

# EU POLICY CONTEXT AND ZECOS POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

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Development and Introduction of the Communal Zero CO<sub>2</sub>e  
Emission Certification System as a Tool for Sustainable  
Communities and Regions

229H-ZECOS



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## **Glossary of Terms**

### **Regional Added Value (RAV)**

Within ZECOS, RAV represents the economic benefit to the community resulting from the implementation of GHG emission reduction actions. RAV may also be taken to include social gains through the creation of jobs, improved infrastructure and enhanced social cohesion within communities. In addition, calculating RAV may support decision making, whereby potential projects found to be equally financially viable may differ in benefits offered to the community.

### **Social Development**

Processes of change that lead to improvements in human well-being, social relations and social institutions, and that are equitable, sustainable, and compatible with principles of democratic governance and social justice. The sustainability of a community depends on creating and maintaining economic and environmental health and resilience, promoting social equality and developing its citizens' participation in planning and implementing shared goals.

## 1 EU Climate Change Policy

The EU identifies the avoidance of serious climate change as being a major strategic priority and has committed to transforming Europe into a highly energy-efficient, low carbon economy (EC, 2014). The 7<sup>th</sup> EU Environment Action Programme guides European environment policy until 2020 and sets out a vision of where it wants the EU to be by 2050. The programme identifies three key objectives:

- i. protecting, conserving and enhancing the EU's natural capital,
- ii. turning the EU into a resource-efficient, green, and competitive low-carbon economy, and
- iii. safeguarding EU citizens from environment-related pressures and risks to health and wellbeing.

These goals are to be enabled by: better implementation of legislation, improving the knowledge base to provide better information, greater and shrewder investment for environment and climate policy, and the full integration of environmental requirements and considerations into other policies (EC, 2014). The programme also defines two horizontal priority objectives:

- i. to make the EU's cities more sustainable, and
- ii. to help the EU address international environmental and climate challenges more effectively.

The EU has set progressive carbon emission reduction targets up to the year 2050; additionally, the EC is taking steps to strengthen climate change adaptation across the EU.

As part of the **Europe 2020 Growth Strategy**, the **Climate and Energy Package** has set three objectives for 2020. Known as '20-20-20', the package targets a CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reduction goal of 20% compared to 1990 levels by the year 2020, which is to be achieved through a combination of increased use of renewable energy to 20% and an increase of energy efficiency by 20% (Holt and Gilligan, 2013; da Graca Carvalho, 2012). The policies are implemented across the 27 EU Member States through binding legislation.

The climate and energy package includes four pieces of complementary legislation which are intended to deliver on the 20-20-20 targets:

- reform of the EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS), including the introduction of a single EU-wide cap on emission allowances in place of the existing system of national caps and cutting the cap annually to achieve a 21% reduction on 2005 levels by 2020,

- national targets for non-EU ETS emissions: under the effort sharing agreement, each Member State has binding targets which must be reported annually under the EU monitoring mechanism,
- national renewable energy targets: under the **Renewable Energy Directive**, Member States have differing national targets for raising the share of renewable energy in their energy consumption by 2020. The targets are also intended reduce GHG emissions and reduce the EU's dependence on imported energy,
- carbon capture and storage: legal framework for the environmentally safe use of carbon capture and storage (CCS) technologies to trap and store CO<sub>2</sub> emitted by power stations and other major industrial installations.

Energy efficiency is seen as a cornerstone of the 20-20-20 goals (Kanellakis et al., 2013), and is addressed through the **Energy Efficiency Directive**.

The **Climate and Energy Policy Framework for 2030** aims to build on experience gained from the 2020 Growth Strategy and set energy policy objectives for the period from 2020 up to 2030, in addition to preparing for the EU's goal of reducing GHG emissions by 80-95% below 1990 levels by 2050 (EC, 2014). The Framework also establishes the EU's position for GHG emission reductions under a new international agreement on climate change due in 2015 (McGuinn et al., 2013). The framework has set a target of 40% emission reductions by 2030 compared to 1990 levels and an increase in the share of renewable energy to 27% of the EU's energy consumption. As of November 2014, no target has been specifically set for energy efficiency improvements under the Energy Efficiency Directive 2014 (EC, 2014). In addition to emission reduction and renewable energy targets, the framework also includes a new governance system and a set of new indicators intended to provide certainty and reduce risk for investors a competitive and secure energy supply (McGuinn et al., 2013; EC, 2014). However, the 2030 framework lacks reference to the role of local and regional authorities in these energy and climate policies, thereby neglecting efforts already undertaken and ongoing at the local level that contribute to meeting these targets.

