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Enabling the Green Transition

Professional Certification and Green Building Councils

Author: Prof. Dr. Zenebe Uraguchi
Contributors: Nastasija Stojanovikj, Marianna Avetisyan, Sabin Selimi

1. Background

Countries in the Eastern Partnership and the Western Balkans introduced energy efficiency legislation aligned with European frameworks, including requirements for energy audits and building energy performance certification. The regulatory architecture was in place, yet implementation progressed slowly and construction practices showed limited adjustment.

In the Eastern Partnership, RECONOMY worked with national institutions to establish accredited training and certification pathways for energy auditors and Energy Performance Certification (EPC) specialists. As certified professionals began operating in the market, regulatory processes gradually became practicable and energy efficiency requirements started to influence building practices.

In the Western Balkans, RECONOMY complemented regulatory certification and energy efficiency efforts by supporting the establishment of new Green Building Councils (GBCs) and strengthening existing ones, as sector coordination platforms. GBCs bring together private companies, professionals, and technical experts to build market awareness, strengthen skills, promote green standards, and support both regulatory compliance (EPC) and voluntary sustainability practices as part of the green transition.

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The Learning

Regulatory systems rely not only on rules and enforcement authorities but also on professional functions that connect policy to economic activity. In this case, the emergence of certification as a viable profession created the operational link between legislation and everyday practice. Once certification services began to be provided by recognized specialists, compliance processes became more feasible, creating conditions for the broader energy efficiency framework to function more effectively.

Additionally, sector-level institutions matter. GBCs help translate sustainability goals into market practice by convening actors, strengthening professional capacity, and creating shared reference points for green construction, supporting both EPC implementation and broader adoption of sustainable building approaches.

Why this matters

The experience points to a broader lesson about inclusive and green economic development: regulatory delivers impact when it becomes embedded in everyday economic activity rather than remaining a formal requirement. In this case, certification evolved into a viable profession, linking public policy to the labor market. Engineers and service providers gained access to skilled employment and stable income through services that the market continued to demand, allowing benefits to persist beyond the intervention.

At the same time, the establishment of Green Building Councils (GBCs) in the Western Balkans strengthened the institutional environment surrounding this professional ecosystem.

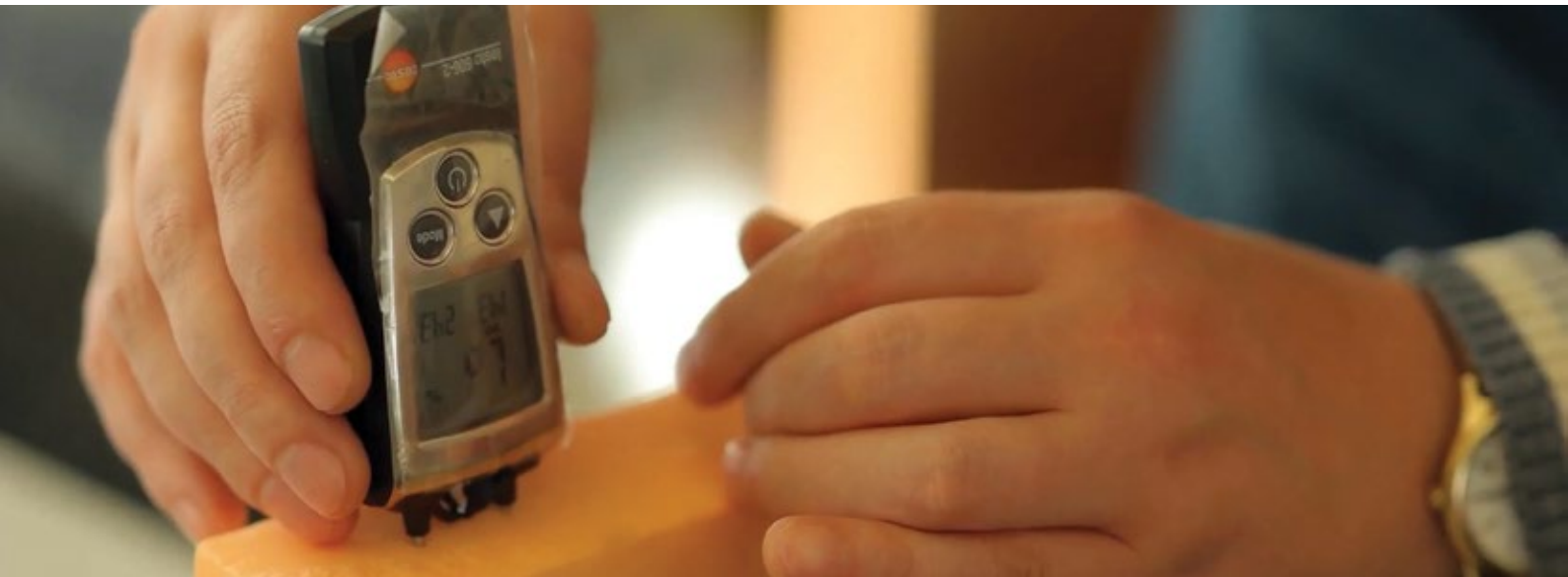
While certification enables compliance, GBCs provide collective voice, promote sustainability standards, and facilitate structured dialogue between private actors and policymakers.

