

# Housing from Diversity: The Challenges and Possibilities of Habitar en Igualdad

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## Abstract

Housing exclusion in Latin America stems in part from structural discrimination on the basis of gender and sexuality, categories only formally integrated into public policy in the early 2000s, particularly in Argentina with the Ley de Matrimonio Igualitario (Equal Marriage Law; 2010) and the Ley de Identidad de Género (Gender Identity Law; 2012). This article analyzes the Habitar en Igualdad program (2019–2023), which built 25 housing units in La Rioja for cisgender women survivors of domestic violence and LGBTQIA+ individuals in precarious conditions. Based on qualitative fieldwork and feminist and queer theory, it interprets this initiative as a situated milestone shaped by transgender sex workers' political struggle. The program's fragility underscores the urgency of inclusive housing policies.

**Keywords:** gender and sexuality; housing policies; LGBTQIA+ housing; Argentina

## Resumen

La exclusión habitacional en América Latina se deriva en parte de la discriminación estructural basada en el género y la sexualidad, categorías que solo se integraron formalmente en las políticas públicas a principios de la década de 2000, particularmente en Argentina con la Ley de Matrimonio Igualitario (2010) y la Ley de Identidad de Género (2012). Este artículo analiza el programa Habitar en Igualdad (2019-2023), que construyó 25 viviendas en La Rioja para mujeres cisgénero sobrevivientes de violencia

doméstica y personas LGBTQIA+ en condiciones precarias. Con base en trabajo de campo cualitativo y teoría feminista y queer, se interpreta esta iniciativa como un hito situado, marcado por la lucha política de las trabajadoras sexuales transgénero. La fragilidad de este programa subraya la urgencia de políticas de vivienda inclusivas.

**Palabras clave:** género y sexualidad; políticas habitacionales; vivienda LGBTQIA+; Argentina

## 1. Introduction

Persistent social inequality in Latin America is also shaped by gender and sexuality markers that have historically excluded cisgender women and LGBTQIA+ individuals from public policies, especially in the field of housing. Data from the report *Entender la pobreza desde la perspectiva de género*<sup>1</sup> and from the Red Sin Violencia LGBTI+<sup>2</sup> network show that these two population groups face specific barriers to accessing the right to safe and dignified housing, which distribute precariousness in differentiated ways. On the one hand, cisgender women are disproportionately affected by domestic, psychological, and economic violence; on the other hand, LGBTQIA+ people often experience early rejection from their families and systematic institutional exclusion, which increases their chances of living on the streets or in vulnerable and insecure housing.

It is essential to recognize that the categories mobilized in this article, such as gender, sexual orientation, and LGBTQIA+, are not universal or timeless but historically situated and politically contested. In Argentina, for example, sexual and gender diversity only began to be formally integrated into state policies in the early twenty-first century, with decisive turning points such as the Ley de Matrimonio Igualitario (Equal Marriage Law) of 2010 and the Ley de Identidad de Género (Gender Identity Law) of 2012. These legislative milestones consolidated new legal vocabularies and institutional practices, while earlier state documents referred more narrowly to women or to so-called sexual minorities, thereby rendering much of the population invisible. Contemporary use of the term LGBTQIA+ reflects the convergence of global academic debates with local activist interventions, but in Latin America it intersects with a parallel vocabulary that speaks of gender-dissident people,<sup>3</sup> emphasizing resistance to heteronormative and patriarchal orders. In this article, the term LGBTQIA+ is employed in dialogue with international scholarship, while also acknowledging the epistemological and political weight of Latin American activist categories that foreground dissident practices of inhabiting and claiming space.

For these groups, dwelling is not merely the occupation of physical space. It is an existential, emotional, and political process. Authors such as Heidegger<sup>4</sup>

and Bollnow<sup>5</sup> argue that the home represents an ontological locus of belonging and meaning. For those expelled from their families or neglected by the State, the home becomes a space of resistance, care, and reinvention. It is, therefore, an achievement rather than an inheritance. Understanding this requires a break with the universal paradigms that have historically shaped housing policies, paving the way for more inclusive practices that embrace diversity. It is in this break that authors such as Reddy<sup>6</sup> and Crawford<sup>7</sup> develop the idea, for example, that the home (especially the North American or European model), idealized as a space of security, stability, and belonging, is in fact historically founded on relations of inequality—of gender, race, class—and on forms of domestic work and social segregation, especially racialized ones.

For Reddy, in his seminal text “Home, Houses, Nonidentity: Paris Is Burning,” the house idealized by North American or European standards is intrinsically connected to the family wage and the capitalist way of life (American way of life), that is, the so-called home is also based on an order of production and social reproduction that depends on the division of domestic labor based on gender and race. As a result of this, within this societal model, all bodies and subjects are expected to conform to a homogeneous model of home, identity, and belonging. But this equivalence clashes with material corporeality, racialized inequalities, and tensions between gender and body—revealing the contradictory and exclusionary nature of this home.

On the other hand, it is necessary to move towards understanding the role of the very concept of home for bodies that dissent from gender and sex norms. In this sense, Crawford<sup>8</sup> observes that there is, historically, a great mismatch between architecture and the very idea of dissidence. According to the author, there is a paradox: while “architecture remains firm, transgenderism is, in essence, a principle of change,” emphasizing the fundamental conflict between disciplinary spatial permanence and embodied gender dissidence. To illustrate this historical mismatch, Crawford<sup>9</sup> uses the experiences of trans bodies—bodies that are routinely prevented from using bathrooms, from entering emergency shelters, and that are not included in housing projects—examples of how architecture is part of the surveillance and policing of their bodies in the public sphere. This directly demonstrates that the house as “home” cannot be considered a neutral or inherited shelter, but rather a normative spatial condition historically denied to dissident bodies.

Crawford’s critique is also crucial from the moment he questions the very spatial aspiration of belonging.<sup>10</sup> He asks to what extent the home of transgender people is a capitalist, middle-class, and heteronormative home, observing that the dominant conceptions of house and home that we create are not necessarily positive ideals. His critique shows that, predominantly within the field of

architecture and urbanism, the conception of housing and habitat is intrinsically related to cis-heteronormative thinking, especially to the ideas of home and family constituted from the perspective of a heterosexual marriage, and that relying on these conceptions is dangerous for the field of dissidence, since it can reproduce the same binary and heteronormative logics that trans lives supposedly contest. In this reading of scale, the right to a home must shift from inheritance, comfort, capital accumulation, and the production of material goods to a deeper dialogue that also embraces urbanity, collectivity, and alternative ways of life. These, in fact, should be key conceptual points used here to understand the object of analysis: the *Habitar en Igualdad* (Living in Equality) housing program.

This conceptual shift becomes particularly urgent in Latin America, where the dominant production of housing has historically privileged stable interiors detached from the infrastructural and political conditions that make inhabiting materially possible. Crawford's critique reminds us that architecture and planning norms do not merely shape buildings but also govern who is intelligible as properly located within urban life.<sup>11</sup> By exposing the limitations of the spatial fantasy of home grounded in cis-heteronormative stability, the debate opens space to rethink housing as a problem of habitat scale, daily urban praxis, and collective spatial conditions. It is from this broader conceptual and territorial tension that recent gender-inclusive housing initiatives in the region must be understood.

Therefore, rather than emerging as isolated, programmatic novelties, these experiments can be read as responses (still partial and disputed) to long-standing demands for spatial justice, capable of materially hosting differences once planning frameworks engage the city as infrastructure of everyday life. With this framework in mind, in recent years we have observed that countries such as Mexico, Uruguay, Brazil, and Argentina have launched initiatives seeking to incorporate gender and sexuality into public housing policies.

This article analyzes one such experience: the Argentine program *Habitar en Igualdad*, launched in 2019 and lasting until 2023, which aimed to promote the right to housing for cisgender women in situations of domestic violence and LGBTQIA+ people in situations of vulnerability. Despite its limited scope and short duration, the program represented an unprecedented experience in the region by explicitly incorporating gender and sexual diversity into urban and housing planning.

