

JOURNAL

PROJECT

EPIU - Energy Poverty
Intelligence Unit

📍 Getafe, Spain

TOPIC

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Interview with Sara Hernández, mayor of Getafe

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In this article, UIA Expert Marta Garcia interviews the mayor of Getafe, Sara Hernández, to explore how the municipality is integrating EPIU, the UIA project that is identifying and tackling hidden energy poverty in the municipality.

Ms Sara Hernández, thanks for accepting this interview and to show your commitment with energy poverty and EPIU project. I would like to start asking you to describe Getafe and the challenges the municipality is facing at this moment.

Getafe is one of the largest cities in Madrid region and one of the most important in the southern metropolitan area. Getafe grew up significantly in the 1970's, and people from all over Spain became the workforce of important factories placed in Getafe and surroundings. For this reason, Getafe population has been always constituted by blue collar workers. The great labour achievements of the country have had their origin and their impact in Getafe.

Currently, even though the city has expanded integrating neighbourhoods in the last decade, a significant proportion of the resources are being dedicated to improving the infrastructures and the oldest neighbourhoods to adapt them to the present quality of life.

Through some concepts like sustainability and application of new technologies, we want to turn Getafe into a modern reference in the Madrid's Southern metropolitan area for their neighbours. The main objective is to improve the quality of life of the citizens, bringing the municipal interventions and the neighbouring participation even closer to Getafe's transformation wanted for the future.

Energy poverty is a social priority that affects all municipalities in Europe. How is the situation in Getafe?

Whereas Getafe has an average income above the neighbouring cities, more of the 50% of the dwelling stock has been built before the first compulsory regulation on energy efficiency and building thermal conditions issued in Spain in 1979 (NBE-CT-79 - Basic Building Standard on building thermal conditions approved by Royal Decree 2429/1979, July 6th).

The situation among neighbourhoods is diverse due to the energy expenses, buildings quality, and sociodemographic conditions. Furthermore, in Getafe we have several kinds of neighbourhoods: some have priority intervention needs, covered by the municipal public aids, and other neighbourhoods with higher income levels and a lower intervention priority upon which some improvements have also been made.

The housing stock is characterized by an old constructive quality, as they were built before 1979. There is no heating in many cases, and they house most of the population.

Regarding consumptions, there is a lot of polarization. We have located areas with a low energy consumption among which are the neighbourhoods where EPIU is developed (Las Margaritas y La Alhóndiga-Fátima), other ones are "sinks" of energy, and some are mixed cases. In Getafe we noticed that the economical vulnerability is concentrated in the most vulnerable sections in terms of energy and edification.

Energy Poverty Intelligent Unit project tackles energy poverty and innovates the way of approaching affected people. *How did the municipality tackle energy poverty situations before the project started in 2019 and what is going to change in the coming months thanks to EPIU?*

Social Welfare was already taking care of energy poverty cases with a personalized attention based mainly on the scarcity of resources. The innovation of EPIU lies in the broadening of the spectrum and the attention. Thanks to the intelligence unit that is being developed, we will be able not only to detect the hidden energy poverty, but also the vulnerability that sometimes precedes that poverty. In that way, we will be able to go from reaction to prevention using data.

A new service will be offered with EPIU to attend energy poverty in the municipality. This service will be nourished by data from the computing tool, and will build a new collaboration, cooperation and referral service with different entities and associations of the municipality.

Getafe will be able to provide universal solutions beyond the areas participating in the project, making a real benefit by giving energy advice or energy efficiency awareness for all Getafe's citizens, even if they don't live in Las Margaritas or La Alhóndiga-Fátima.

It will not sound strange if we share with the audience that Covid-19 has had an impact on the project too. *As a total social fact that is affecting all spheres of life, how has or is the pandemic changing EPIU's initial design?*

The pandemic situation forced the EPIU project to reinvent itself in its way of working in the new real situation. Basically, delays took place as we had to define a new way of work among the partners, and also to solve the difficulties that the lack of access to the citizens have caused. All this caused a delay and some readjustments in some work packages had to be done, impacting the development of the new intelligence tool and in the citizen communication, adapted to the current health situation.

Nevertheless, EPIU's original design has managed to keep on track, and the innovation and the challenges faced in the project remain stable.

With the pandemic scenario, the project became more difficult to implement, but the difficulties found by the team are not bigger than the difficulties the population is overcoming. That is why the project is more necessary than ever.

With the idea of generating this transversality among institutions, project, and citizens, and looking for synergies, if possible, the original focus of the project has been broadened. Some actions and initiatives of the City Council have been included, such as grants for energy rehabilitation and supply expenses, being integrated with the project's methodology.

