ComActivate

Enabling community action for energy sufficiency

BUILT TO LAST

How Central and Eastern Europe can turn one-stop shops and neighbourhood energy sufficiency roadmaps into permanent public infrastructure

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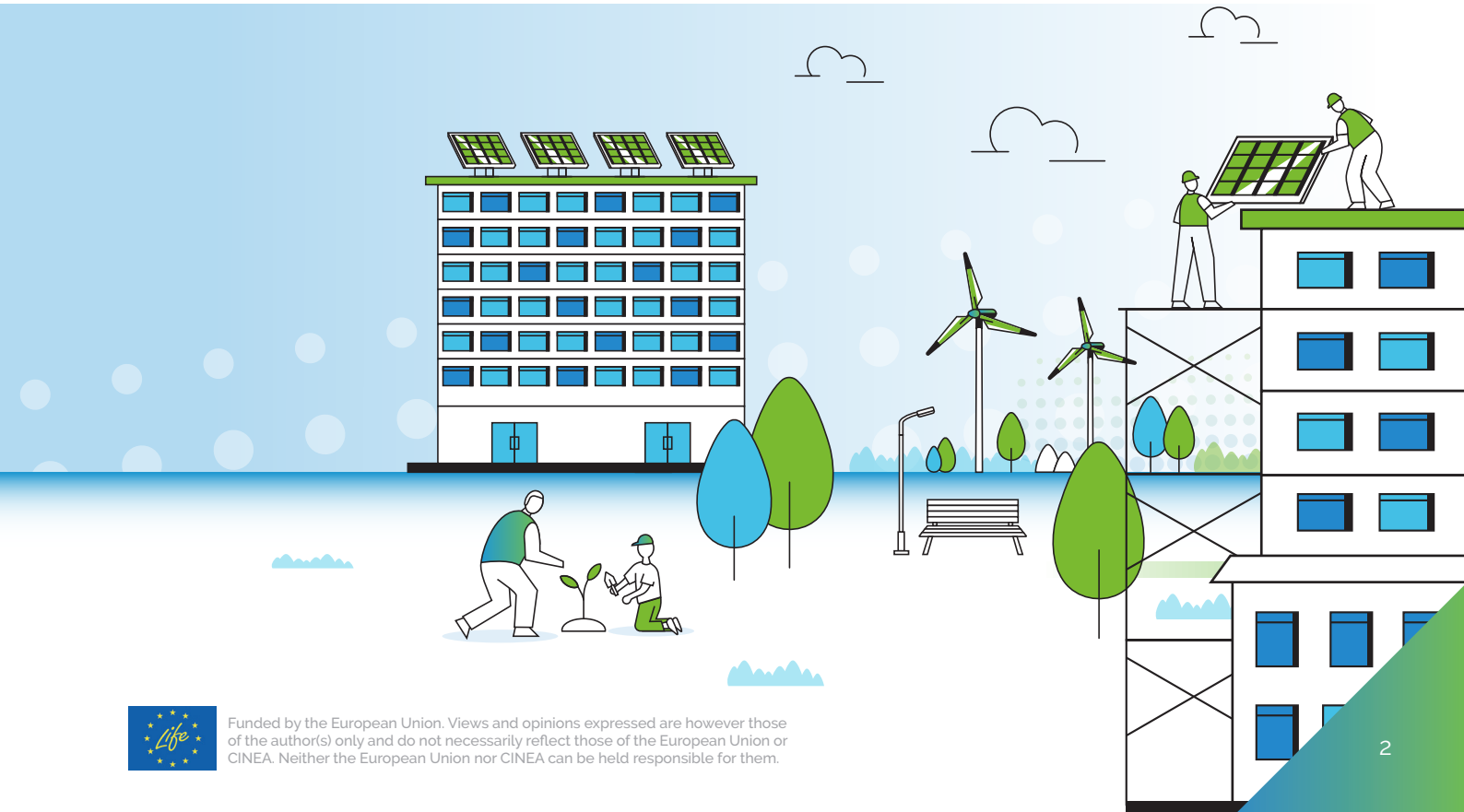
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Executive summary

Multi-family apartment buildings (MFABs) house around 60% of the population of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), and most of them were built before 1990 to low energy standards. Their renovation is central to reducing energy poverty, lowering gas imports and meeting the targets of the recast Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD). In practice, the main challenge is turning available technical and financial solutions into renovation projects that homeowners' associations (HOAs) can agree on, finance and implement. There are various tools available that respond to this need, among which ComActivate has worked on two: **one-stop shops (OSSs)**, that accompany residents and HOAs through the renovation process; and **Neighbourhood Energy Sufficiency Roadmaps (NESRs)**, that help municipalities to plan renovation and demand-reduction on a neighbourhood scale. Both tools have been tested within the ComActivate project in **Burgas (Bulgaria)**, **Józsefváros (Budapest, Hungary)**, and **Elektrėnai** and **Kaišiadorys (Lithuania)**.

The pilots show that **the central policy challenge is the reliance of local authorities on temporary projects, discretionary municipal budgets and irregular national renovation programmes to deliver MFAB renovation**. OSSs are most effective when they are embedded in public institutions, connected to other municipal services and able to support residents throughout the renovation process, rather than functioning only as information points. Their effectiveness also depends heavily on the predictability of national renovation programmes: demand increases sharply when funding calls open, while local capacity is difficult to maintain when support is intermittent.

The institutionalisation of OSSs should be a national policy responsibility. Municipalities can organise and deliver local services, but national governments determine whether those services have a clear legal mandate, stable funding, predictable renovation programmes, and access to the data and financing instruments they need. The recast EPBD already requires Member States to establish OSSs and reflect them in National Building Renovation Plans (NBRPs), while the Social Climate Fund creates an additional opportunity to finance advisory and renovation support. These frameworks must now be used to move from fragmented and temporary services towards a permanent national delivery network.

