



ComActivate

Enabling community action for energy sufficiency

TRANSFERABILITY REPORT ON RESOURCE CENTRE IMPLEMENTATION

August 31, 2026



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1 Introduction

Climate change mitigation and adaptation have recently become primary strategic goals of the European Union, and there are several EU objectives concerning these subjects. The European Green Deal establishes a binding target to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 relative to 1990 levels, positioning the residential building sector as a critical domain for intervention. These objectives also include reducing energy poverty, requiring systemic measures ranging from deep energy-efficiency renovation to change of consumer behaviour and the use of renewable energy sources.

The main goal of the [ComActivate project](#) (2023-2026) is to alleviate energy poverty among residents living in multi-family apartment buildings (MFABs) across four pilot municipalities: Józsefváros (Budapest, Hungary), Burgas (Bulgaria), Kaišiadorys and Elektrėnai (Lithuania), while promoting energy efficiency renovations, which help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and residents' expenses. While these target municipalities exhibit diverse climatic, legal, administrative, and cultural profiles, they share common historical trajectories defined by post-socialist urban development and extensive privatization of the housing stock during the 1990s.

Former project deliverables analysed building stock typologies, socioeconomic conditions, national and municipal subsidy frameworks for MFAB renovation, and local potential for renewable energy integration. Furthermore, ComActivate formulated tailored Neighbourhood Energy Sufficiency Roadmaps (NESR) that provide a practical, locally grounded plan for tackling energy poverty and strengthening resilience in each pilot area. Rather than applying a single template, it considers the socio-economic conditions and the housing stock of each area, so that the guidance is tailored to the specific needs and realities of each pilot municipality. Complementary capacity-building modules and specialized technical training tools were also developed.

One of the main outcomes of the project is the establishment of municipal Resource Centres (RCs) operating as One-Stop Shops (OSS). These hubs provide integrated technical, administrative, and financial advisory services to homeowners, homeowners associations (HOAs), and vulnerable households navigating complex renovation processes. RCs aim to make the renovation process easier by delivering tailored technical guidance, facilitating grant applications, and connecting clients with certified market actors.

The goal of this deliverable is to collect transferable knowledge, lessons learnt and good practices about the establishment and operation of the four RCs. The report outlines systemic challenges and provides actionable policy and administrative recommendations for municipalities seeking to establish similar RCs.

While all RCs within the ComActivate framework are municipally operated, OSS governance models may vary. Alternative models include management by NGOs, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), or public-private partnerships. Private sector involvement often results in diversified funding sources and reduces reliance on public budgets, however, the financial model directly influences service accessibility. As vulnerable, energy-poor households typically lack the financial capacity to pay for services, OSS models targeting these groups must maintain publicly funded, free services.

2 Brief overview of the Resource Centres in the four pilot cities

2.1 Resource Centre in Józsefváros, Budapest (Hungary)

The Hungarian pilot area includes the Losonci, Magdolna, and Orczy quarters within the 8th district of Budapest (Józsefváros). Józsefváros is one of the socially and economically most disadvantaged districts of Budapest, despite the comprehensive social urban regeneration programs executed between 2005 and 2024, that reduced the segregation rates in Magdolna and Orczy-quarters. Educational attainment, employment rates, household income, and life expectancy remain below Budapest averages, with socioeconomic indicators being even less favourable within the pilot area than in the broader district. Additional challenges include substance abuse prevalence, educational segregation, and elevated vulnerability among elderly residents. Approximately 17% of housing units in the pilot area are municipally owned, housing tenants with disadvantaged socioeconomic profiles.

Józsefváros is characterised by relatively older buildings, nearly 75% of the building stock was constructed before 1950, many in the 19th century. Most of the buildings have not been refurbished properly, thermal efficiency across the stock is poor, leading to excessive space heating expenditures. Ornate street-facing facades restrict external thermal insulation or make it costly. Decentralized, room-controlled natural gas heating dominates in the Magdolna and Orczy quarters, while Losonci quarter contains mostly 1970s prefabricated panel buildings that are connected to district heating.

The pilot area is densely built-up, which heightens urban heat island effects in the summer, while low soil permeability risks structural moisture infiltration during extreme precipitation events. Elevated ceiling heights, single-glazed windows and uninsulated buildings aggravate thermal losses, which combined with the disadvantaged socioeconomic situation of the population and the low-energy efficiency building stock, result in energy poverty in a significant share of the population in the area.

At the national level, public grant schemes for MFAB energy renovation are currently absent in Hungary, as state support until 2026 has focused on single-family dwellings. Although an interest rate subsidy has been available since 1988 for common-area MFAB repairs (the subsidy content of these loans is 70% of the interest in the first 5 years, while 35% in the next 5 years), it is insufficient to finance deep energy efficiency renovation. Consequently, MFAB renovation predominantly relies on their own resources and commercial bank loans. Condominium or housing cooperative joint loans are a regular feature in the portfolios of various commercial banks.

At the municipal level, the Municipality of Budapest in cooperation with certain district municipalities introduced the Green Panel Programme in 2026 for prefabricated buildings constructed between 1946 and 1995. Although it is only applicable to a smaller part of the buildings located in the pilot area, and its funding volume restricts renovation to 1-2 building complexes per district. Józsefváros Municipality also offers grants for buildings to eliminate life-safety hazards, but these interventions do not cover deep energy efficiency renovations. A home renovation programme is also available for municipal tenants, which can also be used for energy efficiency renovation inside the flats, but it is rather limited in scope.

The Municipality of Józsefváros has limited options and funding to support energy efficiency renovations within the district. However, combating poverty and renewing the municipal housing management system is a prominent objective of the Municipality. One of the aims of the Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan of Józsefváros is to reach a 40% refurbishment rate and 35% energy saving by 2030. This goal concerns privately owned and publicly owned buildings. The Municipality of Józsefváros and the RC have mostly encouraging roles, and financial constraints seriously hinder the realisation of this goal.

Józsefváros Municipality established its RC, named [LakóTér](#), in late 2025. Initially embedded within the Community Participation Office (part of the Mayor's Office) to leverage existing community organising

expertise and allow experimental projects, the RC is scheduled for institutional transition to the Housing Affairs Office in late 2026 to enhance operational synergy and long-term sustainability



Picture 1. The building and the office of the RC in Józsefváros

The RC's main tasks are municipal tenant engagement, housing quality improvement, and energy poverty alleviation. The limited financial resources of the Municipality currently only make it possible to lay the groundwork for energy efficiency investments in municipality-owned buildings, and the community organising activities are primarily implemented within municipal buildings. The community organising activities of the RC aim to raise awareness of individual and community resources, strengthen trust among neighbours and towards institutions, channel clients towards municipal support schemes and services, while also providing information about the different administrative pathways available in various situations. The community organisers working in the RC hold information forums in every municipal building prior to renovation to allow tenants to ask questions and discuss their concerns. They also organise meetings with tenants if there is an increase in rent or a given problem, like conflicts caused by pets, loud events etc. With the help of the municipal asset management company, which conducts visits in municipal rental apartments, the staff of the RC establish personal contact with tenants facing problems and needing help.

