

European Manifesto for a sustainable built environment

How sustainable buildings can be at the heart of a prosperous and equitable future for Europe

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EUROPE REGIONAL NETWORK



WorldGBC's Europe Regional Network is ready to support EU policymakers in taking action for an energy efficient, regenerative and just transition in the built environment.

The election of a new European Parliament and Commission marks a golden opportunity for politicians to embrace the potential of the buildings sector to address many of the issues affecting EU citizens while putting Europe firmly on track to achieve its climate goals.

By putting into practice the vision outlined in this manifesto, policymakers can work together with industry to deliver energy efficient, low-carbon and high-quality built environments which are fit for present and future climates, facilitate the regeneration of our spaces and resources, and which serve to celebrate and continue Europe's rich heritage of beautiful architecture.

What's more, the enormous opportunities of a sustainable transition cut across many of the problems currently faced by the EU, including economic hardship

caused by energy price volatility, job shortages, energy poverty and energy security. Transitioning to a sustainable built environment can and should prioritise buildings, especially housing, that are more affordable and healthier, in addition to being more environmentally sustainable.

In this manifesto, we outline the key policy priorities we call on European leaders to endorse and champion, which our network is ready to deliver. Under the pillars of Carbon, Circular Economy, Health, Water, Finance, Resilience, Biodiversity and Just Transition, we have included key regulations, information and incentives which should be introduced to support these priorities. Only by establishing clear and long-lasting policies that support transformative action can our sector's potential be realised.

The World Green Building Council (WorldGBC) Europe Regional Network, represents Green Building Councils (GBCs):

in over
20
countries

working with
7
regional
partners

and around
5,000
stakeholders
across the construction
and real estate sector

Our network demonstrates the **support and demand from across the European value chain for a sustainable transition** and for an **EU policy framework that embraces the social, environmental, and economic benefits of sustainable buildings.**

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By supporting, establishing and implementing strong policies across these priority areas, European politicians can drive an energy efficient, regenerative and just transition in the built environment.

1 Carbon

Prioritise deep renovation of existing buildings and eliminate both operational and embodied carbon emissions across the life cycle of all buildings.

2 Circular Economy

Create a circular economy ecosystem by phasing out waste and optimising the use and re-use of resources and materials.

3 Health

Develop healthy, equitable and resilient buildings and cities that deliver improvement in public health.

4 Water

Conserve and protect water resources and guarantee equitable access to safe and sustainable, potable water and sanitation.

5 Finance

Accelerate investment into sustainable building practices.

6 Resilience

Enhance the ability of buildings and communities to respond to external shocks and stressors.

7 Biodiversity

Enhance, expand, and protect Europe's natural environment.

8 Just Transition

Ensure all citizens have equal access to safe and sustainable homes, communities and employment.

1. Carbon

Prioritise deep renovation of existing buildings and eliminate both operational and embodied carbon emissions across the life cycle of all buildings.

The EU's built environment holds enormous potential for climate action since buildings are responsible for 36% of the EU's CO₂ emissions. In addition, the fact that the EU's buildings also contribute 40% of energy consumption ([European Commission, 2021](#)) illustrates the need to reduce this considerable demand through an energy efficiency first approach.

Industry welcomes measures by EU and national policymakers to address both operational and embodied emissions resulting from the manufacturing, transportation, construction, and end-of-life phases of built assets – together known as Whole Life Carbon (WLC).

Regulations

- Ensure EU sustainable building policy measures are implemented promptly by Member States and tightened appropriately in line with the EU's climate targets for 2030, 2040, and 2050.
- Bring forward and consolidate the introduction of mandatory Minimum Energy Performance Standards (MEPS) in the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) for all building segments, set at the EU level and adjusted regularly to remain on a trajectory towards full decarbonisation by 2050 at the latest.
- Establish a timeline for the Zero Emission Building (ZEB) definition in the EPBD to encompass embodied, as well as operational carbon.
- Phase out the installation of fossil fuel heating systems across the EU in new and existing buildings by 2030 via the EPBD.
- Publish the European Commission WLC Roadmap and outline a strategy for integrating it into policy revisions and development.

Information

- Develop a harmonised methodology for Member States on calculating and disclosing WLC aligned with the Level(s) framework and EN 15978.
- Clarify how data from sources such as Digital Building Logbooks and Renovation Passports will feed into WLC databases.
- Provide detailed guidance for Member States to create national roadmaps for the introduction of WLC limit values.

