCO Chair also provided advice to DG Ecological Innovation on gender mainstreaming in the "Proyecto Piloto" program, one of the most relevant initiatives of the VSCVAB in the field of public housing promotion. This program was developed with a threefold objective. Firstly, to contribute to the expansion and strengthening of the public housing stock. Second, to channel knowledge transfer on innovative housing issues in line with the triple dimension of economic, social and environmental sustainability. Third, to strengthen the role of public administration as a role model through innovative public procurement. To this end, DG Ecological Innovation launched a series of three architectural competitions for the development of three residential buildings that would serve as

demonstrators of innovative and responsible housing models with respect to the triple dimension of sustainability (Matarredona Desantes and Ferreiro Chicote, 2022).

The UNESCO Chair contributed its expertise to facilitate gender perspective as one of the innovation parameters of the program. The gender perspective had to be mainstreamed in such a way that it would be present both in the public procurement process itself and in the architectural proposals that would compete in the competitions. On the one hand, the competition rules should contribute to equal opportunities between women and men in the architecture sector by encouraging more women to apply and benefit from public investment. Furthermore, the integration of gender-based design criteria into residential building projects should be encouraged.

The utilization of anonymous competitions in public procurement has been demonstrated to be a comparatively inclusive mechanism for the acquisition of architectural services by public administrations. However, the design of the competitions incorporated additional characteristics with the aim of promoting the diversification of the professional profiles participating in these calls for tenders, particularly with regard to encouraging the involvement of women and young professionals. The competition was to be evaluated by a jury composed of experts, with an equal gender composition. The process was intentionally structured in two phases, with the primary objective of ensuring that the initial phase of these competitions was a manageable undertaking for all types of professionals. The second phase, which would comprise only five finalist proposals, would necessitate a greater level of documentation and workload, but would be remunerated accordingly.

The stipulated competition rules outlined that the technical teams should be overseen by an architect, whose sole technical competence was deemed to be equivalent to an official qualification in architecture, as opposed to stipulating a minimum track record of completed projects. Concurrently, the composition of these teams was such that they comprised an interdisciplinary group of individuals with accredited experience in specific areas identified by the VSCVAB as potential vectors of innovation. As Matarredona Desantes (2023),³⁰ Director General for Ecological Innovation, explains, greater participation was expected from young professionals, from teams with less hierarchical and more inclusive forms of organization and with greater gender parity, as well as the enrichment of residential architecture through interdisciplinarity. In addition to other profiles, a person with a knowledge of gender and the social dimension of housing was required.

The gender perspective was incorporated into the evaluation criteria of the competitions. Specifically, the housing model proposed by the projects had to respond to the concept of "Housing Equity", as defined in the aforementioned "El Libro Blanco de la Vivienda. Comunitat Valenciana." It was necessary for both housing buildings

29 A detailed description of these two buildings can be found in the Best Practices section of the book "Designing Daily Life Spaces. Gender Criteria for Housing Design and Public Procurement," a text authored by Inés Sánchez de Madariaga and Inés Novella Abril (Director and Researcher, respectively, of the UNESCO Chair) at the commission of the DG Building Innovation.

30 Matarredona Desantes "Inclusion and gender perspective in new approaches to regulating residential architectural design", presented at the Conference "Habitatge i Inclusió. Jornades de Noves Polítiques," Maó, 27 January 2023, 2:48:12, available online at: https://youtu.be/NDsL__clUeI?t=10089 (Accessed April 25, 2025).

and units to adopt a gender perspective, taking into account the spatial requirements for care, the various stages of the life cycle, and promoting safety perception and inclusion (Matarredona Desantes and Ferreiro Chicote, 2022).

The UNESCO Chair collaborated with the DG Ecological Innovation in the preparation of the documentation that formed part of the call for tenders and during the evaluation process of proposals. A document was produced that included fundamental recommendations for the integration of a gender perspective within the domain of public housing. The report was divided into two sections. The initial part was addressed to the VSCVAB itself and comprised a summary of public housing policies with a gender perspective and some priority lines of action.³¹ The second part of the report compiled design criteria for the integration of a gender perspective into the architectural design of residential buildings. These design recommendations were drafted to form part of the documentation provided to the technical teams participating in the “Pilot Project” program. The format of the guidelines was unembellished and practical in nature, offering specific recommendations that were meticulously categorized according to the nature of the space in question. These recommendations were intended for application to both residential units and the broader scale of the edifice and its external areas. These fundamental recommendations facilitated the process of familiarization with the gender dimensions in residential architecture for technical teams, thereby providing a foundation for the integration of these considerations into their proposals.

The UNESCO Chair’s contribution included the provision of technical support to the juries during the second phase of the competition. The UNESCO Chair produced a report for each of the five finalist proposals, assessing the project on the basis of gender criteria. This report was one of a series of sectoral reports on innovative housing issues. The objective of these reports was to inform the jury’s overall assessments by providing technical criteria on these issues.

The favorable reception of the concise dossier comprising design recommendations encouraged DG Ecological Innovation to commission a more extensive and elaborate publication from the UNESCO Chair. The objective was to develop a comprehensive manual on the integration of a gender perspective within the fields of residential architecture and public housing procurement. The document was to be both didactic and useful to the public administration itself in terms of future initiatives, as well as being designed to appeal to professionals in the sector, so that it would serve as a consultation document during the drafting of projects. The outcome of this research was the publication of the book “Designing Daily Life Spaces. Gender Criteria for Housing Design and Public Procurement” published in 2021 and translated into English and

³¹ This section included a concise presentation of the subject, various approaches to it from different areas of public policy, and a selection of the primary instruments for gender mainstreaming in housing policies. A set of criteria was established to guide the selection of instruments, with the selection being contingent upon the context and objectives of the endeavor. The proposed lines of action for gender mainstreaming were classified into two types: some of a general nature and others to address the housing inequality of specific profiles of women.