The services of the RC also target owner-occupiers and private market tenants across the district, not just municipal tenants. The Municipality also offers housing allowance, which is also available for homeowners and private market tenants. Together with other departments of the Mayor's Office, the RC also engages a wider range of residents to raise awareness, provide energy advisory services, give information on condominium-related funding opportunities, or through different events. The communication programme of the RC is operated by the Communications Office, which also includes a monthly Condominium Newsletter. The RC also regularly organises forums for condominium managers to discuss the most pressing issues, give information on the subsidies provided by the municipality and distribute informational materials, like posters and leaflets. The Citizen Participation and Housing Offices in the Municipality, along with the RC, have produced several flyers and guidebooks, which are available district-wide.

The RC provides free, on-site energy efficiency consultations conducted by an external expert who evaluates operational habits, identifies thermal envelope defects, and prescribes low-cost efficiency measures. Appointments can be booked on the website of the RC. These appointments are also part of the social service provider's arrears management programme. The RC often recommends that municipal tenants use this opportunity. In the framework of the consultation, municipal tenants may receive smaller equipment including thermometers and humidity meters, window insulation pads, smart thermostats, which are not available for other clients.

LakóTér employs four full-time community organizers and one part-time administrative assistant, supported by municipal staff within the Grants and Communications Offices regarding applications and available municipal subsidies. The Energy-usage expert is not employed by the Municipality, he has a subcontract. The opening hours of the RC are on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, usually for 4-6 hours, until late afternoons.

The funding of the RC is relatively secure since it is integrated into the municipal structure. The establishment and launch of the RC were implemented by the Municipality supported by the Budapest Capital Solidarity Fund. The condition of the grant is a five-year maintenance period for the established service following the conclusion of the project period. The office operates in a municipal venue, so no rent is paid. The RC also gets funding from the ComActivate project, which helps to integrate efficiency-related activities into the operation of the RC, like the energy efficiency advisory services and awareness-raising programmes.

2.2 Resource Centre in Burgas (Bulgaria)

The Bulgarian pilot area is situated in the central Vazrazhdane neighbourhood of Burgas. The area is characterized mostly by low- and medium-rise brick or panel buildings. There are many old buildings that are cultural monuments, but new apartment buildings from the last 20 years significantly densified the urban structure and resulted in a high population density and a lack of green spaces. 80% of the buildings were built prior to 1990 and have low energy performance and problems connected to physical ageing.

Bulgaria's national policy framework has provided 100% grant coverage for MFAB energy-efficiency renovation since 2016 funding façade insulation, window replacement, and common-area lighting upgrades to achieve energy class A or B standards. Burgas has been very successful in applying for these grants, with more than 300 MFABs having been completely renovated in the last few years. Municipal initiatives also include heating appliance replacement schemes (transitioning households to high-efficiency heat pumps or pellet boilers) with the help of EU funding and targeted winter heating allowances. An RRF-funded programme for the installation of PVs is only available for single-family households and not for MFABs.

The municipal climate strategy aims for a fully decarbonized municipal building stock by 2050, through the deep renovation of its buildings. The renovation of municipal buildings will hopefully serve as a good example stimulating private investments for deep renovation of residential, commercial and industrial buildings. By 2030, the Municipality will renovate at least 33% of the municipal building stock to levels corresponding to class A and class A+ and will increase the share of energy from renewable sources in Burgas to 32% by 2030. Awareness raising and information campaigns are also planned to achieve these goals. The RC plays an important role in citizen engagement, technical guidance, and administrative support.

The RC in Burgas is called [Energy Office](#), and it opened in December 2022, making it the oldest of the RCs included in this study. It is located in the city centre and serves the whole city. The approachable, central location is a big advantage for the office.

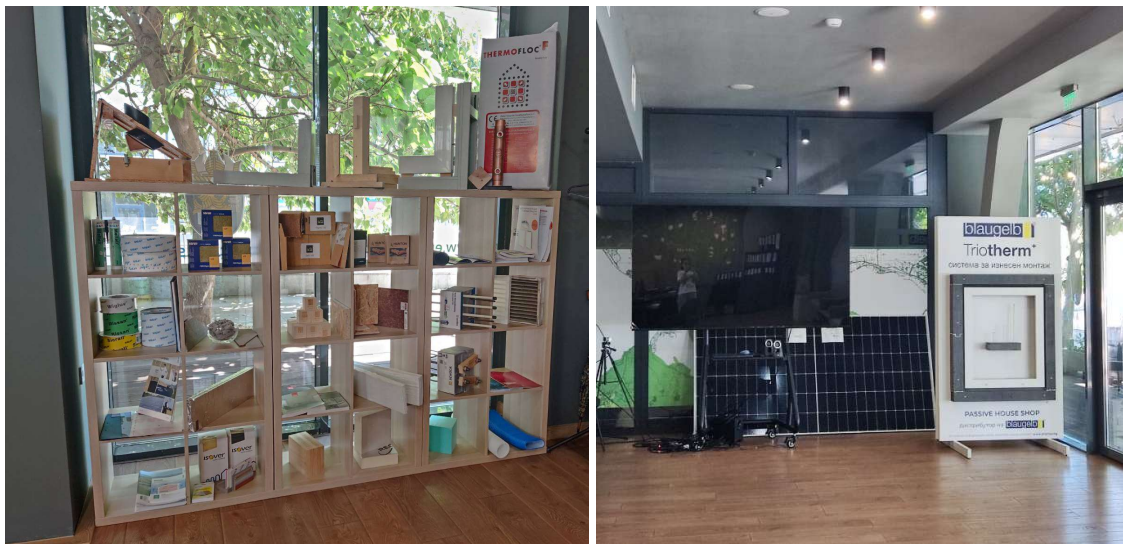


Picture 2. The building and the office of the RC in Burgas

Operating as a dedicated municipal unit, the RC collaborates with two directorates from the Burgas Municipality: one responsible for strategic planning and EU funded projects, and the other is responsible

for construction and urban planning, including the implementation of energy efficiency measures and the promotion of renewable energy sources.

The main function of the Energy Office is assisting HOAs throughout the application process for national and European grant programmes for energy efficiency improvements and renewable energy installations. The RC also gives information about the programmes and financial instruments available, helps with the application process and gives assistance in the preparation of documents. During the application process, the RC cooperates closely with two municipal units that write and submit project proposals and prepare the energy and technical audits of the buildings. As a result, residents have relatively few tasks to complete themselves. Additionally, the RC organises trainings and information days for HOAs and businesses dedicated to energy efficiency and renewable energy sources. The RC also maintains a showroom within the office established by a private partner, where residents can learn more about insulation materials and window solutions, and they can compare different products.



