



ComActivate

Enabling community action for energy sufficiency

FINAL CONFERENCE SUMMARY REPORT

**Affordable, Resilient, Home: Community pathways out of
energy poverty in Central and Eastern Europe**

October 8, 2026

BPIE



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Author(s)	Larissa Milo-Dale, BPIE
Reviewed by	Zuzana Matusova, Habitat for Humanity International
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Executive summary

On Tuesday 29 September 2026, the ComActivate project held its final conference, “**Affordable, Resilient, Home: Community pathways out of energy poverty in Central and Eastern Europe**”, at the BIP Meeting Centre in Brussels. The event was held in person only. Of the 89 people who registered via Eventbrite, 61 attended. Participants came from EU institutions, national and local government, civil society and research.

The conference presented what ComActivate has learned over three years of working with multi-family apartment buildings (MFABs) in four municipalities in Bulgaria, Hungary and Lithuania, and asked what is needed to turn those lessons into practice as new EU policies move from adoption to implementation. The programme combined an opening session with interactive Mentimeter quizzes and polling, a panel on one-stop shops (OSS) (referred to as Resource Centres in the ComActivate project), a fishbowl discussion on the neighbourhood approach and closing remarks.

Headline messages

- **Resource Centres (i.e. one-stop shops) work as facilitators and need to be treated as a critical service.** Without someone to convince residents, supervise works, organise tenders and navigate funding, “almost nothing moves”. They are not a “holy grail”: they need governance, permanent staff, outreach capacity and sustained funding.
- **Start with people.** Early and continuous engagement with residents, tenants as well as owners, is the precondition for renovation. Participatory processes cost money and require professional facilitators, a cost that renovation funding rarely covers.
- **The neighbourhood approach is more challenging than the single-building approach, but the efforts are worth it.** The neighbourhood approach connects renovation with public space, renewables and protection from heat, but needs a shared vision and small first steps.
- **Ensure the people whom the renovations are meant to serve remain at the heart of renovation efforts.** Speakers warned against “renovictions”, called for costs not to fall on those who struggle most, and asked for smart, targeted subsidies.
- **Energy sufficiency is about “doing the right things”, not just using less.** 78% of those who answered the poll said “use less energy” is not an adequate way to communicate what energy sufficiency means, and the term is hard to translate, particularly in post-socialist contexts.
- **Data, EU funding and implementation of existing EU instruments** (EPBD, Social Climate Plans, Energy Efficiency Directive, Affordable Housing Initiative) were identified as the main levers at EU level.

Live polling with Mentimeter (42 participants) showed strong support for the project's core propositions: 92% agreed that OSS are an urgent and relevant puzzle piece for accelerating renovation in MFABs, and 89% agreed that working at neighbourhood level has great potential for improving daily life (Section 5).

1. About the conference

1.1 Context and objectives

ComActivate (Enabling Community Action for Energy Sufficiency) ran from November 2023 to October 2026. It developed, demonstrated and advocated for solutions tailored to MFABs in four municipalities in Bulgaria, Hungary and Lithuania, where communities are disproportionately affected by energy poverty. Its main tools were local Resource Centres (i.e. OSS), Neighbourhood Energy



Sufficiency Roadmaps (NESRs) for each municipality, capacity building for homeowner associations, and multi-stakeholder policy and investment dialogues.

The final conference's concept note framed the case for the event as follows:

Buildings account for 43% of energy consumption in the EU, yet 75% of buildings constructed before 2000 remain energy inefficient. Around 60% of the population of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) lives in multi-family apartment buildings, and about one in ten people spend winters in apartments that leak heat. Diverse ownership structures, unclear financing pathways and the complexity of collective decision-making have kept renovation rates low.

The concept note also pointed to the Affordable Energy Action Plan and the Citizens Energy Package of March 2026 as signs of EU recognition of these challenges.

The conference thus aimed to bring together EU policymakers, national and local representatives, civil society and researchers to discuss concrete ideas for what comes next: how to make EU tools work on the ground for the communities that need them most.

1.2 Fulfilment of the grant requirements

The project grant describes the final conference as follows:

"The final conference will be held between M30 and M36 to inform and raise awareness about the project findings at EU level, thus fostering (EU) exploitation of project outcomes. The conference will be organised in Brussels or another location (if relevant, in one of the implementing countries), gathering between 80 – 100 participants. To maximise impact and attract stakeholders, the conference can be organised within the framework of another relevant event. The event will be documented with minutes and will be available on the website."

Requirement	How it was met
Held between M30 and M36	29 September 2026, month 35 of the 36-month project (November 2023 – October 2026).
Location: Brussels or another relevant location	BIP Meeting Centre, Salle des guichets, Rue Royale 2-4, 1000 Brussels, Belgium. In-person only.
80–100 participants	89 people registered via Eventbrite and 61 attended (68.5% of registrations).
Inform and raise awareness about project findings at EU level, fostering EU exploitation of outcomes	Project findings (OSS, NESRs, policy recommendations) were presented and discussed with speakers from the European Commission's Housing Taskforce, the Permanent Representation of Lithuania to the EU, EU-level research and NGO networks and local government. 3 of the 38 participants who answered the Mentimeter question on organisation type were from the European Commission and 1 from another EU institution (Section 5).
May be organised within another relevant event	Not applicable: the conference was organised as a stand-alone event.
Documented with minutes, available on the website	Two note-takers recorded minutes throughout the event. This report summarises them together with the Mentimeter results.

1.3 Programme

Time	Session
09:00–09:30	Registration and light breakfast
09:30–09:45	Welcome Zuzana Matusova, ComActivate Project Coordinator, Habitat for Humanity International
09:45–10:00	Opening Emily Bankert, Senior Researcher, BPIE Belma Jahović, Senior Social Consultant, Eko Invest
10:00–11:00	Ending energy poverty, one multi-family apartment building at a time: The case for One Stop Shops Input presentation: Éva Gerőházi (MRI) Panel discussion: Sandra Vainutė, Ignas Simonaitis, Saskia Petrova Moderator: Marine Cornelis (Next Energy Consumer)
11:00–11:30	Coffee break and ice breaker
11:30–12:15	From homes to neighbourhoods: Solving persistent challenges and scaling best practices from CEE Fishbowl discussion: Maarten De Groote, Johann Strese, Edit Lakatos, plus an empty chair for rotating participants from broader civil society Moderator: Emily Bankert (BPIE)
12:15–12:30	Closing Zuzana Matusova, Habitat for Humanity International
12:30–14:00	Lunch and networking

2. Participation

2.1 Registration and attendance

Registration was handled through Eventbrite. In total, **89 people registered** and **61 attended** the event in person. There was no online participation option. The registration list is held by the project partners and not disclosed in this document for privacy purposes. During the event, 42 participants joined the Mentimeter polling, equivalent to 69% of attendees, with an average engagement rate of 84%.

