Own Your SECAP

Guideline on Systematic Implementation of SECAP Measures

A Practical Handbook

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Foreword

Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAPs) set ambitious goals, but many municipalities struggle to turn plans into concrete action. This guideline was created to bridge that gap. It provides a practical, step-by-step approach for implementing measures, monitoring their success, and embedding climate action into everyday municipal work.

At its core lies a simple cycle: prepare, implement, monitor, adapt, and scale up. By starting with a small number of visible measures, building cross-departmental cooperation, and securing political support, municipalities can achieve early results that build momentum. Monitoring and reviews then ensure lessons are learned and fed back into the next round of implementation.

The handbook also highlights cross-cutting factors such as communication, stakeholder involvement, and budget mainstreaming, which often determine whether measures succeed. Drawing on experiences from municipalities across Europe, it offers clear guidance, lessons learned, and practical tools.

This handbook is designed as a companion for energy and environmental managers and as a roadmap for municipalities. It shows how to move from planning to lasting action - turning SECAPs into living instruments that drive the transition to climate neutrality.

Executive Summary

Municipalities across Europe have committed to ambitious climate and energy targets through their Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAPs). Yet, many face the same challenge: how to move **from planning to action**. SECAPs often remain documents on paper, while implementation lags behind.

This **Guideline for Systematic Implementation of SECAP Measures** addresses this gap. It offers municipalities a **practical step-by-step handbook** on how to systematically prepare, implement, monitor, and scale up climate action measures. The target group of this handbook are **municipal energy and environmental managers**, as well as working groups and administrative staff tasked with turning SECAPs into reality.

From Plan to Action - The Implementation Cycle (Chapter 2)

The guideline introduces a clear **implementation cycle**: preparation → implementation → monitoring → adaptation → scaling up. Following this cycle ensures continuity and helps municipalities learn from each round of measures, gradually embedding climate action into everyday practice.

Getting Started (Chapter 3)

Implementation begins with creating the right conditions: setting up a strong **local working group**, establishing collaboration agreements, carrying out an internal audit of existing measures, and selecting **3 - 4 priority measures** for the first cycle. These initial steps build ownership, secure political commitment, and provide a realistic starting point.

Implementing Measures in Practice (Chapter 4)

The core of the guideline focuses on **practical implementation**. Municipalities receive templates and checklists to describe measures in detail, allocate responsibilities, mobilise resources, and organise cross-departmental discussions. Methods such as **design-thinking** help find innovative solutions, while a focus on visible, feasible measures ensures early success.

Monitoring and Learning (Chapter 5)

Implementation must be followed by **monitoring and evaluation**. The guideline explains how to track progress and assess impacts (mitigation, adaptation, energy poverty). Drawing on ISO 50001 principles, it introduces management reviews as a structured way to reflect, learn, and improve. Monitoring is positioned not as bureaucracy, but as a **learning process** that feeds into the next cycle.

Scaling Up and Institutionalising (Chapter 6)

After first successes, municipalities need to **expand efforts and secure continuity**. The guideline shows how to scale up by implementing additional measures, integrate climate action into **municipal budgets** ("climate-mainstreaming"), and update SECAPs with more ambitious targets. Institutionalisation ensures that climate action survives changes in staff or political leadership.

Cross-cutting Success Factors (Chapter 7)

Successful implementation depends on more than technical measures. Municipalities must secure **political commitment**, communicate effectively (internally and externally), involve stakeholders and citizens, and use supportive tools such as dashboards and energy management systems. These factors often make the difference between stalled plans and successful action.

Lessons Learned from Practice (Chapter 8)

The guideline compiles insights from partner municipalities across Europe. Success factors include strong leadership, dedicated staff, cross-departmental cooperation, and visible quick wins. Common barriers include limited resources, weak data, and silo structures. A set of **Do's and Don'ts** provides municipalities with practical advice on how to avoid pitfalls and replicate proven solutions.

Outlook and Recommendations (Chapter 9)

The handbook concludes with clear recommendations:

- Treat SECAPs as **living documents**, not static plans.
- Anchor implementation in daily municipal procedures.
- Mainstream climate action into budgets.
- Continue learning, sharing, and scaling up.

Local action not only delivers immediate benefits such as lower costs and better quality of life, but also contributes directly to EU and global climate targets.

Why Use this Guideline?

This document is more than a report - it is a **practical handbook**. It provides:

- Ready-to-use templates, checklists, and monitoring tables.
- Step-by-step guidance for the **full implementation cycle**.
- Real-world lessons from municipalities across Europe.
- Motivation and structure to turn SECAPs into action.

For energy and environmental managers, this guideline is a **toolbox for everyday work**. For municipalities as a whole, it is a roadmap towards climate neutrality that combines ambition with practical steps.

The message is clear: **plans alone are not enough - action is needed.** With this guideline, municipalities can take systematic, confident steps to implement SECAP measures and make climate action a permanent part of local governance.

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1. Introduction

At a glance: Introduction

Municipalities across Europe have adopted **Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans** (SECAPs) to guide their path towards **climate neutrality**. However, the real challenge lies not in preparing these plans but in putting them into practice. This handbook is designed to **support municipalities** in **systematically implementing SECAP measures**, ensuring that actions move from paper to reality.

It provides **step-by-step guidance, practical tools, and lessons learned** from municipalities already active in implementation. The **target group** includes municipal **energy managers, environmental managers,** and **working groups** responsible for SECAP implementation, but also political representatives and stakeholders engaged in decision-making.

Municipalities are on the front line of Europe's climate transition. They own and manage relevant parts of the building stock and infrastructure, provide essential services, and interact directly with citizens and local businesses. Many have already prepared Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAPs) as part of the Covenant of Mayors or similar initiatives. These plans outline ambitious targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, increasing energy efficiency, and adapting to climate change.

However, the key challenge is not in developing the plans but in implementing them. Too often, SECAPs remain documents on paper while the measures they contain are only partially carried out. Limited staff capacity, lack of funding, and insufficient political or public support can make implementation difficult. At the same time, many municipalities have already taken first steps, achieved results, and gained valuable experience that can inspire others.

The **OwnYourSECAP project** was established to strengthen the capacity of municipalities to move from planning to action. It supports local administrations in implementing SECAP measures systematically, using a common methodology, shared tools, and mutual learning across Europe. Within this framework, handbook provides a **practical guideline for municipalities**.

The objectives of this document are to:

- Provide a **step-by-step handbook** for systematic implementation of SECAP measures.
- Offer **templates, checklists, and examples** that municipalities can apply directly in their daily work.
- Summarise **lessons learned** from municipalities that have already gained experience with SECAP implementation.
- Motivate and support **energy and environmental managers** as well as working groups and municipal staff in taking ownership of the implementation process.

This guideline is written in a practical style. It is not an academic report or a policy paper. Instead, it is intended as a **companion for practitioners**: short enough to be read quickly, detailed enough to be used in daily work, and flexible enough to be adapted to different local contexts.

By following the systematic approach outlined here, municipalities can strengthen their capacity, build confidence, and ensure that their SECAPs become **living documents** that drive measurable change towards climate neutrality and resilience.

2. The Implementation Cycle

At a glance: The Implementation Cycle

Implementing SECAP measures is not a one-off activity but a **continuous cycle of planning, action, monitoring, and improvement**. This chapter introduces a **step-by-step implementation cycle** that municipalities can follow to ensure consistent progress.

It also highlights how **responsibilities** can be assigned within municipal administrations and how SECAP measures should be embedded in the **broader local policy cycle** to ensure **long-term sustainability**.

Implementing climate action measures is not a linear process but a **cycle of continuous improvement**. Municipalities rarely succeed by carrying out a single, isolated action. Instead, successful implementation comes from repeating a structured cycle: **preparation → implementation → monitoring → adaptation → scaling up**.

This chapter introduces the OwnYourSECAP implementation cycle. It outlines the main steps municipalities should follow, explains how to embed measures into the existing municipal policy cycle, and clarifies roles and responsibilities.

2.1. Step-by-step Approach

The OwnYourSECAP cycle follows a **plan - do - check - act** logic that is widely used in energy management but can easily be applied for the implementation of climate actions. Municipalities can use the following steps:

1. **Preparation (Plan)**
   - o Establish a working group and secure political support.
   - o Conduct an internal audit of existing SECAP actions and progress.
   - o Select 2 - 3 priority measures for the first implementation phase.
2. **Implementation (Do)**
   - o Describe each measure in detail (objectives, scope, indicators, responsibilities, resources).
   - o Organise cross-department discussions to align responsibilities.
   - o Mobilise and secure financial and staff resources.
   - o Launch the selected measures, starting with visible and feasible actions.
3. **Monitoring (Check)**
   - o Track progress of implementation (outputs).
   - o Monitor the actual impact (outcomes), e.g. CO_2 reduction, energy savings, resilience benefits.

- o Document results in a management review and share with the municipal council, relevant stakeholders and the public.

4. **Adaptation (Act)**
    - o Adjust measures if progress is not on track.
    - o Learn from barriers and successes and update procedures accordingly.