The neighbourhood approach complements this delivery infrastructure by shifting renovation from isolated building interventions towards coordinated local planning. NESRs bring together information on the building stock, energy poverty, infrastructure and local priorities and translate these into a sequenced set of actions. NESRs can help municipalities identify where renovation can deliver the greatest social and energy benefits, coordinate with heating and electricity networks, and create a pipeline of projects for the OSSs to support.

Member States should embed OSSs and NESRs as complementary parts of the renovation delivery framework. OSSs can provide the permanent local capacity needed to support households and HOAs through the renovation process, while NESRs give municipalities a practical way to identify priorities, coordinate actors, and align renovation with energy poverty, heating, electrification and network planning. Used together, they can connect national renovation objectives and funding with coherent neighbourhood-level implementation.

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This paper recommends a clear division of responsibilities between national and local authorities, where national governments create the enabling framework for permanent renovation support, while municipalities use that framework to plan and coordinate delivery at the neighbourhood level.

For **national governments**, this means:

- Establishing OSSs by law as a permanent service with public support and minimum service standards covering the full renovation journey, including giving direct support to HOAs, while allowing municipalities to adapt the service model and additional support offered to local needs and circumstances.
- Providing stable, multiannual funding for core OSS operations, complemented by additional resources from renovation programme budgets to expand capacity when funding calls open.
- Making renovation support more predictable and better connected, through multiannual calendars of funding calls and stronger links between OSSs, energy performance certificates, social services and financing instruments.

For **municipalities**, this means:

- Adopting a NESR for at least one priority neighbourhood through a formal council decision and integrating it into existing climate, heating and cooling, and urban development plans.
- Giving the local OSS a formal mandate to support implementation of the roadmap, including through work with residents and HOAs.
- Using the NESR as a coordination and investment tool, including to prepare funding applications and align renovation priorities with electricity grid and district heating planning.

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1. Introduction

Buildings account for more than half of the gas consumed in the EU (Commission Recommendation (EU) 2026/536), making renovation a central issue not only for decarbonisation, but also for affordability and energy security. In Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), a large share of the multi-family apartment building (MFAB) stock was constructed before 1990, when energy performance and insulation standards were considerably lower than they are today. Poor building performance contributes directly to high energy costs and energy poverty, although the scale of the problem varies across countries. In 2023, 20.7% of people in Bulgaria and 20.0% in Lithuania were unable to keep their homes adequately warm, compared with 7.2% in Hungary and an EU average of 10.6% (Eurostat, 2025).

EU policy is increasingly addressing these challenges through a combination of renovation requirements, technical assistance, targeted funding and stronger local delivery structures. The recast Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) (2024/1275) requires Member States to ensure access to one-stop shops (OSSs) across their territory and to reflect their OSS framework in their National Building Renovation Plans (NBRPs). At the same time, the Social Climate Fund provides an important opportunity to support vulnerable households and the services needed to help them access structural renovation measures. These developments form part of a broader policy shift towards affordable energy, better use of the existing housing stock, and reduced dependence on imported fossil fuels. Together, they create a clear opportunity for Member States to move from temporary advisory initiatives towards permanent renovation delivery structures.

This shift is particularly important because many OSSs operating in CEE have been established through time-limited EU-funded projects. Their continuation is often uncertain once project funding ends, even where they have built up expertise, relationships with homeowners' associations (HOAs) and trust among residents. Institutionalisation therefore means moving OSSs from being a temporary service to a permanent part of public delivery infrastructure. This requires a clear legal mandate, defined responsibilities, stable multiannual funding, qualified staff, integration within public administration, and monitoring of results. An institutionalised OSS should be able to continue operating beyond individual project cycles and funding calls, providing households and HOAs with a reliable point of support over the long term.

This paper draws on the experience of resource centres operating as OSSs in Burgas (Bulgaria), Józsefváros (Budapest, Hungary), Elektrėnai and Kaišiadorys (Lithuania), alongside the development of Neighbourhood Energy Sufficiency Roadmaps (NESRs) in these municipalities. **OSS and NESRs are two instruments designed to complement each other**. A NESR provides the neighbourhood-level planning framework by identifying priorities and sequences of activities, alongside connecting building renovation with energy demand, infrastructure and local needs. The OSS provides the delivery capacity by working with residents and HOAs to translate those priorities into concrete renovation projects. Used together, they can help move renovation from a succession of individual building applications towards a more continuous and coordinated local process.

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Institutionalisation of these instruments, therefore, should be considered at two interconnected levels: at national level, governments shape the legal mandate, financing framework, service standards and renovation programmes within which OSS operate; at local level, municipalities can use NESRs to identify priority neighbourhoods, coordinate actors and investments, and give OSS a clear role in implementation. The central argument is that neither instrument should remain dependent on temporary projects: **national policy should create the conditions for permanent local delivery, while municipalities should embed neighbourhood planning within their existing governance, planning and investment frameworks.**

