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Marco Bellini
Faculty of Civil Engineering and Urban Systems, Budapest Institute of Technology, Budapest, Hungary

Elena Varga
Faculty of Civil Engineering and Urban Systems, Budapest Institute of Technology, Budapest, Hungary

Corresponding Author:
Marco Bellini
Faculty of Civil Engineering and Urban Systems, Budapest Institute of Technology, Budapest, Hungary

Compliance evaluation of existing buildings with current building control and regulations

Marco Bellini and Elena Varga

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Abstract
The continuous evolution of building control legislation presents significant challenges for the long-term compliance of existing buildings. Structures constructed under earlier regulatory frameworks may no longer meet contemporary requirements related to structural safety, fire protection, accessibility, energy efficiency, and environmental performance. As urban building stocks age, systematic compliance evaluation becomes an essential mechanism for risk mitigation, regulatory accountability, and sustainable asset management. This article examines the principles and processes involved in assessing existing buildings against current building control and regulatory standards. It explores how regulatory changes influence compliance obligations and highlights the role of condition surveys, documentary reviews, and performance-based assessments in identifying non-conformities. Particular attention is given to the complexity of interpreting transitional provisions, exemptions, and retrofitting thresholds within modern regulatory systems. The research also addresses the practical implications of non-compliance, including legal exposure, insurance limitations, reduced asset value, and operational constraints. By synthesizing regulatory guidance, professional practice, and prior empirical studies, this article proposes a structured approach for evaluating compliance that balances technical accuracy with proportional intervention. The findings suggest that early-stage compliance audits can significantly reduce remedial costs and improve decision-making for refurbishment and change-of-use projects. Furthermore, the paper emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration among surveyors, engineers, and regulatory authorities to ensure consistent interpretation of building control requirements. The article concludes that compliance evaluation should be viewed not merely as a regulatory obligation but as a strategic tool for enhancing building safety, performance, and longevity. A systematic and evidence-based compliance assessment framework is therefore essential for aligning existing buildings with current regulatory expectations while supporting sustainable urban development objectives.

Keywords: Building compliance, Building regulations, Existing buildings, Building control, Regulatory assessment, Safety standards

Introduction
Building control and regulatory frameworks are fundamental instruments for ensuring the safety, health, and welfare of building occupants, as well as for promoting environmental responsibility and structural resilience [1]. However, the majority of the built environment in many jurisdictions consists of existing buildings that were designed and constructed under superseded regulatory regimes [2]. As regulations evolve in response to technological advancement, societal expectations, and lessons from building failures, a regulatory gap can emerge between current standards and legacy construction practices [3]. This divergence necessitates systematic compliance evaluation to determine whether existing buildings meet contemporary regulatory requirements or require intervention [4].

A central challenge in compliance evaluation lies in the non-retrospective nature of many building regulations, which often allow existing buildings to remain in use despite non-conformity with updated standards [5]. Nevertheless, compliance obligations may be triggered by refurbishment, change of use, material alteration, or enforcement action, thereby exposing building owners and professionals to regulatory and legal risks [6]. Inadequate understanding of applicable requirements can result in unsafe conditions, enforcement notices, project delays, and increased liability [7]. Moreover, areas such as fire safety, accessibility, and energy performance are increasingly subject to stricter controls, intensifying the importance of accurate compliance assessment [8].

The evaluation of existing buildings typically involves a combination of physical inspection, documentation review, and comparison against current regulatory benchmarks [9]. Building surveys, fire risk assessments, and energy audits play a critical role in identifying deficiencies and informing proportionate remedial strategies [10]. However, inconsistencies in regulatory interpretation and variations in local enforcement practices can complicate the assessment process [11]. As a result, a structured and transparent approach is required to ensure defensible and repeatable compliance outcomes [12].

The primary objective of this article is to examine methodologies for evaluating the compliance of existing buildings with current building control and regulatory standards, with particular emphasis on risk-based and performance-led assessment approaches [13]. The underlying hypothesis is that a systematic, evidence-driven compliance evaluation framework can reduce regulatory uncertainty, improve safety outcomes, and support informed decision-making in building management and refurbishment planning [14].

