EUSALP EU STRATEGY FOR THE ALPINE REGION
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POLICY BRIEF: SUSTAINABLE AND CIRCULAR CONSTRUCTION IN THE ALPS

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Timber architecture in Switzerland. Source: Bernhard, Unsplash

Summary

Buildings and their construction are responsible for one third of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions and waste generation. In response, the EU has introduced wide ranging legislation to tackle energy use in buildings and the material footprint of the construction sector, recently updating the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive and Construction Products Regulation. This is supported by the New European Bauhaus initiative, which aims to make the green transition enjoyable, attractive and convenient for building users. The transformation of the construction sector has been picked up as a key priority by the 2025 EUSALP Presidency, that aims to make the Alps a model region for circular construction.

Public policy can be an important lever to accelerate this transition, and regions can play a key role. The creation of regional or macro-regional strategy documents can help to create a common understanding and shared vision around circular construction, fostering alignment in policy making, education and implementation. Thematic networks or clusters that unite the construction value chain can also be effective in creating a shared understanding. Sufficiency measures to maximise the use of the current built environment should be part of any circular strategy, with the aim of extending the usage and lifespan of existing buildings. To increase reuse in the sector, secondary markets for construction materials need to be created and supported. Wood is a renewable, locally available material, which is well suited for circular construction methods. Its use should be promoted through campaigns, incentives and public procurement. Vocational and university curricula should be updated to incorporate circular principles, and companies should be supported to upskill the current workforce. Procurement can be an important driver for circular construction and public authorities should consider including tailored requirements in tender specifications. A significant amount of EU funding is available to support these efforts, including the newly launched New European Bauhaus Facility.

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Making the Alpine region a model for circular construction

The EU strategy for the Alpine region (EUSALP) Presidency is jointly held by Austria and Liechtenstein in 2025. Transformation of the construction industry is one of the three priority areas, a topic that was championed by the Salzburg region in Austria. **Christina Bauer, Head of Regional Development and EU Regional Policy at Land Salzburg**, explains the rationale for this focus.

Why has circular construction been made a priority of the 2025 EUSALP Presidency?

The topic of construction in the Alpine region has its very own specific characteristics that are typical of the region and is therefore particularly suitable for being dealt with in the EUSALP.

The construction industry is responsible for around 30% of landfilled waste. As a society we simply can no longer afford to waste raw materials on this scale. Legislators and the construction industry and research are therefore making efforts to make construction and renovation circular. The longer use of existing buildings is becoming increasingly important. In addition, there are already successful methods of recycling demolition materials. Concrete recycling is one of the keywords here, as is the re-use of used wood. The Alpine Space is particularly affected by climate change, which is why action is needed.

The EU has moreover showed us the path through the Green Deal and New European Bauhaus, including also the vital social and aesthetical aspects.

What is special about the Alpine construction sector and which specific challenges is it facing?

Due to the topographical and climatic conditions of the Alpine region, the efficient and sustainable use of available resources in terms of land and energy efficiency as well as infrastructure utilisation is a major challenge. Building land is only available to a limited extent in Alpine regions, and mostly very expensive. This makes it all the more important to use these areas efficiently. In this context, in addition to the circular economy, solutions for the internal development of existing settlement areas are also coming to the fore.

How will the Presidency advance circular construction, and what impact do you hope to have?

As presidency, we want to raise awareness and connect people but also highlight concrete good and best practices and inform about innovative and progressive solutions. Special emphasis will also be placed on highlighting existing funding opportunities in the individual regions that support a circular construction industry. Our impact should be that Alpine regions become more aware of what is already being successfully implemented elsewhere, inside and outside the Alpine Space. We know that these massive challenges can only be met successfully if we work together and use existing expertise as efficiently as possible.

EU policy framework

The construction sector has a central role to play in the EU's commitment to create a climate-neutral society by 2050. Currently, buildings and their construction are responsible for around a third of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions and waste generation. The built environment is therefore the target of a raft of policies within the Green Deal and Fit for 55 packages.