A long-term vision for making the European economy more climate-friendly and less energy-consuming is set out in the **Roadmap to a Competitive Low Carbon Economy by 2050**. The roadmap proposes that the EU should cut its domestic emissions to 80% below 1990 levels by 2050, through low energy consumption, pollution, and emissions. The strategy outlines a cost-efficient pathway to meeting this target through emissions reductions of 40% and 60% below 1990 levels by 2030 and 2040, respectively. The roadmap provides for future policy direction in emission reductions in the power production, buildings, transport, industrial and agricultural sectors. The roadmap highlights how transitioning to a low-carbon society can enhance the European economy through increased technological innovation and

investment and low or zero-carbon energy, envisaging lower energy use and increased energy security at community level, locally produced, mainly renewable sources (EC, 2014).

In April 2013, the EC adopted the **EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change** which focuses on three key objectives:

- i. promoting action by Member States: encouraging all Member States to adopt comprehensive adaptation strategies and providing funding to help build adaptation capacities and take action,
- ii. 'climate-proofing' action at EU level: by promoting adaptation in key vulnerable sectors such as agriculture, fisheries and cohesion policy, ensuring that Europe's infrastructure is made more resilient, and promoting the use of insurance against natural and man-made disasters,
- iii. better informed decision-making: by addressing gaps in knowledge about adaptation and further developing the European climate adaptation platform (**Climate-ADAPT**) as the 'one-stop shop' for adaptation information in Europe.

Actions include mainstreaming of climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies into EU sector policies and funds, and the provision of support platforms and guidance documents to support adaptation policy and decision making at all levels, from EU to national, through to regional/local levels. Mainstreaming climate change policy began with the inclusion of climate and energy objectives as a headline target of the Europe 2020 Growth Strategy. This process is seen as being crucial in turning objectives into achievements, with an agreement that at least 20% of the EU budget for the 2014-2020 period should be spent on climate change-related action. However, the integration of climate change into sectoral policy can make it difficult to assess the adequacy of budgets or the achievement of objectives (EC, 2014; Illés & Medarova-Bergstrom, 2014; Berkhout et al, 2013). For evaluation of national and regional/level policies for each of the four partner countries, please refer to the National Baseline Documents available at: [www.zecos.eu/xxx](http://www.zecos.eu/xxx).

## 2 Meeting EU Targets through Community Action

The Climate and Energy Policy Framework for 2030 aims to reduce GHG emissions in the EU by 40% compared to 1990 levels in preparation for the 2050 objective of reaching 80% reductions. It is estimated that in order to meet these targets emissions from EU-ETS sectors would need to reduce emissions by 43% compared to 2005 and emissions from the non-ETS sectors would have to reduce by 30% compared to 2005 levels. In addition, it is proposed that 27% of EU energy consumption will be derived from renewable sources. Transitioning to a low-carbon economy also reduces air pollution and its associated health costs (EC, 2013).

To meet targets, communities must play their part in generating local renewable energy and improving energy efficiency. Communities are where people live and work, they own the land, built environment and control or direct the resources required to employ every method and utilise every opportunity necessary in achieving these goals. ZECOS aims to promote the reduction of GHG emissions at community level with the intention of leading communities towards the ultimate goal of zero emissions. The use of more locally produced energy reduces dependence on imports, boosts economic growth, and creates jobs.

The concept of zero emission communities is supported by a number of European governments and EU development plans, with many communities across the EU already engaged in efforts to promote sustainable development and reduce GHG emissions far beyond that required by national or EU targets. The role of fostering GHG emission reductions by communities is acknowledged by the EC in the form of:

- The Action Plan on Urban Mobility: promotes sharing innovative solutions at community level for the benefit of transport operators and citizens alike (EC, 2009),
- Energy Strategy 2020: stresses the need to strengthen initiatives such as the Covenant of Mayors as urban communities consume *'up to 80% of energy, are at the same time part of the problem and part of the solution to greater energy efficiency'* (EC, 2010),
- Energy Efficiency Plan: supports *'the role of local and regional authorities in planning and implementing energy efficient and environmental friendly strategies'* (EC, 2011), and
- Smart Cities and Communities European Innovation Partnership: aims at demonstrating how innovative solutions implemented by industry consortia at the intersection of energy, transport, and information and communication technologies can support urban communities in meeting their targets in reducing GHG emissions, by improving local energy efficiency and renewable energy systems (EC(1), 2012).