5. **Scaling up**
    - o Plan and implement additional measures.
    - o Apply a climate relevance assessmant tool for all decisions in the municipality council, not only for climate action.
    - o Integrate climate considerations into municipal budgeting (climate-mainstreaming).
    - o Update SECAPs with more ambitious targets and new measures.

This cycle should be repeated every year (or every two years, depending on municipal capacity). With each cycle, municipalities move from isolated actions towards a **systematic and institutionalised implementation process**.

2.2.   Integration into the Municipal Policy Cycle

For long-term success, the SECAP implementation cycle must not remain a side activity but be fully embedded into the municipality's regular decision-making and policy processes. Political approval is central to this integration: when measures are formally endorsed by the municipal council or board, they gain legitimacy, visibility, and continuity across political cycles. Budgeting provides another critical anchor. By including SECAP measures in the annual budget process and gradually introducing climate-mainstreaming, municipalities can align spending decisions with climate objectives and secure the resources needed for implementation.

Integration also requires linking SECAP actions with other strategic planning documents such as urban development plans, mobility plans, adaptation strategies, and social policies. This alignment ensures that climate action is not treated in isolation but becomes a guiding principle across all areas of municipal development. Finally, public accountability is essential. Monitoring results should not only be reviewed internally but also communicated openly to citizens and stakeholders. Transparent reporting strengthens trust, builds legitimacy, and demonstrates that the municipality is delivering on its commitments.

By embedding the SECAP implementation cycle into political decision-making, financial planning, strategic development, and public communication, municipalities can move climate action from the margins into the centre of governance. In this way, SECAPs become part of "business as usual" rather than temporary projects, ensuring both continuity and long-term impact.

2.3. Roles and Responsibilities

Successful implementation of SECAP measures depends on clearly defined roles and responsibilities within the municipality and beyond. Political leadership plays a central role, as the municipal council and elected representatives provide formal approval for measures, secure political commitment, and give legitimacy and visibility to climate action. Their support ensures continuity across electoral cycles and signals to citizens that climate objectives are a priority.

Within the administration, the energy or environmental manager typically serves as the coordinator of the implementation cycle. This role is essential for overseeing monitoring and reporting, providing technical guidance, and ensuring that activities remain aligned with the SECAP. Coordination is strengthened by a local SECAP working group or climate action team, which brings together representatives from key departments such as technical services, finance, communication, and social affairs. This cross-departmental structure fosters ownership, prevents silo working, and allows climate objectives to be integrated across all fields of municipal activity.

The line departments and administrative units remain responsible for delivering concrete tasks. They manage procurement procedures, implement building renovations, develop mobility solutions, and contribute their sector-specific expertise. Their involvement ensures that actions are technically sound and practically feasible, supported by the necessary staff resources.

Beyond the municipal administration, external stakeholders such as citizens, businesses, NGOs, and utilities also play an important role. They can contribute to implementation through co-financing, partnerships, or active citizen engagement, thereby increasing capacity and strengthening legitimacy. Their participation connects municipal climate action with the wider community and ensures that measures reflect local needs and interests.

Clarity of roles and responsibilities across these different actors prevents overlap, ensures accountability, and builds trust. It creates a governance framework where political leadership, administration, and stakeholders work together towards the shared goal of climate neutrality and resilience.

3. Getting Started

> **At a glance: Getting Started**
>
> The **first step in implementation** is creating the **right conditions**. Municipalities need to set up or strengthen a local **SECAP working group**, bring together key departments, and **clarify roles and responsibilities**.
>
> This chapter guides municipalities in establishing collaboration agreements, carrying out an internal audit to assess the current situation, and **selecting priority measures** that can realistically be implemented in the short term.

Before municipalities can launch their first SECAP measures, they need to put in place the right **structures, agreements, and processes**. Experience shows that many implementation problems arise not from the measures themselves, but from insufficient preparation: unclear roles, missing resources, or lack of political support.

This chapter guides municipalities through the **essential first steps**: setting up a working group, building collaboration, conducting an internal audit, and selecting priority measures for the first cycle.

3.1. Setting up the Local Working Group

A functioning working group is the backbone of SECAP implementation. It ensures cross-departmental cooperation, maintains momentum, and provides a central structure for coordination. At minimum, the group should include the energy or environmental manager together with representatives from the technical or building department, finance, and communication. Depending on the measures under consideration, other units such as social services, mobility, or procurement can also be involved. To be effective, the working group needs a clear mandate from political leadership - either the municipal council or the mayor - authorising it to act on SECAP implementation. Its tasks include coordinating measures, preparing decisions for council approval, monitoring progress, and ensuring communication within the administration and with external stakeholders. Meetings should take place regularly, ideally on a monthly or bi-monthly basis, with clear agendas and documented minutes to follow up on agreed actions. The group should remain small and effective, with around four to six core members, while additional staff or stakeholders can be invited when relevant to specific topics or measures.

3.2. Establishing Collaboration Agreements

Climate action is rarely implemented by municipalities alone. Cooperation with external partners strengthens local capacity, brings in additional expertise, and enhances legitimacy in the eyes of citizens and stakeholders. Formal agreements can be established with experienced municipalities, utilities, local associations, or regional energy agencies to secure this cooperation. Such agreements should clearly define the roles and responsibilities of each party, specify the resources they will contribute in terms of staff, knowledge, or funding, and outline the expected outputs such as implemented measures, reports, or joint events. They should also establish clear communication channels to ensure smooth coordination throughout the process. In practice, it is advisable to start with partners who have already expressed interest, for example through letters of support, or those who have successfully implemented similar measures. These early allies are often decisive in achieving quick successes and in building momentum for further climate action.

3.3. Preparing the First Internal Audit

Before choosing which measures to implement, municipalities should know where they stand. An internal audit provides a structured overview.

- **Audit template**: Use a standard template (see annex) to ensure comparability.
- **Scope**: Assess progress of past SECAP actions, identify gaps, and evaluate available resources.
- **Criteria**: Consider relevance across sectors (buildings, mobility, energy, adaptation), expected impact, feasibility within one year, and resource availability.
- **Process**: Conduct the audit together with the working group and key municipal staff, ideally involving energy managers.

Outcome: A clear list of strengths, weaknesses, barriers, and opportunities for action.

3.4. Selecting Priority Measures for Implementation

From the audit, municipalities should select **3 - 4 priority measures** to implement in the first year. These serve as a **pilot cycle** and a learning process.

Selection should be based on:

- **Impact**: Measures that contribute significantly to climate mitigation, adaptation, or energy poverty reduction.
- **Feasibility**: Actions that can realistically be implemented within 12 months.
- **Visibility**: Measures that show clear results to citizens and politicians.
- **Replicability**: Actions that can serve as a model for future cycles.
- **Resources**: Availability of staff, budget, and possible co-financing.

Tip: Include at least one measure from different sectors (e.g. public buildings, transport, adaptation) to build experience across the SECAP scope.

3.5. Building Commitment and Communication

Finally, municipalities should secure political and administrative buy-in for the chosen measures. This begins by presenting the audit results and the selected actions to the municipal council or board for formal approval, ensuring both legitimacy and continuity. In parallel, a short communication note should be prepared for staff and citizens to explain the first planned steps and highlight the municipality's commitment to climate action. Making this commitment visible is equally important: publishing information on the municipal website, issuing a press release, or organising a small kick-off event demonstrates that implementation has started and invites the wider community to be part of the process. By building commitment at this early stage, municipalities can avoid delays later on and send a clear signal that implementation is a shared responsibility across both the administration and the community.

4. Implementing Measures in Practice

At a glance: Implementing Measures in Practice

Once priority measures are selected, the focus shifts to **practical implementation**. This chapter outlines how municipalities can **describe measures in detail**, **set clear objectives and indicators**, and **assign responsibilities**.

It also introduces methods such as design-thinking to stimulate innovative solutions, highlights the importance of **cross-department coordination**, and provides guidance on **mobilising resources**, financing, and **stakeholder engagement**.

Turning selected SECAP measures into reality requires clarity, coordination, and persistence. This chapter provides step-by-step guidance on how municipalities can move from a priority list of measures to actual implementation. It focuses on defining measures in detail, ensuring organisational readiness, mobilising resources, and applying methods that improve collaboration across departments and stakeholders.

4.1. Describing Measures in Detail

Before implementation starts, each measure should be described in a clear and standardised format. This avoids misunderstandings and helps everyone involved to work towards the same goal. When defining objectives, municipalities should specify not only mitigation goals but also adaptation targets. Co-benefits such as health improvements, comfort, biodiversity or local job creation should be explicitly listed, as they can increase political and public support.

Key elements to include:

- **Objectives** - What is the measure aiming to achieve (e.g. reduction of CO_2 emissions, improved resilience, energy savings)?
- **Scope** - Which sector or area does the measure cover (e.g. buildings, transport, renewable energy, adaptation)?
- **Indicators** - How will success be measured (e.g. kWh saved, % reduction in emissions, number of households reached)?
- **Responsibilities** - Who is in charge (department, person, working group)?
- **Timeline** - When will the measure start, key milestones, expected completion?
- **Resources** - Estimated costs, staff effort, external expertise needed.

