Collective Purchases at ZPS: From the general idea to Heat Pumps Collective Purchases

How ZPS's collective purchasing works, and what it delivers, illustrated by the CLEAR-HP heat-pump campaign

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PART 1

What Is a Collective Purchase and what's In It for the Consumer?

What Is a Collective Purchase?

- Individual consumers who share the same interest join forces.
  Together they create a strong negotiating position with suppliers — something no single consumer has alone
- The more consumers join, the stronger CO negotiating position
- Free and non-binding for everyone; for example ZPS membership is not necessary
- ZPS organises the campaign but is never the seller — the purchase contract is directly between the consumer and the supplier, and ZPS carries no liability for it
- Only private individuals (consumers) can buy at collective purchase conditions — not businesses

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Added Value for the Consumer

- A better price than buying alone, through group discounts ZPS negotiates on your behalf
- Only independently tested, well-rated products are offered — rated "good" or "very good"
- ZPS negotiates the whole package, not just the price: installation, delivery, warranty and service conditions
- ZPS's own legal team checks every supplier's terms & conditions, warranty and service conditions when possible in advance
- Guidance and education throughout the process — real decision support, not just a discount
- ZPS only ever organises the campaign, never sells — you buy directly and safely from the chosen supplier, and registering costs nothing and commits you to nothing

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Preparing a Collective Purchase

- Analysing consumer interest and the market to choose which product category to run next
- Setting quality criteria from independent comparative tests — only models rated "good" or "very good" qualify
- Drafting the legal and technical requirements suppliers must meet before they can even bid
- Building the campaign infrastructure: a registration website, GDPR-compliant data handling, a communications and media plan, and a realistic timeline

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How a Collective Purchase Works

1. **Market & test analysis:** independent comparative tests identify eligible, well-rated products
2. **Call for suppliers : ZPS** negotiates offers and conditions, and reviews contracts and warranties
3. **Consumer registration:** free, non-binding sign-up, including basic property details
4. **Individual offers:** each consumer requests a tailored offer and decides freely whether to proceed
5. **Purchase & installation:** arranged directly between the consumer and the chosen supplier

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Negotiating with Suppliers

- Aggregated demand is ZPS's only real leverage — the more consumers register, the stronger its position at the negotiating table
- ZPS negotiates the full package, not just a discount: no hidden costs, no lock-in, delivery, installation, warranty, after-sales terms, and pre-agreed pricing for any extra work found on-site
- Example: the 2014 electricity & gas group purchase brought together more than 40,000 households and achieved tariffs up to 21% lower for electricity and 15% lower for gas
- Example: after the 2017 campaign, several suppliers lowered prices market-wide — the effect reached well beyond the campaign's own participants

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ZPS's Track Record

8

collective purchases completed to date

120,000+

households have taken part

Electricity & gas (×3) · Air conditioners (2019, 2023) · Pellet stoves (2019) · Heat-pump tumble dryers (2022)

- Across all three ZAMENJAJ IN PRIHRANI ("Switch & Save") energy campaigns, consumers saved more than €1.2 million, over 13,200 households switched supplier and more than 15,700 contracts were signed in campaign #2 alone
- Within the CLEAR project family, Slovenia consistently outperformed other countries , 600+ air conditioners sold in 2019 and 700+ dryers plus 500+ air conditioners sold in 2022/23, showing that real added value (installation, guarantees), not discount alone, drives participation

The latest and most technically demanding was the collective purchase of air-to-water heat pumps:
CLEAR-HP.

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PART 2

In Focus: The CLEAR-HP - Heat-Pump Collective Purchase

About CLEAR-HP

- EU LIFE-funded project
- Run by 7 independent consumer organisations across 7 countries: Slovenia, Italy, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Slovakia and Bulgaria
- Goal: help consumers through the entire heat-pump buying journey, removing financial, regulatory and knowledge barriers
- What makes the CLEAR project family unique: it is made up entirely of independent consumer organisations that people already trust

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Why Heat Pumps Are Different

- Far more technically complex than air conditioners or tumble dryers: sizing, installation quality and building fit all matter
- Needs deeper consumer education, not just a competitive price
- Not suited for multi-apartment buildings: the model fits single-family homes best
- That's why this campaign added dedicated consumer webinars and one-to-one guidance, beyond what earlier campaigns needed

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Building the Campaign: Suppliers & Testing

- Public call for suppliers (November 2024) — only suppliers with their own installer network could join, turning the offer into one-stop purchase-and-installation
- Only heat pumps independently tested and scoring above 60/100 were eligible, and only models eligible for Eco Fund (national subsidy) support
- ZPS's legal team reviewed every supplier's terms & conditions, warranty statements and certificates, and required changes that strengthened consumer protection

