Global Sustainable Buildings Guide - Belgium

| Contents |
| --- |
| To generate table of contents, right-click here and select **Update Field.** |

Select a topic from the menu and explore the questions within.

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# Authors

# Green Certification

## Is there a nationally adopted and recognized form of certification for buildings? What is it and is it mandatory for all new buildings and refurbished buildings?

There is no mandatory green building certification system in any of the three Belgian regions. However, there are several voluntary frameworks being developed and used, together with the competent authorities.

In the past, international certification standards were applied, with the Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Methodology (BREEAM) becoming the most preeminent system. Today, BREEAM has been further refined into TOTEM, the Tool to Optimize the Total Environmental impact of Materials.1 Like the E-level in energy ratings, the M-level emphasizes the environmental performance of buildings. It is a product of the three Belgian regions, in collaboration with architects, promotors, contractors and universities.

There is also the GRO tool, whose name is inspired by former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Brundtland, which focuses more on the circular principles. GRO is a tool for measuring and increasing the sustainability of construction projects. The aim of GRO is to arrive at future-oriented, comfortable buildings through an integrated design process, with a strong commitment to circular construction. The initiative was taken by the Flemish Region, and cooperation with the two other regions is starting. The website is in Dutch and French: [GRO tool – GRO tool (gro-tool.be)](https://www.gro-tool.be/).

The Belgian Construction Certification Association continues to grant certification for products and building systems, according to international criteria ISO/IEC 17065, 17021-1 17024 and 17020 .

In 1959, several professional associations of contractors established a technical research center, Buildwise, which also promotes studies addressing quality, productivity and sustainability. This in turn inspired the governmental initiative in Brussels called “ecobuild,”2 which supports the development and structuring of supply in sustainable buildings in the Brussels-Capital Region, to help companies be more competitive and conquer new markets.

[1] <https://www.totem-building.be/>.

[2] <https://ecobuild.brussels/>.

# Energy Performance Certificates and Minimum Energy Standards

## Is there a mandatory form of energy performance certification? When does it apply and are there any prescribed minimum standards?

In Belgium, the EU Energy Performance of Buildings Directives have been fully implemented on a regional level by various pieces of legislation, most notably the Flemish Energy Decree of 8 May 2009, the Brussels Ordonnance of 2 May 2013, the Walloon Decree of 28 November 2013 and the Walloon Government Decision of 15 May 2014.

In all three regions, newly constructed buildings or substantial renovations generally require a building energy performance study, as well as a broader study of all energy efficiency and interior climate conditions. This mechanism is not only informative but also allows the competent authorities to enforce certain efficiency standards for new buildings. Selling or letting existing buildings also requires an energy performance certificate (EPC), although this is only intended for informing the possible buyer or tenant. In principle, all EPCs are valid for a maximum period of 10 years.

EPC requirements differ in each region depending on the type of building, its surface area, and whether it is constructed, renovated, sold or let. In addition, different efficiency measurements are used, with the full set of measurements and related thresholds mostly only applying to new construction projects. Finally, the required minimum efficiency thresholds also differ between regions and are periodically increased to achieve overall long-term EU energy efficiency goals.

**In Flanders**

In the Flemish Region, for newly constructed, expanded or renovated residential or nonresidential buildings for which the building permit request was submitted after 1 January 2018, the maximum allowed E-rate decreases every year. Buildings with a higher E-rate will be fined, while buildings with a substantially lower E-rate may be rewarded with subsidies offered by the grid operator. Separate EPC systems exist for residential, nonresidential and public buildings. For public buildings, a floor surface of more than 250 square meters requires that a Display Energy Certificate be displayed in a publicly visible place. For selling or leasing existing buildings, an EPC has to be part of all publicity and annexed to the actual contract.

Moreover, a new renovation obligation for nonresidential buildings has been adopted in Flanders as of 1 January 2022. This obligation applies to every new owner, tenant under a lease that includes construction works, and long leaseholder (emphytéote/erfpachter) of offices or retail buildings. Basically, they have to comply with the following new energy regulations within a five-year period:

Installation of roof insulation

Installation of high-efficiency glazing

Replacement of heating systems that are more than 15 years old which do not meet the minimum installation requirements for renovations

Replacement of refrigeration units that are more than 15 years old and installation of systems that do not require ozone-depleting or noxious refrigerants

The following is also required within the same five-year period:

The new owner of a nonresidential building of less than 500 square meters has to obtain a level C (or above) EPC.

For buildings of more than 500 square meters, they have to use a minimum of 5% of renewable energy.