In addition, in December 2012 the Directorate-General for the Environment and the Committee of the Regions launched the 'Technical Platform for Cooperation on the Environment' (EC(2), 2012) as referred to in the 7<sup>th</sup> EU Environment Action Programme. This forum aims to involve local and regional authorities in all phases of future EU environmental policy, by facilitating dialogue and information pooling, in order to improve the implementation of legislation at local level.

Schemes such as the Covenant of Mayors are currently being adopted by an increasing number of communities, but only in some EU States. Such schemes have recently been supported by six networks of European local and regional authorities (Climate Alliance,

CEMR, Energy Cities, EUROCITIES, FEDARENE and ICLEI) as key instruments within meeting targets of the 2030 Framework, calling on:

- placing local and regional authorities at the heart of the EU's climate actions, and
- ensuring continued EU and national support to communities to translate policy into actions at local level, through financial support or support for capacity building and exchange of information on good practice.

### **3 Development of ZECOS Policy Recommendations**

Evaluating suitable policies to promote the reduction of GHG emissions at the community level can be difficult. There are no effective stand-alone policies (Fitzgerald et al, 2014) that are capable of meeting the needs of all communities. Added to this is the complication of the number of available policies and stakeholders involved (O'Doherty et al, 2013). It is also recognised that standardising policies at a national level may discourage policy innovation at the local level, as what works in one community may not work in another. It may be better for communities therefore to implement policy packages that are tailored to the individual circumstances of that area. As the implementation of one policy may affect the effectiveness of other policies in an area, the selection of which policies to implement and at what level is critical (Fitzgerald et al, 2014). The need to avoid unintentional rebound, through considered selection of actions, is vital (Fitzgerald et al, 2012).

Against this background, the policy recommendations made are intended to help enable policy makers at European, national and regional/local level to support the development of zero emission communities in order to increase the number of communities involved, and the extent to which they are effective. The work of the eight project communities has aided in the formulation of twenty-two recommendations. These have been developed through the experience and knowledge gained in the identification of their local renewable energy and energy efficiency potentials, development of management plans, engaging stakeholders and in the implementation of actions that reduce GHG emissions, providing Community Added Value (RAV), and promote social development. National policies and laws differ, and also change over time, so that full recommendations need to be tailored to the requirements of individual States and regularly updated. However, based on the experience of ZECOS partner countries, it is clear that significant common issues emerge, on which recommendations may be made. These recommendations are based on three over-arching goals.

1. To facilitate EU-wide adoption of effective community level targets for significant and verifiable reduction in GHG emissions.



2. To identify and support policies which encourage meeting such targets, and to remove barriers to progress.
3. To identify and facilitate actions which support the creation of RAV and social development.

## 4 Policy Recommendations

**Goal 1: To facilitate EU-wide adoption of effective community level targets for significant and verifiable reduction in GHG emissions.**

### EU Level

While it must be recognised that EU Directives may not immediately appear to impact at community level action, policies such as EU 20-20-20 goals, Energy Efficiency Directive, Renewable Energy, and Energy Performance of Buildings directly influence the setting of national and regional targets for GHG reduction. The experience of ZECOS project communities suggests a lack of coordination and agreement on the level of GHG reduction and renewable energy generation targets and policies creates confusion and uncertainty.

1. Linkage between future development of EU standards for GHG emission reduction and policies for community development is required to ensure coordination between policy and action, to avoid unintended barriers.
2. The acceptance of ZECOS as an EU standard for the management and verification of GHG emission reductions by communities. While ZECOS is currently at the prototype stage, the management system will lay out how to systematically manage for continual GHG reductions. ZECOS documentation will provide this in a more holistic and complete way than has been achieved previously. Thus, widespread acceptance of ZECOS as a standard will work to increase the rate at which GHG emission reductions may be achieved. This will enhance harmonisation as all community claims to achievement of greater sustainability will be based on a common set of criteria, and inflated claims designed to encourage inward investment will be discouraged.
3. The identification of a responsible body within an existing structure for the oversight of ZECOS implementation.