The 2024 revision of the **Energy Performance of Buildings Directive** sets the framework to reduce emissions and energy use in buildings. Under the directive Member States must adopt their own national trajectory for renovation, addressing the 26% worst-performing buildings by 2033, and establishing one-stop-shops to help simplify the renovation process for owners. All new constructions must have zero on-site emissions from fossil fuels from 2030 onwards (2028 for public buildings).

To address emissions, buildings will be included in a new **emissions trading system** (**ETS2**) from 2027. This 'cap and trade' system will force energy suppliers to incrementally reduce their emissions and provide a market incentive for investments in renovations. Revenues from the ETS2 will enter a **Social Climate Fund**, which will support vulnerable citizens and SMEs through structural measures and investments in energy efficiency, clean heating and cooling, and integration of renewable energy.

Circular construction

The **Circular Economy Action Plan** sets out the strategic framework for the EU's circular economy policies. 'Construction and buildings' is one of seven key value chains identified in the plan that have a high potential for circularity but require urgent, comprehensive and coordinated actions to start this shift.

Construction and demolition waste is a priority waste stream under the **Waste Framework Directive** (WFD). The WFD promotes re-use and high-quality recycling through selective removal of materials during demolition and establishing sorting systems. A Construction and Demolition Waste Management Protocol was published to inform stakeholders on how to properly handle this waste stream.

The **Construction Products Regulation** was updated in 2024, complemented by the **Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR)**, and aims to increase the sustainability and circularity of building products. They set more stringent requirements on product durability, repairability and recyclability as well as transparency of material sourcing and environmental performance. Digital Product Passports for construction products have been introduced, providing all stakeholders with information about product performance, safety, environmental footprint and recyclability.

Sustainable timber

New public procurement rules in the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation will strongly favour construction materials with lower global warming potential, such as wood. Wood is a highly versatile building material that also has many environmental advantages compared to concrete or steel, firstly being renewable and (potentially) local, secondly being a carbon store and more easily reused or recycled.

The **EU Forest Strategy for 2030** is a framework aiming to guide and promote sustainable forest management within EU Member States. One main priority of the strategy is to promote wood products and especially long-lived wood products, such as for construction, following the cascading principle. To help turn the construction sector from a source of greenhouse gas emissions into a carbon sink, the strategy foresees the development of a 2050 roadmap for reducing whole life-cycle carbon emissions in buildings.

The New European Bauhaus

The New European Bauhaus (NEB) is an EU policy and funding initiative that aims to make the green transition in built environments and beyond enjoyable, attractive and convenient for all. It is a creative and transdisciplinary movement that aims to bridge the worlds of science, technology, art, and culture.

A range of actions have so far been launched under the NEB umbrella:

- The **NEB Lab** is a co-creation space at the service of the New European Bauhaus community. It is a project-based structure where teams self-organise to achieve tangible change in a specific place or context. One example is the New European Bauhaus of the mountains project, which is focuses on the transformation of places, public spaces and buildings and is anchored in Bolzano, Italy.
- The **NEB Academy** aims to boost sustainability skills in the construction sector. The Academy will bring together educational and training professionals and connect five local and regional hubs across Europe to provide courses on bio-based, circular, regenerative, long-life and digital construction. The initiative is coordinated by the University of Primorska, Slovenia, who will lead activities in the Alpine region.
- The **NEB Facility** is the funding tool for all things NEB. €120 million per year is being made available to develop novel NEB solutions through research and innovation, while a similar amount is available to support the implementation and scale-up of NEB solutions. NEB National Contact Points have been created to provide support to potential applicants.
- The **NEB Prizes** exemplify beautiful, sustainable, and inclusive real-life projects and encourage younger generations to develop new concepts and ideas. In four editions, more than 5,000 applications have been received, and over €1.5 million awarded to 72 winners.

