



**European Committee
of the Regions**



8 September 2020

16th meeting of the Joint EC-CoR

Technical Platform for Cooperation on the Environment

"How can local and regional authorities use the circular economy as an enabler of a sustainable recovery?"

Report

Welcome speeches

- **Juan Espadas Cejas, Chair of the ENVE commission of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR)**, introduced by stating that circular economy will be more important than ever now in the time of **economic recovery**. In this, cities and regions have a crucial role. Citizens have shown with the crisis how quickly they can adapt to drastic changes. Cities and regions can see Europe through the crisis, by finding new ways of generating jobs, social innovations and awareness raising to transition to the circular economy and the climate objective of 2030 and 2050. Multilevel governance and peer-to-peer learning are essential to ensure a swift transition to the circular economy.
- **Kestutis Sadauskas, Director for Circular Economy and Green Growth, DG Environment, European Commission**, introduced by framing the role of circular economy in the context of the Covid-19 outbreak, the European Green Deal and climate neutrality objectives, as well as describing shortly the content of the **new CEAP**. Local and regional authorities have an important role in initiating and scaling up circular solutions in several areas such as waste collection, green public procurements and circular buildings. The CoR was invited to engage in the ECESP, together with the EC and the EESC, joining forces with the activities of the Technical Platform.

The circular economy as an enabler for a sustainable recovery: local and regional authorities paving the way to the circular economy

- **Pierre Condamine, Zero Waste Europe (ZWE)**, put forward that the **local circular economy is key in the recovery**, especially for foods, where we need a circular system with closed loops of nutrients and biomaterial, with short supply chains that nurture the local economy and reduces dependencies of global supply chains, which creates resilience. Only 16% of food waste is today properly collected and recycled. The circular economy contributes to the economic recovery; a recent ZWE report showed that packaging-free shops could contribute to 3,5 billion euros in EU total turnover in 2030. Deposit return schemes of reusable (to be washed and reused) items to be more labour intensive was given as an example of a circular economy measure creating new green jobs. The local level has a key role to play, but needs however to be supported by action at national level and European level.
- **Tamara Vidic Perko, Project manager, Public Utility JP Voka Snaga, City of Ljubljana (Slovenia)** Voka Snaga is a public waste management company that has gone **beyond waste to promote waste prevention and reuse**, focusing on changing habits and behaviours of citizens. Measures include inspiring second hand shopping, enabling package free shopping, addressing food waste and re-use

centres. Bio-waste is collected to be used on agriculture land. Rain water collected at facilities' roofs is reused for green areas in the city.

- **María Pilar Gómez López, Director General for Economic Planning and Development**, Regional government of Aragon (Spain), Presentation of the **Aragon Circular Strategy**. The region's circular economy objectives are in line with the EU objectives as well as the climate objectives, and is a true economic strategy. Several principles underlines the Aragon Circular Strategy, such as targeting emissions, waste management, reducing consumption, promoting responsible consumerism at local level. Companies will be incentivized to get involved in the transition via a network and collaborations with municipalities will be encouraged. Specialized training will also be promoted and indicators established.

Empowering local and regional authorities to transition from linear to circular models: what is missing?

- **Håkon Sandven Jentoft, Urban Agenda for the EU - Circular Economy**, Presentation of the results of the Partnerships. The Circular Economy partnership has identified barriers at all levels (local, regional, member states, EU), and has presented 12 actions to solve some of the 50 barriers identified. Three actions focus on **better regulation** (e.g. end-of-waste criteria, change from risk-based waste legislation to value-based legislation taking care of resources, better use of bio-resources, resource management plan rather than waste management plan), two on **better funding** (e.g. Circular City Funding Guide with the EIB) and seven on **better knowledge** (e.g. resource mapping in cities, sharing economy guidance, portal for cities' CE strategies). The partnership strongly supports the new SPPI.
- **Tjisse Stelpstra, Rapporteur of the European Committee of the Regions on the New Circular Economy Action Plan**, opened by concluding that the **Covid-19 crisis** has shown even more that the existing linear economy is unsustainable. It has shown how dependent we are on resources; we need to strengthen security and supply, of scarce materials specifically. The investments of the recovery plan need to be steered to long-term economic, social and environmental progress, improving the circularity of the system. Mr. Stelpstra continued to highlight parts of the **CoR opinion of the new CEAP**, such as targets needed, and a total resource use reduction target as part of those, which can also help to prioritise actions. He called for circular public procurement and total cost of ownership, a mind-shift to "there is no waste", the obligation of businesses to prevent waste and to use recycled materials. Extended producer responsibility (EPR), design for circularity and radical change of consumption habits are key, as education and skills for the circular economy. There is hope that the new EC Circular Cities and Regions Initiative will provide concrete help at local and regional level to ensure a swift transition.
- **Andrea Accorigi, DG Research & Innovation, European Commission**, Presentation of R&I activities in the field of Urban circular bio-economy and outlook on future R&I activities for LRAs. The **Circular Cities and Regions Initiative** will focus on the territorial dimension of the circular economy, to support circular economy demos, projects and initiatives at local level. This initiative will demonstrate how the local level can contribute to EU and international circular economy objectives, including for sustainable development and climate change. Specific instruments will be implemented in the next month. This is a born from the **local bio-economy initiative**, valorising bio-sources from bio-waste and wastewater sludge to produce bio-based fertilisers and bio-based plastics.

