



D6.5 – Topten ACT Added Value Report

August 2018

Topten Act coordinator: ADEME

European portal www.topten.eu

Project partners and websites

Austria, AEA
www.topprodukte.at

Belgium, BBL
www.topten.be

Czech Republic, SEVEN
www.usporiespotrebice.cz

France, Guide Topten
www.guidetopten.fr

Germany, Oeko-Institut
www.ecotopten.de

Italy, Eliante
www.topten.it

Lithuania, LNCF
top-10.lt

Luxembourg, Oeko-Zenter
www.oekotopten.lu

Norway, Naturvernforbund
www.besteprodukter.no

Poland, FEWE
www.topten.info.pl

Portugal, Quercus
www.topten.pt

Romania, Icemenerg
www.topten.info.ro

Spain, WWF
www.topten.wwf.es

Sweden, SSNC
www.toptensverige.se

Switzerland, Bush Energie
www.topten.ch

UK, EST
www.toptenuk.org



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About Topten ACT

Topten ACT aims at transforming the European market of energy-using products towards higher energy efficiency.

Topten ACT identifies the top energy-efficient products in 16 European countries, and makes this information available to consumers and large buyers on tailored national websites. The most energy efficient models in different product categories (such as household appliances, lighting, office equipment, consumer electronics, cars) are presented with comprehensive product information based on official labels and standardized declarations. Topten works with manufacturers and thus increases both market offer and consumer demand of high energy efficiency products. Topten is strictly neutral and independent from manufacturers and retailers, its selection criteria are always published online.

Topten ACT is supported by the European Commission's research and innovation programme Horizon 2020, and many national organisations (energy agencies, environmental and consumer organisations, research institutes). The Topten ACT project involves 17 partners in 16 European countries. It is coordinated by ADEME (Agence de l'Environnement et de la Maîtrise de l'Energie).

More information and access to all national websites on the European site: www.topten.eu

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1 - Introduction

Aside from quantitative environmental and economic impacts (calculated in D6.4), the Topten activities undertaken within the Topten ACT project have impacts on the market. These impacts are definitely real but difficult to measure (though a tentative was made to quantify some of them were quantified using very conservative hypotheses). For example, a city modifying its procurement policy; a utility deciding on a rebate programme; policy makers favouring ambitious regulations; NGOs communicating on energy savings in homes in order to link individual behaviour and climate change issues; retailers choosing to adopt energy-efficient positioning and revising their product range; manufacturers developing new efficient models and strongly marketing them; consumers demand for efficient models growing. Though these decisions depend on the strategies stakeholders decide to adopt, Topten ACT has weighed, more or less explicitly, in all of them.

Topten – as a tool in the market transformation toolbox – involves several target groups and key actors to whom it brings different inputs that help them reach their goals and in turn reinforce the project. Different actions with different stakeholders of the Topten project are meant to reinforce one another, transforming the market towards highly energy efficient products.

Manufacturers and **retailers** decide on the technical attributes of products and the product range available to consumers. Topten may help them in building trust in the demand of most efficient products so that they can engage in market transformation. Topten has reached manufacturers and retailers through direct contacts (manufacturers) and cooperation projects and referral marketing work (retailers).

Professional buyers such as large private buyers, local governments and other public procurers have two main roles in market transformation: they invest significantly in energy using products and they often play the role of "trend setter" providing shining examples. They have been reached by the Topten web pages and their "Pro sections" delivering tailored information (from simple and clear information feeding-in their specifications for call for tenders, to more complex LCC analysis) and by direct contacts from the consortium members.

Policy makers and public authorities can use the Topten information to design policy tools to transform the market towards more efficient products and services and to launch supporting programmes.

"Multiplier" organisations using and relaying the Topten message in their daily activities to their own target groups are: NGOs, mainly **environmental and consumer organisations**, local governments and institutions who can use Topten for their own procurement activities and to convey a message to their community, innovative manufacturers and large retailers promoting Topten, utilities, etc.

In summary, Topten intends to bring to all of these target groups and key actors an added value, according to what they are looking for:

- Manufacturers get support for marketing their Topten listed products.
- Retailers benefit from the sales of Topten products, as they increase their mark-up and reinforce their image.

- Professional buyers, public authorities and procurement officers get support for their specifications, can reduce their operating costs and ensure the best use of public funds.
- Policy makers benefit from real time market data on the most efficient products and can make informed decisions on policy instruments.
- Utilities can continuously identify the best products and can use Topten as a basis for their rebate programmes and for informing and consulting their clients.
- NGOs and consumer organisations can use the information provided by Topten in their own campaigns on sustainable consumption and climate change.

To verify in how far these objectives are achieved, short interviews were conducted towards the end of the Topten Act project with different types of stakeholders at the national and at the European levels. Even if, as for all interview exercise, the Topten teams had to face a certain turnover at several stakeholders' organisations and though the schedule (summer 2018) was not very favourable, a total of 67 interviews could be achieved.

Section 2 presents the feed-back received from different stakeholders, section 3 some conclusions drawn by the Topten Act project, and section 4 the questionnaire used and the list of interviewed stakeholders.

2 – Topten added value for different stakeholders

In order to collect feedback from the various stakeholders' groups, questionnaires were developed (presented in Section 4); the questions are generally similar with some adaptations for each target group. Altogether 67 interviews were realised by project partners (see Table 1 below).

A list of all interviewed stakeholders can also be found in Section 4. In the next pages, a summary of the feedback received is presented, per stakeholder group. The objective was not to describe their current interactions with the Topten Act project (this is done in other Deliverables) but rather to reflect on the usefulness of this interaction to the stakeholders, to collect their opinion on how the Topten-added-value could be improved from their point of view, and their perspectives and wishes for the future.

One should note that, though the feedback was aggregated and summarised, each feedback received on Topten is actually very specific to the person that answered the questions (e.g. was it a person from a marketing department or from an R&D department within the same organisation), to the country where this person knows Topten (at the national level, the Topten websites present different features and have undertaken different partnerships) and to the time of the interview (some of the mentioned wishes were actually already implemented thanks to new software, or were just about to be implemented). Hence Section 2 presents "untreated" feedback, whereas a Topten point of view on the feedback is presented in Section 3.