The *Habitar en Igualdad* program was responsible for the creation of 25 houses distributed across two housing blocks in the province of La Rioja (northern Argentina), in a context marked by poverty, vulnerability, and social disputes strongly shaped by a conservative culture. Although it was designed as a national program, *Habitar en Igualdad* was only effectively implemented in

La Rioja thanks to the partnership between a collective of transgender women and sex workers (Chicas Trans Autoconvocadas) and a local congresswoman who presides over a foundation (Congresswoman Hilda Aguirre).

To synthesize the advances and shortcomings of this paradigmatic case in Latin America, this article is structured into four sections: the first presents contemporaneous housing policy experiences in Latin America, with a focus on Mexico, Uruguay, and Brazil, highlighting advances and persistent gaps in the inclusion of gender and sexuality. The second examines the trajectory of Argentina's housing policies between 2003 and 2023, identifying the institutional conditions and political shifts that enabled the emergence of *Habitar en Igualdad*. The third analyzes the implementation of the program in the province of La Rioja, focusing on its institutional design, key actors, and the tensions revealed through fieldwork. Finally, the fourth offers a critical reflection on the limitations and potential of the initiative, drawing broader lessons for inclusive housing policies in Latin America.

Methodologically, this study adopts a qualitative and exploratory<sup>12</sup> approach, combining bibliographic and documentary research with fieldwork conducted in two stages. We conducted a literature review, first to understand the topic of housing and issues of gender and sexuality, drawing on theoretical contributions from authors such as Colomina, Cortés, and Preciado. We also considered academic articles in Portuguese and Spanish, Master's theses, and doctoral dissertations on housing policies and issues of gender and sexuality to understand the state of the art. Furthermore, we used as sources the main housing policies in Argentina (FONAVI, Pro.Cre.Ar) and the main documents that underpinned the *Habitar en Igualdad* program (Joint Resolution 04/2021).

In addition, we initially sought, remotely, institutional contact with the national ministries responsible for the program and with Fundación Vamos a Andar (Let's Walk Foundation – FUNDAVA), an important civil society organization chaired by Congresswoman Hilda Aguirre and the main federal-level articulator between the province of La Rioja and the Argentine federal government. It is important to mention that during this stage we contacted the Ministerio de Desarrollo Territorial (Ministry of Territorial Development), Ministerio de Mujeres, Género y Diversidad (Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity), and Ministerio de Viviendas y Hábitat (Ministry of Housing and Habitat) of the government of La Rioja. However, despite some initial success in obtaining responses, the Argentine electoral context of 2023, marked by the rise of far-right forces and regime change, closed off our access to official data, leading us to conduct fieldwork.

Thus, we carried out field research in January 2024 (15 days including seven days in the city of La Rioja and eight days in Buenos Aires), with visits

to the National Congress of Argentina, the headquarters of FUNDAVA, and the construction site of the two housing blocks, both in the city of La Rioja. We also conducted conversations with Congresswoman Hilda Aguirre, political articulator of the program; Solange de Luna, leader of the Chicas Trans Autoconvocadas collective; and Luciana de Soria, project coordinator at FUNDAVA, who personally guided us to the construction site of the housing complexes. This article also draws from one of the co-authors' Master's thesis, "Políticas de habitação e a perspectiva do gênero,"<sup>13</sup> presented to the Postgraduate Program in Architecture and Urbanism at the University of Brasília (PPGFAU/UnB).

Due to ethical limitations and the absence of approval from a research ethics committee, direct interviews with beneficiaries of the program were not carried out. Instead, complementary sources such as public interviews, a documentary, social media content, and local press reports were used to collect additional perspectives on the program's implementation and impact.

In this way, the objective of this article is to critically reflect on the challenges and meanings of including women and LGBTQIA+ people in public housing policy in the Latin American context, using the experience in La Rioja as a lens on such undertakings. A case that reveals institutional limitations, political tensions, and the emancipatory potential of housing initiatives based on diversity and dissident experiences.

## **2. Contemporary possibilities on gender and housing policies in Latin America**

The housing crisis in Latin America starkly exposes the reproduction of structural inequalities in cities, according to Serrano,<sup>14</sup> "the housing deficit, both quantitative and qualitative, affects more than half of Latin Americans." To get an idea of the scale of this housing issue in the region, in 2002, the estimate was that it would be necessary to build or renovate around 53.6 million housing units, while in 2024 the Inter-American Development Bank estimated that around 45% of families in Latin America do not have decent housing, which shows that the situation has not changed. Furthermore, the problematic context of precarious housing in Latin America specifically affects cisgender women and low-income LGBTQIA+ people, who experience a series of barriers to accessing decent, safe, and non-discriminatory housing.

This occurs for a number of reasons, among which it is worth noting that the intersection between gender, sexuality, and housing is still neglected by most of the normative and institutional frameworks of Latin American countries, which leads to the invisibility of these demands in urban planning and public

policies. Furthermore, the housing exclusion of these two population groups in Latin America is a reflection of the fact that, for the institutional apparatus, these subjects are nothing more than worthless bodies, “that do not matter,”<sup>15</sup> since they do not fit into the social norms designated as valid by the predominantly male, white, and cisheterosexual normative system.

In this section, however, as a way of highlighting these invisible bodies and encouraging debate on the need to include them in public housing policies, we will present a brief overview of distinct and contemporary experiences that have emerged in Latin America. We chose, for example, the initiatives of housing cooperatives in Mexico and Uruguay, the recent advances and shortcomings of housing policies in Brazil from the perspective of gender and sexuality; and the trajectory of public housing policies in Argentina between 2003 and 2024, highlighting the emergence of initiatives with an intersectional focus before culminating in the launch of *Habitar en Igualdad*—our main object of analysis—in 2019. The choice of these countries is due to the relevance and diversity of experiences that, although localized, offer powerful clues about possible paths towards more inclusive housing policies in Latin America.

### *2.1. Housing cooperatives in Mexico and Uruguay*

Mexico, one of the main economic powers in Latin America, alongside Brazil and Argentina, has a significant history of public housing policies, which, as in other countries in the region, began to intensify from the 1970s onwards. It was during this period that its main housing policy took shape, with the creation, in 1973, of the Instituto del Fondo Nacional de la Vivienda para los Trabajadores (National Workers’ Housing Fund Institute – INFONAVIT), after the formation of a Tripartite Commission requested by then president Luis Echeverría. According to L. M. Virgilio,<sup>16</sup> INFONAVIT functions as a compulsory housing fund for private sector workers, similar to the Brazilian *Fundo de Garantia do Tempo de Serviço* (Severance Pay Guarantee Fund – FGTS), offering housing credit for the purchase, construction, or renovation of properties, through contributions from employers, employees, and the government.

In addition to INFONAVIT, Mexico has a robust framework of housing policies, including the Comisión Nacional de Vivienda (National Housing Commission – CONAVI), the Fondo de La Vivienda del Instituto de Seguridad y Servicios Sociales de los Trabajadores del Estado (Housing Fund of the Institute of Security and Social Services for State Workers – FOVISSSTE), the Programa Raíces (Roots Program) focused on rural housing and housing for Indigenous people, and the Programa de Mejoría Urbana (Program for Urban

Improvement – PMU). This set of instruments has contributed to changing, albeit partially, the reality of the housing deficit in the country.

However, despite this comprehensive range of policies, Mexico still lacks a systematic and institutionalized approach to gender and sexuality in its housing policies. The only program that touches on this discussion is the Programa Vivienda Digna, launched in 2014, which prioritizes cisgender women, mothers, and heads of households each of whom earn up to five minimum wages, offering them easier payment conditions for the acquisition of housing.<sup>17</sup> Although it represents an advance in the care provided to women in situations of social vulnerability, the program is limited to a cisheteronormative profile, leaving out transgender women, transvestites, and other gender-dissident groups.