2.2 Speakers and moderators

Name	Role and organisation	Session
Zuzana Matusova	ComActivate Project Coordinator, Habitat for Humanity International	Welcome, closing
Emily Bankert	Senior Researcher, BPIE (Buildings Performance Institute Europe)	Opening, moderator of fishbowl
Belma Jahović	Senior Social Consultant, Eko Invest	Opening
Éva Gerőházi	Senior Researcher, Metropolitan Research Institute (MRI)	Input presentation and panel 1

Name	Role and organisation	Session
Sandra Vainutė	Energy Attaché, Permanent Representation of Lithuania to the European Union	Panel 1
Ignas Simonaitis	Deputy Mayor, Kaišiadorys, Lithuania	Panel 1
Saska Petrova	Professor of Geography, University of Manchester; principal investigator of the GENERATE project	Panel 1
Marine Cornelis	Founder and energy policy advisor, Next Energy Consumer	Moderator of panel 1
Maarten De Groote	Programme Manager, VITO; coordinator of the oPEN Lab project	Fishbowl
Johann Strese	Project Director, Housing Initiative for Eastern Europe (IWO e. V.)	Fishbowl
Edit Lakatos	Policy Officer, Housing Taskforce, European Commission	Fishbowl

2.3 Profile of participants

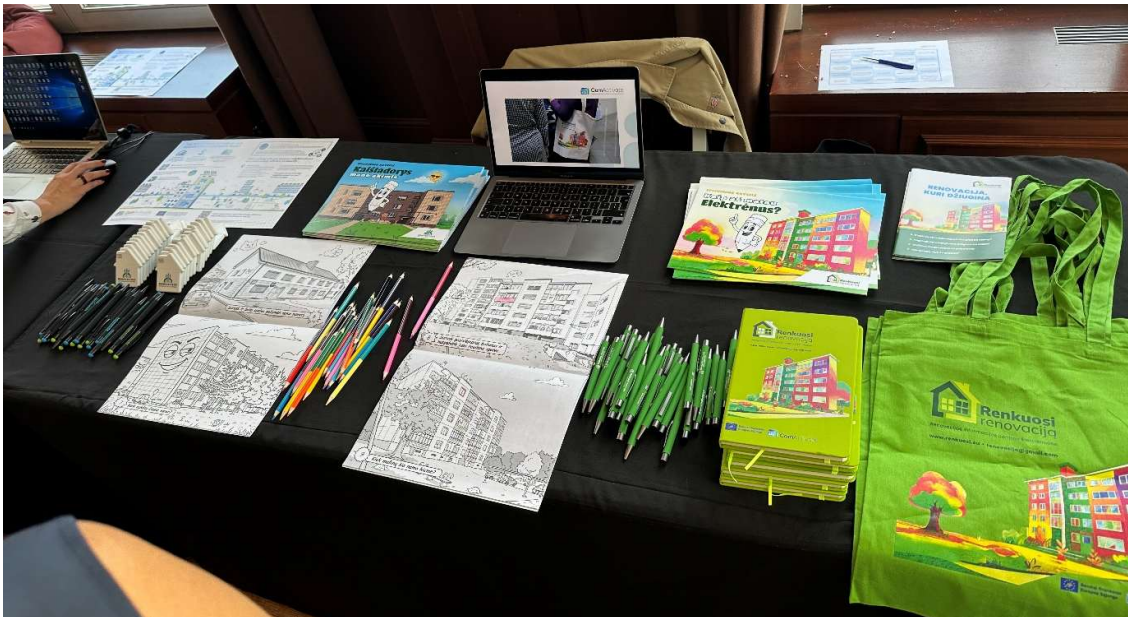
Participants were asked via Mentimeter which type of organisation they represent. Thirty-eight of the 42 participants answered (90%). Non-governmental organisations were the largest group, followed by local government and research organisations.

Organisation type	Respondents	Share of respondents
NGO	17	45%
Local government / municipality	8	21%
Think tank / research	6	16%
European Commission	3	8%
National government	1	3%
Other EU institution	1	3%
Private sector	1	3%
Other	1	3%
Total	38	100%

Percentages are rounded and the sample is self-selected, so they describe the Mentimeter respondents and not all 61 attendees.

3. Showcasing the pilots

Tables were set up at the back of the room where the four municipalities from the three ComActivate countries presented materials and promotional videos related to the work of their Resource Centres/OSS. Participants were encouraged to ask questions and take the free materials.



4. Conference proceedings

This section summarises the minutes taken independently by two note-takers during the conference. Statements are attributed to speakers as recorded; figures and examples are as cited by the speakers.

4.1 Welcome

Zuzana Matusova (Habitat for Humanity International) opened the conference by recalling that ComActivate built on the ComAct project, the first project on energy poverty in Central and Eastern Europe, taking that work to the neighbourhood level. She highlighted:

- the opening of three new OSS over the course of the ComActivate project, and improvements to the OSS in Burgas, which was already open when the project started;
- the introduction of the concept of energy sufficiency to the participating municipalities. The project was conceived during the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which is where the aim of making energy sufficiency known to municipalities in CEE came from;
- the key publications: the Neighbourhood Energy Sufficiency Roadmaps (NESRs), policy analyses and best practices from the OSS.

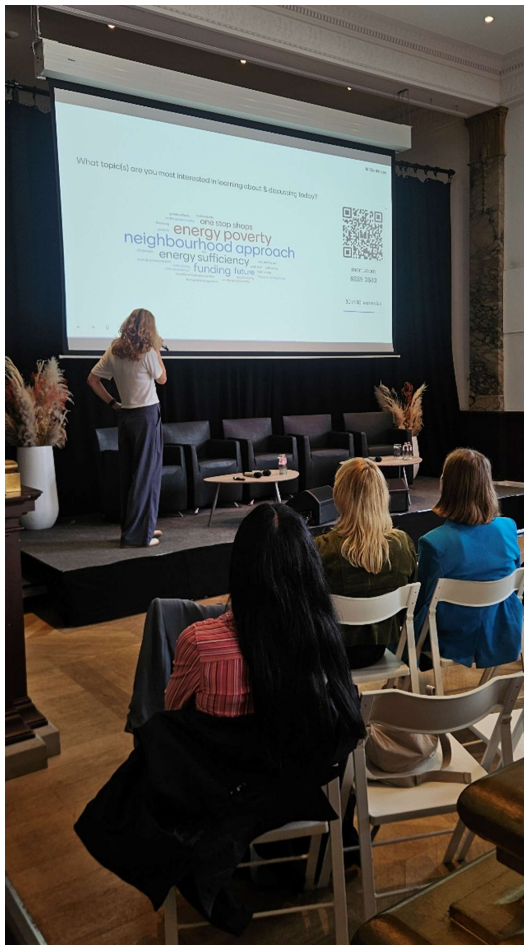
The first questions of the Mentimeter (see more details in Section 5.1), related to quizzing participants on their understanding of energy poverty and energy inefficiency, were part of the opening session.



The first question was “What % of buildings in the EU are energy inefficient?” The average response from participants was 69%, with the correct response being 75%.



The second question was “In 2023, what percent of Europe’s population couldn’t keep their homes adequately warm?” The average response was 10.1%, with the correct response being 10.6%.