Wood4Bauhaus

The European wood-based sector has launched Wood4Bauhaus - the Wood Sector Alliance for the New European Bauhaus - as an open platform to reach out to the construction industry and all involved stakeholders. The Alliance raises awareness for and puts a spotlight on the versatility of innovative wood products and building systems to facilitate dedicated co-creation partnerships with the construction sector, architects and the wider NEB community.

> Wood-based construction, as a method to capture and store carbon safely for decades, is finally receiving the highest level of recognition. Our Wood4Bauhaus Alliance is ready to engage in transforming the built environment through research, co-creation and open science to accelerate innovation and inspire people. The business-as-usual approach centred on concrete and steel must be replaced by the New European Bauhaus's quest for a sustainable, beautiful, and affordable future for us all.
>
> **Prof. Andreja Kutnar, Director of InnoRenew CoE, Slovenia, and member of Wood4Bauhaus**

Alpine policy

Policies for sustainable and circular construction in the Alps are being addressed within EUSALP, the EU strategy for the Alpine region. The topic is touched upon by a number of EUSALP working groups including Action Group 1 Research and Innovation (development and demonstration of new technologies), Action Group 3 Labour market, education and training (construction skills), Action Group 6 Resources (spatial planning and forest products) and Action Group 9 Energy (energy efficiency of buildings). In addition, Action Group 2 Economic Development operates a sub-group dedicated to wood, which aims to promote sustainable timber mobilisation, processing, transformation and use according to cascading principles, as well as its potential to mitigate climate change by storing carbon in the construction sector.

The EUSALP Task Force on Multifunctional Forest and Sustainable Use of Timber was established in 2019 to foster cross-cutting and interactive cooperation among Action Groups regarding topics linked to forests and wood. The Task Force keeps the community updated on developments via a dedicated LinkedIn page. Boosting circular economy has also been introduced as a cross-cutting priority within EUSALP, with the aim of contributing to the reduction and valorisation of waste, the reduction of materials consumption, the promotion of product-as-a-service businesses, and the creation of professional profiles in key Alpine sectors.

Transformation of the construction industry

Circular construction and renovation has been pushed up the political priority list by the 2025 EUSALP Presidency, which is jointly held by Austria and Liechtenstein. They have made the transformation of the construction industry towards circularity one of their three priorities. The Presidency is focusing on cooperation in the following topics:

- A common, integrated and practicable understanding of the principle of circular economy in the construction sector, taking into account competing objectives
- Methods for extending the utilisation cycles of buildings and for designing circular buildings in the sense of long-lasting, aesthetic and circular architecture
- Utilisation of regionally available, if possible renewable, raw materials in the construction sector as an important component of an Alpine building tradition
- Analysis and further development of job profiles and training programmes in the field of circular construction and renovation
- Guidelines for action and supporting measures for the implementation of circular procurement and a funding model as an incentive for circular construction and refurbishment.

> The Alpine region has a long tradition of sustainable construction and a large number of innovative and visionary architects, companies and building owners. This potential can be utilised to make the Alpine region a model region for circular construction.
>
> **Programme of the joint EUSALP Presidency of Austria and Liechtenstein 2025: Cooperation empowers transformation**

Policy measures to support circular construction

1. Creating a common understanding

Circularity means different things to different people. Some may conflate it with recycling, while others see it as a holistic principle. Creating a common understanding of the circular economy in the Alpine construction sector is vital because it lays the foundation for coordinated action. The sector is highly fragmented, with many stakeholders - architects, engineers, contractors, suppliers, policymakers, clients. Without shared terminology or goals circularity risks becoming vague or inconsistently applied.

A shared understanding is the basis for developing common codes, certifications, and procurement rules. It supports policymakers in creating aligned legislation, such as minimum circularity requirements or reuse incentives. It will also support training and workforce readiness. Educational institutions and vocational training can only equip future professionals for circularity if the sector is on the same page.

