

Circular Economy for the SDGs: From Concept to Practice

General Assembly and ECOSOC Joint Meeting

Draft Concept and Programme for the joint meeting of the Economic and Financial (Second Committee) of the 73rd UN General Assembly and the UN Economic and Social Council

Background

In recent years, the circular economy has gained increasing prominence as a tool which presents solutions to some of the world's most pressing cross-cutting sustainable development challenges. By addressing root causes, the concept of a circular economy, an economy in which waste and pollution do not exist by design, products and materials are kept in use, and natural systems are regenerated provides much promise to accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda.¹ The concept was also repeatedly mentioned as a key solution in the Expert Group Meeting² and in-depth review of SDG 12 on Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) during the 2018 High-Level Political Forum, including in the areas of SCP and climate change, ocean action, and food waste and loss. The circular economy holds particular promise for achieving multiple SDGs, including SDGs 6 on energy, 8 on economic growth, 11 on sustainable cities, 12 on sustainable consumption and production, 13 on climate change, 14 on oceans, and 15 on life on land.

The transition from a linear to a circular economy requires a joint effort by stakeholders from all sectors. Companies can contribute to the transition by developing competencies in circular design to implement product reuse, and recycling, and serving as trend-setters of innovative circular economy business models. Policy makers can support the transition by promoting the reuse of materials and higher resource productivity by rethinking incentives and providing the right set of policies and access to financing.³ Major Groups and other Stakeholders also play an important role in promoting the transition to a circular economy by mobilizing broad forces to carry out

¹ <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/circular-economy>

² <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/19990EGMSDG12advanceuneditedoutcomeFORWEB9July2018.pdf>

³ <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/circular-economy/building-blocks>

practical actions and putting pressure on businesses and governments to accelerate implementation.

The circular economy is relevant to all sectors of the economy. Examples of its successful implementation exist in different countries and sectors, such as the automobile industry, the food industry, the textile industry, the chemical industry, and wastewater management.

Objectives

It is within this context that the joint event of the Second Committee and ECOSOC aims to provide a deeper understanding of the circular economy and how it can be leveraged to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Experts representing different sectors will discuss global trends and industries at the forefront of this transition, as well as key opportunities and barriers to its implementation.

The event will also explore the concept of a circular economy through the lens of practical case studies, which will be examined in-depth to learn about enabling environments for this fundamental paradigm shift, including through new technologies, policies, and partnerships.

Key Questions

- What is the circular economy, and what does it look like in practice?
- In which industries is the circular economy being instituted, and what are key characteristics to enable the shift towards a circular economy?
- Where are the biggest opportunities to build and expand the circular economy?
- What are barriers impeding this transition, and what are some ways they can be addressed?
- What are some of the benefits of transitioning towards a circular economy, especially in terms of implementation of the 2030 Agenda?
- Who is involved in this transition, and what are their key roles, including of policy-makers, the private sector, and civil society?

The event will focus on two major themes: policy frameworks and platforms to enable the circular economy, and partnerships to support implementation of the circular economy.