The fourth question was a free-form response, resulting in a word cloud. For a detailed overview of the most common terms and phrases, see section 5.2.

4.2 Opening

The opening session was led by **Belma Jahović** (Eko Invest), who led development of the NESRs, and **Emily Bankert** (BPIE), a principal researcher on EU and national-level policies and their implementation as related to the project. Their session began by continuing the Mentimeter to collect opinions from the audience related to key areas of the ComActivate project's work and on energy

sufficiency, as part of prompting the presentation and discussion that followed; detailed insights on these responses are in sections 5.3 and 5.4.



Voting on a scale from 1-5, where 5 was “strongly agree”, participants, on average voted from “agree” to “strongly agree” on the statements that “One Stop Shops are an urgent and relevant puzzle piece for accelerating renovation in multi-family apartment buildings” (average score of 4.32), “Working at neighbourhood level, connecting renovation, renewables and public space, has great potential for improving daily life” (average score of 4.46) and “It is possible to reduce neighbourhood energy use while lifting residents out of energy poverty, without burdening those who struggle most” (average score of 3.81).



When asked “Is “use less energy” an adequate way to communicate energy sufficiency?”, participants overwhelmingly voted “no”.

Key takeaways from Belma Jahović’s presentation:

- Neighbourhood-level action requires a holistic, systemic approach that goes beyond individual buildings, connecting renovation with public and green spaces and protection from heat.

- It is important to check who benefits most, because households have different needs, resources and required levels of comfort, and to ensure that renovation costs do not fall on those who struggle most financially.
- Talking to residents as early as possible is essential. Eko Invest's technical team, which carried out the energy inspections of the buildings, found that residents have insights about their buildings that cannot otherwise be identified.
- Energy sufficiency is difficult to frame in languages other than English, especially post-socialist ones. In Bulgaria the translation carries a negative connotation: it can recall the slogans of the previous political system, and it sounds as though people should expect less. Communication in Bulgaria has therefore remained about energy efficiency, and care is needed not to convey negative connotations.

Key takeaways from Emily Bankert:

- In a building with 80 apartments and a homeowner association, someone is needed to convince residents it is worthwhile, supervise the project, organise the tender and help people navigate funding applications. “Without a facilitator, almost nothing moves. That is what a one-stop shop does.”
- Sufficiency is a pragmatic response to the scarcity and poor distribution of resources: ensuring everyone has enough for a decent life while avoiding unnecessary consumption that does not improve quality of life. “While efficiency is about doing things right, sufficiency is about doing the right things.”
- “Use less energy” is not an adequate way to communicate energy sufficiency. The problem is not that people choose to consume too much, but that systems are not built to deliver what people need within planetary boundaries.
- The NESRs are a key tool for neighbourhoods to plan their energy transition around the idea of “enough but not too much”.
- Trusted intermediaries proved crucial in the pilot municipalities. Three ingredients came up constantly: **champions** (people in municipalities or communities who believe in this and push it forward), **intermediaries** (the OSS, the facilitator, the person who holds the process together) and **courage** (political and institutional courage to try something that does not yet have a template).

4.3 Panel 1: The case for one-stop shops

Input presentation

Éva Gerőházi (MRI) gave the input presentation that opened the session. Her key points were:

- **Municipal OSS serve local policy goals.** OSS embedded in municipal bodies are not necessarily set up to tackle energy poverty or to renovate the worst-performing buildings, as high-level policymaking would desire. Their goals are mostly to accelerate renovation and capture as much state subsidy as possible. They tend to be most successful with cooperative homeowner associations, which decide more efficiently but are not necessarily the communities suffering most from energy poverty. Energy poverty may come into focus once mass energy efficiency goals have been met.
- **National and local definitions differ.** The worst-performing buildings nationally may not be the worst stock locally: in most CEE countries they are family houses, while urban municipalities generally prefer to renovate multi-family buildings. Likewise, energy poverty defined nationally (mostly through EU-SILC indicators) may not be recognised locally, where social vulnerability is defined by the local social network.
- **Municipal OSS are flexible by nature.** They are often embedded in different municipal bodies and shift with needs: many staff assist communities during a state support application period, and are occupied with other municipal tasks in quieter periods.

- **Pro-active outreach is what makes them effective.** Municipal OSS work best when they approach communities directly, for example by visiting HOA general assemblies, which requires atypical working hours and flexibility. A top-down system, such as the new regional OSS system in Lithuania, will never do this. Even if a national OSS system is created, municipal OSS should remain its “hands and legs”, reaching people in their homes.



Panel discussion

The panel was moderated by **Marine Cornelis** (Next Energy Consumer), who opened by asking who benefits from OSS and who is left out. The discussion covered the following themes.

What OSS are for. Ignas Simonaitis (Deputy Mayor of Kaišiadorys) explained that in Lithuania renovating an apartment building requires the approval of a majority of residents, and that strong attachment to owning one's property makes consensus harder. For this reason the OSS there is not only a source of information on funding schemes and sufficiency but, above all, a means of meeting residents in person and motivating them to renovate. Reaching parents who work, he noted, is a challenge. Saska Petrova (University of Manchester) stressed that OSS mean different things in different contexts, and that they are fundamentally about energy renovation, while tackling energy poverty is a different issue that some would not see as an OSS task. Marine Cornelis added that the setting and the skills of the people working there matter: they need to “glue the social fabric” and be embedded in the community. Éva Geróházi pointed out that there are different types of OSS across municipalities. In Józsefváros, for example, the emphasis is on organising the community through the OSS.

Not a holy grail. Saska Petrova cautioned that it would be wrong to see OSS as a “holy grail” without the proper support and governance, and that they cannot be expected to do everything. She asked how the people who need support most can be included: how tenants who do not own property in MFABs can be helped, and whether childcare is provided so that parents can take part in meetings. As OSS become community hubs, staff may also find themselves supporting people with physical and mental health issues. She cited alternative social energy business models through which residents can become active shareholders via the municipality, and an English example in which a GP can refer a patient living with mould to an OSS.

Funding and permanence. Ignas Simonaitis reported that Lithuania had received new national funding for OSS just as the project was coming to an end, so the service can continue, and stressed that its importance was clear. He argued, however, that capacity to reach out to people must be maintained: regional OSS serving five or six municipalities can end up answering calls rather than

speaking to people, which disadvantages older and less connected residents, while younger and better educated people find it easier to reach out. More permanent staff are needed, and funding must be sustained after work starts. Éva Gerőházi added that even a structured, region-based OSS can hardly be as proactive as a local one: “It is easy to create a system on paper, but there needs to be a system on the ground.” People need to be on the ground, and this must be part of the system established under the Social Climate Plans (SCPs).

Renovictions and social justice. Saska Petrova warned that rents tend to rise once building quality improves, pushing out lower-income households, and asked how renters will be protected. A neighbourhood approach and a social justice perspective are crucial. Éva Gerőházi noted that renovictions are often forgotten even for owners, and that specific support schemes can help prevent them; she pointed to good examples from Lithuania, and to the role of OSS in transferring the right information to people.