Providing this detail ensures that measures are actionable and ready for political approval and implementation. A template for the description of SECAP measures can be found in this chapter.

4.2. Organising Cross-department Communication

Most SECAP measures affect more than one municipal department. An energy renovation programme, for example, might require the involvement of the building department for technical planning, the finance unit for budgeting, and the social affairs office to address the needs of vulnerable households. To prevent silo thinking and avoid delays, municipalities should establish regular working group meetings where the different departments can discuss their responsibilities and coordinate tasks. Simple process maps can be used to visualise who is responsible for what and when, making workflows transparent and easier to follow. It is also useful to appoint a measure coordinator who tracks progress across departments and ensures that information flows smoothly. This kind of cross-departmental dialogue not only strengthens ownership of the measures but also helps to reduce resistance later in the process, as all units feel involved from the beginning and are clear about their role in implementation.

4.3. Applying Design-thinking Methods

Complex SECAP measures often require innovative solutions and collaboration across traditional boundaries. Design-thinking provides municipalities with a structured yet creative approach to organise such processes. Instead of jumping directly to predefined solutions, it encourages administrations to explore challenges in depth, generate a wide range of ideas, test them in practice, and refine their approach based on real-world feedback. This makes design-thinking a valuable tool for building ownership, overcoming barriers, and finding workable pathways for implementation.

The process usually begins with **understanding the problem**. Municipalities need to analyse carefully what barriers stand in the way of implementation - whether they are technical, financial, or organisational. This stage is about mapping the problem space clearly, engaging the relevant departments, and aligning on a shared understanding of what exactly needs to be solved. Without this step, solutions risk addressing symptoms rather than causes.

Once the challenge is clearly defined, the next stage is **collecting ideas**. Here, creativity and openness matter. Staff and stakeholders should be invited to brainstorm together, generating as many potential solutions as possible without premature judgement. Methods such as mind maps, sticky notes, or quick sketches can help capture and structure contributions. The diversity of perspectives - technical staff, finance officers, social departments, external partners - is what makes this step powerful.

The third step is **testing solutions**. Promising ideas should not be rolled out immediately at full scale but first piloted in small, low-risk settings. For example, a single building renovation can be tested before expanding to a city-wide programme, or a new mobility measure can be trialled for one street or district. These pilots provide real-world insights, uncover unforeseen obstacles, and allow adjustments at a manageable scale.

Finally, the process moves to **refining the approach**. Feedback from pilots, along with monitoring data and stakeholder reactions, should be used to adjust the chosen solution. Some ideas will prove successful, others may require modification, and a few may need to be discarded altogether. What matters is that each cycle produces lessons learned that strengthen the next round of implementation.

Training energy or environmental managers in design-thinking methods equips them to facilitate this process in their daily work - from problem framing and workshop moderation to pilot design and feedback evaluation. When applied in this way, design-thinking reduces risks, accelerates learning, and fosters shared ownership across departments and stakeholders. It turns complex measures into manageable steps and creates the conditions for scaling solutions with confidence and legitimacy.

4.4. Mobilising Resources and Financing

Without adequate resources, even the best-planned SECAP measures cannot be implemented. Municipalities therefore need to ensure that financial and human resources are secured from the outset. This begins with an early estimation of costs, which should be integrated into the regular municipal budget cycle so that climate action is considered alongside other priorities. In addition to local funds, municipalities should actively explore external financing opportunities such as national grant schemes, EU programmes, or regional support instruments, many of which are specifically designed to support local climate action. Partnerships with private actors can also play an important role. Energy service companies (ESCOs), for example, can provide technical expertise and financing models that reduce the burden on municipal budgets. Equally important is the allocation of sufficient staff time, as implementation is rarely successful if it is treated as a side task in addition to other responsibilities. In later stages, municipalities can progress towards climate-mainstreaming of their budgets, as described in chapter 6.2, but for the first measures the priority is to secure immediate resources and make implementation feasible.

4.5. Launching the First Measures

The first implementation cycle is critical for building momentum and credibility. Start with **3 - 4 well-selected measures** that:

- Are **visible** to citizens and politicians,
- Can be implemented within a **short timeframe** (1 - 2 years),
- Deliver **tangible results** (e.g. energy savings, reduced costs),
- Are **replicable** for later cycles.

After launch, communicate clearly about the start of implementation and involve stakeholders. This creates trust and demonstrates that the municipality is serious about turning its SECAP into reality.

4.6. Ensuring Institutionalisation

Implementation should not depend solely on individual champions, as personal commitment alone cannot guarantee long-term success. To embed SECAP measures into the daily work of the municipality, the associated tasks need to be integrated into existing job descriptions so that responsibility becomes part of regular duties rather than an additional, voluntary effort. Responsibilities and procedures should be clearly documented to provide continuity and transparency, ensuring that the implementation process does not stall when staff change or new colleagues join. Equally important is strong political support, complemented by regular reporting to the municipal council, and the public, which secures legitimacy and keeps climate action visible on the political agenda. Institutionalisation in this way is the key to ensuring continuity and resilience, even when staff turnover occurs or political priorities shift.

Practical Checklists for Implementing SECAP Measures

Checklist 1: Preparing for Implementation

✔ Local SECAP working group established (with political support)

✔ Roles and responsibilities clarified (energy manager, departments, stakeholders)

✔ Internal audit of SECAP measures completed

✔ Priority measures selected based on clear criteria (impact, feasibility, resources)

✔ Collaboration agreements signed (if relevant)

✔ Timeline for first implementation cycle defined

Checklist 2: Measure Description Sheet

For each measure, ensure the following information is documented:

✔ Title of the measure

✔ Objectives (e.g. CO_2 reduction, adaptation, energy poverty alleviation)

✔ Scope/sector (e.g. buildings, transport, renewable energy)

✔ Key activities (what exactly will be done?)

✔ Indicators (e.g. kWh saved, % emission reduction, number of households reached)

✔ Responsible unit/person

✔ Partners involved (departments, external actors)

✔ Timeline (start date, milestones, completion)

✔ Estimated costs

✔ Financing source(s) (municipal budget, external funds, private contributions)

✔ Risks and barriers (and how to mitigate them)

✔ Expected co-benefits (comfort, air quality, jobs, etc.)

Checklist 3: Adaptation and Co-benefits

✔ Risks and vulnerabilities identified (e.g. heat waves, floods, droughts)

✔ Adaptation targets defined (protection level, resilience indicators)

✔ Measure addresses local climate risks (e.g. shading, stormwater management, resilient buildings)

✔ Co-benefits explicitly described (e.g. comfort, health, biodiversity, local jobs)

✔ No-regret options considered (measures beneficial regardless of climate scenario)

✔ Social aspects integrated (e.g. protection of vulnerable groups, reduction of energy poverty)

✔ Long-term perspective included (measure designed for future climate conditions)

✔ Synergies with mitigation identified (e.g. green roofs reduce heat and save energy)

✔ Conflicts with other policies checked (e.g. water use, land use planning)

✔ Monitoring indicators defined (resilience metrics, number of citizens protected, avoided damages)

Checklist 4: Organising Cross-department Discussions

✔ Regular meetings scheduled (every 1 - 2 months)

✔ Participation of all relevant departments (technical, finance, communication, social)

✔ Measure coordinator assigned

✔ Agendas include decisions, responsibilities, deadlines

✔ Decisions documented and shared with all involved

Checklist 5: Resource and Financing Mobilisation

✔ Cost estimate prepared for each measure

✔ Budget line secured in the municipal budget

✔ Staff time allocated (not just "on top" of other tasks)

✔ External funding opportunities reviewed (national/EU grants, regional support)

✔ Private sector partnerships considered (ESCOs, cooperatives, energy communities)

Checklist 6: Launching the First Measures

✔ At least 3 priority measures identified for Year 1

✔ Measures are visible, feasible within 12 months, and replicable

✔ Responsibilities and tasks allocated in writing

✔ Internal and external communication plan prepared

✔ Kick-off event or communication activity organised

Checklist 7: Monitoring and Review

✔ Monitoring indicators defined for each measure

✔ Data collection procedures in place (monthly, quarterly, annually)

✔ Management review scheduled (aligned with ISO 50001 principles)

✔ Progress reports prepared and discussed in the working group

✔ Results communicated to council and stakeholders

✔ Lessons learned documented for next cycle

Checklist 8: Institutionalising the Process

✔ SECAP measures integrated into existing municipal procedures

✔ Political reporting ensured (regular council updates)

✔ Staff responsibilities anchored in job descriptions

✔ Budget mainstreaming initiated (climate-related budget tracking)

✔ SECAP updated regularly with new targets and measures

Measure Description Sheet Template

This template helps municipalities describe and document each SECAP measure in a structured way. Fill in all fields before starting implementation.

