



Questions and Answers: A New Circular Economy Action Plan for a Cleaner and More Competitive Europe

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What is the new EU Circular Economy Action Plan?

The new Action Plan announces initiatives for the entire life cycle of products, from design and manufacturing to consumption, repair, reuse, recycling, and bringing resources back into the economy. It introduces legislative and non-legislative measures and targets areas where action at the EU level brings added value. The Action Plan is at the core of the [European Green Deal](#), the EU roadmap towards climate-neutrality. Half of total greenhouse gas emissions come from resource extraction and processing. It is not possible to achieve the climate-neutrality target by 2050 without transitioning to a fully circular economy.

The aim of the Action Plan is to reduce the EU's consumption footprint and double the EU's circular material use rate in the coming decade, while boosting economic growth. This will be done in full cooperation with stakeholders and business. Applying ambitious circular economy measures in Europe can increase EU's GDP by an additional 0.5% by 2030 and create around 700,000 new jobs.

What measures are foreseen for products?

At present, many products break down too quickly, cannot be reused, repaired or recycled, or can only be used once. This linear pattern of production and consumption ("take-make-use-dispose") does not give producers an incentive to make more sustainable products. The Sustainable Product Policy Framework aims to change this situation with actions to make green products become the norm. The rules will also aim to reward manufacturers of products based on their sustainability performance and link high performance levels to incentives.

A new Sustainable Product Policy Framework includes three main building blocks – actions on product design, on empowering consumers and on more sustainable production processes.

What measures do you foresee on design?

The Commission will launch a sustainable product legislative initiative. This initiative will have at its core a proposal to widen the Ecodesign Directive beyond energy-related products. The approach is to make the Ecodesign framework applicable to the broadest possible range of products and make it deliver on circularity.

As part of this legislative initiative, and, where appropriate, through other instruments, the Commission will consider establishing sustainability principles. The new rules will in particular address the need to improve product durability, reusability, upgradability and reparability, addressing the presence of hazardous chemicals in products and increasing the recycled content in products. We will also aim at restricting single-use and countering premature obsolescence. Introducing a ban on the destruction of unsold durable goods will also be part of the measures.

The Commission will launch a European Circular Dataspace to mobilise the potential of digitalisation of product information, introducing for example digital product passports.

What actions are foreseen for consumers and public buyers?

The Commission will work towards strengthening the reparability of products. The aim is to embed a "right to repair" in the EU consumer and product policies by 2021.

The Plan foresees also actions to give consumers more reliable information about products at the point of sale, including on their lifespan and other environmental performance. The Commission will propose that companies substantiate their environmental claims by using Environmental Footprint methodologies. Stricter rules will be proposed to reduce greenwashing and practices such as planned obsolescence.

New measures will increase the uptake of green public procurement, such as introducing minimum mandatory green criteria or targets for public procurement.

How will the transition to a circular economy benefit our economy and contribute to reach the target of climate-neutrality by 2050?

Between 1970 and 2017, the global extraction and processing of materials, such as biomass, fossil fuels, metals and minerals tripled – and it continues to grow, causing greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity loss and water stress.

The circular economy model where value and resources are maintained in the economy for as long as possible and waste generation is minimised, reduces pressures on natural resources.

The circular economy can make a decisive contribution to the decarbonisation of our economy. In the past few years only, several studies have shown the substantial potential of circularity as a tool for climate mitigation.

The Commission will step up the synergies between achieving circularity and climate neutrality. All actions in the Action Plan will contribute to reducing both EU's carbon and material footprint. In parallel, the Commission will work with Member State to promote circularity in future revisions of the National Energy and Climate Plans (NECP) and in other climate policies.

What does the Plan propose for:

- electronics and ICT

The Action Plan proposes setting up a 'Circular Electronics Initiative' to promote longer product lifetimes through reusability and reparability as well as upgradeability of components and software to avoid premature obsolescence.

The sector will be a priority area for implementing the 'right to repair'. The Commission is aiming to adopt new regulatory measures for mobile phones, tablets and laptops under the Ecodesign Directive, as well as new regulatory measures on chargers for mobile phones and similar devices. An EU-wide take back scheme to return or sell back old mobile phones, tablets and chargers will also be considered.

- textiles

The Action Plan announces a comprehensive policy framework that will aim to strengthen industrial competitiveness and innovation, boosting the EU market for sustainable and circular textiles, including the market for textile reuse, and driving new business models.

Textiles are the fourth highest-pressure category for the use of primary raw materials and water, and fifth for greenhouse gas emissions. This future strategy will boost the market for sustainable and circular textiles, including the market for textile reuse. It will support new consumption patterns and business models. The Commission will also provide guidance on separate collection of textile waste, which Member States have to ensure by 2025.