Type of stakeholder	Number of interviews	From country
Manufacturers	8	CZ, DE, PT (2), ES, SE, UK, FR
Retailers	10	AT (2), CH (2), DE (2), LT, PT, RO, FR
Professional buyers	4	LT, NO, PL, FR
Ministries/ Public Authorities	14	AT, CH, CZ, DE, IT, LT (3), LU (2), PL, PT, RO, EU
Utilities	5	AT, CZ (2), RO (2)
NGOs	12	AT, CH, CZ, IT (2), LU (2), RO (2), ES, EU
Consumer Organisations	4	DE, NO, PL, PT
Other multipliers	10	CH, EU (2), IT (2), LU, RO, SE (3)
Total	67	

Table 1 - Overview of the interviewees by type of stakeholders

2.1 - Feedback from manufacturers and manufacturing groups

The interviewed manufacturers **support energy efficient products in general** and some committed themselves to support sustainable development in their daily business – this includes improving the energy efficiency of their own products. Others say that part of their mission is to raise consumer awareness about the benefits of using energy efficient appliances. Accordingly, the subject of energy efficiency is reflected in all areas of their communication towards end consumers and retailers. This includes displaying information on energy and water consumption prominently in communication documents, or disseminating information about the concepts of life cycle costs and end-of-life recycling.

Some manufacturers state that energy efficiency is a **key driver for product development** and manufacturers are highly interested in having products in the top ranges. They also underline their "pioneer role" in investment and R&D, and the development of new features, e.g. making the appliances consume no power at all when they are not used (in the washing segment). However, this is not always reflected in marketing campaigns.

In addition to individual manufacturers, two **associations of manufacturers** have agreed to answer the questionnaire. They illustrate different positions: while collaborating with Topten at the national level, one of the association adopted a rather positive attitude towards any initiative supporting manufacturers, while the other association, not particularly collaborating with Topten adopted a protective attitude, especially with regards to those of its members that are not at all advanced in matters of environmental performance.

The **cooperation between manufacturers and the Topten project** consists mainly in practical issues such as providing energy data and additional information about the appliances. It sometimes involves an active coordination where manufacturers send draft catalogues to Topten and wait for the confirmation of the selection of the highly efficient models that comply with Topten criteria, before printing their final catalogue with the Topten logo next to the selected products.

Also other aspects are evaluated as important: one manufacturer appreciates the fact that they can **discuss the content and details of new Eco-design and Labelling regulations with Topten** or involve Topten in joint campaigns to enhance consumers' education with regards to energy efficiency. Other manufacturers use Topten as a tool for their own communication and marketing and regard it as a good external communication channel and a confirmation for their customers that they can trust the company and energy efficient products.

Topten seems to be a **support for selling energy efficient appliances in a difficult market where the purchasing price plays a predominant role**, even in countries where consumers attach importance to quality, even more so in countries where the only message on the market is "buy cheap". Some (relatively high range) manufacturers underline that the price is very much impacted by the various sales channels and design options rather than by the quality. Others emphasise that they look for a balance between the purchasing price and the life-time costs of their products. One association from the south of Europe reckon that since the prices have gone down with the economic crisis, energy efficient appliances or models that propose technological innovation can be found at a better price than 5 to 10 years ago.

As a result of all those aspects, manufacturers are **motivated to invest time and resources** in order to work with Topten. Manufacturers regard Topten as a positive project for consumers, manufacturers and retailers. The Topten project informs potential customers with all necessary information about energy efficient appliances. At the same time it allows manufacturers and distributors to showcase their best products to customers, who can see which companies really invest in environmentally friendly technologies and appliances. One manufacturer stated that it was important to be mentioned on such a website targeting ecological forerunners; another stated that being listed on the Topten website distinguishes products and companies, and is therefore an added value in terms of branding and advertising. The ranking seems also to be appreciated (with one company always aiming to be number one on Topten).

Concerning the **impact of Topten on changes of the product range towards more efficient products**, manufacturers' answers are rather negative because they state they make efforts in this direction anyway. They do acknowledge that Topten allows them to promote energy efficiency features though it does not actively trigger changes in their product range. This may also vary by country, depending on the level of impact the energy efficiency class may have on consumer choices.

Similar answers are given regarding the increase of **sales numbers of their selected Topten products**. Most manufacturers do not explicitly track the sales numbers of Topten products, they say those are hard to measure. All of the interviewed manufacturers underline an increase of feedback from consumers on the theme of energy and water consumptions, and more questions about the energy label. They also note a trend in the sales for more efficient appliances (but do not provide numbers).

The **specific Topten web pages which are most important for manufacturers** are the good overview of the lists of the most efficient products in individual categories, defined clearly by the EU technical criteria, the energy saving calculation, the fact that Topten mentions electricity and water costs, the selection criteria pages (so that manufacturers can know which of their products could be compliant) and the recommendations pages for the public (which allow consumers to understand in a fast and effective way the best option for their needs).

Appreciated features are the download function as Excel table, the presence of filters and the sorting of appliances by functionalities because consumers will have different priorities (after ensuring high energy efficiency).

Specific tools of the Topten web pages which could be improved are highly influenced by the different ranges of information on the specific national web pages. As such, some manufacturers demand more information about other aspects than energy consumption like product quality, the useful lifetime, the quality of materials or functional differences between different models. Also criteria and recommendation pages could be simplified and made easier to read on some web pages. One manufacturer asked for a revision of the selection criteria in order to allow their best products to be displayed on the list.

Manufacturers also brought forward **proposals on how Topten could improve generally** in the future to increase the added value for them. Again the answers should be regarded as country specific, as the national Topten web pages display different information. The different answers therefore could serve as a basis for discussions for the national teams and can be

summarized as follows [*several of the proposals below were actually planned for by the new Topten software*]:

- The web page could be made more modern looking
- There should be more product images
- More frequent updates of product lists
- Improve the filter function to make them more visible and comfortable
- Improve the links to retailers
- Include the EAN number in the Excel files for download to ease the matching of products
- Develop a specific logo to ease the identification of selected Topten models at the point of sale
- There could be a “Topten newsletter” and more Topten events
- There could be a Topten Brand Shop at Amazon
- Topten could cover a wider range of issues to include innovation issues
- Provide a short description of Topten to always have at hand for the communication department, to train the staff and our retailers
- Declared values should be examined/questioned by Topten (market surveillance function)
- Highlight outstanding products ("top device of the month")
- Make more systematic links to consumer evaluation and consumer associations' tests (that should gain more interest from visitors than e.g. CO₂ emissions)
- The visibility of the project should be increased so that it becomes known to the masses

Regarding **additional aspects and future plans of cooperation with Topten**, manufacturers are rather happy to continue the existing activities (and sometimes worry that the Topten activities may stop). One manufacturer proposed to try a bimonthly exchange of XLS files including EAN to ease the selection process. Another would like to push further the branding of their products with the Topten logo in their catalogue and on-line, and increase the communication on this topic. However, one manufacturer states that Topten cannot be high-up on their agenda until it is massively advertised.