Description of SECAP measures	
Title of the measure	
Objectives (e.g. CO₂ reduction, energy savings, adaptation)	
Scope / sector (e.g. buildings, transport, renewable energy)	
Key activities (what will be done?)	
Indicators (e.g. kWh saved, % emission reduction, households reached)	
Responsible unit / person	
Partners involved (departments, external actors)	
Timeline (start date, milestones, completion)	
Estimated costs (€)	
Financing source(s) (budget line, grants, external funds)	
Risks and barriers (and mitigation strategies)	
Expected co-benefits (comfort, air quality, jobs, etc.)	

Table 1: Template for the description of SECAP measures

Do's and Don'ts for Implementing Climate Action Measures

Starting Implementation

Do's	Don'ts
Secure political commitment early and communicate priorities clearly	Don't overpromise or set unrealistic targets
Start with 3 - 4 visible measures that can deliver quick wins	Don't leave implementation in the hands of a single person or department
Involve all relevant departments (not only energy/environment)	Don't neglect the importance of staff time and resources
Define roles and responsibilities	Don't delay implementation by waiting for the perfect measure
Use existing plans, audits, and data as a basis (avoid reinventing the wheel)	Don't forget to communicate internally before going public

Table 2: Do's and Don'ts for starting the implementation

During Implementation

Do's	Don'ts
Break measures into manageable steps with clear milestones	Don't underestimate administrative procedures (permits, approvals, procurement)
Use checklists, templates, and process maps to structure the work	Don't ignore feedback from frontline staff or citizens
Apply design-thinking or participatory methods to solve barriers	Don't allow silo thinking - measures usually cut across departments
Document decisions and share them with all involved	Don't assume financing will solve everything; organisational buy-in is equally critical
Keep communication open with politicians, staff, and stakeholders	Don't let delays in one measure block progress on others

Table 3: Do's and Don'ts during implementation

Monitoring and Review

Do's	Don'ts
Define measurable indicators before implementation starts	Don't only measure outputs (e.g. money spent); track outcomes (e.g. CO_2 reduction)
Monitor both implementation (what has been done) and impact (what has been achieved)	Don't make monitoring overly complicated - simple is better
Apply simple reporting formats that can be updated regularly	Don't keep data in silos; ensure accessibility across departments
Use management reviews (ISO 50001 logic) to assess progress	Don't ignore negative results; use them for learning
Share monitoring results with political leaders and the public	Don't skip regular review cycles

Table 4: Do's and Don'ts for monitoring and review

Scaling Up and Institutionalising

Do's	Don'ts
Integrate climate action into municipal budgeting (climate-mainstreaming)	Don't let the SECAP remain a one-time project document
Update SECAPs regularly with adapted targets and measures	Don't depend solely on external funding - plan for internal resources too
Anchor responsibilities in job descriptions and procedures	Don't neglect capacity building; trained staff are essential
Build long-term partnerships with stakeholders and citizens	Don't stop after first successes; keep momentum going with new measures
Communicate successes visibly to build trust and political support	Don't isolate climate action - link it to wider municipal goals (health, economy, quality of life)

Table 5: Do's and Don'ts for scaling up and institutionalisation

5. Monitoring and Learning

At a Glance: Monitoring and Learning

Implementation does not end once a measure is launched. **Monitoring progress** and evaluating results are essential to **ensure accountability** and **continuous improvement**.

This chapter explains how municipalities can track progress, apply management reviews (based on ISO 50001), and **monitor the impact of measures** across mitigation, adaptation, and energy poverty. It also shows how results can feed back into the next cycle of implementation.

Implementing SECAP measures is only the first step. To ensure they deliver the expected results - and to learn from successes and failures - municipalities need a **robust but simple monitoring system**. Monitoring provides evidence for decision-makers, secures accountability, and builds public trust. It also ensures that results feed into the next cycle of implementation.

This chapter explains how municipalities can set up monitoring procedures, measure impacts, apply management reviews, and use findings for continuous improvement.

5.1. Tracking Implementation Progress

Monitoring begins with tracking whether planned actions are actually being carried out. This stage, often referred to as **output monitoring**, focuses on the practical progress of implementation rather than its wider impacts. It answers the basic question: are we doing what we said we would do? Without this first layer of monitoring, municipalities risk losing sight of whether measures are on schedule, resources are being used effectively, and responsibilities are being met.

Key questions help to structure this process. Municipalities should ask: **Has the measure been launched as scheduled, or has it been delayed?** They should also check whether **the planned activities - such as procurement, construction, training, or communication - are being completed on time.** Finally, it is important to verify whether **the milestones defined at the start of the measure are being achieved**. These questions allow administrations to identify early whether implementation is progressing smoothly or whether corrective action is needed.

A number of simple tools are available to support output monitoring (e.g. the SECAP journal, see chapter 11. Annex). **Gantt charts or implementation dashboards** provide a visual overview of progress, showing what has been completed and what is still pending. **Traffic-light systems** are another useful option, offering an easy-to-read status update where green indicates that activities are on track, yellow signals delays, and red warns that the measure is at risk. In addition, **short progress reports prepared regularly by the responsible unit** ensure that information is systematically captured and can be shared across departments or with political leadership.

The effectiveness of output monitoring depends not only on the tools but also on how they are used. It is crucial to keep reporting formats **short and practical** - ideally no more than one to two pages per measure. Overly complex reporting systems tend to discourage regular updates and increase administrative burden, which reduces their usefulness. Simple, consistent formats make it more likely that monitoring will become a routine part of implementation rather than an occasional exercise.

By adopting these methods, municipalities can ensure that they always have a clear picture of progress, can respond quickly when delays occur, and can provide transparent information to political leaders and the public. Output monitoring is therefore the foundation of effective SECAP implementation, linking day-to-day activities to the broader cycle of planning, adaptation, and scaling up.

5.2.   Monitoring Impacts

While tracking outputs shows whether activities have been carried out as planned, this alone does not reveal whether the measures are making a real difference. Municipalities therefore need to go one step further and assess whether their actions are delivering the intended benefits for climate protection, resilience, and social well-being. This stage, often referred to as **impact monitoring**, focuses on outcomes rather than activities. It looks at how much energy has been saved, how much CO_2 has been reduced, or how many citizens have become better protected against climate risks. In other words, impact monitoring provides the evidence that implementation is not only happening but is also achieving meaningful results.

Typical indicators include:

- **Mitigation**: CO_2 emissions reduced, energy saved, renewable energy produced.
- **Adaptation**: Reduced flood risk, heat-resilient infrastructure, number of citizens protected.
- **Energy poverty**: Households supported, energy costs reduced, comfort levels improved.

Indicators should be **SMART** (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound). If possible, use existing data sources (e.g. energy bills, municipal statistics) to avoid extra burden.

Measure	Outputs (activities completed)	Outcomes (impact achieved)	Indicators	Status (traffic light)	Next Steps
Renovation of municipal building	Tender published; contractor selected	20% reduction in heating demand	kWh saved/year, CO_2 reduced (t)	⦾ On track	Monitor energy bills after retrofit

| LED street lighting programme | 500 lamps replaced | 40% reduction in electricity use for lighting | kWh saved/year, € saved | ◑ Slightly delayed | Complete installation in remaining districts |
| Bicycle infrastructure improvement | 2 km of bike lanes constructed | Increase in bike usage by 15% | Number of cyclists, modal split share | ◍ At risk | Resolve safety issues, extend lanes further |

Table 6: Example for a monitoring system

5.3. Management Reviews (ISO 50001 Approach)

A useful approach is to align monitoring with the management review process established under ISO 50001 for energy management. This method provides a structured framework that encourages regular reflection and systematic improvement. A management review typically includes a summary of the measures that have been implemented, an assessment of progress towards defined targets and indicators, and an analysis of barriers encountered along with the corrective actions proposed. It also provides space for developing recommendations for the next steps in implementation. To be effective, such reviews should be carried out at least once a year and formally presented to the municipal council or board for discussion. In this way, monitoring is not only an administrative exercise but a structured opportunity to strengthen accountability, adapt strategies, and embed continuous improvement into the municipality's climate action process.

5.4. Feeding Results Back into the Next Cycle

Monitoring is not only about reporting; it is first and foremost about learning. The results of implemented measures must feed directly into the next implementation cycle so that progress is sustained and improved over time. Successes should be celebrated and communicated both internally and externally, as this builds trust, motivates staff, and demonstrates to citizens that the municipality is delivering on its commitments. At the same time, failures or underperforming measures should be analysed openly, with objectives, methods, or resources adjusted where necessary. Monitoring also provides the basis for updating plans, helping municipalities to prioritise new measures and refine targets in light of real experience. Documenting lessons learned and sharing them with other municipalities further amplifies the value of monitoring by spreading knowledge and accelerating collective progress. The SECAP should therefore be treated as a living document, updated and adapted regularly. By applying these principles, municipalities can turn monitoring data into concrete action, ensuring that their SECAP measures remain effective, credible, and continuously improving.