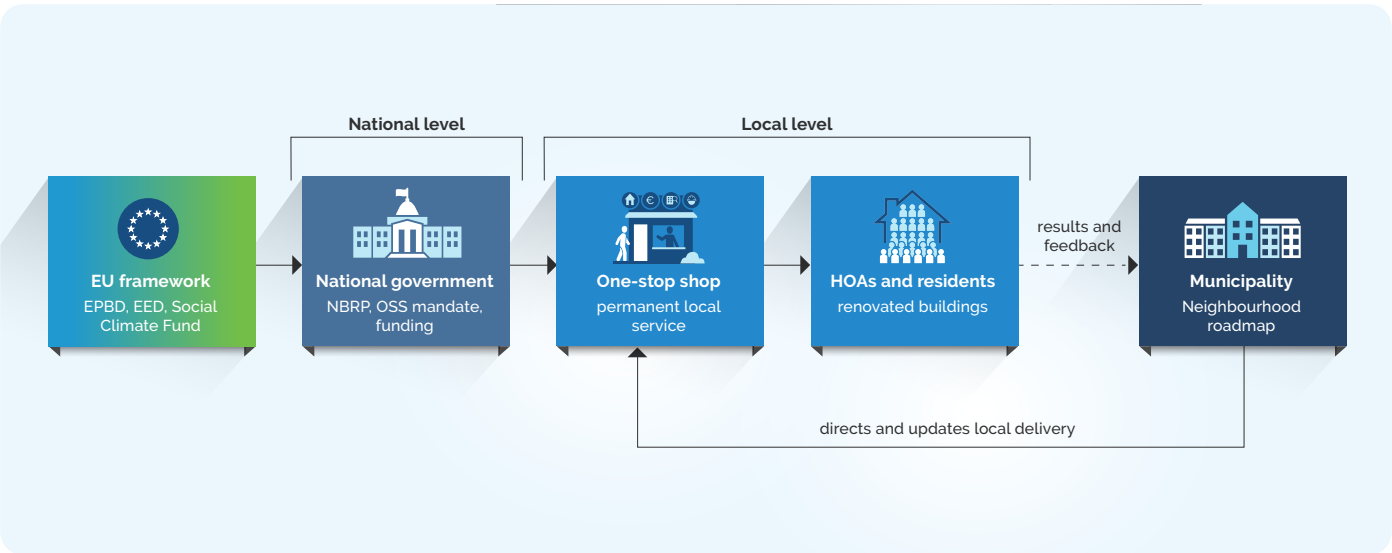


Figure 1: Governance framework for OSSs and neighbourhood roadmaps

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2. One-stop shops as permanent public infrastructure

Why apartment building renovation stalls

The EU currently renovates around 1% of its building stock each year, but the renovation rate needs at least to double to meet its climate and energy objectives (Recommendation (EU) 2026/536). HOAs, many of which emerged from the privatisation of housing in the 1990s and are largely managed by volunteers (Bankert and Milanovska, 2025), must bring together households with different incomes, priorities and willingness to invest. They are then expected to navigate a complex process: reaching agreement among owners, commissioning technical documentation, applying for public support, securing finance, procuring contractors and overseeing implementation. In a typical apartment building with dozens of owners, this can become a significant organisational burden.

Additionally, households within the same building can have very different capacities to contribute to renovation costs, while eligibility rules may exclude some buildings or households that need support. For example, in Elektrėnai, some owners were found to earn too little to comfortably finance renovation but too much to qualify for targeted assistance. In Lithuania, preferential financing can also be constrained where utility arrears within a building exceed permitted thresholds. At the same time, concerns about construction quality, long-term debt, rising costs and contractor reliability can make owners reluctant to approve renovation even where financial support is available.

Experience across the three countries shows that subsidies alone do not remove these barriers. Lithuania provides full support for eligible households receiving heating compensation, yet some residents remain hesitant to renovate. Bulgaria has relied heavily on very high grant rates for apartment-building renovation and has invested around EUR 5 billion in fully-subsidised apartment building renovation since 2016; attempts to introduce owner co-financing have received only limited support. Hungary, by contrast, currently lacks a national or EU grant programme for the comprehensive renovation of apartment buildings, which restricts the scope of local advisory services. This range of experiences suggests that **financial support needs to be designed around the socioeconomic circumstances of households and should be complemented by predictable schemes and trusted assistance for HOAs throughout the renovation process**. High subsidy rates alone may not be sufficient where affordability concerns, uncertainty or other barriers to collective decision-making remain.

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From information point to full-service model

An OSS is most useful when it provides coordinated support across the full renovation journey, rather than only providing isolated information at the beginning of it. The European Commission's 2026 practical guidance notes that the low uptake of deep renovation is not primarily caused by a lack of actors: auditors, architects, contractors, banks, energy agencies and other professionals already provide relevant services. The problem is that these offers are fragmented, responsibilities are dispersed, and homeowners are left unsupported to coordinate actors with different interests. The purpose of an OSS is therefore to create the missing links between these services and provide homeowners with a coherent route through the renovation process.

The European Commission distinguishes three broad OSS models. An advice model focuses mainly on initial information, broad technical guidance, and information on available finance. A support model goes considerably further: it can include detailed energy audits, definition of the works, assistance with contractor selection, and supervision of implementation. An implementation model may also take responsibility for delivering the renovation works themselves.

For MFABs, an advice-only model is often insufficient. The most difficult stages are precisely those that come after general information has been provided: reaching agreement among owners, preparing the project, identifying suitable professionals, meeting funding requirements, and maintaining quality during implementation. The European Commission recognises these limitations, noting that advice-only services may not meet the needs of homeowners undertaking complex renovations and that public or publicly-funded bodies are permitted to provide more active support during design and implementation, provided that their advice remains independent.

The Vilnius OSS Amiestas illustrates what this broader support role can look like in practice. As a non-profit public institution accountable to the municipality, it supports apartment-building owners throughout the renovation process. Its staff participate in general assemblies, help prepare grant and loan applications, and support procurement, supervision and loan administration (BEUC, 2024; BUILD UP, 2025). Józsefváros has developed a similar concept for a future apartment-building renovation service, organised around the different stages of the renovation process. Before a funding call, the service would focus on awareness-raising and identifying interested HOAs. Once an HOA decides to undergo renovation, it would support representatives in building agreement among owners and preparing the necessary documentation. During project preparation and implementation, it would assist with the procurement of designers and contractors; and, after the works are completed, it would provide follow-up support. **These models shift the OSS from being an information desk to acting as a trusted process manager for complex collective renovations.**

For this reason, the paper argues for publicly-anchored OSSs with a broad mandate, while recognising that many specialised services can still be provided by private actors. Public anchoring can help ensure continuity, accessibility and independence, particularly for vulnerable households that cannot pay for advisory services. It can also provide a neutral interface between homeowners, contractors, financial institutions and public authorities. The European Commission stresses that independence is particularly important where commercial relationships are involved: if an OSS is remunerated through commissions from particular providers, it may no longer be acting solely in the homeowner's interest. At the same time, publicly-supported OSSs may charge for some services where households are able to pay, provided that support remains accessible free-of-charge to vulnerable groups.