Picture 3: Different products for energy efficiency renovation displayed in the office of the Burgas RC

Since its opening, approximately 6,000 clients have visited the centre, including residents, HOAs and households facing energy poverty. The office is open from Monday to Friday, between 08:30 and 17:15. Services are available in person or by phone and email. The majority of clients prefer telephone calls or in-person visits, sometimes they also communicate via email, online services are not typical.

The RC is currently staffed by one full-time employee supported by 20 experts across partner municipal directorates. The RC provides residents with information and guidance on a wide range of questions. If the RC employee does not have the necessary information, clients' questions are referred to the relevant municipal department. When the RC employee is absent, residents are provided with a municipal contact who can assist them in the meantime. Monthly operational expenditures are around EUR 1,800-2,000, covering personnel, utilities, and event logistics. Operation is funded by the municipal budget and EU project grants. The RC is located in a building owned by the Municipality, so no rent is paid.

2.3 Resource Centre in Kaišiadorys (Lithuania)

The Kaišiadorys district comprises the town of Kaišiadorys and surrounding rural settlements, with a population of 28,554. The residential building stock contains 128 MFABs alongside extensive single-family housing. The majority of MFABs were constructed between 1960 and 1980 utilizing prefabricated panel or brick methods. These structures exhibit severe thermal degradation, obsolete mechanical infrastructure, and low energy efficiency (typically falling into energy classes E, F, or G). The city is characterized by five-storey and lower buildings, however, there are also two nine-storey buildings. Following the political transition, no more apartment buildings were constructed for approximately 30

years, but in 2025-2026 the construction of new apartment buildings resumed. All MFABs are connected to a centralized district heating network fuelled predominantly by biomass and biogas. Natural gas serves as a secondary or backup energy source.

Over the past decade, 19 MFABs underwent comprehensive energy efficiency renovation, with 7 additional projects currently underway. Unrenovated buildings usually have energy classes E, F or G, after renovation buildings reached B or C classes and their thermal energy costs were reduced by nearly 60%.

Because of the outdated building stock and the socioeconomic characteristics of the residents, energy poverty is a serious problem in the district. Low-income residents eligible for heating compensation receive 100% state coverage for energy efficiency renovation, including loan interest and principal payments. Nevertheless, risk aversion, lack of trust in construction quality, and uncertainty regarding long-term financial commitments sustain hesitancy among vulnerable populations, particularly among elderly residents.

Lithuanian law mandates formal management structures for all MFABs (HOAs, joint-venture partnerships, or designated administrators) and obligates owners to accumulate funds for building maintenance and renovation, the minimum amounts are determined depending on the area used and the building's condition.

National subsidy programmes administered by the Environmental Projects Management Agency (EPMA) provide up to 30% subsidies for energy efficiency measures, an additional 10% for heating and hot-water upgrades, and 100% coverage for project management, expert reviews and supervision. Owners of apartments eligible for heating cost compensation receive 100% support. According to the latest call for proposals, renovated apartment buildings must reduce heating costs by at least 40% and achieve an energy efficiency class of B or higher.

Co-financing for HOAs is also facilitated through state-subsidized favourable loans featuring a fixed 3% annual interest rate over a 20-year term. The calls for renovation indicate which funding provider to contact. Currently most apartment building renovation projects are financed by the National Development Bank. It is usually difficult for HOAs to take joint commercial bank loans in Lithuania. In theory, HOAs can apply for loans from commercial banks, but some lenders do not even offer loans with a term as long as 20 years, their interest rates are high, and there is no government support for interest subsidies. Rules also require that building utility arrears (over EUR 200 and overdue for more than 60 calendar days) remain below 10% of total ownership, creating hurdles for MFABs with vulnerable or energy-poor residents.

To reach the national target of renovating at least 30% of MFABs by 2030, Kaišiadorys Municipality needs to intensify its renovation pace. The municipality's strategic objective is to renovate 5-10 MFABs annually to achieve 50 fully renovated buildings by 2030, serving as an intermediate milestone toward complete building stock renovation and decarbonisation by 2050. The renovated buildings must have at least energy class B or C and minimum 40% primary energy savings. The RC will have a large role in reaching these goals, mostly through monitoring data, proactively assisting residents and promoting the use of organic modular construction in pilot projects to reduce construction time and improve carbon sequestration.

Launched in May 2026, the Kaišiadorys RC operates as a centralised, advanced support platform under the municipal Property Management Unit. The RC is in a very initial operational phase, it has been open during the summer of 2026, but since summer is usually vacation period and not a very busy time of the year, only a few clients contacted the RC so far. The centre mostly conducted preparatory works, but in the autumn the RC plans several events for building administrators and HOAs, and work on different forms of communication to make the services more popular. A new call for renovation will probably be announced in the autumn, so demand for the services is expected to increase at that time. The RC aims to provide residents with all necessary information and services for MFAB renovation, by connecting homeowners, housing administrators and the municipality, and also to facilitate more informed decision-making for local authorities and help them to develop effective strategies to accelerate the pace of renovation. The RC plans to organize information campaigns about calls for renovation, solar panels, electric vehicles and the modernisation of biomass boilers. The planned

services include individual and group consultations, educational trainings, community outreach and information dissemination by both online and offline methods.



Picture 4: The building and the office of the RC in Kaišiadorys

Since the RC just opened, it does not have a client base yet, the staff works on establishing a broad client base within the municipality. The primary target audience includes MFAB owners and representatives of HOAs seeking information on how to initiate the renovation process. The RC also plans to include individual property owners in its outreach and provide them with information on energy efficiency improvements, sustainable heating solutions, and available financial incentives. The RC plans to include socially vulnerable groups, with particular attention to their needs.

Currently, the RC has one staff member employed by the Municipality, whose salary is fully funded by the ComActivate project, which provided the necessary financial foundation for the RC's initial establishment and pilot operations. After the ComActivate project ends, the Municipality will need to secure an alternative source of funding, either through EU funding or its own budget. The RC is located in the building of the Municipality, so no rent is paid.

2.4 Resource Centre in Elektrėnai (Lithuania)

Elektrėnai Municipality comprises two urban centers (Elektrėnai and Vievis), one smaller town (Semeliškės), 275 rural villages and 28 homesteads, with a total population of approximately 24,000, two thirds of the residents living in urban areas. Elektrėnai is a young city, with construction beginning in 1962 during the Soviet period, around Lithuania's largest power plant at the time.