Incentives

- Ensure that sufficient EU funding, such as from the Recovery and Resilience Facility, is channelled towards the deep renovation of buildings at the national level.
- Provide EU funding for Member State capacity building for the transition to WLC reporting and target setting.
- Require the transparent disclosure of WLC for all EU Taxonomy-eligible buildings, as well as WLC limit values for all new buildings.
- Ensure that EU Taxonomy criteria for buildings are updated to be on a more ambitious timeline than the EPBD.
- Require that all EU Taxonomy-eligible buildings are zero emissions in operation by 2035 at the latest.

2. Circular Economy

Create a circular economy ecosystem by phasing out waste and optimising the use and re-use of resources and materials.

The buildings sector contributes over a third of Europe's waste ([European Commission, 2021](#)), meaning it has enormous potential for driving greater circularity. Indeed, a number of industry pilots have already demonstrated that construction can be almost completely circular ([WorldGBC, 2023](#)), an approach which has additional benefits such as reducing resource scarcity and undue reliance on foreign imports.

The circular transition also brings multiple economic advantages; it has been estimated that increasing resource productivity by 30% by 2030 could boost gross domestic product (GDP) by nearly 1% and create 2 million additional sustainable jobs in the EU ([European Commission, 2015](#)).

Regulations

- Set a deadline in the Waste Framework Directive (WFD) for Member States to publish building circularity roadmaps by the start of 2027, detailing the introduction of national circularity measures and how the sector moves towards a functioning circular ecosystem.
- Require the development of effective dismantling, collection and sorting infrastructures for construction waste in the WFD.
- Introduce a progressive landfill ban in the WFD on non-hazardous construction and demolition waste and by-products.
- Require the development of effective dismantling, collection and sorting

Information

- Launch public awareness campaigns on the value of sufficiency measures including optimising resource and space use.
- Develop key standards and protocols for circularity, including additional end-of-waste criteria, to validate the safety and efficacy of secondary materials.
- Provide detailed guidance for the buildings sector on implementing circular construction methods in public and private procurement, prioritising resources and support for the Level(s) framework in particular.
- Secure a standardised system of product passports building on Construction Products Regulation (CPR) requirements, containing information on product lifespans, potential new-use scenarios, localisation and availability.

Incentives

- Invest in creating new value chains and infrastructure for reused buildings and materials.
- Use EU subsidies and tax rebates as financial tools to encourage businesses to support the transition to a circular economy.
- Add material reduction thresholds in line with the Level(s) framework to the circularity criteria in the EU Taxonomy.
- Clarify definitions of primary and secondary materials and prioritise re-used materials over recycled ones based on a robust performance assessment in the EU Taxonomy.

3. Health

Develop healthy, equitable and resilient buildings and cities that deliver improvement in public health.

In order for a building to be truly sustainable, it must protect and enhance the physical and mental health and safety of users and occupants, as well as enhance social equity within the wider community and supply chain.

There is a compelling body of evidence that good indoor air quality, visual comfort, daylighting, acoustics and enhanced levels of thermal comfort, amongst others, lead to decreased rates of health conditions, including cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. They can also help improve cognitive performance, mental health, sleep quality, productivity and many other benefits. Therefore, the EU's buildings must optimise health, prioritise comfort and facilitate positive behaviour, and sustainable buildings are part of the solution.

Regulations

- Accelerate a transition towards non-fossil fuel heating and cooling systems via the EPBD.

Information

- Ensure that guidance is issued with the EPBD on how renovation can enhance energy efficiency, indoor air quality and health at the same time, such as via building renovation passports.
- Boost the uptake of industry best practice by providing holistic and neutral guidance on how different measures across the life cycle of a building can support health, mental and physical wellbeing.
- Provide guidance to all players in the construction value chain on how to identify and address health and wellbeing impacts in the workforce.
- Encourage companies to provide data on their products' contents – e.g. by publishing content declarations or Health Product Declarations (HPDs) – to minimise exposure to hazardous substances and to facilitate reuse or recycling at their end of life.

Incentives

- Implement the Social Climate Fund earlier than the planned date of 2026, in coordination with EPBD implementation work and channel funds towards low-income households to carry out energy renovation work that improves indoor air quality.
- Introduce financial mechanisms to incentivise “healthy” renovations and buildings, such as planning fee rebates.