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One service, several policy objectives

Policy objective	Contribution of a permanent OSS	EU framework
Energy poverty reduction	Identifies households at risk, combines grants and compensation, protects against unfavourable contracts	EED Article 22, Social Climate Fund, forthcoming energy poverty Recommendation
Affordable housing	Helps households access renovation support that can reduce energy costs and improve the quality and long-term usability of existing buildings	European Affordable Housing Plan
Energy security	Reduces gas demand for heating	REPowerEU, phase-out of Russian gas
Electrification	Ensures insulation comes before heat pumps and solar panels, reducing new electricity demand	Citizens Energy Package
EPBD implementation	Receives referrals from energy performance certificates, supports renovation passports and the worst-performing buildings	EPBD Articles 9, 12, 18 and 19

What the pilots show about lasting operation

All four ComActivate resource centres (i.e. OSSs) are publicly operated, provide free services, and have developed sustainability and business plans looking towards 2030 (ComActivate, 2026a). Taken together, these plans point to a set of conditions that determine whether an OSS can move from being a temporary initiative to become a durable public service.

Embed the OSS within existing public institutions. Institutional embedding gives OSSs access to premises, staff, expertise and administrative structures that would be difficult to finance independently. All four ComActivate OSSs operate in publicly-owned premises and draw on support from other municipal departments. For instance, in Burgas, this institutional backing allowed three staff members to work alongside 20 municipal colleagues during the 2022 national renovation call, resulting in 220 project submissions, the highest number of any Bulgarian municipality. At the same time, embedding an OSS within existing structures requires clear political commitment, particularly where municipal companies or property managers may have interests that do not fully align with renovation objectives. A municipally-owned district heating company may see renovation as a loss of revenue, and property managers may see it mainly as additional work. In Kaišiadorys this is considered to be one reason why renovation rates have been lower than in comparable municipalities. Addressing this issue requires political commitment and, where needed, adjustments to tariff-setting or to the services offered by municipal companies, for example energy audits.

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Good practice example from the pilots: Józsefváros anchors its centre in municipal policy

Józsefváros had an earlier OSS, RenoPont, financed by projects, private sources and service fees. It closed in 2025 when these sources ended. The new centre, LakóTér, was therefore placed within the mayor's office and is written into several municipal strategies, including the long-term asset management plan, the environmental programme and the local equal opportunities programme. The municipality considers this the most durable basis for its future. The centre operates in separate premises, which residents perceive as a community space rather than an office, and it is staffed by four community organisers. The municipality has also made a consultation at the centre a mandatory step for residents applying for its home renovation grants, so that every applicant receives independent advice before applying for funding (ComActivate, 2025).

Funding beyond project cycles. Even relatively modest operating costs require a predictable source of funding. The Burgas centre, for example, costs around EUR 1,800 per month to operate, covering salary, utilities and events. It intends to offer paid energy audits, technical assessments and building renovation roadmaps to clients who can afford them, so that it generates income between funding calls. In Kaišiadorys, the single dedicated post is currently financed through project funding, while Elektrėnai has considered reducing its service to basic information and referral if resources become constrained. These examples show that project funding can help establish and test an OSS, but cannot be a substitute for long-term core financing. A sustainable model may combine public funding with complementary revenue-generating services, such as paid audits or technical assessments for clients able to afford them. However, public funding remains essential to guarantee continuity and ensure that support remains accessible to vulnerable households.

Staff capacity that follows demand. OSS workloads are closely linked to the design and timing of national renovation programmes. Demand rises sharply when a funding call opens and can fall significantly between calls. Where calls are regular, as in Lithuania, workloads are more predictable; where they are irregular, as in Bulgaria, pressure on local capacity is much more uneven. This means OSSs need a staffing model that combines a stable core team with flexible access to additional capacity when demand peaks. The business plans developed for the OSSs set out realistic staffing needs: Burgas aims for at least three full-time staff, with core advice kept in-house and specialised audits contracted out; Elektrėnai needs a communications specialist and a dedicated budget for training and events; the Józsefváros plan states that a full-service office for apartment buildings would need a manager with project management and energy expertise, supported by facilitators.

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Good practice example from the pilots: Burgas keeps the office open when demand falls

The Burgas Energy Office, the municipality's OSS, has been open every working day since 2023, and every visitor, call and email receives an answer. Each visitor is registered with their contact details and area of interest, so that invitations to training and information about new funding reach the right people. When renovation subsidies paused and demand for consultations dropped, the municipality did not close the office. It linked the centre to other EU projects, and partnered with a solar company to include advice on photovoltaic installations. Burgas also feeds its experience into national policy through its partnership with the Centre for Energy Efficiency EnEffect, including on the National Renovation Programme and the Social Climate Plan (ComActivate, 2025).

Proactive outreach. An OSS that waits for residents to come through the door will not reach everyone, particularly vulnerable households or residents who are hesitant about renovation. Experience from Hungary and Lithuania shows that face-to-face engagement, building-level meetings and direct outreach are more effective than relying mainly on office-based or online services. These activities require time and staff capacity and should therefore be treated as part of the core OSS mandate, not as an optional communication activity.