Although single-family homes account for 90% of total residential buildings, MFABs represent nearly half of total floor space. Almost all residential buildings are privately owned. Over 90% of MFABs were built prior to 1993 using brick and industrial panel techniques that were typical during the Soviet era. The external enclosures of these buildings have poor thermal resistance, their walls, roofs, and other structural elements have deteriorated, resulting in significant heat loss, so their standard thermal energy use is twice that of buildings constructed after 1993. Therefore, most buildings need energy efficiency and other types of renovation. Non-renovated buildings usually have F or G energy performance classes, while renovated buildings reached B and C classes, which leads to roughly a 58% cost savings. By the end of 2025, 75 MFABs were renovated, which is 23.1% of the building stock, and 3 houses are currently under renovation.

Approximately 75% of MFABs are connected to a biofuel- and gas-fired district heating grid. There is no reliable data on the energy consumption of households not connected to the district heating network. They probably use wood, coal, natural gas and electricity for heating.

The national level legal and subsidy framework is the same as described above in the case of Kaišiadorys.

Municipal planning targets a 15-20% reduction in total energy consumption by 2030 through the renovation of at least 50 additional MFABs and the integration of rooftop photovoltaic panels. Renovated

buildings should achieve at least energy efficiency class B. The RC has a main role in raising awareness, disseminating information and engaging directly with the target audience.

The RC in Elektrėnai was established only recently, it has been operational since December 2025, but it is already quite active. The office is located in the city centre, so it is easily accessible. The RC is part of the municipal utility company called “Elektrėnų komunalinis ūkis” – abbreviated as EKŪ. The RC employs two part-time experts (combining for 80 working hours per month) providing consultations in person and online, who normally work for EKŪ. Their work for the RC is distinguished, because it involves providing consultations to a wider client group than the clients of the utility company. The office space is owned by EKŪ, so no rent is paid. The operational costs are covered by the municipal budget and the ComActivate project, the publicity services, materials, training sessions, events, and promotional campaigns are funded by the ComActivate project.



Picture 5: The building and the office of the RC in Elektrėnai

The main services are consultations and information sharing. The RC originally planned to be open only once a week and mainly providing consultation online, but it became evident that clients prefer face-to-face consultations, so opening hours were extended. In practice, clients can generally visit the office anytime during working hours between Monday and Friday, because the employees are available in the building. It has also become common to meet the HOAs at their assemblies to discuss their specific issues on site. Residents can ask questions online that do not require detailed answers. The RC also organises training sessions on energy efficiency renovations with the help of experts, where residents can express their concerns, ask questions and exchange information with residents living in already renovated buildings. The RC also shares information through local media and its social media platforms.

The primary clients are residents of the Elektrėnai Municipality who are interested in renovation opportunities. The RC welcomes all clients, including both MFAB owners and representatives of HOAs, but the current client base mainly consists of apartment building owners. The RC records data about all visitors. Most of them were interested in general information on how to start the renovation process, what energy efficiency measures can be applied in a specific home, what savings could be made, and how much it might cost. Participants in the training sessions also include representatives from building management companies, municipalities and local administrative units, as well as HOA representatives.

3 Recommendations – lessons learnt – transferable knowledge

All RCs evaluated within this report encounter shared institutional and practical challenges that are likely to arise in other municipalities establishing similar one-stop shops. This report synthesises the most common challenges, but also the main lessons learnt and successful strategies for risk mitigation and high-quality service delivery. Based on these lessons, compact recommendations were formulated towards municipalities which aim to establish RCs/OSSs to help their residents in accomplishing energy efficiency measures.

3.1 Possible activities of Resource Centres

Energy efficiency renovation is a very complex process, consisting of several interrelated activities, starting from preparing applications to funding calls, preparing and conducting energy audits, maintaining relationships with professionals who implement the specific renovation, making decisions within communities. Through the whole process, vulnerable and energy poor households require continuous tailored support, beginning with early identification and active outreach.

OSSs can be involved in this process at several different stages, and they are often expected to manage this entire pathway, which presents significant operational challenges for units operating with constrained human and financial resources. RCs relying on a limited number of office-bound staff can deliver only a small part of these potential activities. Conversely, combining office-based advisory services with proactive, on-site neighbourhood engagements significantly enhances service delivery. For example, the Burgas RC has one full-time employee who is available in the office five days a week, but the RC also gets additional support from the municipality, and they also plan to provide more on-site services in the future and be more proactive in reaching residents. In Elektrénai, on-site services are often demanded by clients, but the employees of the RC also reach out to buildings in the need for renovation if a call is announced.

Since the renovation process is very complex and often involves a significant amount of documentation and bureaucracy, providing administrative and technical support to clients, especially to vulnerable groups would be one of the most important tasks of an OSS.

The operational scope of the RC should also reflect local market conditions. Where private contractors prepare tenders supported by public subsidies, the centre does not need to manage application procedures directly.

Furthermore, centres with deep technical expertise can contribute strategically to broader municipal planning, including the formulation of climate strategies, Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAPs), and social inclusion strategies.

Lessons learnt

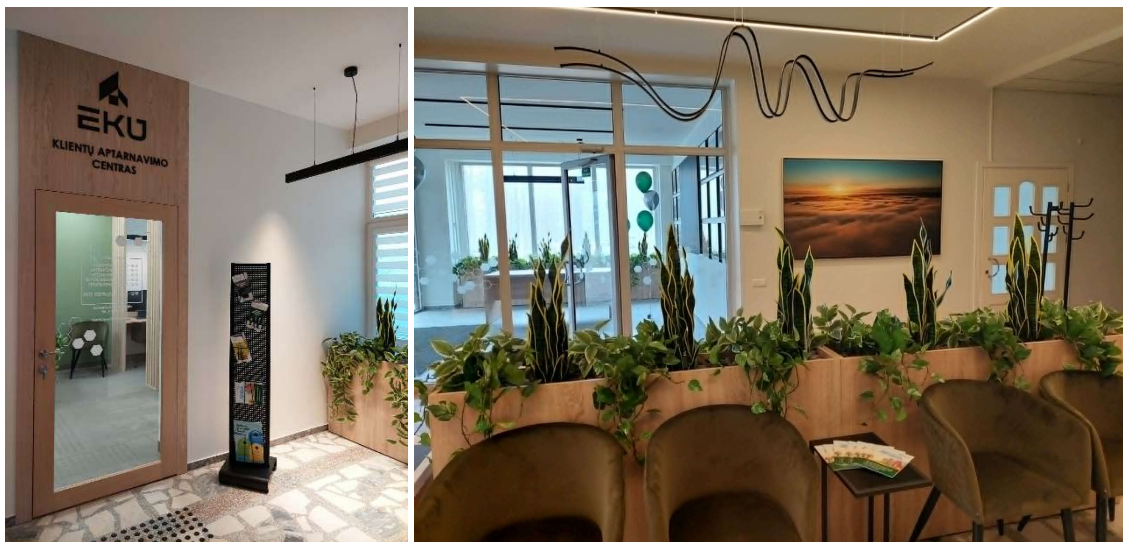
The four pilot RCs within the ComActivate project demonstrated varied operational models tailored to their local contexts. The two, newly established Lithuanian RCs, focus primarily on sharing information, translating complex technical, legal, and financial details into accessible guidance while building local capacity through structured training, so essentially, they function as central knowledge hubs. Their planned activities also include connecting different actors, organising awareness campaigns and events.