Between 2002 and 2022, INFONAVIT granted 43,034 mortgage loans to 21,517 same-sex couples through the Unamos Créditos Infonavit line, which allows two people to acquire a home regardless of marital status. This measure was a milestone in expanding access to social housing before equal marriage legislation was passed in Mexico, but as it was only accessible to those integrated into the formal labor market, it excluded socially vulnerable groups, especially transgender and transvestite people. In response, LGBTQIA+ communities have turned to self-managed cooperatives, such as Xochiquetzalli, founded in 2019 by activist Octavio Mandujano. Registered with local authorities, the cooperative has 21 families and successfully pushed for reform of Mexico City's housing law, enabling LGBTQIA+ cooperatives to receive support from the Instituto de Vivienda de la Ciudad de México (Housing Institute of Mexico City – INVI). Yet real estate speculation driven by digital nomads and retirees has inflated land prices, limiting access. Despite these obstacles, Xochiquetzalli seeks to forge alliances with other cooperatives to collectively acquire land and build housing, reaffirming cooperative organization as a political strategy for the right to housing.

This housing cooperative model, adopted by Xochiquetzalli, was inspired by the Uruguayan case, where the system of mutual aid housing cooperatives, regulated since the Ley de Viviendas (Housing Law) of 1968, has been an international reference. In Uruguay, cooperatives were institutionalized in 1970, with the creation of the Federación Uruguaya de Cooperativas de Vivienda por Ayuda Mutua (Uruguayan Federation of Mutual Aid Housing Cooperatives – FUCVAM), which promotes values such as collective ownership, solidarity, self-management, and social inclusion.<sup>18</sup>

In the Uruguayan model, cooperative members actively participate in construction and management, contributing work hours that reduce costs and ensure access to housing for low- and middle-income groups. This format has proven effective in serving women and LGBTQIA+ populations. A pioneering case is the

Cooperativa 28 de Junio (La Cope), founded in 2004 in Montevideo as the first LGBTQIA+ housing initiative in Latin America. Created by a group of friends seeking mutual care in old age, La Cope overcame bureaucratic and financial obstacles and began construction in 2018, with land from the Montevideo City Council, financing from the Banco Hipotecario del Uruguay, member contributions, and mandatory weekly shifts on-site. Its trajectory inspired Cooperativa Basquadé, founded seven years ago by feminist women, lesbians, and trans people, which also applies mutual aid and self-management, requiring weekly construction hours and collective care shifts for children and the elderly, thereby promoting non-discrimination and reinforcing community ties.

According to Leslie Kern, traditional urban planning reinforces the exclusion of dissident bodies by perpetuating heteronormative and patriarchal norms.<sup>19</sup> Initiatives such as Xochiquetzalli, La Cope, and Basquadé demonstrate, however, that it is possible to subvert these logics by creating feminist, queer, and inclusive housing spaces, in which gender and sexuality are central. These experiences, in addition to consolidating more feminist cities, align with the resistance of dissident communities against the heterocentric system, as proposed by Preciado,<sup>20</sup> by challenging normative power structures and building emancipatory alternatives for living.

## *2.2. Public housing policies in Brazil and gender issues: a new horizon ahead?*

While Mexico and Uruguay have diversified housing policies by explicitly integrating cisgender women and LGBTQIA+ populations in vulnerable situations, Brazil lags in this regard. Since redemocratization in the 1980s, even under progressive governments, national housing policies have rarely addressed cis and trans women facing domestic violence and transphobia, or LGBTQIA+ groups more broadly.

Although Brazil has a relevant history of high-impact housing policies, with programs such as Institutos de Aposentadoria e Pensões (Retirement and Pension Institutes – IAPs), Fundação da Casa Popular (Popular Housing Foundation – FCP) and Banco Nacional de Habitação (National Housing Bank – BNH), the country's housing deficit has not been effectively addressed over the decades. Most of these initiatives have been aimed at the salaried and middle-class population, leaving aside more vulnerable segments. Bonduki points out that, among these policies, the BNH stood out as the main national housing instrument between 1964 and 1986.<sup>21</sup> In partnership with the Sistema Brasileiro de Habitação (Brazilian Housing System – SFH) and financed by resources from the Fundo de Garantia por Tempo de Serviço (Severance Pay

Guarantee Fund – FGTS), the BNH structured a model for the mass production of housing for different categories of workers.

From 2003, with the first Lula administration and the creation of the Ministério das Cidades (Ministry of Cities), the housing debate regained momentum after the extinction of the BNH. The Política Nacional de Habitação (National Housing Policy) (2004), the Sistema Nacional de Habitação de Interesse Social (National Housing System of Social Interest), and the Fundo Nacional de Habitação de Interesse Social (National Housing Fund of Social Interest) (2005) marked the restructuring of housing policy in Brazil.

Yet, despite this progressive scenario, policies remained focused on redistribution of wealth and large-scale housing production, reproducing the BNH model. Early government documents emphasized financing and delivery of housing complexes, neglecting regional specificities, cultural diversity, and, above all, gender and sexuality. In this context, the Minha Casa Minha Vida (My Home My Life) program (PMCMV) was launched, consolidating efforts to strengthen national housing policy.

According to Rolnik, Nakano, and Cymbalista,<sup>22</sup> both the PMCMV and the Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento (Growth Acceleration Program – PAC) promoted a significant increase in the supply of credit and subsidies for the low-income population, addressing the housing deficit in a more structured manner. However, these authors also highlight that the PMCMV faced important limitations, mainly related to the unequal distribution of land and local urban plans marked by exclusionary zoning, which hindered the construction of more just and inclusive cities.

Still, as Rocha Lima and Costa<sup>23</sup> point out, the PMCMV's approach to issues of gender and dissident sexuality was restricted to what had already been outlined in previous frameworks, such as the City Statute and the National Housing Policy: the recognition of cisgender women, mothers, and heads of households as the only group prioritized within gender agendas. The LGBTQIA+ population and other identity groups did not find significant space in this model.

In recent years, some state and municipal initiatives sought to include the LGBTQIA+ population in housing plans, from proposed laws to adjustments in PMCMV criteria. Pernambuco State approved Law No. 16,851/2020, guaranteeing LGBTQIA+ families access to social housing; the City of Natal approved Law No. 6,910/2019, ensuring the same right for same-sex couples; and Belém launched campaigns in 2023 prioritizing the trans population.

At the federal level, 2023 marked renewed debate. Bill No. 2327/2023, introduced by Congresswoman Camila Jara, proposed recognizing same-sex couples and trans populations as priority groups in housing programs, though it remains under congressional review. In the same year, the Ministry of Human

Rights and Citizenship, under Simmy Larrat, launched Acolher+, aimed at expanding shelters for LGBTQIA+ people through public and private initiatives, and established an Evaluation and Monitoring Committee.

Despite these advances, Brazil still lacks a systematic approach to integrating gender and sexuality into housing policy. Drawing inspiration from Mexico and Uruguay, which have achieved significant progress, it is urgent to develop a culture of studies and practices that embed gender and sexuality at local, state, and federal levels, advancing the right to housing for historically marginalized groups.

To move beyond a purely genealogical narrative of political milestones, it is necessary to explicitly question the conceptual distance between the house (house/dwelling) and the broader notion of housing as habitat. In Brazil and Latin America, the dominant political metric has historically prioritized the delivery of isolated units, often relegated to peripheral lands and hostile urban edges. As Ferreira critically states, “we understand that housing can no longer be a quantitative or sanitary concern, but rather a qualitative and environmental one,” explicitly calling for a qualitative and also urban-scale reorientation in housing agendas.<sup>24</sup>

Ferreira reinforces that the housing problem in the Brazilian scenario, and also observable in Latin America, “is an urban problem, of the *civitas* or *polis*, that is, citizen and political,”<sup>25</sup> emphasizing that the meaning of a house needs to go beyond the debate of the best architectural form and must be understood within the political, infrastructural, and community conditions that enable daily life. In other words, it is necessary to acknowledge once and for all that habitat is not merely a neutral backdrop to be addressed exclusively through numbers and statistics but must be understood as a powerful phenomenon in the production of urban space, the formation of cities and communities, and an active influence on distinct ways of living, cultures, and societies. Therefore, the right to housing for women and the LGBTQIA+ population must also be framed as a right to urbanity, a right capable of protecting their own identities, cultures, and urbanity.