2.2 Feedback from participating retailers

The interviewed retailers state that they **support energy efficient products in general** in their own environmental policy. They generally have a consumer portal with energy- and environmental advices, often (at least in part) provided by Topten.

Some of them have **cooperated with Topten** for several years, within long term agreements or recurring campaigns in which Topten is involved to raise awareness about "green issues": energy labels, energy consumption, potential savings, etc. Flyers are distributed to consumers (either the retailers' or Topten's brochures), staff members are trained and messages on energy efficiency are displayed in the internal company magazine, blog-articles are jointly developed.

One price comparison site indicates the promotion of Topten on their pages – with an explanation of what it is, and the reciprocity on the Topten pages. They provide "average price" information for the Topten selected products, and Topten provides their updated product selection.

Once best products are listed on the Topten websites, **retailers can label these products on their website with the Topten logo and key messages** (e.g. "Switch to green now", "Save energy and recover your investment"). This is implemented thanks to an exchange of files with Topten who checks the products. One retailer has developed in cooperation with Topten an e-learning course for lighting and cooling appliances for their staff (integrated in their intranet). The most involved retailers explicitly aim to improve their range and sales figures of Topten products. One of them underlines that when products are marked with a "Best choice" logo, the sales increase.

One retailer requested a specific assessment of their range with the goal to understand its positioning compared to the average of the market and to the average of installed in homes, because Topten is able to provide trustworthy numbers and facts and also to provide advice on how to communicate this to a larger public.

Energy efficiency seems to be an important factor (depending on the type of appliances) and retailers always make information available to customers – provided manufacturers supply it in the first place. Of course, some clients will always focus - and focus only - on price but depending on countries and on type of consumers, the quality, brand and performance of the products are also important. Retailers too have different positioning, and the ones working with Topten usually sell from low segment to top products (i.e. provide a wide choice to consumers), or focus on the high range.

According to the interviewed retailers, the **price criterion** is important, but affordability seems to be more important. Showing financial benefits over the lifetime is a convincing argument to invest a bit more at the time of purchase, as well as reaching a better quality.

Their **motivation to invest time and resources in order to work with Topten** results from the fact that they see it as part of their concept to offer more than just price and basic information concerning the products. Consumers are interested in energy efficient and environmentally friendly products and they think they should be easy and quick to find. Some retailers emphasise the importance of working on this topic in relation with the social

responsibility policy and internal goals in terms of sustainability. Others refer more directly to energy efficiency as a selling point along side quality and price.

One retailer indicated that they had to face a situation of conflict between, on the one hand, the objective of selling cheap equipment that is suitable for mass production, and on the other hand the objective of selling devices that can be used with a clear conscience. One solution is at least to raise awareness on energy efficiency. Another retailer indicated that consumers have more and more questions about impact on the environment: energy, material, health, etc.

Referral marketing linked towards on-line retailers (implemented by Topten) also ensures a good publicity and brings potential clients.

Comparison sites indicate that their goal is to bring more transparency on the market and that Topten contributes to this movement on the topic of energy consumption.

While collaborating with Topten, the most important Topten functions are the product category pages and the specific product pages that supply relevant and simple information to the consumers. The credibility and the popularity of the Topten brand have been as well stated (but this is depending on the situation of each national Topten project). The printing function was mentioned as still interesting for certain consumers. To some operators, it is interesting to analyse the collaboration in terms of SEO (search engine optimization).

Interviewed retailers tend to think that **Topten activities contributed to a change in their product range** towards more efficient products and a **change in the sales**, though they don't all track this fact with sales data (which is difficult) – only two publish this data (one indicated up to 20% of their sales made by Topten products in the covered categories, a bit below their target). The comparison sites note that the collaboration with Topten may enrich their range (depending on the product type) because they tend to focus on very well known brands and popular products, whereas Topten finds the most efficient ones and tries to attract the attention to them.

One **retailer studied the reaction of their on-line consumers** when confronted and when not confronted with environmental information: it seems that when the purchase price is impacted by an environmental feature, consumers are ready to take the environmental information into account for small and relatively cheap products, but not for large appliances, even if they can make money savings on the long run. So the idea that consumers are sensitive to the financial argument may not be always true.

Concerning potential **improvements of the Topten web pages** the interviewed retailers emphasize the great improvement thanks to the new use of EAN codes and suggest the following:

- More investment in communication so that their customers can better understand energy labelling and the value added of Topten products
- Products should be ranked based on their total costs and not only according to energy efficiency) – or at least the possibility to chose this criteria for ranking should be made more obvious
- Expand the range of Topten products
- Expand the Topten opinion on products that are not listed so that consumers feel accompanied even in the absence of a Topten product in a shop (the ecoGator widget

using a traffic light on different features was very interesting and could be adapted in the Topten website: if consumers could describe the appliance of their choice, the widget was displaying e.g. a red light if the screen of the TV was very large, a green light if the condensation class of a drier was B but a red light if the energy class was also B, each time with a one line explanation for this assessment)

- Expand the range of features not linked to energy (e.g. inform on the TV display resolution)
- Invest in a more friendly design
- Continuous update of the website, highlighting the newly displayed products
- Add an intuitive tool for searching the articles
- Produce videos for customers

Regarding **future cooperation plans with Topten**, most of the interviewed retailers already engaged in showing the Topten logo on their website wish to continue this activity. Some retailers wish to extend this activity with the use of Topten for rebate programmes (where Topten products would benefit from subsidies) and with the development of API (programming interface to ease the data exchange between Topten and the retailers).

One retailer mentioned the coming new label and hopes to communicate on this topic together with Topten. Others mention the wish to organise a communication campaign in their stores together with Topten.

