ComActivate Project: Resource Centers and Neighborhood Energy Sufficiency

Submitted By: Habitat for Humanity International - Europe and the Middle East

Organization Profile

Organization Name: Habitat for Humanity International - Europe and the Middle East (consortium lead)

Organization Type: Civil society

Website: https://www.habitat.org/emea

Practice Details

Country(ies): Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania

City(ies): Burgas, Budapest, Kaisiadorys, Elektrenai

Start Year: 2023 **Ongoing:** Yes **End Year:** N/A

Main Adequate Housing Components:



Housing Thematic Areas:

- Housing Affordability & Financing
- Housing Rights & Social Inclusion
- Housing Policy, Legislation & Governance
- Housing Data & Monitoring

Relevant SDGs:



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Problem & Context

Energy poverty in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) stems from high energy prices, low energy efficiency in housing, and fragmented ownership of multi-family apartment buildings (MFABs), where around 60% of the population lives. Unlike in Western Europe, common low-cost interventions have minimal impact, while impactful renovations are unaffordable for energy-poor homeowners. Privatization in the 1990s created complex ownership structures and homeowner associations (HOAs) that lack financial capacity, awareness, and decision-making efficiency. Existing policies fail to address these socio-technical and institutional barriers, offering no mechanisms to support collective renovation or mobilize investment. ComActivate's approach fills this gap by empowering HOAs, improving access to finance, and implementing cost-effective, high-impact energy efficiency measures, providing a sustainable model to lift households from energy poverty.

Solution Developed

Municipal capacity to tackle energy poverty, low renovation rates, and the lack of renewable energy solutions are addressed by institutionalizing Resource Centers (RCs) and developing Neighborhood Energy Sufficiency Roadmaps (NESRs).

RCs act as local hubs where residents, HOAs, and other stakeholders receive tailored guidance on technical, financial, and administrative aspects of renovation. By combining information services, training, and community engagement, RCs streamline the renovation processes, making them easier, more transparent, and inclusive, helping overcome barriers such as limited knowledge, lack of expertise, and uncertainty about financing.

Expanding the focus from single buildings to the neighborhood level creates a scalable renovation impact and fosters stronger community collaboration. Integrated with the concept of energy sufficiency, NESRs provide flexible solutions that address both building quality and residents' energy behavior – encouraging some to reduce overuse and others to save more. The roadmaps link energy efficiency, renewable energy integration, and long-term investment planning, forming a sustainable model for energy self-sufficiency.

Implementation

The RC institutionalization includes developing business and investment plans for the RCs, further strengthening political commitment for the implementation of the plans and building the operation and technical skills within municipalities to deliver services to the community. NESRs are being developed to analyze the selected building stock and provide recommendations on next steps towards the renovation process.

A wide range of actors are involved: municipalities provide regulatory support and integration with local strategies; financial institutions and energy companies help design and test financing

models; civil society organizations lead community outreach; and HOAs and residents are directly engaged in planning and decision-making.

The implementation process of ComActivate follows five main phases: 1. Establishing partnerships, identifying pilot areas, and preparing methodologies, 2. Institutionalizing RCs, 3. designing NESRs, 4. Delivering training, community engagement, and pilot renovations, 5. Launching policy and investment dialogues to ensure long-term sustainability.

This initiative is mainly supported by EU LIFE funding, and possible in-kind contributions from local partners. It further lies in cooperation agreements among public authorities – in specific municipalities, NGOs, and private actors, ensuring both financial sustainability and long-term impact, especially of the RCs.

Enablers & Obstacles

Implementation of RCs builds on strong municipal commitment and existing RCs, partnerships with NGOs and private companies. Capacity building, trained staff, and data from previous projects supported informed action.

Key challenges included staff turnover in the RCs, limited expertise, and fluctuating public funding for renovation resulting in reduced citizen interest. These were mitigated by expanding partnerships with technical experts, and further diversification of RC services, and maintaining outreach through flexible, multi-channel communication formats.

Main challenges for development of NESRs included limited awareness and experience in partner countries and difficulty identifying qualified stakeholders. To address this, international examples were presented to introduce the concept, build understanding, and spark discussions on local adaptation.

Results & Impact

The practice develops 3D neighborhood models to assess current energy use, potential savings, and RES generation capacity for MFABs. NESRs for energy-poor neighborhoods provide comprehensive framework for addressing energy inefficiency. The projected impact based on the pilots includes 33 GWh/year saved on primary energy, 96 GWh/year RES generated, 357 tCO2/year GHG emissions reduced, 31 mil EUR investments in energy efficiency, several policies and strategies adapted on EU and national level.

Activities target vulnerable energy-poor households in MFABs (often elderly individuals, low-income retirees, and single-parent households) and HOAs. These households are energy-poor, meaning they struggle to afford adequate heating, cooling, and electricity. The initiative engages these communities by facilitating homeowner meetings, providing technical advice, and supporting discussions within HOAs. The RCs provides comprehensive financial and technical assistance, particularly for energy-poor households. This holistic approach ensures that

residents not only benefit from improved energy efficiency but also experience a better quality of life due to reduced energy costs, improved living conditions, and greater financial stability.

In the longer term, the initiative strengthens community cooperation and stimulates green economic growth. Environmentally, it contributes to lower carbon emissions, higher energy efficiency, and progress toward climate neutrality and energy security.

Replication & Scale Up

The practices are now being tested in project pilot locations. Planned replication is for North Macedonia who already have RC established. The approach using RCs and NESRs are generally applicable to regions of CEE with similar housing challenges, including complex ownership structures and existence of HOAs that lack financial capacity, awareness, and decision-making efficiency. Crucial is the presence of subsidy/state funding for renovation, that can boost the work of the RC and possibly the implementation of the NESRs.

These housing practices have strong potential for replication in other similar context in the region of CEE and CIS. The replication can be ensured via collaboration with further municipalities within the pilots, with different projects addressing similar issues, and the international awareness raising about the approach. The project houses materials available publicly to provide guidance on establishing sustainable RCs and development of NESRs.

Policy Uptake

This housing practice is a new or innovative practice that is not yet adequately or fully integrated into formal policy frameworks.

Policy uptake lies in institutionalization of RCs by integrating them into municipality structures that have not yet been adequately integrated into local policy frameworks. Creating the political commitment for the implementation of the plans prepared within the project and building the operational and technical skills within municipalities to delivering services to the community, the RCs can become embedded entities of the municipalities, sustain beyond the project end and continue to support local communities to boost MFAB renovation.

Lessons & Takeaways

Main challenges for the RCs are connected to fluctuating public funding for renovation resulting in reduced citizen interest and the identification of resources for financing of the RC and its administrative side. Main challenges for development of NESRs included limited awareness and experience in partner countries. These challenges consist of external factors influencing the work, however, better planning and understanding the local contexts can improve the implementation of these housing practices.