In line with this scenario, Ludermir and Souza highlight that housing and land regularization policies in Brazil can also reinforce inequalities even when they aim to be emancipatory, by failing to consider the social mechanisms that bind women to remaining in violent contexts. This contradiction is relevant to understanding initiatives that, like *Habitar en Igualdad*, arise precisely to break with the logic according to which the home operates as an extension of domestic violence. The authors reveal how the inadequacy of public policies and the gap between legal frameworks and their implementation “fuel the housing deficit

and the inadequacy of housing,” a diagnosis that also runs through the trajectory of Latin American programs dealing with gender, housing, and vulnerability.<sup>26</sup>

While the housing initiatives in Mexico, Uruguay, and Brazil provide important insights into the possibilities and limitations of integrating gender and sexual diversity into urban policies, they often take shape as fragmented efforts or local experiments. To fully understand the conditions that enable the creation of a more robust, state-backed housing program explicitly centered on gender and LGBTQIA+ inclusion, it is essential to examine the Argentine context. Argentina stands out in the region not only for the scale of its housing programs since 2003 but also for the institutional pathways that led to the development of a federal initiative like *Habitar en Igualdad*. Before delving into the case study of La Rioja, the only province to implement the program, we first present a historical and political overview of Argentina’s housing policy over the past two decades.

### **3. Two decades of Argentina’s housing policies (2003–2023)**

This section provides an institutional and historical analysis of Argentina’s housing policy from the early 2000s to the present, with the aim of contextualizing the emergence of the *Habitar en Igualdad* program. The country underwent profound transformations in its approach to housing provision over the last two decades, oscillating between expansive, state-led initiatives during progressive administrations and restrictive, market-oriented strategies under neoliberal governments. Special attention is given to how different political cycles shaped the prioritization of social groups, the financing structure of housing programs, and the integration of gender and sexual diversity into policy frameworks. By understanding these shifts, it becomes possible to grasp the broader institutional and discursive conditions that made *Habitar en Igualdad* viable in 2019 as a pioneering federal initiative focused on women and LGBTQIA+ individuals. This trajectory also reveals the program’s fragility in a highly polarized political context.

During the 1990s, according to Martins,<sup>27</sup> neoliberal reforms drastically weakened the Argentine state’s ability to offer social welfare policies. Throughout the decade, the country experienced a stagnation in public policies aimed at improving quality of life, while seeking to demonstrate commitment to the fiscal adjustment demanded by creditors such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the United States. In this scenario of recession, housing policies were also reformulated.

The Fondo Nacional de la Vivienda (National Housing Fund – FONAVI), the main housing production instrument, had its administration decentralized and weakened. At the same time, the National Mortgage Bank—responsible for arranging real estate financing—was privatized in 1998.<sup>28</sup> Ibáñez Mestres<sup>29</sup> notes that, although the resources of FONAVI and the Mortgage Bank have historically benefited the middle class more than the low-income population, their disarticulation worsened the stagnation of housing production. Under a neoliberal logic, Argentina began to limit its operations to minimal market regulation, prioritizing efficiency and profitability.

Starting in 2003, with the election of Néstor Kirchner to the presidency, public policies “went through a historic turning point.”<sup>30</sup> From this moment on, having identified the negative consequences of neoliberal policies for the country’s economy, the new administration led by Kirchner began a movement to resume the country’s development, positioning the state as a central agent in decision-making, in clear opposition to previous presidential administrations that advocated non-state intervention in the economic and social sectors. In the following years, Argentina began to reactivate its social welfare policies, with the creation of new health and economic programs and a new structure for ministries. During this period, housing policies also went through a new phase, since FONAVI was paralyzed by the lack of investment.

Thus, FONAVI was reinstated and, with it, new federal plans were implemented to respond to the social crisis. Among them, the Programa Federal de Emergencia Habitacional (Federal Housing Emergency Program), created in 2003, stands out, aimed at providing housing and infrastructure for families in situations of extreme poverty, and the Programa de Solidaridad Habitacional (Housing Solidarity Program), focusing on regions with the greatest housing urgency.<sup>31</sup> One of the distinguishing features of these programs was the incorporation of professional training and job creation initiatives, linking access to housing to qualifications in construction and sanitation-related trades. It is important to emphasize the inclusion, during this period, of historically marginalized groups as priority beneficiaries. Female heads of households, transgender people, and transvestites began to be recognized in housing policies, marking a step forward in the recognition of gender in urban and social planning.

The Programa Federal de Emergencia Habitacional was notable for its interministerial design and for promoting cooperatives of heads of households, creating opportunities for professional development in response to unemployment among the popular classes. These two features, governmental coordination and cooperative association, would reappear in 2021 with *Habitar en Igualdad*, when a collective of transgender women from La Rioja demanded housing, professional training, and labor inclusion from the federal government.

In 2012, during Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's administration, Pro.Cre.Ar. (Argentine Bicentennial Credit Program for Single-Family Housing) was launched, marking a countercyclical shift in housing policy. Unlike previous approaches, it emphasized fiscal control, sought to stimulate the economy, and responded to the housing crisis by creating a trust fund financed by the National Treasury and federal real estate. According to Ibáñez Mestres,<sup>32</sup> its innovation lay in its broad territorial coverage and flexibility to serve different family profiles, with the middle and lower-middle classes as its target audience.

However, the country's public policies suffered a setback after the election of Mauricio Macri in 2015, which implemented a new rupture. The Macri government adopted a management model opposite to that of the Kirchnerist governments, with a strong neoliberal bias. According to Arias and Bertolo, this government sought to change the distribution of power in Argentine society, criticizing previous programs for lack of long-term planning, corruption, and clientelism.<sup>33</sup> For Favale, the Macri administration prioritized the interests of the business sector, promoting mortgage policies, budget cuts, and the discontinuation of social programs.<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, the Macri government did not foresee the 2018 currency crisis, which ended up worsening the situation of the Argentine currency and, as a result, the country experienced several problems: the cost of living increased, purchasing power fell, and defaults on rent and financing soared. Data from Taranto<sup>35</sup> reveal that, even after popular pressure, in 2019 the housing deficit affected one in three families. It was estimated that 1.5 million homes needed to be built and another 2.5 million in precarious conditions needed to be renovated. In contrast, the Kirchner governments had left a legacy of more than one million housing solutions, including new units, renovations, and Pro.Cre.Ar loans.

Miguel Ángel Barreto,<sup>36</sup> a researcher at the Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (National Council for Scientific and Technical Research of Argentina – CONICET), highlights that the Macri government implemented an economic process of late neoliberalism, with the liberalization of the foreign exchange market, the elimination of subsidies for services and public policies, and the uncontrolled growth of foreign debt. In this sense, according to Barreto,<sup>37</sup> the government succeeding that of Alberto Fernández (2019-2023) had no choice but to try to implement a reform to return to the course of the previous twelve years of Kirchnerist governments, but facing challenges such as financial difficulties, right-wing and far-right governments, the devaluation of national commodities, the COVID-19 health crisis, and, more recently, the destabilization of the international market driven by international economic and armed conflicts.

Influenced by the attempt to revive development, housing policies entered a new phase under the government of Alberto Fernández. Barreto highlights the institutional hierarchy and the variety of approaches and actors as the first points of this government's agenda.<sup>38</sup> The creation of the *Ministerio del Habitat y Vivienda* (Ministry of Habitat and Housing) was one of the government's first measures, an act that signaled that housing issues would once again be an important topic of debate and investment.

The decree that established this new Ministry represented a milestone in the struggle for the right to housing, as it expressly recognized housing as a social right that should be implemented through various national policies and programs that respond to the diversity of places and individuals. According to Barreto,<sup>39</sup> the decree also designated another ministry, the *Ministerio del Desarrollo Territorial y Habitat* (Ministry of Territorial Development and Habitat), as the one that would be responsible for promoting decent housing for the Argentine population. It is precisely an interministerial partnership between the *Ministerio del Desarrollo Territorial y Hábitat* and the *Ministerio de las Mujeres, Géneros y Diversidad* (Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity) that, in 2021, created the federal housing program *Habitar en Igualdad*, tasked with promoting housing and urban development policies from a gender perspective, aimed at women and the LGBTQIA+ community.