**In Brussels**

In the Brussels-Capital Region, an energy performance of buildings (EPB) certificate is required instead of an EPC. An EPB is compulsory when selling or renting a home larger than 18 square meters or an office larger than 500 square meters. As of 2025, all homes will have to have an EPB certificate. There are three different models of the EPB:

EPB “New construction”: for new constructions (houses, schools, offices, etc.) for which the first planning permission was submitted after 1 July 2008

EPB “Residential unit”: for older (possibly renovated) dwellings (planning permission submitted before 1 July 2008)

EPB “Tertiary unit”: for older offices larger than 500 square meters (planning permission submitted before 1 July 2008)

As a general rule in the **Brussels-Capital Region**, the maximum allowed primary energy consumption rate for new buildings, substantial renovations and renovations that have an impact on the E-rate is 45 kilowatt-hours per square meter for houses and 90-2.5x ratio of protected volume over heat loss surface kilowatt-hours per square meter . Likewise, in the Flemish Region, each real estate transaction of an existing building requires an EPC to be obtained before and published together with each market consultation or contract negotiation.

**In Wallonia**

Similar standards apply in the Walloon Region, where the most important current maximum standard for new or substantially renovated or rebuilt residences, offices, service buildings and schools is an E-rate of 80 kilowatt-hours per square meter. For new or substantially renovated buildings, however, there is currently only an EPC obligation for single-family houses and apartments. For other residential buildings, offices, service buildings and schools, the implementing regulation is still lacking. Similar to the other regions, selling or letting existing buildings in the Walloon Region requires a completed EPC to be part of all publicity and contractual documents.

Q-ZEN is the new standard for new buildings: From 1 January 2021, all new buildings must be “quasi” or nearly zero-energy. A quasi zero-energy building is one that meets the following criteria:

The envelope is well insulated and airtight (insulation requirement for each wall Umax, overall insulation requirement K ≤ 35 and overheating index < 6500 Kh).

The systems are efficient.

The small amount of energy required for heating and hot water production is mostly produced from renewable energy sources.

This translates into an overall energy performance requirement of Ew ≤ 45 and Espec ≤ 85 kWh/m² year corresponding to the A label.

# Incentives for Green Retrofit

## Are there any government-funded or sponsored schemes for improving the energy efficiency of existing buildings and, broadly, how do they work?

As an addition to the “Energy performance certificates and minimum energy standards” section, another form of assessment should be mentioned: the energy audit created by Article 8 of the EU Energy Efficiency Directive. As a mandatory obligation every four years, this has been implemented in the Flemish Region (mandatory for large enterprises subject to an environmental permit or notification system), in the Brussels-Capital Region (mandatory for certain large enterprises and for large energy consumers if they request (a renewal of) certain types of environmental permits) and in the Walloon Region (mandatory for large enterprises).

From 1 January 2023, every house that is sold in the Flemish Region with only an E- or F-label, according to the required EPC, needs a green retrofit within five years, in the absence of which a heavy fine will be imposed by the Flemish Agency for Energy and Climate.

Roof insulation is also made compulsory to the R-value of 0.75 kilowatt-hours per square meter. When Flemish housing inspectors notice that this insulation is not provided for, a severe penalty of 15 points will be given. This may lead to an interdiction to use the house, following a procedure before the local authority.

For the moment, the Walloon and Brussels-Capital regions do not foresee mandatory green retrofit, but the Brussels-Capital Region is working on it because it wants every house to reach EPC level C by 2050.

Most notably, since 2006 the Brussels-Capital Region has also encouraged private and public actors with a large real estate portfolio to develop and implement their own Plan for Local Action for the Use of Energy (PLAGE) program. PLAGE aims to create a tailored “energy culture” involving all employees, suppliers, clients/visitors, etc., for the institution or organization. The coordination of the whole program is entrusted to an appointed energy coordinator (energieverantwoordelijke). A PLAGE program has been mandatory since 1 July 2019 for all public services with a building surface area of over 50,000 square meters and for private services within the region’s territory with a building surface area of over 100,000 square meters.

For natural persons, the Brussels-Capital Region offers a range of subsidies and even an interest-free loan for energy-saving investments (including studies, smaller works, renovations and new construction projects), with conditions that vary depending on the applicant’s socioeconomic position.

For companies, the Brussels-Capital Region also has a range of financial support mechanisms, depending on the size of the company (e.g., SMEs) and the type of investment: subsidies and tax reductions for energy-saving investments (including studies, smaller works, renovations and new construction projects), help from the “facilitating agency for sustainable buildings,” support for investments in renewable energy production, soil depollution, and a broad range of sustainable projects (e.g., eco-construction, circular economy, waste management, etc.).

The Walloon Region offers natural persons subsidies that are revised annually (primes énergie 2015), and which increase depending on the applicant’s socioeconomic position, for roof, wall or floor isolation works, installation of efficient heating or boiler systems, and energy audits.