4. Water

Conserve and protect water resources and guarantee equitable access to safe and sustainable, potable water and sanitation.

Buildings use water at all stages of their life cycle – from material extraction to construction, operation and the end-of-life phase – which demonstrates the importance of a life cycle approach.

The construction sector consumes around one third of the EU's freshwater ([ECOS, 2022](#)). Around 30% of Europeans are already affected by droughts and water scarcity during an average year ([EEA, 2021](#)), which is expected to worsen due to climate change, meaning that effective building water efficiency measures could have a considerable impact on boosting water availability.

Regulations

- Integrate water efficiency measures and standards for indoor and outdoor water use at all stages of the building life cycle into the EPBD.
- Introduce minimum water performance standards and mandatory water performance certificates in the EPBD by 2027.
- Commit to investigating potential “whole life water” limit values for buildings as part of the introduction of WLC limit values in the EPBD.

Information

- Develop detailed guidance for the construction industry on how to minimise water usage, such as:
 - preventing the usage of potable water for manufacturing, construction and building operation.
 - measuring water use effectively to manage losses and leakages.
- Expand the Level(s) framework's water indicators and promote Level(s) as a means to harmonise methodologies on the impact of water.

Incentives

- Provide funding for national financial incentives for the improvement of building water efficiency across the building life cycle.
- Invest in the development of technology to help retain, recuperate and re-use rainwater in renovation efforts.

5. Finance

Accelerate investment into sustainable building practices.

In the context of continuing geopolitical and economic uncertainty, we need a forward-looking and cost-effective strategy to channel private and public funding into reducing the energy demand of buildings and phasing out our reliance on fossil fuels.

It is entirely unsustainable, for example, that EU Member States' annual fossil fuel subsidies have remained at a similar level over the past decade, apart from 2022, when they more than doubled to €123 billion (EEA, 2023). This urgently reinforces the need to redirect finance towards decarbonising solutions for buildings and the ways in which they are powered and heated.

EU policymakers should also consider the potential for job creation and economic growth associated with decarbonising buildings. For example, for every €1 million invested in energy renovation of buildings, an average of 18 local, long-term jobs are created in the EU (BPIE, 2020).

Regulations

- Develop standards for private financing products, such as mortgage portfolio standards, that are aligned with EU Taxonomy definitions of minimum energy savings to protect against short-term divestment.
- Require public disclosure of life cycle global warming potential of EU Taxonomy-aligned buildings to inform WLC thresholds and regulation over time.
- Align Green Public Procurement (GPP) buildings criteria with EU Taxonomy and mandate that Member States use GPP.

Information

- Take the lead on measuring and monitoring the real energy and environmental impact of public assets and disclosing them through tools such as Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs).
- Develop green insurance mechanisms to promote low-carbon buildings through resilience risk assessment.

Incentives

- Promote private sustainability loans for improving real estate assets in line with EU climate targets.
- Ensure that the EU's long term renovation plans are linked to subsidies and support schemes for local governments.

6. Resilience

Enhance the ability of buildings and communities to respond to external shocks and stressors.

The impacts of natural events, some of which are being made worse by climate change, including extreme weather events, rising temperatures, wildfires and sea-level rise, pose significant threats to buildings and the EU citizens who occupy them.

While climate mitigation remains a first priority, climate resilience action is essential to build community capacity to survive and thrive in our built environments.

Climate resilience can be improved for new buildings by considering the current and future climate when locating, designing and operating a building. Existing buildings can improve climate resilience through renovation and ensuring that maintenance regimes incorporate resilience to the impacts of climate change over the building's lifetime, working more widely at the neighbourhood and city level where relevant.

Regulations

- Introduce climate adaptation measures in the EPBD as outlined in the [EU's best practice guidelines](#).
- Strengthen seismic and fire safety requirements in the EPBD for new construction and renovation of existing buildings, according to the level of seismic and wildfire risk.
- Require that manufacturers anticipate future climate risks in their products via the CPR.

Information

- Define 'resilient buildings' to assist the harmonisation of approaches across Member States while factoring in regional climate differences.
- Provide information to insurance providers on how their policies and rates should recognise the value of resilient buildings and adaptation measures in planning.
- Expand the Level(s) framework to contain more in-depth indicators and criteria for the resilience and adaptation of all aspects of the building life cycle.
- Make building risk and exposure level assessment tools publicly available.
- Mandate the disclosure of assets' physical risks to climate change.

