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Seminar on measuring circular economy
The stats we need and how to get them
Online meeting, 14 December 2021

Report

On December 14, 2021, the UNECE and Statistics Canada organized an online seminar on measuring circular economy (CE) titled “The stats we need and how to get them”. The event was well attended, with over 150 participants representing government organizations, businesses and individuals from countries around the world. Greg Peterson, Assistant Chief Statistician responsible for the Economic Statistics Field at Statistics Canada, and Olga Algayerova, UNECE Executive Secretary, provided opening remarks which highlighted the importance of collaboration between national statistical offices and international partners in the space of CE and how it is important to establish comparable statistics. Additionally, they remarked the importance of finding ways to reduce the burden that the economy and society place on the environment when it comes to CE; policy departments have an important role. This report will outline the main conclusions of the seminar and some recommendations mentioned by the various speakers.

Main Conclusions

Granularity matters

One of the main themes identified during the seminar was that granularity matters, both for the geographic level of data collected (municipal, city, national, etc.) but also in terms of the level of detail related to the materials being measured. This idea was mentioned by Meaghan Davis of the City of Toronto (who provided a city perspective) and Roy Vissers of Royal DSM (who provided a company perspective). One of the biggest challenges faced by both the suppliers and users of CE data is the level of data available at the local level. Maikel Kishna from PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency mentioned a lack of higher quality use data and data gaps related to other forms of circularity are some challenges the Netherlands faces.

Linkages

Another theme identified was the need to link macro data to micro data to get a more complete picture of circularity to help policy makers make informed decisions. Arturo de la Fuente of Eurostat highlighted the incomplete coverage of CE data from EU members that makes it difficult to use to monitor policy targets. One way the gaps in raw material consumption data are filled is through estimations using the adjusted coefficient approach (EU RME model). Tim Lang of Statistics Canada provided an overview of the work on the physical flow account for plastic material, that was initiated in response to a policy need to better understand plastic flow in Canada. Rob Smith of Midsummer Analytics questioned which method is the best to use when measuring CE; broader physical flow accounts that aggregate materials (approached used by the EU), or develop physical flow accounts of specific, high priority materials (the Canadian approach); and the answer lies in what is most relevant to policy makers. Given policy makers needs are changing, which makes a combination approach the best approach forward.

Beyond GDP

There was also a discussion on the need for policy makers to redefine economic progress, beyond GDP. There is a disconnect between national progress of CE and an increase in GDP as most concepts of CE do not align with a growth in GDP.

Collaboration

Lastly, the theme of collaboration and the importance of collaboration among diverse groups of organizations (private, public and international) to advance CE was highlighted. Ricardo Valencia of DANE Colombia remarked the work of CE in Colombia was started with a review of international indicators related to CE followed by a review of data available in Colombia. Therese El Gemayel from UNEP highlighted all the great material the organization makes available to help countries develop their CE statistics. Lotte Holvast from PACE mentioned the role of PACE, which is to bring leaders working on circular economy together to increase aggregated knowledge and reduce duplication.

Key Recommendations

Some key recommendations mentioned during the seminar included a comment by Kees Baldé from the United Nations University, who mentioned there is an opportunity to use novel technology to report and meet some informational needs. For example, there is an opportunity to use block chain to track the source of materials as well as provide security for the information. There is also an opportunity to use material passports for dangerous and valuable goods, such as batteries.

Roel Delahaye of Statistics Netherlands also recommended using the SEEA as the statistical method to measure CE because it is standardized and it combines physical and economic data. While supply use tables and macro-economic indicators are a good starting point, governments and policy makers are interested in specific materials and their impact on the economy.

Rob Smith of Midsummer Analytics endorsed the idea changing what we are measuring - for example including data related to the repair industry in business statistics surveys to promote the importance of CE.

The recordings of the seminar are available [here](#).

Meeting documents can be downloaded from [this UNECE webpage](#).