At the EU scale, Level(s) provides a common language for assessing and reporting on the sustainability performance of buildings. It is firmly based on circularity and provides a common language for the building transformation process in line with the EU's sustainability initiatives. A dedicated Alpine strategy for circular construction could help develop a shared lexicon and agreed principles for use by all stakeholders.

Thematic networks and clusters can also be an effective way to create a common understanding. Creating a cross-border macro-regional cluster could be a next step to extending this understanding across the Alpine region.

Good practice: Knowledge and network platform for circular construction (Liechtenstein)

Circular construction is gaining momentum in Liechtenstein, in no small part thanks to ZirkuLIE, a circular construction knowledge and network platform. The platform connects all relevant stakeholders - from architects, manufacturers, policy makers to financial actors - to promote the transition to a circular economy in the construction industry. As well as creating a common understanding and platform for cooperation, the network also offers advisory services for building contractors, to provide a basic understanding of circular construction and to outline possible ways in which their project(s) can be developed in this direction. ZirkuLIE has also developed a component exchange, where used building materials are made available via a dedicated webshop. The network also leverages events and exhibitions to increase awareness and understanding of circular construction principles. ZirkuLIE is a project of the Liechtenstein Livable Foundation in cooperation with Circular Hub GmbH Zurich.

2. Extending the lifecycle of buildings and building products

Extending the lifecycle of buildings and construction products, avoiding or minimising the need for new buildings and materials, is a cornerstone of the circular economy. Renovation or adaptive reuse of buildings reduces the frequency of demolition and rebuilds and is often cheaper than new construction, especially when energy retrofits are integrated. Extending the lifespan of buildings also preserves local character and supports cultural and architectural heritage. Equally many construction products – think of windows, bricks, beams, flooring, doors – retain high functional and economic value well beyond typical replacement cycles.

In the first instance this requires us to maximise the usage and lifespan of our current built environment. This includes optimising the use of existing (vacant and under-utilised) spaces, buildings, and infrastructures. So-called 'sufficiency' measures are gaining traction among policy makers and the EU is funding research into sufficiency measures in the built environment.

Other measures to increase the longevity of buildings include regular maintenance, which prevents premature decay of building elements. Incentives and subsidies for retrofitting or conversion can also help encourage renovation over demolition. Building codes can also be adapted to allow for flexibility and change of use.

In order to keep materials in the loop a market needs to be created for secondary materials. This requires better management of construction and demolition waste – selective demolition, removal of hazardous materials, source separation into pure material fractions – something that will be facilitated by digital product passports. Digital and physical marketplaces need to be established to match supply and demand.

New buildings should be designed and built considering circular principles: longevity, adaptability and disassembly.

Good practice: Secondary construction product markets (Switzerland)

Switzerland has a relatively established market for secondary building products, with multiple marketplaces currently operating. One of the most advanced is useagain.ch (formerly bauteilclick.ch). Unlike other marketplaces it does not have a physical depot, branding itself as a brokerage platform, that connects supply with demand. Users can create their own listings on the site and arrange delivery/pick-up with the eventual buyer. If they can't find what they are looking for, the platform will help buyers source their desired components from other secondary marketplaces or suppliers.

The platform is targeted at professional users and operates a subscription system which incentivises regular usage. Networking is also an important part of the platform, and it aims to help users find experienced architects, contractors and consultants engaged in circular construction.

3. Promoting local, renewable materials

Historically, building materials were predominantly derived from local, renewable and biological sources. In Europe today however, cement, steel, aluminium and plastic are the norm, and their production accounts for no less than 15% of our greenhouse gas emissions. Shifting back towards local, renewable materials such as wood should be a key tenet of sustainable, circular construction, especially in Alpine regions, where forest resources and timber craftsmanship are deeply rooted.