FIGURE 6

Some of the publications resulting from gender mainstreaming actions on housing policies in the Region of Valencia between 2019 and 2023. Photography: Inés Novella Abril.

Catalan in 2023³² (Figure 6) (Sánchez de Madariaga and Novella Abril, 2021).

The publication under consideration is a 144-page color illustrated guide, which is structured into five chapters. The first section of the book provides an introduction to the subject matter in an informative language and style. The second chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the design criteria, with detailed specifications addressing both the scale of the building and that of the residential unit. The third chapter of this text comprises a selection of seven real Spanish and international projects that are regarded as benchmarks in the incorporation of gender in housing. The fourth chapter provides a detailed comparison of the gender criteria outlined in the existing regulatory framework for residential architecture in the Valencian Community. The inclusion of this section within the guide was deliberate, with the objective being to provide a framework for professionals in the sector to align the emerging gender perspective with the established considerations and frameworks with which they are already familiar. The ultimate aim is to facilitate the integration of the gender perspective into their day-to-day professional activities. In chapter five, an extensive bibliography is provided, meticulously categorized according to the type of document. This feature is designed to empower each user profile of the guide to expand the information in accordance with their individual interests.

The manual swiftly evolved into the standard reference document for other initiatives undertaken by the Generalitat Valenciana and the VSCVAB, which addressed the gender perspective in the built environment. Following its publication, the guide has been met with considerable acclaim within the professional sector of architecture on a national level. It has been incorporated into the recommended

³² The three versions of the handbook (Spanish, English and Catalan) are available to download at no cost from the website of the current regional ministry with housing competences: <https://habitatge.gva.es/es/web/arquitectura/perspectiva-de-genero> (Accessed April 25, 2025).

bibliography for undergraduate, master's and doctoral courses in various schools of architecture across the country.

Initiatives of an informative, exploratory or demonstrative nature typically represent the initial stages in the process of gender mainstreaming in sectoral public policies. However, once this process has reached a certain level of maturity, it becomes essential to adopt more substantial measures. These typically encompass the integration of gender-related considerations within the regulatory frameworks of the respective sectoral policies. The integration of a gender perspective within regulatory frameworks, particularly those of a technical and mandatory nature, has been demonstrated to possess significant transformative potential. This is due to the assumption that these frameworks will, to a certain extent, normalize a gender perspective within their respective contents or procedures. The pioneering experience of the Basque Habitability Decree and the periods of confinement caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which highlighted many of the gender dimensions of housing, opened the door for the Generalitat Valenciana to incorporate the gender perspective in the revision of equivalent Valencian regulations.³³

The Department responsible for revising the Design and Quality Standards for Residential Buildings of the Valencian Community, more commonly referred to as the DC-09 Norms, was the DG Building Quality of the VSCVAB. In the context of Spain, the development of regulatory frameworks of this nature falls within the remit of regional governments and is mandatory. These regulations stipulate the spatial and technical characteristics of dwellings, with the aim of ensuring that they meet minimum habitability requirements and of preventing the provision of substandard housing.³⁴ In 2021, when the process of revising the DC-09 Norms began, it was considered that the housing model they proposed was obsolete and no longer aligned with the current needs and challenges of Valencian society. In accordance with the overarching framework of public policies on housing as outlined by the Generalitat Valenciana, the technical regulation of housing design should be aligned with the concept of "Housing Equity."

The UNESCO Chair was part of the commission³⁵ responsible for revising the current regulations, contributing its expert knowledge of gender and housing. The overarching objective of the gender mainstreaming process was to be implemented across the entire regulatory framework, with a particular emphasis placed on the review of issues that had been identified as priorities by the VSCVAB. These issues under discussion included the adaptation of typologies to novel housing models, the response to the

challenge posed by climate change, the contribution to the rehabilitation of existing housing stock, and the facilitation of responses to housing emergencies. As it is a mandatory regulation, the standard resulting from the review should constitute a guaranteeing framework, but without being so rigid as to compromise its implementation.

Between January and July 2021, the commission held more than a dozen working meetings coordinated by DG Building Quality staff, where different specific topics were addressed. The commission's working sessions focused on specific topics or sections of the standards. During the initial session, the UNESCO Chair presented its experience in gender mainstreaming in Basque housing regulations, highlighting the most relevant issues to be taken into account during the review, drafting, processing and approval of the new regulations. During the commission's working sessions, the UNESCO Chair provided insights on gender issues, both cross-cutting and strategic, and on other, more specific aspects. These included the sizing of certain rooms in the home that are key to care activities.

During the latter half of 2021, the technical and legal personnel at DG Building Quality developed and refined a draft of the new regulation, incorporating input from the commission. Prior to their adoption, the drafts were also discussed in a broad consultation process involving thematic roundtables with representatives from the professional sector, academia and innovation, the development and construction sector and local administrations. This consultative process also included a thematic roundtable on inclusion, in which representatives of the third sector, citizens' associations and the UNESCO Chair participated. Following the public exposure process and the resolution of allegations, the final text was approved in May 2023 under the "Decree 80/2023, of 26 May, on Design and Quality Standards in Housing of the Region of Valencia" (hereinafter DC-23 Norms).

