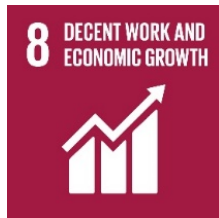


The Growth We Want Is Sustainable:



Harnessing innovation for a circular economy for all

High Level Political Forum | 9 July 2019 | 6:30 to 8:00 pm | Conference room B, UN Conference Building, United Nations, New York HQ

Opening remarks

Ms Olga Algayerova UNECE Executive Secretary

Excellencies, distinguished Delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome all of you to this side event co-organized by UNECE and UNEP to discuss how innovation can help us transition towards a circular economy.

Globally, we have made significant progress in development over the past decades. Pulling billions of people out of poverty has been a major achievement, but this has come with the need to urgently address the related environmental impact.

This is certainly also true for the UNECE region, which covers all of Europe, the countries of the former Soviet Union, Turkey, Israel, Canada and the USA. The comparatively high level of economic and social development in the region remains associated with lifestyles and production and consumption patterns that take a very heavy toll on the environment. This leads to high material footprints, depletion of natural resources and pollution.

We therefore need to move towards an economy that is truly circular, that ensures inclusive economic growth, while sustainably managing the resources we need to drive economic progress.

But how do we get there? I believe that technological change presents us with significant opportunities for more sustainable growth. Despite a number of concerns, a circular economy does not have to be a poorer or slower economy. On the contrary. It is a different system of production and consumption which minimizes waste and optimizes the resources used with minimal pollution. It reshapes production and consumption from a life-cycle and recycling perspective. It regenerates natural capital and creates opportunities for jobs and entrepreneurship along the way.

The issue is rather that we simply do not know exactly how this transition will take place, just as little as we know where the jobs of the future will come from as others become obsolete. We are in the midst of the fourth industrial revolution. It is changing societies and economies in ways we have never imagined before. Therefore, what we need is to enable experimentation – with technologies, policies, governance and business ideas – to find out what works. In other words: innovation.

This can include:

- New technologies, processes, services and business models that re-shape product life cycles from design through production and usage, then on to disposal and re-cycling.
- Sharing platforms in industry, trade, transport, housing and other areas, including “Resources As A Service” and not as mere “commodities”;
- IT- and Artificial Intelligence-enabled, knowledge-based solutions: smartphones, shared platforms, the internet of things, blockchain;

- Advanced manufacturing and processing technologies such as 3D printing.

The benefits of going circular are enormous. However, less than 10% of the global economy is currently circular.

Experimentation is costly, and oftentimes – it fails. That is the nature of innovation. Before we succeed, we must allow ourselves opportunities to test new ideas, which may not always work right away. But even failure along the way is an asset as it guides us on the path ahead.

Events like this bring countries, civil society, and the private sector together and allow us to share experiences, explore what works, what does not and why. And they allow us to develop a clearer understanding of the policies, institutions, enabling factors, and sources of finance that countries need in their efforts.

At UNECE, we facilitate policy dialogue, develop norms, standards, and a number of collaborative tools and activities to support member States in rethinking production and consumption patterns in the region. These efforts cover a wide range of areas, including trade, innovation, environment, transport, energy, forestry and housing. My colleague Maria-Teresa Pisani will go into detail with some specific examples a little later.

To enhance internal coordination of work in achieving the SDGs, UNECE has launched four cross-divisional nexuses. The nexus on “natural resources management” is meant to develop innovative approaches and initiate work to assist UNECE member States in their transition towards a circular economy, through policy dialogues, normative work and capacity building activities.

Today, we have an extremely interesting panel of speakers and discussants which are here to share experiences from different parts of

the ECE region and identify a set of policy recommendations on how to harness innovation for an inclusive circular economy.

Thank you very much indeed and I am looking forward to a productive – and innovative – discussion.