Good practice example from the pilots: Lithuania takes the conversation to the building

In Elektrėnai, meetings are held at each unrenovated building, announced on the noticeboard in the stairwell, on the building administrator's website and on social media. Representatives of the national agency that administers renovation programmes attend, so residents can ask them questions directly. Meetings last one to two hours per building. Elektrėnai and Kaišiadorys also enlisted older residents as Seniors Renovation Ambassadors to speak to their peers, and gave kindergarten children colouring books featuring local buildings to start conversations about renovation at home. Kaišiadorys uses voting records held by the building administrator to approach buildings that have voted against renovation and start new conversations about the topic. In Elektrėnai the share of renovated apartment buildings rose from 13% at the start of 2024 to 22% at the end of 2025, an increase that can be partly attributed to the project's activities (ComActivate, 2025; ComActivate, 2026a).

A national renovation framework to work within. Local delivery capacity cannot compensate for the absence of national programmes. The Józsefváros business plan makes this particularly clear: without national support for apartment buildings the centre can still provide information and community support, but a fully developed renovation service only becomes viable when there is a programme through which projects can actually be financed. The scale and scope of an OSS are therefore shaped as much by national programme design as by local ambition. Predictable funding calls, stable eligibility rules and a gradual approach to co-financing are essential if municipalities are to maintain staff, prepare projects and communicate credibly with homeowners.

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Monitoring results. Long-term public funding will require evidence that OSSs contribute to renovation outcomes. Most centres already record basic data on consultations and outreach, but monitoring remains uneven and information on vulnerable households is often limited. Lithuania provides a stronger example through its national database, which records renovated apartment buildings, their energy class before and after renovation, and changes in heating costs. Kaišiadorys has also introduced annual targets for residents reached, consultations, neighbourhood meetings and training participants. Over time, monitoring should move beyond counting contacts towards tracking buildings mobilised, projects submitted and completed, energy savings achieved, and vulnerable households reached.

A blueprint for national governments

Turning OSSs into permanent renovation infrastructure requires more than establishing individual offices. National governments need to create the legal, financial and institutional conditions that allow OSSs to operate continuously, support households throughout the renovation journey, and connect local demand with national renovation programmes. The following actions provide a practical framework.



Phase 1: Institutional set-up

1. **Establish OSSs as a permanent public service with a nationally defined core framework and locally adapted services.** National legislation should establish the mandate for OSSs and define a limited set of core functions that households can expect across the country, such as initial advice, guidance on available financing, and referral to relevant technical or social support. Beyond this common baseline, municipalities should have the flexibility to shape the OSS offer according to local needs. In areas with a high share of MFABs, for example, this may require more intensive support, including assistance with collective decision-making. The services defined by Józsefváros for apartment buildings illustrate one possible model, rather than a standard that every municipality would need to replicate. National governance should also be clear: one ministry or agency should have lead responsibility for the OSS framework, even where implementation involves several ministries, national agencies and local authorities. This is particularly important where responsibilities for buildings, energy efficiency, social policy and renovation funding are currently fragmented. In Bulgaria, for example, responsibilities are currently shared between the Ministry of Energy, the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, and the Sustainable Energy Development Agency.

2. **Define a delivery network that ensures effective territorial coverage**. The EPBD requires Member States to establish and operate OSSs across their territories using one or more criteria, including population, regional coverage, building-stock characteristics, integrated district renovation programmes, and accessibility within a reasonable travel time. National governments should use these criteria to design networks that combine local access with sufficient technical capacity. Smaller municipalities may be better served through intermunicipal or regional hubs (as Lithuania plans to have for all ten counties from 2026) rather than being required to maintain a full service independently.

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3 **Integrate OSSs into national renovation and energy planning**. The EPBD requires the NBRP to state the number of OSSs, their staffing, services, budget for 2026 to 2032, and performance indicators. However, OSSs should not sit alongside NBRPs as a separate measure; they should be treated as part of the delivery infrastructure needed to implement them. NBRPs should specify how the national OSS network will support renovation objectives, including its coverage, functions, financing and expected results.



Phase 2: Financing

4 **Finance the core service on a multiannual basis**. OSSs need stable funding for permanent staff, outreach and basic operations, rather than having to rebuild their capacity with each project or renovation call. The appropriate staffing model should reflect the scale of the area served and the services provided, with specialist expertise contracted externally where this is more efficient. The Social Climate Fund provides an immediate opportunity to strengthen this infrastructure. OSS support included in national Social Climate Plans is explicitly eligible for funding, and Commission guidance encourages Member States to use OSSs to combine grants, loans and financial instruments according to household income, living situation and building type. This is particularly important because structural renovation support for vulnerable households is difficult to deliver effectively without local services that can identify households, prepare projects and help them access funding. Cohesion Policy funding and project-development assistance can complement this by financing capacity building and project preparation.

5 **Build additional capacity into renovation programmes**. A permanent core service will not be sufficient during periods of exceptionally high demand. National renovation programmes should therefore budget not only for grants to building owners, but also for the technical and administrative support required to prepare and implement projects. This can include temporary additional capacity for OSSs, as well as externally contracted services such as project preparation, technical supervision or specialist engineering support. Lithuania provides an example of this broader approach, with renovation support covering project preparation, administration and technical supervision alongside investment aid. The relevant lesson is that these supporting activities should be financed as part of the renovation programme itself, rather than be left to municipalities or OSSs to absorb within their existing resources.

6 **Provide a predictable pipeline of renovation support**. Governments should publish multiannual information on forthcoming renovation programmes and maintain stable eligibility and administrative requirements wherever possible. Predictability allows municipalities and OSSs to prepare buildings in advance rather than mobilising only once a call opens. Grant design also needs careful management. In countries where households have become accustomed to very high or 100% public subsidies, abrupt moves towards co-financing can suppress demand. Bulgaria's experience illustrates this risk: once full subsidies become the expected model, introducing an owner contribution becomes politically and practically difficult. Any transition towards co-financing should therefore be gradual, clearly communicated, and differentiated according to household vulnerability and building needs.