The DC-23 Norms incorporate a gender perspective in a cross-cutting manner, including gender provisions in both the preamble and the articles of the Decree. In the preamble, the text underscores the significance of housing as a factor impacting the principle of equal opportunities. It explicitly acknowledges the necessity to dignify the tasks of care and daily life, and signifies that the gender perspective has been a pivotal factor considered during the formulation of the novel regulations. Indeed, the gender perspective is one of the perspectives that introduces innovative regulations and has the capacity to guide residential architecture projects towards buildings and housing that are better able to respond to the daily needs of households. The following paragraphs offer a non-exhaustive summary of the main contributions of the gender perspective to the DC-23 Norms.³⁶

33 Decree 151/2009, of 2 October, of the Consell, approving the basic design and quality requirements for housing and accommodation buildings. (Decreto 151/2009, de 2 de octubre, del Consell, por el que se aprueban las exigencias básicas de diseño y calidad en edificios de vivienda y alojamiento), DOGV no.6118, October 7, 2009, available online at: https://dogv.gva.es/auto/dogv/docvpub/rlgv/2009/D_2009_151_ca_D_2019_065.pdf.

34 These regulations cover a wide range of aspects, including the minimum surface areas of a dwelling and its rooms, minimum clear widths and heights of spaces, relations and accesses between rooms, lighting and ventilation conditions, minimum equipment and facilities for bathrooms and kitchens, and universal accessibility requirements.

35 The commission comprised technical experts from the professional field, public administration and academia, with the collaboration of the Instituto Valenciano de la Edificación being of particular significance.

36 The majority of the gender innovations incorporated into the new regulations were derived from the recommendations provided by the UNESCO Chair during the revision phase of the pre-existing regulations. In addition to the commission's collaborative efforts during working sessions, VSCVAB officers consulted the UNESCO Chair on specific issues pertaining to the text during the drafting phase of the new regulations. The UNESCO Chair also provided references (similar regulations, bibliography, etc.) to support the work of the staff of the VSCVAB and the Instituto Valenciano de la Edificación. In the course of the research, reference was made to two documents of particular pertinence: the Basque Habitability Decree (Decree 80/2022) and the Building Code of the city of Vienna (Bauordnung für Wien—BO für Wien, LGBL Nr. 70/2021).

With regard to the functionality of housing, the text explicitly mentions that a significant proportion of care tasks are carried out in housing and that it should therefore be designed to facilitate them (Article 8). On this basis, when describing the basic uses and spaces of the dwelling, employment and studies are considered for the first time, as well as the necessary relationship with the outdoor space (Article 9). The inclusion of productive work as a fundamental use is motivated by gender-related criteria concerning the complexity of everyday life, the necessity to adapt to changes in the life cycle, the diversity of households, and the work-life balance. The importance of enhancing the relationship and visual control between housing and the surrounding public space is related to the gender criterion of promoting safe urban environments in residential areas.

The aforementioned concepts concerning the functionality of housing are elaborated in greater detail in subsequent sections, wherein minimum dimensions are stipulated and specific functional relationships between rooms are delineated. For instance, two gender innovations are implicitly introduced in Articles 10 and 11. Firstly, in addition to stipulating the minimum dimensions of openings for ventilation and lighting criteria, the DC-23 Norms emphasize security by stating that “their surface area and position should allow visual perception of the outside.” Secondly, new dwellings are required to have “access to outdoor spaces whose design is conducive to human habitation such as terraces and balconies.” This conception of outdoor spaces as “rooms” where activities can take place is a recurring theme in the text, and is a concept introduced from a gender perspective with the aim of enhancing housing flexibility, improving the indoor-outdoor relationship of the building, and promoting safety in the public space near the dwelling.

Another significant gender innovation is the change in the focus of Chapter III of the regulation, which is dedicated to safety and habitability. In contrast to prior regulations, the present framework encompasses a more expansive conception of security, extending beyond mere structural or constructive stability to encompass the perceived safety of the spaces. In this sense, the DC-23 Norms stipulate that the common areas of the building must be designed to promote a sense of safety and, to this end, incorporate specific design elements relating to their configuration or artificial lighting (Article 15). As stated in Article 17, the importance of artificial lighting in contributing to the safety perception of security is emphasized. In Article 40, which concerns access and circulation areas, the regulation establishes precise criteria for the design of accesses and vestibules with a view to enhancing the user’s safety perception. The aforementioned subjects were the focal point of one of the working sessions of the commission, wherein the gender perspective constituted a pivotal axis. The final text of the regulations incorporates a significant proportion of the gender-related considerations that were proposed with regard to circulation spaces.

The DC-23 Norms included gender criteria in terms of the requirements for communal use spaces. It is vital that they exist to offer versatility in residential building and encourage the development of relationships between residents. In addition, they must meet a series of design characteristics that support safety perception and care activities. The regulations stipulate requirements for the location, materiality, dimensions and minimum equipment that these spaces, complementary to the purely residential use, must have. For instance, they should be located in close proximity to circulation areas, their walls should facilitate visual interaction, and they should be equipped with a compact kitchen and a compartmentalized toilet. The norms also include the

need for buildings to incorporate communal spaces for the storage of pushchairs, bicycles, shopping trolleys, as well as extra storage. It is also proposed that they should have specific spatial characteristics and a designated location to facilitate their daily use, with considerations given to safety, inclusion and accessibility (Articles 41, 43 and 44).