Policy, data and communication. Sandra Vainutė (Permanent Representation of Lithuania to the EU) said it is difficult to draw legal conclusions without being aware of practical problems on the ground. She noted that the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD), the Social Climate Plans (SCPs) and the Energy Efficiency Directive (EED) should be combined into one national plan, and that as regulations are reopened it is important to have concrete problems in hand to know what needs to change. Her takeaway was that **data and communication are essential**: data should be collected better, exchanged and used to improve the renovation process. She reported that her team had asked DG CLIMA to come back with information on how it can support. Marine Cornelis added that existing data should be consolidated and fed into OSS, including to help address overheating.



4.4 Panel 2: Fishbowl discussion – From homes to neighbourhoods

The concept of a “fishbowl” is that, instead of the panel sitting in a row in front of a theatre of seats, speakers sit in a circle with the audience all around them. This brings the audience much closer, physically, to the speakers, dissolving the formal barrier between the two, and facilitates more natural discussion. For the ComActivate final conference, an additional component was added to build on this dissolved barrier: an open seat with the panel, where the audience was invited to sit to ask questions and share their views.



The fishbowl was moderated by **Emily Bankert** (BPIE), who invited the panellists to discuss what working at neighbourhood scale can unlock, with an empty chair open to audience participants. Topics she flagged included specific barriers in CEE, affordable housing, summer energy poverty and whether a neighbourhood approach can help re-establish democracy.

Start with the people. Maarten De Groote (VITO, oPEN Lab) urged participants not to over-romanticise neighbourhoods and OSS, and said the core message should be to always start with people. He gave two examples: in Genk, 35 Positive Energy Neighbourhoods (PENs) were renovated, with nine months of work compressed into nine weeks, though some residents were unable to take part during Ramadan, which illustrated the risk of not starting with people; and in Tartu, a housing association voted against renovating a Soviet-era apartment building, creating a negative spiral against renovation.

The neighbourhood scale is harder, and needs a facilitator. Johann Strese (IWO e. V.), drawing on the workshops he led as part of ComActivate, said that working at neighbourhood level is much more challenging than working on a single building, and that in CEE most flats are owner-occupied, which complicates decision-making. An entity such as an OSS, a municipal department, an NGO or a company is needed to bring people together, explain, convince and link to institutions, and it should also connect to the wider neighbourhood: parks, parking, other buildings and businesses. "If you are a municipality, you would never close a hospital ... if you close it, people will move away. It's a critical service." OSS should be seen the same way and need municipal support. Workshops in the pilots with homeowner association representatives, NGOs and municipal representatives produced discussions about a shared vision for the neighbourhood: a direction is needed, but the first steps should be small. He also suggested assemblies of renters and owners to discuss the direction of their neighbourhood.

EU policy perspective. Edit Lakatos (European Commission, Housing Taskforce) explained that DG ENER leads the file and the Housing Taskforce works in alignment with it, recognising that housing and renovation are interconnected and that an integrated approach including key services is needed. Lessons from the Affordable Housing Initiative, which worked at neighbourhood level, are to be integrated into the New European Bauhaus; she mentioned 19 blueprints on how to renovate, down to the detail of working with tenants. The Commission pushes for more social conditionalities and can flag when they are missing in legislation. She acknowledged the challenge of lessons from EU-funded projects like ComActivate being lost after projects end, and said there are many initiatives on the table. The Affordable Housing Initiative faces the question of why to continue a programme that has achieved what it set out to do, but 22 districts are only a starting point: the aim is to advocate for a bigger programme under the next Multiannual Financial Framework that includes projects like

ComActivate. She also noted that on the SCPs a large share of resources would go to vulnerable households, as designed, and that, although there is no public money, the Commission would still like to establish a pan-European investment platform.

Funding engagement, not only works. Gyorgy (Habitat for Humanity) asked for good-practice examples of how to secure participation at neighbourhood level, noting that professional facilitators and effective campaigning cost money. Johann Strese observed that funding for renovation, as presented at a C4E Forum, did not include funding for this kind of engagement, and that if all money goes only to the works the approach will not succeed. He warned that when nothing happens, democracy erodes, and cited Germany's millions of empty housing units as an example of the cost of inaction. Edit Lakatos described a UK campaign in which residents had "a cup of tea" conversations about what had to be done at neighbourhood level, later replicated in Lyon, and underlined the need for psychological expertise and for hiring people who know how to communicate with residents, including older people who may not be looking far into the future. She also cited the value of homeowners pooling reserves to maintain services such as lifts.

Co-benefits and fairness. Maarten De Groote called co-benefits "the elephant in the room": in the UK the cost of poor housing is higher than that of tobacco or alcohol, and Belgium recorded over 1,000 excess deaths during this summer's heatwave. He also mentioned reported improvements in school performance in renovated buildings, and asked what robotics could do to make renovation sites safer and works faster. A member of the audience who joined the fishbowl, who introduced herself only as Anna, called for the current funding distribution to be reworked, pointing to injustices in who pays most for renovation, and for building managers to be motivated, since they see renovation as a hassle. Emily Bankert noted that ComActivate had found homeowner associations to hold potential power but very few resources.

Two complementary approaches. Another audience member who joined the fishbowl, Assya from Habitat for Humanity, argued that OSS and the people who want change should not be afraid to act together, and that two approaches are needed to tackle energy poverty: a social one (for example housing mediators who visit families to discuss specific issues) and a financial one (for example heating allowances so families can heat their homes in winter, and financial incentives to take part in renovating their apartment block). Energy cost assessments should be integrated into the OSS approach.

Final thoughts. Maarten De Groote reminded the room that finding the money is not the end: monitoring during the operational phase must not be forgotten. Johann Strese said that in some ComActivate pilots, an "energy efficiency first, renovation later" approach did not work in energy-poor communities, where more pressing problems exist. He argued that people should always contribute something to renovation, even a symbolic €2, so that they feel part of the process, and that the expectation that a "white knight" will come to save them must be removed. Subsidies, a contributor added, can end up in the wrong places: OSS need **smart subsidies**, designed with sub-national governments and accompanied by technical assistance, and "where there is no subsidy, there is no OSS". Housing and homeowner associations also need to be educated so they can support residents.

4.5 Closing

Zuzana Matusova closed the conference with two key points:

- **Be people-centred.** Sufficiency, OSS and municipalities are important concepts, but "we cannot forget who we are doing it for".
- **LIFE and other EU-funded projects need project KPIs that are more people-focused.**

She also announced the bingo winners (see section 6.1) and the most voted-for actions from the oPEN Lab infographic for securing vibrant neighbourhoods (see section 6.2).

5. Audience polling (Mentimeter)

Mentimeter was used to encourage participants' active participation during the conference. Forty-two participants joined, with an average engagement rate of 84%. Response rates per question ranged from 76% to 90%. Results reflect those who chose to answer and are indicative only.