For public services and not-for-profit organizations, the Walloon Region offers an energy-saving subsidy program called AMUREBA (previously UREBA). Investments for which subsidies are offered include works that improve a building’s energy efficiency, energy audits, feasibility studies for installing certain technologies and energy accounting studies.

For companies, the same AMUREBA program (previously AMURE) also offers an energy-saving subsidy. Currently, subsidy programs are only offered for energy accounting studies, energy audits and obtaining the technical approvals necessary for a product or system to be accessible on the market.

All three regions award “green power certificates” to companies or households that are connected to the grid and autonomously produce electricity from renewable sources. This green certificate is a financial aid granted by the region when installing these energy sources. However, both the Walloon Region and Flanders reduced the scope of these certificates to large installations only and, in parallel, introduced different complementary financial aids (such as the “call green power” in Flanders). Separate calls for project-based support are launched regularly.

Finally, many municipalities and even some provincial authorities also offer local financial stimuli for certain types of energy efficiency investments.

# CO2 and Energy Targets

## Are there any national targets for CO2 reduction and/or energy use reduction from buildings? If there are, are there any exclusions?

As a signatory to the UN Climate Treaty and the Kyoto Protocol, and as a fully committed member state participating in the EU climate policy (notably the European Green Deal), Belgium’s main real estate objective is net-zero carbon by 2050. This applies to the residential sector (both private and social), nonresidential sector and public sector.

The main instrument put in place to meet this objective is the EPC for buildings, with gradually more and more severe thresholds to be complied with (please refer to “Energy performance certificates and minimum energy standards” for more information in this respect).

# Renewable Energy

## Are there any regulations requiring a percentage of energy consumption to come from renewable sources?

Belgium has committed to a clean energy transition, aligning with the goals of the Paris Agreement and the EU’s climate and energy targets for 2030.

The binding targets include the following:

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least **40%**

Increasing energy efficiency by at least **32.5%**

Increasing the share of renewable energy to at least **32%** of EU energy use

Ensuring at least **15%** electricity interconnection levels between neighboring member states

Belgium’s draft National Energy and Climate Plan proposes an 18.3% share of energy from renewable sources in gross final consumption by 2030 as its contribution to the EU renewable energy target.

Since 2014, the EPB has required a minimum proportion of the energy needed in buildings to be obtained from renewable sources. How large the minimum share must be, and which quality requirements apply depends on the date of the building permit application, the nature of the works (new construction or major energy renovation) and the destination (residential or nonresidential building).

**Flanders**

In the Flemish Region, as of 1 January 2022, nonresidential buildings of more than 500 square meters have to meet a minimum use of 5% of renewable energy. This obligation has to be complied with within a five-year period and applies to every new owner, tenant under a lease that includes construction works, and long leaseholder (emphytéote/erfpachter) of offices or retail buildings.

The requirements in Flanders for new permit applications can be found here: <https://assets.vlaanderen.be/image/upload/v1693302908/epbeisentabel2025_sq9f78.pdf> (in Dutch).

As a rule of thumb, the share of energy stemming from renewables is at least 20 kilowatt-hours per square meter per year.

**Brussels**

In Brussels, the EPB submissions for new buildings with a surface area of more than 1,000 square meters or substantial renovation works with a surface area of more than 5,000 square meters have to include a similar feasibility study regarding alternative high-efficiency energy systems. Brussels has very ambitious targets: For a building to comply with zero or very low energy consumption targets, the recommendations of the EU (2016/1318) must be taken into account, depending on the EPB destination:

Residential: 15 to 30 kWh/(m².year) primary energy consumption (after deduction of renewables)

Nonresidential: 40 to 55 kWh/(m².year) primary energy consumption (after deduction of renewable energy sources)

The new rules set an indicative target of at least a 49% renewable energy share in buildings by 2030.

Additionally, renewable targets for heating and cooling will gradually increase as follows:

A binding increase of 0.8% per year at the national level until 2026

A binding increase of 1.1% per year from 2026 to 2030

**Wallonia**

Wallonia aims to reach its 2030 target of a 17.5% share of renewable energy sources. Measures focus on wind, photovoltaic energy, biofuels and the use of waste heat. Since **1 January 2023**, large nonresidential buildings in Wallonia have had to achieve a minimum **5% renewable energy share** within **five years** of transfer.

# Regulation

## What other national regulatory measures are there, such as taxes on energy consumption and/or tax reliefs on energy-saving measures, that can encourage more efficient use of energy in buildings?

Every region has plenty of premiums and tax reductions for renovation, increasing the EPC level and with a possibility to deduct some expenses from existing taxes.