The new regulation also introduces gender criteria in particularly vulnerable areas such as car parks. These must have a push-button alarm system (Article 46) and, preferably, the design should allow natural light to pass through (Article 42). Further gender-specific considerations pertain to the significance attributed to storage, both within and without the residential unit. This is regarded as a component that contributes to the management of the household, care and daily life (Articles 14, 57, among others). Other contributions from a gender perspective pertain to the management of the regulations themselves; specifically, the regulations stipulate that the Norm’s Monitoring Commission must comprise a group of people with equal representation of each sex (Article 7). The incorporation of the housing model known as “Collaborative Housing” is also innovative. This model has been shown to diversify housing typologies and to make it possible to adjust housing designs to make them more suitable for gender-relevant cohabitation models such as single-mother households or different types of sheltered housing (elderly people, women victims of gender violence, etc.).

Another pertinent issue from a gender perspective is addressed in the category of recommendations,³⁷ specifically in the Annex “Recommendations for housing projects”. This section contains recommendations for the design of housing to facilitate care tasks. For instance, it is proposed that the kitchen should be connected to both the dining room and the living room. The importance of incorporating a designated “laundry cycle” into the design, encompassing spaces for washing, ironing, folding and storing clothes, is also emphasized. The recommendations include a section on the flexibility of spaces that incorporates several of the gender recommendations regarding the versatility of housing to accommodate the diversity of households and the changing needs of households.

The regulation was finally approved in May 2023, a few days before the regional elections that led to a change in the government of the Generalitat Valenciana. The new executive, formed by a coalition of conservative parties,³⁸ postponed the entry into force of the DC-23 Norms on several occasions. In April 2025, the Generalitat Valenciana

³⁷ Given the technical and mandatory nature of the regulation, the text was required to be responsible with the requirements it demands and to seek a balance so as not to be limiting. It was determined that certain gender considerations could not be incorporated into the mandatory articles; however, these considerations were deliberately included in the Annex of Recommendations. This approach to gender mainstreaming in technical regulations—a combination of mandatory and recommendatory nature—has established precedents that have demonstrated positive outcomes upon implementation. The Territorial Planning Guidelines of the Basque Country (*Directrices de Ordenación Territorial del País Vasco, DOT*) serve as a prime example of the efficacy of this approach.

³⁸ The Generalitat Valenciana government was assumed by the *Partido Popular* (a center-right party based on conservative liberalism and Christian Democrat ideologies) in coalition with Vox (a radical right party with neoliberal and nationalist ideology).

announced a new regulation (DC-25 Norms), the content of which is not yet public.³⁹ Ultimately, the DC-23 Norms were formally revoked without having ever been implemented through Law 5/2025 of 30 May.⁴⁰ It is important to note that the incorporation of the gender perspective in the DC-23 Norms did not generate any relevant controversy during the process, including the consultation period and the public information period.

Due to the unique structure of each department within the VSCVAB, not all General Directorates received the same level of guidance from the UNESCO Chair, and the implementation of gender mainstreaming initiatives occurred autonomously or with the support of other specialists. However, the convergent perspective of all VSCVAB departments on the significance of mainstreaming gender in housing policies enabled the establishment of specific collaborative relationships with the departments associated with housing emergency (DG Housing Emergency) and urban regeneration (DG Urban Regeneration).

In early 2022, the UNESCO Chair served on the jury for an architectural competition organized by DG Urban Regeneration. The competition was for the design and construction of a multi-family building with 70 affordable rental units. In January 2023, the head of DG Housing Emergency was invited to participate in a conference on housing and inclusion, organized by the UNESCO Chair and the Consell Insular de Menorca.⁴¹ The primary public policies formulated by the VSCVAB in the domain of gender and housing were showcased as a best practice at the conference, which was designed for a diverse audience of professionals and representatives of public administrations (Novella Abril, 2023).

4 First results: a pilot project designed with gender criteria

Architecture tenders for social housing can provide an opportunity for innovation in residential design, as well as how to manage the public procurement of architecture services, urban planning or construction. This section will provide a detailed description of one of the three winning projects of the aforementioned “Proyecto Piloto” program, which was initiated by the DG Ecological Innovation in 2020. Although the three winning buildings all contain interesting contributions, it was the second competition’s winning project, located in the city of Castellón de la Plana, which integrated the gender perspective in its architectural proposal in a more complete and cross-cutting way. The competition was for the remodeling and extension of an existing public housing building. Under the slogan *Viu i Conviu (Habitare and Cohabitar)*, the multidisciplinary team led by Mentrestant Arquitectura⁴² proposed a building full of solutions aligned with gender criteria for the design of residential architecture, as regards both the scale of the building and the residential units (Figure 7).

The proposal focusses on strengthening the relationship between the building and its immediate urban surroundings through several mechanisms. On the one hand, the façade is completely remodeled by enlarging openings and adding balconies with sufficient dimensions to accommodate different activities. On the ground floor, it is interesting to note the presence of two small commercial premises for local shops and services that dynamize the public space, improving the perception of safety and facilitating the linking of daily activities and work-life balance. Access to the building is designed to facilitate visual control between the interior and exterior, and also achieves a sequence of spaces that transition from the public nature of the street to the semi-privacy of the interior courtyard (Figure 8).

Circulations are concentrated in the central part of the plot, combining the staircase core in a vertical direction with a corridor distribution on each floor providing access to each unit. Spatially, an area of great height is achieved for the entry of natural light, ventilation, visual control between different levels and also for the community to meet together. The compartmentalization of these corridors enables circulations to be filtered, so that homes are accessed via a corridor for private use that operates as a small access terrace, avoiding the lack of privacy that usually characterizes corridor circulation systems (Figure 9).