Besides providing information and face-to-face consultations to clients, the RC in Burgas, also actively participates in preparing applications for renovation programmes, alongside organising training sessions and information days. Therefore, in the case of Burgas, almost the entire renovation process is managed by the RC and the Municipality together, very little is left to residents.

The activities of the RC in Józsefváros are quite specific compared to the others, because they mostly target municipal tenants and perform community organising tasks among them. Otherwise the tasks

are quite similar to other RCs, like improving the living conditions of residents and reducing their energy poverty, as well as to organising meetings and forums, only their main target group is different. The RC maintains a permanent presence in several buildings, they visit municipal tenants regularly and also carry out minor renovation works in these buildings with the help of the Municipality's home renovation programme. The RC also supports the municipal asset management company in managing conflict situations with tenants, as a mediator between the municipal institutions and the tenants. These are very locally relevant activities, because in Józsefváros, the share of municipally owned buildings and municipal tenants is relatively high, though it might not be relevant in other local contexts. On the contrary, energy efficiency is less prominent than in the case of other RCs, because of the lack of resources for such renovation and also due to numerous more pressing technical problems. Besides services to municipal tenants, the RC also provides face-to-face on-site energy advisory consultation by an energy expert to the entire district population and organizes events to condominium managers, which usually focus on available subsidies provided by the Municipality, including the home renovation subsidy.

All RCs place strong emphasis on integrated communication strategies combining online (social media, local media, websites, newsletters, mailing lists) and offline (flyers, posters, guidebooks) channels to reach a wide range of social groups. For example, in the RC in Elektrėnai, brochures and flyers are placed in the waiting room of the utility company, EĶ, where the RC is located. RC staff also distribute these materials during meetings, training sessions and on-site visits. In Józsefváros, the RC also regularly places posters in municipal buildings, and their flyers and brochures are available in other municipal institutions as well.



Picture 6. Brochures and flyers in the office of the RC in Elektrėnai

Innovative campaigns targeting specific age groups proved particularly effective in Lithuania, such as the "Elektrėnai/Kaišiadorys through My Eyes" project, which engaged kindergarten children using custom colouring books featuring local buildings to spark family conversations about renovation benefits. Similarly, the "Seniors-Renovation Ambassadors" initiative empowers elderly residents to advocate for building renovation among their peers. The campaign generated significant interest and proved to be an excellent way to disseminate information directly to the target audience.



Picture 7. Colouring books in Elektrėnai and Kaišiadorys

Experience from Józsefváros demonstrates that the lack of national grant schemes severely restricts public interest in renovation, highlighting that available national or municipal subsidy programmes for energy efficiency renovation would be necessary for the successful operation of the RC and the available funding also largely determine the scope of activities. The Józsefváros RC already made different plans on how to diversify and extend its activities and client base if different funding sources will be available in the future.

The Lithuanian example also showed that clients strongly prefer in-person and on-site group meetings over online interaction. Group meetings at buildings also proved to be more effective than office consultations. The recently opened RC in Elektrėnai originally planned with more limited opening hours and mostly online consultation, however, once operations began, it quickly became clear that clients prefer in-person consultations, so opening hours were extended. The situation would also probably be similar in other smaller urban centres, while online services are probably more popular in bigger cities. The experiences of the Burgas RC also show that clients usually prefer in-person consultations in the office or phone calls but are less likely to write emails or use online services.

The RC in Józsefváros found that it would be beneficial to have an employee whose main task is organising events. Events should have a bigger focus, as they make it possible to reach a greater number of residents, establish meaningful contacts and have real discussions with them, so a professional event organizer would be a great help with that. Originally, the RC planned to organise more events to municipal tenants, but the staff did not have the capacity, so only a few events took place so far, that is why an additional staff member would be ideal for this task.

Józsefváros's experiences with the energy advisory consultations show that it is mostly worth providing such services if the RC or the Municipality can give something to the applicants, such as smaller equipment, or if some problem comes up, then they can help to solve it. These consultations can also provide feedback to the RC. For example, in Józsefváros, the equipment which was used to heat refurbished apartments consistently proved to be inefficient, so they were later replaced. In another case, during a consultation it became evident that a firewall should be insulated in a building, and after the consultation the RC initiated the work.

Recommendations

Maintain hybrid services

Maintaining both online and in-person or even on-site services is beneficial, clients can choose what is most suitable for them. On-site visits and informational/awareness raising events in neighbourhoods can also help to reach vulnerable households.

Activities not limited to an office

It is better if the operation of the RC is not limited to one employee who is only available in the office during opening hours for advisory services. More limited opening hours, but more diversified services could be a lot more effective and help to reach a broader audience.

Activities aligned with the local context and market

The activities of the RC should be planned around the local context and market. If private contractors prepare tenders and the state subsidises it, then it is not needed for the RC to participate in the application process.

Preparing different scenarios based on available funding

The lack of sufficient funding for the RC or subsidy schemes for renovation often determine the activities. However, it is recommended to prepare different plans or scenarios on the potential additional activities, so the RC will be prepared if different funding sources suddenly became available. Similarly, the RC should also be prepared for the termination of a certain funding source, which was available before.

3.2 Reaching vulnerable and energy poor households, behavioural barriers

Aligned with the Social Climate Fund's focus and the EPBD's social equity provisions, engaging energy-poor and vulnerable households is vital for achieving municipal, national and European climate targets, as these groups predominantly reside in energy-inefficient buildings where renovation may lead to substantial reductions in energy demand and carbon emissions. However, reaching elderly citizens, low-income families, and residents in peripheral areas requires proactive, tailored outreach rather than standard office-bound communication

The situation of the RC in Józsefváros is quite special, because its main target group is municipal tenants who are usually from a more modest socioeconomic background and are often affected by energy poverty, so the RC originally has direct contact with a substantial part of vulnerable and energy poor households. According to the Municipality, it is a great success that since the establishment of LakóTér (the RC), there is an organisation that deals comprehensively with municipal tenants, has a better understanding of their situation and acts as mediator between institutions.

