

The Generalitat opens grants of up to 80% for the energy retrofit of rural homes in Catalonia

The Government of Catalonia has opened a round of grants of up to 80% to retrofit homes in rural municipalities. We review who can apply, which works are covered and why a well-planned retrofit transforms a building's behaviour for decades.

The Government of Catalonia has launched a new round of grants aimed at driving the energy retrofit of homes located in rural municipalities. The programme, managed by the Catalan Housing Agency, offers subsidies of up to **80 % of the cost of eligible works**, making it one of the most significant initiatives of recent years to support the recovery of the existing housing stock and improve its energy performance.

Beyond the financial support, this call responds to a structural challenge. Much of the rural housing stock in Catalonia was built decades ago, often with insufficient insulation, outdated systems and energy use far above today's standards. Retrofitting these buildings not only helps reduce energy spending and the associated emissions, but also recovers built heritage, increases comfort and strengthens the residential appeal of smaller municipalities.

A call to recover homes and improve their energy efficiency

The regulatory framework approved by the Generalitat sets a twofold objective. On one hand, to encourage the recovery of empty homes so they return to the available housing stock. On the other, to promote works that improve the energy performance, accessibility and condition of existing buildings.

The call is open to private owners as well as local administrations and other holders of homes located in municipalities within the scope of the Statute of Rural Municipalities of Catalonia. Depending on the type of project and the final use of the property, the eligible percentage and maximum amounts vary, but in certain cases they can reach up to 80 % of the cost of the intervention.

This approach positions energy retrofit as a public policy tool that combines environmental, social and territorial goals. Improving the building stock simultaneously reduces energy demand, increases housing quality and supports the revitalisation of rural areas.

What grants does the programme provide?

The amounts depend mainly on the type of municipality, the nature of the beneficiary and the intended use of the home once the retrofit is complete. In summary, the call sets out three broad scenarios:

- **Empty homes destined for the rental market**, with grants of up to 80 % of the eligible cost, within the financial limits set by the call.
- **Homes for own or family use**, with lower grant percentages that are still significant in reducing the cost of the works.
- **Public housing promoted by local bodies**, which has a dedicated line with higher maximum amounts to support the recovery of the municipal housing stock.

Given the diversity of situations covered, it is advisable to analyse each case individually before starting the application. Factors such as the location of the municipality, the age of the building, its occupancy status or the final use of the home can change both the eligible percentage and the documentation required.

Which homes can apply for the grants?

The call applies to the rural municipalities defined by current regulations and includes hundreds of localities across the four Catalan provinces.

As a general rule, homes must have been built before **31 December 1999**. For unoccupied properties, applicants must also prove that the home has not been a primary residence during the two years prior to the call, in line with the requirements set by the Catalan Housing Agency. To make this check easier, it is advisable to consult the official documentation directly before starting any works or preparing the application.

Which works are eligible?

One of the most notable aspects of the programme is the breadth of works that can qualify for the grants. The call is not limited to isolated interventions; it favours retrofits capable of improving the overall behaviour of the building.

Eligible works include improving the insulation of the thermal envelope, replacing windows and doors, adding mechanical ventilation systems with heat recovery, renovating energy systems, structural interventions, retrofitting roofs and façades, accessibility works, the works needed to guarantee habitability and even converting disused buildings into new homes.

The call also covers certain technical costs that are essential for the project, such as drafting the technical documentation, site management, the Technical Building Inspection (ITE) or the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC), always within the limits set by the regulatory framework.

This integral view reflects an idea that is increasingly established within the sector: an effective energy retrofit is not about adding isolated solutions, but about improving the overall behaviour of the building from a constructive perspective.

Why an energy retrofit goes far beyond the grant

The value of this call does not lie solely in the subsidy percentage. Its main strength is that it enables works capable of transforming the energy behaviour of a home for decades.

In much of the housing stock built before the 2000s, heat losses in winter and heat gains in summer are the result of an inefficient envelope, with insufficient insulation, low-performance windows and numerous thermal bridges. These limitations raise the building's energy demand and force heating and cooling systems to run continuously to keep interiors comfortable.

An integral energy retrofit acts precisely on these elements. Improving thermal insulation, renewing windows, reducing air infiltration and adding high-efficiency ventilation systems all significantly lower a home's energy demand before the heating and cooling equipment is even considered. The difference is not only about using less energy, but about achieving a building that, by design, works better.

Less energy demand, more thermal stability

The first consequence of a well-planned retrofit is a reduction in energy use. Depending on the scope of the works carried out, it is common to achieve very significant reductions in heating and cooling demand compared with the building's initial state. This translates into a sustained drop in running costs and less exposure to future energy price movements.

Energy efficiency, however, is only part of the benefit. A high-performance envelope keeps interior conditions far more stable throughout the year. In winter, it limits heat loss to the outside; in summer, it hinders the entry of high temperatures. The result is a reduction in temperature swings and a considerably higher level of comfort, even during extreme weather.

This behaviour is especially relevant in a context marked by more frequent heatwaves, where a building's ability to hold a stable indoor temperature becomes a decisive factor for both comfort and the health of its occupants.

Indoor air quality is also part of efficiency

When we talk about energy retrofit, the focus is often on insulation or on cutting consumption. Indoor environmental quality, however, is equally decisive. Retrofits that add mechanical ventilation with heat recovery renew the air continuously without compromising the building's energy efficiency.