6. Scaling Up and Institutionalising

> **At a Glance: Scaling Up and Institutionalising**
>
> After first measures have been successfully implemented, municipalities should move towards **scaling up their efforts**. This chapter describes how **additional measures** can be systematically introduced, how climate-mainstreaming can be **integrated into municipal budgets**, and how SECAPs can be updated with more ambitious long-term targets.
>
> It emphasises the **importance of institutionalisation**: making SECAP implementation a standard part of municipal operations rather than a one-time project.

After municipalities have successfully implemented their first set of measures, the next challenge is to **expand efforts systematically**. Scaling up means moving from a handful of visible actions to a broader portfolio of measures, while institutionalising ensures that climate action becomes a **permanent part of municipal routines**.

This chapter explains how municipalities can build on early successes, integrate climate goals into budgets, update their SECAPs, and secure long-term ownership.

6.1. Scaling up: Implementing Additional Measures

The first implementation cycle of a SECAP is usually designed to be manageable and focused, often concentrating on just two or three measures that are relatively easy to deliver and that generate visible results within a short time. These initial actions play a crucial role: they provide proof that implementation is possible, create early successes that build confidence among staff and politicians, and demonstrate to citizens that climate action produces tangible benefits. However, the first cycle should be seen only as the starting point. Once these initial measures are completed, municipalities need to expand their efforts systematically and use the experience gained to strengthen their overall implementation process. Municipalities should:

- **Identify additional measures** from the SECAP using the same selection criteria (impact, feasibility, resources).
- Aim for at least **6 - 8 further measures** over the following two years, covering different sectors (buildings, transport, renewables, adaptation).
- Use lessons learned from the first measures to improve planning, communication, and resource allocation.
- Ensure **parallel implementation**: while some measures are completed quickly, others may require longer-term investment and planning.

Tip: Document and communicate achievements from the first cycle to maintain political and public support for scaling up.

6.2. Climate-Mainstreaming in Municipal Budgets

One of the most effective ways to institutionalise climate action is to embed it into financial planning. As long as SECAP measures are treated as "add-ons" or exceptional projects, their funding will always be uncertain and dependent on temporary programmes or individual champions. By contrast, when climate action becomes part of the regular budget cycle, it is anchored in the municipality's core business and backed by stable resources year after year. Financial integration also sends a strong signal to both staff and citizens: climate neutrality and resilience are not optional extras but essential responsibilities of the local government.

Municipalities have several options for moving towards climate-mainstreaming. A first step can be **environmental or climate budget tagging**, where the administration systematically identifies which share of the annual budget contributes to climate-related objectives. This improves transparency and provides a baseline for gradually increasing climate-relevant expenditures over time. A second option is to establish **dedicated budget lines for SECAP measures**, for example through an energy renovation fund or a renewable energy investment programme. Dedicated funds make it easier to track progress and ensure that money is earmarked specifically for climate action.

A more advanced approach is **green budgeting**, where municipalities actively assess whether their overall budget allocations are consistent with mitigation and adaptation goals. This involves not only identifying climate-positive expenditures but also scrutinising spending that may run counter to climate objectives. Green budgeting aligns financial planning with long-term strategic goals and provides decision-makers with a clearer picture of trade-offs. Finally, some municipalities go further by adopting **divestment policies**, ensuring that municipal funds are not invested in fossil fuels or carbon-intensive activities. This strengthens credibility and aligns local financial assets with climate commitments.

Mainstreaming climate into budgets requires commitment and effort, but it pays off by ensuring predictability, continuity, and long-term impact. Instead of relying on temporary projects or one-off grants, municipalities can guarantee that resources for SECAP measures are consistently available and that climate action is embedded in all areas of financial decision-making. In this way, municipal budgets become not just financial instruments but strategic tools for steering the transition towards climate neutrality.

6.3. Updating and Strengthening SECAPs

A SECAP is not a static plan but a living document that must evolve as municipalities gain experience and adapt to changing circumstances. The process of updating the SECAP is therefore a critical step in

maintaining momentum and ensuring that the plan remains relevant and effective over time. Each update should incorporate new measures identified during the scaling-up phase, ensuring that the plan reflects the latest opportunities and priorities. Updates also provide an opportunity to raise ambition levels, for example by extending targets beyond 2030 and setting longer-term goals in line with the EU's climate neutrality objective for 2050.

Equally important is the integration of lessons learned from monitoring and management reviews. By analysing what has worked well and where barriers remain, municipalities can refine their strategies, improve their allocation of resources, and strengthen the effectiveness of future actions. Updates should also align the SECAP with evolving national and European frameworks, ensuring consistency with new policy requirements, funding programmes, and reporting obligations. This alignment maximises opportunities for external support and positions municipalities as credible partners in the wider climate transition.

Crucially, updates should go beyond technical content. They should also reflect improvements in institutional processes that have developed since the SECAP was first adopted. For example, municipalities may have introduced climate budgeting, established stronger cross-departmental coordination structures, or formalised cooperation with external stakeholders. Capturing these institutional changes in the SECAP underlines the fact that implementation is not only about individual projects but about embedding climate action into the very fabric of municipal governance.

By treating the SECAP as a living document in this way, municipalities ensure that it remains a dynamic and powerful instrument - continuously adapted to new realities, aligned with broader frameworks, and capable of guiding the transition to climate neutrality over the long term.

6.4. Ensuring Long-Term Ownership and Continuity

Scaling up SECAP implementation is about much more than simply adding new measures to an existing list. It is about shifting climate action from a collection of individual projects into a systematic, long-term process that becomes part of the municipality's very identity. Scaling up means embedding climate priorities into everyday governance, ensuring that responsibilities are anchored institutionally, that political support survives election cycles, and that staff continuously build the skills needed to manage increasingly complex tasks. It also means broadening the base of support by engaging citizens, businesses, and local organisations, and by learning from peers in other municipalities. In this way, scaling up transforms climate action into a normal feature of municipal life - woven into budgets, procedures, and decision-making - rather than an occasional or project-driven activity. This requires:

- **Institutional anchoring**: integrate responsibilities into job descriptions and municipal procedures.
- **Political continuity**: secure cross-party support to avoid setbacks after elections.

- **Capacity building**: continuous training for staff in technical, financial, and participatory methods.
- **Citizen engagement**: involve the community to build long-term support and accountability.
- **Networking**: exchange with other municipalities nationally and internationally for fresh ideas and peer learning.

Tip: Position SECAP implementation not just as a climate task but as a **driver of co-benefits**: lower costs, healthier environments, better quality of life. This widens political and public support.

By scaling up and institutionalising, municipalities move from **isolated pilot actions** to a **systematic, long-term process**. This ensures that SECAPs are not just documents but living instruments driving continuous transformation.

7. Cross-cutting Success Factors

At a Glance: Cross-cutting Success Factors

Successful implementation depends not only on technical solutions but also on organisational and social aspects. This chapter highlights the key cross-cutting factors: securing political commitment, ensuring effective communication, involving stakeholders and citizens, and applying supportive tools such as dashboards and energy management systems (EnMS).

Practical advice and checklists help municipalities strengthen these enabling conditions.

Implementing climate action measures is not only about technical solutions. Experience shows that **political, organisational, and social factors** determine whether municipalities succeed. This chapter highlights the most important cross-cutting success factors: political commitment, communication, stakeholder involvement, and supportive tools. Each municipality should pay attention to these aspects from the beginning of the implementation cycle.

7.1. Political Commitment and Decision-making

Strong political commitment is a **cornerstone of implementation**. Without it, measures risk being delayed, underfunded, or cancelled.

Key elements:

- **Formal approval**: Ensure measures are adopted by the municipal council or board.
- **Visible leadership**: Mayors and councillors should publicly endorse measures.
- **Cross-party support**: Try to secure backing beyond the current political majority to ensure continuity after elections.
- **Decision-making routines**: Integrate SECAP discussions into regular council agendas.

Tip: Link climate measures to co-benefits (cost savings, job creation, improved quality of life) to strengthen political buy-in.

7.2. Internal and External Communication

Communication is critical to avoid misunderstandings, build trust, and ensure that SECAP implementation remains visible both inside and outside the municipality. To achieve this, municipalities should develop a clear communication plan that defines how information will be shared, who is responsible, and which channels will be used.

Internally, communication should ensure that all parts of the administration are kept informed and engaged. Regular updates on progress, transparent sharing of responsibilities, and open reporting on challenges help create a sense of joint ownership. Simple tools such as intranet posts, short newsletters, or brief information notes for staff can ensure that climate action does not become confined to one department but is recognised across the whole organisation.

Externally, communication is equally important. Citizens and stakeholders should be informed about the objectives, progress, and results of SECAP measures in clear and accessible language. Formats such as infographics, short videos, or factsheets can translate technical results into messages that are understandable for a wider audience. Highlighting visible success stories - a renovated public building, new solar panels, or improved cycling infrastructure - helps demonstrate the tangible benefits of climate action and maintains motivation among both citizens and decision-makers.

Overall, communication should be simple, frequent, and transparent. Silence creates uncertainty and resistance, while clear and visible communication builds trust, ownership, and momentum for further implementation.