Due to its versatility, strength and availability wood has always been a popular building material, but new advances in engineered timber have further expanded its possible utility. Locally sourced wood has lower embodied carbon than energy intensive alternative materials, and acts as a carbon sink over its lifecycle. It also supports circular design, being easy to reuse, repair and even disassemble. And like other natural materials it contributes to healthier indoor air quality and humidity regulation.

Good practice: The Styrian Wood Cluster (Austria)

The Styrian Wood Cluster unites 170 partners from the forest-based sector in Styria, Austria, including companies, universities, research institutions, and know-how partners. With 85% of its members being SMEs, the cluster plays a central role in fostering innovation and collaboration across the wood value chain. An interdisciplinary team - comprising architects, engineers, innovation managers, and communication experts - supports member companies by initiating innovation projects, enabling networking and international cooperation, and providing access to current information on the sector. To help shape a strong future for the forest-based economy in the region, the cluster has developed the Wood Cluster 2025+ strategy, serving as both an agenda and source of inspiration for ongoing development and market expansion.

Wood construction can and should be supported in different ways. Building codes and standards need to be updated to reflect the new possibilities offered by engineered timber, for example allowing greater height limits for timber buildings. Incentives can be put in place to subsidise the use of timber in private projects. While for public projects, setting embodied carbon targets can be a way to favour timber construction in tendering processes.

Supporting networks and clusters can be an effective way to boost the wood sector, fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange. This could be connected to deconstruction networks or sorting hubs for used wood to help foster secondary wood markets.

Good practice: Timber Construction Funds (Italy and Germany)

To incentivise the use of wood in construction, and to support the local wood sector, the region of South Tyrol, Italy, launched a dedicated timber construction fund in 2023. €1.2 million is available each year, with the fund initially foreseen until 2030 and open only to public authorities. To qualify, buildings must have a wooden or hybrid structure, with at least 100 kg of wood per square metre. At least 80% of the solid wood used must have been cut and processed within a maximum radius of 500 km from the construction site. Insulation materials made from renewable raw materials such as flax, hemp, cork or straw are also eligible for funding. The financial contribution amounts to €500 per tonne of carbon stored in the above-ground parts of the building, with a maximum of €200,000 per project. A similar programme *Bayerisches Holzbauförderprogramm – BayFHolz* is also operating in Bavaria, Germany.

4. Building skills and knowledge

Circular construction principles are only impactful if the workforce have the knowledge and skills to apply them. Without adequate skills, even the best policies or technologies cannot be implemented effectively.

Most current construction professionals – be it architects, engineers, site managers or contractors - were trained according to linear building principles. Architects need to be (re)educated in the principles of circular design: utilising a minimal amount of materials to achieve a maximum lifespan, designed with maintenance and disassembly in mind. Site workers need skills in selective demolition, digital tools, and reuse of materials.

Good practice: Circular time lab (Switzerland)

BAUHALPS is an Interreg Alpine Space project that aims to foster circular building in the Alpine area. Within the project, Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, has created a 'circular time lab' to promote circular thinking among young professionals. To achieve this, it provides space for innovation and a platform to experimentally test the implementation of circular practices. The idea is for young people of all educational levels to plan and implement small timber construction projects in an interdisciplinary team setting, engaging in a hands-on experience. The constructed objects serve an interim use and are dismantled after one year. The following year, a new team initiates the dismantling process, embarking on a different project with a different purpose and location. The small-scale constructions are intentionally implemented on public land, or visible and accessible to the public. In doing so, they not only provide a temporary value to the community through their respective use but also make circular construction practices a living experience.

While circular construction may be more present in today's training programmes and courses, it is still not the norm. Efforts should be made to include circular construction as a central theme in vocational and university curricula. Companies also need to be encouraged to upskill their workforce, this could be achieved through financial support or tax incentives for SMEs to train staff in circular construction methods.

Collaboration is key. Encouraging public-private cooperation between training providers, universities and construction firms, or teaming up with regional clusters or networks to deliver expert training are both interesting strategies. This could help in the creation of educational materials which can be reused by multiple institutions.