The project presents numerous spaces for communal use, distributed on the ground floor, roof and an intermediate floor. All are characterized by giving priority to activities related to the daily needs of the resident community: a laundry, a work or study area, a communal kitchen, an urban garden, a workshop, or multipurpose room, among others. These spaces are also versatile thanks to their

39 According to the information available on the web page of the current regional ministry responsible for housing: <https://habitatge.gva.es/es/web/arquitectura/habilitat-qualitat-i-disseny-dels-habitatges> (Accessed May 28, 2025).

40 Law 5/2025, of May 30, on Fiscal Measures, Administrative and Financial Management, and the Organization of the Valencian Regional Government (ley 5/2025, de 30 de mayo, de medidas fiscales, de gestión administrativa y financiera, y de organización de la Generalitat), BOE no.143, June 14, 2025, available online at: <https://www.boe.es/eli-es-vc/l/2025/05/30/5>, is a miscellaneous law that implements various administrative and fiscal reforms and repeals multiple previous regulations. In addition to the repeal of DC-23 Norms, the aforementioned legislation also repeals Decree Law 6/2020, of June 5, of the Consell, for the Expansion of Public Housing in the Valencian Community through the mechanisms of rights of First Refusal and Repurchase (Decreto-ley 6/2020, de 5 de junio, Para la ampliación de vivienda pública en la Comunitat Valenciana mediante los derechos de tanteo y retracto), DOGV no. 8832, June 11, 2020, available online at: <https://www.boe.es/eli-es-vc/dl/2020/06/05/6/con>. This regulation was one of the mechanisms established by the previous regional government to consolidate and expand the public housing stock in the Region of Valencia through the strategy of rights of first refusal and repurchase in favor of the public administration.

41 All of the presentations are available on the YouTube channel of the Consell Insular de Menorca. Day 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NDsL_cIUel. Day 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4inWz7hZ74&t=2s> (Novella Abril, 2023). Available online at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/390916411_Jornadas_sobre_Vivienda_e_Inclusion_Documento_Final (Accessed April 4, 2025).

42 The winning team was led by the architectural firm “Mentrestant Arquitectura Cooperativa” (Irene Civera, Jorge Navarro, José Sambartolomé, and Raúl Ferrándiz) and architect Jaime Prior. The design process also involved contributions from several students from AZALEA UPV, along with the expertise of professionals such as Iván Ortuño, who was responsible for the infographics. The guidance on gender-related subjects was provided by sociologist Yaiza Pérez.



FIGURE 7

Virtual image of the building's new façade. Source: Mentrestant Arquitectura Cooperativa, with permission.

dimensions, access design and systems of compartmentalization, and can be adapted to the changing needs of the community (Figure 10).

As for the residential units, the proposal combines typological diversity with versatility. On the one hand, the project includes co-housing typologies aimed at household models other than the more conventional ones, and standard housing for more traditional households. On the other hand, all the typologies are designed in such a way that they can be compartmentalized in different formats, enabling various spatial configurations and the possibility of adding or subtracting modules to provide homes of different composition and size (Figure 11).

The modular system favors the de-hierarchization of rooms, making them more versatile and adaptable to different uses. The spatial relationships between the different parts of the homes are designed to favor care-based and other daily activities. For example, kitchens are central rooms from which a large part of the home can be supervised, as well as the bathroom, whose compartmentalization enables it to be used simultaneously by more than one person, while maintaining a certain degree of privacy (Figure 12).

The types intended for co-housing can be configured in various ways, making possible the coexistence of different profiles of people, depending on public rental needs detected: for example, as a first home for a group of young people; for elderly people who may or may

not need continuous care; or as accommodation for single-parent families.

5 Conclusion

The integration of a gendered perspective within public policies concerning spatial planning and design has attained a comparatively advanced level of development in certain regions of Spain. The present article has focused on describing in detail the specific case of gender mainstreaming in public housing policies in the Valencia Region, which is one of the most advanced Spanish regions in this field. The text particularly examines the period between 2019 and 2023, during which a series of diverse initiatives were concentrated within various departments of the regional government. These initiatives, originating from different approaches, were able to tackle the housing issue in a coordinated manner. The gender perspective was instrumental in facilitating this coordination, thereby demonstrating its potential as a mechanism for effecting transformations in public policies of both a socio-economic and spatial or architectural nature.

The article under discussion emphasizes the significance of establishing favorable frameworks for the implementation of gender mainstreaming. The description of the Spanish case, followed by the

