

Delivering the Paris Agreement – The Role of the Built Environment

As global leaders convene in Poland for COP24, the World Green Building Council's Europe Network (WorldGBC Europe) urges the European Commission to recognise the vital role that the built environment sector can play in delivering the requirements of the EU2050 long-term strategy.

WorldGBC Europe represents Green Building Councils in over 20 countries, 8 Regional Partners and over 4,500 diverse members across the construction and real estate sector. We are the common voice for a sustainable built environment in Europe.

- We have certified over 137,000,000m² of sustainable building space across Europe.
- We train over 10,000 construction and real estate professionals annually.
- We helped establish sustainable building policies in eleven countries last year alone.
- We commit to providing practical support to our sector to achieve the demands below.

The Paris Agreement demands a more ambitious built environment strategy

The importance of the construction and real estate sector in delivering the ambitions of the Paris Agreement and the UN Sustainable Development Goals is unparalleled. In the EU, the sector accounts for:

- 36% of all emissions.
- 40% of energy consumption.
- 50% of all raw material extraction.
- 1/3rd of all potable water usage.
- 18 million construction jobs.

The 2011 '2050 low-carbon economy roadmap' outlined a path towards a reduction of at least 80% in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and a cut of around 90% from buildings. We now know this does not go far enough. Although signatories to the Paris Agreement have pledged to keep temperature increases to between 1.5C and 2C, the recently published report from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says that going above 1.5C will significantly worsen the risks of drought, floods, extreme temperatures and poverty.

COP24 provides an opportunity to take stock and recognise the role of the built environment in delivering the urgent and unprecedented action that the IPCC report calls for. Working together to act now across all sectors and industries¹ means that we can achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050 and stay within 1.5C temperature rise. To achieve this, the EU's 2050 strategy must fully recognise the unique impact potential of the construction and real estate sector. The strategy must:

1. **Prioritise the Reduction of Operational Carbon Emissions, particularly through Increased Energy Efficiency**

Globally, [leading cities and companies are committing to a highly efficient and decarbonised building stock by 2050](#). EU buildings policy must continue to lead on the world stage. The EU is predicted to miss its 2020 energy efficiency targets because Europe's buildings are not being renovated at the rate and depth needed to achieve these targets. The Energy Efficiency Directive and the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) provide a

¹ We aim to ensure the essential contribution of the building environment to the Paris Agreement and acknowledge that ambitious actions are required in all sectors (also transport, industry and agriculture).

solid framework to achieve these targets; yet for this to happen strong implementation is required.

We urge the European Commission to work with countries, cities, companies and citizens to collectively deliver the requirements of these directives, ensuring that Member States are delivering highly ambitious nearly zero-energy buildings strategies and long-term national renovation strategies.

Critically important is the cooperation of these stakeholders to design and deliver ambitious long-term renovation strategies that increase the rate and depth of renovation, enabling the delivery of a highly efficient and decarbonised building stock. **Unless Member States are able to deliver strategies that support action at the local level, the energy savings and carbon reduction potential of our existing buildings will not be realised.**

As well as setting out clear roadmaps to 2050, with clear targets, milestones and measures that support local action, these strategies must also quantify **the wider socio-economic impacts of renovation: improved health and wellbeing, reduced fuel poverty and increased local economic activity.** The EU's 2050 strategy should build upon these social-economic benefits in order to create the political and consumer support needed for the climate transition.

Under the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive, all new buildings must be nearly zero-energy by the end of 2020. However, in order to achieve the Paris goals *and* limit global warming to 1.5C until 2100, the European Commission must urge Member States to develop and implement nearly zero energy strategies that go beyond the requirements of the Directive so that all new buildings are net zero carbon by 2030, in line with the goals of WorldGBC's advancing net zero project.

2) Address the full life-cycle impacts of the Built Environment sector

To achieve a net zero emissions circular economy, the 2050 strategy must unlock the potential of addressing the full life cycle of buildings, their impacts and opportunities, in addition to operational emissions. Emissions from the building sector are 50% of EU emissions if embodied emissions² – for example, the emissions associated with the extraction and processing of natural resources to manufacturing, transport and product delivery – are included. While global operational emissions are going down (1% decrease since 2010), construction-related emissions are going up (1.5% increase since 2010).

Embodied emissions are the next big global challenge for our sector, together with its wider life-cycle environmental impacts. Taking leadership on these global issues offers the EU significant opportunities for technological innovation and political and trade dialogue with China and US States who share the EU's desire to tackle these issues.

We support and commend the European Commission's efforts to establish '[Level\(s\)](#)' as the world's first regional framework to tackle these strategic issues for our sector. Level(s) has the potential to create a 'common European language' around life-cycle performance in terms of emissions, resource and water efficiency, health and comfort, resilience and asset value/cost - similar to how the EPBD has galvanised debate and action on energy efficiency.

However, far greater political support and resource will be needed if Level(s) is to create the impact we need it to. We stand committed to supporting the Commission with this challenge.

² *As defined in the European reference standard EN 15978: "Sustainability of construction works – Assessment of the environmental performance of building"

Signed by Green Building Councils and Partners Across Europe