As for the ones less engaged in environmental issues, they state they will have to deal with this topic in the future, even if customers are not yet ready to massively do so (it is a matter of social responsibility).

2.3 - Feedback from professional buyers

Interviewees for this stakeholder group come from municipalities, buying agencies (including one not public but with the aim of helping its clients from a life-cycle perspective) and an eco-label organisation. Their objective is to follow the law for public procurement but also to ensure best use of resources by optimising procurement activities.

In terms of cooperation with professional buyers, Topten advised several buyers on energy efficiency in products as a whole (regulations, standards, market data) and on Topten tools in particular (product lists, selection criteria insuring demanding performances yet from products available on the market, professional guidelines). Several buyers state that a valuable fact about Topten is that the information provided is impartial and does not come from a commercial entity (though some of them regret that the Topten tool is not an "official" one, which makes them hesitating in their using it, quoting it, recommending it to their members). One municipality organised a training day during its "Energy days". Another one invited the Topten expert to participate in Green Public Procurement working groups for IT products and professional refrigerators. Another one is regularly trained by Topten on the latest regulations and standards on a series of products.

For large buyers **the main criterion for choosing products** is the price, followed by the technical values and the service quality. Energy consumption may be integrated in the technical values. Purchasing costs must always be weighed against operating costs and durability. One large buyer states that their focus is on life cycle costs and eco labelling when choosing products. This is not relevant for all buyers, but at least they state they are interested in this approach.

Regarding the **quality of products**, it seems that it is more difficult to set objective criteria that would be accepted within the public procurement rules. However, several aspects could be highlighted (and receive weight in the product evaluation) such as maintenance and the availability of spare parts. Life cycle cost is important as the purchasing costs can be weighted against the operating costs. Performance in the context of user friendliness and aesthetics is also considered.

An issue is the necessity to find several brands able to participate in a call for tender given the demanding specifications.

One public organisation underlined the **difficulty of working with the topic of energy efficiency**: a national decree has passed, making it mandatory for State level procurers to chose the most energy efficient products available. However, nothing is done to explain how to find those most efficient products, and which are they, especially as markets evolve all the time. In this respect, Topten, even though supported by the national energy agency, is not perceived as "official" enough to be systematically used as a reference. In addition, contrarily to other difficult topics, such as the mandatory use of recycled paper, the energy efficiency parameter is not even discussed and hence this decree is not enforced.

Only a few buyers have fully applied the Topten selection criteria as proposed in the **procurement guidelines** displayed on the Topten web page. Others may have read them to understand the context, or they may have used the cost calculation hypotheses, but they did not use the selection criteria because they found them too ambitious to serve as a basis for their work. The Topten tailor-made advice is also regarded as a very important tool.



Some buyers wish that the Topten recommendations would cover a larger range of products and that they would provide more details, because suppliers within a public contract should above all think in terms of the buyers' needs (and not only in terms of products). More parameters could be also part of the Guidelines, such as the currently applicable regulations and standards, water consumption, noise emissions or drying performance. Another buyer would like to see a column that shows whether the product is eco-labelled or not. Also having more products listed and more regularly would be an advantage.

What would also help large buyers, as one buyer mentions, is to have **more information about the market as a whole**: when a buyer defines specifications, he or she should know not only the best performance level but also how many different manufacturers are able to propose such super efficient products (which is not obvious in the Topten lists). Even more importantly, they need information about poorly performing products and average performing products and more information about standards and regulations so that they are able to justify their specifications' level.

For the future the involved large buyers wish to **stay in regular contact with Topten**.

2.4 - Feedback from public authorities

Public authorities are active in the field of energy efficiency and **support energy efficient products in general** with manifold activities on different political levels. They regulate energy utilities, oversee consumer protection, co-finance energy efficiency projects, support labels, launch programmes to support energy efficiency or procurement programmes, provide information and advice on energy related products (to professional stakeholders, such as retailers, aiming at involving them in the local environmental policy, and to the general public) and are involved in the eco-design process or are even responsible for the development of implementing measures under the eco-design and energy labelling directives, as well as for the implementation of tyre labelling in the EU.

One interviewed municipality has as a goal to be energy self sufficient by 2030. One stakeholder interviewed at the EU level emphasised the important role of Topten in terms of consumer empowering which is key at a time when, strategically, the European Commission has put consumers at the centre of the energy system.

The use of and **cooperation with the Topten project** is characterized by different activities such as:

- Exchange of technical information
- Input on policy recommendations
- Input on methodologies (e.g. for market surveillance)
- Common dissemination activities: campaigns targeting consumers (including with Topten videos), advising to use the Topten web page as a source of information, co-publication of articles in ministry's newsletters, campaigns targeting professional sectors (e.g. of “Alles LeuchtED” [meaning: “Everything is illuminated”] in Germany targeting retailers and consumers)
- Partnership to achieve better information targeting their citizens and to encourage consumers to choose products with higher energy efficiency
- Support for and display of existing subsidy programmes
- Co-organisation of product competitions
- In some countries, Topten also provides specific studies on products not yet covered by a regulation (e.g. signage displays)
- Presentation of the Topten project as a successful EU funded project, independent, concrete, close to the consumers because available in several languages and covering distinct national markets.

Several **subsidy programmes** are based on the Topten product database and/or on the product criteria of Topten, are available at least in Switzerland, Austria and Luxembourg. The aim is to increase the market share of highly efficient devices. Topten serves as a basis for eligible products, or its selection criteria are more or less copied to identify eligible products, or Topten experts provide advice on which appliances could be subsidised. In Switzerland, Topten implements the rebate programme directly, which is regarded as suitable because Topten is recognised as neutral with regards to manufacturers and products.

For public authorities **the most helpful specific tools of the Topten web pages** are product lists including the life cycle costs. Beyond the tables with the most energy efficient products, the

tips for proper selection of energy efficient products are significant (especially the explanations of the energy label), and, of course, the rebate information (citizens can easily see the amount of subsidies for each type of product).