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7 **Connect public support with private finance**. Renovation at the required scale cannot rely on grants alone. OSSs can help generate a pipeline of sufficiently prepared projects, aggregate demand across buildings, and connect HOAs with banks and other financial institutions. This can reduce transaction costs for lenders, particularly in a market where individual MFAB renovation projects may otherwise be expensive to assess and administer. National frameworks should encourage partnerships between OSSs and financial institutions while safeguarding the independence of the advice they provide. Banks could, for example, contribute to the administrative costs associated with preparing and aggregating finance-ready renovation projects, provided that homeowners retain access to transparent and independent advice and are not steered towards a particular commercial provider. The European Commission explicitly identifies OSSs as a mechanism for activating and aggregating demand for renovation investment, while also encouraging cooperation with financial intermediaries.

8 **Connect OSSs to data, social services and financing**. The EPBD requires owners of buildings with very low EPC ratings (below C) to be invited to an OSS. Member States should make this referral operational through their EPC systems rather than relying on owners to seek assistance themselves. Similarly, appropriate data-sharing arrangements between OSSs and social services can help identify vulnerable households and connect them with renovation support. This should be designed with clear safeguards for data protection and consent. Links with renovation grant systems should also be strengthened: requiring or encouraging an OSS consultation before an application is submitted can help households understand their options, improve project quality, and reduce unsuccessful applications.



Phase 3: Consolidating quality and results

9 **Professionalise OSS staff**. Effective OSSs require more than just technical knowledge. Advisers working with apartment buildings need to understand financing and regulation, but also collective decision-making, community engagement and mediation. National training frameworks and recognised professional standards can help ensure consistent service quality while creating more stable career paths for OSS staff. The involvement of social workers can also be important to reach energy-poor households.

10 **Monitor outcomes and use the evidence to improve policy**. National monitoring should go beyond counting consultations. It should track how OSSs contribute to the renovation pipeline: buildings engaged, positive HOA decisions, projects prepared, finance secured, renovations completed, energy savings achieved, and vulnerable households supported. Where possible, these indicators should connect with national building and renovation databases. Lithuania's monitoring of renovated buildings, including their energy performance before and after renovation, provides a useful starting point. Regular evaluation should then be used not only to justify continued funding, but to identify which services and delivery models are producing results.

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3. Neighbourhood energy sufficiency roadmaps as a planning tool for municipalities

Why the neighbourhood scale matters now

Many of the challenges facing municipalities cannot be addressed effectively one building at a time. The neighbourhood scale provides a practical middle ground between individual renovation projects and city-wide strategies: it is large enough to reveal patterns in energy demand, building performance, vulnerability and infrastructure needs, while remaining small enough for municipalities to work directly with residents, HOAs and local service providers.

A neighbourhood perspective can first help municipalities identify where intervention is most urgent. Combining information on building performance, energy use and energy poverty can reveal concentrations of worst-performing buildings and vulnerable households that may not be visible through individual applications alone. This allows municipalities **to prioritise areas where renovation can simultaneously reduce energy demand, protect households from high energy costs, and contribute to wider energy-security objectives**. The NESR approach explicitly encourages municipalities to combine technical and social data, and to tailor interventions to different parts of a neighbourhood rather than applying the same approach everywhere.

This is particularly relevant for energy security and affordability. Recent price shocks and the move away from Russian fossil fuels have highlighted the exposure of households living in inefficient buildings. Income support and heating allowances can protect households in the short term, but they do not address the underlying energy demand of the building stock.

The neighbourhood scale is also increasingly important for electrification and local energy infrastructure. As heating, mobility and electricity generation become more closely interconnected, decisions taken at building level can have consequences for the wider distribution network. Renovating buildings before replacing heating systems can reduce future peak electricity demand; rooftop solar can be planned with available network capacity in mind; and electric-vehicle charging can be managed to avoid unnecessary reinforcement. **A neighbourhood roadmap can help municipalities coordinate demand reduction, electrification and local renewable energy with electricity and district heating operators, rather than treating each investment separately**. The Elektrėnai roadmap, for example, combines building renovation with changes to district heating, rooftop solar and managed electric vehicle charging. This also creates opportunities for demand-side flexibility. Once municipalities understand where energy demand is concentrated and how it may change after renovation, they are better placed to consider when and where electricity use can be shifted or reduced.

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Finally, working on the neighbourhood scale makes it possible to address **climate resilience and summer comfort alongside winter energy poverty**. Poor housing conditions are not only associated with the difficulty of keeping homes warm. Overheating is becoming increasingly relevant, particularly in dense urban areas with limited shade and green space. In the Elektrėnai resident survey (Elektrėnai NESR), 67% of respondents considered shared outdoor spaces very important for comfort on hot days, rising to 90% among respondents with disabilities. Dense districts such as Józsefváros already experience urban heat island effects. A neighbourhood approach can combine building-level measures such as shading and insulation with interventions in public and green space that cannot be delivered by individual homeowners.

The value of the neighbourhood approach is therefore not simply that it aggregates buildings. **It allows municipalities to connect building renovation with social vulnerability, energy infrastructure and climate resilience, and to decide where different interventions should happen first.**

Energy sufficiency as a policy strategy

In ComActivate, energy sufficiency is defined in a practical sense as being about ensuring that every household has enough energy for a decent quality of life, while avoiding energy use that does not contribute further to personal wellbeing (BPIE, 2025). It therefore has a minimum and a maximum: the minimum is a decent standard of heating, cooling and electricity for all households, which is relevant in a region where low consumption often reflects underheating rather than efficiency; the upper boundary means avoiding energy use that does not further improve household comfort, health or basic living conditions.

