A framework for Member States to support business in improving its resource efficiency

An Analysis of support measures applied in the EU-28

Measure synthesis

Providing targeted resource efficiency information and advice to companies
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Providing targeted resource efficiency information and advice to companies

The provision of targeted information/advice to companies on resource efficiency can help to encourage improvements. Online information on improving resource efficiency, support for sharing of best practices between companies, virtual or ‘in person’ support and advice programmes, and financial support for implementing advice all have the potential to help. Although audits (see measure 2 Incentivising external audits to support resource efficiency) will be an important foundation to base targeted resource efficiency advice on (e.g. in relation to which measures could be effective to reduce material/energy needs of a company), they are not covered under this measure, which covers a much wider range of information and advice and does not necessitate a systematic (auditing) procedure for obtaining information to generate advice and provide information.

State support for the provision of targeted resource efficiency information and advice to companies is widely used in six Member States (22%; Austria, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland and the Netherlands,) and used a little in the large majority of Member States (18 MS, 64%) (see Figure 1). In four Member States (14%, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia) there is no national policy in place for this support measure.

Good practice examples

In the following section, we provide selected good practice examples for this support measure from five different Member States (see Figure 2; the full list can be found in the separate Annex document): Austria, Finland, Hungary and Ireland (each with wide use of this measure); Denmark (with a little use of this measure).
Figure 2: Good practice examples and scope of application for support measure 5 across EU-28
The Austrian ÖKOPROFIT programme was launched in 1991 and is still ongoing, aiming to help companies to implement environmental measures, thereby reducing industrial emissions (waste water, exhaust air, noise and waste), decreasing the operating costs for companies and strengthening partnerships between public agencies, companies and experts. By 2011, 150 companies participated in the city of Graz and implemented 6,600 environmental measures, helping to save more than 177,000 tonnes of waste (Umwelt GRAZ 2011). ÖKOPROFIT was initiated in Graz, but has since then been transferred to other cities and regions in Austria, e.g. Vorarlberg, Vienna, Carinthia and Styria. In addition, the ÖKOPROFIT concept was also successfully transferred to other countries, e.g. Germany, China and Uganda.

The Finnish National Material Efficiency Centre, established in 2008, provides information (data and knowledge) in the field of material efficiency, develops tools and services to promote material efficiency of businesses and the public sector and initiates and coordinates interactive networks among material efficiency professionals. Funded by the Ministry of Employment and Economy with 500,000 EUR per annum, the Centre operates nationwide. Its offers to businesses since 2008 encompass:

- An information portal on material efficiency under the Motiva (the administrative body) web-pages;
- A Consultancy Service for Public Environmental Technology Procurement;
- The development and promotion of material efficiency audit tools for companies;
- The development and implementation of the Finnish Industrial Symbiosis System FISS; and
- The TUORE Expert Network (www.tuoreverkosto.fi) promoting the building of resource efficiency related skills.

In Hungary, the main support measure is the so-called “Money Thrown Out the Window” initiative (Ablakon Bedobott Pénz, http://www.ablakonbedobottpenz.hu/index.php), which was created by the KÖZET Association for Sustainable Economies, an independent and non-profit organisation. Launched in 2002, the initiative’s objective is to promote resource efficiency measures in the industry sector that result in financial savings. The companies that apply for this initiative receive a list of suggested measures to achieve environmental savings. The list is based on a site visit, a discussion with the employees of the company and an examination of documents. Targeted sectors include fisheries and forestry, mining and quarrying, manufacturing, electricity and water supply, construction, the commercial sector, hotels and restaurants, transport logistics and real estate. The support measure is available for a wide range of organisations and companies. In 2014, 78 organisations participated in the programme, with 370 measures initiated and contributing to company savings worth 71.29 million EUR (22.1 billion HUF), 663,000 tonnes of non-hazardous and 60,500 tonnes of hazardous waste and 751 GWh of energy.

The Irish Green Business Programme provides targeted resource efficiency information and advice to businesses, in particular online information relevant to companies in specific sectors all over Ireland, in formats which they find useful. Various information that covers many different sectors has been produced since 1995, with a series of 133 documents now available online dating from 2002 onwards. In 2014, Green Business published two good practice guides on resource efficiency: Resource Efficiency for the Retail Sector and Resource Efficiency for the Print & Packaging Sector. Both of these guides were developed in collaboration with industry and business sector organisations. Moreover, in the last three years, Green Business has hosted 29 Resource Efficiency Seminars. These seminars are aimed at promoting the message that ‘Green Business’ is ‘Smart Business’ and that resource efficiency has a crucial part in sustaining business.

One interesting Danish example for the state supported provision of targeted information and advice on resource efficiency for companies is the web portal “Green21.dk.” Launched in 2012, this web portal aims to (i) help especially SMEs with their voluntary strategic environmental activities and (ii) offer enterprises advice and guidance with regard to designing greener products, eco-labelling, calculating total costs of purchases and strengthening of enterprises’ green competitiveness. Green21.dk has had more than 11,000 website hits since July 2015.

