

NEWS

PROJECT

Yes We Rent! - Leveraging vacant private property to build up a cooperative affordable housing scheme

📍 Mataró, Spain

TOPIC

Housing

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Mataro Zoom-in 1: Vacant flats for a better future of vulnerable young adults - The ‘Yes, We Rent!’ training programme

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Yes, We Rent! – Training vulnerable young adults

Within the UIA project ‘Yes, We Rent!’ the city of Mataró, a city of 127,000 inhabitants 34 km north-east of Barcelona at the Costa del Maresme, tackles the challenge of **“people without flats and flats without people”**. There are about 2.800 private owned vacant flats in Mataró. Owners leave these properties empty due to different reasons: among others because they do not have the resources to renovate them or are afraid of tenants not paying the rent (and it is very difficult and takes a long time to evict “rental nomads”). Speculation may also be a reason for leaving the flats empty.

At the same time, there is a low number of affordable rental flats for households that both, are not eligible for social housing and cannot afford to buy a flat (as is typical in Spain). These households are increasing that can barely afford the rents on the housing market. Thus, the city of Mataró has set up a support and incentive scheme to reactivate private vacant flats for the housing market below average rental market price to households in need

of affordable housing.

One important part of the project is to use the renovation of the vacant flats to **train labour skills of vulnerable young adults** to improve their chances on the job market. This is important, as youth unemployment is one of the segments that has suffered the most from the negative impact of the economic crisis in 2008.

The training of a group of 12 young adults had started in October 2019 by the non-profit organisation [Salesian Mataró](#), an organisation working in social education and capacity building of children, problematic teenagers and adults. The goal of this part of the 'Yes, we rent!' project is to train 24 vulnerable young adults in basic renovation works, provide them with practical work experience and by this improve their chances on the job market. At the end of the project, 12 of the trained adolescents are supposed to have entered the labour market.

The 1st round of training has finished in July 2020, despite the Corona adversities. The experiences from the first round are presented in this 'zoom in'.

For further information on the 'Yes, we rent!' project:

<https://www.uia-initiative.eu/en/uia-cities/mataro>; <https://www.mataro.cat/sites/lloquem>

The training programme

The main objective of the training programme is to teach the young adults to do basic renovation works of apartments. But not only that: it is also about to teach organisation skills and learn necessary working behaviour i.e. to be punctual, constancy, team-working, active listening and being responsible. Also, the training programme is about that the young adults enter the labour market with a small success story, finishing successfully this training programme.

Step 1: Hiring trainers and preparing the training programme

To be able to deliver the training programme [Salesian Mataró](#) had to hire professional trainers. Following skills and experiences have been crucial for the selection of the trainers:

- experience working with vulnerable groups and vulnerable young people;
- experience providing technical training;
- working experience in the training modules (see step 3);
- ability to work as a team and to adapt to unforeseen events;
- creativity.

Salesian Mataró had a trainer in its team that fit to this profile. For the other trainer, the profile was announced to other social entities with which Salesian Mataró is linked. Thus, they hired the 2nd trainer.

Step 2: Selecting young adults for the training programme

The target group of the training programme are young adults:

- in vulnerable situations with complicated personal, social, family or economic background;
- between 16 to 24 years
- neither studying, nor working
- having problems to enter the labour market.

Many of them have not had access to training in Spain because they are migrants and have difficulties with the Spanish language.

Salesian Mataró published the training course and informed different services of the city (social welfare department, municipal employment service) and social entities working with young adults about this. These referred potentially fitting young adults to Salesian Mataró. Salesian Mataró invited them to personal interviews to analyse their basic skills and motivation for the course. It was in particular checked:

- The minimum knowledge of the Spanish language to be able to follow the classes in case of young migrants
- The personal commitment to attend and make use of the training programme
- How the training content fits to their future professional expectations

At the end, together with the trainer responsible for the group training, the 12 young adults were selected and invited to join the training. Key criteria for the selection have been:

- Age between 16 and 24 years and not participating in any other training course at that time
- Sufficient oral knowledge of the Spanish language
- High motivation to learn the course content
- Having their documentation of CV and working documents in order to be able, later, to help them in their labour insertion.

Step 3: Technical training of the young adults

The training programme is divided in seven modules in which they learn the methodological aspects on how to work in these fields:

- Carpentry
- Plumbing
- Electricity
- Construction
- Energy efficiency
- Occupational risks
- Training and vocational guidance

As important as the technical training it is for the young adults to work on their social abilities to get a job. Thus they are coached in a range of skills for the world of work, such as:

- presence,
- job interviews,
- writing a CV,
- using social networks to find work,
- knowing how to speak and explain oneself,
- active listening, etc.

In this regard, the team of social workers of Salesian Mataró offered an individually based programme during the training period to work on the interpersonal skills necessary for their future insertion into the labour market. This training is done individually and with the help of other professional trainers doing fictional job interviews analysing mistakes and aspects to improve on the spot, visiting companies and talking with employers, etc.

The training programme is supposed to take 6 months, 20 hours a week in average. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its restrictions with group work, Salesian Mataró had to reorganise its training plan and training facilities. How they have successfully shifted their physical training program for vulnerable adolescence online and the experience with it due to the COVID-19 restrictions, you can read in the [interview](#) with Laura Font Mela, director of Salesians Sant Jordi-PES Mataró. Key steps have been to shift the technical training to online training programmes and the practical training from group works to more personal work on individual projects to be able to comply with the safety distance requirements.

Step 4: Practical training of the young adults renovating flats

In the last months of the training, the young adults put into practice the acquired knowledge of the technical training by renovating flats under the supervision of their trainers. Thus, the training becomes real and the young adults have to put into practice what they have learned.