Incentives

- Use the Recovery and Resilience Facility to channel necessary funding into national programmes for retrofitting and future-proofing homes and towards education and training in resilience strategies for buildings sector professionals.
- Fund the development and promotion of systems which identify buildings and regions at risk and design innovative financing mechanisms to share risks and financial burdens in an equitable way.

7. Biodiversity

Enhance, expand, and protect Europe's natural environment.

Europe's nature is declining at an alarming rate, with 81% of natural habitats considered by the EU to be in poor health (EEA, 2020). Apart from the negative implications for biodiversity, this crisis is having increasing economic repercussions too, because more than half of global GDP – some €40 trillion – depends on nature (European Commission, 2020).

The built environment plays a pivotal role in preserving or degrading biodiversity, and EU policymakers have a critical opportunity to mitigate the built environment's embodied ecological impact through targeted measures across the life cycle of buildings, from material production through to construction and demolition.

Policymakers should adopt a holistic approach integrating ecological considerations into urban planning, infrastructure development and construction practices to limit and reverse the building sector's impact on biodiversity.

Regulations

- Drive the prioritisation of redevelopment of brownfield sites over new development of greenfield sites via the Nature Restoration Law (NRL).
- Set a biodiversity net-gain target for new developments by 2027 via the NRL.
- Prohibit development on ecologically fragile sites via the NRL.
- Require sustainable sourcing for all construction materials in the CPR and Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR) to ensure manufacturers identify and mitigate their embodied ecological impact.

Information

- Establish clear guidance for the buildings sector on biodiversity net gain and how it can contribute to the implementation of the NRL.
- Introduce a common definition of 'nature-positive' development.
- Develop best-practice guidance for insurance companies on covering nature-based solutions.

Incentives

- Provide funding towards financial incentives for building sector value chain stakeholders that follow best practice design guidance for supporting and boosting biodiversity.
- Improve the usability of the biodiversity Do No Significant Harm criteria in the EU Taxonomy.

8. Just Transition

Ensure all citizens have equal access to safe and sustainable homes, communities and employment.

In the transition towards a sustainable built environment, without adequate support measures, some industries and communities will be more negatively impacted than others and this must be mitigated.

This means that social, as well as environmental sustainability, must be at the core of policy decisions. Sustainable buildings have enormous potential to deliver societal benefits for EU citizens to live and work in better-quality built environments that cost less to maintain and facilitate a better quality of life.

Regulations

- Introduce mandatory checks via the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) or similar legislation to ensure that the construction value chain acts to prevent human rights abuses and criminal activity such as unacceptable working conditions and modern slavery from occurring, as well as fraud and corruption.
- Ensure that GPP sets a limit on the number of subcontractor tiers.

Information

- Review and map the market barriers for the financial products needed to help the Renovation Wave facilitate a just transition and maintain social cohesion, ensuring that public funding prioritises the most vulnerable citizens.
- Launch public information campaigns on the benefits of retraining in professions that benefit the green transition, such as retrofit and carrying out EPCs and Life Cycle Assessments (LCAs).
- Provide EU guidance for the establishment of transparent, public monitoring and reporting mechanisms to track progress towards the provision of safe, secure, habitable, and affordable homes.

Incentives

- Implement the Social Climate Fund earlier than the planned date of 2026, and channel funding towards low-income households to carry out renovation work and install sustainable heating systems.
- Introduce grants and schemes to incentivise underrepresented groups, such as women, to join the construction workforce.
- Ensure that sufficient funding from the Just Transition Fund is used to decarbonise the buildings sector, from renovation and sustainable heating systems to the transition towards sustainable construction material production.

Our network is ready to deliver

By establishing and implementing strong policies across these eight priority areas, European politicians can drive an energy efficient, regenerative and just transition in the built environment.

Our network of GBCs and European partners recognise that this transition can set the EU on a trajectory aligned with the Paris Agreement, which holds enormous business and job creation potential.

Key to this transition will be a holistic approach to policy development that recognises the cross-cutting role of buildings, and we support the European Commission's initiatives such as the New European Bauhaus which embrace this. The development of a Commission Whole Life Carbon Roadmap also has great potential to ensure that EU policymakers are aligned across the various legislative developments affecting the built environment.

We stand ready to assist the European Commission so that sustainable buildings can be at the heart of a prosperous and equitable future for Europe.

Find out more: worldgbc.org/europe

Supported by GBCs and partners across Europe