Mentimeter provided the following AI-generated summary of the quiz and polling results:

- Energy sufficiency is understood as lowering demand without compromising wellbeing.
- “Use less energy” appears too narrow, with participants largely rejecting it as a complete description.
- Neighbourhood approaches and One Stop Shops draw strong support, while poverty reduction without added burden remains less settled.
- Interest clusters around funding, neighbourhood approaches and energy poverty, suggesting demand for practical routes from pilots to scale.

5.1 Quiz questions

Participants were asked three quiz questions on the scale of the challenge. Responses were reasonably close to the correct figures.

Question	Number of responses	Median answer	Mean answer	Correct answer
What % of buildings in the EU are energy inefficient?	36	74%	69%	75%
Buildings account for around what % of all energy used in the EU?	35	41%	45%	40%
In 2023, what percent of Europe's population couldn't keep their homes adequately warm?	36	10.6%	10.1%	10.6%

5.2 Topics of interest

When asked which topics they most wanted to learn about and discuss, around three quarters of participants (76%) responded. The most frequent themes were funding and financing (around eight respondents), the neighbourhood approach and energy poverty (around six each), energy sufficiency (four) and one-stop shops (three). Several respondents asked about scaling up beyond the pilots, replication and lessons learned. Individual answers included on-the-ground reality, gender effects, climate resilience and grid relief, and the right to stay and affordability in social housing.

What topic(s) are you most interested in learning about & discussing today?

32 / 42 50

Most popular



Also prominent



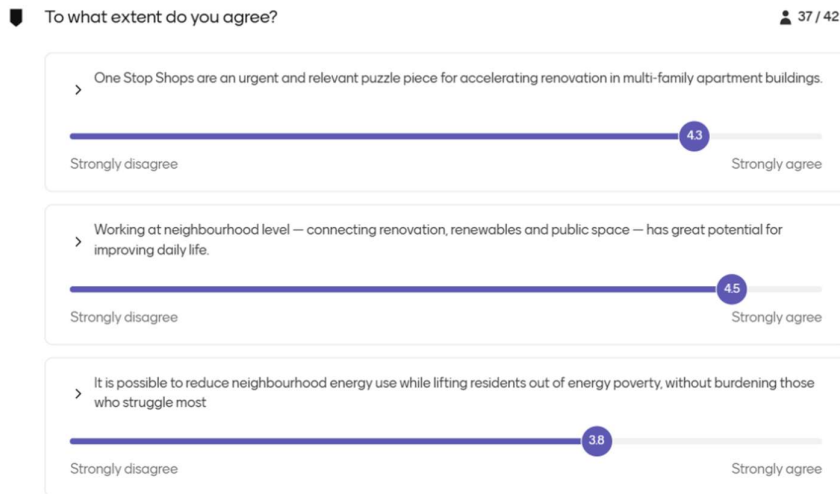
Other responses



5.3 Level of agreement with the project's propositions

Participants rated three statements on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Thirty-seven participants responded to each.

Statement	Mean (1–5)	Agree (4–5)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (1–2)
One Stop Shops are an urgent and relevant puzzle piece for accelerating renovation in multi-family apartment buildings.	4.32	34 (92%)	2 (5%)	1 (3%)
Working at neighbourhood level, connecting renovation, renewables and public space, has great potential for improving daily life.	4.46	33 (89%)	3 (8%)	1 (3%)
It is possible to reduce neighbourhood energy use while lifting residents out of energy poverty, without burdening those who struggle most.	3.81	25 (68%)	9 (24%)	3 (8%)



Support was strongest for the neighbourhood approach and for OSS. The third statement, which asks whether energy demand can be cut without burdening those who struggle most, received the most cautious response, consistent with the concerns raised in the discussions about affordability, renovations and who pays.

5.4 What comes to mind when you hear “energy sufficiency”?

Respondents could select more than one option (49 selections from 35 respondents). A large majority chose the definition closest to the concept as used by the project.

Option	Selections	Share of respondents (n = 35)
Lower energy demand without reducing well-being	32	91%
Producing as much energy as possible from renewable sources	8	23%
Switching all appliances to more efficient models	6	17%
Becoming independent from the electricity grid	3	9%

Participants were then asked whether “use less energy” is an adequate way to communicate energy sufficiency. Of the 32 who answered, **25 (78%) said no** and 7 (22%) said yes. This supports the point made in the opening session that the message “use less energy” falls short.

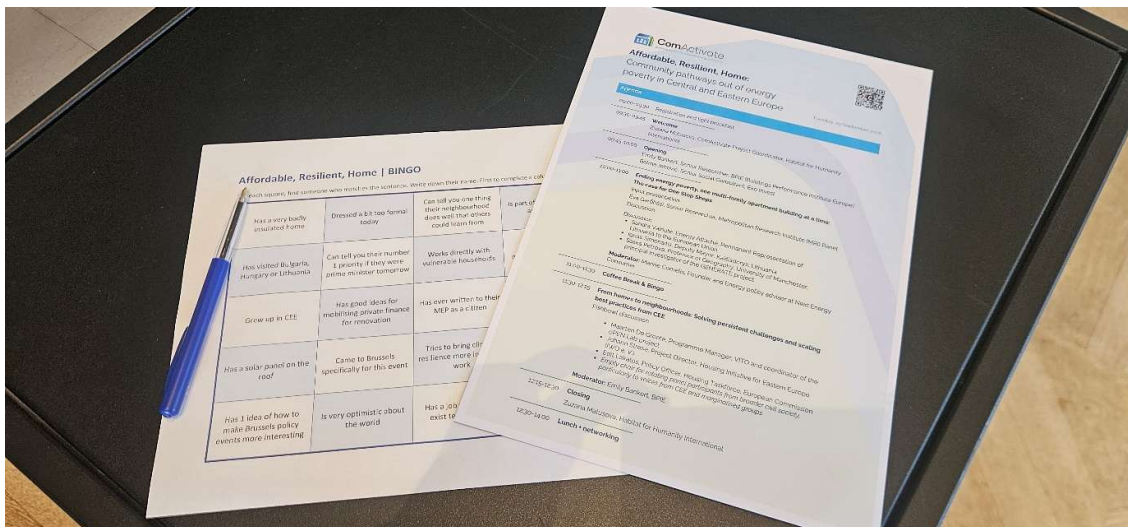
6. Interactive elements

To encourage networking and as part of the connection between ComActivate and the oPEN Lab projects for this event, two interactive components were set up for participants to engage with before the event started and during the coffee break.

6.1 Bingo

Following check-in at the registration desk, all participants were offered a bingo sheet and pen, with the chance to win a small prize for finding five different people who met the requirements of the sentences in either a complete row, column or diagonal on their sheet. Categories ranged from more formal and project-related to more casual, such as someone who “has good ideas for mobilising private finance for renovation”, someone “who grew up in CEE” and someone who “works directly with vulnerable households”.

The first three people who submitted their sheets each won a prize. The winners are not disclosed in this report for privacy purposes.



Photograph showing the conference agenda and a blank bingo sheet.

6.2 oPEN Lab infographic

The main infographic from the [oPEN Lab policy roadmap](#) was printed as a large-format poster and conference participants were invited to vote on the actions they deemed most necessary to “deliver vibrant and healthy neighbourhoods”.