Despite this progress, Fernández's government went through a turbulent period<sup>40</sup> and was unable to follow through on its goals to control the course of the economy or effectively respond to years of accumulated housing deficit. When he became president in 2019, his government found itself surrounded by right-wing and far-right governments in neighbouring countries, which made agreements and commercial transactions difficult given the climate of political hostility. The result was popular dissatisfaction and Alberto Fernández's refusal to run for reelection. At the end of 2023, Javier Milei was elected to the presidency as a new candidate from the new far-right. Also in 2023, the new administration launched another series of measures to dismantle various social welfare policies, including housing.

These developments in Argentina's housing policy over two decades laid the institutional and discursive groundwork for the creation of *Habitar en Igualdad* in 2019. While the previous programs prioritized income redistribution and the mass production of housing, the new initiative stood out by explicitly integrating gender and sexual diversity into its framework. In what follows, we turn to the specific case of the province of La Rioja, the only one to fully implement the program, in order to analyze its institutional design, local dynamics, and broader implications for inclusive housing policies in Latin America.

As highlighted by Solange de Luna,<sup>41</sup> leader of Chicas Trans Autoconvocadas, the program was the result of more than 15 years of grassroots struggle by trans women in La Rioja. She recalls how the collective, initially organizing “silently” in public squares, gained the attention of then senator Hilda Aguirre, who later became a key political articulator of the program: “We had to endure many housing allocations that were delivered to the rest of society while we were never included. It was only when Senator Hilda Aguirre walked alongside us that the project of Habitar en Igualdad could finally be presented at the national level.”<sup>42</sup> This testimony reinforces that the program was not only a governmental initiative but also the outcome of sustained activism by marginalized groups.

#### **4. Housing from diversity: limits and possibilities from Habitar en Igualdad in La Rioja (Argentina)**

During Alberto Fernández’s administration between 2019 and 2023, the Ministerio del Desarrollo Territorial y Hábitat and the Ministerio de las Mujeres, Géneros y Diversidad established that the main purpose of the Habitar en Igualdad program would be to promote housing and urban development policies from a gender perspective, specifically aimed at women and the LGBTQIA+ community. According to its general guidelines, the program also aimed to generate lines of action that would allow the inclusion, participation, and training of women and the LGBTQIA+ population in the processes linked to access to housing construction, as well as training in the associated trades and the generation of a more inclusive urban space.<sup>43</sup>

The general guidelines of the program established four specific objectives. The first was to promote gender and diversity perspectives in public policies for access to decent housing and in the planning, development, and construction of urban and rural facilities. The second was to encourage the participation of women and the LGBTQIA+ population in the processes of design, planning, development, and monitoring of housing, land production, and urban development policies. The third was to foster equality for these groups in both access to and improvement of housing, as well as in the design and use of public spaces. Finally, the program sought to create, through collaboration between ministries, prioritization criteria for housing allocation that would specifically address the needs of people in situations of gender-based violence.

It is important to highlight that Habitar en Igualdad emerged from a scenario of implementation of several programs focused on women and the LGBTQIA+ population. Manias attributes these advances to the enactment of the Ley de Identidad de Género (Law No. 26,743) in 2012 as a milestone for changes in

legislation and public policies.<sup>44</sup> Thus, Argentina began to implement a more inclusive culture within its bureaucratic apparatus, implementing changes ranging from the state's official forms, which include new gender fields in addition to the male/female binary, as well as compulsory training of public employees in matters of gender and diversity (Law No. 27,499 of 2019), and the possibility of voluntary termination of pregnancy for women and other people with the capacity to carry a child.

Despite the enactment of Law No. 26,743 in 2012, it is important to highlight that since 1994, Argentina, through its Constitutional Reform, had already been a signatory to several international acts and standards established in agreements and pacts that entered the country's legal system with standards of a customary nature. In addition to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (PIDESC) of 1976, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) of 1981 and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women of 1994 will have immediate legal effects in the South American country.

Over the decades, several international documents informed the Fernández government's policies, including the 2015 *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, the 2016 *UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III)*, the 2016 *Yogyakarta Principles*, and the 2019 *UN Report on Adequate Housing*. These instruments were mobilized by the Ministerio del Desarrollo Territorial y Hábitat and the Ministerio de las Mujeres, Géneros y Diversidad to justify the creation of *Habitar en Igualdad*. After years of public employee training and exposure to more inclusive global agreements, the rise of a progressive government marked the moment to officially include women and LGBTQIA+ populations as beneficiaries of national housing programs.

The program, however, was conditional on provincial adhesion. Government announcements in 2019 indicated that La Rioja, Chubut, Chaco, Río Negro, and La Pampa would join, but La Rioja was the only province to implement it. The province was later designated as its official laboratory, meant to inspire other jurisdictions. Yet, the absence of a specific federal law and the advance of far-right agendas prevented expansion, leaving La Rioja as the sole province to build 25 housing units in two blocks. The following section analyzes the design of this experience, its advances, and its shortcomings.

#### *4.1. The institutional design of the program*

The following analysis is informed not only by official documents and secondary sources, but also by fieldwork conducted in January 2024 in the city of La Rioja. This on-site research allowed for a more detailed examination of how *Habitar en Igualdad* was operationalized, revealing discrepancies between the program's original intentions and its practical implementation. The field visit took place shortly after the election of President Javier Milei, in a context marked by growing political hostility toward progressive agendas and the announced dismantling of the national ministries that had launched the program. In this uncertain and volatile environment, the housing initiative in La Rioja stood out as the only local embodiment of a federal effort that had already begun to unravel.

By the time the fieldwork was conducted, Milei's government had already assumed the presidency and control of the country. The week we arrived in Buenos Aires to interview federal officials responsible for the *Habitar en Igualdad* program, we discovered that several ministries had been eliminated. Among them were the *Ministerio del Desarrollo Territorial y Hábitat* and the *Ministerio de las Mujeres, Géneros y Diversidad*, both responsible for implementing the program. This situation directly affected the scope of the research, requiring us to rely even more on local actors, alternative data sources, and on-site observation. Rather than documenting a fully operational federal program, the research focused on a local initiative that persisted despite federal backtracking, allowing for an analysis of both the implementation and the fragility of inclusive housing policies under unstable political regimes.

The institutional design of the program involved actors from multiple spheres of government, emphasizing federal and provincial agencies and civil society organizations. Nationally, the main financing instrument was the FONAVI, regulated by Law No. 24,464/1995, which used contributions from the guarantee fund and workers' payments to subsidize housing projects. In addition to FONAVI, the program integrated other federal initiatives such as the *Plan Nacional de Partes Interesadas* (National Stakeholder Plan – PPI), *Proyecto de Habitación y Suelo Urbano* (Housing and Urban Land Project), *Programa de Mejoramiento de Barrios* (Neighborhood Improvement Program – PROMEBA), and *Proyectos de Fortalecimiento del Capital Social y Humano* (Projects for Strengthening Social and Human Capital – PFCSyH). Connected to World Bank guidelines, these programs provided technical and financial support while promoting the strengthening of communities.

Even with extensive research, official reports, and multiple contacts with ministries, provincial governments, city councils, deputies, housing managers,

universities, and feminist collectives during 2023 and 2024, the implementation path of *Habitar en Igualdad* remained unclear. The program's general guidelines assigned its regulation to the Ministries that created it, yet no complementary norms were ever issued to operationalize the interministerial resolution. Evidence from emails, social media exchanges, and ministry websites suggests that initial coordination fell to the Subsecretaría de Abordaje y Gestión Territorial del Ministerio de Desarrollo Territorial y Hábitat de la Nación (Undersecretariat of Territorial Approach and Management of the Ministry of Territorial Development and Habitat of the Nation), led by María Higonet.

Information from Higonet<sup>45</sup> on the official launch page of *Habitar en Igualdad* by the Argentine government<sup>46</sup> also suggests that the program would have diversified financing: a main part to be funded by FONAVI; another part of several coming from sectoral housing programs such as PROMEBA, PFCSyH, PIC and even Casa Propia. However, what was observed was that, in practice, only FONAVI was effectively mobilized to finance the works in La Rioja.

