

Public Consultation on Sustainable Buildings

Background document

Introductory comment

The European Commission is preparing a Communication on Sustainable Buildings. To this end, the Commission wishes to consult European citizens and stakeholders to get additional input to the policy development. Your views will help us to identify which issues to prioritise in the preparation of the Communication for the beginning of 2014. Results of this consultation will be made available at: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/consultations_en.htm

This note accompanies the public consultation on sustainable buildings, please read it carefully before filling in the questionnaire. It is meant to describe the structure of questionnaire but also to provide background to the respondents.

The questionnaire is divided into four sections. The first one is intended to gather information about the respondent and his or her background. The second section is short and asks for input regarding which particular aspects ought to be in focus to improve the environmental performance of buildings. The third section is longer and goes through a number of issues which might be considered as problems or barriers to better environmental performing buildings. The respondent is asked to give feedback on this but also on the appropriate level of intervention (EU, national, etc.) to address the areas for which the respondent feels improvements are needed. The fourth and last section is longer and suggests a range of policy options in order to address the different problems identified in the third section. The respondent is asked to comment on the effectiveness of the different options but also on their benefits and costs. It is of course also possible to send in further relevant information to ENV-SUSTAINABLE-BUILDINGS-EXT-FORWARD@ec.europa.eu.

Only one reply per individual or organisation is accepted. The questionnaire needs to be filled in on-line in one single session. This means that the respondent cannot save incomplete questionnaires. We strongly recommend first saving the questionnaire text as a pdf file, in order to examine the questions and elaborate the replies before starting an on-line session. Please note that you will only have 90 minutes to fill in the questionnaire and that if you have not been able to fill it all in and save it within this time frame, the session will automatically expire and the replies will be lost. This is why it is so important to prepare the answers in advance, before starting to work on-line.

We thank you for your time and effort!

What do we mean with "Sustainable Buildings"?

Sustainable buildings in the scope of this work will relate to the environmental aspect of sustainability. Other aspects, i.e. social and economic, will be taken into account when assessing the impacts of possible actions but the main objectives of the actions will focus on the reduction of the environmental impact of buildings.

Given that energy efficiency of buildings in the use stage is already addressed by existing policies, the focus of this initiative will be on resources such as materials (including waste), water and embedded energy. It will address resource use and related environmental impacts all along the life-cycle of buildings, from the extraction of building materials to the demolition and recycling of materials (end of life). Residential and non-residential buildings will be covered, excluding industrial ones and infrastructure (for example roads).

Barriers to a more efficient use of resources in buildings

Society is demanding more build space. Typical drivers are:

- Increased space per person in residential buildings;
- Single functions of buildings;
- Empty buildings.

The demand for better environmental performing buildings is however not rising at the same rate, mainly due to:

- Low awareness among consumers (private end users, developers, public purchasers);
- Lack of financial and non-financial incentives targeting consumers;
- Low level of green procurement in the buildings sector.

In addition, markets for waste management are generally not robust enough to provide enough secondary material to producers of construction products. This is partly due to:

- Split incentives between waste generator and user of secondary construction materials;
- Lack of confidence in quality of secondary raw materials.

In order to increase demand generally among consumers, more knowledge on resource use and environmental impact throughout the value chain is needed. This knowledge, which could be used to inform stakeholders including consumers as well as to link future policy initiatives to it, should be based on transparent and comparable data which is currently missing. Even if numerous schemes exist today in order to assess and report the environmental performance of construction products and buildings, they apply different scopes, environmental indicators and methods respectively. In combination with scarce and varying national requirements linked to this, the following factors will moreover need to be tackled:

- Lack of information:
 - Lack of indicators and data on the environmental performance of buildings;
 - Lack of robust assessment schemes for environmental performance of buildings.
- Fragmentation of single market/technical barriers to trade:
 - Missing or varying national reporting requirements for buildings and components;
 - Proliferation of commercial assessment schemes.

The objectives of this initiative

The general objective of this initiative is to reduce the environmental impact by improving the overall resource efficiency and, as a consequence, improve the related competitiveness.