The federal government recently increased the VAT rate on energy in Belgium from 6% to 21%. Although this was primarily a budget exercise, its benefits as an additional stimulus for energy efficiency investments are clear. Many social public service obligations have been imposed on the grid operators protecting households that are struggling to pay their energy bills. This should serve as a social safeguard, while the increased price of energy consumption should increase efficiency.

The VAT rate on works for the installation of the following for homes less than 10 years old will be reduced from 21% to 6% from 1 April 2022 to 31 December 2023:

Photovoltaic solar panels

Thermal solar panels

Solar water heaters

Heat pumps

For heat pumps, that measure has been extended through 31 December 2024. That extension does not apply to solar panels and solar water heaters.

# Financing

## Are there any public or private “green” financing initiatives for sustainable real estate projects?

In Belgium, public initiatives often involve government policies and incentives aimed at promoting sustainability in real estate development. Some examples include the following:

Green investment grants: The Belgian government offers grants and subsidies to support investments in renewable energy, energy efficiency and other environmentally friendly projects. These grants help businesses, local governments and individuals to finance the up-front costs of implementing green technologies.

Renewable energy certificates (RECs): Belgium has a system of RECs that incentivizes the production of renewable energy. Renewable energy producers can earn RECs for each megawatt-hour of electricity generated from renewable sources, which can then be sold or traded to energy suppliers to meet their renewable energy obligations.

Green building incentives: Regional governments in Belgium provide incentives for green building certifications such as BREEAM and Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED). These certifications recognize buildings that meet high standards of environmental performance and energy efficiency, and incentives may include tax breaks, grants or expedited permitting processes.

Sustainable transport funding: The Belgian government invests in sustainable transportation infrastructure and initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote cleaner modes of transport. This includes funding for public transit projects, electric vehicle charging infrastructure and bicycle-friendly urban planning.

Circular economy support: Belgium has initiatives to promote the circular economy, including funding programs for circular business models, resource efficiency projects and waste reduction initiatives. These programs aim to shift toward a more sustainable and resource-efficient economic model.

These are just a few examples of public green finance initiatives in Belgium, indicative of the general political climate geared toward promoting environmental sustainability and supporting the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Private initiatives typically involve real estate developers and investors incorporating sustainable practices into their projects. This could mean designing and constructing energy-efficient buildings with features like efficient insulation, LED lighting and renewable energy systems such as solar panels or geothermal heating. Additionally, there is a growing trend to incorporate green spaces, such as rooftop gardens or urban parks, into real estate developments to enhance sustainability and livability.

On a sector level, Agoria, a Belgian federation for the technology industry, and Febelfin, the Belgian financial sector federation, have collaborated on the development of a special tool for helping banks when evaluating loan requests for energy-saving or green investments. The tool uses a reference list indicating how much profit a certain green technology might provide in the future. The tool offers banks more certainty when assessing whether the proposed cost cuts will indeed be realized, thereby removing a barrier for the financing of sustainable real estate.

In terms of financing, banks and financial institutions in Belgium offer green financing options specifically tailored to support sustainable real estate projects. These may include green loans, green mortgages, green bonds, sustainability-linked loans, green business financing, sustainable investment funds or other financial products with favorable terms for projects that meet certain environmental criteria. These initiatives aim to incentivize and support the transition toward more sustainable and environmentally friendly real estate development in Belgium.

# Planning

## Is the national or local/state government able to mandate green initiatives via the planning/zoning regime (e.g., district heating systems on large developments)?

In all three regions, the well-developed framework of zoning and planning laws represent a formidable instrument to encourage and impose sustainable real estate development at the macro level.

Examples vary widely on a case-by case basis.

For example, urban planning instruments impose measures that address emissions of air pollutants, particularly through the reduction of (additional) automobile traffic. They can also impose measures that do not reduce automobile traffic, but still have an impact on the concentration of pollution in the air. These are spatial measures that reduce the mixing of pollutants with less polluted air and promote ventilation between buildings.

Another example is heating via shared local renewable networks.

# Green Leases

## Are green leases or green lease provisions mandatory or optional? If mandatory, to whom do they apply? If optional, is there significant take up?

Green leases per se are not mandatory and not yet common in the three Belgian regions. However, in large residential, office or commercial real estate projects, clauses with a sustainability dimension are increasingly incorporated into lease contracts. These often relate to waste treatment and recycling, lighting and heating policies, and so on. In general, the initiative mostly comes from private landowners. That being said, tenants’ willingness to not only accept these terms but also to fully cooperate reveals a great potential. There is certainly room for public policies encouraging green lease aspects or stimulating the introduction of full green lease contracts as a whole.

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