

The background features a large circular graphic composed of several overlapping segments in various shades of green (from light to dark) and white. The segments are arranged in a way that creates a sense of depth and movement, resembling a stylized 'C' or a circular path. The text is centered within the white segments of this graphic.

**CIRCULAR
CONSUMPTION
CHARTER**

2021

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Why do we need a circular consumption charter?

The shift from a linear to a circular economy model is needed to accomplish the transition to green consumption and production, by decoupling economic growth from the excessive use of material and natural resources, whilst making a key contribution towards achieving climate neutrality by 2050.

According to the New Circular Economy Action Plan published by the European Commission, the move towards a circular economy should be achieved through “co-creation”, as a result of cooperation between various parties: public authorities, economic actors, consumers, citizens and civil society organisations¹. The involvement of **communities** and **individuals**, especially when considered in their role of **consumers and users**, is a **vital part** of the EU Action Plan to accelerate the transition to the new “circular model”. By adopting behaviour and making choices purposely aimed at achieving “circularity”, consumers reduce their environmental footprint, both by expressing a desire for goods and services designed and produced according to circular economy principles and encouraging changes to the way in which businesses manufacture their products or provide services.

Nevertheless, consumers need to be supported and actively involved in this process of transformation of the economic model, since very many different obstacles can prevent them from being consciously empowered. These obstacles are associated, for example, with poor environmental knowledge and awareness, information asymmetry and lack of faith in the prospect of real change, as well as the business, institutional, regulatory and social framework. In order to be able to help citizens and consumers overcome these obstacles, various challenges need to be tackled. In particular:

- ensuring that consumers can receive **reliable and comprehensible information** about the environmental impact of products and the industrial processes that generate them, as well as arising from their consumer choices, thus protecting the market and general public from the risks of greenwashing;
- promoting **awareness of the concepts of “circularity” and environmental footprint of products/services** and the respective assessment methods, thus ensuring their full understanding and, above all, their implementation in consumer choices (and choices in life in general);
- overcoming once and for all the single-use approach to consumption and production, promoting the values, both new, but also retrieved from past tradition, **of the durability, sharing, repair and maintaining utility, reuse and redistribution of products and material resources**, fighting, in particular, the tendency towards planned (or premature) obsolescence;

¹ EU Commission. A new Circular Economy Action Plan - For a cleaner and more competitive Europe. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions COM/2020/98 final.

- involving the consumer in the co-creation of the circularity features of products that depends on all stages of their life cycle and the behaviour adopted by consumers during **the use and post-consumer stage** (e.g. reuse, repair, sharing, return to manufacturer, waste sorting, etc.).

In order to take up these challenges without hesitation, this document's signatory Associations share the **guidelines** used as the basis for the actions to be implemented in order to empower, motivate and support consumers, pointing them towards more "circular" consumption, turning these guidelines into a series of **events** and programmes designed to assist the transition to the new model.

This document can therefore be considered a "manifesto" designed to motivate the strategies and decisions of all other players in the system and also aims to **obtain support** from the government and manufacturing sector so that the ideas set out hereafter can become a tangible reality.

About us

We are the Italian Consumer Associations. Our main objective is to contribute towards improving and strengthening the consumer's position within the market, thus protecting the rights provided by the Consumer Code (Legislative Decree No. 206/2005).

In January 2020, to mark the launch of the Circular Lab sponsored by **Eni** with the assistance of the **Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies in Pisa** and **FUTOUR**, we began a joint project aimed at identifying the challenges to be tackled and the actions to be implemented in order to empower consumers for the circular economy transition.

The principles of circular consumption

In order to be well and truly coherent and integrated with the new circular economy framework, the consumer has to be able to play a far more conscious and active role than in the past. A person making buying decisions must be able to understand, find, select and favour those products best able to meet circular economy criteria, based on the possibility of retaining their value and usefulness over time for as long as possible: by saving the material and natural resources required for their production and consumption, reusing and redistributing, sharing, etc.

In order to meet these criteria, "circular consumption" must therefore be driven by guiding principles capable of making it:

I. "Educated", conscious consumption

Consumer education is a prerequisite to be used to increase awareness on the **subject of the circular economy** and highlight **the active role that consumers can play** with their choices and actions in order to use resources effectively and efficiently, whilst protecting the

environment. This educational process needs to start from schools of every type and level with a view to involving the new generations in the circular transition.

In particular, the consumer must be capable of understanding the reasons for which it is essential to implement choices and patterns of behaviour modelled on circularity and be able to recognise genuinely circular products, whilst taking the entire life cycle into account.