7.3. Stakeholder and Citizen Involvement

Climate action is most effective when it is co-created with stakeholders and citizens. Early and meaningful involvement helps reduce resistance, creates trust, and increases acceptance of the measures being implemented. Municipalities can use a range of approaches to bring different voices into the process. Workshops and focus groups with local businesses, NGOs, and utilities allow expertise and resources to be shared, while also building strong local partnerships. Citizens can be directly involved in planning and monitoring measures, for example through energy communities or participatory budgeting initiatives, which give them a concrete role in shaping outcomes. Schools and youth groups can act as important multipliers, spreading awareness and building long-term commitment to climate action among the next generation. Feedback channels such as surveys or online platforms provide additional ways to gather suggestions and understand community priorities. However, participation should never be pursued for its own sake. Involvement must have a clear purpose, and feedback should be genuinely considered in decision-making to show that citizen and stakeholder contributions are valued. When done in this way, participation strengthens ownership, builds legitimacy, and helps ensure that SECAP implementation reflects the needs and aspirations of the local community.

7.4. Tools, Dashboards, and Energy Management Systems (EnMS)

Practical tools support implementation and monitoring. Municipalities should use **digital and organisational tools** to make work easier.

- **Dashboards**: Visualise progress on measures, costs, and CO_2 reductions.
- **Checklists & templates**: Standardise processes, avoid duplication.
- **Energy Management Systems (EnMS)**: Introduce systematic monitoring of energy use and costs, based on ISO 50001 principles.
- **Knowledge platforms**: Use online repositories or national climate networks for best practices and funding opportunities.

Tip: Start simple - even Excel-based dashboards or shared document folders can make a big difference. Tools should serve people, not the other way around.

By addressing these cross-cutting success factors, municipalities can **remove barriers before they appear** and strengthen the institutional foundation for climate action.

8. Lessons Learned from Municipal Practice

> **At a Glance: Lessons Learned from Municipal Practice**
>
> Implementation is often complex, with many barriers along the way. This chapter summarises lessons learned from partner municipalities in the OwnYourSECAP project, including common challenges, practical solutions, and examples of success stories.
>
> It also provides a concise list of Do's and Don'ts to guide municipalities in avoiding common pitfalls and building on proven success factors.

Implementing SECAP measures is rarely straightforward. Municipalities face organisational, financial, and political challenges, but they also achieve important successes. Learning from these experiences is essential for making future implementation smoother and more effective.

Municipal practice shows that adaptation measures such as urban greening, shading, or stormwater management often deliver quick and visible benefits for citizens. These "no-regret" measures combine resilience with improvements in urban comfort and liveability.

This chapter summarises the most important lessons learned across partner municipalities from 11 European countries in OwnYourSECAP. It covers **success factors, barriers, and practical do's and don'ts**, and provides concrete examples that can inspire replication elsewhere.

Implementation succeeds when municipalities combine clear political and administrative commitment, dedicated resources, cross-departmental cooperation, and simple tools for planning and monitoring.

8.1. Success Factors for Implementation

Experience from the OwnYourSECAP project and from municipalities across Europe shows that successful SECAP implementation is rarely a matter of chance. Municipalities that made real progress shared a number of common characteristics that allowed them to move from plans on paper to concrete actions on the ground. These factors combined political will, administrative capacity, and community involvement, creating a framework in which measures could be carried out effectively and sustained over time. The most frequently observed success factors include:

- **Strong political commitment**: Council approval and visible leadership by mayors and councillors.

- **Dedicated staff resources**: Appointed energy or environmental managers with clear mandates.
- **Cross-departmental cooperation**: Active working groups bridging technical, finance, communication, and social departments.
- **Clear processes**: Use of templates, checklists, and regular reporting cycles.
- **Integration into existing systems** - Embedding SECAPs into energy management (ISO 50001), municipal budgets, or development strategies ensured continuity and institutionalisation.
- **External funding and partnerships**: Combination of municipal budgets, national grants, and EU funds.
- **Quick wins**: Early implementation of visible measures (e.g. LED lighting, public building retrofits) that built momentum.
- **Stakeholder engagement**: Involving citizens, businesses, and NGOs increased acceptance and provided additional resources.

8.2. Common Barriers and Challenges

While many municipalities achieved important progress in implementing their SECAPs, the process was rarely free of challenges. In practice, administrations often encountered a range of obstacles that slowed down progress, limited ambition, or even stalled implementation altogether. These barriers were not isolated, but often interconnected, with one difficulty reinforcing another - for example, a lack of staff capacity leading to weaker planning, or insufficient political support undermining budget allocations. The most frequently observed barriers included:

- **Limited staff capacity**: SECAP implementation often added to existing workloads.
- **Weak political commitment**: SECAPs were deprioritised when leadership changed or competing crises (e.g. energy price shocks) dominated the agenda.
- **Resistance to change**: New approaches (e.g. design thinking, energy performance contracting) were sometimes seen as too complex.
- **Insufficient budgets**: Climate action was not always prioritised in annual financial planning.
- **Weak data availability**: Lack of reliable energy and emissions data hindered (impact) monitoring.
- **Political changes**: Elections or shifting priorities disrupted continuity.
- **Silo structures**: Departments worked separately, slowing progress.
- **Low awareness**: Citizens and even municipal employees were sometimes unaware of SECAP objectives.
- **Overly complex plans**: Long SECAP documents with too many measures made implementation unmanageable.

Tip: Address these barriers proactively through clear communication, realistic planning, and institutional anchoring.

8.3. Do's and Don'ts in Implementation Practice

Based on the experiences of OwnYourSECAP and other European municipalities, it has become clear that the successful implementation of SECAPs depends not only on technical measures but also on how municipalities organise their processes, assign responsibilities, and engage stakeholders. From this, a set of practical recommendations emerged in the form of Do's and Don'ts.

Secure commitment early
Successful implementation starts with political and administrative buy-in. Councils and mayors need to endorse the process, and administrations should establish a small but active working group with a clear mandate.

Start small and build momentum
It is better to begin with two or three feasible and visible measures than to aim too high at the outset. Early successes create trust and provide the confidence to take on more ambitious actions later.

Allocate time and use tools
Implementation cannot happen "on the side." Staff time must be explicitly allocated, and the use of monitoring tools and clear indicators is essential to track progress.

Communicate and involve
Successes should be communicated internally and externally to maintain motivation. Citizens, businesses, and stakeholders should be meaningfully involved, ensuring that climate action reflects local needs and benefits from additional resources.

Keep the SECAP alive
A SECAP is not a one-off plan but a living document. It should be regularly updated and adapted to new conditions, rather than left to gather dust. Sharing experiences with other municipalities further strengthens learning and replication.

At the same time, municipalities should be aware of common pitfalls.

Avoid static and overloaded plans
A SECAP treated as a static document or overloaded with unrealistic and unprioritised measures will quickly become unmanageable. Prioritisation is key.

Don't centralise responsibility
Implementation must not be left to a single person or department. Broad ownership across the administration prevents delays and ensures continuity.

Don't rely only on external funding
While grants and EU programmes are valuable, internal resources are indispensable. Relying solely on external funding creates vulnerability when subsidies end.

Don't neglect staff and data

Training and capacity building are essential to keep staff motivated and capable. Data collection and monitoring must be systematic to ensure credibility.

Learn from mistakes

Failures should not be hidden. Analysing underperforming measures and adjusting accordingly is part of the learning process and strengthens future implementation.

Taken together, these Do's and Don'ts form a practical framework for municipalities. They highlight what to prioritise and what to avoid, helping ensure that SECAP implementation remains effective, realistic, and sustainable over the long term.

Top 10 Lessons Learned for Implementing SECAP Measures

1. Secure political commitment early

2. Appoint dedicated staff with clear responsibilities

3. Start with 2–3 visible, feasible measures

4. Build cross-departmental working groups

5. Use templates, checklists, and clear processes

6. Allocate budget lines and explore external funding

7. Monitor progress with simple indicators

8. Communicate successes internally and externally

9. Involve citizens and stakeholders meaningfully

10. Treat the SECAP as a living document, not a one-off plan

Figure 1: Top 10 lessons learned

9. Outlook and Recommendations

At a Glance: Outlook and Recommendations

This chapter looks beyond the immediate project framework and addresses how municipalities can **sustain implementation** over the long term. It provides recommendations for **replication, integration into existing structures**, and strategic next steps for municipalities committed to ambitious climate action.

The key takeaways **summarise the most important messages** of this handbook for practical application.

Implementing climate action measures is a long-term task that extends well beyond the timeframe of individual projects. For municipalities, the challenge is not only to start but to **sustain implementation over decades**, continuously improving and adapting to new circumstances. The OwnYourSECAP project has shown that systematic approaches, combined with practical support tools, can significantly strengthen the capacity of municipalities to move from planning to action.

This final chapter provides an outlook on how municipalities can continue the implementation process, replicate good practices in other contexts, and position SECAPs as core instruments of local governance.