In answer to the question which **specific tools of the Topten web pages could be improved**, several suggestions were made:

- In the product lists: more products covered and more extensively (e.g. to also cover very local producers), add the monthly savings in energy and money, add an advised date of replacement
- Improve the search engine
- In the Topten Pro Guidelines, more information about a possible verification procedure for products described as energy efficient
- Displaying tests on product durability (when they exist)
- Displaying on-line applicable legislation and standard for each product, possibly not only for energy efficiency
- Develop a newsletter
- Enable on-line access for manufacturers and interested institutions
- Add information on circular economy
- Add information on consumption depending on household size and lifestyle.
- Make the website more responsive
- Add a compare function
- Add a calculation tool to enable consumer to compare their old device to the BAT one proposed on Topten, clearly displaying all savings and benefits

At a more general level, several interviewees would welcome more categories (for which a methodology is needed e.g. professional products such as medical equipment, electric vehicles) and more tools and information to be able to answer the many questions from large buyers asking how to choose energy efficient products, and more publicity around the project (professional marketing): Topten is a sound scientific tool but if only a few persons know about it, it has a limited impact.

For the **future cooperation with Topten**, they seem to take for granted the continuation of Topten. In one country, several studies are already planned on new product categories, as well as communication projects, and the publication of procurement guidelines for companies. A city is planning a rebate programme based on the Topten products for low-income families buying at a local retailer and using green electricity. Other interviewees would like to invite Topten experts to GPP working groups, to co-publish a catalogue of products to be presented at fairs, or help in the definition of a possible future programme aiming at penalising inefficient products and boosting efficient ones thanks to a tax neutral approach.

Finally, **Topten support is hoped for by several stakeholders in the framework of the introduction of the new energy label** (new scale, new evaluation systems, new standards, etc.).

One stakeholder at the European level, though acknowledging the usefulness of Topten for a wide range of actors – from European citizens to professional and public stakeholders at various



levels – wished that Topten could maintain its neutral and independent approach while at the same time not depend on European funding.

2.5 - Feedback from utilities

The interviewed utilities **support energy efficiency in general**. In the field of household appliances, they have published several publications and points of sale materials, they offer personal and general advice, they operate a web page with energy advice, etc. They have also organised several projects and campaigns with the aim to increase awareness on energy efficiency among consumers. One utility claims to be a comprehensive energy service provider rather than a mere utility.

One utility **cooperates with Topten** since many years, providing an adapted Topten homepage for their clients (the rest of the site has the same content). They also regularly use the Topten information brochures. Others have co-developed brochures with Topten or integrated the Topten recommendations in their own advice to their clients. One utility, as a public entity uses the Topten procurement guidelines and information.

Some utilities do have **subsidy programmes** that are based on the product database and the product criteria of Topten, even if Topten cannot be publically advised.

The **most important specific tools** of the Topten web pages are the well-designed tables of products, the possibility to filter, and to compare with average/non-efficient products in individual categories, the product categories themselves, recommendations and articles (especially those presenting new legislation). Utilities also appreciate the educational purposes of the website – though some doubt that many consumers use this functionality.

Regarding the **specific tools of the Topten web pages that could be improved**, utilities state the need to bring this valuable information where the buying decision is made, i.e. in shops, and the opportunity to include a section with a consumer forum discussing products. More to the point, while energy savings are presented for one year, they should be presented over the product's lifetime (to stimulate manufacturers), add a CO₂ calculator and a calculator allowing users to customize their values, add a section on heating systems.

One utility states that **Topten could generally improve** by working on smart homes and e-mobility. Another would like Topten to motivate producers on developing services (cooling) rather than products (refrigerators). One consultant advises to contact each utility in order to present Topten.

2.6 - Feedback from NGOs

The interviewees actively support environmental issues and therefore promote energy efficient products in many ways. Their mission is to promote sustainable development. They carry out educational programmes and workshops, raise consumer awareness about energy efficiency, encourage citizen participation in the decision, monitoring and evaluation of public policies, publish expert and PR articles about energy efficiency and savings thanks to the replacement of products, promote energy saving behaviour and purchasing decisions and provide technical input and expertise for the development of ambitious and forward looking product policies.

WWF is a specific case because it has had a long-term collaboration with Topten, formalised in 2011 with the Topten International Group Association. WWF and Topten share the common goal to mitigate climate change through energy efficiency. So does ECOS, mainly involved in Eco-design and Energy labelling policies looking at regulations, standards and enforcement in supporting energy efficiency – topics for which Topten is a great support. Both WWF and ECOS are members of the Topten Act project Steering Committee.

The **cooperation with the Topten project** covers many activities:

- Many NGOs are using Topten as a source of information for expert commentaries and notes for their articles, replies to readers, and PR concerning efficient appliances topics. They also actively promote Topten through their social media channels and one NGO has circulated a Topten leaflet in one of their magazines in the past.
- The cooperation can also concern the co-development of brochures or web-information campaigns (e.g. for LEDs), or teaching material in which Topten is quoted.
- NGOs also use the Topten analysis in their policy advocacy work, using the evidence based performance that are displayed on the website to discuss with policy makers and question the industry positions, or to negotiate demanding levels for rebate programmes.
- The use of Topten data as BAT products (indicative benchmarks) is also emphasised – i.e. the data produced within the Topten Act project at the various levels – to push for higher ambition when developing energy efficiency requirements on products and assess what levels of performances are achievable by the industry. This data is also very useful for products that are not yet regulated or investigated by the EC (this data would be otherwise missing).
- In some cases NGOs were invited to participate in common projects with Topten at the national and European levels (e.g. the ecoGator project).
- The partnership with WWF covers communications, fund raising, policy advocacy and capacity building with relevant stakeholders.

The **NGOs promote Topten** because they think of it as a very important project for the consumers, producers and retailers. They are working on the same topic and can be stronger by working with Topten as often they do not have in-house competencies. Some NGOs note that Topten delivers reliable information as a strong and independent partner, which is very helpful for their own communication. Topten presents important information in a clear, helpful format that makes it easy to take action. This makes it a valuable resource for anyone looking to save energy or cut down his or her carbon footprint. It identifies front-runners in the various product



categories that give a long-term signal of where the market could and should head towards. The fact that Topten does not push for the use of appliances is also appreciated (e.g. by not putting on-line Topten selections of air conditioners, or of tumble driers, but by proposing sustainable alternatives).

At the EU level, Topten is appreciated as a source of information to better know the European market and also as a counter expertise when the industry is claiming that certain levels cannot be reached. More transparency on the market is always welcome and Topten provides a fair assessment of the products on the EU market.