II. Transparent consumption

The manufacturer/consumer relationship is normally characterised by information asymmetry, particularly as regards product environmental performance: in the case of the circular economy, this may have an extremely adverse effect on consumer choices, introducing elements that can distort reasons for buying (e.g. purchasing a product without considering its negative impact on the environment and, therefore, on everyone). Action therefore needs to be taken so that such relationship is based on a principle of transparency, making available, through, for example, a standardised labelling system, important details regarding a product's circular features and the beneficial consequences arising from buying and behavioural decisions coherent with circular economy principles. The aim is to allow consumers to make their decisions in a conscious, balanced manner without wasting resources.

III. Properly informed consumption

In order to be able to perform the task of encouraging the transition towards a circular economy, it is essential that the information available to the consumer regarding product performance be based on the principles of **clarity**, ensuring comprehensible language for all possible recipients, **accuracy**, by referring to specific, tangible aspects and avoiding vague declarations, and **relevancy**, by referring to the environmental and circular aspects (possibility of reuse, recycling, recovery, etc.) that actually regard the specific product/service. It is also important to arrange the information in various levels of detail: **conciseness** is essential for quick and fruitful reading of the information, but **further details** should also be readily available for more in-depth study. In order to guarantee the correctness of information, **third-party auditing/certification** should play an important role. This can enable a relationship of trust between manufacturers and consumers to be established.

IV. Ongoing comparative consumption

In order to allow consumers to make informed choices, they must have the possibility of comparing functionally-equivalent products, selecting those with the best performance as far as the circular economy is concerned. Therefore, comparability of information is essential and this is obtained by **standardisation of the methods** used to calculate environmental performance and the construction of a common framework for the **establishment of** publicly-consultable **benchmarks** that must be life-cycle based and guarantee that the information provided can be verified. In addition to environmental and circular parameters, the comparison should also include ethical and social aspects.

V. Balanced consumption

Consumer choices seek to balance various requirements: quality, economic, social and environmental. In order to increase consumers' awareness of their responsibilities in decision-making processes, it is desirable that prices reflect the environmental costs and benefits connected with the manufacturing, consumption and post-consumption processes when applying the polluter pays principle. Establishing reward and incentive mechanisms aimed at pointing consumers and businesses towards more circular choices, based on criteria of durability, reuse, use of recycled materials, recyclability, reparability, efficiency in the use of resources and energy, etc., may allow environmental and economic benefits to coincide.

VI. "Multiple lifetime" use

When applying the life cycle concept, a consumer's role does not end with the decisions to buy or utilise a service but also involves the use and post-use stages. It is essential that consumers receive reliable, relevant information about products and services, also as regards lifetime, reusability and availability of repair and upgrading services, spares and repair manuals, in order to extend the useful life of the goods, fight planned obsolescence and save resources. Post-consumer actions are a crucial moment when closing the loop in a circular economy. Helping the consumer to make the right decisions during and after the use stage should represent a genuine commitment by all players, including by making it worthwhile to repair an item rather than replacing it, also enabling the consumer in turn to advocate best use and after-use practices to other citizens and consumers belonging to his network. This objective can only be achieved with genuine commitment on the part of the entire supply chain upstream from the consumer that must focus its efforts on the "sustainability by design" maxim right from the earliest conceptual stages of a product, process or service.

VII. Shared and collaborative consumption

The transition towards a circular economy cannot be restricted to supporting technical and biological loop closure, but must also be based on the sharing principle that needs to be promoted by offering (including with the assistance of manufacturers and supply chains) tangible solutions for sharing goods and helping to generate widespread awareness of the methods of accessing existing sharing platforms. Sharing culture should be encouraged until temporary possession is preferred to exclusive individual ownership in order to make the most of those periods when physical assets are not being used, thus restricting inefficient use of resources and reducing the amount of waste produced. Reference is made to both tangible and intangible sharing: therefore, where possible, citizens will share assets and utilise sharing services; but there is also sharing of experiences, knowledge and best practices that can enable fast dissemination amongst the public of skills and abilities, along with a system of values capable of encouraging day-to-day actions in keeping with circular economy principles.

VIII. Increasingly digital consumption

Digital innovation provides a great chance for sustainable development in the transition towards a circular economy. Digital transformation is helping to link people, civil society organisations, economic actors and public authorities, allowing rethinking and development of new economic models, new technology for the exchange and sharing of goods and use of services, for access to information and experiences that can encourage actions modelled on circular economy principles. Digital transformation increases and consolidates the point of contact between all players in the economic system, and therefore also between manufacturers and consumers, and needs to be managed so that it represents an invaluable means of connection and cooperation, at the same time protecting consumers from possible risks caused, for example, by a lack of digital literacy or associated with data protection and security.

IX. Inclusive green consumption

During transition towards a circular economy it is necessary that rethinking of the various stages of production and consumption envisage a future scenario capable of marrying our planet's health with the **well-being of individuals** and **the dignity of workers**. It is necessary to work towards a green circular economy that bases its action on the principles of intergenerational and intragenerational justice, creating osmosis between young people's and old people's culture through **appropriate** awareness-raising, communication and information processes **for different people**.

