

European Circular Economy Stakeholder Conference
Brussels, 20-21 February 2018
Civil Society Perspectives

On the 20th and 21st February 2018, the European Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee co-organised the annual conference of the **European Stakeholder Circular Economy Platform**. The first day was hosted by the Commission, and had speakers and discussions from across sectors working towards a circular economy. To see more from this day, please visit the [European Circular Economy Stakeholder Conference page](#) of the Platform website, where the recordings and presentations can be found.

In this document, we present the different perspectives that were expressed on the second day of the conference, which was hosted by the European Economic and Social Committee.

What is the Platform all about?

Through the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform (ECESP), the Circular Economy community in Europe is being brought closer together. Under the guidance of the [24 Coordination Group members](#), representing a wide spectrum of sectors and regions, through the website which links good practices, strategies, events and a growing knowledge base, the sharing and exchange of information and experience will be used to drive the transition from linear to circular.

What does this mean in practice?

It means fostering dialogue, it means the exchange of good practices and it means providing knowledge and identifying barriers. And of course, it also means getting stakeholders together through the annual conference where this year, stakeholders gave great input on a large variety of issues such as Circular Economy partnerships, re-manufacturing, green finance, extended producer responsibility, the risks and rewards of circularity for SMEs, and the impact of the circular economy on workers and consumers.

What does Civil Society think?

This document puts together some of the ideas and views of the 300+ Stakeholders from all over Europe that gathered on the second day of the Circular Economy Stakeholder Conference. The attendees, from across the entire civil society spectrum, participated in 16 participatory circles, in which they were asked to reflect upon three questions:

1. *Delivering the Circular Economy – from Policy to Practice: How is civil society making it happen?*
2. *A transition for all: How do we create a more inclusive and widespread Circular Economy Community?*
3. *What's next: how can we boost the share and take-up of good practices?*

The perspectives gathered on these questions provide messages for both policy makers and civil society seeking to make the change to a circular economy happen. The following is a snapshot of different perspectives and views expressed in the 16 circles:

Topic	Perspectives
Roadmap to ICT-enabled circular economy <i>Looking at the use of ICT as a tool to enable, promote, manage, monitor and report on the circular economy</i>	Boost take-up of good practices through global benchmarking, labelling and data sharing; though account must be taken of red line issues, such as impact of data use on workers and competitive issues with data sharing.

	<p>Other comments included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ ICT Products should not be black boxes anymore ➤ ICT helps to understand our consumption needs ➤ ICT Policy makers have to provide a level of trust to citizens
<p>Reparability and Serviceability Ratings of Appliances <i>Looking at how to manage existing appliances, in terms of reparability; and how to design for a future circular economy</i></p>	<p>Increase action by having a rating system with agreed criteria for options on reparability and serviceability, to allow consumers to make better choices.</p> <p>The option of a rating system for reparability and serviceability of appliances was mentioned again - as was the case on Day1.</p>
<p>Circular Bioeconomy – the regenerative story <i>Looking at how the bioeconomy can contribute to a circular economy, and how a shift to a circular economy could protect natural resources</i></p>	<p>There is a need to integrate bio-based industries into circular economy – they are not mutually exclusive. More R&D resources are also needed to help bio-based products become biodegradable, compostable or recyclable.</p> <p>Good practices in Sweden – explore how one sector's residual by-product can be another sector's value added.</p>
<p>Product design for long-life products/industrialised maintenance and repair: what methods? What examples? <i>A more in-depth look at how products could be designed for a longer lifespan.</i></p>	<p>Standards for products are not enough – there needs to be ways of verifying compliance. Customer feedback should also be taken on board in product design.</p> <p>Success in circular economy will be ensured only if the investment pays off.</p>
<p>Low carbon/low waste and the Circular Economy <i>Looking at the link between low carbon, low waste and a circular economy society</i></p>	<p>More financial incentives are needed to boost recycling – from better prices for recycled material to fining designers for producing non-recyclable products.</p> <p>Flemish good practice: look for local solutions for recycling; 72% of house waste is collected separately, setting up of repair cafes; match material flows and producers' responsibility schemes.</p> <p>Good practices: it's smart to go for low carbon for industries and its possible and cost reducing.</p>

