



CIVIS Alliance – Open Lab Project
Impact Assessment Report

01 – PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Title of the project Generating shared knowledge on rent regulation

Project coordinator Maëlys Waiengnier (ULB)

Universities involved ULB (Proponent/coord.), AMU, UNIL

Hub theme Cities, Spaces, Mobilities

Duration of activities March 2026

Place of the activities Brussels

02 – PARTNERS/TARGET AUDIENCE

Number of internal and external stakeholders involved in and impacted by the project

INTERNAL (All CIVIS universities)				EXTERNAL (All CIVIS cities/regions)	
Academics	Researchers	Students	Admin personnel	Citizens	Other - please specify
2	6	3		±20	Workshop: 3 representatives from associations. Public event: 13 workers from associations (Fédération Bico, Plateforme Logement étudiant, LEEB, ARAU, Foyer du Sud, CIRE, Convivence ASBL, Union des Locataires Marolienne, Logement Pour Tous, FéBUL, Comité de la samaritaine, Angela D, CSC 3 workers from public administration : SLRB (Public Authority in charge of Social Housing in Brussels, Municipalities

Non-university associations and organisations that have been involved in the project

ASSOCIATIONS/ORGANISATIONS		
Name	Country	Description
RBDH (Rassemblement Bruxellois pour le Droit à l'Habitat)	Belgium	Association
ASLOCA (Vaud)	Switzerland	Association

03 – PROJECT IMPACT

Social dimension

The project combined two complementary formats over 16–17 March. A closed two-day workshop brought together researchers and association representatives from Brussels, Lausanne and Marseille, who began by presenting their respective activities and field experience before collectively examining the preconceptions structuring the rent regulation debate. This led to the co-drafting of a joint note, written collaboratively by academic and associative participants — a concrete case of knowledge co-creation in which field expertise carried equal weight to academic research.

The public discussion evening opened these questions to 35 registered attendees of notably diverse profiles: associative housing sector, elected representatives (Brussels regional MPs), public administration (municipalities, SLRB) and students. Around twenty institutions were represented, spanning tenant unions, federations (FéBUL, FdSS, Fédération BICO), housing rights organisations (RBDH, Bonnevie, CIRE, ARAU, Logement Pour Tous), a trade union, and local authorities — reaching stakeholders directly positioned to act on housing policy. The discussion generated substantial interaction, with the audience showing particular interest in the complementarity of the three urban contexts presented, confirming the added value of the transnational CIVIS framework for a debate usually confined to a single national setting.

The project also serves inclusion objectives directly: addressing rent regulation from the tenants' standpoint targets a population over-represented in the lowest income deciles, as documented in the note.

Cultural dimension

The project's main output is a jointly authored note deconstructing three preconceptions that structure public debate on rent regulation:

- that regulation disproportionately infringes property rights; that a "supply shock" would suffice to lower rents;
- that regulation deprives landlords of income needed for maintenance;
- that regulating Airbnb alone would ease rental pressure;

Each of these preconceptions is examined by confronting academic literature with the field experience of tenant organisations.

The comparative framing this project brings is the principal contribution. By setting three legal and institutional configurations side by side — Belgian third-generation regulation and the reference rent grid, the Vaud conciliation commissions and rental tribunal, French rent control in designated "tension zones" — the note makes visible both the diversity of available instruments and a gap common to all three: the distance between the formal existence of tenant rights and their effective use. This gives partner associations comparative arguments previously unavailable to them.

The note also links disciplines and sectors, drawing on urban economics, housing financialisation literature and original empirical data (notably an exploratory survey of landlord maintenance costs in Brussels), while translating this material into a format usable for advocacy. The public event of 16 March served as a first dissemination moment, and the planned open-access publication and infographic redesign will extend accessibility to non-specialist audiences.

Economic dimension

The project's economic contribution lies in consolidating and disseminating knowledge with direct economic relevance for rent regulation policy. The joint note brings together empirical findings on the actual scale of landlord maintenance costs in Brussels — estimated at around 10% of rental income, against the 40% assumed by Belgian tax rules — and formulates concrete regulatory proposals, including conditioning public renovation subsidies on rent levels set below the reference grid and on a freeze on increases for a defined period. By making such material available to partner associations in a usable form, the project addresses a constraint identified at the outset: the difficulty, within the demands of political advocacy, of finding the time needed to critically engage with academic work on rent regulation.

Added value for the beneficiaries

The project's primary beneficiaries are the associations and community workers defending housing rights in the three partner cities. For them, the added value is twofold. First, the workshop provided something rarely available within the demands of ongoing advocacy: dedicated time to critically engage with the academic literature on rent regulation, and to confront it with their own field experience. Second, the resulting note gives them a consolidated resource — structured around the arguments they actually encounter in public debate — that can be mobilised directly in advocacy work.

The comparative dimension adds a further layer of value. Associations working within a single national framework gained access to how regulation, contestation mechanisms and their limits operate elsewhere: the Vaud conciliation system and its three-year protection against retaliatory termination, the Brussels reference grid and parity commission, French rent control in tension zones. This allows partner organisations to situate their national context, identify what is contingent rather than inevitable in their own system, and draw on foreign precedents when formulating demands.

For the researchers involved, the value lies in the reverse movement: field expertise brought empirical grounding and practical relevance to work that might otherwise remain confined to academic circulation.

Beneficiaries also include the wider audience reached through the public event — associations, administrations and elected officials — for whom the discussion offered access to evidence-based arguments on a debate often shaped by fixed positions and alarmist claims.

Relevance to the context

The project responds directly to an acute and current issue in each of the three cities. In Brussels, rental market pressure is severe and the regulatory framework is actively evolving: the parity rental commission became operational in September 2024 and the prohibition on abusive rents took effect in May 2025, making the question of how these instruments actually function unusually timely. The public event drew participants from across the Brussels housing ecosystem, including elected regional representatives and public administrations, confirming the salience of the topic for local policy actors.

At the national and European level, the project connects to debates that are structurally similar across contexts but rarely examined together. Bringing Belgian, Swiss and French experiences into dialogue allowed participants to identify a shared pattern — the gap between the formal existence of tenant rights and their effective use in tight markets — that is not visible from within a single jurisdiction.

Internally, the project embodies the mission of the Brussels Open Lab: producing knowledge with civil society rather than about it, and recognising associative and activist expertise as a legitimate form of knowledge alongside academic research. It also builds on and internationalises an existing ULB-RBDH research collaboration, extending a locally rooted partnership into the CIVIS network.

Explain how the project has fulfilled the goals and objectives of the European project CIVIS2 (Erasmus+, 2022 - 2026)

The project delivered on several WP2 and WP4 objectives.

Building bridges between academia and local stakeholders (WP2). The project brought researchers from three CIVIS universities into sustained working contact with tenant organisations in their respective cities — RBDH in Brussels, ASLOCA in Vaud — around a societal challenge these organisations had themselves identified. The public event extended this reach to municipal administrations, the SLRB and elected regional representatives, connecting academic work directly to actors positioned to act on housing policy.

Establishing knowledge co-creating teams with local and global partners (WP2). The two-day workshop constituted precisely such a team: academic and associative participants worked jointly, and the resulting note was co-drafted rather than written by researchers and reviewed by partners. Associative and field expertise shaped the framing of the questions, not only the answers.

Setting up and sharing tools to tackle societal challenges (WP2). The note is designed as an operational advocacy resource, structured around the arguments its users actually encounter, and accompanied by an annotated bibliography enabling further independent work.

Supporting concrete civic projects and participatory research (WP4). The project applied a participatory research approach throughout, and the transnational format — a Brussels-hosted activity mobilising partners from two other CIVIS cities — corresponds to the Transnational Open Lab model WP4 seeks to support.

Sharing expertise and best practices among Open Labs (WP4). As a follow-up, a presentation to Open Lab Brussels members is envisaged to share the methodological lessons drawn from articulating associative and academic knowledge, with a view to feeding into participatory practice across other Open Lab projects.

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Member universities :

amU Aix
Marseille
Université

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National and Kapodistrian
University of Athens

ULB UNIVERSITÉ
LIBRE
DE BRUXELLES

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BUCHAREST

University
of Glasgow

Unil.

UAM Universidad Autónoma
de Madrid

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UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA

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