X. Accessible consumption

Everyone should be guaranteed the availability of products and services designed and delivered according to the principles of the circular economy and accessibility to the information about them so that the consumer can actually benefit from their use. Accessibility refers to both physical availability, therefore on show and identifiable in stores, and virtual availability through on-line sales or sharing channels. The use of circular products and services must be within the reach of all consumers, regardless of their socio-economic status.

XI. Moderate, non-wasteful consumption

Citizen choices at the buying and post-buying stage should be in keeping with the principle of **prevention**. Indeed, the most circular product as far as saving resources is concerned is the one that is not created and does not generate waste. As a result, everyone should moderate their choices by seeking to **purchase only the strictly necessary, thus avoiding wastage**. This applies to all product sectors, but an important example regards the food sector that has a significant environmental impact and high rates of wastage. Consumer guidelines should be: improve shopping habits by buying only essentials that can be consumed before sell-by date; use leftovers rather than throwing away; store food in the correct manner so that it lasts longer; choose portions commensurate with actual needs; donate rather than throwing away edible food. Clear information should be available regarding the method of storage and safe consumption even after the "best before" date. Even when not at home, for example in restaurants and canteens, wastage should be

avoided by ordering no more than a person can eat and, if applicable, taking home leftovers (for example in a doggy bag).

Our proposed circular consumption actions

1. Circular education pathways

One of the main challenges that must continue to be tackled when guiding consumers in the transition towards a circular economy is that of educating and promoting awareness so that they become conscious citizens adopting careful behaviour. Indeed, there is confusion and lack of knowledge on the subject of the circular economy leading to uninformed behaviour that is not in keeping with it. By tapping the potential of today's fast, widespread and multichannel information, it is important to design and implement educational, awareness-raising pathways for the circular economy that are aimed at various targets: schools, adults, trainers/teachers. By giving these pathways the necessary exposure, we can obtain benefits by disseminating circular-economy knowledge/awareness and commendable behaviour to be implemented. In addition, by training instructors, these can act as a driving force in order to multiply the achievable benefits, arriving indirectly at other young people and their families.

2. Labelling handbook

It is essential that products with environmental and/or circular features be recognisable and this should begin by familiarising consumers with the numerous environmental labels already on the market, making clear their real meaning and preventing misunderstandings. All citizens should have a handbook covering the main environmental labels found on products that can help with their choices and be available from various physical and digital channels. In addition, the handbook should give prominence to and increase awareness of the label considered capable of communicating a product's environmental footprint and circularity better than the other numerous existing marks. This should also comply with the requirements of the European Commission's New Circular Economy Action Plan and Green Claims Initiative that refer to the life cycle assessment method employed by the Product Environmental Footprint (PEF) as a means of standardising and substantiating claims about the environmental features of products and services.

3. Circular product digital data sheet

Information about product circularity features needs to be made clearer, more uniform, credible and accessible. Consumers should not find themselves in a condition of information asymmetry where information about product environmental and circular features is unavailable, incomplete or unverifiable. Consumers, associations, public authorities and economic actors should work on standardising product environmental footprint details and circular features so that they are clear and comprehensible for consumers, preparing a data sheet accessible through a QR code or barcode on the product itself that provides details of its main features and any certification.

4. Circular incentives

A way in which to promote more circular consumption behaviour is to design incentive mechanisms for manufacturer and consumer in order to encourage the purchase of products with certain environmental and circularity features and/or give preference to sharing over buying. By working alongside public authorities, manufacturers and distributors, a “circular card” should be issued offering bonuses and discounts when purchasing products and services of circular design and with lower environmental footprint.

5. Physical platforms

We think it is very important to create physical areas that become a material place in which to experience the opportunities arising from circular actions and lifestyles. These places, obtained by renovating unused areas, can become the fulcrum for involvement in circular post-consumer actions and lifestyles such as repair, reuse, sharing and recycling, in addition to an area in which to revive endangered ancient crafts that, in the nature of the circular economy, would regain value.

6. Digital platform

Digital transformation can act as an important driving force in connecting people and creating shared circular value. Once created, a virtual platform could perform various tasks: be the means of guaranteeing access to more detailed environmental information about products, involve the consumer in circular actions and lifestyles, disseminate knowledge about the consumer circular economy and best practices.

7. Monitoring and disseminating

There should be a permanent circular economy monitoring centre operated by representatives from associations, businesses, the academic world and public authorities. This entity should hold scheduled meetings in order to promote the participatory processes of consumers and manufacturers, share and circulate circular economy strategies and create a circularity culture in order to promote maximum dissemination and replicability with a view to boosting improvement.

Member associations:



We thank for the pivotal role played in *Circular Lab*:

