



## Support and sustain efficient energy use

- The need to promote greater articulation between all the stakeholders involved in the definition and implementation of energy efficiency initiatives is crucial to increase the impact of such measures among consumers.
- The relevance of i) working in collaboration with local entities, ii) considering the most vulnerable consumer segments as priority target-groups, iii) ensuring a continuous assessment of the needs and results achieved among consumers and iv) reflecting such results in the definition and implementation of the measures will enhance the success of energy efficiency initiatives.
- The need to make available financial support schemes that enable the continuous implementation of these kind of initiatives by the different market actors, combined with the availability of affordable and simple financial support mechanisms for ordinary consumers to improve the energy efficiency of their households.

### Introduction to the topic

According to the European Commission, buildings in the EU are responsible for 40% of our energy consumption and 36% of greenhouse emissions. Households' energy consumption is, therefore, one of the strategic axes in energy efficiency policies and programs to tackle climate change and foster a transition to a circular economy where citizens can have an active and decisive participation.

The empowerment of citizens for a more efficient and sustainable energy consumption has been at the centre of initiatives that seek to provide information and knowledge, but also to motivate for an effective and lasting change of behaviour of consumers and their households in terms of energy consumption.

Important efforts have also been made to mitigate the possible behavioural responses from consumers that can "take back" the potential energy savings that come from the improvements made in energy efficiency in a first effort of behaviour change.

This phenomenon, known as rebound-effect, is defined as an unexpected increase in energy

consumption which may occur as an unintended side-effect of the introduction of policy, market or technology improvements in energy efficiency.

The effectiveness and positive impact of information, awareness raising and capacity building initiatives aimed at consumers can only be achieved through an effective integration of the rebound effect dimension in the definition and implementation of such activities, that translates into greater support and information for consumers regarding their energy consumption management and behaviours.

Integrating rebound effect in current policies and programmes is therefore crucial to assure that consumers continue to have the right and strong motivation and "reward" to keep in the path of energy efficiency, but also not to end up making energy efficiency a way of saving on one side to spend on the other, using more energy or buying more appliances.

### Identified challenges

The challenges presented below have been identified during three national level policy





seminars that took place in May-June 2021 in Portugal, Denmark and Finland, discussing the topic of sustaining efficient energy use (rebound effect).

### **Overlapping initiatives and lack of articulation in intervention**

There is a general consensus that the multitude of market and non-profit actors involved in the array of strategies and initiatives for promoting energy efficiency, ends up hindering an articulated implementation of the initiatives and highlights the importance of a greater involvement and collaboration between all entities with responsibilities in the definition and implementation of such measures.

This is particularly important when stakeholders end up targeting the same publics, for instance, with an awareness and information campaign. Sharing this kind of initiative would raise quality in terms of the message, of the reach and of the credibility.

### **Project or time framed approach**

It is also noted that the current initiatives aimed at the consumer, arise, in most cases, as a result of national or European funding schemes, having an implementation and monitoring that is limited to the life time of the project, lacking many times continuity over the years to make the needed improvements and consolidate results.

### **A single approach for all**

These initiatives also end up not being able to cover all the vastness of target audiences and consumer needs, not reaching the most vulnerable populations such as the elderly and

children. This is even more relevant when we are dealing with measures that use digital channels, which ends up not including consumers without access to information and communication technologies.

### **Professionals and salesperson are out of the equation**

These gaps in the suitability to different target audiences and the needs of different consumers are also reflected in the fact that key market players such as housing and construction professionals are not involved, which is a missed opportunity since their participation could help create conditions for a reduction in the energy needs of households.

### **Lack of clear, easy and attractive sources of updated information**

All issues related with energy efficiency are in a constant change and consumers need to be clarified and updated every step of the way, no matter if they are beginners or already at ease with the topic.

Consumers need to be aware where they can get reliable information at any step of the way, be it to change a lamp or to buy a heating system. Can they trust salespersons? Are they certified? How to navigate in long information sites and portal and find quickly the information you need?