This portal targets all sectors and is available nationwide. It features 11 green tools to help especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with their voluntary strategic environmental initiatives. A new tool is the “Green Entrepreneurship House,” which offers physical facilities (e.g. a workshop and demonstration facilities), guidance and competency-development, mentors and contacts to experienced
companies. Its objective is the acceleration and support of green entrepreneurs in Denmark. Launched in 2013, the Green Entrepreneurship House has had 371 entrepreneurs participating in different activities, until July 2015. A further example is a paperback case collection (accessible as a free online document) published by the Ministry of the Environment, showing the potential of resource efficiency in selected industries.

Lessons learnt from the application of the support measure

From the application of this support measure in the above five Member States, the following lessons learnt could be derived.

Success factors for the application of the Austrian ÖKOPROFIT programme encompass cooperation between the regional industry, public administration and external experts; participation of a number of companies in common workshops, which include expert presentations, practical examples, interactive work and exchange of experiences; individual consultation by experts supporting the companies in the implementation phase; formulation of company-specific measures and saving targets which controlled via (environmental) performance indicators. Furthermore, companies who successfully participate receive the label “ÖKOPROFIT Company” at the end of the programme and join the “ÖKOPROFIT Club”, a network of companies that aim to continue improving their energy and resource efficiency. In addition, ÖKOPROFIT serves well as preparation for EMAS certification.

The Finnish National Material Efficiency Centre presents a central contact point for information and advice on material efficiency, which eases processes of information search, retrieval.

The website of the Hungarian “Money Thrown Out the Window” initiative hosts a large database listing companies that undertook environmental saving measures under the initiative (see at: http://www.ablakondobottenz.hu/megtakaritas.php). The database provides information on each company, indicating types of measures, achieved environmental savings and key economic information. This database provides useful information for other companies for their own measures.

The Irish Green Businesses online information is targeted to specific sectors. Some guides have been written together with the representative organisations for particular sectors (e.g. print and paper, retail) and are promoted by these sectoral organisations to their members. All work carried out by Green Business is 100% confidential and information is not shared with any third party. In order to be practical and encouraging, the site reports are specific, detailed and concentrate on “no and low cost” improvement actions. Furthermore, Green Business follows up with the firm after approximately 6 months to see how the firm is progressing with the identified savings, thus providing an incentive for their implementation. The results from this follow up are used as case studies, providing further implementation incentives, and demonstrate benefits to other firms. An additional factor of success of the Green Business programme can be seen in the cooperation with the EPA and the Irish Business representative organisation (IBEC), which has 7,500 business members. This cooperation aims to promote resource efficiency to IBEC members and other stakeholders in Ireland. Its achievements include developing relationships with other players involved in Resource Efficiency. The liaison is believed to have increased attendance at regional workshops and participation.

The Danish Green21.dk web portal’s different information offers are well targeted to the needs of SMEs. For example, a main objective of the paperback case collection was to break with the perception of SMEs not having enough resources to take environmental friendly initiatives. Therefore, varied and innovative examples of successful cases of resource efficiency initiatives from different industries were presented – with concrete examples of economic savings. Apart from that, advice on how to take the initial steps towards resource efficiency are given, as well as advice on which governmental funds can be applied.

In addition, further lessons learnt emerged from the information obtained for the other Member States where this support measure is being applied:

The Belgian independent research and technology organisation VITO has a special programme (SMEs find VITO!) that provides SMEs with low threshold support in relation to sustainable innovation. Thanks to the support of the Flemish government (and EFRA), SMEs benefit from an important financial contribution towards the costs of feasibility studies, tests at lab scale, pilot tests or tests within a company.
relating to the living environment or energy. The financial contribution from the Flemish government (and EFRD) may cover up to 66% of research costs, on average 20,000 to 25,000 EUR per project. The support is available for all SMEs in Flanders. In 2014, VITO supported 77 SMEs in their sustainable innovation plans. In total, VITO offered support to 89 projects concerning innovative and sustainable products and processes. Various Flemish SMEs have worked with VITO-KMO (VITO-SME) to take specific steps towards the achievement of more sustainable business operations. VITO-KMO has helped others to launch sustainable products and concepts. Administrative affairs are taken care of by VITO and not by the SME. VITO applies for the financial contribution from the Flemish government.

In Cyprus, targeted information on resource efficiency is provided in particular to the tourism industry aiming to encourage tourist establishments to implement measures to increase their resource efficiency and improve waste management. Launched in 2014, this measure targets hotels and other tourist establishments. Hotels implementing resource efficiency measures particularly through voluntary schemes such as the ECOLABEL and EMAS report a decrease in the use of water, energy, paper and packaging products, chemicals, etc. Intense and continuous stakeholder engagement was a key success factor particularly given the costs of initial investments.

