



Event Report

EPPA Sub- regional Workshop on Circular Economy

17 November 2021

Live video conference



This Project is funded by the European Union

NIRAS **umweltbundesamt^U**

The project implemented by the Consortium of NIRAS (lead)
and Umweltbundesamt GmbH

1 The event

The EPPA sub-regional workshop on “Circular Economy” took place on the 17th of November 2021, via live video conference. The workshop was organized in cooperation with TAIEX, and under the EPPA project work programme, namely activity 2.3 “Organisation of regional and national conferences on resource efficiency and circular economy”. It targeted the following EPPA beneficiaries: Albania, Kosovo*, and North Macedonia.

The participants came from the relevant authorities of the EPPA beneficiaries involved in environmental policy. They represented the Ministries with the environment and waste management portfolios, in addition to environment agencies. Details are available in the list of participants. Civil society was represented by NGOs from the beneficiaries, namely: Co-PLAN Institute for Habitat Development (Albania), Advocacy Center (Kosovo), INDEP (Kosovo), and the Macedonian Green Center (North Macedonia). The EU Delegations in Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, and North Macedonia were also present.

The speakers represented the experience of EU Member States, including Belgium, Lithuania, Austria, Bulgaria, and Slovakia, as well as that of the EPPA beneficiaries, namely Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia. Additionally, the workshop mobilized contributions from the European Commission (EC), URGE -circULaR buildinG citiEs, the European Topic Centre on Waste and Materials in a Green Economy/VITO, ICLEI Europe - Local Governments for Sustainability, the Extended Producer Responsibility Alliance (EXPRA) and EPPA experts. Details are available in the agenda; the presentations can be downloaded in both the TAIEX website and in the EPPA project website.

The aim of the Workshop was to share the EU’s policy initiatives and practical measures for the development of a sustainable, low carbon, resource efficient, and competitive economy in the frame of the Green Deal. Advice and guidance as well as practical examples were provided on Circular Economy (CE) in order to support the development of CE in the beneficiary countries. The specific objectives of the workshop were: to explain the CE concept and to present the latest EU initiatives in this area; to present the latest initiatives in the beneficiary countries in the area of CE; to provide examples of CE business models in practice; to present and share experiences and best practices from EU Member States, from two public and the private sectors where the potential for circularity is high: plastic and construction; and to discuss the opportunities and challenges for CE in the beneficiary countries.

2 Proceedings and conclusions

The European Commission opened the event with a presentation of the new Circular Economy Action Plan. The EC recognized that urgent actions are needed to keep material consumption within planetary boundaries and to avoid negative externalities to biodiversity and water resources. The EC defines circular economy as an economy where the value of products, materials and resources is maintained in the economy for as long as possible, and the generation of waste minimized. EC projections indicate that circular economy approaches can have significant cost saving impact for EU’s industry (8% of annual turnover), while having a positive impact in GDP growth. The Action Plan includes 35 actions along the entire life cycle of products, including ensuring sustainable products (durability, reusability, upgradability, and reparability, as well as product as a service business models and digital product passports to enhance recovery and recycling). The Action Plan focuses on key value chains, like batteries and vehicles, electronics and ICT, construction and buildings, textiles, plastics, and packaging, including concrete circularity targets for each.

The EU’s perspective as complemented by an overview of national circular economy approaches around Europe compiled by the European Environment Agency (EEA). The EEA noted that interest in developing raw material strategies is growing across Europe, with policies focusing on construction, food, retail, and consumer goods, among others. However, at the moment the majority of policy targets are geared towards the waste sector, while measures for economy wide resource productivity, raw materials supply and circular economy as a whole are still lagging behind. The main challenges identified by the EEA for a circular economy were institutional and cross-sectoral coordination, business sector willingness, market barriers for recycled resources and consumer behaviour and awareness.



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This European wide perspective was followed by the case study of Slovakia and its initiatives to enable the transition to a CE and to create the conditions for the wider adoption of circular business models by the private sector. Slovakia's main tools are the waste prevention programme and the waste management programme (to 2025) where the main objectives are to prevent waste and increase recycling. Furthermore, Slovakia is preparing a circular economy roadmap, through an interministerial group, focused on food and biowaste; construction; sustainable production and consumption; and economic instruments. The main lessons from the Slovakian experience are to understand CE as a cross-cutting and complex field, to set strategic goals, priority areas and quantitative targets, to implement different types of policy measures (regulatory, economic, social/information measures), to have monitoring and evaluation, to communicate and a raise awareness and to ensure cooperation with all sectors of society. Finally, some examples of circular economy initiatives at local and urban level were also presented to highlight how local governments have a critical role to play in enabling the transition to a CE.

The discussion then moved to the measures being taken to transition towards a circular economy in the Western Balkans, with examples from Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia regarding circular cities, circular business models activation policies, and extended producer responsibility examples. In order to create a policy dialogue, mutual recognition and exchange of experiences, the workshop then focused on the experience of EU Member States with specific sub-sectors of circularity. EXPRA provided an overview of the organization of extended producer responsibility schemes around Europe and the key success factors, that include a clear separation of roles and responsibilities of all relevant actors involved; ownership of the EPR limited to the obliged producers; not-for-profit set-up; measurable waste management targets; information to consumers; cost efficiency and coverage; modular fees to reflect recyclability and monitoring and enforcement.

The participants could learn from Lithuania's example of plastic management, which was centred around an extended producer responsibility scheme for plastic beverage bottles. The deposit refund system started in February 2016, and it is the responsibility of the producers and importers of beverages. The system is administered by a single entity. The deposit fee is 0,10 EUR, which has proved highly effective. The refund system is used by 98 % of the population.

Belgium offered its experience with circularity in the construction sector, where the focus is on refurbishment and reuse. In a circular system, buildings are not designed but redesigned, not built but rebuilt. This must be facilitated by future architectural design and urban planning, which should recognize the importance of location (accessibility), building polyvalence (for easy adaptation to multiple uses), independence (where different rates of change are possible within a single building). Moreover, the reuse of materials should be ensured through the recovery of building components, which should therefore be durable, reversible and compatible (allowing recombination/reconfiguration). Finally, Bulgaria presented its policy measures to encourage the prevention, reuse and recycling of construction and demolition waste, which is based on a hierarchy that prioritizes prevention, reuse, recycling, and backfilling. At the bottom of construction and demolition waste priorities are energy recovery and disposal. In order to implement the hierarchy, Bulgaria set concrete targets for material recovery, per material type, and targets for percentage of use of recycled materials in specific construction works, like buildings, roads, and green areas. Nevertheless, there are challenges. The targets are not achieved, illegal dumping of construction and demolition waste continues, lack of capacity of public administrations, data quality for monitoring, and underdeveloped market for secondary materials.

Workshop outputs

The workshop's main outputs were:

- Strengthened capacity to address the implementation challenges of circular economy policies.
- Exchanged experiences on the latest initiatives and best practices on circular economy in EU Member States and in the EPPA beneficiaries, including in the key sectors of plastic and construction
- Increased regional dialogue on the implementation of circular economy policies.



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Endnotes

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

Annexes

Annex 1: Agenda (provided as a separate document)

Annex 2: List of Participants (provided as a separate document)

Annex 3: Presentations (provided as a separate document)



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