

CLOSING INFRASTRUCTURE MATERIAL CYCLES THROUGH EUROPEAN COOPERATION

EVENT SUMMARY



NOVEMBER 2022

Background

Infrastructure makes up a significant part of the built environment and is the backbone of a healthy economy. However, delivering infrastructure is becoming increasingly challenging. Infrastructure has a major environmental impact due to material use, waste production and CO2 emissions. At the same time, infrastructure projects have to cope with shortages and unavailability of materials, along with dramatic price increases due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Matters will only get worse as global supply chains face new disruptions triggered by global conflicts.

As European economies are highly dependent on imported materials, closing infrastructure material cycles through high-quality reuse and recycling is paramount.

Summary of the debate

On 22 November 2022, 14:00-16:00 CET, Rijkswaterstaat, SGS INTRON, the German Sustainable Building Council (DGNB), Holland Circular Hotspot and the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform organised an #EUCircularTalks roundtable discussion on closing infrastructure material cycles for two value chains: cement/concrete and asphalt. The aim of the event was to identify blind spots and to activate European cooperation to close infrastructure material cycles.

With 181 registrations and 118 people attending the event, the webinar showed the huge potential of sustainable and circular infrastructure.

European cooperation in material value chains is key to achieving sustainability goals and ensuring continuity in this important sector. Cooperation is required for knowledge exchange and to give people the confidence that new technologies can be applied.

Here are some examples of suggestions made during the event with a view to fostering better cooperation:

- European funding should focus on the infrastructure sector and materials relevant to it, like asphalt and concrete. Along with technical innovations, the focus should be on acquiring and sharing practical experience;
- Better cooperation is needed between European infrastructure authorities at national, regional and local levels so as to exchange knowledge and experience about innovations;
- European policies and standards are very welcome on various issues, covering the whole life cycle of construction work and individual products. These should encompass proper design geared to a long life and future disassembly and reuse, end-of-waste criteria and standards promoting high-quality recycling and reuse;
- Pricing mechanisms could kick-start moves to close the loop. Green Public Procurement for infrastructure and the Taxonomy should apply these mechanisms, which already exist in other areas.

At the end of the webinar, participants were asked to respond to a poll about the preferred type of European cooperation for closing infrastructure material loops. The responses are displayed below:

Which type of European cooperation for closing infra material loops do you prefer (projects, policies, ...)?

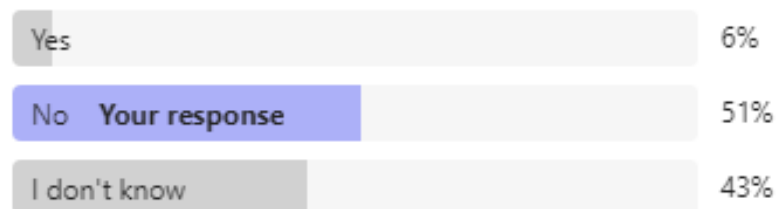


36 responses

Pending questions

Though infrastructure is not explicitly excluded from European policies and programmes, there are fewer measures for the infrastructure sector than for buildings. Half of the audience believed that European policies fail to take sufficient account of infrastructure and only 6% believed the opposite (poll results below). It was acknowledged that there is a lot to be gained from dedicated measures with a greater focus on infrastructure. One pending question is why the sector seems to be less organised when it comes to getting messages across. Other pending questions are how circular tools like passports can be applied to infrastructure and how to get innovations accepted in practice, in terms of the technical aspect and the willingness to adopt them.

Do the existing European circular policies sufficiently take the infrastructure potential into account?



51 responses

Online discussion main takeaways

Let's make the voice of circular infrastructure heard! The more we work together, the louder we can get.

Summary/conclusions

Several European companies, researchers and authorities are working on high-quality reuse and recycling for closing infrastructure material cycles. Many technical solutions have been devised or are in development. However, upscaling, implementation, acceptance and experience across Europe and at various levels is required to reap their potential. Public sector procurement of infrastructure work offers unique opportunities for scaling up and encouraging markets to adopt climate-neutral and circular solutions.