For the interviewed NGOs the **most important specific tools of the Topten web pages** are the information about the appliances with the highest energy efficiency available on the market, also professional appliances, news section, the information section (how to save energy, how to purchase products, efficient lighting...) and the filtering options that allow narrowing the listings to specific needs. The product guides are also highlighted as very useful, providing important context beyond the energy ratings themselves, on advices not only to choose wisely but also to use wisely the products.

Several recommendations were given for the question which **specific tools of the Topten web pages could be improved**:

- More use of social network
- Development of a newsletter
- Store location function (where Topten appliances can be bought)

When it comes to the question how **Topten could generally improve**, many NGO quote the needed improvement in terms of communication, including on the social networks, to make the websites known and hence have a bigger impact. Also the simplification of the message is mentioned because citizens are not very interested in numbers and too technical matters (it is difficult to mobilise on such topics).

At the same time, new topics seem to be crucial for NGOs: circular economy, reparability, durability, use of hazardous substances and resource efficiency. They underline that focusing on energy efficiency is not only too narrow but risks misleading citizens because it is the global sustainability of the product that they should take into account, from "cradle to grave". This would help integrating these topics in the future Eco-design and Energy Labelling Directives and weight on the negotiations of Voluntary Agreement (which are not assessed as very effective).

When it comes to **future plans in the cooperation with Topten**, the interviewed NGOs would like to continue the successful work on the project with more activities, more product categories, increasing popularity in the public, expert run Q&As, where people can submit questions on a particular topic.

Some NGOs would welcome a more frequent journalistic cooperation, possibly also placing the logos on their portals. Others would like to develop more training courses. **Most interviewees count on Topten as a resource for their policy advocacy work**, or for other European projects. They hope for a renewed input and added value to continue influencing European and national decisions on such an important topic.



WWF cooperates with Topten on various joint projects regarding energy efficiency in Switzerland and around the world, and these efforts will continue.

2.7 - Feedback from consumer organisations

The interviewed consumer organisations **support energy efficient products in general** by energy efficiency programmes, in the context of consulting and public relations, with press information, often for specific products, and advisory recommendations. Some consumer organisations are involved in projects to raise consumer awareness about energy efficiency (including some funded by the European IEE programme), for some specific target groups (low-income families, elderly, schools...). They often make presentation or receive the general public at their premises when households seek advice on energy consumption.

As already mentioned for NGOs, consumer organisations also **cooperate with the Topten project** in manifold measures:

- Use of the 'Topten websites' very complete information on energy consumption of products: background information, product lists, etc. which allows consumer associations to check and revise their editorial content on specific products.
- Most interviewed consumer organisations promote and recommend Topten in their main communication channels: web page, social network, press releases, meetings and workshops.
- Regular exchange of information between experts from the consumer association and from Topten on environmental topics.

Consumer organisations **promote Topten** because they regard the Topten project as a reliable and well-known source of information; it is also important that Topten is an independent platform, which provides transparency for consumers. The project gives the consumers the necessary information about energy efficient appliances: consumers often have a hard time knowing what to look for when choosing a product to buy. A lot of people know about energy labelling, but not all make use of it while shopping. Since a lot of stores do not promote energy efficient products, Topten is an invaluable tool for every consumer. Topten empowers consumers by being a knowledge base for them (it goes further than just a list of products and helps moving the market towards greener goals).

The **most important specific tools of the Topten web pages** are the product lists that provide an overview of efficient products and their price, the selection criteria and the background information (also provided in the criteria papers). Consumer associations also value when an indication on whether the product has been tested is provided, and when pictures are provided (e.g. the LED picture gives an idea on which lamp it will fit-in).

For consumer organisations it is important that in the product lists one can find not only the recommended products but also their electricity costs and the other features that interest consumers, as well as a picture of the related energy label.

Being asked **which specific tools of the Topten web pages could be improved** the interviewed consumer organisations proposed the following:

- Make more obvious the ranking order and the possibility to change it.
- Make more obvious the sorting and filtering functions.
- Make the site available on a mobile application

General hints for **improvements of Topten in future** concern the extension of the Topten project:

- The possibility that more appliances are included in Topten, i.e. those that are tested by consumer organisations, or those that are commonly found in shops – consumers would be better accompanied when they shop. If possible, it would be very interesting to signal those appliances that have been tested because consumers tend to focus on this.
- Add a compare functions that would allow comparing not only with "bad" products sold on the market but also with installed products in the homes (e.g. an average 10 year old product) to see if it would make sense changing an old device.
- Add more product groups such as wood pellet stoves, shower heads, coffee machines
- Develop a tool allowing consumers to customise the total costs' estimates for their situation and habits (and not be confronted with an "average" user profile)
- Produce videos targeting consumers (from "how to use the Topten website" to "product videos")
- Achieve a higher visibility by means of more advertisement and public relations activities.
- Develop graphics for the use of consumer organisations, for example on the development of the energy consumption of household appliances or on the extent of saving potentials.
- Develop clearly visible, condensed and readily understandable overview of the most important information on individual EU energy efficiency labels.

In the future the interviewed **consumer organisations want to intensify their Topten promotion** to their possibilities of increasing the level of awareness. Collaborations would be foreseen also in the view of the new label implementation.

2.8 - Feedback from other multipliers

Several interviews targeted **organisations that multiply the Topten message and impacts** but that cannot be classified in the above groups of stakeholders: a private organisation working on the promotion of energy efficiency (thus reaching out to many of the Topten target groups), a private organisation managing an environmental label that Topten is highlighting in its IT product lists, an internationally recognised laboratory testing products and very much involved in the measurement of energy consumption, 2 universities working on appliances often cooperating with Topten, a company in the field of electrical engineering, 2 research institutes working in the field of circular economy and industry responsibility.