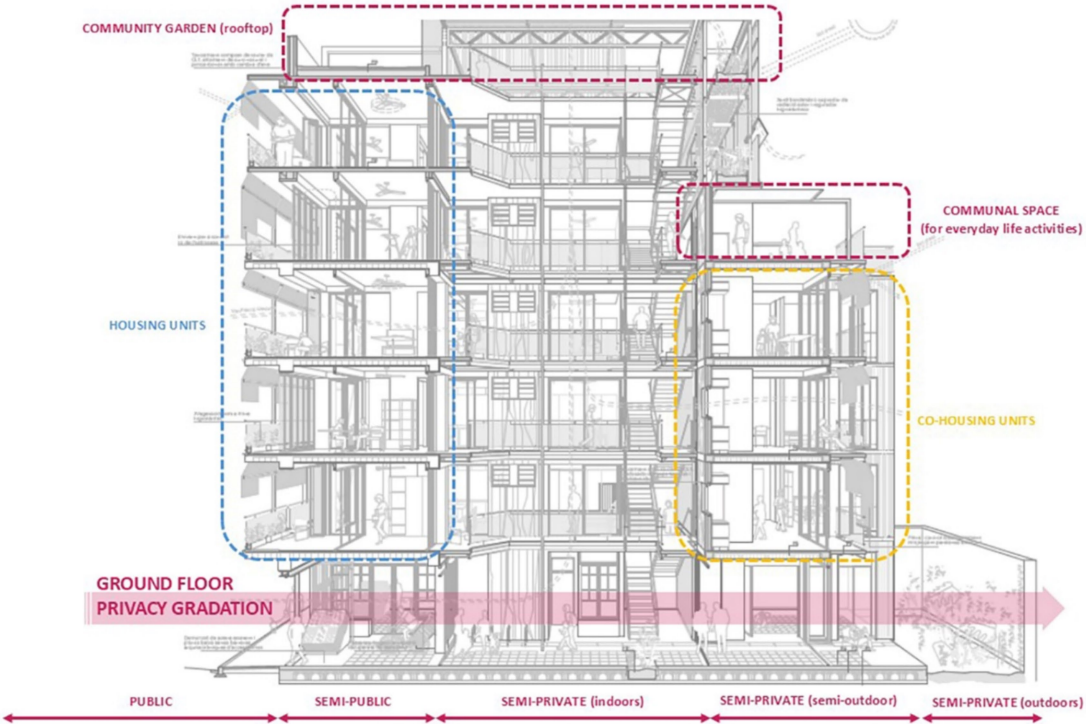


FIGURE 8
Cross-section of the building. Source: Mentrestant Arquitectura Cooperativa, with permission.



FIGURE 9
Virtual image of central courtyard. Source: Mentrestant Arquitectura Cooperativa, with permission.

GROUND FLOOR PLAN

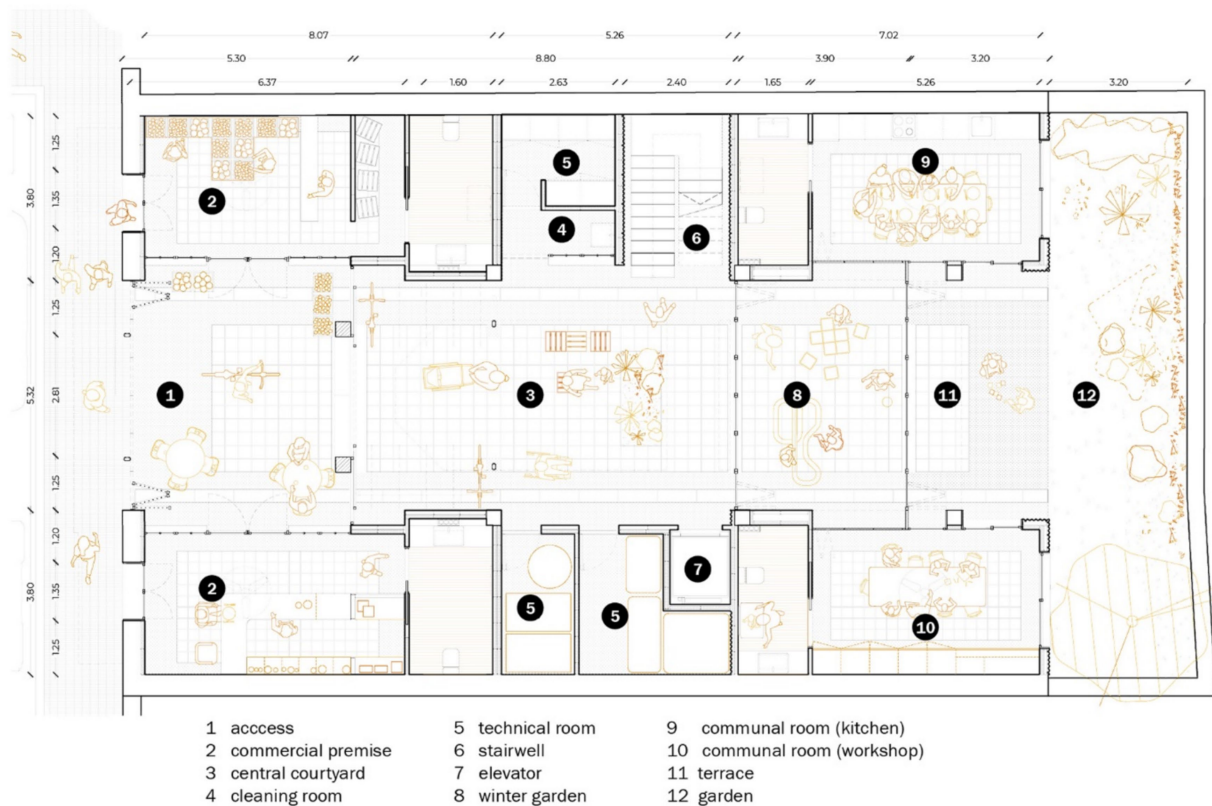


FIGURE 10
Ground floor plan. Source: Mentrestant Arquitectura Cooperativa, with permission.

