



Circular economy and sufficiency



OVERVIEW

This interactive session explored the concept of sufficiency that is necessary to broaden horizons of circular economy and look beyond key concepts such as reuse and recycle, to facilitate lifestyles that involves not just consuming better but also consuming less.

A direct link between sufficiency and circular economy concepts is also a key lever to tackle problems induced by climate change. The demand for material extraction triggered by companies, households, governments, and in the EU is still too high. The total amount of materials directly used by the European economies contributes to an increase in carbon emissions in the short term.

The moderator (Françoise Bonnet, Secretary General, ACR+), the EESC (Alain Coheur, INT Section President) and experts (Jean-Pierre Schweitzer from EEB, Mélanie Bourgeois from Energy Cities, Yves Decelles from Veolia and Virginia Gómez Oñate from Navarra Zirkular) discussed topics such as:

- Are circular economy policies having a sufficient impact on the resources consumption (e.g. plastics, textiles)?
- What are policy/institutional challenges towards the transition to sufficiency-based circular economy?
- What is the role of business in the sufficiency-based circular economy?
- How to define and promote lifestyles that involve not just consuming better but also, and critically, consuming less?

CHALLENGES

- The EU material footprint is still way above sustainable and just levels.

- Sufficiency is still not a clear concept: the main idea is to give back to the planet more than taking from it.
- There is a social aspect linked to sufficiency: redistribution of wealth.
- Need to learn from the energy sector to see how we can apply the sufficiency concept to circular economy.
- Reuse is a good idea but many clothes collected are exported. What is the impact?
- Buildings have the biggest impact in terms of resources use. Do we need new buildings when so many spaces are vacant (16%)?
- Rethinking our needs to reduce resource consumption and limit the rebound effects.
- Sufficiency is not about putting pressure on individuals but about offering the right structure to provoke the behavioral change.
- Adequate balance between local needs and local resources.
- Put strong constraints on companies (bans on certain products and packaging, eco-design, provide services instead of selling products).
- Concrete local measures for short term CO2 reduction.

KEY MESSAGES

- The Sustainable Products Initiative, proposed by the European Commission, is a central piece in the policy framework that will make sustainable products the norm, by setting requirements on, inter alia, durability, reparability and recyclability.
- Social economy is a practical example of a systemic model that can contribute to integrate the concept of sufficiency in our economy, by putting people over profits.
- Citizens need to be further encouraged to make conscious consumption decisions for sustainability, avoiding unnecessary purchases by aligning purchase decisions with consumers' needs and buying pre-existing products.
- Sobriety is a lifestyle that involves not just consuming better but also consuming less. Sufficiency is about rethinking our needs.
- Roles of cities and regions: at local level, when speaking about lifestyle, we can really make a difference.
- Example of sufficiency measures: Grenoble policy to reduce street advertisement. It reduces energy and resource production, prevent overconsumption.
- Public private partnership is key when discussing sufficiency.