14 Jan 2025 — Registration opens

Mid-Mar 2025 — Tailored offers sent

31 May 2025 — Campaign window closes

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Challenges

- ✓ **Collecting consumer home information**: Obtaining complete data from consumers was essential for HP providers to prepare the initial offers. Consumers often needed multiple reminders to submit the required information.
- ✓ **Complexity of HPs**: HPs are a highly complex product with significant variations. Consequently, the negotiation process and communication with consumers required additional technical support from energy advisors and the Chamber of Craft.
- ✓ **Challenges in engaging providers**: Some HP providers missed the initial call to participate and sought to join after the campaign had started and gained visibility with consumers. By then, it was too late to include them which resulted in some frustration.
- ✓ **Negotiation difficulties**: Aligning offers from different providers on comparable terms proved challenging and required intensive negotiation.

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Supporting Consumers, Step by Step

Educational Webinars (5)

- ☐ Heat-pump maintenance
- ☐ Network-fee changes and their impact on owners
- ☐ Preparing your home for installation
- ☐ Financing, subsidies and green loans
- ☐ What to check before buying
- ☐ 5 webinars for consumers, 1 for media

Materials, Media & Partners

- ☐ A dedicated online portal, FAQ, blog and two brochures ("How the Collective Purchase Works" and "From the Idea to the Purchase of a Heat Pump")
- ☐ A nationwide media campaign (TV, radio, digital) across all ZPS channels
- ☐ Expert partners - Eco Fund (subsidy list, technical advice, energy-advisor network) and the Chamber of Craft and Small Business (translating suppliers' offers into comparable terms)

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Communication in Numbers

One 12-month window. Every channel running at once.

2+
press releases sent to 50 media outlets each

1.000,000+
consumers reached free of charge through print & online articles (distributed 4 separate times)

24,000
readers reached via a dedicated ZPStest magazine feature

32,000
newsletter subscribers, plus dedicated lists of 450–580 heat-pump-interested leads for targeted follow-ups

35,000+
people reached per social media wave (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram — run twice)

1400+
participants at workshops

6+
separate workshops and conferences, one dedicated to media

All of it had to add up to one accurate, consistent message.

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One Campaign, Many Channels

Website and portal, print and online press, a dedicated consumer magazine, segmented e-newsletters, social media, radio and TV, live workshops and conferences, and joint tools built with partner projects — all running together, all needing to agree.



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Why It Got Complicated

- A chaotic, mid-campaign overhaul of national electricity network tariffs forced ZPS to rewrite consumer messaging on the fly
- Suppliers often had limited understanding of independent testing and consumer-protection principles. Every joint communication needed extra alignment and trust-building first
- No one-size-fits-all message worked: Slovenia's older, varied housing stock meant advice had to be property-specific, not generic



Consumer Satisfaction Feedback

Results for consumer satisfaction are based on **689 responses from consumers** to the ***Satisfaction Survey*** sent to the "**Heat Pumps Heat & Cold**" campaign database in May 2023.

Campaign communication channels with more awareness - TOP 3:

» **Slovenian Consumers' Association (ZPS website, ZPStest magazine, or ZPS e-newsletter)** - 353 responses (51%)
» **Social media (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn...)** - 79 responses (11%)
» **Online advertisement** - 56 responses (8%)

62% of the consumers who responded to the survey did not purchase the product.

The main reasons for not purchasing were:

» **The price was still too high.** - 211 responses (30%)
» **Other** - 158 responses (23%)
Examples:
- *"My apartment is large and the air conditioners you offered were not powerful enough for its size."*
- *"The device did not come with a 5-year warranty."*
- *"The price for the same air conditioners with installation was cheaper at other providers."*

» **I didn't recognize any benefits in the group purchase offer.** - 117 responses (17%)

Out of the remaining 261 respondents who reported purchasing the product, 73% replied:

"The installation is complete. It was carried out within the planned deadlines and everything went well."

Only 7% were not satisfied with the installation:

Example: *"The indoor and outdoor units were installed superficially. The indoor unit was not installed in the agreed-upon location, and the outdoor unit was installed sideways."*

90% of consumers agreed that the website's information was useful in helping them make a decision.

Only 10% disagreed. Some of the reasons given were:

- *"Exact price for installation, inspection, and servicing."*
- *"A wide range of different device models."*
- *"Not enough information on which air conditioner is suitable for a house, apartment, etc."*

The satisfaction level with the campaign was high, with over half of the respondents rating it between 8 and 10. When asked if they would recommend the campaign to other consumers, approximately 50% responded positively while 23% were passive. The global Net Promoter Score was positive (24).

