

Policy Webinar Series

SMEs and Climate Action

Output 8th Webinar: Empowering SMEs to Take Action: Climate Pledges That Make a Difference

🌟 About:

This 10-part webinar series provides a platform for researchers and policy-makers to share experiences and explore new policy approaches to engage Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the path towards climate-neutral economies. The series is jointly hosted by the [Austrian Institute for SME Research](#) and the [Zero Emission Enterprise \(ZEE\) Network](#). The webinar series runs from November 2023 until February 2025.

📅 8th webinar 10 December 2024

Speakers: Ivana Rogulj, Institute for European Energy and Climate Policy; Georg Houben, European Commission

Topic: Empowering SMEs to Take Action: Climate Pledges That Make a Difference

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a major role in achieving a climate-neutral and energy-independent Europe. The European Commission's pilot initiative, the Covenant of Companies for Climate and Energy (CCCE), invited businesses—especially SMEs—from across the EU to pledge their commitment to reducing carbon emissions. Through this pledge, participating companies received dedicated support and awards for their efforts. In this webinar, Georg Houben from the European Commission and Ivana Rogulj from the Institute for European Energy and Climate Policy will share key lessons learned from this unique initiative. We will also explore broader strategies and tools needed to help SMEs enhance their energy efficiency and progress towards climate neutrality.

See presentation slides: [Covenant of Companies for Climate and Energy; Energy-Efficiency-in-SMEs](#)

Discussions / Links to relevant initiatives (Output Padlet):

Questions, comments, thoughts on the presentations

- ▶ Why was the covenant discontinued? is the EU the wrong level of intervention? what would you recommend other initiatives planning to launch a climate pledging initiative for SMEs?
 - Also interested in this - why should they be incorporated into cities? That isn't true for wider enterprise policy is it?
- ▶ Standard resource management software: Ivana, what thoughts do you have on why the standard packages used by SMEs don't seem to have an energy dimension? Sales and stock levels are prioritised
- ▶ Pledge types: Sorry if I missed this, but was the type of pledges defined by the project? Could SMEs choose their own pledges, based on their own circumstances?

- ▶ Evaluation: Was the SME perspective evaluated? Do they find pledges motivating and effective? What does an ideal pledging intervention look like?
- ▶ Looking at your co-benefit approach were SMEs able to enter the process through other more immediate business issues rather than start with 'less important' energy efficiency? Was this tested

Climate pledges & voluntary measures: an approach for accelerating change? for inducing deep change in enterprises?

- ▶ Initial thoughts are that pledges need to mean something. Too easy to sign up to something on a webpage. They need following up with various measures, like monitoring, feedback from peers, even penalties for non-compliance
 - Would agree with above - also we have seen new organisations/programmes develop new pledges - competing for company sign up.
 - Yes, key challenge for policymakers - how to promote innovation while avoiding a proliferation of competing initiatives and greenwashing 'cowboys' that undermine legitimacy for others - tricky!

How can the lessons of climate pledgers be scaled?

- ▶ Might it be counter productive? There is an argument which suggests that the more voluntary initiatives we have, the less there is a need for regulation. But if we are serious about scaling up climate action (in line with the science), then we need more regulation. Might these delay regulatory measures, as policymakers think 'look something is happening', so don't act? OR, do these help to create the groundwork for regulation?

What roles for climate pledges in wider policy mixes? which policies are needed to accompany climate pledges?

- ▶ Climate Change Agreements (UK): These incentivise participants to reduce emissions or energy consumption (discount on a levy). Thought to be a success, but mainly for the large corporations, some medium enterprises do join in. Could be extended downwards in a simplified form
- ▶ Pledge for the Planet: Came across this initiative, which I thought was quite nice. When running a marathon (e.g.), instead of raising money for good causes, you are encouraged to pledge for the planet, and others can 'sponsor' you by also making pledges
- ▶ Accompany with collaboration and support arrangements: This will probably be covered later but it looks to be good practice to combine pledges with easily accessible services where small businesses can learn from specialist support providers and (in some contexts) collaborate with their peers. This is an example from Northern Ireland, delivered here by a not for profit organisation, Business in the Community NI: <https://www.bitcni.org.uk/programmes/business-action-on-climate/>
 - I like how the 'pyramid' is strongly linked to the uptake of support