



3rd April 2022

MALTA INTERREG EUROPE ZEROCO2 STAKEHOLDER MEETING

In the last quarter of 2021, the University of Malta's Institute for Sustainable Energy, hosted a round table discussion forum (as part of the extended Interreg-Europe ZEROCO2 project) for relevant stakeholders to discuss how COVID-19 has affected energy efficiency measures and the decarbonisation of buildings and to discuss the main strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities of the current policy instruments.

The event was held online, and several members of different entities participated and shared their views and expertise. The Malta Project Lead Dr. Ing. Charles Yousif opened with an introduction to the ZEROCO2 project, highlighted its one-year extension, and gave an overview of the structure of the day's events and the agenda. The procedure that was adopted was to present one particular issue and then open discussion on it, to allow participants to have more opportunities to share their experiences about individual issues. Each session was followed by a number of questions to facilitate discussions.

Ing. Krista Rizzo gave an overview of the policy instrument under consideration in the ZeroCO2 project, namely Cohesion Policy 2014-2020 (Operational programme 1) under Priority axis 4c, which focuses on achieving lower carbon emissions through supporting initiatives for the installation of systems that contribute towards energy efficiency and renewable energy systems, especially in the public buildings, private property, households and the housing sector. The ZeroCO2 project could not consider other newer instruments for 2030 because they were not ready yet. Therefore, a comparison was carried out between the original policy instrument under consideration and two other policies, namely the draft EU Funds for Malta 2021-2027 under priority axis 4.2 (2), and the Recovery and Resilience Plan post COVID-19. So far, no grants or projects have come out of these policy instruments as they are still at the beginning of the period. We could only compare what areas they will focus on and funding capacity. It was demonstrated that all three policies cover very similar initiatives. On the one hand, this is considered as positive because it implies that the same expertise, grant mechanisms, and organisational infrastructure can be used, thus enhancing success rates. On the other hand, it was observed that all these initiatives are managed independently and this calls for more coordination if they are to be successful.



During the first session, discussions took place about how stakeholders felt that COVID-19 had affected them, the projects they managed, and how COVID shaped things differently in their area of work. The aim was to identify issues such as the need for grants to support a technology that is now more needed than before and challenges in implementing policies on the ground.

The second part focused on discussion for the establishment of a one-stop shop as a policy measure that has seen appreciable success in a number of regions, including the region of Ostrobothnia in Finland, who are also partners in the ZeroCO2 project. Moreover, one-stop shops have been flagged by at least two key EU energy directives for Member States to apply them. Malta has many one-stop shops in different sectors such as BusinessFirst, mygov.mt, myhealth.mt, and others, all of which were instrumental in improving operational efficiency and ensuring the provision of services even during the pandemic period. In these difficult times caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, one-stop-shops, which guide customers through the complete renovation journey, are even more needed, as their whole ambition is to help overcome uncertainties.

Another area that was discussed was the issue of indoor air quality for which Malta does not have any regulatory policies. The only guidance document that was found was issued in June 2020 by the Health Department featuring some guidance on the use of air-conditioning and risk reduction of Covid-19 transmission. The Covid-19 era has shown that appropriate ventilation must be ensured not only to dilute pollutants and reduce the risk of contamination by the virus, but also to diffuse the formaldehyde and total volatile organic compounds (TVOCs) that are associated with the frequent use of sanitizers indoors. It was noted that there are different standards such as the EN16798-1, ASHRAE, CIBSE, WHO that address indoor air quality and these would need to be carefully considered to understand which of them would best apply for the case of Malta – being an island in a Mediterranean climate.

The presentation and discussion then focused on the need to promote energy performance certificates (EPC) and make better use of their potential in accelerating energy renovation in buildings. At the moment in Malta and in several other EU countries EPCs are not very effective. Many EU citizens perceive EPCs as an added burden when buying or renting property. There is in general no dialogue after the EPC assessment to explain the outcome and continue advisory for implementation of the suggestions and identified areas for improvement. It was proposed that a scheme or grant should be launched seeking to implement improvements based on EPC recommendations. Property buyers could benefit from a grant to implement energy efficiency measures on their property to improve the EPC rating and get it closer towards Zero energy and ZeroCO2. Some local banks already offer



beneficial loans to promote energy efficiency based on the EPC rating, a true step in the right direction. The important thing is that the improvement is truly verified. This can only be done by ensuring the quality of the EPC through proper monitoring and enforcement.

The last point discussed involved better use of smart meters to help raise awareness and to act toward greater energy efficiency and alleviating of peak loads. Malta already has installed smart meters, but the data from these smart meters is not accessible by the respective consumers. An example from the UK showed that access to smart meter data has resulted in improved energy efficiency. Another example from the USA showed that managing energy through smart meters can also benefit the energy producers and distributors, in a post Covid era, where a change in working patterns has created a shift in building usage and patterns (especially offices) and shifted energy loads to houses due to the new practices of work-from-home during the pandemic.

The overall outcome of the roundtable discussion forum was very positive because it achieved the goal of facilitating discussions between key policy stakeholders and other private and public entities that are relevant to the work being carried out in the ZEROCO2 project. Furthermore, useful information was collated, which contributed to the preparation of the SWOT analysis for the policy instruments and the proposed actions.

The project will continue and an international workshop is to be held in Malta on 8 June 2022, when stakeholders will meet to learn from each other on good practice policy initiatives for decarbonisation in the post-COVID-19 era.

Interested stakeholders willing to participate are to contact us by email on charles.yousif@um.edu.mt

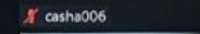
Facilitating funding schemes supported by Cohesion funds and Recovery Funds

One-stop shop KEY FEATURES & OPPORTUNITIES

- One of the most important requirement to make the funding process for national schemes more efficient is to ease the administrative barriers of such funding via a one-stop shop.
- A one-stop shop can simplify the process of making interested entities more aware of the different funding mechanisms available for renewable energy and energy efficiency.
- A website detailing products and retailers and some of the funding opportunities was created but it is not comprehensive.
- A one-stop shop can provide technical know-how and support for professionals, on how to achieve nearly zero-energy buildings. Training could also be part of the services offered by this one-stop shop.



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