



## CONSUMERS IN THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY – WORKSHOP REPORT

This intensive deep-dive workshop took place in JDE60 (EESC Building) during the first session, with 60 enthusiastic participants discussing how consumers perceive the circular economy and its impacts as well as how consumer behavioural insights in view of circular economy challenges could be generated and applied to inform policy making and business innovation.

The objectives of the workshop were twofold:

- to launch the Consumer Insight Action Panel to frame key circular economy challenges related to textiles, plastics and electronics with potential for consumer behaviour-based solutions
- to explore how promising practices to tackle these challenges from a consumer behavioural insight perspective can improve policymaking and take-up of circular business models

### Success Stories

Led by Michael Kuhndt of the Collaborating Centre on Sustainable Consumption and Production (CSCP), the main contributors to the [discussion in this workshop](#) included: Markus Terho from the Finnish Innovation Fund - **Sitra**, Jeroen Van Laer from **DG JUST**, Jean-Pierre Schweitzer from the **European Environmental Bureau**, Lars Fogh Mortensen and Daniel Montalvo from the **European Environment Agency**.



Aiming to understand the motivations behind consumer behaviour and opportunities for boosting circular economy policy and strategies, the breakout sessions centred on three main themes: **textiles**, **electronics** and **plastics**. These are some of the incentives identified for consumers to transition:

- with new types of recycled textiles being developed, innovation is a strong factor in this domain
- nudges (behavioural science) can be used to promote the adoption of alternatives among the consumers
- in the past few years, the tech industry has noted a decline in the sale of new products, and a consequent rise in refurbished devices (particularly in France and the UK)
- leasing could act as an enabler and remove barriers
- marketing can act as a strong driver for packaging change
- identifying different consumer groups helps to establish specific consumer needs. For example, an ageing population is better served by simple electronic devices, rather than sophisticated ones

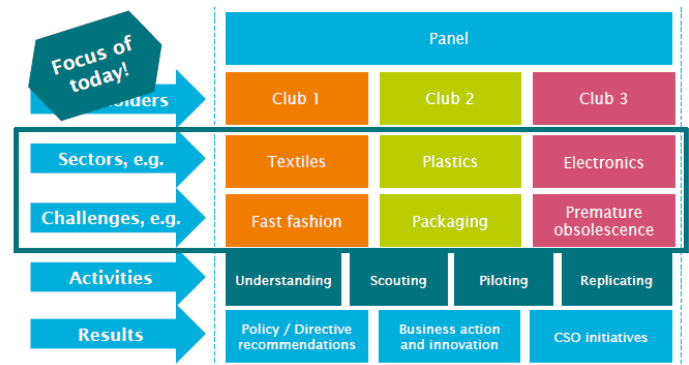


## Challenges

The break-out sessions looked at sectoral challenges in textiles, plastics and electronics, with feedback from participants set out below:

For **textiles** the key challenges were:

- "fast fashion": clothes are simply too cheap
- when more sustainable alternatives are promoted, time becomes a key issue for consumers: the repair process takes far longer than buying new clothes
- identifying how to make circular fashion appealing to large companies despite cheap competition
- in common with the plastic industry: Greenhouse Gas emissions and the use of chemical products
- the fashion industry needs to understand and assess producer responsibility
- how to make final consumers realise the actual number of clothes they own



For **plastics**, the key challenges included:

- given the complexity of some plastic-related issues, how can the consumer decide between "good" and "bad" plastic, based on available information?
- in view of the convenience of plastic packaging, both for consumers as well as producers, alternatives need to offer advantages for consumers and at the same time respect food safety standards
- more Life Cycle Analysis needed to identify which in fact is the wise consumer choice from an environmental perspective (considering aspects such as climate change, waste management, exporting the packaging problem to countries that are not properly equipped and entitled to handle it, etc)
- greater transparency to better communicate to consumers about how a choice is made – a method for calculating this would be useful
- profiling of consumers, inter alia according to rural or urban dwelling, income levels will be necessary

For **electronics**, the key challenges were:

- premature obsolescence
- lack of good maintenance and repair services

## What's Next?

- The setting up of a **Consumer Insight Action Panel** with multiple stakeholders within the next 6 months, including (i) stakeholder mapping, engagement and invitation to join the panel and its "clubs"; (ii) mapping and definition of circular economy challenges of focus of the work; (iii) publishing a positioning paper on the results of this ground work of the Consumer Insight Action Panel
- Participants were encouraged to register as active members (not observers) in the 3 action "clubs" of the Panel: Textiles, Electronics and Plastics: [consumerinsights@scp-centre.org](mailto:consumerinsights@scp-centre.org)
- The **ECESP forum** is also available to continue the conversation
- The **EESC** will publish a study later in 2019 on the impact of the circular economy on the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods sector, specifically looking at one element of the electronics sector and how this will impact on workers, employers and consumers.

**Want to keep the conversation going? Contribute your good practice on [circulareconomy.europa.eu](http://circulareconomy.europa.eu), join the online forum or drop us a line: [CEStakeholderEU@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:CEStakeholderEU@eesc.europa.eu)**