The development effect also extended to inclusion. Professional certification opened pathways into higher-value technical occupations for women and young professionals, supporting not only job creation but long-term career progression and professional recognition. Similarly, GBCs expand access to green construction through professional networks, learning opportunities, and sector visibility.

Sustainability emerged through aligned incentives. Educational institutions continued delivering accredited programs, professionals offered services because they generated income, and regulators relied on certified expertise. As certification became integrated into routine transactions, environmental objectives, labor market participation, and private sector activity began reinforcing one another.

Overall, systemic interventions generate lasting impact when policy implementation is linked to viable professions and durable sector institutions. Whether through certification systems in the Eastern Partnership countries or Green Building Councils in the Western Balkans, change becomes sustainable when economic actors are organized around shared standards and long-term market incentives.

To understand why these interventions matter, it is important to revisit the underlying system constraints that initially prevented regulatory frameworks from functioning as intended.



2. The System Problem

Across the Eastern Partnership countries, energy efficiency legislation required audits and building certification in line with EU directives. Although the regulatory framework was formally in place, the functions needed to translate regulation into everyday economic practice were incomplete.

Certification depends on a coordinated chain: trained professionals, accredited institutions, regulatory reliance, and market recognition. That chain had not yet formed. Construction companies did not treat certification as standard practice, property owners saw limited value in it, inspectors lacked accredited specialists, and educational institutions had no clear professional pathway to offer. Engineers, in turn, had little incentive to specialize in a field without predictable income or recognition. As a result, regulation existed largely as a legal requirement, with limited practical implementation. The system lacked a professional role capable of linking policy to construction practice and market demand.

In the Western Balkans, the constraint was different. Beyond skills and enforcement challenges, low awareness and the absence of credible industry representation hindered the green transition. The construction sector lacked coordinated platforms to promote sustainable practices, represent private sector interests, and engage policymakers in structured dialogue. Without sector institutions, market actors operated in silos, sustainability initiatives remained fragmented, and demand for green construction developed slowly.

In both regions, progress was constrained not simply by technical gaps but by missing system functions. What was required were durable professional and institutional roles capable of organizing actors around shared standards and enabling regulatory objectives to operate in practice. RECONOMY's entry point therefore focused on addressing these structural gaps rather than isolated symptoms.

3. RECONOMY's Entry Point

In the Eastern Partnership countries, RECONOMY identified the core constraint not as a lack of awareness or technical knowledge, but as a coordination gap within the market system. The regulatory framework relied on professional roles that had not yet emerged. The entry point therefore focused on enabling certification as a recognized and remunerated profession capable of linking regulation to economic activity.