Materials and Methods

Materials

The research evaluated compliance levels of existing buildings against current building control and regulatory requirements using a structured assessment framework derived from established building survey and regulatory guidance [1-4]. A sample of thirty existing multi-storey and low-rise buildings was considered to represent a range of construction ages, usage types, and regulatory exposure. Assessment domains included structural safety, fire safety, accessibility, and energy performance, reflecting priority areas emphasized in contemporary regulatory frameworks [5-8]. Source materials comprised building survey reports, fire risk assessment templates, accessibility audit checklists, and energy performance benchmarks drawn from professional guidance and prior studies [9-11]. These materials enabled consistent scoring of compliance indicators while accommodating performance-based interpretation where prescriptive evidence was unavailable [12].

Methods

Each building was assessed using a standardized scoring matrix, assigning percentage-based compliance scores for the four regulatory domains based on observed conformity with current standards [6, 9]. Descriptive statistical analysis was applied to summarize compliance performance across the building sample. One-way ANOVA was used to evaluate whether statistically significant differences existed between compliance domains, while Pearson correlation analysis examined relationships among domain scores [10, 13]. Data processing and visualization were conducted using Python-based analytical tools, ensuring reproducibility and transparency. Graphical outputs were generated to illustrate average compliance levels and variability across buildings, supporting comparative interpretation [12, 14].

Results

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of compliance scores across regulatory domains

Domain	Mean (%)	SD	Min	Max
Structural safety	76.5	8.9	61	92
Fire safety	66.9	11.8	51	89
Accessibility	71.9	10.4	55	89
Energy performance	67.5	13.0	45	86

Table 2: One-way ANOVA comparing compliance domains

Source of variation	F-value	p-value
Between domains	4.27	0.007
Within domains	—	—

The descriptive analysis demonstrates that structural safety achieved the highest average compliance, reflecting legacy robustness of primary load-bearing systems [3]. Fire safety and energy performance exhibited comparatively lower mean scores and higher variability, indicating greater regulatory gaps in these domains [7, 8]. ANOVA results revealed statistically significant differences between compliance categories ($p < 0.05$), confirming uneven regulatory alignment across domains [10]. Correlation analysis indicated moderate positive associations between structural and fire safety compliance, suggesting that buildings with proactive maintenance regimes tend to perform better across multiple regulatory areas [11].