Photos of conference participants voting.

The three most-voted for categories were announced at the conference's closing session. They were:

- **Deep renovation.** High-performance building envelopes reduce energy consumption and improve comfort and indoor air quality.
- **Climate adaptation.** Green infrastructure reduces overheating, improves comfort and enhances urban resilience.
- **One-stop shop support service.** Local services guide and accompany citizens on renovation, financing and energy decisions.



7. Key takeaways

Drawing on the presentations, discussions and polling, the main messages from the conference were:

- 1. Treat one-stop shops as a critical service.** OSS provide the facilitation that MFAB renovation needs: convincing residents, supervising works, organising tenders and navigating funding. Like hospitals, they may not generate revenue for a municipality but they keep communities viable. They need governance, permanent staff, funding that continues once works start, and capacity for proactive outreach rather than reactive call handling. Regional OSS can complement but not replace proactive local ones.
- 2. Start with people and fund engagement.** Early dialogue with residents, including tenants, older and less connected people and parents, determines whether renovation happens at all. Professional facilitation and participatory processes need dedicated funding, not only funding for works. A symbolic financial contribution and a shared neighbourhood vision help people feel ownership.
- 3. Make the neighbourhood approach practical.** Working at neighbourhood scale connects renovation, renewables, public space and heat protection, but is more complex than the single-building approach. Small first steps, a shared vision, and an entity to hold the process together were the recurring recommendations, along with climate adaptation and the co-benefits for health and education.
- 4. Design for fairness.** Renovation must not push out tenants (renovictions) or burden those who struggle most. Subsidies should be smart and well targeted, and both social measures (such as housing mediators) and financial ones (such as heating allowances and participation incentives) are needed.
- 5. Communicate energy sufficiency carefully.** Sufficiency is about enough for everyone and about doing the right things, not simply using less. The concept is hard to translate in some languages and carries negative connotations in post-socialist contexts, so framing needs care.
- 6. Use and align EU tools.** Participants pointed to the EPBD, the Social Climate Plans, the Energy Efficiency Directive and the Affordable Housing Initiative, with the New European Bauhaus, as the vehicles for scaling up. They called for better data collection, exchange and communication, for concrete problems from the ground to inform the reopening of regulation, for a bigger programme in the next Multiannual Financial Framework, and for lessons from EU-funded projects like ComActivate not to be lost when projects end.
- 7. Keep EU projects people-centred.** As the Project Coordinator concluded, LIFE and other EU-funded projects should adopt project KPIs that are more focused on people.



ANNEXE – conference minutes

About these minutes: two note-takers recorded the conference independently. This document consolidates both sets of notes into one record, in the order of the programme. Points recorded by only one note-taker are included. Language has been lightly edited for readability, and statements, figures and examples are as cited by the speakers.

Abbreviations:

OSS	One-stop shop(s)
MFAB	Multi-family apartment building
HOA	Homeowner association
NESR	Neighbourhood Energy Sufficiency Roadmap
EED	Energy Efficiency Directive
EPBD	Energy Performance of Buildings Directive
SCP	Social Climate Plan
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
NEB	New European Bauhaus
PEN	Positive Energy Neighbourhood

1. Welcome

Zuzana Matusova (ComActivate Project Coordinator, Habitat for Humanity International)

- ComActivate built on the ComAct project, the first project on energy poverty in Central and Eastern Europe, to take the work to the neighbourhood level.
- Celebrating the opening of three OSS over the course of the project, and the improvements made to the OSS in Burgas, which was already open when the project started.
- Celebrating the work to introduce the concept of energy sufficiency to the municipalities. The project was conceived during the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which is where the aim of making energy sufficiency known to municipalities came from.
- Key publications: the NESRs, policy analyses and best practices from the OSS.

2. Opening

Belma Jahović (Senior Social Consultant, Eko Invest):

- Neighbourhood-level action requires a holistic, systemic approach. It goes beyond individual buildings, connecting renovation with public and green spaces and protection from heat.
- It is important to check who benefits most, because households have different needs, different resources and different required levels of comfort.
- It is also important to ensure that the costs of renovation do not fall on those who struggle most financially.

- Talking to residents as early as possible is essential. The Eko Invest technical team that carried out the energy inspections of the buildings said it is crucial to talk to residents, as they have insights about the buildings that cannot otherwise be identified.
- The concept of energy sufficiency is difficult to frame in languages other than English, especially post-socialist ones. In Bulgaria, the translation has a negative connotation and can evoke memories of the previous political system, which used “equality” slogans but whose intentions and results were the opposite. The message, when translated, sounds as though people should expect less, so communication in Bulgaria remains about energy efficiency. Great care is needed not to communicate any negative connotation.

Emily Bankert (Senior Researcher, BPIE):

- In a building with 80 apartments and a homeowner association, someone is needed to convince residents it is worth doing, supervise the project, organise the tender and help people navigate funding applications. “Without a facilitator, almost nothing moves. That is what a One Stop Shop does.”
- Question to the room: what comes to mind when you hear “energy sufficiency”? Sufficiency is a pragmatic response to the scarcity and poor distribution of resources: it is about redistributing so that everyone has enough for a decent life, and about respecting the scarcity of resources by avoiding unnecessary consumption that does not improve quality of life.
- Switching all appliances to more efficient models is not sufficiency. “While efficiency is about doing things right, sufficiency is about doing the right things.”
- “Use less energy” is not an adequate way to communicate energy sufficiency. The problem is not that people consume too much by choice; it is that systems are not built to deliver what people need within planetary boundaries.
- A neighbourhood can plan its energy transition around the idea of “enough but not too much”. One of the key tools for this is the NESRs.
- Trusted intermediaries are crucial. In practice, three things came up constantly in the pilot municipalities: **champions** (people inside municipalities or communities who believe in this and push it forward); **intermediaries** (the OSS, the facilitator, the person who holds the process together); and **courage** (political and institutional courage to try something that does not yet have a template).

3. Panel 1: The case for One Stop Shops

Session title: Ending energy poverty, one multi-family apartment building at a time: The case for One Stop Shops

Input presentation: Éva Gerőházi, Senior Researcher, Metropolitan Research Institute (MRI). Key points, as provided by the speaker:

- OSS embedded in municipal bodies are not necessarily established to handle energy poverty or to renovate the worst-performing buildings, as high-level policymaking would desire. They are rather about fulfilling local policy goals, and these goals are mostly about accelerating the renovation process and capturing as much state subsidy as possible. Municipal OSS tend to be more successful when they work with cooperative homeowner associations, which can make decisions more efficiently. These are not necessarily the communities that suffer most from energy poverty. Energy poverty may come into focus once mass energy efficiency goals have been fulfilled.
- Energy poverty and worst-performing buildings may be defined differently at national and local level. The worst energy performance at national level may not be the worst stock at local level: in most CEE countries the worst-performing buildings are family houses, while for most urban municipalities multi-family building renovation is the preference. Similarly, energy poverty defined at national level (mostly through EU-SILC indicators) may not be recognised at local level, where social vulnerability is defined rather by the local social network.

