

ECI DAY 2025

SESSION

Empowering the European Citizens' Initiative: Strengthening Support across Member States

Tuesday 18 March | 11:15 – 12:30

(1) **Shortly present your ongoing ECI** : (title, objectives, etc.)

Title: [HouseEurope! Power to Renovation](#)

Objectives:

HouseEurope! wants to create incentives that make the renovation and transformation of existing buildings the new norm — instead of their demolition for financial speculation. Because the demolition of existing buildings is as outdated as food-waste, animal testing, fast-fashion and single-use plastics. The goal is to preserve homes and communities, ensure a fairer and more local building industry, save energy and resources, and preserve our memories and history.

State of play:

Today, buildings are treated as investments rather than spaces for people to live in. Due to financial speculation, millions of square meters sit empty and ruined or are demolished and replaced: from functioning family homes to abandoned industrial and office spaces. For real estate speculators, every building is up for demolition!

By 2050, we will have demolished 2 billion square meters of existing space in Europe. This is the equivalent of half of Germany's building stock and more than Paris or Berlin in their entirety. Instead, we will have built billions of square meters of new space as a replacement for what was already there. This practice creates social, economic, environmental, and cultural problems as demolition comes with a loss of homes, jobs, energy, and history.

The current system is designed to demolish and build anew. This approach is driven by a lack of regulations and incentives that favor new construction. Existing buildings are replaced with high-end developments, putting profit over people. However, the relation between speculation and redevelopment, with the needs of communities and ecosystems, is complex.

While development is essential for our society, it's equally crucial to ensure that it doesn't come at the expense of existing communities, local economies, our planetary ecosystem, and history. Thus, our aim is to shed light on the harmful practices of speculative real estate development that are the reason for demolition and that impact each and every one of us.

The building industry's impact on our lives is significant, and it is therefore urgent that it becomes part of our daily conversations. It stands as one of the most profitable and vital markets within the EU, yet it is also one of the most significant contributors to CO2 emissions and energy consumption. According to the European Commission, buildings are responsible for approximately 36% of CO2 emissions and 40% of total energy consumption in the EU, representing 35% of energy-related EU emissions in 2021. Moreover, the sector generates over 35% of the EU's total waste, highlighting its substantial environmental footprint.

Yet, we maintain a system in which buying something new is cheaper than caring for the old. This system prioritizes financial profit over the well-being of the people and the planet. A system in which renovation and adaptation have taken a backseat to demolition and new construction.

The renovation of public and private buildings presents enormous potential. The goal of EU member states to renovate our existing buildings by 2050 can be translated into tangible numbers: Currently, only 25% of the European building stock has been renovated, meaning that 75% of the work is still ahead of us. At the current annual renovation rate of 1%, it would take three times longer than we have to reach the agreed goals. Therefore, we face a reality: we need to triple the renovation rate to reach our goals!

To do so, we must recognize the value of existing buildings and prioritize their renovation. We demand a Right to Reuse for existing buildings based on three key pillars: (I) tax reductions for renovation works and reused materials, (II) fair rules to assess not only the risks but the potentials of existing buildings, and (III) new values for the embedded CO2 in existing structures. Furthermore, subsidies for the renovation and transformation of existing buildings and not only for new construction.

(2) **Give examples of and/or ideas** for getting support across Member States and the strategies you use in this regard (working together with civil society organisations, local and regional authorities, economic and social councils, any other stakeholders)?

We have national partners in all 27 countries. Before we launched the ECI we started building a network of partners:

(1) institutional partners such as architecture chambers, environmental associations and exhibition spaces

(2) supporting practices and initiatives such as architecture firms working in that field or movements against the demolition of buildings

(3) educational partners such as universities and schools that organize thematic classes