9.1. Sustaining Implementation Beyond the Project

The end of a project does not mean the end of climate action. On the contrary, projects are often just the beginning. While externally funded initiatives such as OwnYourSECAP provide valuable impulses, tools, and support, municipalities must ensure that climate action becomes a permanent responsibility rather than a temporary activity. If implementation is tied only to project lifetimes, momentum is quickly lost, staff capacity diminishes, and measures risk remaining incomplete. Ensuring continuity therefore becomes one of the most decisive tasks for municipalities that are serious about their long-term climate commitments.

A first element of continuity is **institutional anchoring**. Responsibilities for SECAP measures should not rest on individual enthusiasm alone, but be embedded in permanent job descriptions, administrative structures, and official procedures. When the tasks of coordinating SECAP implementation, monitoring progress, and reporting to the council are clearly defined within the organisation, staff turnover or political change will not derail the process. Municipalities that institutionalise responsibilities in this way are far better equipped to sustain long-term action.

A second requirement is **budget continuity**. Climate action cannot depend only on short-term funding calls or occasional project grants. Municipalities need to move towards climate-

mainstreaming in their finances by establishing recurring budget allocations for SECAP measures. This can take different forms: dedicated budget lines for energy efficiency, integration of climate criteria into procurement, or climate budget tagging to identify which expenditures contribute to mitigation or adaptation. Regardless of the method, what matters is that climate measures are considered part of the "normal" municipal budget cycle rather than exceptional items. Stable financing provides the predictability needed for long-term planning and successful implementation.

Equally important is **sustained political support**. Municipal councils and local leadership must remain committed beyond the lifetime of individual projects. Regular reporting to councils, supported by transparent monitoring, keeps climate action visible on the political agenda. Public communication of results builds legitimacy and strengthens trust between administrations and citizens. When successes are highlighted and challenges openly discussed, political ownership grows and continuity is more likely to be maintained even across election cycles.

Another dimension of continuity lies in **capacity building**. Staff need ongoing training and opportunities to update their knowledge in a rapidly changing field. Energy management, digital monitoring tools, new financing instruments, and participatory methods evolve quickly. By investing in training programmes and knowledge exchange networks, municipalities ensure that their staff remain motivated and capable of delivering ambitious measures. In addition, peer-to-peer learning between municipalities creates valuable support structures that outlast individual projects.

The principle of **routine cycles** is also essential. Climate action is not achieved through one-time efforts but through continuous improvement. Repeating the implementation cycle - preparation, implementation, monitoring, adaptation, and scaling up - every one to two years ensures that progress does not stagnate. Each cycle adds experience, builds capacity, and increases the ambition of measures. Over time, the municipality evolves from taking isolated actions to establishing a systematic approach where climate considerations are integrated into all decisions.

Taken together, these elements - institutional anchoring, budget continuity, political support, capacity building, and routine cycles - ensure that climate action is not project-dependent but becomes self-sustaining. By embedding SECAP measures into the daily operations of the municipality, administrations create a resilient system that can withstand changes in leadership, funding cycles, or external conditions. This transformation is what ultimately guarantees that SECAPs remain living documents, continuously driving the municipality towards climate neutrality and resilience.

9.2. Replication in Other Municipalities

The OwnYourSECAP methodology is not limited to the participating municipalities but can be replicated by other local authorities of different sizes and capacities. The challenges of implementing climate action measures are common across Europe: small towns often lack staff and resources, while larger cities sometimes struggle with complex governance and competing priorities. The

methodology responds to both situations by providing a clear structure, simple tools, and a step-by-step cycle that can be adapted to local realities.

A central element of replication is the use of **ready-made tools and templates**. These include checklists, measure description sheets, monitoring tables, and do's and don'ts collected from municipal practice. Such resources give administrations a concrete starting point. Rather than inventing new processes from scratch, municipalities can rely on tested instruments that have already proven useful in other contexts. This reduces uncertainty and lowers the entry barrier for municipalities that may be hesitant to take first steps.

The **five-step implementation cycle** developed in OwnYourSECAP is another replicable feature. It consists of preparation, implementation, monitoring, adaptation, and scaling up. This logic is simple enough to be applied by small administrations but robust enough to guide larger cities. Crucially, it works regardless of size, resources, or political context. Municipalities can begin with a handful of measures and gradually expand. Repetition of the cycle strengthens capacity over time and ensures continuity.

At the same time, replication does not mean copying actions blindly. **Flexibility is essential.** Each municipality has its own context: building stock, transport patterns, financial situation, political culture, and community needs. The methodology encourages local authorities to adapt the tools and cycle to their specific circumstances. For example, a rural municipality might prioritise renewable heating networks, while an urban centre may focus on mobility or building renovation. The strength of the approach lies in its adaptability rather than in prescribing identical solutions.

Replication also benefits strongly from **networking and peer exchange**. Municipalities learn best from one another. Sharing experiences nationally and internationally allows practitioners to see how others have solved similar challenges, what worked, and what did not. Peer learning reduces the feeling of isolation and inspires confidence. In OwnYourSECAP, regular exchange between partners created a sense of community that motivated staff and provided practical solutions. Beyond the project, municipalities can continue this exchange through national energy agencies, Covenant of Mayors networks, or regional cooperation.

Finally, **showcasing pioneers** plays an important motivational role. Examples from municipalities that have successfully implemented SECAP measures provide tangible evidence that change is possible. When a small town demonstrates that it can retrofit public buildings with renewable energy, or when a larger city introduces climate budgeting, others can follow with greater confidence. Pioneers provide both technical inspiration and political legitimacy, helping to convince councils and citizens that climate action is feasible.

In this way, knowledge gained in one city can be transferred to many others, multiplying the impact far beyond the original participants. Replication ensures that the methodology evolves into a **scalable movement** rather than remaining a single project. By equipping municipalities with tools,

processes, and peer support, OwnYourSECAP contributes to building a Europe-wide culture of systematic SECAP implementation.

9.3.   Key Takeaways for Practitioners

SECAPs should be understood as dual instruments: they reduce emissions and strengthen resilience. Adaptation measures, when framed with their co-benefits - health, cost savings, biodiversity, jobs - can mobilise broader support and ensure municipalities are prepared for the unavoidable impacts of climate change.

From the experiences of OwnYourSECAP, several core messages stand out for practitioners. The first and perhaps most important lesson is that **implementation matters more than planning**. A SECAP that remains a document on paper has little value. Municipalities need to move beyond strategy documents and translate their commitments into tangible action. Even small-scale interventions demonstrate that climate goals are achievable and help to close the well-known gap between words and deeds.

Closely linked to this is the insight that municipalities should **start small but act quickly**. Large-scale infrastructure projects are important, but they often require years of preparation. Quick, visible actions such as retrofitting street lighting, installing bicycle racks, or piloting a renewable energy system can deliver immediate results. These early measures build credibility, strengthen the confidence of staff and politicians, and show citizens that change is underway. Small successes, achieved early, create momentum for more ambitious measures in later cycles.

A third lesson is that **cross-departmental cooperation is essential**. Climate action cannot be managed by one office or one energy manager alone. Measures affect buildings, transport, finance, procurement, and social services. Without cooperation across these fields, implementation becomes fragmented and slow. Successful municipalities established working groups that brought together technical experts, financial officers, and communication staff, ensuring that responsibilities were clear and decisions could be taken jointly. This integration across departments avoids silo thinking and makes climate action a shared responsibility.

Monitoring emerged as another crucial element, captured in the message that **monitoring is learning**. Many municipalities feared monitoring would be a bureaucratic burden, but those that approached it as a learning tool gained the most. Monitoring allows administrations to track both outputs and outcomes, to see where progress is on track and where adjustments are needed. Failures are not setbacks but opportunities to improve future cycles. By systematically collecting and reviewing data, municipalities strengthen their ability to make informed decisions and to communicate achievements transparently.

Another clear message is that **political and public support are decisive**. Even the best-prepared measure will struggle if it lacks legitimacy. Municipal councils need regular reporting to remain

engaged, and citizens should see and understand the benefits of actions being taken. Visibility and transparency in communication - both within the administration and with the wider public - ensure accountability and build trust. Public support in turn encourages politicians to keep climate action high on the agenda, creating a reinforcing cycle of legitimacy and action.

The financial dimension cannot be overlooked, and municipalities emphasised that **budgets are climate tools**. Climate action will only be sustained if it is anchored in financial planning. Mainstreaming climate priorities into municipal budgets ensures that actions are not dependent on one-off projects or external grants. Whether through green budgeting, climate budget tagging, or dedicated budget lines, financial integration gives stability and predictability to implementation efforts.

A further lesson is that **continuity beats innovation**. Municipalities often feel pressure to launch new initiatives or innovative pilot projects. While innovation is valuable, the greater success comes from repeating the implementation cycle and embedding it into routines. Each cycle builds capacity, refines processes, and strengthens trust within the administration and among citizens. Continuity ensures that climate action becomes part of daily governance rather than a special initiative.