This would be achieved by the following specific objectives:

- Raise awareness of and demand for better environmental performing buildings, among private consumers, developers and public purchasers;
- Improve knowledge and information regarding resource use and related environmental impacts in relation to buildings in order to support decision making among designers, architects, developers, construction companies, construction product manufacturers, investors, consumers etc;
- Remove the barriers created by different sets of requirements concerning the environmental performance of buildings;
- Improve material efficiency, including the prevention and management of construction and demolition waste;
- Support more intensive use of buildings in order to reduce the need for further built environment (e.g., use empty buildings instead of building new, use buildings for more than one purpose when suitable, build flexible buildings to be adapted to new functions or changing needs when appropriate).

Areas for future work in order to support better environmental performing buildings

The questionnaire in this public consultation sets out a number of possible areas in which the European Commission could work to meet the above objectives. These areas include:

- Establish and promote an assessment framework for the environmental performance of buildings, taking into account the building as a system, building components and construction products;
- Provide information on the environmental performance of buildings to designers, architects, engineers, developers, construction companies, construction product manufacturers, investors, consumers etc;
- Establish comprehensive GPP criteria for different categories of buildings and promote their use;
- Recommend requirements for the reporting of environmental impacts and resource use of buildings and components to be used at national level;
- Advice MSs in developing/reforming financial incentives for better environmental performing buildings, including linking to the existing/emerging incentives for energy efficiency;
- Promote efficient material management, in particular support markets for secondary construction materials;
- Co-operate with Member States on policies aiming at more intensive use of public buildings.

Why does the European Commission look into this now?

The EU2020 strategy from 2010 sets the course for the European economy for the following ten years and beyond by focusing on three main priorities; smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. As a follow up of this, the Resource Efficiency Roadmap¹ was adopted by the European Commission in September 2011. It concludes that the above existing policies, mainly linked to energy efficiency, need to be complemented with policies for resource efficiency looking at a wider range of resource use and environmental impacts, across the life-cycle of buildings. Such policies would *"contribute to a competitive construction sector and to the development of a resource efficient building stock"*. The Roadmap foresees adoption of a Communication on Sustainable Buildings in 2013.

Meanwhile, the Communication on "Strategy for the sustainable competitiveness of the construction sector and its enterprises"² of 31st July 2012 points to the main challenges that the sector faces up to 2020 in order to grow strong and more viable in the future. This includes improving resource efficiency, environmental performance and related business opportunities. It identifies some of the problems in relation to resource use but does not elaborate on them. It instead refers to the future Communication on Sustainable Buildings and, in particular, highlights areas for future development, such as the need for *"methods to assess the environmental performance of buildings"* and, in its attached action plan, it refers to an EU wide life cycle costing methodology applied to buildings for green public procurement.

What actions are already taken?

Existing EU policy initiatives in the area of environmental performance of buildings have mainly targeted energy efficiency. For example, the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive³ obliges Member States to apply minimum requirements on the energy performance of new and existing buildings. Moreover, the Energy Efficiency Directive⁴, the Energy Labelling Directive⁵ but also the Eco-design directive⁶ mainly focuses on the energy consumption in the use stage. Apart from these initiatives, the revised Waste Framework Directive⁷ with its objective to reach 70% of preparation for re-use, recycling and others forms for material recovery (excluding energy recovery) represents the main European policy driver towards better recycling of construction and demolition waste in the coming years.

¹ COM(2011)571 of 20.9.2011

² COM(2012)433 of 31.7.2012

³ 2010/31/EU of 18.6.2010

⁴ 2012/27/EU of 14.11.2012

⁵ 2010/30/EU of 18.6.2010

⁶ 2009/125/EC of 31.10.2009

⁷ 2008/98/EC of 22.11.2008

So far, only a limited number of Member States initiatives have addressed resource use beyond energy efficiency in the building sector. A few of those are, in different ways, regulating the calculations of the environmental impacts of buildings and/or construction products. However, though aiming at tackling more or less the same issues, national initiatives partly differ in scope and method.