	Local cooperation is paramount.
<p>The real potential of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)</p> <p><i>What will be the effects of EPR, and will this have potential for helping to shift the economy from a linear, ownership model, to a consumer-leasing model?</i></p>	<p>Harmonisation and transparency of rules on EPR throughout the EU would help to break down barriers and boost good practices. Recycled packaging should be included, as part of recycling targets, and the value of waste products needs to be addressed.</p> <p>The cost of littering needs to be included as part of the EPR system, one of the main problems to tackle - should not just be left to municipalities to clean up, but financially supported centrally.</p> <p>The grey zone between when a product is a product, and when it becomes a waste needs to be tackled to promote EPR.</p>
<p>Circular approaches in the agri-food and forestry sector. How do we scale up existing ideas and promote new ones?</p> <p><i>Looking at how traditional and modern techniques that sit comfortably within a circular economy can help issues facing those in the agri-food and forestry sectors.</i></p>	<p>Research and innovation will be key to boost circular approaches in the agri-food sector, and rural networks need to be strengthened to help knowledge sharing.</p> <p>Some EU countries soon going zero emissions and net absorbers of CO₂ through forestry that are forever increasing in countries such as Sweden</p> <p>Farmers need to take part in the research and innovation process from the beginning</p>
<p>Risk and Reward of Circularity in SMEs</p> <p><i>Approaching the circular economy from the point of view of SMEs – the challenges they face, particularly if they are at the forefront of change.</i></p>	<p>To boost the take up of good practices, SMEs will need help with capacity and knowledge building, technical assistance at a local level, and financing.</p> <p>For SMEs, finding information on the circular economy at local level is never easy – there is a big gap – local SMEs need information. A small company will not know or have the time to find information in large cities at a hub – therefore information needs to be disseminated to the local level.</p>
<p>The circular economy and the international level</p> <p><i>Looking at what's happening at an international level, and the impact that a change within Europe to a circular economic model may have on our global partners.</i></p>	<p>A European circular economy will have an impact on the wider world, through existing and potential trade agreements and international cooperation mechanisms – the road ahead may be bumpy, and there is a need to understand, measure and monitor the risks that lie ahead.</p> <p>What kind of trade do we want coming into Europe,</p>

	and what kind of impact will this have on our ecosystems? European Trade Agreements need to go further to adopt a Circular Economy.
<p>Social dimension of the circular economy: What impact on the nature and volume of work?</p> <p><i>How will a change in economic model impact society – for example, changes to work practices and managing population growth; and how to overcome the challenges that may be faced.</i></p>	<p>Circular economy also requires more skills, and especially soft, horizontal skills such as innovation and creativity. We need to invest in people and allow them to acquire the skills that are needed. Higher skills will also give a competitive advantage to the EU, in the context of globalisation.</p> <p>For every 10.000 used goods, 296 new jobs are created in the circular economy compared to 36 in recycling.</p> <p>Transition to the circular economy is expected to induce job creation, because there is higher labour intensity in sectors such as repair and maintenance. This will also allow relocating jobs back in Europe, which were lost in the context of globalisation.</p>
<p>Overcoming cultural challenges in the circular transition</p> <p><i>Focusing more on the cultural challenges to a change in economic model – what will these be, and how can they be overcome? What supports will be needed to help encourage the change?</i></p>	<p>Awareness raising is needed, but not enough – new behaviour must come from linking circular economy to values and norms.</p> <p>How can the past inspire present and future changes in behaviour, e.g. collection and reuse of milk bottles?</p>
<p>Bottom-up initiatives: Creating a problem-solving community for circular economy business challenges</p> <p><i>Looking at how to best use initiatives that have been implemented and have worked, but may not be widely known.</i></p>	<p>A culture change is needed – the technology is not a problem, but logistics can be.</p> <p>If the approach fits with the consumer's values, is he ready to pay more?</p> <p>Setting up intermediate targets might be one of the solutions for driving a problem-solving community.</p>
<p>Green Financing</p> <p><i>Discussing where financing for the circular economy, particularly at an early stage, will come from.</i></p>	<p>Bottom up initiatives are needed that offer simplicity and address the regional context. Remove the 'Green' from the talk, and then all range of SME companies begin to engage. Another initiative could be to ask companies to pay back natural capital.</p> <p>Start-ups begin because we believe in what they do. They are the innovative sector. Funding with a little more flexibility for start-ups is needed.</p>
<p>Remanufacturing</p> <p><i>Discussing the role of manufacturers in the change to a circular economy, and how a shift to seeing waste as</i></p>	<p>Bring together people that produce new products and those that remanufacture them, so that products can be remanufactured with the least extra materials</p>

<p><i>a resource may result in a need to change how outputs are viewed.</i></p>	<p>possible. There is a need to move away from thinking about remanufacturing only in terms of the whole product. The approach should also include the product's components.</p> <p>The first producer has to be protected - transfer of ownership - intellectual property.</p> <p>There is no legal definition of remanufacturing and this is a problem.</p> <p>Set a target of a percentage of remanufactured components that a product should have, like for cars.</p>
<p>Urban agenda – circular economy partnership <i>A discussion on the role of local authorities in urban areas, and the view from an urban perspective.</i></p>	<p>Boost take-up of good practices through better knowledge sharing, better regulation, and better funding. Residents and entrepreneurs need to think in terms of "resources" and not "waste".</p> <p>To deliver the Circular Economy we need to tackle the common needs of cities. City level > country level to achieve the Urban Agenda.</p>
<p>How circular is the SME community over Europe? <i>Looking at what projects and programmes currently exist in SMEs across Europe, and the tools being designed to help more make the change.</i></p>	<p>There are more circular SMEs than we think – to identify them, we need to measure the level of engagement in circularity in Europe. It's also important to remember that the behaviour of large companies is important to SMEs – one culture change will affect another.</p> <p>To become circular, a number of questions must be answered, such as: Do you have a system for take back management or collection for recycling (recovery)?</p>