The Interreg IVB project “PRESOURCE – Promotion of Resource Efficiency in Central European SMEs” (www.presource.eu, ended in November 2014), has developed tools and schemes to support resource efficiency in SMEs in Italy and other countries in Central Europe. In the context of PRESOURCE the “EDIT Value Tool” was developed, a need-driven holistic tool that enables the identification of the most effective opportunities for improving resource efficiency in SMEs across all business levels and with a life cycle approach. The tool is available in 6 different languages. In Italy, the National agency for new technologies, Energy and sustainable economic development (ENEA) is the national contact point to support intermediaries and SMEs in the utilisation of EDIT Value Tool to identify the most effective opportunities for improving resource efficiency and the overall sustainability performance. Pilot applications of the EDIT Value Tool in 18 SMEs showed that it is manageable and effective in promoting resource efficiency in SMEs. EDIT Value is based on both a quantitative and qualitative analysis, thus pointing out the priorities that can guide the most effective actions. The EDIT Value Tool focuses primarily on opportunities for improvements and innovations within the given enterprise; suitable instruments for improvements and innovations are assigned to these opportunities only after completion of an initial analysis, thus ensuring a need-driven approach.

The Maltese “Investing in Water” project aims to help businesses and hotels reduce their water consumption by providing expert advice to enterprises on water saving opportunities and how to achieve them. Enterprises can also receive individual consultations to identify the most relevant solutions for their individual circumstances. The project beneficiaries are businesses and hotels. The project is funded through the EU LIFE+ programme. In early 2012, the Investing in Water project concluded water audits with around 40 enterprises from various sectors, identifying water saving opportunities and potential solutions. In 2013, the Malta Tourism Authority, Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association and Malta Business Bureau signed an agreement to recognise the water saving initiatives taken by hotels through the Investing in Water project as meeting ECO-Certification award criteria, thereby facilitating the award of the label to those hotels.

In the Netherlands, the EU Life+ funded REBus project (jointly undertaken by Rijkswaterstaat, the executive agency of the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment and WRAP) supports businesses and public organisations to develop resource efficient business models (REBMs) both for implementation on the supply side and for the demand-side procurement (business and public procurement). The focus is on electrical products (ITC), textiles, furniture, carpeting and construction. The most popular business models to date relate to incentivised return, hire/lease, and replacing waste contracts by contracts for recycling. For construction business models including maintenance, finance, and life-cycle-based business models including shadow pricing and Life-Cycle-Costing. The project aims to deliver 30 REBMs with a range of large and small company pilots, achieving 15% resource savings

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over the project’s lifetime. Launched in mid-2013 and still ongoing, in cooperation with Green deal Circular Procurement more than 35 organisations participated in the programme and committed to at least 2 pilots each. Around 60 pilots are under development and 15 pilots receive support through REBus. More than 80 are still in start-up phase. With this approach, Rijkswaterstaat reaches out to some 200 key-players in sectors such as office furniture, IT and textile and achieve significant change.

The UK’s Waste & Resources Action Programme (WRAP) offers a wide range of tools and publications to help businesses use resources more efficiently, reduce waste and save money. Advice by telephone was provided on request, until recent budget cuts. Firms were approached on the basis of their primary interest – cost-savings, rather than environmental benefits. In a sectoral approach (WRAP sector guides), relevant sector firms were identified, approached and, where they declined participation, the experts in the state funded coordinating organisation were able to put forward evidence-based counter-arguments on the benefits of participation. The implementing body worked with large companies, whose influence on smaller companies (particularly their suppliers) has been found to be the most influential factor in firms changing their resource efficiency.

Across the examples obtained from literature review and Member State responses, the following aspects could be identified as key success factors for providing targeted advice to improve resource efficiency in businesses in the EU:

- Fostering cooperation between regional industry, public administration and external experts.
- Designing expert advice to (i) be targeted at different sectors and include practical examples; (ii) promote exchange of experiences; (iii) give individual advice supporting the companies in the implementation phase; and (iv) formulate company-specific measures and saving targets.
- Incentivising participation in advice programmes, e.g. through labelling participants at the end of the programme, using such labels as a beneficial criterion for public tendering processes or as meeting existing certification criteria and making the companies who participated part of a network of companies.
- Establishing a central contact point acting as a one-stop-shop for easy/low threshold retrieval of relevant and targeted information and advice, including (i) offers to take over administrative affairs and applications for possible financial contributions and (ii) evidence-based counter-arguments on the benefits on participation in advice programmes.
- Encouraging and fostering the establishment of a database listing companies that undertook environmental saving measures as part of the programme, indicating the types of measures, the achieved environmental savings and key economic information in order to provide useful information for other companies for their own measures.
- Inviting co-authorship of sectoral advice from representative sector organisations and/or from larger businesses with influence on smaller companies through supply chains.
- Encouraging representative organisations for particular sectors/larger businesses to promote the advice to their members/suppliers, including the promotion of the economic benefits from profitable and useful best practice cases with concrete examples of savings.
- Concluding, where necessary, confidentiality clauses between the companies advised and those providing the advice.
- Financial and administrative support through EU funding programs (e.g. LIFE+).

References used