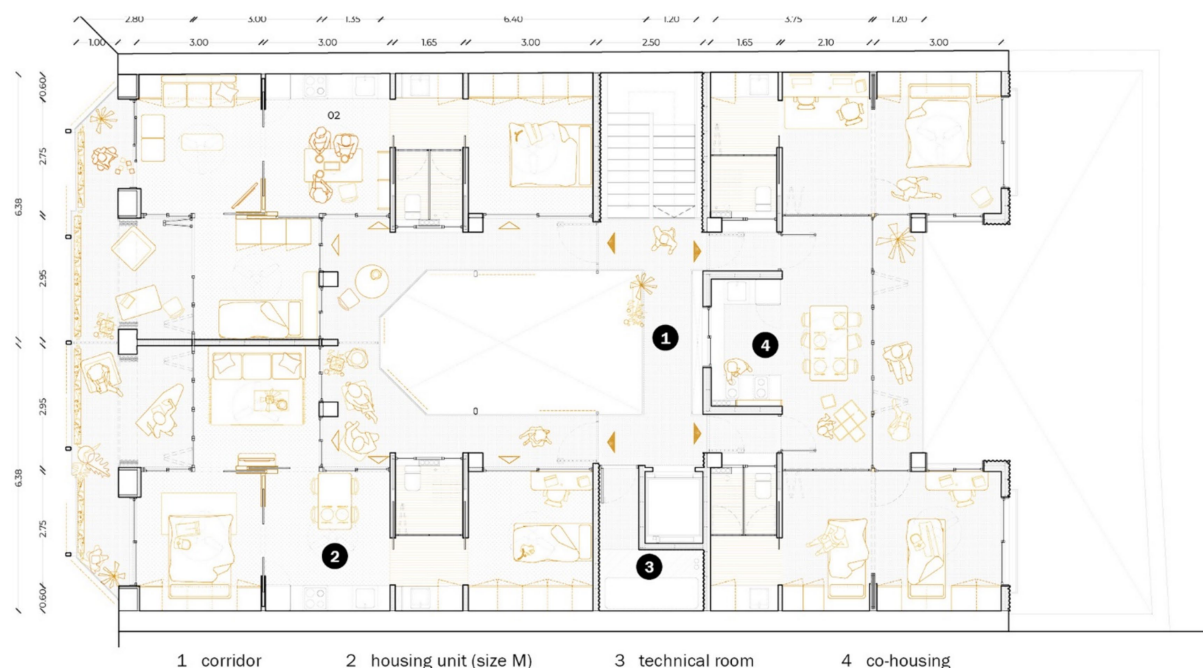
Valencian case, highlights the complexity and slowness of these processes, as well as the risk of regression in terms of equality between women and men. However, the case study enables the extraction of lessons that can be used strategically to consolidate and develop gender mainstreaming in the field of architecture and urban planning, particularly in housing. A combination of bottom-up actions by citizens and top-down actions by institutions appears to be a strategic formula for initiating the mainstreaming process. This process involves people from the academic, political and civic spheres and is focused on raising awareness, disseminating information and providing training. In order to progress in this process, it is essential that institutions prepare their own internal structures for equality. In the Valencian case, the establishment of the Gender Board and the Equality Unit within the sectoral departments for spatial planning and design proved to be a pivotal moment. This institutionalization of initiatives was instrumental in initiating the process, as well as in consolidating and further developing it.

In this regard, the article describes the case, distinguishing two stages, of which the second is the one that is developed in more detail. The initial phase, spanning from 2015 to 2019, underscores the diversified awareness-raising initiatives (conferences, training programs, manuals and awards), the establishment of the aforementioned structures, and the advancement of regulatory

frameworks. These formed the foundation for the process of gender mainstreaming in spatial planning and design policies within the Valencian region. Two pieces of legislation are worthy of mention from this period, which would prove to be pivotal for the subsequent stage: the Law 2/2017 on the Social Function of Housing, and the Law 1/2019 on Spatial Planning, Urban Planning and Landscape.

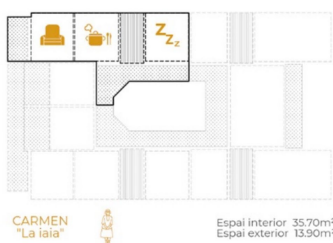
The second stage, corresponding to the legislature between 2019 and 2023, is the most relevant from the perspective of this article because it exemplifies a case of fairly advanced mainstreaming on a very specific sectoral issue, housing, where the actions in favor of equality were of a different nature, allowing to respond to different gender dimensions. The article draws attention to several important aspects that were pivotal to facilitating gender mainstreaming in public housing policies in the Valencia region. On the one hand, it concludes that the structure of governments has an impact on the degree of precision of gender mainstreaming. The establishment of the Vice-presidency and Conselleria of Housing and Bioclimatic Architecture (VSCVAB) as a regional ministry with the rank of vice-presidency, yet exclusively dedicated to architecture and housing, facilitated a more specialized, coordinated and strategic approach to housing policies, including those promoting equality. Moreover, the significance of expert advice in the advanced stages of gender

TYPICAL FLOOR PLAN

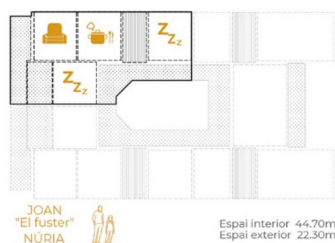


FLEXIBLE TYPOLOGIES

HOUSING UNIT (size S)



HOUSING UNIT (size M)



HOUSING UNIT (size L)

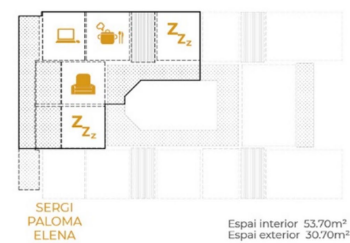


FIGURE 11

Typical floor plan (top) and diagrams showing the versatility of typologies (bottom). Source: Mentrestant Arquitectura Cooperativa, with permission.

mainstreaming is manifest, particularly in the context of specific and technical domains such as housing.