The **cooperation with the Topten project** covers many activities and are often long term collaborations:

- Communication efforts, mutual promotion of events
- Policy advocacy
- Capacity building for many target groups
- Participation in the Topten Act Steering Committee because common goals are shared to promote energy efficient and sustainable products and support procurement. Topten uses the certified label
- Increase market transparency by supporting conformity tests
- Support in introducing high quality and highly energy efficient products
- Know-how exchange
- Collaboration with European projects such as the ProCold project
- Use of the Topten material in presentations and university courses
- Common studies on how to enlarge the Topten selection criteria to other climate and recycling rating (beyond the energy use)

The motivations stated for such collaboration with Topten are most often that these multipliers share the goals of Topten and highly appreciate its scientific, neutral, credible and pragmatic approach. It is also very important that Topten is an internationally recognised tool, a knot for promoting efficient products and policies. Topten can bring knowledge and help them become known by manufacturers and eventually reduce environmental impacts. There is a complementarity between what Topten does and what the multipliers do, except that the later cannot be as specialised as Topten is on this issue. Multipliers also appreciate that Topten concretely encourages consumers to choose energy efficient products that help reduce CO₂ emissions.

Some organisations underline **that the principle of selecting top products is very effective** in general but also because it concretely shows to all stakeholders involved (producers, retailers, consumers, professional procurers) that the EU regulations on Eco Design and Energy Labelling have an impact and could have even more if there was more transparency on the market – Topten, as a established expert and knowledgebase, contributes in a valuable and positive way to this movement. Other multipliers have used the product lists and policy recommendations while working with producers and decision makers.

The **most important specific tools of the Topten web pages** are the product lists that provide an overview of efficient products, a basis for policy advocacy, a demonstration of the market

evolution for producers, an explicit presentation of total costs over the life-time; the Topten Pro Guidelines that help in working with large buyers; and the recommendations that are a good source of information on technical issues and EU regulations for all stakeholders.

Being asked **which specific tools of the Topten tool could bring more added-value to their work**, the interviewed multipliers proposed the following:

- Strengthen the market research activities and communicate more the results towards all stakeholders to increase the reach level
- Intensify the policy advocacy work
- Keep on investing in product testing and compliance measurements to improve EU regulations
- Work on indicators involving a feed-back from product users
- Improve the website from a technical point of view (for mobile devices)
- Add environmental selection criteria (beyond energy and water)
- Link the Topten work with the building work: e.g. the Topten criteria should be included in the net zero energy building approach
- Develop tools to calculate CO₂ emissions, energy costs, water costs, LCA approaches
- Offer the possibility to download the material from the selection criteria and recommendation pages (similarly to the Pro Guidelines)

All interviewees intend to continue their collaboration with Topten in the future.

3 – Conclusions

The feedback received from the different stakeholder groups has been generally positive, which is not surprising considering that the interviewed stakeholders in their great majority work together with the Topten project. In this sense, the interviewed stakeholders are representative of the 158 organisations that have engaged in a partnership with the Topten Act partners.

Topten has brought enough value for those stakeholders to motivate them and have them invest time and resources in common projects and collaboration, undoubtedly demonstrating a strong interest in the project. They found that **Topten has brought them:**

- Impartial, scientific, and yet concrete and solution-oriented information (in their language) produced by an independent and internationally recognised network.
- Highly specialised information on a very specific topic – review of appliances with regards to energy performance – that is complementary to their own activity and that no other organisation or network is able to provide.
- Support for their activity – whatever it was, i.e. confirming that Topten is a multi-focus project that is used by a whole range of various stakeholders.
- In some cases, the essential basis for some of their activities that could not exist without Topten, such as rebate programmes.

It is difficult to get numbers from the stakeholders on the design of Topten-compliant products, changes in ranges, sales or procurement of Topten compliant products. But it is unquestionable that Topten contributes to a great extent to the promotion of energy efficient devices where economic operators tend to focus on price, and where public procurers are sometimes not even able to apply related regulations (such as the obligation for public procurers to choose most efficient appliances).

All the tools developed and maintained by Topten Act – the products lists and reviews, the recommendations and tips' pages, the selection criteria pages, the Pro Sections, the Pro Guidelines, the links towards on-line retail shops – seemed to be used and appreciated, even though **stakeholders would like to get "more" from Topten:**

- **More visibility:** as several stakeholders underlined it is a pity (and it is also blocking their own involvement in the project) that so few people know about Topten. They have proposed that Topten develop advertisement, videos, newsletters, increased presence on the social networks, branding and labelling with the Topten logo at the point of sale (which is starting to develop), etc.
- **More modernity** for the website: changes in design, new features (compare function, better and more visible filters, improved search engine, store location function), automatic data exchange (which has started with the new software), development of widgets (customisation of energy and money savings for consumers), development of calculators (CO₂, LCA...).

- **A wider scope of action:**

- More details about each product
- More products covered, e.g. from the professional sector, or for not yet regulated household products
- A more complete picture of the overall market to help consumers choose products even in absence of Topten models at their shops, or to help professional buyers understand the context of their call for tenders
- More parameters covered: CO₂ emissions, resource efficiency, durability, reparability
- More product testing
- More market research to provide input to the regulatory process
- Future upstream information and shared activities in view of the coming new energy label

Finally almost all interviewed stakeholders seem to assume that Topten will continue delivering its free of charge information in the future, helping out consumers, professional buyers, and participating to the development of new Eco-Design and Energy labelling regulations. It is as though they acknowledge that Topten is an established operator that fulfils a mission of public interest, while at the same time stating that in some cases they cannot fully endorse it (mostly in the case of public authorities) because it is not recognised as an "official" tool.

It should be noted that the Topten consortium is motivated and invested in a continuation of all those activities that produce such an added value to the connected stakeholder; additional developments to further increase this added value are in part already being implemented and in part could be developed in the future. Prerequisite for both the continuation as well as the further development is a sustainable funding of the project (cf. D6.8).