Energy sufficiency complements energy efficiency by asking a different question. **Energy efficiency focuses on reducing the energy required to provide a service; energy sufficiency considers how much energy service is actually needed to ensure a decent standard of living.**

The NESR Guidelines distinguish between four types of sufficiency measures (ComActivate, 2026b): dimensional measures, which match the scale of an energy service to actual need; **cooperative measures**, which encourage shared use of services or resources; **usage measures**, which reduce unnecessary duration or intensity of energy use; and **organisational measures**, which organise buildings, spaces and daily activities in ways that reduce demand. Examples range from heating only occupied areas and using passive cooling to sharing certain facilities or organising services so that residents need to travel less.

For public authorities, however, the most important point is not the classification itself but the **hierarchy it introduces into investment decisions**. The first priority is to make better use of the buildings and spaces that already exist – for example by bringing vacant homes back into use, adapting underused spaces, or reducing unnecessary heated or cooled floor areas. Reuse and adaptation should come before new construction is considered. The Guidelines therefore place improving and optimising the existing stock ahead of building new capacity.

Applied at neighbourhood level, this approach broadens renovation planning beyond individual energy-efficiency measures. A municipality can ask not only how to renovate each building, but also **which buildings should be tackled first, which spaces are underused, how passive cooling and green infrastructure can reduce summer demand, how shared services could work, and how mobility or public-space planning can reduce energy use without reducing quality of life**. The NESR Guidelines explicitly encourage municipalities to extend the approach beyond housing to energy systems, mobility, and public and green spaces, recognising that neighbourhood design influences both energy demand and residents' wellbeing.

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What a Neighbourhood Energy Sufficiency Roadmap involves

An NESR sets out the current situation, the desired future state and the steps needed to move from one to the other, with energy efficiency and energy sufficiency as its two main pillars. It is developed by municipal staff together with the OSS and the HOAs of the buildings concerned, and it can later be extended to cover local energy supply, mobility, and public and green spaces. The ComActivate Guidelines organise the process into six stages.

Stage	What it involves	Output
1 Understanding the neighbourhood	A walk through the area and conversations with housing staff, building managers and other local actors, before any data analysis	Local knowledge not found in databases
2 Profile and technical assessment	Location, demographics, incomes and energy poverty, housing stock and tenure, energy performance, climate risks, existing plans and funding	A shared evidence base
3 Setting priorities	Findings are grouped and scored for urgency, such as the number of households affected and risks to health or cost, and for feasibility, such as available funding and action within 6 to 12 months	Three to five priorities, at least one on sufficiency, and a watchlist of issues that need national action
4 Vision and goals	Goals aligned with the municipal climate plan, with a minimum and maximum range of energy use, and objectives that are specific, measurable, assigned, realistic and time-bound	Agreed goals
5 Action plan	Each objective broken down into activities with a lead actor, supporting actors, target group and timeline	An implementation plan
6 Outreach and monitoring	Accessible information, trusted channels, dialogue with residents, and indicators that track the participation of energy-poor households separately	A communication and monitoring framework

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The watchlist in Stage 3 is particularly relevant for national policymakers. It records urgent problems that municipalities cannot solve alone, such as eligibility rules or loan conditions, and these often affect energy-poor households most. NESRs can therefore provide ministries with structured evidence from the local level.

Good practice example from the pilots: The Elektrėnai roadmap

The Elektrėnai NESR covers 143 apartment buildings in the town centre, all connected to a gas-based district heating network. A technical survey estimates that full efficiency measures would reduce average heating demand from about 95 to 44 kWh per square metre per year. The roadmap recommends starting with the largest buildings, which make up 40% of buildings and 62% of heated floor area, switching district heating from gas to biomass, installing rooftop solar, and using load management for electric vehicle charging to avoid grid reinforcement. It sets out 6 to 12 months of preparation, up to five years of works, and at least ten years of monitoring. Its action plan includes forming a renovation committee in each building, identifying basements and storage rooms that can be removed from the heated area, workshops on reducing energy use without losing comfort, and a requirement for contractors to show in their tenders how their designs minimise energy demand. A survey of 87 households informed the goals for shared spaces, with shade, seating and maintenance identified as priorities (Elektrėnai NESR).

Institutionalising Neighbourhood Energy Sufficiency Roadmaps

An NESR becomes part of regular municipal practice when it is formally adopted, assigned to a responsible unit, linked to the municipal budget, supported by an OSS, and reviewed at defined intervals. Institutionalisation therefore requires more than adopting a roadmap: municipalities need the administrative capacity, data and technical expertise to implement and update it over time. It also has to be continuously synchronised with other existing municipal plans and strategies.

This starts with **clear responsibility and coordination**. A designated coordinator needs the authority to work across housing, energy, social services and urban planning. The municipality also needs access to relevant data, including building registers, energy performance certificates, district-heating consumption, and information on households receiving heating support. An OSS is needed to engage residents and HOAs, while technical expertise is required to analyse the building stock, assess options, and update the roadmap as conditions change. The availability of qualified local experts to continue this work beyond the project period has been identified as one of the main challenges (ComActivate, 2025). Smaller municipalities are unlikely to maintain all of this expertise in-house and may therefore need shared regional support or assistance from national energy agencies.

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Digital tools can reduce the effort required, provided they are maintained and updated. For example, 3D neighbourhood models can be used to help estimate building-level energy use and renewable-energy potential, and to support the preparation and revision of local roadmaps. Their long-term value, however, depends on continued access, maintenance and integration into municipal planning processes.

The **EU policy framework already provides a basis for neighbourhood-level planning**. Annex II of the EPBD requires NBRPs to set out how Member States promote district and neighbourhood approaches, which may also take account of sufficiency (BPIE, 2024). Article 17 provides for stronger support for integrated district renovation programmes, while Article 18 allows OSSs to accompany such programmes and recognises them as one of the criteria for locating OSS. The EED also requires larger municipalities to prepare local heating and cooling plans. An NESR can therefore serve as a practical local instrument for bringing these different requirements together.