ComActivate project supports only MFABs and not single-family houses, therefore RCs are focused on households living in MFABs and not so much on households living in single-family houses, though there are also socially vulnerable and energy poor households among them. The expansion of services to single family house-owners are among the future plans of the RCs, but it might require additional human and financial resources.

Lessons learnt

Central and accessible office locations are important for reaching a wider range of residents. In Burgas, the central location of the RC is found to be essential, considering that in other Bulgarian cities RCs were established in more peripheral locations, and they were significantly less frequented.

High grant rates, such as 100% in Bulgaria, up to 100% for low-income residents in Lithuania, shaped the expectations of residents, making them reluctant to contribute private co-financing when public funding levels decrease, in those cases residents are more likely to refuse renovation. Communicating more realistic future funding conditions and awareness raising are essential for the RCs.

In Lithuania, despite 100% funding availability for low-income households, many elderly residents remain hesitant due to distrust in construction quality, rising costs, fear of debt, and systemic passivity. Similarly, generous heating cost compensations can reduce the perceived urgency of long-term renovation. This can also be observed in Hungary, and to a certain extent, also in Bulgaria, where residents only showed interest in the 100% funded renovation programmes, and not for an experimental programme which provided 80% funding and required 20% own co-financing, which is still generous comparing to other countries.

Since the RC in Elektrėnai is part of the utility company, which is also responsible for managing buildings, the RC has an established channel of cooperation with property managers who inform them about the most vulnerable buildings and households, so the RC can reach out to them more easily.

Experiences, mostly from Józsefváros, show that engaging residential communities demands strong social facilitation, mediation, and communication skills alongside technical expertise. In the Józsefváros RC, the full-time employees are community organizers, whose work and skills are essential for trust-building in a context of historical institutional scepticism. The employees of the Józsefváros RC also participated in a mediator training and are involved in handling conflict situations with municipal tenants. Those skills could also be beneficial when approaching vulnerable groups that are hesitant towards renovation.

The employees from Józsefváros also reported that very few clients come to the office and often with complaints that are not in the scope of the RC (for example problems with squatters). The contacts initiated by the RC in the form of residents' meetings and door-to-door visits, are much more successful. The RC maintains permanent presence in municipal buildings, meaning that the employees regularly visit tenants, they conduct door-to-door outreach and engage in direct dialogues with them. These discussions always prove to be useful, the tenant and the RC both give new information to each other.

In Józsefváros, the RC (and before its establishment, the Municipality) organises a residents' meeting in every building that will be renovated, where they discuss the renovation with tenants, listen to their concerns and answer their questions. The municipal asset management company also participates at these meetings. Similar meetings are also organised when there is a specific problem that should be discussed.

The experience in Józsefváros showed that municipal tenants, who are usually vulnerable, do not use any online platforms to find information, the RC can only reach them through the local newspaper, posters placed in their building or through their in-person visits. This case underlines the importance of offline communication in the case of vulnerable groups. It is also important to note that if clients do not come to the office in person, it does not necessarily mean that they prefer online services.

In Elektrėnai and Kaišiadorys, one of the biggest difficulties during the renovation process is residents who are dissatisfied but vocal and influential, and they can affect and change the opinion of other residents during HOA meetings. Communication with them can be challenging, so mediation and conflict resolution skills are essential.

Employees from several RCs emphasized the importance organising peer-to-peer exchanges, where residents of successfully renovated buildings share their experiences and utility savings. These exchanges has proven highly effective in overcoming scepticism among hesitant residents.



Picture 8. Trainings organised in the Józsefváros and in the Kaišiadorys RCs

Recommendations

Cooperation with condominium and property managers

Closer working relationship with condominium and property managers, for example by holding different events and forums for them, or asking for data and information from them can help in reaching vulnerable households, because they know the residents in their buildings, have interactions with them and often know their difficulties and potential arrears.

Central, easily accessible location

It is recommended to have the office in a central location that is easily accessible by public transport, bicycle or even by foot, but there are also some parking places nearby. Wheelchair accessibility should also be ensured.

Combining online and in-person services

RCs should maintain both online and in-person or even on-site services, so clients can choose that is most suitable for them. On-site visits and informational/awareness raising events in different neighbourhoods can also help to reach vulnerable households, because they are less likely to go to the office.

Facilitating peer-to-peer exchanges

It is recommended to invite groups of residents living in already successfully renovated buildings to events, information forums or residents' meetings to share their experiences with residents of buildings that are before renovation. These interactions can help to reassure residents who are hesitant towards renovation.

Maintaining user-friendly online interfaces, online and offline communication

RCs should maintain user-friendly online interfaces, including mobile-friendly versions, which contains easily understandable, up-to-date information and FAQs, and are suitable to book appointments online. Additionally, RCs are recommended to perform both online and offline communication activity, for example through their website, social media, the local media, mailing lists, newsletters, flyers, posters and brochures.

Employing staff with social and mediation skills

It is important to employ staff that do not only have experience or qualifications in the energy and construction sector, or grant administration, but also has experience with social facilitation, mediation and communication and are willing to work directly with residents, for example community organizers or social workers.

3.3 The organisational structure, staffing and expertise of the RC

Integrating RCs into existing municipal administrative structures provides operational stability, rent-free accommodation, and direct access to municipal expertise. However, alternative governance models managed by NGOs or private companies can offer more diversified funding streams. Although the funding model largely determines the target audience, since low income, vulnerable groups are unlikely to pay for services, so if they are the main target group, then the RC should provide free services. It is also possible to provide both free and paid services. RCs in ComActivate have a mixed audience, thus they need to serve both vulnerable households and those with a stable income.

Lessons learnt

The pilot centres demonstrated various successful placement strategies within public administration. Józsefváros initially placed its RC within the Social Participation Office before scheduling a transfer to the Housing Affairs Office to enhance alignment with municipal housing operations. The Burgas RC is a municipal unit cooperating closely with two directorates. Kaišiadorys placed its RC within the municipal Property Management Unit, and Elektrėnai established its RC within the municipal utility company, EKŪ, leveraging existing property management relationships.

If the RC is integrated in the municipal organisational structure, it can be beneficial for several reasons. For example, none of the four RCs pays any rent, because they are located in a municipality-owned building. They all have good working relationships with several municipal departments and municipal companies who can support their work and lend their expertise. The municipal staff can also help the RC during the periods of high demand and active funding calls. The Burgas RC and the Municipality work together, so that clients can reach someone with their questions almost any time, which is important to make clients satisfied.

Sometimes, like in the case of Józsefváros, municipalities can also provide funding and publish calls for proposals for energy efficiency renovation, in that case close cooperation between the RC and the municipality is crucial. The possibility of funding from the municipal budget, if no sufficient EU project funding is available, can secure the future of the RC.

