

# HARP Project – The heating professionals’ role in the consumer’s decision process to replace old and inefficient heating appliances

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Professionals play a key role in accelerating the modernization of EU’s heating stock. Considering their relevance in the consumer’s decision process to replace heating appliances, the **HARP (Heating Appliances Retrofit Planning)** project has developed an online application to support the comparison of heating systems through the energy label and plans to reach and train 1,000 professionals across France, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

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The residential sector is the main consumer of heating and cooling in Europe. The building sector is responsible for roughly half of the EU’s energy consumption and 80% of that energy is used for space heating and domestic hot water production.

Despite its significance in terms of energy consumption, the heating system stock is very static. Installed boilers can last for over 15 years, which justifies the slow replacement rate in Europe, at about 4% per year. Additionally, consumers lack of awareness, information and advice on the technical possibilities and actual energy costs, results in 60% of the European heating stock being composed of old and inefficient boilers (performing as a C or lower energy class).

In this context, professionals play a key role in accelerating the modernisation of EU’s heating stock and significantly contribute to the compliance of the energy efficiency targets set for the EU. Except for Germany where an energy label for installed heating appliances already exists, European consumers are not informed about the energy efficiency of their installed heating systems. This is particularly concerning when the systems are more than 10 years old and there is no information about how the system is performing. In fact, according to the European Commission<sup>1</sup>, consumer choice is limited by a lack of information on actual energy consumption and costs, lack of awareness of the benefits of cost-efficient technologies, lack advice on the technical possibilities, split

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission. (2016). An EU Strategy on Heating and Cooling. <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2016/EN/1-2016-51-EN-F1-1.PDF>

incentives (for instance in multi-apartment buildings) and lack of financial means to invest in the most efficient technology .

In addition, it is necessary to support professionals in improving their expertise and knowledge in new efficient and renewable heating technologies.

Considering the relevance of professional in the consumer's decision process to replace heating appliances, the HARP European funded project plans to reach and train 1,000 professionals among the partner countries (France, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain) and provide an online application to further support the consumer. Thanks to this online application, professionals will be able to accompany the consumer decision process, supporting in the identification of the consumer's actual heating system energy class and presenting technological solutions that respond to the consumer's heating needs. The online application also aims to provide a quantified approach for economic and non-economic benefits as well as information on the availability of national incentives for the replacement of old and inefficient heating systems.

### **The important role of intermediaries**

The vast majority of heating systems currently installed in European homes is old and inefficient. Decisions on replacing old appliances are typically made under pressure when the heating system breaks down. Comparison of prices between solutions, as well as information on how their existing system performs, is not easily available for most consumers. Furthermore, it is difficult to compare technologies and solutions based on lifetime costs and benefits, quality and reliability.

Initial findings<sup>2</sup> highlighted that an important role in the consumers' decision to choose a heating system is played by intermediaries or key professionals (namely energy experts, installers, system designers, retailers), which interact directly with consumers. The acquisition process of heating systems by the consumer relies mostly on professionals when a maintenance relation is in place and sales agents when going for replacements or new acquisitions.

Moreover, professionals are found to be the preferred information channel for consumers regarding the replacement of their heating systems. For many consumers, their knowledge comes very often from professionals. Although they try to collect more information from other sources such as the national and local authorities, internet or friends, the installers' advice has often more impact on the customers' decision due to their professional knowledge. This advice is especially important when it is urgent for consumers to replace their heating system and they do not have any time to do further research on their own. In this case, the recommendation by professionals determines the choice.

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<sup>2</sup> European Commission (2019). Final report on the analysis of the heating and cooling consumers and recommendations in terms of new business models and regulatory framework. Retrieved from <https://www.rhc-platform.org/content/uploads/2019/12/Final-report-on-the-analysis-of-the-heating-and-cooling-consumers.pdf>



Additionally, consumers are more likely to switch to a more efficient heating system<sup>3</sup> when they are aware of additional co-benefits and are willing to spend extra money to achieve them. These benefits go beyond cost savings: an energy efficient heating system offers improved air quality, noise reduction, higher market value of the building, etc.

Key professionals need therefore to stress the main benefits and additional co-benefits over an energy efficient heating appliance to foster the consumer's decision process.

### **An opportunity for professionals**

Professionals have a high know-how and all the technical information necessary for the installation, maintenance or replacement of a heating system. However, many times they do not have simple, clear tools to facilitate the dialogue with consumers who lack technical background.

Additionally, installers have a good connection with the industry. Professionals are usually in an intermediate position between heating companies and consumers. Therefore, they are key to advice on the best possible solutions and on the latest market developments.

Under these circumstances, the professionals' that cooperate and receive training from the HARP project will be able to stand out from their competition since the training programme helps them to interact with the consumer and promote efficient heating solutions in the consumer advisory process. Additionally, the training programme allows them to be part of a list of HARP trained professionals accessible by potential clients.

On the other hand, in some countries like France and Germany, consumers word of mouth is the most trusted communication channel, which could result in a differential factor among the competence. Those consumers who replaced their heating systems with more efficient ones thanks to the advice of a professional who uses the HARP online application, will see their energy bill reduced. These consumers will share their positive experience with family, friends and co-workers among others, who will eventually contact the same professional to benefit from energy labelling and replace the heating system.

### **Mitigation measures: HARP methodology**

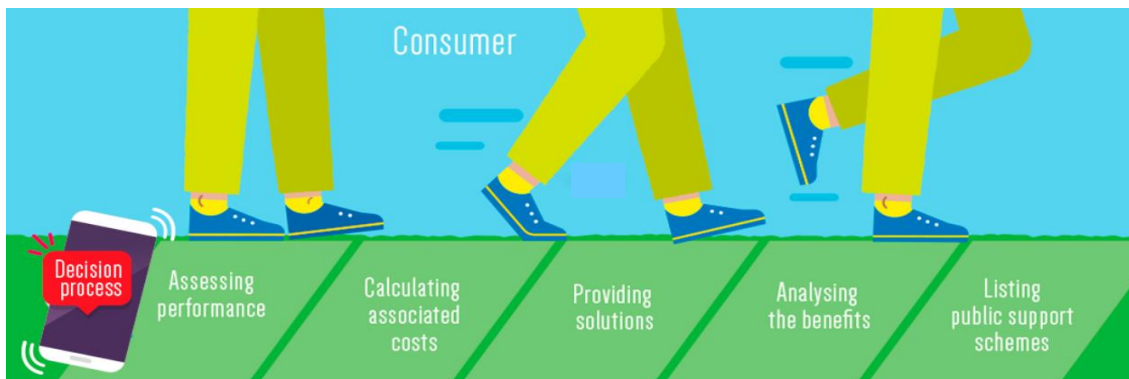
Professionals are multiplying agents, as they have direct contact with multiple consumers. The development of a comprehensive customer-targeting toolbox is an asset professional's

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<sup>3</sup> Oliveira, T., Neves, C., & Neves, J. (2020). Deliverable 2.1: Consumer behaviour change model regarding the adoption of efficient heating systems. <https://heating-retrofit.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/HARP-D2.1-Consumer-behaviour-change-model-EEHA-V1.1.pdf>

can use in their interaction with consumers to explain and justify the importance of energy efficient heating. The HARP project delivers a **toolbox** providing a training programme on how to interact with the consumer and promote efficient heating solutions in the consumer advisory process, using the HARP resources and an online application.

The **online application** has two different versions (lighter version to be directly used by consumers and a detailed version to be used by the professionals supporting the consumer). The detailed version includes comprehensive and technical information, so experts can explain this type of data to consumers during maintenance visits or in the event of possible breakdowns. The application allows standardizing the proposed methodology for any type of user, giving a common, coherent and transparent information in the countries where the project is carried out.



In addition, the application indicates which technologies among those currently available on the market is more adequate to the consumer's specific heating needs, considering the dwelling characteristics and the consumer's preferences.

Trainings for professionals will be available, delivered by HARP partners and promoted via market associations and impartial organizations with the aim of bringing dynamics into the heating market and enhancing professionals' skills and presence in such market, strengthening their business.

Upon this, professionals' will be able to use the HARP resources and, during maintenance/audit/inspection activities, professionals will be able to evaluate the installed heating system, calculate the energy class and present the energy label for the existing heating solution, thus supporting the consumer in the evaluation of heating replacement opportunities by using the online application and additional information resources provided in the **professional's toolbox**.

For further information, visit [customize national [HARP website](#)] and contact the [national partner] to get involved.