Policy Brief

Advancing rural renovation across Europe: Insights and policy recommendations from REERs

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Highlights

Rural Energy Efficiency Roadmaps (REERs) provide a replicable and scalable framework for addressing rural energy poverty across Europe.

The methodology directly supports the implementation of the EPBD, EED and Social Climate Plans (SCPs) by linking technical, legal, financial and social/community measures.

Successful replication depends on institutional mainstreaming, capacity-building and political commitment to rural inclusion.

REERs offer a bridge between EU ambitions and local delivery, ensuring that no rural household is left behind in the energy transition.

Executive Summary

Across Europe, rural and peri-urban areas face some of the deepest manifestations of energy poverty. Ageing and inefficient housing stock, limited access to affordable finance, and weak institutional capacity make renovation particularly challenging outside urban centres. Through the **RENOVERTY project, Rural Energy Efficiency Roadmaps (REERs) have proven to be a practical and inclusive methodology for addressing these barriers**. A REER is divided into two documents, the first being a locally tailored roadmap that identifies energy inefficiencies in rural homes and defines realistic, achievable and timebound renovation pathways for citizens.

Developed collaboratively with public and private local actors, each roadmap combines solutions for common technical, financial, legal and social/community-level barriers, quantifies the investment for the most relevant energy efficiency measures to be implemented and proposes feasible financial solutions to support the renovation process. The second document proposes high-level conceptual solutions to be implemented by energy stakeholders, thereby tackling the same barriers with a top-down approach.

REERs therefore combine technical analysis, stakeholder co-creation and policy alignment resulting in targeted renovation pathways for rural and peri-urban households experiencing energy poverty. The methodology builds a bridge between EU legislative frameworks and local implementation, guiding investments that deliver both social and climate impact. Beyond the seven pilot regions, REERs demonstrate strong potential for replication and scaling across Member States, supporting Europe's ambition to achieve climate neutrality by 2050.

Key lessons learnt from RENOVERTY

Experience from **pilots in Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Slovenia, Italy, Portugal and Spain** confirms that tackling rural energy poverty requires integrated solutions. High upfront costs, administrative burdens, and insufficient access to information continue to hinder progress. Many rural homes are old, poorly insulated and rely on inefficient heating systems, while citizens often lack awareness or support to take part in renovation programmes. These challenges are further compounded by policy misalignment between national, regional and local levels, which often weakens coordination mechanisms and slows down the effective delivery of renovation programmes, as well as by the lack of specialised local actors and limited technical capacity in rural areas to design and deliver renovation projects effectively.

The pilots validated several practical approaches. **Local Action Groups (LAGs) and one-stop-shops (OSS) proved invaluable as facilitators** connecting households in rural and peri-urban areas with legal counselling, financing and technical support. Energy communities emerged as effective models for collective investment in renovation and renewable energy, while also empowering and directly targeting vulnerable groups. Above all, the co-creation of REERs with municipalities, NGOs and citizens, following energy audits and the emergence of energy guidance resulting from understanding the technical needs of households within the pilots, ensured that the developed measures were feasible and tailored to local realities. **These lessons underline the importance of combining community participation with policy coordination to ensure long-term trust and impact.**

Replicability and scalability potential of REERs

The REER methodology is flexible by design. It integrates technical, legal, financial and social dimensions within a single framework, making it adaptable to different national contexts. This structure aligns directly with European policy priorities. Under the **Energy Performance of Buildings Directive**, REERs contribute to the renovation of the worst-performing buildings and the inclusion of vulnerable households. Through the **Energy Efficiency Directive**, they support national energy-saving obligations and consumer empowerment. Within the upcoming **Social Climate Fund**, they can serve as an operational tool to identify households experiencing energy poverty and channel assistance effectively.

Scaling up REERs at the EU level will require their institutional mainstreaming into national renovation strategies and funding mechanisms. Member States should recognise the added value of REERs for targeting rural and peri-urban areas within their **NECPs, SCPs and Long-Term Renovation Strategies.** Alongside this, capacity-building for regional and local authorities, civil society organisations and intermediaries such as LAGs and OSSs will be essential. Political commitment to rural inclusion must also be reinforced so that the specific challenges of rural territories are not overlooked in energy and housing policy design.

Peer learning and knowledge exchange between Member States can further enhance scalability. Establishing an EU platform for sharing methodologies, success stories and data from existing pilots would accelerate adaptation and uptake of REERs across regions.

Policy Recommendations

Effectively addressing rural energy poverty requires coordinated action and complementary measures across all levels of governance. In this context, the RENOVERTY project identified a set of common policy needs and barriers through its seven pilot regions. These were grouped into six main areas: technical, financial, legal and administrative, social and community, governance and integration and scalability and replication, as summarised below.