The assumption was that once certification became a viable service, specialists would specialize, audits would become routine, and regulatory procedures could be applied in practice. Implementation would follow from participation: when professionals could provide certification as a market service, regulation would gain operational meaning within the economy. The intervention thus concentrated on establishing the actors who make compliance possible, creating conditions for regulators, builders, property owners, and training institutions to coordinate around a functional process.

In the Western Balkans, the constraint was different. The key gap lay in fragmented sector coordination and limited industry representation around sustainable construction. RECONOMY therefore supported the establishment and strengthening of GBCs as membership-based platforms to organize collective action, promote standards, and engage policymakers.

Rather than focusing on individual compliance roles, the intervention in the Western Balkans aimed to build institutional platforms capable of aligning market actors around shared sustainability objectives and strengthening the enabling environment for energy-efficient construction.

4. The Interventions

Eastern Partnership countries

RECONOMY supported the formation of a certification ecosystem anchored within national institutions. The objective was not to deliver a set of project activities, but to establish lasting system roles that would continue to operate as part of the economy and regulatory framework.

The intervention therefore focused on enabling institutions to perform functions that the system required on a permanent basis. Accredited Energy Audit and Energy Performance Certification (EPC) training programs were established, certification pathways were linked to regulatory procedures, and these responsibilities were integrated into recognized organizations. Institutions such as the Energy Efficiency Centre Georgia and the National Polytechnic University of Armenia (NPUA) were enabled to train and certify specialists.

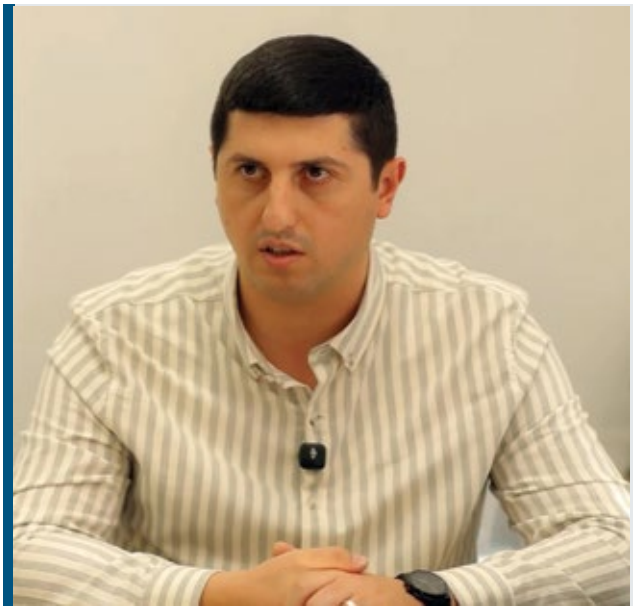
Through this process, certification moved from being a formal regulatory requirement to a professional service exchanged in the market. Specialists were able to provide audits and certification directly to clients, and compliance became part of normal economic transactions. The regulation was no longer implemented only through administrative oversight; it was carried out through routine interactions between service providers, construction actors, and property owners.

Western Balkans

In the Western Balkans, the intervention addressed a different system constraint: weak awareness, limited coordination, and insufficient industry representation around sustainable construction. RECONOMY supported the establishment of Green Building Councils in four countries (MKD, MNE, ALB, KOS) where they did not previously exist and strengthened the role of the existing Green Building Council in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

These councils were developed as membership-based sector platforms bringing together construction companies, real estate developers, manufacturers, designers, financial actors, and technical experts. Their role is not limited to certification, but includes promoting sustainable construction standards, organizing training and awareness activities, facilitating dialogue with public institutions, and building a collective industry voice for the green transition.

By supporting the institutional development of these councils - through governance structures, strategic planning, regional coordination, and visibility, RECONOMY aimed to anchor sustainability within permanent sector institutions. Rather than relying on fragmented initiatives, the intervention created organized platforms capable of shaping market norms, strengthening information flows, and representing private sector perspectives in policy discussions.



At NPUA, institutional ownership quickly became visible. As Hayk Igityan, Head of the Climate and Sustainable Development Lab at NPUA, explains:

“At NPUA, we began thinking about how we could contribute, retrain people, and bring the issues of energy efficiency and energy auditing to a wider public. The main goal was to develop an energy audit training program for buildings.”

