



## 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

### OBJECTIVES

To hold a **multi-stakeholder dialogue** to develop, based on experiences and ideas from different parts of the ECE region, a set of policy recommendations for a wider audience on how to harness innovation to transition towards an inclusive circular economy. This touches on several targets: advancing inclusive growth through technological upgrading and innovation (SDG8.2), entrepreneurship, creativity and the empowerment of MSMEs (SDG8.3), while enhancing resource efficiency in consumption and production patterns (SDG8.4), and promoting trade and economic integration as an engine for a circular economy, particularly in less advanced and transition economies (SDG 8.A)

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. How can **circular economy strategies** promote innovative ways to decouple GDP growth from resource depletion and environmental degradation?
2. How can countries **harness the potential** of frontier technologies and innovation

for an inclusive circular economy?

3. What are the **right policies, partnerships, and sources of finance** to enable and promote innovative high-growth entrepreneurship that create new and green jobs and accelerate this transition?

### MODERATOR AND SPEAKERS

- **Opening: Olga Algayerova**, UN Executive Secretary, UNECE
- **Welcoming Remarks: Bertrand Piccard**, UN Environment Goodwill Ambassador
- **Moderator: Satya S Tripathi**, Head of NY Office, ASG, UN Environment
- **Speakers and Discussants: Georgia | Finland | Slovenia | Sweden | Germany | ACUMEN | World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)**

### PARTICIPANTS

This side-event targets **policy makers** (Ministries of Finance/Economic Development/Trade/Environment/Labour/Agriculture and Forestry), **the private sector, investors, trade unions, civil society** and **academia**

interested in promoting the circular economy transition.

### ORGANIZERS

This side-event is organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (**UNECE**) and UN Environment (**UNEP**).

### BACKGROUND

Current patterns of production and consumption, coupled with swift economic growth among many developing and emerging economies, risk exhausting natural resources, degrading ecosystems, and generating hazardous substances, waste and pollution – undermining long-term sustainability. At the same time, fast technological change raises questions of how countries can ensure decent jobs for all segments of society. These challenges must be tackled in parallel.

By adopting the **2030 Sustainable Development Agenda** countries have committed to work towards economic prosperity while protecting our planet and ensuring that no one is left behind. This requires moving from a linear to a **circular economy**, promoting resource and energy efficiency, reducing food waste along the whole supply chain, building a sustainable infrastructure, and

providing access to basic services, green and decent jobs, for a better quality of life for all.

Decoupling GDP growth from resource consumption is crucial for **achieving SDG 8**. The application of the circular economy principles of reuse, repair, upgrade, remanufacture and recycle can incentivize a shift to clean technologies and encourage closed-loop material cycles and eco-design of products, as well as resilience and low-carbon infrastructure design. The circular economy has also a high potential in creating new and green jobs and across industrial sectors, through local reverse logistics, and within SMEs, through increased innovation and entrepreneurship and a new service-based economy.

Consumers should be encouraged to share products instead of purchasing

them, as the **sharing economy** allows more efficient use of existing resources and assets while also promoting social inclusion. Policy makers will have to decide on how to regulate this newly emerging markets and how to balance concerns about fair competition, consumer safety and labour standards.

Central to this increasingly necessary transition is innovation. This involves not only using technology well, including frontier technologies such as artificial intelligence, but also experimenting with different business, governance, partnership, and cooperation models. The transition towards circular and inclusive economic development patterns can be accelerated using frontier technologies and processes that allow, where possible, to use renewables or better performing

resources. **Innovation** will have a key role, as the circular economy transition requires. The private sector will play a central role in finding out what works – in design, production, delivery models and life cycle management.

Moving towards a circular economy might involve considerable transition costs, and requires the **right mix** of policies, regulations, standards, and fiscal measures to mobilize the necessary private, public and blended investment, and to make sure that any harm created by economic activities is internalized and reflected in their cost.

To enable this process of discovery, policy makers, entrepreneurs, investors, and civil society need to engage in **continuous, multi-level dialogue** to understand the opportunities, create appropriate incentives and remove bottlenecks.

## LINKAGES WITH OTHER SDGs

In addition to the central targets for this event, solutions for inclusive and circular economic growth also contribute to several **other SDGs** and related targets, including:



**Goal 5: by promoting the empowerment of women and girls at all levels**



**Goal 9: by promoting innovation for inclusive and sustainable industrialisation**



**Goal 12: by facilitating the emergence of more sustainable consumption and production patterns**



**Goal 13: by facilitating public-private partnerships to sustain climate action**



**Goal 15: by helping to mobilize resources for sustainable management of natural resources and the preservation of terrestrial ecosystems**



**Goal 17: by harnessing the potential of digital transformation to help less advanced economies better integrate in the multilateral trading system**

## CONTACTS

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