5. Harnessing public procurement

In Europe, public procurement accounts for around 14% of GDP, and construction is a major share of that. Procurement is therefore one of the most powerful tools to support circular construction because it sets the rules for how materials, buildings, and services are sourced. If public authorities demand reused materials, low-carbon products, or design-for-disassembly, it sends a strong signal to the market. This encourages suppliers and contractors to develop circular offerings, helping to build a competitive ecosystem.

There are also other benefits to circular procurement for the built environment. Procurement that values life cycle performance leads to lower total cost of ownership, longer building lifespans and easier maintenance, repair, and reuse.

Procurement can support circular construction in a number of ways. A lot of this comes down to setting circular criteria in tendering, for example requiring partial or total use of secondary materials or design for disassembly. Award criteria can also be modified to include circularity criteria such as life cycle assessments or carbon footprint. Tenders can also mandate or reward teams with circular construction qualifications or training credentials, to ensure the right skills.

Good practice: Reuse and recycling at a school rebuild (France)

Children in Six-Fours in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region may attend the most circular school in Europe. The school has been built largely using materials recovered from the old school, which was demolished on the same site. In all more than 2,000 tonnes were reused and recycled on site. The architect incorporated specific circular economy requests into the public procurement process and a detailed resource assessment identified materials for reuse and recycling, including furniture, ceiling slabs, a gas boiler, stone rubble, electrical equipment, and sanitary ware. The deconstruction produced over 1,500 tonnes of concrete, which was crushed and screened for reuse in gabion filling, backfilling, and sewage sand. Important to the success of the project was the involvement of a dedicated, circular economy project manager, who oversaw the bidding process, ensuring standards for reuse and recycling. This support was co-funded by the regional authority.

EU funding opportunities

A large amount of EU funding is available to advance sustainable and circular construction along the value chain, from research and development and material innovation to large-scale renovation, deployment, and financing platforms.

Horizon Europe is the EU's key funding programme for research and innovation. Legal entities from the EU and associated countries can participate. This includes Switzerland, which became fully associated from the start of 2025, but not Liechtenstein, which does not intend to associate to Horizon Europe.

Funding for sustainable and circular construction projects are spread across some of the different Horizon Europe sub-programmes, including Cluster 5: Climate, Energy and Mobility, and the Missions on 'Climate Neutral and Smart Cities' and 'Adaptation to Climate Change'. Topics related to renewable building materials including wood may be found in the Circular Bio-based Europe Joint Undertaking. Funding for the demonstration of circular solutions is available from the EU Circular Cities and Regions Initiative, which has dedicated calls for proposal within Cluster 6: Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment.

Further deployment of breakthrough innovations for construction is addressed via the **Innovation Fund**. The Innovation Fund focuses on highly innovative technologies and flagship projects within Europe that can bring about significant emission reductions. The fund awards grants through calls for proposals and through competitive bidding procedures (auctions).

The new **NEB Facility** is the funding arm of the EU's New European Bauhaus initiative. It aims to revitalise neighbourhoods through design for sustainability and inclusion. A research and innovation component funds basic research, testing, and demonstration projects, and has its own dedicated work programme within Horizon Europe. Calls are spread across three 'destinations': (1) connecting the green transformation, social inclusion and local democracy, (2) circular and regenerative approaches for the built environment, and (3) innovative funding and new business models for the transformation of neighbourhoods. The second 'roll-out' component of the NEB Facility pools funds from other EU programmes to scale, deploy, and implement innovative solutions for the built environment and beyond, with the goal of enhancing their transformative impact.

The **LIFE Programme** is the EU's primary funding instrument for the environment and climate action, supporting demonstration and capacity building projects. There is a dedicated sub-programme for 'Circular economy and quality of life' which has a budget of €450 million for the current period (2021-2027). Selective collection and recycling of materials used in buildings and construction is an eligible activity within the sub-topic on recovery of resources from waste. 'Standard Action Projects' in this sub-programme are funded at 60%. LIFE is also funding Coordination and Support Actions within its clean energy transition sub-programme, some of which have a focus on building renovation.