This controlled renewal helps reduce CO₂ concentration, control indoor humidity, limit airborne particles and improve the environmental conditions of living spaces all year round. Energy efficiency is not only about using fewer resources, but also about delivering a higher level of comfort and environmental quality.

An investment that increases the value of the property

Energy retrofit also has a direct impact on the asset value of buildings. Homes with a better energy rating are in growing demand within the residential market, especially in the face of a European regulatory framework that pushes for increasingly efficient buildings and progressively narrows the margin for keeping properties with poor energy performance.

This trend turns retrofit into an investment that creates value beyond energy savings. A building with better thermal behaviour, renewed systems and higher construction quality holds a more competitive position both in sales and in the rental market. When a significant part of the cost of the works is covered by public grants, the economic return on the investment becomes even more favourable.

Recovering heritage is also building the future

The Generalitat's call pursues an objective that goes beyond the individual retrofit of each home. Recovering the existing housing stock helps preserve the architectural heritage of rural municipalities, reduce the resource use associated with new construction and support a more sustainable development model from an environmental and territorial point of view.

Retrofitting an existing building extends its useful life, reduces construction waste and makes the most of the architectural and cultural value accumulated over time. At the same time, it brings new homes into the residential market and strengthens the economic and social life of small municipalities. From this perspective, energy retrofit stops being merely a construction task and becomes a tool for territorial regeneration, climate adaptation and the conservation of built heritage.

Before retrofitting: what should you analyse?

Before defining any intervention it is essential to understand how the building behaves. Not all retrofits deliver the same impact, and not all works provide the same energy return. For this reason, any project should begin with a technical assessment that identifies the main constructive shortcomings and sets an order of priorities.

Factors such as the orientation of the home, the condition of the thermal envelope, air infiltration, thermal bridges, the quality of the windows, the existing construction system or the efficiency of the systems directly shape the building's energy behaviour. This analysis makes it possible to determine which works will generate a more significant reduction in energy demand and which will have a more limited impact.

In many cases, acting first on the envelope is considerably more efficient than replacing heating and cooling equipment without having resolved the building's main energy losses. Retrofitting with judgement does not mean adding more technology, but getting the building to work better from a constructive point of view.

An integral view of retrofit

The most efficient interventions are those that understand the building as a system in which every element is related. Thermal insulation, windows, ventilation, systems, solar protection and airtightness do not act independently. The final performance depends on how these components work together to reduce energy losses, control infiltration and keep interior conditions stable throughout the year.

This approach delivers more consistent results than a retrofit based solely on isolated works. At the same time, it makes it possible to adapt each project to the specific features of the building, optimising both the investment and the final performance.

Retrofitting with the next decades in mind

Energy retrofit no longer responds only to an immediate need to cut consumption. It is also an investment aimed at extending the useful life of buildings and preparing them for a context marked by rising energy costs, evolving European regulation and the effects of climate change.

The construction decisions taken today will shape a home's behaviour for the coming decades. For this reason, it is increasingly important to prioritise solutions that deliver sustained performance over time, reduce maintenance needs and improve the overall quality of the building. From this perspective, retrofit stops being a one-off task and becomes a long-term value strategy, in both energy and asset terms.

The PAPIK Group approach

Every retrofit project presents specific constructive, energy and heritage conditions. For this reason, at PAPIK Group every retrofit project is approached from a global analysis of the building, with the aim of identifying the works that have the greatest impact on its energy behaviour and construction quality.

This approach integrates criteria from high-efficiency construction, such as improving the thermal envelope, reducing thermal bridges, renewing windows, controlled mechanical ventilation and, where the project allows, adding low-impact materials. The goal is not only to renovate a building, but to increase its performance, reduce its energy demand and improve occupant comfort, while respecting the architectural value and particularities of each property.

The experience gained in Passivhaus homes and in industrialised timber construction makes it possible to bring many of these criteria to retrofit projects too, adapting each solution to the real needs of the building and the client's objectives.

How to start the grant application

Before starting any works, it is advisable to confirm that both the home and the municipality meet the requirements set by the call published by the Catalan Housing Agency.

Once this eligibility has been verified, the first step is to carry out a technical assessment of the building. This analysis makes it possible to define the most suitable works, estimate the expected energy improvement and prepare the documentation needed to process the grant. Afterwards, the technical project must be drafted, the required administrative documentation gathered and the application submitted within the deadlines set by the call.

Since the admission criteria, eligible amounts and required documentation can vary from one programme to another, it is advisable to always consult the current regulatory framework before starting any investment.

Conclusions

The Generalitat's new call is an opportunity to drive the energy retrofit of homes in rural municipalities, enabling works that help reduce energy demand, increase comfort, preserve built heritage and improve the quality of the existing housing stock.

Beyond the financial support, programmes like this reinforce an idea that is increasingly established within the sector: the buildings that best respond to the challenges of the future are those that prioritise efficiency from their own construction. Retrofitting with technical judgement means acting on the causes of energy use, not only on its consequences, to deliver homes that are more comfortable, more efficient and better prepared to face the climate and energy challenges of the coming decades.

Retrofitting with judgement is not about adding technology to an old building, but about correcting the reasons why it wastes energy. That is the difference between a renovation and an energy retrofit.