Before the establishment of LakóTér, there was a former RC, a one-stop shop called RenoPont in Józsefváros, which was mostly financed by a project, private sources and service fees, but their main funding sources stopped, and eventually it had to be closed in 2025 due to the lack of funding. Learning from this negative experience, LakóTér is integrated in the municipal structure and better supported by the municipal budget.

The experiences from Kaišiadorys show that it might be easier in smaller cities to have the RC also physically in the building of the Municipality, because residents often come to the Municipality if they have different problems, and it is easier to have all kinds of experts, including the expert working in the RC, in the same building. The employee of the RC can also easily get expertise from other municipal experts. The office of the RC is around the entrance, so people who come to the building can easily see it, so its position is an advertisement in itself.

However, municipal integration can occasionally create internal institutional conflicts of interest. If the utility company is also municipally owned, which is the case in many European cities, then the municipally owned district heating suppliers may perceive energy efficiency renovation as a threat to their revenues, which indirectly affects municipal budgets. If a municipality plans large-scale renovation, they should also be prepared for some losses in revenue. Obviously, the situation is very different if the utility company is not municipally owned, like in the case of Burgas. In Kaišiadorys, it is also a problem that property management companies and some municipal units are not very motivated about renovation, because it creates more work and it means less revenue for them. Most property management companies are private, and renovation is not their main focus. It might be one of the reasons why the renovation rate in Kaišiadorys was lower than in other municipalities of similar size in the region. Overcoming these internal conflicts requires a clear political commitment from the side of the municipality towards renovation and energy efficiency, and maybe also restructured business models. To compensate the losses in revenue, the utility price setting mechanisms may be slightly modified, or the municipal companies can enter the market as energy efficiency service providers, for example with preparing energy audits.

All RCs operate with limited staff relative to demand, particularly during active funding periods, mostly due to the financial constraints of RCs and municipalities. Moreover, the skills necessary for efficiently providing the RCs' services are rather diverse, combining technical energy knowledge, grant administration, social work competencies, facilitation and communication. Very often, only one or even two employees cannot have all the needed skills and qualifications, and it influences the quality of the services provided. Though the needed skills can be strengthened through different trainings. One of the first trainings organised for the employees of municipality and the RC, the representatives of HOAs and property managers in Elektrėnai focused on how to engage with people, how to use simple and easily understandable language when explaining renovation. Representatives of the Burgas municipality also reported that it was challenging to find the most suitable employee for the RC, because of the diverse needed skills. Hiring the most suitable experts was also a question in Józsefváros at the establishment of the RC, and later it turned out that a greater emphasis should have been given to event organising qualifications.

Recommendations

Place of the RC in the most suitable municipal unit

RCs can be placed at different municipal units or municipal companies. In fact, they should be placed at the most suitable units, where the employees and their tasks are best aligned with the planned activities of the RCs. Based on early experiences, the RC can also be relocated to another unit if it proves to be more suitable.

Fostering inter-departmental cooperation

The usually limited staff of the RC should be supported by employees from several other municipal units and municipal companies whose activities, skills and expertise are connected to the work of the RC. It is especially important during active funding calls.

Developing flexible funding models

Since demands of active subsidy periods require substantially more staff than other periods, RCs should develop flexible staffing models that can scale up during funding cycles. This could mean support from the municipality but also subcontracting or employing additional experts for a fixed term.

Employing staff with different qualifications and skills

RCs should employ experts with different qualifications and skills, to successfully fulfil the tasks. Energy and construction experts, like engineers and architects, as well as experts on EU and municipal finances and grants, and experts in social facilitation and communication are also needed.

Capacity building and working cooperations to fill the gaps in needed skills

If the RC does not have the means to employ diverse staff, then trainings can still be useful, and it is also possible to hire external experts for specific tasks or events. Strong working relationships with the municipality or private companies can also help fill in the potential capacity gaps, as they can also lend expertise and even staff occasionally. Additionally, establishing a network with other RCs in the country can also be beneficial.

Hiring experts aligned with the provided services

RCs should hire experts whose skills and qualifications are aligned with their provided services, so the services should be carefully planned before the opening, and both services and the staff can later be modified based on the gained experiences.

Implementing front-office and back-office models

It is recommended that there are employees who are available in the office or on-site and have direct contact with clients, and there are other employees who work in the background, for example by replying to emails, doing the communication activities, preparing applications, organising events etc. Rotating staff between front-office and back-office responsibilities is also an option. The municipality or subcontractors can be involved in the activities both of the front- and the back-office.

Responding to advisory consultations

It is recommended to provide advisory consultations, including energy advisory consultations, only if the RC has the capacity and resources to help to solve the problems that come up during such consultations and can handle the feedback.

Managing financial conflicts within the municipality

The municipality should show a clear political commitment towards energy efficiency renovation to handle internal conflicts attributed to the losses in revenue caused by renovation, and find financial mechanisms and incentives that would accommodate both sides and makes renovation worth it for the whole municipality. It is also an option to introduce new services to compensate for the losses in revenue.

3.4 Financial instability and subsidy dependency

Financial sustainability remains a primary challenge for RCs, as municipal budgets are often constrained, and their services are also dependent on external EU project funding.

The financial stability of the RCs also depends on the availability of national and EU subsidy programmes for the renovation of buildings. If there are no renovation programmes available, then they might not have enough work, because in periods without accessible funding, interest drops and centres risk underutilisation. The Social Climate Fund (SCF), which is planned to become available later in 2026, the National Building Renovation Action Plans and other EU Cohesion Funds will be critical in the RCs' future. However, the future of the SCF and the next Multiannual Financial Framework altogether are uncertain at the moment, which makes it difficult to plan.

Another common problem is that the RCs or the municipalities need energy experts (usually engineers) at least as subcontractors to effectively contribute to the energy efficiency renovation, but technical and energy related expertise is usually too expensive for a municipality as market prices apply.

Lessons learnt

Municipal embedding lowers operational costs significantly by providing rent-free office space within publicly owned buildings. Municipalities can sustain the operation of the RC from their own budget in the absence of available EU project funding. If the RC supports the realisation of the municipality's strategic climate and energy efficiency goals, then maintaining the RC is also essential for the municipality.

During the periods of active calls for proposals, there is a high demand for the services, and probably the capacity of one or two employees is not enough, whereas in periods without accessible funding, interest drops and centres risk underutilisation. This problem became the most evident in the Burgas RC, it turned out that with one full-time employee, the centre cannot adequately serve demand during active funding cycles. For example, the 2022 renovation call required three RC staff, ten staff from the Directorates for Construction and for Urban Planning for energy and technical audits, and ten staff from the Directorate for Strategic Planning for project preparation and submission. This combined capacity enabled Burgas to submit the most projects nationally. This experience shows that the RC might need additional support from the municipality or from private experts during active call periods.