Civil society organizations and collectives were central to the program's implementation in La Rioja. The FUNDAVA, led by Congresswoman Hilda Aguirre, managed financial resources, oversaw construction, and organized participatory workshops to incorporate community demands. The FUNDAVA's partnership with the provincial government provided technical teams, including engineers and sanitation specialists, to monitor the works. The collective of transgender sex workers *Chicas Trans Autoconvocadas* also played a decisive role, collaborating with FUNDAVA to pressure local authorities, raise political awareness, and identify potential beneficiaries among women and LGBTQIA+ people. Their joint efforts enabled these groups to secure, as early as 2012, the first land for housing construction from the provincial government.

According to Solange de Luna,<sup>47</sup> the first block (Manzana I) was allocated to the "pioneers," those trans women in situations of greatest vulnerability, sex workers, and those living collectively in rented rooms. "We saw the urgency and the need that these compañeras had to be the first to receive a house... women like María Laura, Sasha, Mara, Pamela, Katy, Rocío, Violeta, Yara, Marianela, Sabrina, and Dana." This highlights how criteria of vulnerability shaped the distribution of units, although residents of the second block (Manzana II) also faced precarious housing conditions.

This testimony illustrates how vulnerability criteria were not merely abstract guidelines in official documents but became materially decisive in shaping the allocation of housing. While federal program guidelines emphasized gender and diversity as categories of inclusion, in practice, the first block was reserved for those trans women in situations of extreme precarity—sex workers and those living in collective rented rooms. This reveals both the responsiveness of the

program to grassroots activism and the selective way in which vulnerability was operationalized. Rather than dispersing beneficiaries across different developments, local actors created a hierarchy of need that prioritized those at the sharpest intersection of gender, sexuality, and poverty. The result was a concrete alignment between activist demands and program implementation, though it also raises questions about whether such vulnerability-based criteria can produce long-term stability for broader LGBTQIA+ and women's populations beyond the "pioneers."

The lands initially acquired, however, were located far from the city center and segregated from all urban infrastructure. In 2020, an Urban Development Plan for the Province of La Rioja (Plan Angelelli) designated a better plot of land, closer to the city center and connected to urbanized and consolidated areas, for the execution of the project. Thus, once the new location was chosen, construction of 25 housing units began in La Rioja (fig. 1). To make this possible, different social and political actors were involved in the three spheres of the Federative Republic of Argentina (from the national to the municipal level).

The first of these, the financier of the works, according to Aguirre, was the Fondo Nacional de La Vivienda (FONAVI), a fund created from contributions from the Severance Pay Guarantee Fund (FGTS) and investments from private companies. Also according to Aguirre, the investment for the construction of housing, landscaping, common-use equipment, as well as funds for participatory workshops, community consultation, hiring of the architect and the architectural project, came from FONAVI and went directly to FUNDAVA, which, in turn, was responsible for distributing the resources and operationalizing the project.

In parallel, a partnership was also established between FUNDAVA and the Government of La Rioja to carry out other activities. This partnership made it possible to have a team of engineers and sanitation technicians from the Administración Provincial de Vivienda (Provincial Housing Administration) available to build and monitor the works, and also allowed the participation of the Dirección General de Servicios Sociales (General Directorate of Social Services) to conduct audiences and participatory workshops and enroll beneficiaries in social assistance programs. According to Solange Luna, one of the coordinators of FUNDAVA and responsible for coordinating the program together with the Chicas Trans Autoconvocadas collective, 25 new lots were chosen, distributed in 2 blocks created within another pre-existing neighborhood (fig. 1). The architectural and urban design was carried out by architect Luis Alberto Peralta, hired directly by FUNDAVA.

However, according to FUNDAVA, the future inhabitants of the blocks were involved in the design process and in defining the needs program and the zoning. This occurred through meetings held at the foundation's headquarters

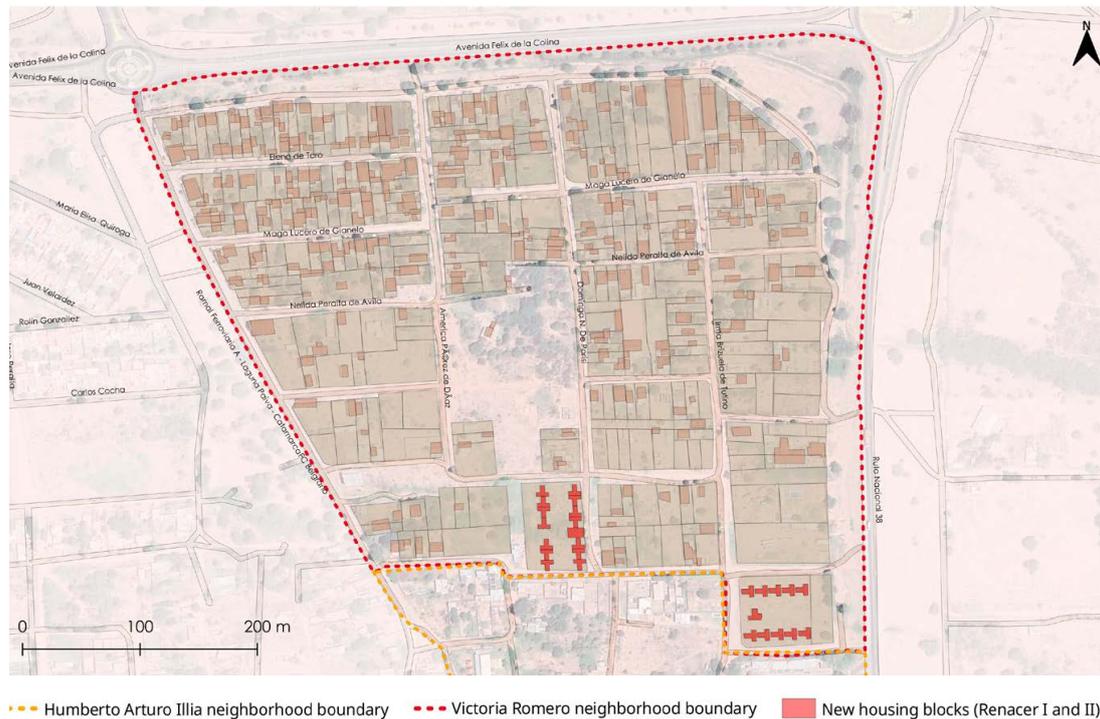


Fig. 1: Implementation of the two residential blocks in La Rioja. Source: Yuri da Costa using QGIS software (2025).

with the participation of the Chicas Trans Autoconvocadas collective, deputy Hilda Aguirre, Solange Luna, Luis Peralta and Alicia López (a social worker). In these meetings, for example, it was requested that spaces be created in the middle of these new blocks where professional training centers and/or stores for trade and services offered by the neighborhood's own residents could be set up. As can be seen in the images released by the Argentine government in 2021 promoting the program (fig. 2).

Despite the ambitious goals stated in official documents, the physical reality of the housing units revealed significant mismatches between design and execution. During the field visit, it became clear that several elements originally planned as part of the project (such as commercial spaces to be managed by the residents, and a common-use hall for gatherings or vocational activities) had not been implemented. The surrounding urban infrastructure also remained precarious, with no paved sidewalks or adequate lighting. The housing units themselves showed signs of poor finishing and use of low-quality materials, suggesting a disconnect between architectural intention and construction outcome as can be seen in the image comparison in Figure 3. These inconsistencies reflect not only technical and logistical shortcomings, but a broader pattern of symbolic inclusion without structural transformation, in which progressive discourse is mobilized but not supported by adequate investment or political continuity. In



Figure 2: Image of the community center to be built between the housing units. The image was made available by the Argentine government in 2021 at the launch of the *Habitar en Igualdad* program in La Rioja. Source: Ministerio de Desarrollo Territorial y Hábitat (2021).

this sense, the case of La Rioja exposes the limits of recognition-based public policy when it is not anchored in sustained investment, structural redistribution, and long-term political commitment.

Victoria Romero, the neighborhood that received the new housing units in La Rioja, has more than 70 families and received the two new blocks (Renacer I and Renacer II), which housed 25 new homes to a total of 75 people. The target audience includes transgender women, transvestites, lesbians, gay men, and cisheterosexual women who are victims of domestic violence, which demonstrates an amplified view of the gender and sexuality spectrum. According to Hilda Aguirre, the selection of the target audience was also carried out by the Foundation itself, from among the target audience usually served at FUNDAVA facilities and beneficiaries of federal social assistance programs.