## **Policy insights**

### **Greater stakeholder cooperation for greater synergy and impact**

The cornerstone for an effective promotion of energy efficiency initiatives among consumers should lie in greater collaboration between stakeholders. This would allow sharing





resources and creating synergies for a greater impact and reach. However, the greatest potential could be of working more closely with a wider range of target audiences targeting them separately with specific messages, activities and approaches. This would be particularly relevant for vulnerable consumers, such as elderly or with less economic capacity. At the same time, it would allow to better tap the potential of using younger audiences as a dissemination channel and the role that schools may have in promoting these issues among young consumers.

#### **Tailored approaches (message and activities) for each audience**

As introduced above, it is also important to take into consideration the profile and needs of consumers when defining and implementing initiatives. In this sense, efforts should also be made to guarantee greater support and follow-up among consumers in the long term and to foster partnerships with local bodies and actors that are already recognised by consumers and that support them daily, being in the best circumstances to know what their needs and how they should be overcome. Local actors can act as mediators and be the key to overcome lack of access to technologies or to the proper understanding the complexity of energy efficiency.

#### **Energy efficiency needs to fit consumers' possibilities and responsibility**

Investments in regular and up to date consumer information and education has necessarily to be accompanied by a legal framework that creates the conditions for an increase in energy efficiency in the market, for

instance availability and prices of equipment, as well as in the areas of construction and housing. Consumers cannot see their efforts blocked because building is not suitable, because choosing appliances is too complex or because they need to spend too much time studying, preparing, comparing, moving around, buying things. Changes in legal framework should consider easiness for consumers to change and adapt.

In this respect, more funding schemes should be made available to enable the implementation of information and consumer empowerment measures, being that these funding schemes, should be defined in a way to facilitate the participation of consumers and thus making it possible for consumers to seize these support schemes. This is particularly relevant for vulnerable consumers who cannot deal with the bureaucracy to reach for funds or to advance money or coordinate house interventions.

#### **Methodology for collecting results**

The challenges and policy insights presented in this policy brief were collected during national-level policy seminars that were held by each ECO2 partner in May-June 2021. The seminars gathered policy-makers, academia, NGOs (incl. consumer organisations) and businesses and looked into EU level, as well as national and local level policy interventions for improving the impact of policy on consumers' behavior towards increased energy efficiency.

#### **The ECO2 project in a nutshell**

**ECO2 (Energy Conscious Consumers)** is a Horizon2020 funded project. Its main objective is to increase the awareness of EU consumers regarding their energy consumption and ways





to improve the energy efficiency of their homes. Since consumers play a key role in the transition towards more sustainable energy use, the project both engages and empowers them by enhancing their knowledge on how to consume energy more consciously in their everyday lives.

The main outcome of the ECO2 project is **ACT4ECO**, an interactive online platform available at [www.act4eco.eu](http://www.act4eco.eu). It is aimed at motivating energy consumers to explore various solutions in terms of home improvements and implementation of energy-saving best practices.

ECO2 also aims at establishing a dialogue with policy-makers and innovators at national and EU level through policy seminars, to discuss energy efficiency measures available to households and their impact on consumer behaviour.

### Project partners

**Fonden Teknologirådet – Danish Board of Technology Foundation (DBT)**, Denmark – Project coordinator

**Hebes Intelligence Single Member Private Company (HEBES)**, Greece

**Sinergie Società Consortile a Responsabilità Limitata (SINERGIE)**, Italy

**Helsingin Yliopisto – University of Helsinki (UH)**, Finland

**Associação Portuguesa para a Defesa do Consumidor (DECO)**, Portugal

**Strategic Design Scenarios (SDS)**, Belgium

**Applied Research and Communications Fund (ARC Fund)**, Bulgaria

**Asociacija Žinių Ekonomikos Forumas (KEF)**, Lithuania

**University College Cork, National University of Ireland, Cork (UCC)**, Ireland

