



EU Green Deal initiatives for buildings are an opportunity to build in fire resilience.

The COVID-19 crisis has shown us the importance of living in healthy and safe buildings as many of us transitioned to working remotely and spent a substantial time home¹. In a post-COVID-19 European Union, the European Commission's "Next Generation EU" plans to inject €750 billion to support economic recovery². This recovery instrument will support economic activities aligned with the EU Green Deal's priorities, including building renovation³. We welcome this decision, which furthers the European Commission's objective to make the EU climate-neutral by 2050 and can reinforce the EU Green Deal measures previously announced for the construction sector:

- The Renovation Wave, aimed at least at doubling the annual building stock renovation rate in Member States;
- Strict implementation of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) at national level;
- A new comprehensive Strategy for a Sustainable Built Environment to promote circularity throughout a building's entire lifecycle.

While these actions will clearly lead to significant positive changes, they could be even more impactful. Buildings consume 40% of the EU energy⁴, yet 75% of them are energy inefficient⁵. The construction sector is responsible for 36% of all carbon emissions in the EU⁶. There is huge potential for improvement. Fire Safe Europe believes that with this new and welcomed focus on buildings, the European Commission has a once in a decade opportunity to build resilience into our building stock. And in addition to increasing energy performance and sustainability, we have a chance to build safety in and make buildings fit for the future by integrating fire resilience. Fire resilience is the capacity of a building to resist to, adapt to and recover from a fire and resume to its essential functions – timely and efficiently.

¹ <https://www.fire-magazine.com/covid-19-does-lockdown-pose-a-greater-fire-safety-risk>

² https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_20_941

³ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_20_941

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-green-deal-communication_en.pdf

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/info/news/driving-energy-efficiency-european-building-stock-new-recommendations-modernisation-buildings-2019-jun-21_en

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/info/news/new-rules-greener-and-smarter-buildings-will-increase-quality-life-all-europeans-2019-apr-15_en



Fire resilience is currently the missing part of the sustainable buildings puzzle – a building is not truly sustainable if it can burn to the ground⁷. Building fires can release effluents and by-products⁸ that contaminate the soil, the air and the groundwater as well as threaten our health and well-being. The pollution and destruction triggered by building fires can truly disrupt our community's life – impeding transport and mobility, closing schools and public offices; bringing life to a standstill or rushing us to find coping mechanisms. And the economic impact of building fires can be severe: business closure, financial loss and job loss; each taking a substantial toll on people.

Boosting energy performance and renovation sometimes implies the introduction of new materials and technologies which can significantly increase a building's sustainability. Yet, the fire risks associated with modern methods of construction and new materials are not always adequately assessed. Accounting for these risks in relevant legislation and in long-term strategies both at European and at national level is an opportunity to seize to bring buildings' sustainability to the next level. The recently revised EPBD recommends that EU countries address fire safety not only in long-term renovation strategies but also when buildings undergo major renovation. Now is the time to put this into practice.

The European Commission's Roadmap on "A Renovation Wave initiative for public and private buildings" stresses that "[deeper renovation is] a must for a net climate-neutral EU and a clear win-win investment priority for green, digital and fair recovery". Additionally, its recovery package focuses on building renovation as one of its priorities to support economic growth. Thanks to these stimulus measures and through the Renovation Wave, we expect a doubling of renovation rates, so it is fundamental to get fire safety right. That's why we encourage EU actors to make the most of this unique occasion by investing in safety and fire resilience amid these deep renovations.

The circularity of building materials is also under the spotlight and for good reason. Level(s), the EU's new sustainable buildings' reporting framework, is presented as one of the potential tools to assess buildings' embodied environmental impact⁹ and the new comprehensive Strategy for a Sustainable Built Environment envisions its use as adequate to conduct life cycle assessment in public procurement¹⁰. Level(s) currently does not account for a building's fire resilience or fire safety. Considering the potential impacts fire can have on buildings' sustainability, it is vital to address this gap and guarantee circularity throughout the entire lifecycle of a building, including in case of a fire. We would encourage the European Commission to ensure that reporting frameworks like Level(s) take into account buildings' fire resilience in the future.

We urge the European Union and Member States to recognise the interconnectedness between fire resilience and sustainability. Making sure buildings' fire safety and fire resilience is accounted for in this transition to greener constructions will help reduce carbon emissions, increase energy efficiency, material circularity and climate-neutrality.

⁷ <https://firesafeeurope.eu/fire-resilience-opportunity-minimise-building-fires-impacts/>

⁸ <https://www.structuremag.org/?p=10431>

⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/circular-economy/pdf/leading_way_global_circular_economy.pdf

¹⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2020/EN/COM-2020-98-F1-EN-MAIN-PART-1.PDF>



With the EU Green deal, the European Commission and Member States should seize the opportunity to ensure fire resilience is reflected in all relevant legislation and regulation, including:

- In the Renovation Wave, by encouraging the insertion of fire resilience in national long-term renovation strategies, and by providing incentives within the recovery package for renovations improving fire safety and fire resilience, for instance through the foreseen revision of state aid rules;
- In the implementation of the EPBD at the national level, by ensuring EU countries follow the revised EPBD recommendations on fire safety (Article 2a paragraph 7 and Article 7 paragraph 5¹¹);
- In the new comprehensive Strategy for a Sustainable Built Environment, by providing for fire resilience in buildings lifecycle assessment and by updating Level(s) to factor in fire resilience.

We call on the European Union to integrate fire resilience in the EU Green Deal measures and recovery package, in order to minimise the potential impacts of building fires on the environment, on society and on the economy, thereby enabling us to live a truly sustainable future.

¹¹ <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/PE-4-2018-INIT/en/pdf>