The visit to the Victoria Romero neighborhood and the newly built units in Renacer I and Renacer II revealed, for instance, the precarious urban infrastructure surrounding the housing blocks and their distance from the city center (fig. 4). Although the area is connected by a main avenue that integrates different zones of La Rioja, the location reflects a broader pattern observed in Latin American housing initiatives, where low-income populations are often relegated to peripheral areas with limited access to services and opportunities. This spatial logic underscores the contradictions of inclusive housing policies that, while progressive in intent, may still reproduce exclusionary urban configurations.



Figure 3: Comparison between the image released at the launch of the Habitar en Igualdad program (left) and the reality of the houses delivered in April 2024. Source: Government of Argentina (2021) and Yuri da Costa (2024).



Figure 4: Reality of the poor urban infrastructure found around the new housing blocks in La Rioja. Source: Yuri da Costa (2024).

The peripheral location of the housing complexes in La Rioja (although better connected to the urban fabric than in the initial project) can also be interpreted in light of the perspective developed by Manzi and Coroa dos Anjos, according to which female and dissident territorialities in the Global South are shaped by an expanded conception of territory that extends from the body to the city.<sup>48</sup> This line of thinking allows us to understand that distance, incomplete infrastructure, and isolation from public facilities and services are not merely technical problems, but factors that directly interfere with the ability of cisgender, transgender, and transvestite women to move freely and independently, as well as to build networks of care and mutual support among themselves and other family members—essential dimensions for transforming a house into a habitable territory.

Nevertheless, the design of the two housing blocks has interesting elements that allow us to rethink mass and traditional housing projects in Latin America. For example, the design of the houses was conceived so that there would be no hierarchies between the residents; in this sense, the bedrooms were designed with the same dimensions and both share a bathroom (fig. 5). The kitchen and living room are integrated and open to the entire house, allowing for the collectivization of domestic chores. The kitchen is also connected to an outdoor area through a door that transforms into a large opening, blurring the boundaries between the exterior and interior—an interesting design decision that reveals that it is possible to think of a domesticity distinct from cisgender norms. Other interesting decisions regarding the housing project: a motorcycle parking area was planned (most transgender women are sex workers and depend on this vehicle for transportation), the houses were designed with high ceilings due to the need for hot air circulation because of La Rioja's harsh climate (high temperatures during the day and low temperatures at night), a solar heating system was also included for bathroom water temperature, as well as upper and lower water reservoirs to avoid water supply problems since many of the transgender women live with and care for their elderly mothers.

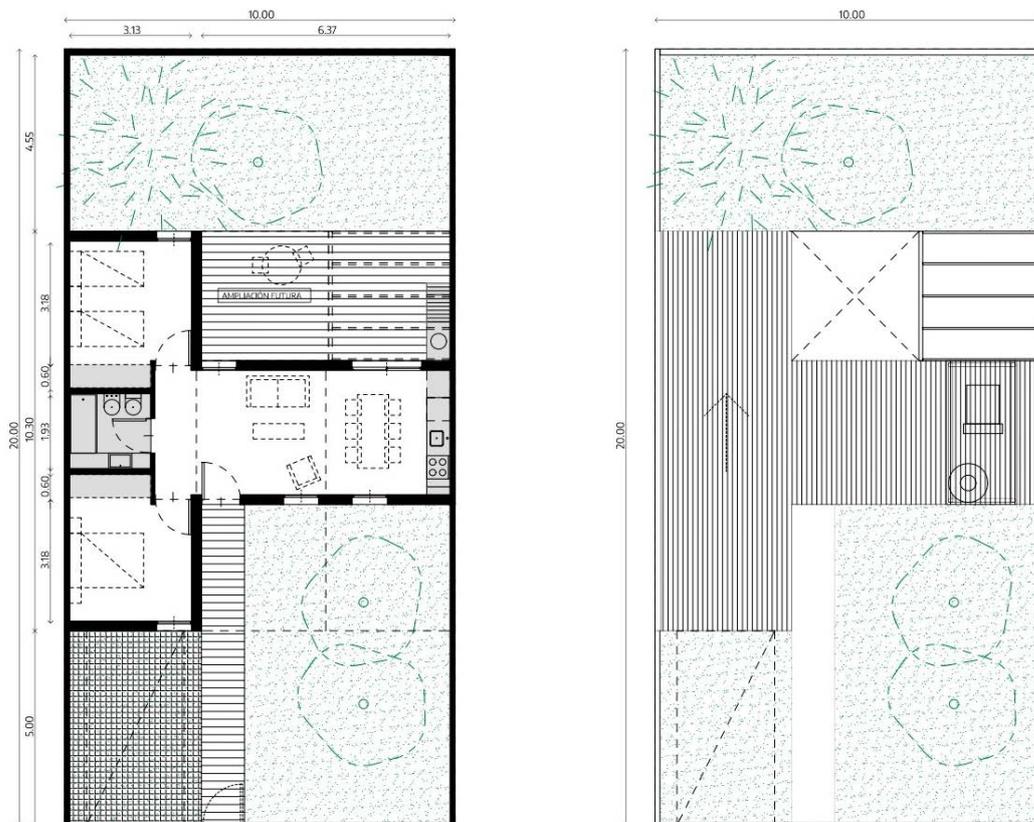


Figure 5: Floor plan of the housing units of Renacer I and II. Source: Government of Argentina (2021).

Despite the construction of housing units in La Rioja, *Habitar en Igualdad*, as well as the ministries that created it and other sectoral policies for various minorities and socially vulnerable groups, especially the elderly, people with disabilities, women and the LGBTQIA+ population, were extinguished with the arrival of the new federal government at the end of 2023. Despite this, the works initiated in La Rioja were maintained due to the country's legal system, which requires the continuity of public works. However, the contribution of subsidies was considerably reduced since FONAVI is no longer the main investor in the program. The current budget is the responsibility of the *Casa Propia* subprogram, linked to the *Secretaría de Desarrollo Territorial y Hábitat* within the Ministry of Economy. During the short duration of the *Habitar en Igualdad* program, there was no legal framework for implementing the program and, as mentioned, no other province, apart from La Rioja, joined the program.

Despite the institutional achievements made in Argentina between 2003 and 2023 in the housing field, such as the expansion of FONAVI, the implementation of *Pro.Cre.Ar.* and, more recently, the creation of the *Habitar en Igualdad* program, it is essential to question how these policies, in addition to responding to quantitative demands for housing production, generate (or not) spatial devices capable of subverting normative and exclusionary logics associated with gender and sexuality.

In this sense, Cortés states that, first of all, it is necessary to keep in mind that urban space and architecture function as material expressions of power. According to the author, “the design of cities, including housing policies, is not neutral.”<sup>49</sup> Going further, what Cortés<sup>50</sup> tells us is that the city project also participates in a “heterocentric system”<sup>51</sup> of discipline that domesticates bodies, behaviors, and desires, especially those that deviate from patriarchal norms. Architecture, in this context, becomes a technology of power that organizes the flows, uses, and representations of space in line with dominant economic, social, and moral interests.

In this way, the domestic space also does not escape this system of control. According to Colomina, the home space has historically been configured to reinforce the separation between public and private spheres, reproducing male domination over the female and marginalizing dissident bodies. Thus, the home space, even in progressive housing policies, can continue to reproduce cisheteronormative norms, relegating women and sex-gender dissidences to a place of subordination or confinement.<sup>52</sup>

The trajectory of Argentine housing policies, when viewed through this lens, reveals both institutional advances and structural limitations. Although *Habitar en Igualdad* represents an important shift in incorporating gender and sexuality as central categories of housing eligibility and design, the challenge remains of

reconfiguring housing space itself so that it not only welcomes dissident bodies but also recognizes them as legitimate agents of spatial production.

