

The Renovation Wave will play a key role in Europe's economic and social recovery



□ In this interview, [Enrico Rossi](#) (IT/PES), a member of Signa Municipal Council (Florence) and former president of the Tuscany Region (2010-2020), answers six questions about his opinion on the EU's Renovation Wave initiative, adopted in March by the European Committee of the Regions. The Renovation Wave, [launched on 14 October 2020 by the European Commission](#), aims to improve the energy performance of the EU's building stock and is a key pillar of the [European Green Deal](#) roadmap. With buildings accounting for 40% of Europe's energy consumption and 36% of greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), their renovation is crucial to making the EU climate-neutral by 2050. In [the opinion](#) drawn up by Enrico Rossi, cities and regions call for a revision of state aid schemes, more flexible budget rules to maximise investments and renovations, subnational targets for the renovation of buildings, and the integration of renewable energy sources in renovation projects. The CoR and the European Commission have just signed an action plan to accelerate the renovation and decarbonisation of the EU's building stock.

Enrico Rossi, you started working on the Renovation Wave months ago, even before the publication of the document by the European Commission, recognising its importance. Why do you think this strategy is important for European cities and regions in 2021?

I see the Renovation Wave as pivotal to the success of the European Green Deal and to a strong economic and social recovery for Europe. Cities and regions need to pay close attention to this strategy for two reasons.

The first is undoubtedly the climate. Europe's buildings are currently responsible for 40% of energy consumption and 36% of greenhouse gas emissions. It is clear that achieving the objective of climate neutrality by 2050 requires a veritable revolution in urban planning and architecture geared towards the green and sustainable transition of our regions and cities right from the design phase of projects, including by promoting and encouraging the reuse of materials.

The second reason is fostering an economic recovery aimed at tackling inequalities. The Renovation Wave is an opportunity to restart the engines of the economy, creating jobs and regenerating spaces in our cities. It is estimated that its deployment could generate around four million new jobs. At the same time, the strategy is an ideal tool for investment in social housing and public buildings, from hospitals to schools. Therefore, economic development, energy sustainability and strengthening social cohesion and solidarity.

The Renovation Wave is seen as a perfect example of green recovery, where

climate-related choices meet the need to revitalise local economies: what conditions are required to make this potential a reality?

The resources available to the EU in the coming years are extraordinary, when you consider the [Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027](#) and [Next Generation EU](#), also known as the Recovery Plan. Together they amount to around EUR 1.8 trillion. However, if we are to make full use of this huge availability of resources and the opportunities presented by the Renovation Wave, the regions and cities must be involved in the planning and implementation of the national recovery and resilience plans.

We are strongly calling for multilevel governance, including with regard to funding. In particular, a technical assistance tool, accessible to all regional and local authorities for the implementation of the strategy, and more flexible budgetary rules for administrations would be very useful. I am thinking of the decentralised local model of the [ELENA](#) (European Local ENergy Assistance) facility run by the European Investment Bank (EIB), and greater synergy between ELENA and the EU's programme for research and innovation [Horizon Europe](#), making it possible to move from good practices to large-scale investments. The EIB should become a climate bank for the European Union and make financing more accessible, including through forms of decentralisation on the ground, possibly following the model of regional one-stop-shops or ad hoc offices dedicated to specific projects.

When we talk about the Renovation Wave, we think immediately of buildings, but your opinion also focuses a good deal on neighbourhoods and cities. Why do you think this aspect is so important?

Up to now, energy efficiency strategies have focused on individual buildings, or even individual apartments. But the Renovation Wave gives us the opportunity to act on a different scale. If this strategy is to work effectively, it will have to be able to produce a green wave in whole neighbourhoods. This is why we welcome the Commission communication, which highlights the importance of the district approach and energy communities.

We have an extraordinary opportunity to promote urban regeneration, and push towards "zero consumption" of new land and the increasing use of nature-based solutions, as part of an ambitious circular economy strategy.

Recently, the European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen launched an initiative called the "[New European Bauhaus](#)". How does this tie in with the Renovation Wave?

The New European Bauhaus is a very interesting idea that can give a soul to urban regeneration and help radically rethink our neighbourhoods, our suburbs and our historic centres. I think that the New European Bauhaus and the Renovation Wave can intersect on some of the points I mentioned before: the district and energy community approach, and the involvement of the regions and cities and the public. We can harness the creative potential of the best brains in European society, putting it at the service of the major transformation that the [European Green Deal](#) aims to achieve.

In your opinion, you call for enhanced cooperation on the Renovation Wave between the European Committee of the Regions and the other European institutions, starting with the Commission. What can the CoR do to promote and support the implementation of the Renovation Wave?

The Committee's mission is to give a voice to the regions and cities, including the more rural and remote ones, in the EU's decision-making and legislative process. The Renovation Wave has generated interest from the Commission in particular, which recognises local and regional authorities as an indispensable level of government for the implementation of the strategy. The two institutions [have just signed an action plan for enhanced cooperation](#), aimed at speeding up implementation of Green Deal policies, by creating the conditions in terms of political will, technical capacity and absorption of EU and national funds. The action plan also aims to ensure that new legislation is fit for rapid implementation, working to pre-empt potential obstacles and constraints when moving from the EU to the national, regional and local levels; it also seeks to derive the maximum benefit from bottom-up initiatives, promoting synergies between different levels of government and strengthening the relationship with citizens.

You stress that the Renovation Wave strategy should be underpinned not only by the European Green Deal but also by the European Pillar of Social Rights. How important is the social dimension in this urban revolution?

The social dimension is crucial. The battle against the climate crisis must be a battle against inequalities and for social justice. We must not leave anyone behind. Some 17% of Europeans live in overcrowded homes and there are 34 million citizens in energy poverty. The Renovation Wave must contribute to implementing the right of everyone to have affordable and healthy housing, in accordance with [Principle 19 of the European Pillar of Social Rights](#). To give an example here, we need to curb the phenomenon of "renovictions", which are forcing many people to leave their homes because they are unable to cope with rent increases resulting from renovations that owners wanted to carry out.

There is also the difficulty for many of our companies to tackle the challenges posed by change and the need to protect our workforce by promoting socially sustainable restructuring pathways. The whole construction sector should be helped to overcome the gap in knowledge, skills and technology and facilitate the start-up of innovative new businesses.

Contact:

PresseCdr@cor.europa.eu