



UNECE TEAM OF SPECIALISTS ON INNOVATION AND COMPETITIVENESS POLICIES

Policy Seminar:

Leveraging Innovation for the Circular Economy

In April 2021, at the sixty-ninth Commission session dedicated to the topic of “Circular Economy and the sustainable use of natural resources”, UNECE member States flagged the importance they attach to the circular economy transition in the UNECE region, in connection with the 2030 Agenda and as part of the efforts to Build-Back-Better post COVID-19.

The UNECE Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies (ToS-ICP) already adopted good practices and policy recommendations for innovation for sustainable consumption and production in 2017 ([ECE/CECI/2018/3](#))¹ and developed good practices on the platform economy and innovation-enhancing procurement for sustainable development in 2020;² at its session this year, the ToS-ICP will take stock of progress in the region and recommend further action to go circular.

Currently, less than 10 per cent of global economic activity is circular. Progress will require a deep re-thinking of production and consumption patterns in all sectors, in line with the Sustainable Development Goal 12 on “Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns”. The circular economy offers a profitable opportunity to move away from resource-intensive processes, maximising the use of existing assets and creating new revenue streams. It makes production and consumption processes more sustainable and competitive.

The circular economy may be broadly construed as a system where the value of products, materials and resources is maintained in the economy for as long as possible. Increasingly, what is considered waste in the traditional linear economy is turned into an asset or resource in the circular economy. It is restorative and regenerative by design, enhancing and preserving natural capital, optimising resource yields and minimising system risks by managing stocks and renewable flows.³ In the circular economy, the ultimate goal is ensuring that economic growth can take place using finite resources in a sustainable fashion.

Innovation has a key role to play in the circular economy transition. There are numerous examples of new technologies, processes, services and business models that are re-shaping product life cycles from design through production and usage on to disposal and recycling. Similarly, innovative forms of sustainable consumption, such as sharing platforms, are emerging in areas such as transport, housing and others.

¹ UNECE Policy paper “Towards the Economy – Innovation Policies for Sustainable Production and Consumption”, ECE/CECI/2018/3.

² UNECE Policy papers on “Building Back Better: using platforms to enable sharing and progress towards the circular economy”, ECE/CECI/2021/4; “Building Back Better: innovation-enhancing procurement for sustainable development”, ECE/CECI/2021/5.

³ Definition by Ellen MacArthur Foundation.



WEBINAR

Monday, 1 November 2021
15:00 – 17:00 CET
On-line and Room Tempus 2,
Palais des Nations,
Geneva

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Fully realizing the potential of innovation in this critical area requires dedicated and sustained policy efforts to create enabling frameworks and incentives for private innovation efforts in circular economy fields and to encourage consumers to rapidly and broadly adopt innovative sustainable consumption patterns. This will also require innovative approaches to regulation to provide incentives and eliminate barriers.

Building on the work and recommendations of ToS-ICP in 2017, the policy seminar provides a platform for international knowledge-sharing, policy-learning and identification of best practices and recommendations on how to leverage innovation and innovation policy for the circular economy transition.

Particular attention will be given to national and sub-national innovation and circular economy strategy and roadmaps, the adoption of support mechanisms for business, particularly to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), innovation-enhancing procurement and the support to the platform and sharing economy.

Delegates will discuss developments and progress in the region in the last four years and recommend further action.

Questions for discussion will be:

- How can UNECE countries further encourage innovative entrepreneurship for a circular economy – what are the support mechanisms in place – policy, regulatory and financial, and what can be improved?
- How can UNECE countries ensure the right regulatory framework for innovation – addressing regulatory barriers for activities and business models (the role of law, standards and norms)?
- What are the possible incentives to enable innovation to deliver new and more sustainable business practices (e.g. taxation, subsidies)? What is the role of innovation-enhancing procurement to promote the transition to the circular economy?
- How should countries ensure policy coherence (i.e. how to align policy support of entrepreneurship, innovation and sustainable development)?
- How could ToS-ICP best contribute to promoting and facilitating a circular economy transition and the sustainable use of natural resources within the framework of its existing mandate?

As an outcome of the seminar, the identified good practices and policy recommendations on leveraging innovation for the circular economy in the UNECE region will be the basis of a policy paper as a contribution to the session of the UNECE Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships in spring 2022. The role of ToS – ICP in supporting member States in the adoption and implementation of circular economy measures will be further explored on 2 November, during the discussion of the programme of work 2021-2022.



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Programme

Monday, 1 November 2021

Opening of the thirteenth session of the UNECE Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies

15:00 – 15:10

Welcome statement

- **Ms Olga Algayerova**, Executive Secretary, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

15:10 – 15:30

Adoption of the agenda and election of officers

Policy seminar on "Leveraging Innovation for the Circular Economy"

Moderator:

- **Ms Elisabeth Tuerk**, Director, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

15:30 – 15:45

Framing presentation

- **Ms Ruba Saleh**, Lecturer, ICHEC Brussels Management School

15:45 – 16:40

Panel discussion

Panellists:

- **Mr Jocelyn Blériot**, Executive Officer, Ellen MacArthur Foundation
- **Mr Iain Gulland**, Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer, Zero Waste Scotland
- **Mr Timo Mäkelä**, Senior Advisor, Sitra - Finnish Innovation Fund, Finland
- **Mr Stefan Maier**, Head of the National Competence Centre on Innovative Procurement, Innovationsfördernde Öffentliche Beschaffung, Austria
- **Mr Henrique Pacini**, Economic Affairs Officer, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

16:40 – 16:50

Q&A

16:50 – 17:00

Conclusions and final remarks



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