Finally, OwnYourSECAP has underlined that **local action connects to global goals**. Municipal measures may appear small compared to the scale of the climate crisis, but they contribute directly to national, European, and international targets. Each tonne of CO_2 reduced, each household lifted out of energy poverty, and each neighbourhood protected from flooding adds up to significant collective progress. Recognising this connection strengthens the sense of purpose among municipal staff and political leaders, reminding them that their efforts are part of a broader global transition.

Taken together, these lessons form a coherent message for municipalities: climate action is achievable, but only if it moves beyond planning into systematic, continuous, and well-supported implementation. With ownership, cooperation, monitoring, communication, and institutionalisation, municipalities can transform SECAPs into living instruments that drive real change.

10. Closing Remark

The systematic implementation of SECAP measures is not an optional extra - it is an essential pathway for municipalities to achieve climate neutrality and build resilience against the impacts of climate change. The urgency of the climate crisis means that plans and commitments on paper are no longer sufficient. Municipalities, as the level of government closest to citizens, play a decisive role in translating strategies into concrete measures that improve daily life, reduce emissions, and strengthen local communities. Implementing SECAP measures is therefore not just a technical necessity; it is a political, social, and ethical responsibility.

The methodology developed in OwnYourSECAP provides municipalities with a **clear cycle and practical tools** that make this task manageable. By following the steps of preparation, implementation, monitoring, adaptation, and scaling up, municipalities can move steadily forward, learning from each round of actions and gradually increasing ambition. The tools and templates - from measure description sheets and monitoring tables to checklists and do's and don'ts - are designed to make implementation less abstract and more practical. They support administrations in organising their work, involving stakeholders, and reporting progress transparently.

Equally important is the principle of **peer learning**. Municipalities do not have to face the challenge of climate action alone. The OwnYourSECAP project has shown the power of exchange and cooperation. When municipalities share experiences - successes as well as failures - they build confidence, reduce the fear of mistakes, and accelerate learning. Replication of proven approaches across regions and countries ensures that knowledge gained in one city can be transferred to many others, multiplying the impact and creating a European culture of climate action at the local level.

Systematic implementation also helps municipalities to **institutionalise climate action**. Instead of relying on individual projects, temporary staff, or political cycles, municipalities that embed climate measures into budgets, job descriptions, and council routines make progress resilient and long-lasting. Climate action becomes part of everyday governance rather than a separate initiative. This shift ensures that measures survive changes in leadership, funding programmes, or public attention, and that the transition towards climate neutrality remains on course.

The OwnYourSECAP project has provided the **foundations and the tools**. It has tested methods, produced resources, and demonstrated that implementation is possible in municipalities of all sizes and capacities. But the next step lies with municipalities themselves. They must take ownership of the process, adapt the tools to their context, and commit to repeating the cycle year after year. By doing so, municipalities can transform climate action from isolated, ad hoc projects into a **permanent, institutionalised process** that steadily drives them towards climate neutrality.

Looking ahead, municipalities have the opportunity not only to implement their SECAPs but also to **lead by example**. Each action - from insulating a school to introducing climate budgeting or

expanding renewable energy - contributes to local well-being while also advancing European and global climate goals. Municipalities that embrace systematic implementation will not only achieve emission reductions and resilience but also gain recognition as pioneers of sustainable development, inspiring citizens and other local authorities alike.

The message is clear: climate action cannot wait. With the structures, tools, and lessons provided by OwnYourSECAP, municipalities have everything they need to act. The responsibility now is to **embed climate action into everyday governance, secure political and financial continuity, and lead the way towards a sustainable and climate-neutral future**.

11. Annex: The OwnYourSECAP Project

The basic idea of the OwnYourSECAP project was to support municipalities in developing sustainable energy and climate action plans (SECAPs). Technical partners offered knowledge, tools, templates, feedback and capacity building while it was in the responsibility of the municipality to establish a working group with an energy manager, environmental manager and other relevant stakeholders, closely linked to the administrative units responsible for the development and implementation of SECAP measures.

3 different groups of municipalities were identified in the project (Figure 2): experienced municipalities, which already had a SECAP in place and aimed for an update, less experienced municipalities which had to develop a SECAP and implement an energy management system (EnMS) and so called replication municipalities which were included in some of the communication formats allowing to share experiences. Exchange between all municipalities - within the target country but also with municipalities from other countries from the project team - was one of the main benefits of the participation in the project. Learning from each other helped to increase the quality of the SECAPs and the following implementation. Furthermore, this structure ensured the continuation of the process after the termination of the project in 2025.
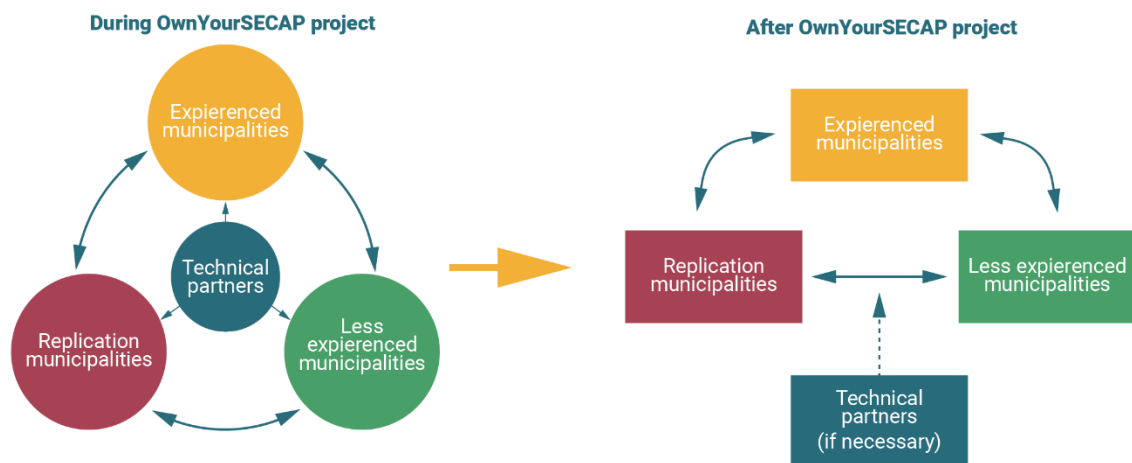

Figure 2: OwnYourSECAP concept

OwnYourSECAP resources

Tools, templates, reports and other resources can be found on www.ownyoursecap.eu/resources/:

Identification of SECAP measures   .xlsx

Description of SECAP measures   .docx

Monitoring climate change adaptation   .pdf

SECAP template   .docx

SECAP action template   .docx

Internal audit template   .xlsx

SECAP journal   .xlsx

[Tools for systematic integration of climate adaptation](#)   .pdf

[Energy management system guidebook (C4S)](#)   .pdf

[Introducing energy management in municipalities](#)   .pdf (.ppt)

[ISO 50001 (energy management system) poster](#)   .png

[Climate mainstreaming](#)   .pdf (.ppt)

[Financing instruments (C4S)](#)   .pdf

[Project deliverables (OYS)](#)   .pdf

Project Partners

The OwnYourSECAP project was active in 11 European countries, with experienced technical partners in each of them. Project partners came from (in alphabetical order):

- Austria: e7 energy innovation & engineering, Vienna

- Czech Republic: SEVEn - SEVEN, THE ENERGY EFFICIENCY CENTER Z.U., Praha

- France: MTPi - MT PARTENAIRES INGÉNIERIE, Bordeaux

- Ireland: TEA - TIPPERARY ENERGY AGENCY LIMITED, Co. Tipperary

- Italy: SOGESCA s.r.l. Rubano

- Latvia: EKODOMA, Riga

- Poland: PNEC - STOWARZYSZENIE GMIN POLSKA SIEC ENERGIE CITÉS, Kraków

- Portugal: ISR - INSTITUTO DE SISTEMAS E ROBÓTICA, Coimbra

- Slovakia: ECB - ENERGETICKE CENTRUM BRATISLAVA, Bratislava

- Spain: EV - EUROVÉRTICE CONSULTORES SL, Murcia

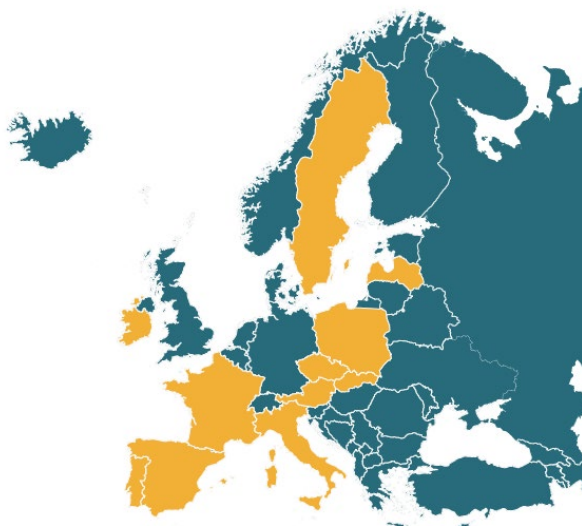- Sweden: ESS - ENERGIKONTOR SYDOST AB, Växjö

Figure 3: Overview of the project partners

Own Your SECAP