

The PAH (Platform of People Affected by Mortgages and Stop-Evictions Platform) is one of the biggest grassroots social movements for housing rights in the world at national level. We are 255 assemblies throughout the country that support and help families in their housing struggles: abusive mortgage contracts, foreclosures, squatting, public and social housing, rentals and evictions. We are a horizontal movement, entirely free of charge, non-partisan and against assistentialism.

For the past 10 years the PAH has continuously condemned the systematic violation in Spain of housing as a human right. We have stopped thousands of evictions and carried out **numerous direct actions** to continue **pressuring banking institutions and local, regional and national administrations, to find a solution to Spain's housing problem**. We have made possible what everyone said was impossible.

From day one the PAH has been at the **front of law proposals**, to bring about **changes that guarantee housing as a human right**. In 2013 a PAH-sponsored law Initiative proposed to **stop all evictions, cancel all foreclosure debts upon home repossession, and an increase to social housing by taking properties in the hands of the bail-out banks**.

How did we carry out that nationwide Popular law initiative in our country?

Once the text of the law initiative had been accepted by the standing committee of the Parliament we had nine months to obtain a minimum of 500,000 signatures around the country.

First, a promoter commission was created for the initiative. It consisted of social movements, trade unions, and other organisations that defend social rights, the right to housing and the right to the city. The commission was responsible for promoting, disseminating, advertising, training, and the collection of signatures.

In our specific case every signature was collected on paper. In different parts of the country people went out daily to give the problem of housing visibility, to make people aware of the possible solutions and to collect signatures.

The collection of signatures has to be done in official state stamped papers. We used sheets of paper, folded over as four pages, numbered sequentially. On the front page of each set of four pages, was the explanation of the Initiative being signed and on the back page was the signature of the persons officially designated by the commission to approve that the signatures were valid. Over 300,000 pages of stamped paper were employed in the whole country with a total cost of 10,000€.

Financially, you must first get the money up front to cover the cost of work involved in applying the initiative. For us -a grassroots social movement that depends on small voluntary donations in our assemblies- that would have been a difficult task. The promoter commission obtained contributions as did our 15M Stop-Evictions assemblies. Private donations from citizens showed an unprecedented support but in order to receive them, the PAH was obliged to register as a non-profit association.

Spain has a reimbursement policy, which allowed asking for reimbursement up to € 300,000, currently extended to € 340,000. But it is not that easy, to receive the reimbursement the necessary minimum number of signatures must be collected, 500,000 signatures in 9 months. If you do not obtain that number of signatures in the time indicated, you can not ask for any reimbursement.

We allowed to claim a reimbursement for the money spent on the promotion and advertising of the initiative, including banners, posters, flyers, photocopies, the cost of

informative meeting and the cost of the stamped paper delivered with the signatures. To be able to request the return of the money spent incurred, it must be justified with invoices. The allowed expenses of reimbursement were those that allowed the diffusion and collection of signatures, such as banner, posters, posters, flyer, advertising, photocopies, pamphlets, information events, official stamped paper and printing on them. All expenses had to be justified with invoices. For our initiative, 44,000€ were reimbursed for the costs that could be justified and it took over a year for the State to pay up as the cost is part of the following year's budget.

In Spain the successful processing of these popular law initiatives depends on the support of political parties in the Parliament. In practice only one of 77 was approved. The promoter commission cannot defend it in Parliament. Binding referendums do not exist in Spain, which could be a way out when parliament blocks or modifies the law initiatives in such a way that any meaning that the promoters gave it, and for which people signed it, is completely lost.

We collected 1.500.000 signatures, having a large amount of Spanish **population supporting our proposal**. But Spain's **right wing party, that had a majority in the Congress, blocked-out our legal reform**.

But the PAH didn't give up.

We decided to **break through the bottom**, submitting proposals for one of the most progressive housing laws in Europe to the different regions in Spain. These proposals were **approved as law by the local regional parliaments** in many of our autonomic communities such as Cataluña, Murcia, Valencia, and Baleares. But again, our **right-wing government, lacking of any political will for housing reforms, took** all these laws to be stuck in the Court of the Constitution, annulling their application knowing it would take years to be processed by the court.

The process behind regional law initiatives is similar to the ones at national level. The number of signatures and time to collect them is reduced. For example, the one in Madrid required a minimum of 50,000 signatures to be collected in 3 months. 76.000 signatures were collected. The amount that can be reimbursed for this initiatives is only 6,000€.

Only the Catalan Popular Law Initiatives have the peculiarity of granting 3,000€ in advance of the total 40,000€ that can be reimbursed.

What have these law initiatives provided us as a movement?

- A moment of true unity of the movement nationally. It created a feeling of belonging to the PAH, working together to achieve a common goal. For 9 months thousands upon thousands of colleagues got involved from more than 250 assemblies. They went out daily, including weekends.

- It allowed us to explain to our neighbours, to young and old, and to all citizens that there is a big problem of housing in our country, and its dimensions are huge.

- We were able to bring awareness before society about the issue of evictions as collective issue, not just concerning to individual families but as a general problem in our society that it could happen to anyone, transmitting in this way the significance of mutual support.

-Our campaigns to inform were really potent, not only in social media but on every occasion possible: escraches, press conferences, demonstrations protests.

It was a moment of total empowerment outside and within the movement