

**OPED: “Beyond bricks-and-mortar:
People-centred solutions for Decent and Affordable Housing for All”
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Since its launch, the Renovation Wave Strategy has been telling us that our building stock is not only made of “bricks-and-mortar”. People living in those buildings, in fact, have been given a very important place within the Strategy, as well as an increasingly prominent voice within EU debates surrounding the quality of housing and the universal right to access it.

The EMPL Committee has recently adopted the Own-initiative Report “Access to Decent and Affordable Housing for All” led by Rapporteur and **Renovate Europe Champion Together for Renovation**, Kim Van Sparrentak (Greens/EFA, NL) which shows that by investing in more energy efficient and affordable homes we will make sure to **#PrioritisePeople**, **#AccelerateRenovation** and, in this historical moment more than ever, to **#Renovate2Recover**.

Prioritising People

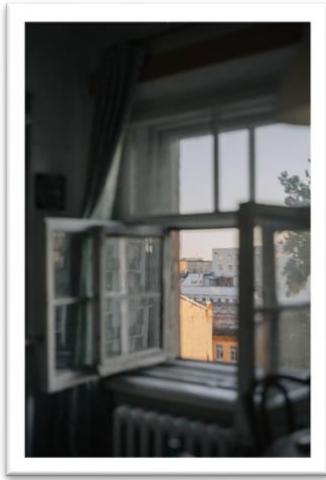
The current housing crisis is a persistent issue that is affecting an ever-growing segment of the EU population. Especially due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the worsening of the economic outlook across the EU (and world-wide) indicates that **it is time to think ambitiously and holistically by putting people at the heart of the solutions**. It is undeniable that in times of confinement, our homes have become shelters for some as well as perils for others. Considering that our (mental and physical) health depends



on the conditions in which we live, work and age, **neglected housing conditions have a direct impact on our wellbeing both in the immediate and long-term**. Beyond sanitary and comfort levels, investing in energy efficient homes helps to decrease energy consumption bills and contributes to housing affordability. As **energy poverty** is affecting more than 50 million citizens in the European Union, the INI Report makes it clear: **the Renovation Wave is an unmissable opportunity where energy savings can play a critical role in reducing costs of energy consumption thus easing housing cost-overburden while improving EU citizens’ living conditions**.

Accelerating Renovation

It is well known that low-income families are more likely to experience energy poverty due to the poor energy performance of the dwellings they live in. That is why, an enhanced importance given to **worst-**



performing buildings in both the Renovation Strategy and INI Report comes as no surprise. The potential lying behind energy renovation of these buildings is huge, however regulatory barriers, coupled with structural factors and scarce (or even inadequate) financing support have always hindered such type of investment and slowed down energy renovation rates. In response to these issues, both **European Commission and Parliament seem to have found their common ground in putting forward Minimum Energy Performance Standards (MEPS)**. This tool presents itself as a way to strengthen information and legal certainty among owners and tenants, thus creating positive dynamics across the whole value chain, which will ultimately inject trust in the financial ecosystem by also awakening a rather silent actor: banks. As said by European Commission Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans

during [REDay2020](#): ***“there is so much value in the built environment that if you get it right, banks will jump at the occasion to finance this.”***. MEPS have in fact the potential to create a clear trajectory for investors, as financing, technical assistance and project development assistance is provided according to the goals that are to be achieved. This positive dynamic, coupled with the increased valorisation of a renovated asset will encourage financial intermediaries to emit more credit to a wider segment of the demand, namely small and medium-size investors. On the long term, this will have the power to spur renovation activities, which is what we need if we are to at least double the current energy renovation rates by 2030.

Renovate to Recover

However, increasing energy renovation rates is not an end in itself. **Investing in the act of renovating a building is a countercyclical intervention with an important job-creation potential**, which is of extreme importance as we will look into the economic aftermath of the current pandemic. If every €1 million invested in energy renovation of buildings generates an average of 18 (local and long-term) jobs in the EU, it is safe to say that Rapporteur van Sparrentak’s suggestion to **prioritize the Renovation Wave within the MFF 2021-2027 and Next Generation EU is of crucial importance**. Member States are strongly encouraged to seize the financing opportunities stemming from the Recovery and Resilience Facility, which, in the case of buildings, is done by identifying energy renovation as an investment priority or **“Flagship Renovate”** within their National Recovery and Resilience Plans. By channeling more funds and linking them with the right reforms, energy renovation of buildings will finally be able to unleash its full socio-economic potential and pave the way towards a higher **deep energy renovation rate**.

A big victory and a powerful message coming from the European Parliament to both Member States and European Commission: the instruments are there, now time to roll up our sleeves to ensure an energy efficient, affordable building stock is delivered to all!