The EU Energy Efficiency Directive (2012/27/EU) states that EU Member States must set national targets for Energy Efficiency based on either primary or final energy consumption. The Directive includes the legal obligation that Member States must set up an EEO Scheme. It is specified that the target shall be at least equivalent to new savings each year from 1

January 2014 to 31 December 2020 of 1.5% of the annual energy sales to final customers. The EEO scheme may be implemented in one of two ways:

- Option A: requires Member States to set up an Energy Efficiency Obligation scheme which would apply to energy distributors and/or retail energy sales companies at a rate of 1.5% of the annual energy sales to final customers
- Option B: allows Member States to count savings from alternative measures towards the 1.5% target, including financing schemes, taxes and the creation of Energy Efficiency Funds. The alternative measures may include an obligation scheme, which would not be required to fulfil the whole of the 1.5% target.

EEOs have been established Belgium (Flanders region), France, Denmark, Ireland, Italy, and the UK and are proposed in Poland. The schemes introduced follow different methodologies in each Member State and are still evolving. The remaining countries including Germany have opted for Option B and have not introduced an EEO scheme to date and are instead using alternatives measures.

The emergence of EEOs and in particular the associated trade in their certificates represents an opportunity for ZECOS communities. In EU countries where an EEO-Scheme has been introduced, supply companies will participate with funding energy efficiency measures in exchange for the energy efficiency savings. ZECOS recommends that increased harmonisation of the EEOs schemes is required to speed up the development of this mechanism and to allow for trade of Energy Efficiency Savings across EU Member States.

4. The harmonisation of EEO schemes could be achieved by introducing the same measurement units and measurement methodologies across all participating Member States. Therefore, an Energy Efficiency would be either measured in terms of new savings or lifetime savings. If Energy Efficiency methodologies were acceptable in all Member States, then this would allow increased cooperation between Member States and enhanced efficiencies.
5. The main principle, that the obliged party must provide evidence of a defined amount of realised energy savings to a regulatory authority, should remain and the targets should still be set per Member State based on their emissions. The Energy Savings however should be interchangeable between Member States which would allow a market to develop where the price would be led by the demand for the energy savings from the obligated parties across the EU. The Energy Savings may be interchangeable among the obligated parties on an EU trading platform or through bilateral deals. This would increase competitiveness among Member States, encouraging energy efficiencies and give energy savings increased recognition.

6. Further mechanisms are required to increase the value of EU-ETS carbon credits, in order to facilitate credit trading.

### EU / National Level

It is recommended that at both national and EU levels, changes are made to encourage mitigation of GHG emissions in Member States. This can be done through following some or all of the options set out below. This would channel finance arising from GHG emission reduction obligations by countries and industry into community mitigation projects in Member States.

7. **Enablement of Article 24a**: Article of Directive 2009/29/EC concerning the EU-ETS, introduced an option (subject to further agreement) that provides more flexibility for EU-ETS participants, while simultaneously incentivising emissions reductions in the non-ETS sectors. Under this Article, participants in the EU-ETS are allowed purchase a portion of their required allowances from projects that reduce GHG emissions from non-ETS sectors. It is recommended that agreement is reached to introduce this option and that enabling legislation is introduced to initiate this. ZECOS recognises three options available to achieve this:
  - a. **Option 1: Governmental crediting**: National governments would commit to pay for the GHG emission reductions generated by projects eligible to the Domestic Offsetting Scheme, and subsequently, the government then sells the credits, in order to recoup the money paid to the project developer.
  - b. **Option 2: Governmental trading**: In this option the government would sell an amount of allowances (annual emissions allocation (AEA) which are non-ETS allowances), and then use the proceeds to fund the DOS.
  - c. **Option 3: Voluntary market**: This option accepts the implementation of domestic (instead of international) projects using the established voluntary market with its available voluntary carbon standards, for example, Gold Standard, Verified Carbon Standard. In order that voluntary carbon offsets can be developed in the EU it is required by most robust standards that the government has to cancel an equivalent amount of AEA or AAUs for each voluntary emission reductions (VERs) generated domestically, in order to avoid double counting. Thus the voluntary market option accomplishes a global net mitigation effect, in contrast to all the other options.

