

By Maria Jose Anitua, ABC

## INTRODUCTION

The intersection of climate action and Collaborative Law presents a groundbreaking opportunity to drive systemic change. This article explores how collaborative legal frameworks can accelerate the global transition toward sustainable housing solutions, with a particular focus on the work of the Empty Homes Collaborative (EHC). Through an in-depth discussion with Glenn Meier, a leading Collaborative lawyer and President of the Global Collaborative Law Council (GLCC), we examine the role of Collaborative professionals in addressing climate change, housing shortages, and environmental impact.

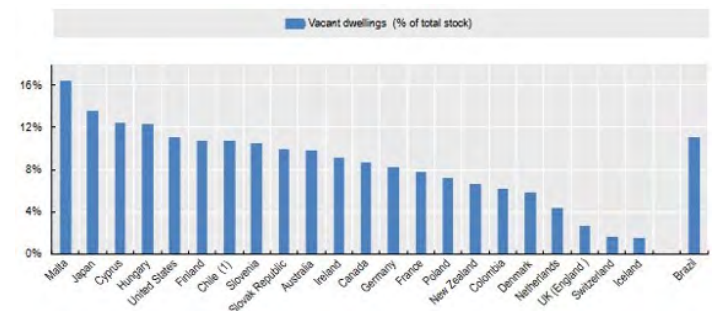
## A JOURNEY IN COLLABORATIVE LAW

My engagement with Collaborative Law has been transformative. It all began in 2014 when Spain hosted its first collaborative law training in partnership with the International Academy of Collaborative Professionals (IACP). As a business lawyer specializing in real estate and contracts, I co-founded an association that introduced Collaborative Law principles to the business sector. This endeavor was inspired by pioneering efforts in the United States, such as Paul Faxon's groundbreaking business restructuring case using Collaborative Law.

Having spent more than a decade advocating for this approach, we have trained public servants and initiated over 12 pilot projects across various sectors—including health, labor, and taxation. While many of these projects faced challenges, persistence paid off. Our thirteenth attempt led to a successful initiative connecting empty homes with refugees, proving that collaborative solutions can yield impactful results.

## THE GLOBAL EMPTY HOMES CRISIS

Housing availability is a pressing global concern. A research project conducted in May 2024 revealed that there are over 100 million empty homes worldwide. This research, published on EHC's website and LinkedIn, underscores a critical opportunity: the reuse of these homes can contribute to both social equity and climate action.



Empty homes exacerbate the housing crisis by restricting supply, driving up prices, and leaving millions without adequate shelter. The question arises: Why are so many homes vacant? The answer lies in systemic legal and financial barriers, which often prevent homeowners from repurposing these properties efficiently.

## A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO CLIMATE ACTION

Environmental experts, like Paul Hawken, argue that a combative approach to climate change is insufficient. Instead, a collaborative strategy—rooted in public-private partnerships and civil society initiatives—is necessary to implement lasting change. The IACP's network of professionals is uniquely positioned to leverage Collaborative Law for addressing these systemic issues.

EHC exemplifies this approach. Our dream is to

## CLIMATE ACTION... (CONTINUED)



Drawn by a refugee former EHC resident

partner with a strong housing technology firm, to develop a robust platform capable of integrating legal, economic, and ecological considerations. This platform aims to facilitate the reuse of empty homes, housing thousands of people, thereby reducing CO2 emissions and contributing to climate mitigation efforts.

### FIELD EXPERIENCE: INSIGHTS FROM THE EHC PILOT PROJECT

Between 2018 and 2024, the Empty Homes Collaborative, led by MJA S.L., the Arteale Foundation, and Artealen Lagunak Association, launched a pilot project in Vitoria-Gasteiz. Using the

principles of Collaborative Law and a specialized Participation Agreement, this initiative repurposed 10 empty homes, housing 40 people, and preventing 396.9 tons of CO2 emissions. This reduction of CO2 emissions is equivalent to the annual absorption capacity of 39,690 trees. The project also prevented the generation of 93 tons of waste.

Despite the growing awareness of climate action, many experts in the field remain unaware of the number of empty homes in their own countries. Our research, based on OECD data, highlights disparities in housing policies across nations. Notably, some countries—such as Canada and South Africa—lack reliable statistics on the

## CLIMATE ACTION... (CONTINUED)

number of empty homes, complicating efforts to address the issue.

### ACHIEVEMENTS SO FAR:

10

HOMES REUSED

40

PEOPLE HOSTED

8

OWNERS SUPPORTING  
PROJECT

98.3

TONS WASTE NOT  
GENERATED

396.9

TONS CO2 AVOIDED

housing shortages, and provide refuge for climate migrants. Collaborative Law plays a vital role in this transformation, enabling stakeholders to navigate legal complexities and drive meaningful change.

Through continued research, partnerships, and legal innovation, EHC aims to scale its impact globally. This article marks the beginning of a series of interviews with experts dedicated to collaborative solutions—starting with Glenn Meier’s insights on integrating law and climate action for a sustainable future

### THE ROLE OF COLLABORATIVE LAWYERS

Collaborative Law offers a crucial framework for tackling housing and climate challenges. Glenn Meier, who joined the EHC team in April 2024, brings extensive experience as a Collaborative lawyer. He brings his experience gained during his tenure at Greenberg Traurig (GTLAW), where he advised on corporate legal matters. His expertise underscores the potential of legal professionals to facilitate dialogue and implement holistic solutions that bridge environmental, economic, and social gaps.

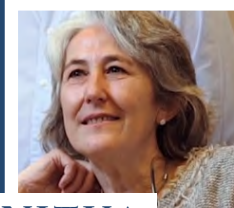
### CONCLUSION

Empty homes represent both a crisis and an opportunity. By repurposing vacant properties, we can mitigate climate change, alleviate

Collaborative Lawyer, CEO at MJA SL, social enterprise promoter of Empty Homes Collaborative.

Looking for the human side of law, I started as a lawyer in Fernando Buesa’s office, specializing in family law. The practice in the courts led me to look for another way to exercise my vocation as a lawyer. After a master’s degree in business law at Instituto de Empresas (Madrid), started to work setting up a law firm, specializing in reale estate ( tax and contracts ) during more than 40 years.

We have discovered collaborative law thanks to the pilot Hiri Space in 2012 and promoted its development through the ADCE ( Collaborative Law Basque Association) that I have chaired from September 2013 to July 2019



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