The starting point nevertheless differs across the three countries. Lithuania has supported municipal neighbourhood renovation programmes since 2016, covering buildings together with surrounding yards, streets and public lighting. In Bulgaria, neighbourhood approaches have not featured prominently in national energy and renovation strategies, while in Hungary stakeholders did not expect the NBRP to include such an approach (BPIE, 2025). This means that the institutional pathway for NESRs will need to reflect national circumstances, but the underlying principle is the same: neighbourhood planning needs a formal place in municipal governance, access to data and expertise, and a clear link to national renovation and energy policy.

A blueprint for local governments

Municipalities can use NESRs to turn broad renovation objectives into concrete neighbourhood-level delivery plans. The process should build on existing data as well as EU and national strategies, involve residents from the outset, and give the OSS a clear role in implementation.

1. **Select a priority neighbourhood based on available data**. Identify areas where the worst-performing apartment buildings coincide with high energy poverty, drawing on energy performance certificates, heating compensation data and district heating consumption as well as other relevant local information. Where possible, prioritise areas where the OSS already has established contacts with HOAs.

2. **Assign clear political and administrative responsibility**. Designate a political lead and a municipal coordinator with the authority to work across housing, energy, social services and urban planning. Clear ownership is essential if the roadmap is to influence decisions across departments rather than remain a standalone document.

3. **Build a shared evidence base within existing planning processes**. Combine existing municipal data with site visits, technical assessments of the building stock and input from residents, without creating a parallel planning process. Where municipalities already have Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAPs) and local heating and cooling plans, the NESR should function as a neighbourhood-level extension or implementation layer, translating broader municipal objectives into more detailed priorities and actions for specific areas. The emphasis should be on integrating processes rather than creating an additional planning exercise.

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4. **Agree priorities with residents and local stakeholders**. Use building-level meetings and targeted outreach to understand residents' needs, including those of older and vulnerable households. Translate the findings into a limited set of clear priorities and record barriers that cannot be resolved locally for follow-up with the relevant national public authorities.

5. **Formally adopt the roadmap and connect it to municipal planning and budgets**. An NESR should be approved through a formal municipal decision and linked to relevant climate, heating and cooling, urban development and budgetary processes. This helps ensure continuity beyond individual projects or political terms.

6. **Give the OSS a formal role in implementation**. Translate the roadmap into an operational mandate for the local OSS, including support for HOAs and renovation committees, resident engagement, and preparation of renovation projects. The roadmap's objectives should be reflected in the OSS's work programme.

7. **Coordinate early with grid and heat operators**. Share the roadmap's projections of heat and electricity demand with the electricity distribution company and the district heating operator, so that insulation, heating system changes, rooftop solar and charging infrastructure are aligned with network plans.

8. **Use the roadmap to support investment**. Use NESR priorities to prepare funding applications, group buildings where joint approaches are possible, and ensure that procurement supports demand-reduction objectives. This can help municipalities connect neighbourhood priorities with national renovation programmes, the Social Climate Fund and cohesion funding.

9. **Monitor progress, review and replicate**. Track participation and implementation, including the participation of energy-poor and vulnerable households, and hold regular review meetings with OSS staff and a residents' representative. The roadmap should be updated periodically and the lessons used to replicate and extend the approach to additional neighbourhoods.

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4. Conclusion: From pilot to policy

Successful renovation depends not only on funding and technical solutions, but also on permanent institutions capable of turning them into projects on the ground. In MFABs, HOAs need support to organise collective decisions, navigate financing and procurement, and manage complex renovation processes. At the same time, municipalities need a way to identify where intervention is most urgent and to coordinate building renovation with energy poverty, heating, electricity networks and wider neighbourhood priorities.

The experience of Burgas, Józsefváros, Elektrėnai and Kaišiadorys shows that **continuity is critical.** OSSs are more likely to endure when they are embedded in public institutions, connected to other municipal services, supported by stable funding and able to engage residents directly. Project funding can help establish and test new services, but it does not provide the long-term certainty required to retain staff, expertise and relationships with HOAs. The closure of the earlier RenoPont service in Józsefváros illustrates this risk: when funding ends, municipalities can lose not only a service but also the institutional knowledge and trust that have taken years to build.

NESRs can help municipalities move from individual renovation projects towards a more integrated planning process at neighbourhood level. By bringing together information on building performance, energy poverty, energy demand and infrastructure, they can help connect existing planning processes around renovation, heating and electricity, climate resilience and local development, while identifying priority neighbourhoods and sequencing investments. Their value therefore lies in complementing and operationalising existing municipal plans, such as SECAPs or local heating and cooling plans, rather than creating parallel processes. To do this effectively, they need political ownership, clear administrative responsibility, access to data and expertise, links to municipal budgets and plans, and a defined implementation role for the local OSS.

Renovating buildings is a core component for the EU to meet its decarbonisation targets, meaning that institutionalisation of both instruments is now needed at both national and local level. National governments need to create the enabling framework: a clear mandate for OSSs, minimum service standards, stable multiannual financing, predictable renovation programmes, links to data and social services, and stronger connections between public support and private finance. Municipalities, in turn, need to translate these frameworks into local delivery by identifying priority neighbourhoods, integrating NESRs into existing planning and budgeting processes, coordinating with residents and infrastructure operators, and giving OSSs a formal role in implementation.

The current EU policy framework provides an opportunity to make this shift. The recast EPBD places stronger emphasis on OSSs and district and neighbourhood approaches, while NBRPs can embed these delivery structures within national renovation strategies. The Social Climate Fund can support both structural renovation measures for vulnerable households and the advisory services needed to help them access those measures. **The key is not only to finance more renovation, but to ensure that the institutions needed to deliver renovation remain in place between individual funding calls and policy cycles.**

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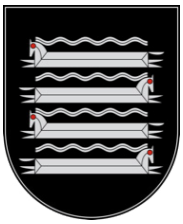


















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