- OSS in municipal hands are not necessarily dedicated offices for energy efficiency. They may be embedded in different municipal bodies and change their boundaries according to need: during a state support application period, many employees of the municipality or municipal company work on assisting communities, while in quieter periods OSS staff may be occupied with other municipal tasks.
- What is crucial is that municipal OSS are efficient when they are pro-active and approach communities directly, for example by visiting HOA general assemblies. This requires atypical working hours and flexibility. An artificially created OSS system set up top-down, like the new regional OSS system in Lithuania, will never do this. Even if a national OSS system is created, municipal OSS should therefore remain the “hands and legs” of the centralised OSS, reaching people in their homes.

Panel discussion: Sandra Vainutė (Energy Attaché, Permanent Representation of Lithuania to the EU); Ignas Simonaitis (Deputy Mayor, Kaišiadorys, Lithuania); Saska Petrova (Professor of Geography, University of Manchester, principal investigator of the GENERATE project); Éva Gerőházi (MRI). **Moderator:** Marine Cornelis (Founder and energy policy advisor, Next Energy Consumer).

Marine Cornelis (moderator): Who benefits from OSS, and who is left out?

Ignas Simonaitis

- In Eastern European countries there is a strong idea of needing to own your property. With many owners in an MFAB, the approval of a majority of residents is needed to renovate.
- For this reason OSS in Lithuania are not only about information on funding schemes and improving energy sufficiency. They are about meeting residents in person, informing them about renovation and motivating the majority to get on board. For other OSS the main goal might be to exchange information, but for his municipality it is about motivating residents, which has been difficult.
- Challenge: working parents are not always available for these conversations.

Saska Petrova

- It is positive to see that things are moving and that more solutions are being sought for energy sufficiency, for tackling the energy inefficiency of buildings, and for how OSS can accelerate the green transition.
- There is no single way of seeing OSS: one idea can mean different things in different contexts. Fundamentally it is about energy renovation.
- Tackling energy poverty is a different issue. Energy poverty can mean different things at local, national and EU level, and it may not even be seen as something OSS should deal with.
- How can we support the people who need help most? How do we help tenants who do not own property in MFABs? Is childcare provided during meetings so that parents can take part?
- People are dealing with mental and physical health issues, so OSS become hubs for the community and for well-being. OSS staff may find themselves supporting people with mental health issues, for example.
- It would be wrong to see OSS as a “holy grail” without giving them proper support and governance.

Marine Cornelis: It is really about the setting and the skills of the people who work there: the ability to “glue the social fabric” and to be embedded in the community.

Sandra Vainutė

- It is difficult to draw legal conclusions when we are not aware of the practical problems on the ground. Reference to the EPBD and its implementation at national and local level.

- What is on the table now is the EPBD, the SCPs and the EDD. They should be combined into one national plan.
- These regulations and directives will be reopened. When that happens, it is very important to have concrete problems in hand to know what needs to be opened and changed.

Ignas Simonaitis: funding and outreach

- The national level provided additional funding for OSS, and the importance of this funding was clear. Just as the project is coming to an end, new national-level funding for OSS has become available, so the same service can be offered.
- It will be hard to make a change if the capacity to reach out to people is not maintained. Regional OSS serving five or six municipalities will find it very hard to go to people to engage with them: employees will in practice only be able to answer calls, not reach out and speak to people.
- Well-educated and younger people have the skills to reach out to OSS. Older and less connected people are less inclined or less able to do so.

Saska Petrova

- Alternative social energy business projects are working and actively support the green transition. Through them, residents can become active shareholders via the municipality.
- We cannot expect everything from OSS. From her experience in England, if a GP sees structural problems with a home, such as mould, the GP can refer the patient to an OSS.

Éva Geróházi

- There are different types of OSS in different municipalities. In Józsefváros, for example, the emphasis is on organising the community through the OSS.
- Question to the panel: is there anything specific you would like to avoid when designing advisory services?

Ignas Simonaitis (in response)

- In Lithuania there is national funding for renovation. Regional OSS are a good thing because they offer expertise at local level.
- There should be more permanent employees to continue the work of the OSS. Once the work starts, it needs to be maintained through funding.

Saska Petrova: renovictions

- Energy renovation is great, but we must protect against “renovictions”: rents tend to go up once buildings are of better quality, and people on lower incomes can no longer afford to live in those areas.
- A neighbourhood approach is therefore very important. How are renters going to be protected in areas where buildings are being renovated? The social justice perspective is crucial.

Éva Geróházi

- “Renoviction” is something we tend to forget, even for owners. How can specific support schemes help prevent renovation from having this effect? There are very good examples from Lithuania. It is very important that OSS are part of the solution and transfer the right information to people.
- On the SCPs and OSS: even a structured, micro-region-based OSS will find it nearly impossible to be as proactive as a local OSS. It is important to organise within the OSS network to build a system within the SCPs: not one that is easy on paper, but one that can overcome the challenges of implementation on the ground. “It’s easy to create a system on paper, but there needs to be a

system on the ground.” People need to be on the ground, and that needs to be part of the system.

Sandra Vainutė and Marine Cornelis: data and communication

- Sandra Vainutė: data and communication are essential. Data need to be collected, and collected better, then exchanged, to improve communication and the renovation process. Her team has asked DG CLIMA to come back with knowledge and information on how best the EU can support.
- Marine Cornelis: the data we have need to be better consolidated and fed into the OSS, including to help address overheating.

4. Panel 2 (fishbowl): From homes to neighbourhoods

Session title: From homes to neighbourhoods: Solving persistent challenges and scaling best practices from CEE

Panellists: Maarten De Groote (Programme Manager, VITO, and coordinator of the oPEN Lab project); Johann Strese (Project Director, Housing Initiative for Eastern Europe, IWO e. V.); Edit Lakatos (Policy Officer, Housing Taskforce, European Commission); an empty chair for rotating participants from broader civil society, particularly voices from CEE and marginalised groups.

Moderator: Emily Bankert (BPIE).

Emily Bankert (moderator): Topics to look at include specific barriers in CEE and affordable housing. What can working at neighbourhood scale unlock?

Maarten De Groote

- We tend to over-romanticise neighbourhoods and OSS, and expectations need to be tempered. The core message: always start with the people.
- Example, Genk: 35 PENs were renovated, with nine months of renovation work squeezed into nine weeks.
- Example, Tartu: for the renovation of a Soviet-style apartment building, the housing association had to vote for or against and voted against, which created a negative spiral against renovation.

Emily Bankert: Communication with residents is important. In Genk there was also an issue of not “starting with the people”: some residents could not take part because of Ramadan. Question to Johann: what are your takeaways from the workshops you led as part of ComActivate, and from the neighbourhood and systemic perspective?