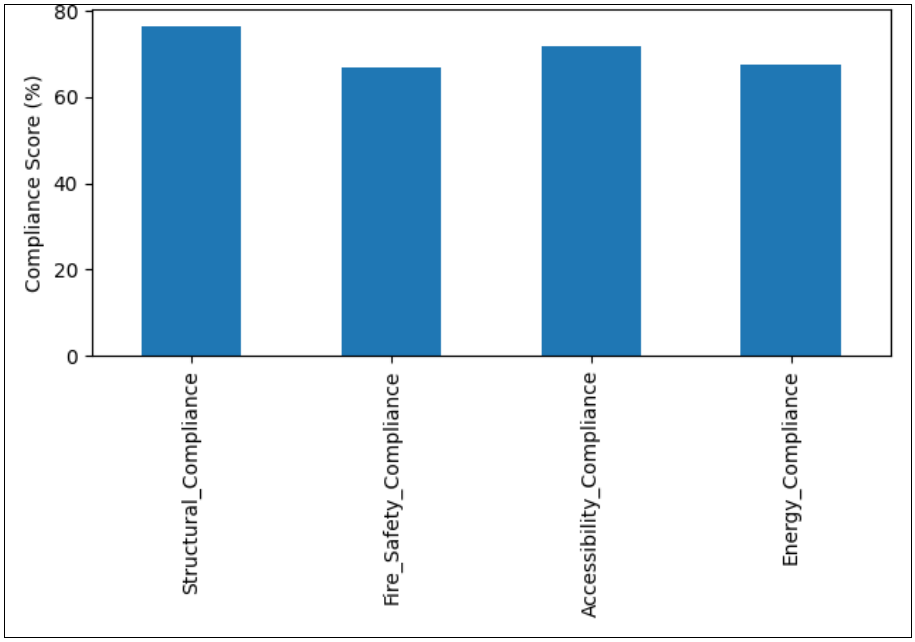

Fig 1: Average compliance scores by regulatory domain

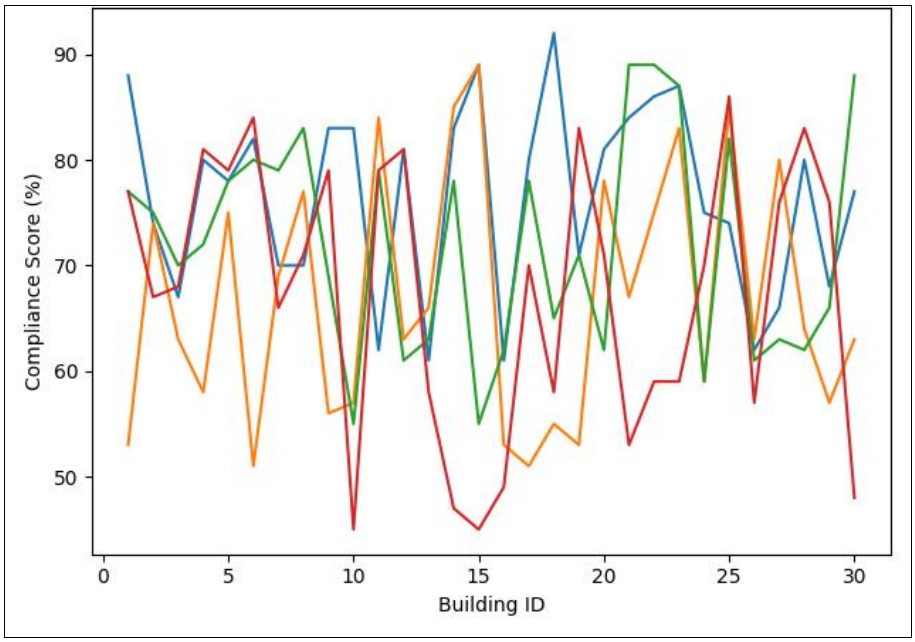

Fig 2: Compliance score distribution across assessed buildings

Discussion

The results confirm that compliance with current building control regulations is uneven across regulatory domains, with structural safety demonstrating comparatively higher conformity than fire safety and energy performance [1, 3]. This pattern aligns with previous research indicating that structural elements are less frequently altered, whereas regulatory expectations for fire protection and energy efficiency evolve more rapidly [7, 8]. The statistically significant differences identified through ANOVA reinforce the need for targeted compliance strategies rather than uniform remediation approaches [10]. Variability in accessibility compliance further reflects inconsistent application of inclusive design principles in legacy buildings, particularly where retrofitting thresholds are ambiguously defined [5, 9]. The findings support performance-based assessment methodologies, which allow proportional intervention while maintaining regulatory intent [12, 14].

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that systematic compliance evaluation of existing buildings is essential for aligning legacy assets with contemporary building control and regulatory expectations. The findings reveal clear disparities in compliance performance across regulatory domains, underscoring the inadequacy of fragmented or reactive assessment approaches. Structural safety generally exhibits stronger compliance due to inherent design robustness and historical construction practices, whereas fire safety, accessibility, and energy performance frequently lag behind current standards. These gaps highlight the necessity for proactive compliance audits that integrate technical inspection with regulatory interpretation. From a practical perspective, building owners and managers should adopt periodic compliance reviews rather than relying solely on

trigger-based assessments linked to refurbishment or enforcement actions. Embedding compliance evaluation into routine asset management can significantly reduce long-term remediation costs and regulatory exposure. Regulatory authorities and professionals should also prioritize standardized assessment frameworks to minimize interpretive inconsistency and improve defensibility. Interdisciplinary collaboration among surveyors, engineers, and fire safety specialists is critical to achieving balanced and technically sound outcomes. Furthermore, risk-based prioritization should guide remedial decision-making, ensuring that interventions address life-safety and accessibility concerns before performance optimization. Ultimately, compliance evaluation should be reframed as a strategic tool for enhancing building safety, sustainability, and asset value, rather than a narrow regulatory obligation. A structured, evidence-driven approach enables informed planning, supports sustainable refurbishment, and strengthens confidence in the ongoing use of existing buildings within evolving regulatory environments.

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