4 - Lists of interviewed stakeholders and questionnaires

AT - Austria

Organisation	Type of stakeholder
Expert	Retailer
VKW - Province of Vorarlberg	Energy utility
Die Umweltberatung	NGO
Durchblicker.at	Comparison website / Retailer
eNu – Energy Agency of the Regional Government of Lower Austria)	Public Authority

CH - Switzerland

Organisation	Type of stakeholder
COOP	Retailer
MIGROS	Retailer
SAFE	Other Multiplier
WWF CH	NGO
BFE – Swiss Federal Office of Energy	Public authority

CZ - Czech Republic

Organisation	Type of stakeholder
CECED CZ - Czech branch of European Committee of Domestic Equipment Manufacturers	Manufacturer
Ministry of social affairs	Public authority
Magazin Ekolist.cz / eco-magazine Evvoluce	NGO
Utility consultant	Utility
Utility consultant	Utility

FR - France

Organisation	Type of stakeholder
BSH	Manufacturer
IKEA	Retailer
UGAP – French buying agency for public procurers	Professional buyer

DE - Germany

Organisation	Type of stakeholder
City of Lahr (Department of Climate and Environmental Protection)	Public Authority
Electrolux	Manufacturer
Idealo	Comparison website / Retailer
Saturn	Retailer
Consumer Association North Rhine Westphalia	Consumer organisation

ES - Spain

Organisation	Type of stakeholder
Ecoserveis	NGO
ANFEL	Manufacturer

IT - Italy

Organisation	Type of stakeholder
Fondazione AEM	Other Multiplier
LEGAMBIENTE	NGO
Italian Ministry of Environment – DG Climate and Energy	Public authority
Politecnico di Milano	Other Multiplier

LT - Lithuania

Organisation	Type of stakeholder
ACC Distribution	Retailer
National Commission for energy control and prices	Public authority
State Consumer Rights Authority	Public authority
State Energy Inspectorate	Public authority
Verta Trade	Professional Buyer

LU - Luxembourg

Organisation	Type of stakeholder
Superdreckskeischt	NGO
Le Mouvement Ecologiste	NGO
Electro-centrer	Other Multiplier
Municipality of Beckerich	Public authority
myenergy (managing the Klimapakt programme)	Public authority

NO - Norway

Organisation	Type of stakeholder
Grønn Hverdag	Consumer organisation
Svanemerket (Swan official Nordic Label)	Professional buyer

PL - Poland

Organisation	Type of stakeholder
Katowice City Hall	Professional buyer
Federacja Konsumentów (Consumer Federation)	Consumer organisation
Lower Silesian Energy and Environment Agency	Public authority

PT - Portugal

Organisation	Type of stakeholder
Gorenje	Manufacturer
Worten	Retailer
Energy efficiency Fund and Innovation support fund	Public authority
DECO	Consumer Organisation
LG	Manufacturer

RO - Romania

Organisation	Type of stakeholder
R'ART	Retailer
Faculty of Power Engineering	Other Multiplier
Fondazione Ecosistemi	NGO
ELCEN	Utility
RADET	Utility
ANRE – Energy Regulatory Authority	Public authority
ENERO –Association for the promotion of clean and efficient energy	NGO

SE - Sweden

Organisation	Type of stakeholder
BSH	Manufacturer
Chalmers research institute	Other Multiplier
Producer responsibility organisation	Other Multiplier
TCO Sweden	Other Multiplier

UK - United Kingdom

Organisation	Type of stakeholder
Liebherr	Manufacturer

EU - Europe

Organisation	Type of stakeholder
ECOS	NGO
TCO	Other multiplier
European Commission EASME	Public authority
VDE - Laboratory	Other multiplier

Questions targeting manufacturers

- General information about your organisation relating to activities in supporting energy efficiency.
- Can you describe your cooperation with the Topten project in brief?
- What is the relative importance of performance, quality (e.g., reliability, durability) and costs?
- Did the product range of your products change due to Topten?
- Could you observe an increase of sales numbers of your Topten products?
- How important is it for you to be listed/to be number one on the Topten website?
- Which specific tools of the Topten websites are most important for you?
- Which specific tools of the Topten websites could be improved?
- How could Topten improve generally in future to increase the added value of Topten for you?
- Additional aspects/ future plans in the cooperation with Topten?

Questions targeting retailers

- General information about your organisation relating to activities in supporting energy efficiency.
- Can you describe your cooperation with the Topten project in brief?
- What is your motivation to participate in Topten?
- What are your main criteria for the selection of brands/technologies/product models?

- What is the relative importance of performance, quality (e.g., reliability, durability) and costs?
- How critical is the price criterion in your opinion/in the opinion of your customers?
- Could you observe an increase of sales numbers of Topten products (in%, in absolute numbers)?
- Which specific tools of the Topten websites are most important for you? Which specific tools of the Topten websites could be improved?
- How could Topten improve generally in future to increase the added value of Topten for you?
- Additional aspects/ future plans in the cooperation with Topten?

Questions targeting professional buyers

- General information about your organisation relating to activities in supporting energy efficiency.
- Can you describe your cooperation with the Topten project in brief?
- In your purchasing decision what are your main criteria for the selection of brands/technologies/product models?
- What is the relative importance of performance, quality (e.g., reliability, durability) and costs?
- When did you involve life cycle costs (LCC) aspects in your procurement rules?
- Did you use the procurement documents, which are provided on the Topten website? If yes, do you regard them as helpful?
- Did you carry out successful procurement activities based on the Topten documents?
- Which specific tools of the Topten websites are most important for you?
- Which specific tools of the Topten websites could be improved?
- How could Topten improve generally in future to increase the added value of Topten for you?
- Additional aspects/ future plans in the cooperation with Topten?

Questions targeting policy makers / Ministries

- General information about your institution relating to activities in supporting energy efficiency.
- Can you describe your cooperation with the Topten project in brief? Does it help you to design policy tools, e.g. Eco-Design measures?
- Are supporting programmes based on Topten?
- Which specific tools of the Topten websites are most important for you?
- Which specific tools of the Topten websites could be improved?
- How could Topten improve generally in future to increase the added value of Topten

for you?

- Additional aspects/ future plans in the cooperation with Topten?

Questions targeting utilities

- General information about your organisation relating to activities in supporting energy efficiency.
- Can you describe your cooperation with the Topten project in brief?
- Are supporting programmes based on Topten?
- Which specific tools of the Topten websites are most important for you?
- Which specific tools of the Topten websites could be improved?
- How could Topten improve generally in future to increase the added value of Topten for you?
- Additional aspects/ future plans in the cooperation with Topten?

Questions targeting NGOs and consumer organisations

- General information about your organisation relating to activities in supporting energy efficiency.
- Can you describe your cooperation with the Topten project in brief?
- Why do you promote Topten?
- By which measures do you promote Topten?
- Did you use the procurement documents, which are provided on the Topten website? If yes, do you regard them as helpful?
- Which specific tools of the Topten websites are most important for you? Which specific tools of the Topten websites could be improved?
- How could Topten improve generally in future to increase the added value of Topten for you?
- Additional aspects/ future plans in the cooperation with Topten?