### Regional / Local Level

8. All EU communities should be encouraged to have GHG emission reduction in place. In planning for GHG emission reductions, communities yet to start should be actively encouraged to adopt ambitious targets for continual improvement, as provided for by

ZECOS. Similarly, those communities which have set targets should be actively supported.

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**Goal 2: To identify and support policies which encourage meeting such targets, and to remove barriers to progress.**

#### EU Level

For the EU to meet strategic GHG emission targets within the 2050 Roadmap, all possible methods and actors will need to be mobilised.

9. The adoption of an ambitious EU policy framework is required. This needs to include clear long-term goals, acknowledge the essential involvement of communities and their climate change mitigation actions, and remove significant obstacles that hamper these communities in realising their objectives.
10. The provision of funding from EU to provide for national funding schemes to encourage community scale GHG emission reduction. This funding will provide resources for communities to develop their strategic plans and initiate actions for GHG emission abatement.
11. It is recommended that local authorities and their communities should participate in policy setting at EU level.

#### National Level

National policy on GHG emission reductions must translate into actions. Communities highlight government actions that do not appear to support such policies. There is need for additional joined-up thinking by national governments, and longer term policy implementation. Therefore, the following recommendations are made:

12. Development of Energy Authorities at national and regional/local levels to provide information and guidance on energy generation and supply, energy efficiency, and finance to communities. In addition these authorities should also supply information on other GHG emission reduction actions such as sustainable transport and more efficient waste management.
13. The introduction by national governments, as a high priority, of laws and regulations relevant to the development of community level initiatives, to remove unintended barriers to action as encouraged within ZECOS.
14. As ZECOS verifies GHG emission reduction, national governments should facilitate the establishment of ZECOS offices in each Member State or identify existing offices or structures that could accommodate the role. Where appropriate, this can be linked to Energy Authority Offices as recommended at 10.

#### Regional / Local Level

15. Encourage local ZECOS networks of communities in order to strengthen commitments, identify opportunities for cooperation and exchange of best practices. Especially, smaller communities should be encouraged to work together in aggregating individual successes in reducing GHG emissions and in that way achieve significant savings at sufficient scale to attract additional funding.

### **Goal 3: To identify and facilitate actions which support the creation of RAV and social development.**

#### National Level

GHG emission reduction can be planned so as to enhance RAV: this may for example create additional local jobs, avoid energy and other resource payments leaving the community boundary, thus increasing local and regional level prosperity. This is a crucial focus of ZECOS. Therefore, the following recommendations are made:

16. For communities to plan and implement continual GHG emission reductions, finance, time and other resources must be committed. This requires that laws and regulations governing, for example, payments for surplus renewable energy delivered to national grids, must be fixed or at least guidance provided on future increases or decreases in rates.
17. National governments should provide much more financial assistance to ZECOS accredited communities, as they may be assured that claims made for GHG emission reduction are verified, and therefore this represents a cost-effective method for contributing toward meeting national targets. Such a target-based approach can be included in existing community financing mechanisms.

18. Costs for communities starting out in action to reduce GHG emissions can be considerable and off-putting. Also, raising initial finance without tangible assets can be difficult. Funding to provide seed capital to ZECOS Applicant communities should be made available by all national governments, as is currently provided in some Member States.
19. National governments should actively support the emergence and success of community based champions for actions to reduce GHG emissions. This may take the form of funding workshops designed to increase the effectiveness of prospective champions. The ZECOS documentation and proposed network provides a basis for structuring such workshops.

#### Regional / Local Level

20. Every effort should be made to exploit local financial sources and organisations such as cooperatives, in order to maximise the engagement and locally available expertise.
21. The role of social development is crucial: local government should proactively encourage initiatives from all types of communities in raising awareness of the positive outcomes associated with ZECOS actions, opportunities for citizen participation and ownership of plans and actions, and the overall urgency in meeting GHG emission reduction targets.
22. Local authorities should proactively encourage dissemination of information to community members aimed at enhancing awareness of the opportunities for citizens to invest in GHG emission reduction technologies in order that they may enhance personal and community prosperity and quality of life through the generation of additional jobs and RAV.

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