While it was not possible to conduct interviews with the program's beneficiaries due to ethical constraints, their voices were partially accessed through indirect means such as institutional videos, social media posts, local news reports, and audiovisual materials produced by the Fundación Vamos a Andar. These sources, combined with field observations and conversations with key stakeholders, contributed to a situated understanding of the program's impact. The overall perception that emerged from this broadened listening was that the initiative offered a concrete sense of safety and belonging for the women and LGBTQIA+ individuals involved. Nonetheless, assessing the long-term outcomes of the program will require future post-occupancy studies to understand how these communities develop within the newly built housing environment.

#### *4.2. Habitar en Igualdad as a Latin American landmark: advances, difficulties and future perspectives*

Habitar en Igualdad represented a paradigmatic milestone in housing policies in Latin America by explicitly incorporating a gender and sexual diversity perspective into the design and implementation of social housing. Unlike traditional approaches, which tend to make non-conforming subjects of gender and sexuality invisible, the program affirms the need for specific policies for cisgender women and vulnerable LGBTQIA+ populations, recognizing that the right to housing is also a right to safety, identity, and community belonging.

Among the program's advances, its interministerial and decentralized design stood out as the articulation of the Ministerio del Desarrollo Territorial y Hábitat and the Ministerio de las Mujeres, Géneros y Diversidad enabled a transversal approach to urban and social policies. Another highlight is that Habitar en Igualdad did not just limit itself to building housing units, but encouraged the participation of women and LGBTQIA+ people throughout the entire process of producing space, from planning to construction, including training activities in the trades, seeking to integrate these populations into the urban fabric in a dignified and sustainable way, in addition to forming the concept that habitat is not limited to the architectural apparatus but also to the formation of a sense of collectivity and integration with the surroundings.

However, the program faced structural limitations that compromised its continuity and expansion. The lack of a robust legal framework that would transform it into a national public policy prevented Habitar en Igualdad from becoming a permanent state obligation, linked to institutions rather than gov-

ernment administrations. This regulatory vacuum weakened the adhesion of other Argentine provinces, which, given the lack of clarity in institutional and financing flows, were hesitant to replicate the experience initiated in La Rioja. In addition, the program was launched in a turbulent political and economic context, marked by institutional crises, the pandemic, and, more recently, the rise of right-wing and far-right governments in the region, culminating in the election of Javier Milei in 2023. This new scenario further compromised the continuation of the program, inserted in an environment of dismantling social public policies, including housing policies.

The province of La Rioja became the only territory to implement *Habitar en Igualdad* in practice, and its experience provides critical insight into how inclusive housing can operate at a local level. In a region marked by economic marginalization and a socially conservative context, the decision to build exclusive housing blocks for cisgender women and LGBTQIA+ individuals was both strategic and protective. Rather than dispersing these groups across standard housing developments, local actors prioritized creating shared spaces that foster mutual support, community identity, and political visibility.

This approach was the result of a strong articulation between civil society, particularly the Chicas Trans Autoconvocadas collective, and progressive political leadership in the province. The *Renacer I* and *II* blocks were not only residential projects but also political projects: spaces designed to enable new forms of sociality, safety, and care for populations often excluded from traditional urban planning frameworks. Fieldwork revealed that the sense of belonging and empowerment associated with these spaces was directly related to their collective design and targeted purpose.

However, the case also highlights the fragility of inclusive housing policies when they are not accompanied by structural commitments. The lack of federal support and the abrupt shift in the political climate left the initiative vulnerable, with unfinished facilities and reduced funding. Despite this, the experience in La Rioja demonstrates that localized, community-driven approaches can create meaningful alternatives even within limited institutional frameworks. As such, it invites a broader reflection on the role of housing in advancing not only access to housing, but also the right to difference, coexistence, and urban justice. The legacy of *Habitar en Igualdad* lies in its ability to imagine housing as a space to confront inequality, resist normativity, and build more plural urban futures. Even though the program has been discontinued, its conceptual and territorial contributions remain vital to rethinking how cities can be shaped around care, solidarity, and inclusion.

Furthermore, the experience in La Rioja exposed how access to housing intersects with the broader conditions of habitability for marginalized popula-

tions. For many trans and queer people, housing is not just a right to space, but a precondition for visibility, protection, and collective existence. For some women, it can be an essential condition for ensuring their survival and autonomy. These spaces, though modest in scale, have opened up possibilities for community building, mutual care, and resistance to the normative spatial logics that often render certain lives unsustainable or structurally excluded. The initiative, though interrupted, leaves a territorial trail that reaffirms the political importance of recognizing, sustaining, and investing in lives historically deprived of the right to housing with dignity.

To contextualize the importance of *Habitar en Igualdad* as a landmark in Latin America, it is fundamental to understand the dialectic that permeates debates about housing in the region. Instead of treating housing policy as a matter of delivering units, Mattos and Link help us understand that, firstly, in many Latin American contexts, habitation has been replaced by housing, notably in massive housing programs that reduce dwellings to a functionalized spatial artifact, disregarding that the surroundings, the collective, and the landscape are also part of the habitat.<sup>53</sup> For the authors, contemporary planning has produced universalizing spatialities that deny differences, including those related to bodies, sexes, ages, race, and class. Given this shift, it is necessary to understand that *Habitar en Igualdad* stood out as an insurgent spatial praxis because “the ways in which inhabitants and users produce, reproduce, transform, and maintain urban spaces allow them to control or alter the social relations inscribed in their habitable space.”<sup>54</sup>

This perspective contrasts with other dominant models existing in the region, such as the Brazilian social housing program (*Minha Casa Minha Vida*), where houses were materially delivered, but habitats were not made viable to the same extent, and the beneficiaries of the program were simply displaced to hostile peripheries and fragmented territories. In the case of the *Renacer I* and *II* housing blocks in La Rioja, despite the challenges and a level of incompleteness in the initial project due to political circumstances, it is clear that there was an attempt to recognize dignified housing, since the project originally started from the concept that housing should be understood as habitat + dwelling: an urban, environmental, and community condition that allows identities, security, and spatial agency to become materially viable, and not symbolically promised or territorially denied. In this sense, the advances of *Habitar en Igualdad* must be recognized along with its limitations: its most transformative promise was not the house itself, but its intended reorientation towards the scale of habitat, citizenship, and everyday urban life.

For the beneficiaries, the program carried a symbolic meaning that transcended the material provision of housing. The blocks were named *Renacer I*

and Renacer II (Rebirth), reflecting the collective's aspiration to extend such experiences nationwide. As Solange<sup>55</sup> emphasizes: "We dream that one day we will inaugurate Renacer ten, fifteen, twenty in different places across the country, so that *compañeras* can also have access to their own homes." This symbolism underscores the emancipatory dimension of the initiative, linking housing not only to survival but to the possibility of imagining futures.

## Conclusion

This article examined housing policies in Latin America through the lens of gender and sexuality, focusing on the Habitar en Igualdad program in Argentina. The comparative analysis of Mexico, Uruguay, Brazil, and Argentina revealed that, despite progress, public policies still operate largely within normative frameworks that hinder full inclusion.

The Argentine experience highlighted the transformative potential of housing programs that explicitly consider gender and sexuality. Habitar en Igualdad stood out by integrating these criteria into housing access and fostering community life for marginalized groups, expanding the meaning of "habitat" beyond physical shelter to include identity, belonging, and recognition.

However, the initiative also exposed key limitations, particularly its lack of legal institutionalization and vulnerability to political change. Without stable frameworks, even pioneering programs struggle to achieve continuity or scalability in adverse contexts.

Inclusive housing requires more than access—it demands a rethinking of the urban and domestic norms that uphold cis-heteronormative models. Housing must be seen as a site of symbolic and material struggle, where diversity and equity are central principles. This reflection urges the advancement of a critical agenda for plural cities and inclusive public policies capable of transforming structural inequalities and enabling more just futures.

The experience in La Rioja illustrates how local political will, when aligned with grassroots mobilization, can generate innovative responses even in contexts of institutional fragility. Despite its limited scale and incomplete implementation, the initiative revealed the possibilities of reimagining housing as a tool for emancipation and collective care. By centering trans women, cis women, and other marginalized identities, the program challenged dominant logics of spatial production and contributed to the construction of a non-normative urban fabric. As such, it should not only be evaluated by its outcomes, but also by the questions it raises about what kind of cities we want to build, for whom, and with whose participation.

## Notas

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