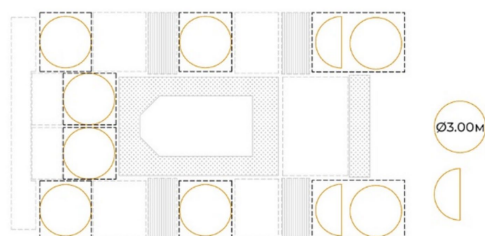
This paper sets out a possible process for the implementation of gender mainstreaming in housing policies in an orderly and strategic manner. It draws on the experience of the UNESCO Chair on Gender at the Polytechnic University of Madrid in advising the VSCVAB on gender issues. The article expounds on the manner in which the convergence of specialized knowledge and political determination can result in the incorporation of gender-related considerations within mandatory technical regulations for architectural design, as well as within the technical specifications of architectural competitions for the construction of public housing.

The detailed description of the gender contributions to the housing standards of the Valencian Region (DC-23 Norms) demonstrates the successful integration of gender mainstreaming into

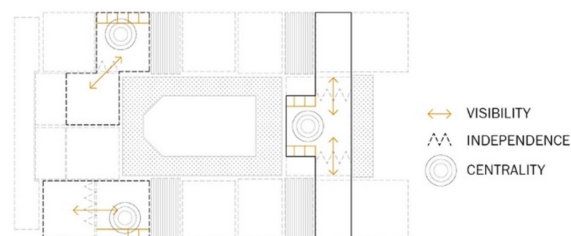
the approach and articulation of the technical regulations. It is also concluded that, as these are mandatory regulations, it is strategic that gender contributions are in a combination of mandatory considerations and considerations at the level of recommendations. Moreover, the article provides a demonstration of the impact of gender on the actual design of residential buildings. The text provides a detailed description of a building that was the result of an architectural competition that required the inclusion of gender-sensitive design criteria. The building exemplifies the manner in which a gender perspective can effect transformation in residential architecture. For instance, the solutions it provides have been designed to promote housing versatility and facilitate the daily lives of a variety of household types. The proposal entails the creation of shared spaces intended for community activities. Concurrently, meticulous attention is to be paid to safety and accessibility.

DIAGRAMS ON GENDER DESIGN CRITERIA

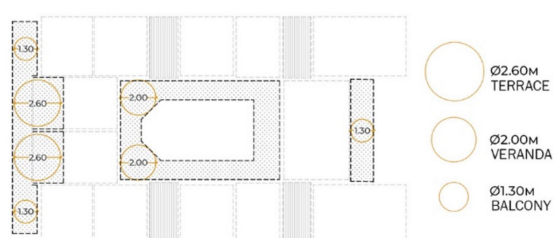
SPACE DEHIERARCHIZATION



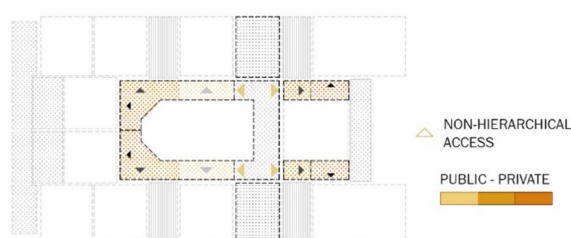
SPATIAL RELATIONS



DIVERSITY OF OUTDOOR SPACES



GRADATION OF PRIVACY



BATHROOM VERSATILITY

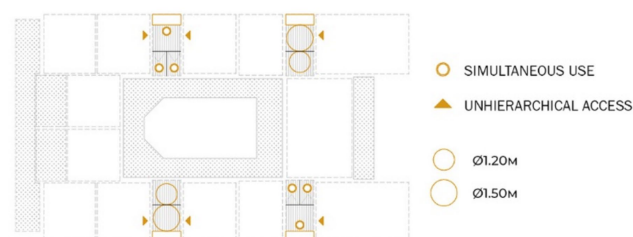


FIGURE 12

Diagrams illustrating some of the gender criteria that were used in the design of the building. Source: Mentrestant Arquitectura Cooperativa, with permission.

Notwithstanding the progress achieved, challenges persist in the effective implementation of these policies. Cultural resistance and the absence of specific training in gender within the fields of architecture and urban planning represent obstacles that must be addressed. The article demonstrates that the continuity of the gender mainstreaming process in public policies is uncertain when parties with a more conservative agenda come to power. The advances described in the Valencian Region have been largely halted after a change of government in 2023, and in some cases, there has been a setback.

With regard to the limitations of the research, the most salient is precisely the interruption of many of the public policies and initiatives described in the article, especially the most transformative ones such as the DC-23 Standards. The repeal, prior to its coming into force, hinders the capacity to verify the potential impact of gender

dimensions on housing constructed within the Valencian Community. However, this study could be conducted in the context of the Basque Country, where analogous norms have remained in force and numerous residential buildings have already been designed and constructed under these regulations.

In summary, the Valencian Region's experience in gender mainstreaming housing policies is a significant example of how public policies can evolve to be more inclusive and equitable. Through a combination of political will, academic collaboration and community participation, progress has been made that, although still imperfect, sets a precedent for other regions. The continuation and enhancement of these initiatives is contingent upon the capacity and readiness of the involved actors to recognize that the promotion of a gender-sensitive built environment is imperative to address the present and future challenges of our society.

Author contributions

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