Here are some testimonials from the participating consumers:

- *"The entire process proceeded according to instructions. I made a quick decision, and the installation was completed within a month. The only potential inconvenience is that you have to pay everything upfront, at least when installation is required."*
- *"Thanks to the group purchase facilitated by ZPS, I was able to make a more informed decision about buying an air conditioner. I trust the organizer of the purchase to provide the best quality-price ratio. Overall, the purchase and delivery process were positive experiences for me."*

Source: ZPS post-campaign consumer satisfaction survey, 689 responses (May 2023)

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The Offer to Consumers

- 6 air-to-water heat-pump models from 4 suppliers, all meeting the test-score and installer-network requirements
- Price includes basic installation to the supplier's specification, plus a reduced 9.5% VAT rate where the property qualifies
- The same negotiated conditions extend even to a different power rating if a consumer's home needs it - ZPS agreed this with suppliers in advance

Many consumers said the campaign helped them understand their options even when they didn't buy through it directly, some went on to purchase a heat pump outside the campaign entirely.

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Conditions for Replicating This Model

- ✓ A trusted, independent coordinating organisation
- ✓ A market with enough reliable suppliers and installers willing to negotiate
- ✓ Access to subsidies or financing support (in Slovenia: Eco Fund)
- ✓ Sustained consumer outreach and education
- ✓ A property type the model actually fits — single-family homes, for now

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What We Learned

- ☐ Trust in ZPS as an independent, consumer-first organisation was the single biggest driver of participation/ success factor.
- ☐ Advocating for consumers attracted a large number of households and provided assurance that support would be available if issues arose
- ☐ Many consumers still lack basic knowledge about heating-system choices, simple, low-effort information works best
- ✓ Technical complexity – collective purchases of HPs are technically much more complex and challenging compared to other technologies, such as air dryers or air-cooling appliances.
- ☐ Complex products need real technical backup, ZPS drew on outside energy and installation expertise throughout
- ☐ Some suppliers felt the campaign temporarily "froze" the wider market as buyers waited for the group offer

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What We Learned

- ✓ The campaign demonstrated the ongoing need for awareness-raising and consulting services for households. Although only a fraction of participating consumers ultimately purchased a HP through the initiative, it was highly effective in educating households about their options for replacing existing heating systems. Some consumers even chose to purchase HPs outside of the joint -purchase initiative.
  - ✓ Despite numerous resources on HPs, many consumers still struggle with basic concepts. Awareness campaigns featuring recognizable figures can attract attention, but this initiative showed that consumers benefit most from information delivered in a simple, easy-to-understand format that minimizes effort on their part.
- ✓ Campaign revealed that reaching the correct audience through existing channels remains challenging. Collaborating with trusted stakeholders, like the ZPS , is effective in attracting the target audience that needs additional guidance to make informed decisions.
- ✓ This business model is less suited for multi-apartment buildings, as obtaining approval from all individual owners is required. However, discussions are ongoing at the EU level regarding strategies for including multi-apartment buildings in such initiatives.

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Business Model of CPC at a Glance

Phase 1 — Setting Up the Campaign

1. **Partner recruitment** — public call
2. **Eligibility criteria** — installer network required; ZPS reviews contracts & warranties
3. **Testing & subsidies** — only models scoring 60+/100 and Eco Fund eligible (subsidies)
4. **Consumer outreach** — multi-channel public campaign launch
5. **Online platform** — central hub for webinars, materials, offers
6. **Consumer registration** — households share property & heating-system details etc.,

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Sources: ZPS public call for suppliers · SKUPINSKInakupZPS.si portal · webinar playlist (YouTube)

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Business Model of CPC at a Glance

Phase 2 — Delivering the Purchase

7. **Webinars** — 5 sessions on maintenance, tariffs, financing, buying tips
8. **Informational materials**, blog, FAQ and two step-by-step brochures
9. **Individual offers,** suppliers tailor offers
10. **Decision & contracting**, on-site inspection; decision
11. **Installation & commissioning** — supplier installs and commissions the system
12. **Post-installation support**, warranties, maintenance help, Eco Fund subsidy assistance

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Key Takeaways

- ✓ **A collective purchase only creates real value when it combines negotiating power, independent testing, reviewed contract terms and consumer education**
- ✓ **The heat-pump campaign proves the model scales to complex, high-stakes products — not just simple appliances**
- ✓ **The numbers: 4,100+ households in this campaign alone; 120,000+ households across all ZPS collective purchases to date**

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Thank You

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