

RENOVATION WAVE

# Eurogypsum's initial remarks on the envisioned Renovation Wave

## *Boosting buildings' energy performance is both a necessity and an opportunity to improve health and comfort*

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The European Green Deal<sup>1</sup> adopted in December 2019 represents a major compass for public authorities, economic operators and European citizens towards protecting our climate and promoting sustainable and circular economic models. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemics, the ambitious EU Recovery Plan<sup>2</sup> presented in May 2020 duly recognises Green Deal principles as key drivers to prioritise public investment. Energy efficiency improvements of buildings are very high on this agenda, with the proposed "Renovation Wave".

Eurogypsum, the European manufacturers association for plaster and plasterboard products, welcomes the priority given to the Renovation Wave both in the European Green Deal and the Recovery Plan, and thanks the European Commission for consulting stakeholders on a roadmap for this initiative.

While we would refer to our more comprehensive position paper on the European Green Deal<sup>3</sup>, we would like to share here a few considerations on the content of the proposed roadmap on the Renovation Wave.

We share the Commission's analysis about the **relevance of renovation** as an effective way to improve energy performance and reduce greenhouse gas emissions of buildings, as well as to cut consumers' energy bills. Renovation is at the core of the circular economy model, since it allows longer lifespans for existing buildings while aiming to approach the environmental footprint of newly constructed buildings. This increases the lifetime of structural elements in buildings, therefore reducing the need for material extraction and emissions in the construction phase.

**Gypsum** is a cost-efficient, low carbon, sustainable mineral that has been used for centuries to produce construction materials such as plaster, stucco or plaster-based products. These materials fulfil all requirements to create a sustainable, safe, resilient, comfortable and aesthetically modern living environment for all. Due to their properties and ability to redesign buildings' interiors in the most flexible way, gypsum solutions are particularly well suited for renovation works. Furthermore, the lightweight gypsum-based construction materials allow forward-looking vertical extensions of buildings, thereby lowering the footprint of construction and developments.

<sup>1</sup> European Commission: "The European Green Deal" (COM(2019)640), 11 December 2019.

<sup>2</sup> European Commission: "Europe's moment: Repair and Prepare for the Next Generation" (COM(2020)456), 27 May 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Eurogypsum: "Modern, comfortable, decarbonised and circular buildings", 3 April 2020:

<http://www.eurogypsum.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Eurogypsum-statement-on-Green-Deal-FINAL.pdf>

We agree that the **current rates of building renovation in Europe are too low** to achieve the European Green Deal's objectives and must be increased. At least a doubling of current rates appears as a necessity. For this to happen we would like to underline the following points:

1. **Long Term Renovation Strategies (LTRS)** should become operational plans for reaching the 2050 ambition and Member States should be asked to be more specific on how they can meet their 2030 and 2040 milestones. Measures and financing should become more specific to the segments and ownership structure. Minimum energy performance standards should be introduced in order to phase out worst performing buildings, leaving enough time for owners to adapt.
2. **Multiple benefits** should be better integrated and quantified in the design of the LTRS. We would also like to stress the societal importance and clear benefits for individual citizens of better performing, comfortable, renovated buildings. Eurogypsum believes the Renovation Wave is a unique opportunity for European citizens to maximise the benefits of any renovation by integrating measures that enhance their health, safety (such as fire resistance) and well-being. For example, ensuring adequate acoustic improvement to reduce excess noise and increase speech intelligibility is proven to increase academic performance. Improving the acoustic performance of multi-family buildings should go hand in hand with energy improvements.
3. Given its ability to **quickly create local jobs**, the Renovation Wave should be implemented immediately. The Recovery Plan should enable public renovation projects to be opened to local authorities and cities as soon as possible. The construction sector is indeed a major driver for our economy and job creation. It is estimated that for an investment of € 1 million in building energy renovation, 18 jobs are created on average<sup>4</sup>. The industry has been substantially impacted by the Covid-19 crisis, particularly in certain European geographies. Promoting building renovation can indeed be highly beneficial to restore and create jobs in the sector and generally stimulate our economic recovery.
4. **Industrialisation and use of modern technologies** should be promoted We share the Commission's views about the positive impact certain industry trends can have on facilitating renovation. Industrialisation of processes, such as prefabrication of building elements, is an important development in gypsum product manufacturing, and can certainly help speeding up renovation works. The use of digital tools, such as BIM or 3D printing, is progressively taking up in our industry, and can optimise the design, operation and maintenance of buildings.
5. Financing: Concerning the type of support needed to mobilise investment in building renovation, we believe **a combination of incentives and supportive regulation** should be the basis for renovation strategies with a long-term visibility, in order to overcome these obstacles. Availability of, and easy access to the right financial tools will be decisive to trigger private investment in renovation. In this respect we believe that a dedicated EU Renovation Fund should be installed in order to facilitate project development by local promoters and encourage local banks to be more active in the renovation market
6. **Public sector** to be back in the lead: The public sector can play a major role in organising the renovation of public buildings, such as hospitals and schools, therefore encouraging sustainable and circular practices that are replicable to private buildings.
7. A bigger role for **renovation services and aggregators of renovation projects**: The decision-making process regarding renovations of buildings is complex; a successful Renovation Wave will need to involve the entire value chain, from building owners, tenants, architects, product manufacturers, promoters and construction workers, as well as public authorities, urban designers and the financial sector. This calls for greater visibility over the renovation targets. At the same time, the essential role of local aggregators such as one stop shops, should be recognised.

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<sup>4</sup> Source: Renovate Europe, 2020.

A side effect of the imposed lockdowns in Europe during the Covid-19 crisis was to give many Europeans a chance to appreciate their homes – and better perceive their limitations. Now the time is ripe to **move gears and make renovations happen**, as a crucial contribution to Europe’s drive towards climate neutrality and a concrete improvement to citizens’ health and comfort.

Eurogypsum thanks the Commission in advance for taking our contribution into account and looks forward to further exchanges on this major initiative for Europe.

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**Eurogypsum** is a European federation of national associations of producers of gypsum products (i.e. plaster and plasterboard). It is one of the few fully integrated industries (from cradle to cradle) within the construction products field. The companies which mine gypsum also process it and manufacture the value-added products and systems used extensively in construction and other industries. With a turnover of EUR 7 billion, the European gypsum and anhydrite industry operates some 160 factories and 154 quarries and generates employment directly to 28,000 persons and indirectly for 300,000 persons. The Gypsum industry provides jobs to 1,100,000 plasterers and plasterboard installers. It trains around 25,000 persons per year across Europe.

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