At regional level, the development of a Western Balkans Green Building Council platform further strengthened cross-country learning and alignment, contributing to a more coherent regional approach to sustainable construction.

In both contexts, the interventions focused on enabling actors who perform system functions that outlast the project: professional certification bodies in the Eastern Partnership and sector coordination platforms in the Western Balkans. By embedding these roles within recognized institutions, the green transition becomes supported by durable market structures rather than temporary external support.

5. System response and emerging market dynamics

Eastern Partnership countries

With certification pathways in place, the sector has begun to organize itself around the availability of accredited expertise. Engineers and technical specialists have entered the field, and enterprises are gradually incorporating certification and audit services into their portfolios. Training providers have introduced certification courses into formal programs, contributing to a growing supply of qualified professionals and the emergence of a more recognizable professional trajectory.

The presence of accredited specialists has made it increasingly feasible for inspectors to rely on standardized professional assessments when reviewing compliance. Certification is progressively being incorporated into project preparation and completion processes, although its consistent application across the sector remains uneven.

In Armenia, certification requirements are gradually becoming mandatory, which is expected to strengthen demand for certified professionals over time. In Georgia, while the regulatory framework is in place, enforcement remains limited due to the absence of fully operational responsible bodies. As a result, some of the changes described reflect the intended direction of the system's development rather than a fully realized current state.

This level of oversubscription indicates that certification is increasingly perceived as a viable professional pathway rather than a niche technical specialization. The demand for participation suggests growing recognition of energy auditing as an economically meaningful role within the sector.

Western Balkans

Across all newly established and strengthened Green Building Councils, formal engagement with DGNB has been initiated as part of building international credibility and technical depth. To date, over 10 GBC board members have successfully completed certification as DGNB consultants. Several are already conducting mock audits, and councils are progressing toward becoming authorized DGNB bodies in the Western Balkans.

This marks an important institutional milestone: rather than relying on external expertise, GBCs are internalizing technical competence and positioning themselves as locally anchored gateways to international green building standards.

While still at an early stage, this shift signals growing regional readiness to host certification processes, support project-level application of green standards, and retain knowledge within domestic markets, strengthening the foundations for long-term sector development.

Early institutional viability is also reflected in growing membership and revenue generation. In Kosovo, the Green Building Council successfully onboarded 14 members during its foundation year, including patron, business, and professional members—demonstrating early market validation of its value proposition across both private sector actors and institutional professionals. Membership fees generated EUR 6,469.94 in 2025, in line with KGBC's five-year strategy that anticipates gradual scaling of self-generated income. While modest in absolute terms, this revenue marks an important transition toward financial sustainability and confirms that market actors are willing to invest in collective sector platforms.

Beyond institutional and market adjustments, these changes also began to influence who participates in the sector.

> As Hayk Igityan observed:
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> *"For our new energy auditor training, although we needed only 30 participants, we received 180 applications."*

Inclusion

In the Eastern Partnership countries, the emergence of a recognized certification pathway expanded access to skilled technical employment. Training programs attracted participation from women — including 19 women in the first Energy Audit cohort at NPUA, 8 in the first EPC cohort at EECG, and 6 in the second EPC cohort — who entered professional roles in the energy efficiency field. Beyond creating employment opportunities, the system enabled access to higher-value technical occupations and supported longer-term career development.

In the Western Balkans, women represent over 50% of participants in RECONOMY-supported Green Building Council activities. This reflects both growing interest in green construction pathways and the deliberate design of inclusive outreach approaches. The participation rate signals early shifts in access within a traditionally male-dominated sector and strengthens the potential for more gender-balanced professional representation as the green transition advances.

Systemic impact

In the Eastern Partnership countries, early changes are visible across the system. Educational institutions now deliver accredited training, certification bodies verify competencies, and professionals increasingly provide services directly to clients. Notably, EECG went beyond training provision to obtain accreditation as a certification body for individual energy auditors—an unintended but important sign of institutional strengthening.