The employees report that when there is no funding call, clients usually still enquire about the next call and try to prepare for that, which is difficult, because calls are often not regular and their content is also quite unpredictable, sometimes there are changes between calls and their requirements. This uncertainty makes the work of the RC and the situation of residents difficult.

In Lithuania, there are calls for the renovation of MFABs quite regularly, nearly every year, which provides a more consistent workload for the RC. Even when there is no active call, clients ask about renovation to be prepared for the next call. The employees of the Elektrėnai RC report that there are only slightly less clients during the periods without active calls. But even in Elektrėnai, the RC needed to add extra working hours during a period of peak demand. In Burgas calls are a lot more unpredictable,

so the workload is more fluctuating. In Józsefváros, there are no national calls, but local ones, and the periodicity of workload can also be observed.

Private-public partnerships and private investments offer potential benefits and help the operation of the RCs. Usually, private companies implement the energy efficiency renovations and the installation of renewable energy resources, so RCs should also have information on companies available for these works in their area and should be able to recommend the most suitable for the clients. However, these partnerships have to be planned carefully. The RC in Burgas had a slightly negative experience with a private company, that decided to install a showroom displaying insulation materials and windows in the office, where clients could see these products on site and receive explanations and recommendations about them. However, it turned out that the employee of the private company did not have sufficient knowledge on these materials, so could not provide the foreseen services. The showroom is still in the centre, but there is no employee who can advise the visitors.

Recommendations

Flexible use of human resources

During active funding calls the relevant departments of the municipality or hired external consultants or partner organisations should support the work of the RC. Some flexibility within the municipality is needed to efficiently handle the fluctuating workload.

Balanced, long-term funding and financial diversification

A combination of different funding sources, such as municipal, EU project or private funding is ideal for the long-term financial sustainability of the RC. RCs can also add other paid services to their portfolio, such as energy audits and technical assessments, which can generate revenue during periods without active calls.

Alignment and special attention to upcoming EU plans and funds

RCs should provide alignment with their member states' (upcoming or already adopted) Social Climate Plans and National Building Renovation Action Plans, because these plans support energy efficiency renovations, vulnerable energy users and the operation of OSSs, therefore can provide additional funding.

Strengthened, but well-planned public-private partnerships

RCs should strengthen their cooperation with private companies and should be able to give information and recommend reliable companies to clients. The representatives of private companies could also be invited to events organised by the RC and can be included in information campaigns, showrooms displaying the products can also be added to the RCs. However, these cooperations should be underpinned by clear performance requirements, and the municipality needs to be careful when selecting partners.

3.5 Monitoring

Systematic monitoring of client engagements, renovation milestones, and energy savings is essential for refining services and evaluating municipal progress toward climate goals. This can cover several types of information and data.

Most RCs collect basic data about their clients, like their gender, age and the reason why they visited the RC. These are very important, because these data help to identify the needs and interests of different groups, which might differ largely. Collecting data about the interests and the services used by clients are also important, because data can help service improvement and development.

Collecting more socioeconomic background data about the clients is also important, because these data would help to assess the general background of their clients, their specific needs, their level of vulnerability and energy poverty. However, it is not easy and sometimes not even possible, because people are often reluctant to share information about their social and economic situation, this is especially true in Central-Eastern Europe, and processing this information may conflict GDPR rules.

However, collecting basic data about the clients who used the RC's services is not enough. RCs should also collect information and data about the different stages of the renovation process to monitor how achieving the country's and municipalities' climate goals proceed. Even if it is necessary to have data about the renovation and the effects of the renovation, it is not necessarily the RC's task, but it should be clear whose responsibility it is to collect exactly which data, and the RC can participate in this complex procedure. The information usually needed is how many houses and apartments were renovated, exactly which measures were completed, how the energy efficiency category of the building changed with the renovation, how much the energy costs of the residents reduced after the renovation, how much the energy use and GHG emissions were reduced. Sometimes providing these data is required if the renovation is realised with the help of a subsidy programme, but not always, especially if the measures were realised only with the residents' own resources or with the help of commercial bank loans.

Lessons learnt

Monitoring and collecting data about renovation is not necessarily the responsibility of the RC or the municipality, especially when these data are needed to monitor national renovation goals. For example, in Lithuania, a [national database](#) records data about each MFAB renovation in the country. It includes the share and the number of renovated houses in each municipality, and the energy class before and after the renovation, the reduction in thermal energy costs and GHG emissions is available for each renovated building. In Burgas, it is the municipality that collects data about the renovation process and its results.

Most RCs do not collect feedback from clients about their services, which would be beneficial for their operation. However, they still often get feedback even if not collected systematically, for example clients usually share their opinion during events or consultations.

The RC in Kaišiadorys works together with the building administrator company that has data about their buildings' voting results for renovation. Based on these data, the RC plans to approach those buildings where the residents voted against renovation and try to convince and support them. The RC also collects basic information about their clients, including the reason for their visit.

Thanks to the energy advisory services provided by the Józsefváros RC, the centre gets detailed data and information about the energy efficiency of the apartments visited, and very often about the whole building, so they can signal problems to the municipal asset management company. The energy expert providing the consultation also informs the tenants about the available subsidies and informs the RC if a tenant needs additional support. By now, there have been more than 50 consultations, so the RC plans to complete an impact assessment about them. The municipal asset management company also has detailed data about the municipal home renovation programme, so now the RC plans to examine more in detail whether the renovated households participated in the energy advisory consultation and how it influenced the renovation.

Recommendations

Collect more detailed data about clients

Try to collect more data about the socioeconomic background and energy use habits of the clients, because it can help in tailoring services and subsidy programmes, and it also helps to assess energy poverty and find energy poor households. Though, giving this information should be optional for clients, they should be allowed to decline giving an answer, and anonymity should be provided when needed.

Collect feedback from your clients

RCs should require feedback from their clients, for example in a form of a short questionnaire through for example Microsoft Forms, which can be sent via email, or uploaded to the website, or it can be available on paper in the office, which clients can fill out after the consultation. The need for anonymity should be respected. The RC should ask questions about the quality and usefulness of their services, what is missing and how could the services be improved according to clients. Later these questionnaires can also cover the renovation process itself, if the clients start a renovation, enquiring about what worked well or not so well, which could have been done better and how, how satisfied they were with the contractors, how complicated the process was etc.

Collect data about the results of the renovation

The RC, in cooperation with the municipality, should collect data about the conducted renovation works, including the number of houses and apartments renovated, the specific works conducted in the buildings, GHG and energy savings, and reduction costs after the renovation.

Only collect information that is missing and cooperate with other organisations

RCs should only collect data and information that is not collected by other organisations, like national institutions, the municipality or companies, but the RCs should cooperate with other organisation to get more information from different sources.