

## **Sustainable construction at affordable prices or energy poverty?**

On the occasion of the XI Semana da Reabilitação Urbana do Porto, in Vila Nova de Gaia, the challenges and the state of the art of the real estate industry in Portugal were debated. During round tables and debates, the major players in this industry contributed with their insights to the evolution of the real estate sector.

From among all the subjects on the table, I believe that the most pressing are, undoubtedly, the those targeting sustainability and the need to build sustainable housing at affordable prices.

Lets face it, in Portugal we seldom talk about the conditions in which the Portuguese citizens live... it is a rather unknown reality and, sometimes, it looks like it is considered a stigma, but lets call it what it really is: the **energy poverty** is a reality in most Portuguese homes.

Lets look into hard facts: "It is estimated that over 34 million people all over the European Union live at different levels of energy poverty. **According to the European stats, Portugal is one of the worst European countries in this matter**" as stated in the introduction to the study carried out in partnership by Lisboa E-Nova, Agência de Energia e Ambiente de Lisboa, ant the AdEPorto, Agência de Energia do Porto, as a result of the survey executed during 2021-2022.

The same study also indicates that "According to estimates provided by the Estratégia Nacional de Longo Prazo para o Combate à Pobreza Energética 2021-2050. between 1.2 and 2.3 million Portuguese citizens live under moderate energy poverty and **between 660 and 740 thousand people are in a situation of extreme energy poverty**".

The reasons set out for this reality are also of little importance within the national scene and focus in low income, energy inefficient buildings, expensive energy, and, last but not least, deficient energy literacy, as stated in the study.

One must declare that the concern at buildings' sustainability and energy efficiency is steadily growing in our country, but very slowly. There are very interesting projects targeting these principles, but are we building more energy-efficient houses that are also affordable for low income families? Are we swiftly progressing towards decarbonization of the industry?

These data leave no room for doubt, it is a very simple issue: the energy conditions the Portuguese citizens live in, as compared to the rest of Europe, should put us to shame.

It is most pressing to look into these issues with a more structural and in-depth perspective, this is the only way to solve this plight affecting most of the Portuguese citizens, who, together with a huge housing crisis, must face the poor quality and low energy efficiency of their houses.

We all want to contribute to address the housing problem in Portugal, we must look into the issue more openly, more globally and in the long-term, but specially without prejudices. These data put

the problems into context, one must roll up one's sleeves and get to work. It is most pressing to build affordable and energy efficient houses for the Portuguese citizens.

I conclude with a thought: It is essential to think whether we want sustainable construction at affordable prices or if we are going to go on perpetuating energy poverty?