Cohesion policy funds such as the **European Regional Development Fund**, the **European Social Fund Plus**, the **Cohesion Fund**, the **Just Transition Fund** and **INTERREG** are key sources of funding for direct investments in energy efficient renovations of buildings. Approximately €12 billion is available to support building renovation during the current period.

Interreg Europe will not be launching another call for projects before 2027, but provides free, tailor-made expert support services to public authorities in the form of peer reviews and matchmakings. The calls are continuously open and can be requested through a short and easy application process.

Conclusions and recommendations

Buildings and their construction are currently responsible for around a third of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions and waste generation. The transformation of the construction sector towards more sustainable and circular practices is therefore vital to achieve EU targets related to resource use and climate-neutrality. Public policy can be an important lever to accelerate this transition, and regions can play a key role. This policy brief has highlighted promising strategies and associated good practices from the Alpine region, from which the following recommendations can be made:

- **Speak the same language**. Circular economy can be understood and applied in different ways. In a highly complex and fragmented sector such as construction, a common understanding of circular construction is a needed for coordinated action. A dedicated Alpine strategy or vision for circular construction could help develop a shared lexicon and agreed principles for use by all stakeholders, including construction professionals, policy makers and educators. Thematic networks and clusters, such as ZirkuLIE, a circular construction knowledge and network platform in Switzerland (Page 6), can also be an effective way to create a shared understanding. Creating a cross-border macro-regional cluster could be a next step to extending this understanding across the Alpine region.
- **Make full use of existing buildings**. With over 47 million vacant homes in the EU, more could be done to maximise the utility of the current building stock. Optimising the use of existing floor space, buildings and infrastructure, combined with measures to increase the longevity of buildings, such as regular maintenance, are therefore key actions. Lack of data is often a barrier to implementing so-called 'sufficiency' measures, so regions should consider investing in studies to identify vacant and under-utilised spaces. Embracing digital solutions can help to optimise building maintenance.
- **Create markets for secondary materials**. Keeping materials in the loop for as long as possible is a key tenet of the circular economy. To this end, well-functioning markets for secondary materials, such as can be found in Switzerland (page 7), are essential to make material reuse a realistic option for construction companies. Regions should consider how they can promote these secondary markets, for example through green tax schemes, and support their establishment in areas where they don't yet exist.
- **Build with wood**. Shifting towards local, renewable materials such as wood can support sustainable construction, especially in Alpine regions where forestry and timber craftsmanship are deeply rooted. Regions can support this by updating building codes and standards to reflect the new possibilities offered by engineered timber, and incentivising the use of timber in new projects, for example through timber construction funds (page 7). Networks and clusters, such as the Styrian Wood Cluster (page 7), are also an effective way to raise awareness and promote timber construction.
- **Boost skills and knowledge**. Most current construction professionals were trained according to linear building principles. Companies need to be encouraged to upskill their workforce, possibly through financial support or tax incentives, or in collaboration with expert clusters or networks. To put future professionals on a better footing, efforts should be made to include circular construction as a central theme in vocational and university curricula, or to set up dedicated infrastructure, such as the circular time lab (page 8).
- **Leverage public procurement**. Incorporating circularity principles into procurement can be an important accelerator for circular construction, encouraging suppliers and contractors to develop new offerings. This can be achieved through the inclusion of specific requirements related to reuse of materials or design for disassembly in tender specifications, like at the school in Six Fours, France (page 9). Adding award criteria related to life cycle assessments or carbon footprint can also encourage circular principles and often also the use of timber.
- **Seek EU funds**. A significant amount of EU funding is available for research and development, demonstration, deployment and capacity building. Don't miss the new NEB Facility which is funding circular and regenerative approaches for the built environment.