Johann Strese

- It is good to work at neighbourhood level, but it is much more challenging than working on a single building, and MFABs prove to be far more challenging.
- In CEE, most flats are owned by the people living in them, which makes decision-making very complicated.
- The potential of an OSS: an entity at municipal level, or an NGO or a company, that brings people together. It is very difficult to bring everyone together, facilitate the process, explain things and convince people, and it takes a lot of time. An entity that takes on this role and links people to the institutions that can support them is very important.
- It is not only about improving buildings but also about the wider neighbourhood: how people move around, parks, parking, other buildings and businesses.
- “If you are a municipality, you would never close a hospital: the public outcry would be enormous. Even with the argument ‘it’s not bringing us any money, and actually it costs us resources’. But if you close it, people will move away. It’s a critical service.” OSS need to be seen as a critical service too, and need municipal support.

Emily Bankert: When you actually spoke to people on the ground, did people support this?

Johann Strese

- The workshops included HOA representatives, NGOs and municipal representatives, with a lot of discussion of “what is our vision for this neighbourhood?”.
- A vision is needed to establish a direction, but start with small steps. Assemblies at renter and owner level should be organised to discuss the direction of their neighbourhood.

Emily Bankert: Because you come from the social housing sector, do you see a risk to housing affordability at neighbourhood level, and what will it take to design for it?

Edit Lakatos

- The Commission tries to recognise in its plan that housing and renovation are interconnected. DG ENER leads the file, and everything is checked with it, so the Housing Taskforce works in alignment with DG ENER. The aim is an integrated approach that includes important services, and it requires work across DGs and everyone's support.
- The New European Bauhaus and the learnings of that programme, such as renovating at neighbourhood level, have been very helpful. The Commission tries to include social renovation in the NEB and to make sure the learnings of the Affordable Housing Initiative, which looked at the neighbourhood level, are integrated into it. There are 19 blueprints on how to renovate, down to the detail of how to work with tenants.
- The Commission tries to push for more social conditionalities, and the Housing Taskforce can flag when social conditionalities are not included in legislation.
- The Commission is also trying to tackle the problem of lessons from EU-funded projects like ComActivate being lost once the projects end.
- Upscaling OSS: many initiatives are on the table.

Emily Bankert: Are there learnings from the Affordable Housing Initiative that fit today's discussion?

Edit Lakatos

- More money is needed to deliver a better programme. Under the new MFF there will hopefully be a bigger programme and scaling up.
- The programme faces the question “why continue a programme that has achieved what it set out to do?”. But 22 districts is only a starting point and the work needs to be scaled up. The aim is to advocate for a bigger programme that includes projects like ComActivate.

Maarten De Groote: robotics

- What can be done with robotics to make construction sites safer and renovation works faster? Robots can also film work sites to identify potential safety risks, and can be active 24 hours a day.

Emily Bankert: The chair is now open. There are many topics to explore: summer energy poverty, consistent challenges and roadblocks, climate adaptation, and whether a neighbourhood approach can help re-establish democracy.

Gyorgy (Habitat for Humanity)

- When the neighbourhood question comes up, the NGO question is how to engage people at neighbourhood level. There are enormous challenges in engaging people.
- It costs time and money to run a participatory process at this level: to secure professional facilitators and to run effective campaigning. Are there good-practice examples of how such participation can be assured?

Johann Strese

- Someone from the European Commission at the C4E Forum in recent years talked about all the funding given to renovation processes, but none for the kind of engagement processes being discussed. A few years ago, grants and loans were given, but nothing to actually kick-start the process.
- If all the money is given only to renovation, it will not succeed. The Commission should be more active and not just wait for funding to arrive.
- What people see is that if nothing is happening, we come to an erosion of democracy.
- In Germany, for example, there are millions of empty housing units, and people are moving to cities where affordable housing is lacking, while hearing “sorry, we are not renovating this building and it will collapse in 20 years”.

Emily Bankert: Climate adaptation is also a big question. Are there good examples?

Edit Lakatos

- Housing associations in the UK ran a big campaign with residents, having conversations over a cup of tea about what needed to be done at neighbourhood level. This was replicated in Lyon and worked well.
- There is also a question of psychological expertise, knowing how to speak to people, so people who know how to communicate need to be hired. Human psychology matters in community organisation and in explaining the added value of investing in these projects. How is the topic introduced to older people, who may not be looking far into the future?
- Funding for resources is also important, for example when homeowners work together to collect reserves to maintain services in buildings, such as lifts.
- Investment is the big elephant in the room. There is no public money, but the Commission would still like to establish a pan-European investment platform.
- On the SCPs, a big portion would go to vulnerable households, just as it was designed to do.
- The Commission advocated for supporting social aspects in Building Information Modelling.

Maarten De Groote: co-benefits

- The elephant in the room for him is co-benefits. In the UK, the cost of poor housing is higher than the cost of tobacco or alcohol. This summer in Belgium there were over 1,000 excess deaths due to the heatwave. Prejudice against the poor and elderly has a cost.
- Further co-benefit cited: students in renovated schools perform around 10% better

Anna (organisation not recorded)

- The current funding distribution needs to be reworked. There are injustices in renovation in who pays and who pays most.
- If private money is to be brought in, the right funding needs to go to the right target groups, so that private money does not end up in the wrong hands.
- Building managers also need to be brought in and motivated, as they see renovation as a hassle.

Emily Bankert: In ComActivate we have looked at how HOAs have the potential to hold a lot of power but very few resources.

Assya (Habitat for Humanity)

- OSS and the people who want change, and who are not afraid to do things together, need two approaches to tackle energy poverty.

- The first is social: helping people understand why it is important to participate, including people in energy poverty. For example, housing mediators go to families and speak with them about specific issues.
- The second is financial support for tackling energy poverty. For example, heating allowances allow families to heat their homes in winter. They should also receive money for taking part in the renovation of their apartment block, as a financial incentive to participate in MFAB renovation.
- Assessments of energy costs need to be integrated into the OSS approach.

Maarten De Groote

- If the willingness of the people and the money are found, “we’re up and running”. But it is not over once the money for renovation is found: monitoring during the operational phase must not be forgotten.

Johann Strese: final thoughts

- In some ComActivate pilots, saying “we will work on energy efficiency first and then do renovation” did not work, especially in energy-poor communities. The buildings in the pilots were in bad shape and had more pressing issues. These are energy-poor municipalities and communities.
- Even if people lack money to invest in their homes, they should always contribute to the costs of renovation, even a symbolic EUR 2. It gives people a way to connect to the process and to feel identified with it. Any expectation that a “white knight” will come and save them needs to be removed.

Further points recorded from the floor (speakers didn’t introduce themselves)

- Subsidies disproportionately go to the wrong places. OSS need smart subsidies to survive: “where there is no subsidy, there is no OSS”.
- Smart subsidies, designed with sub-national governments and offering technical assistance, are crucial for sustainability.
- Associations of co-owners / HOAs need to be educated so that they can support people.

5. Closing

Zuzana Matusova (Habitat for Humanity International) gave two key points to take away:

- **People-centred:** sufficiency, OSS and municipalities are very important terms, but “we cannot forget who we are doing it for”.
- **LIFE and other EU-funded projects:** project KPIs need to be more people-focused.