Construction companies are becoming more aware of certification requirements, particularly in project planning and handover. In Armenia, requirements are gradually becoming mandatory, while in Georgia enforcement remains constrained. As interactions among actors become more regular, compliance processes are clearer: builders better understand requirements, inspectors can rely on accredited expertise, and clients can more easily identify qualified providers. Although full market integration is still evolving, certification is increasingly embedded in routine economic transactions rather than relying solely on administrative enforcement.

In the Western Balkans, systemic change is emerging through the activation of GBCs as sector institutions. Newly established and strengthened councils are facilitating dialogue, organizing capacity-building activities, and building a collective industry voice. A major milestone has been formal engagement with DGNB (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Nachhaltiges Bauen): over 10 board members are now certified consultants, mock audits are underway, and councils are progressing toward authorized status. This shift from reliance on external expertise to locally embedded technical capacity lays the foundation for domestic delivery of green building certification and longer-term sector development.

6. Adaptation and sustainability

In the Eastern Partnership countries, early efforts focused on delivering training courses, which improved technical knowledge but did not yet create a stable professional pathway. Skills were developed, yet the system lacked clear procedures for their regular application. RECONOMY therefore shifted toward institutionalization, embedding certification authority within national organizations, formalizing professional pathways, and linking training directly to regulatory implementation. Certification became part of a recognized process through which specialists could qualify, be accredited, and provide services in the market.

As certification evolved into an institutional function, regulatory procedures became more consistent and demand for services expanded. Inspectors relied on accredited expertise, construction actors increasingly anticipated certification, and participation was sustained through aligned incentives: institutions enhanced credibility through certification programs, professionals generated income and professional standing, and regulators gained a practical basis for compliance. Because certification services were remunerated in the market, the system no longer depended on continued project support.

In the Western Balkans, adaptation focused on strengthening GBCs as durable, membership-based institutions rather than isolated awareness initiatives. Investment in governance, strategy, regional coordination, and financial models enabled GBCs to function as long-term platforms for sector engagement and advocacy. Through DGNB engagement, technical expertise is increasingly localized, reducing dependence on external providers and reinforcing long-term system resilience. Across both regions, sustainability is anchored in economically and institutionally viable roles that extend beyond the initial intervention.

7. Transferable learning — Where can this work and why?

When Regulation Translates into Profession

The experience shows that regulatory change becomes effective when it is carried out by a viable profession. Rules gain practical meaning once identifiable actors apply them in their everyday work. In contexts requiring technical verification or certification, the key step is often not stronger enforcement but the emergence of a service role that links policy to economic activity.

When certification generates professional income, specialists enter the field, institutions organize training around recognized competencies, and regulators gain a reliable basis for implementation. Compliance then occurs through routine market transactions rather than exceptional oversight, embedding regulation within the economy.

The system expands through incentives. As construction activity grows, demand for certification services increases, reinforcing the role of professionals and training institutions without requiring continued project support. Certification also opens pathways into skilled occupations, supporting long-term career development and inclusion, particularly for young professionals and women.

For such a system to function sustainably, supply and demand must remain balanced, standards must be maintained, and regulators must consistently rely on accredited expertise to preserve the value of certification.

If your context has…	Recommended action	Avoid
Regulation that requires verification or compliance assessment	Establish a recognized certification profession linked to licensing	Awareness initiatives without institutional follow-through
Regulations that exist but are difficult to apply	Enable accredited professional service providers	Short-term project-based service provision
Skilled technical graduates with limited career pathways	Connect regulatory compliance to paid professional services	Training programs detached from professional recognition

Sector Platforms for Market Coordination

In the Western Balkans, the main constraint was not technical capacity but fragmented coordination and weak industry representation. Establishing GBCs as membership-based platforms created structured spaces for awareness raising, policy dialogue, and collective action—an approach particularly relevant where regulatory frameworks evolve gradually and market transformation depends on shared norms and institutional credibility.