In the beginning, the trainers meet with the responsible person for the flats to be renovated to make a list of the work to be done and the materials needed. Afterwards, the trainers coordinate together with the young adults the tasks to be carried out designing the working-sheet, detailing each of the things to be done, the time the work will probably take, the amount of material needed, the people who will carry it out and the possible inconveniences that may arise. This working sheet is checked every day by the participants, as well as noting any incidents that arise and unforeseen events.

As the first apartments to be renovated belonged to the town hall, the municipality provided the needed material. Having the material, the young adults under supervision of one trainer started the renovation works. The responsible person for the flat also monitored the work done. At the end of each day together with the young adults, it was analysed what tasks had been planned and which had been carried out, the time invested, the material used, etc. They also made a comparative analysis of the materials requested and those that have been served in reality, to know if they have been adjusted to the initial budget.

The most important points for the learning of the young people are the following:

- knowing how to make a budget adjusted to the tasks to be carried out;
- carry out the assigned works, according to the schedule and leave the house clean and collected;
- knowing how to make a critical analysis of the work done and knowing which points are critical for improvement in future interventions.

Step 5: Follow-up on the young adults after the training programme

Once the training programme has finished, educators stay in constant contact with the young adults. In fact, this is part of their training and professional itinerary. The follow-up by the educators allow to help the young adults to define their short-term objectives: if they wish to continue their training by going deeper into any of the modules

taught, if they wish to look for a job or, if they have realised that renovation work is not what they further want to do, to decide about a new path of professional training in another sector. In each case, the responsible educator continues to tutor the young adults in their professional itinerary for four months.

Results

The 1st training round was finished by 10 of the 12 young people. The two who did not finish were able to find work and enter the labour market during the training programme. Two others are currently looking for a job and eight people have continued with a further training programme. The education team is following up on these young adults, helping them to develop individual itineraries for their future professional life.

Lessons learnt

A few lessons worth sharing are described below:

Hiring trainers and designing the training programme

The importance to **have trainers** who are not only experienced in the technical part of the training, but in particular **very experienced to work with vulnerable young adults** in all aspects that will enable them to improve their future level of employability. For this, trainers need to be capable to “easily and fast” build up a level of trust of the young adults to them, so they accept them as “teacher and supporter”.

Also it is key that the **training programme is designed that the young adults are able to finish the training** to have a positive experience and that it awakes their desire to continue with professional training. The training has to improve their transversal work skills (punctuality, attendance, teamwork, etc.), too!

Selecting young adults

When selecting the young adults **their willingness and commitment to participate in the project** is crucial for successfully finishing the training programme. Working with young adults who have felt rejected in many places, it needs to be checked if they really want to participate actively and not because they are told to do so by others. But “checking” this at the beginning is not easy!

Technical training

During the training course key to the success of the programme is the **individual approach to the young people** as none of them are at the same level of knowledge of the language, nor in terms of knowledge of the other training modules. Thus, the trainers need the capacity to be flexible and adapt the content of the training programme in relation to the functioning of the group of the young people and their personal evolution.

With reference to **language and expression skills**, it came apparent that further efforts were needed. Thus, beside working on their oral, written and grammatical competences, also the technical workshops were used for the language learning at the technical level, learning the words specific to each training module in terms of tools, working methods, specific materials, etc.

To **keep the commitment of the young adults** during the training programme, it is essential that the **technical trainings are experimental and practical orientated**. That is, that they are done in a workshop manner. Pure theoretical classes must be reduced as much as possible. It is in the workshops where they learn best by hand because it is much more meaningful and real for them.

Practical training

Let the young adults analyse together in the group the abilities and interest of one another. That is to say, that each one knows and verbalizes in front of their classmates which part of the renovation works they are best at (based on the training results of training modules: carpentry, plumbing, electricity, etc.). This, in order to distribute the tasks so that each one assumes the part he is best of to have the best possible renovation result of the flat. Therefore, when doing interventions in real flats, with real clients, the distribution of work should take into account these capacities of each individual, because the client is demanding and needs a good result.

Teachers and young adults must be flexible in terms of time. If certain renovation work is due i.e. painting a flat, it must be carried out by the adolescents at that time under the supervision of the teachers. Timewise, this cannot be planned exactly in advance.

Both, the technical training and the rehabilitation of the flats serve the young adults in two ways: to be able to discern in which area they want to specialise from all the ones they have learnt (carpentry, electricity, construction, painting, plumbing) and to have in their curriculum a real work experience.

Outlook

By now, [Salesian Mataró](#) has started with the selection of a 2nd group of adolescents for the technical and practical training programme. For this 2nd course, they will do some modifications in the design of the course, in particular with reference to the COVID-19 situation. These are in particular:

1. The training hours in each of the training workshops will be modified according to the complexity of the content. This with the knowledge that the topics of the environment and renewable energies applied to housing are difficult to understand and require more time.
2. During the technical training programme, a detailed analysis of the technical skills acquired by each young adult will be done in order to organise better, which young adult will be involved in which interventions for the renovation of the flats. Thus, each young adult will be dedicated to an intervention for which he has positively developed his technical skills, improving the quality of the overall renovation works.
3. With regard to the COVID-19 restrictions: at the beginning of the course, the young adults will be trained in their computer skills, so that they know how to use the necessary digital platforms and devices in case single participants or the group has to be put into quarantine to be able to proceed digitally with the technical training programme.
4. Fictional job interviews are added in individual sessions with the young people to strengthen their self-esteem for future real job interviews as well as to polish their presence, their language and their capacity to transmit enthusiasm for work.

[See on UIA website](#)