I am sure we will overcome this situation soon and that EPIU will be reinforced. By the way, previous experiences of the funding schemes for innovation as well as the experiences of the very first UIA projects clearly show that implementing unproven solutions in strong cooperation with a variety of local stakeholders can be a very challenging process. Apart from the Covid-19 impact, which are the challenges that EPIU is facing these months and how are you tackling them?

Beyond COVID 19, we had to tackle with difficulties inherent to the project. At the present time, the most important difficulty is the data access to nourish the tool, this will allow us to make an unprecedented qualitative leap in the energy poverty advanced analysis. Nevertheless, we must keep in mind that the current energy poverty estimations, at local, regional, and European scale, lack the detail and meticulousness.

Properly complying with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is a challenge in this kind of projects. In fact, due to the importance of this matter for the project, a new specific committee has been created. Apart from that, we are working together with IDAE (Institute for Diversification and Saving of Energy of the Ministry for Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge), Secretary of State for Energy and the Electronic Administration Portal.

The aim of EPIU and UIA projects in general is to use the project as a testing phase to verify how an

innovative solution reacts to the complexity of real life. However, EPIU project has not being designed as an atomized initiative. Sara how do you imagine EPIU and its services in five years?

If you ask me the same question in a six-month time, I will probably give you a different answer. The project progresses and adapts daily. Nevertheless, EPIU and its challenges are forcing us to rethink and update different areas of the City Council. Therefore, although in five years EPIU will not exist as we know it today, I am sure EPIU would have already activate the lever for changing in many facets in the municipality. And that is the real success.

Anyway, once the project is finished, the idea is to be able to take advantage of all the acquired knowledge, and to attend the citizens in order to fight energy poverty in the most efficient way. The creation of the innovative new transversal service for the citizens in the project will make Getafe in the future, will be able to get benefit from all the lessons learnt with EPIU, and maintain the best attendance to keep on reducing this kind of poverty in our territory.

- I imagine seeing comprehensive refurbishment and more square metres of photovoltaic panel in other neighbourhoods of Getafe.
- I imagine more funding to keep the investment to improve our existing buildings
- I imagine that thanks to the Intelligence Unit we will be able to be faster and more efficient and precise when managing public aids calls for energy refurbishment.
- I imagine that more building companies would be trained in the execution of technological elements that generate quality of life for the citizens knowing what to expect from the investment to improve the thermal comfort of their houses.
- I imagine there is not a single home in Getafe which cannot be warm enough in winter and fresh enough in summer.
- I imagine Getafe as a reference of social harmony and with a quality of life even better in the city.

To participate in an Urban Innovation Action project situates Getafe as one of the most observed municipalities in Europe as you are going to test new and unproven ideas that are too risky and experimental to be supported by mainstream funding. How do you feel in this position?

We have to take into account that in our call 22 projects have been selected, and all of them presented very ambitious solutions for current and representative challenges. In our case, EPIU proposed introducing machine learning in the diagnosis and the definition of public policies. We propose a transversal close service, breaking silos and getting closer to the citizens.

Really, the UIA objective is to prove innovative solutions in the territories to see how they perform in real life, and this inevitably implies risks.

Given the importance of the energy poverty topic and this kind of European initiatives, for Getafe it's a real pride to carry out EPIU project. We are eagerly facing all the difficulties inherent to this kind of projects, and we are always looking for ways to keep on going, motivated with the expected results.

We look forward to thinking how to improve the way we attend our citizens fighting energy poverty, especially hidden energy poverty. We really hope to do our bit to transfer our experience to other territories.

I am sure many municipalities reading this interview are planning to submit a project under an UIA initiative or similar. From your experience, what would be your advice to those interested on testing new and bold solutions at a real urban scale?

These Innovative Actions revolve around the Main Urban Authority (MUA), in this case Getafe City Council. With the intention of placing the authority as an engine of change and a catalyst for innovation; this kind of projects get us out the comfort zone at all levels. It's true that development of this kind of projects entails an important effort, and indeed are different from the rest of projects we are used to. Nevertheless, the kind of ideas that can be proven generate added value to the territories and entail very interesting opportunities.

Due to EPIU's experience, and even though the pandemic added difficulty, I would undoubtedly encourage those municipalities interested in this kind of challenges to participate in UIA Initiative and similar calls, committing not only at the political level, but also in a budgetary, institutional and technical levels, being aware that such an ambitious project will not lead to success without the proper resources and determination. In return for this the innovative component, beyond the risk associated, bring us opportunities for our citizens that we cannot miss in the municipalities.

Ms Sara Hernández, mayor of Getafe, it has been a pleasure to share with you the experience of Energy Poverty Intelligent Unit project

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