Across both regions, the core lesson is that sustainable change occurs when system roles become economically and institutionally viable. Certification systems and sector platforms function through aligned incentives: professionals generate income and career opportunities, institutions enhance credibility, and private actors gain visibility and influence—anchoring reform within the market itself.

If your context has…	Recommended action	Avoid
Fragmented construction sector with weak industry representation	Strengthen sector platforms (e.g. GBCs) to coordinate actors, build collective voice, and engage policymakers	One-off awareness campaigns without permanent sector institutions
Low awareness of energy efficiency and sustainable construction among SMEs and households	Support membership-based associations to lead outreach, knowledge-sharing, and promotion of green practices	Isolated information activities not embedded in sector structures
Professionals interested in green construction but lacking networks and visibility	Use sector associations to provide professional networking, learning opportunities, and market positioning	Training that does not connect participants to industry platforms

8. System implications and future direction

Professional certification in the Eastern Partnership countries

The experience points toward a broader direction for how regulatory and economic systems can evolve together. Effective implementation emerges when regulation is connected to ongoing economic activity through recognized professional roles. Rather than relying primarily on administrative enforcement, the system functions when everyday transactions carry out the intent of the policy. Professional services such as certification create a practical interface between public objectives and private decision-making.

Over time, this alignment allows multiple parts of the system to reinforce one another. Education providers prepare specialists whose competencies are recognized in the market. Professionals apply their expertise in routine commercial services. Businesses incorporate compliance into planning and investment decisions. Authorities rely on standardized assessments instead of exceptional inspections. In this configuration, regulation becomes part of normal sector operation rather than a separate administrative requirement.

The long-term direction therefore involves strengthening these linkages. Regulatory frameworks can be designed alongside viable professions, education pathways can correspond to real service demand, and compliance procedures can be carried out through accredited expertise. When institutions, labor markets, and market transactions operate within the same framework, implementation becomes continuous and self-sustaining. The system no longer depends on periodic interventions because each actor's ordinary activity contributes to the shared outcome.

As Fahrush Azemi, President and CEO of the Kosovo Green Building Council, describes:

"The first big challenge is awareness. A lot of people still think green buildings are just about solar panels or expensive materials. The second challenge is policy. Right now, our national regulations don't fully support green building standards. That's where Kosovo Green Building Council comes in. With our advocacy role, we are actively working to align local frameworks with EU standards. The third challenge is capacity. Many architects, engineers, and builders in Kosovo haven't had access to international green certification systems like DGNB. That's exactly why we have partnered with them. We are preparing to roll out training and certification programs that will help local professionals grow and keep the knowledge here in Kosovo."

Green Building Councils in the Western Balkans

Beyond individual certification pathways, RECONOMY identified a structural gap in the Western Balkan construction and renovation sector: while environmental impact was high, sustainability awareness and coordination among market actors remained limited. The sector lacked credible, locally rooted institutions capable of advocating for green standards, supporting professional development, and linking national markets to international sustainability frameworks.

To address this, RECONOMY supported the establishment and strengthening of GBCs in the Western Balkans. These councils serve as institutional anchors for the green transition of the construction sector. They bring together private companies, technical experts, and industry representatives around shared sustainability standards and professional practices.

The GBCs create a platform where international standards are contextualized locally. Through collaboration with established European counterparts, such as the Croatian and German Green Building Councils, regional actors gain access to recognized certification systems and technical expertise. Representatives from Kosovo, North Macedonia, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina have initiated DGNB certification training, expanding the region's alignment with international green building standards.

At the same time, private sector actors are increasingly expressing interest in membership and partnership with these councils, recognizing their value as trusted reference bodies for sustainable construction practices. This signals the early emergence of collective market ownership over the green transition.

By supporting the development of these institutional platforms, RECONOMY moves beyond enabling individual professionals toward strengthening the governance layer of the sector. Green Building Councils provide continuity, credibility, and coordination, reinforcing Helvetas' objective of enabling inclusive and green economic development. They act as leverage points within the system, ensuring that sustainability principles are not project-driven but embedded within sector institutions.