Discussion

During the discussion with the participants, the following points were raised:

- **Circular buildings:** cities have to be centres for demo projects on **building more circular**, buildings being reused and refurbished instead of demolished, new buildings being used more efficiently.
- **Investing in research:** there is a need to invest more in research so industries will start recycling and not only produce waste. More data of quantities of waste is needed as well for cities to become autonomous.
- **Implementation of the waste legislation:** regions will be needing **help to implement** the waste

legislation adopted years ago. Eastern regions in Europe highly affected by Asian import bans. EC shipments have to be addressed. **Waste prevention targets** will have to be binding, prevention is important.

- **Circularity and resilience:** cities and companies with **circular strategies were more resilient to the Covid-19 crisis**: a survey in Flanders showed that 98% of organisations experienced shortages during the crisis, but this could be reduced to 34% for "circular" companies.
- **Integrating the circular economy and waste management:** the circular economy should not be treated as a separate issue, but should rather be integrated to waste management strategies. For instance, the heat from a wastewater treatment plant in Helsinki was connected to the district heating system.
- **Health care sector:** the circular economy should also apply to the **health care sector**, and 85% of health care waste is indeed common waste and not special hospital waste.

Conclusions

- **Juan Espadas Cejas, Chair of the ENVE commission of the CoR**, concluded the meeting stating that LRAs can find opportunities for economic development, implementing the new way of resource management and moving away from waste management. Both looking at how businesses can extend the life of products and the role of consumers to give impetus to industry changing the way they produce. Mr. Espadas Cejas summarized all elements of the presentations and finalized by inviting participants to the Green City Accord event 22 October during the EURegionsWeek event https://europa.eu/regions-and-cities/programme/sessions/1035_en, and urging all to continue working for not only reaching the objective of sustainability, but also of economic recovery.

Background and objectives

The European Commission presented, on 11 March 2020, its New Circular Economy Action Plan (NCEAP), one of the key initiatives under the European Green Deal. As half of total greenhouse gas emissions come from resource extraction and processing, achieving the climate-neutrality target by 2050 requires indeed to transition to a fully circular economy¹.

Since the publication of the NCEAP, COVID-19 has strongly affected our economies. On the one hand, the crisis has shown that in a very limited period, our societies can adapt to new circumstances in unexpected ways. On the other hand, however, it has shown that drastic and unprepared changes come with a high economic and social price and worsen the already significant existing social inequalities.

Cities and regions have the opportunity to see this crisis as a wake-up call to transform into more sustainable living environments. In this regard, the circular economy can be seen as a tool to future-proof our societies. Indeed, transitioning to a circular economy can reduce the vulnerability of economic and social systems².

The transition to the circular economy requires multi-level governance and actors: LRAs play a key role in moving towards a circular economy. Many LRAs are pioneers in the field of circularity and they represent a reservoir of best practices. However, many still face different kind of barriers that prevent them from taking the next step towards a greener future.

In the light of the above, this meeting aims at:

- Providing a forum for policy makers and stakeholders to exchange ideas on how local and regional authorities (LRAs) can benefit from the transition to the circular economy in the post-crisis recovery context;
- Enabling the sharing of best practices;
- Contributing to identify the barriers local and regional levels face in transitioning to the circular economy;
- Discussing the tools and initiatives existing at EU level and aiming at offering support to LRAs in the transition to the circular economy as well as identifying the gaps.

Beside this event, with a view to channel the challenges that local and regional authorities are facing while implementing the green transition locally, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) has also launched a working group called "[Green Deal going local](#)". The Green Deal Going Local Working group aims at placing cities and regions at the core of the European Green Deal and ensure that both the EU's sustainable growth strategy and the COVID-19 recovery plan translate into direct funding for cities and regions and tangible projects for every territory. It also aims at communicating their achievements and best practices as to facilitate their replication across the European Union.



	Chair: Juan Espadas Cejas, Chair of the ENVE commission and of the Green Deal Going Local Working group of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR)
	Languages: Participants may speak in & listen to: DA, DE, EN, ES, IT, SK
14.30	Welcome speeches <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Juan Espadas Cejas, Chair of the ENVE commission of the CoR➤ Kestutis Sadauskas, Director for Circular Economy and Green Growth, DG Environment, European Commission

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_20_419

² <https://www.oecd-forum.org/users/396052-oriana-romano/posts/resilient-people-and-places-why-cities-should-embrace-the-circular-economy-to-shape-our-post-covid-19-future>

<p>14.45</p>	<p>The circular economy as an enabler for a sustainable recovery: local and regional authorities paving the way to the circular economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Pierre Condamine, Zero Waste Europe (ZWE) ➤ Tamara Vidic Perko, Project manager, Public Utility JP Voka Snaga, City of Ljubljana (Slovenia) ➤ María Pilar Gómez López, Director General for Economic Planning and Development, Regional government of Aragon (Spain), Presentation of the <i>Aragon Circular Strategy</i> ➤ Discussion
<p>15.30</p>	<p>Empowering local and regional authorities to transition from linear to circular models: what is missing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Håkon Sandven Jentoft, Urban Agenda for the EU - Circular Economy, Presentation of the results of the Partnerships ➤ Tjisse Stelpstra, Rapporteur of the European Committee of the Regions on the New Circular Economy Action Plan ➤ Andrea Accorigi, DG Research & Innovation, European Commission, Presentation of R&I activities in the field of Urban circular bioeconomy and outlook on future R&I activities for LRAs ➤ Discussion
<p>16.15</p>	<p>Conclusions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Juan Espadas Cejas, Chair of the ENVE commission of the CoR

*Participants will attend the meeting **online**, via the web conference platform *Interactio*.