Technical

- **Fund and mandate local One-Stop-Shops (OSS);**
- **Promote bundled renovations;**
- **Prioritise renovation of the worst-performing buildings.**

Financial

- **Establish tailored grant schemes and microloans;**
- **Support energy communities as financing mechanisms;**
- **Co-finance transport and logistics costs in remote areas.**

Legal & Administrative

- **Simplify procedures and support legalisation of unregistered buildings;**
- **Align national renovation programmes with the REER methodology.**

Social & Community

- **Institutionalise co-creation and local engagement;**
- **Build trust through awareness campaigns and support from local intermediaries such as LAGs.**

Governance & Integration

- **Integrate REERs into NECPs, SCPs and local housing strategies;**
- **Strengthen policy coherence across government levels;**
- **Promote municipal energy poverty strategies.**

Scalability & Replication

- **Support capacity-building of LAGs and municipalities as key multipliers;**
- **Disseminate REER tools and practices nationally and EU-wide.**

The REERs provide a practical and adaptable framework to respond to these policy priorities, linking technical, financial, legal, social and community dimensions within a single methodology. This methodology can be effectively integrated and supported at different governance levels.

At the **European level**, REERs should be formally recognised as an operational tool within the implementation of the EPBD, EED and Social Climate Plans. The European Commission could support replication through dedicated funding instruments, such as Cohesion Policy programmes, LIFE, Horizon Europe, including specific budget lines for testing, adapting and scaling up REERs in different Member States and regions. EU institutions should also promote social proofing of renovation measures so that every major funding instrument integrates social inclusion criteria and ensures that financial support explicitly reaches rural households in or at risk of energy poverty.

To ensure accountability and comparability of results, the European Commission should also promote a common monitoring and evaluation framework for REERs. This could include a harmonised indicator set, such as the reduction of rural energy poverty, participation of vulnerable households, and renovation depth, enabling consistent monitoring and comparison of REER outcomes across Europe.

National governments are encouraged to embed the REER methodology into their energy, renovation and climate planning documents and to strengthen cooperation between ministries responsible for energy, environment, construction and social welfare. National one-stop-shop networks can coordinate financing and provide consistent guidance to local authorities. Countries should also expand their renovation programmes to include tailored grants, microloans and technical assistance for households experiencing energy poverty, as well as social conditionality mechanisms to prioritise vulnerable groups.

Regional and local authorities are the key implementers of REERs. Counties, municipalities and Local Action Groups can translate national frameworks into community-level actions by developing renovation campaigns, supporting citizens in grant applications and promoting collective renovation projects to attract contractors. Local one-stop-shops and energy communities can serve as long-term facilitators, ensuring that energy renovation becomes accessible, trusted and community-driven.

Conclusions

The RENOVERTY project has shown that **REERs** are more than methodological tools. They **represent a coherent and adaptable framework for tackling energy poverty in rural and peri-urban areas**. By linking technical, financial and social dimensions, REERs help translate European renovation goals into practical, locally relevant actions for rural areas.

Integrating REERs into European and national policy frameworks is the next step towards ensuring their long-term impact. Their inclusion in the EPBD, EED, and Social Climate Plans, and their alignment with the Social Climate Fund and Cohesion Policy, would allow Member States to better target rural households, improve coordination between funding instruments, and promote balanced territorial development.

Scaling up the REER approach across Europe will require coordination, adequate resources and political commitment. This can lead to measurable improvements in living conditions, reductions in energy poverty, and stronger local capacity to implement the green transition.

By mainstreaming REERs into the European renovation landscape, policymakers can ensure that the **path towards climate neutrality** is not only ambitious, but also **fair, inclusive, and tailored to the needs of citizens in every region of Europe.**

ABOUT RENOVERTY

RENOVERTY fosters energy efficiency building upgrades in the energy poor households of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) / South-eastern Europe (SEE) and Southern European countries (SE) by establishing the methodological and practical framework to build renovation roadmaps for vulnerable rural districts in a financially viable and socially just manner.

RENOVERTY ensures that building retrofits consider the social dimension by incorporating security, comfort, and improved accessibility in the roadmaps to further improve the quality of life of vulnerable populations. Over the project's three years, seven pilots located in Sveta Nedelja (Croatia), Tartu (Estonia), Bükk-Mak & Somló-Marcalmente-Bakonyalja Leader (Hungary), Zasavje (Slovenia), Parma (Italy), Coimbra (Portugal), and Osona (Spain) will implement the roadmaps, while wider integration of rural and peri-urban development is foreseen in the long run.

Our website: https://ieecp.org/projects/renoverty/

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