The Commission will work with the industry and market actors to identify bottlenecks in circularity for textiles and stimulate market innovation.

- plastics

The Action Plan builds on the 2018 Plastics strategy, and focuses on increasing recycled plastic content. Mandatory requirements on recycled content will be suggested in areas such as packaging, construction materials and vehicles.

The Action Plan addresses also challenges related to microplastics and sourcing and use of bio-based plastics bio-based and biodegradable plastics. On microplastics, the Commission will restrict the intentional adding of microplastics. It will also work on their unintentional release, further developing and harmonising measurement methods, pursuing labelling, certification and regulatory measures, and consider measures to increase the capture of microplastics in wastewater.

- construction and buildings

The building sector consumes about 50% of all extracted material and is responsible for more than 35% of the Union's total waste generation.

The Commission will adopt a new comprehensive Strategy for a Sustainable Built Environment to promote circularity principles throughout the whole lifecycle of buildings. The Commission will propose to revise the Construction Product Regulation, which may include recycled content requirements for certain construction products.

- packaging

The amount of materials used for packaging is continuously growing and in 2017 packaging waste in Europe reached 173 kg per inhabitant – the highest level ever.

The Commission will propose measures to ensure that the increase in the generation of packaging waste is reversed as a matter of priority, including by setting targets and other waste prevention measures.

The Commission's aim is to make all packaging placed on the EU market reusable or recyclable in an

economically viable way by 2030. The Commission will propose to reinforce the mandatory essential requirements for all packaging placed on the EU market.

- batteries and vehicles

The Commission will propose a new regulatory framework for batteries. It will include measures to improve the collection and recycling rates of all batteries and ensure the recovery of valuable materials, sustainability requirements for batteries, the level of recycled content in new batteries, and the provision of information to consumers.

The Commission will propose the revision of the rules on end-of-life vehicles in order to improve recycling efficiency, as well as rules to address the sustainable treatment of waste oils

- food

An estimated 20% of the total food produced is lost or wasted in the EU. The Commission will propose a target on food waste reduction as part of the EU Farm-to-Fork Strategy. That Strategy will address the entire food value chain to ensure the sustainability of the sector – strengthening efforts to tackle climate change, protect the environment and preserve biodiversity.

The Commission will launch analytical work to determine the scope of a legislative initiative on reuse to replace single-use food packaging, tableware and cutlery by reusable products in food services.

What measures are foreseen on waste?

Preventing waste from being created in the first place is key. Once waste has been created, it needs to be transformed into high-quality resources.

The Commission will put forward waste reduction targets for more complex streams, and enhance the implementation of the recently adopted requirements for Extended Producer Responsibility schemes, amongst other actions.

The Commission will continue modernising EU waste laws. Rules on waste shipments facilitating recycling or re-use within the EU will be reviewed. This will also aim to restrict exports of waste that cause negative environmental and health impacts in third countries by focusing on countries of destination, problematic waste streams and operations.

The Commission will also consider how to help citizens to sort their waste through an EU-wide harmonised model for separate collection of waste and labelling.

How does the Plan support innovation and investments?

Many EU funds will be mobilised to support the transition to a circular economy – from the EU Cohesion funds, the European Regional Development Fund and the LIFE programme to spending under the social, research and innovation programmes.

The Action Plan also includes actions to mobilise private financing in support of the circular economy through EU financial instruments such as InvestEU.

How will the circular economy be promoted at international level?

The Action Plan proposes the launch of a Global Circular Economy Alliance to explore the definition of a 'Safe Operating Space', kick-starting a discussion on a possible international agreement on the management of natural resources. Moreover, the Commission will lead efforts at the international level to reach a global agreement on plastics, and promote the uptake of the EU's circular economy approach on plastics.

The EU will continue to advocate for the circular economy in its free-trade agreements, its bilateral, regional and multilateral policy dialogues and its international and multilateral environmental agreements – for example via Circular Economy Missions to partner countries. The Commission will step up cooperation with other regions, such as Africa.

How will the transition towards a circular economy be monitored?

In 2021, the Commission will update the existing monitoring framework with indicators related to the current action plan and reflecting the interlinkages between circularity, climate neutrality and the zero pollution ambition. Indicators on resource use, including our consumption and material footprints will also be further developed. The Commission will also reinforce the monitoring of circular economy national plans and other national circular economy measures, including under the efforts to refocus the European Semester process towards integrating a stronger sustainability dimension.

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