



EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH

Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context Ninth Session Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment Fifth session

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Item 6 of the provisional agenda High-level event on the contribution of the Convention and/or the Protocol to energy transition, circular economy, and green financing

WHO Statement on circular economy

Dear Chair, Your excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon,

Thank you for the opportunity to deliver this statement on behalf of WHO.

The world is at a crossroads. The extensive use of natural resources threatens to exceed the carrying capacity of the Earth. For decades, economies have relied on the linear model to “take, make, and dispose”; slowly a circular economy is beginning to emerge, which looks instead to “renew, remake, and share”. The concept of a circular economy (CE) offers an avenue to sustainable growth, good health and decent jobs, while reducing human pressure on the environment and natural resources.

Further, the change from a linear economy to a circular one is expected to significantly support the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 12 and SDG 3. Therefore, it is of critical importance that this High-Level Meeting is focusing on circular economy, in addition to green financing and energy transition. In fact, these three topics are highly inter-related.

The transition to a circular economy provides a major opportunity to yield substantial environmental and health benefits, such as direct benefits to health care systems and indirect benefits from reducing negative environmental impacts. However, there are also risks of adverse and unintended health effects, for example, in processes involving hazardous materials; circular economy strategies and particularly national, regional and local implementation plans need to identify and address these risks.

Hence, a move towards such a circular economy requires tools such as strategic environmental assessment at the higher policy and strategic level together with the more project oriented environmental impact assessment. And both need a full integration of assessing impacts on human health.

Circular economy also requires a fundamental rethinking of recycling and waste management practice and ways in which these practices can affect health and well-being, concentrating on safety, hazard prevention, and responsible product disposal. By promoting sustainable consumption and reducing exposure to harmful chemicals in products, we can create a healthier, environmental friendlier and more sustainable circular economy.

However, transformation to more sustainable waste management with low health risks entails substantial economic costs, such as costs related to remediation of historic waste deposit sites, investment in purchasing and maintaining modern technologies for waste burning or promoting switching to other occupations to avoid lost livelihoods among others. Economic assessment methods have evolved and include selected topics in the social dimension of sustainability, including equity. This trend in economics assessment substantially improved the ability to evaluate health and well-being in the context of the circular economy and waste management in the short and long run. This, in turn, supports the argument for green financing.

WHO has published this year two reports on circular economy, waste management and health. One looking at case studies where the health dimension was integrated into environmental impact assessment, and one on different approaches to assessing health impacts and their economic consequences in the decision-making for a “zero-pollution future” based on the principles of a circular economy and sustainable waste management.

We hope that these documents as well as the document entitled “Assessing health impacts in strategic environmental assessment”, which will be made publicly available, will be an additional resource to support unfolding the health implications of managing waste in the world of circular economy.

Thank you for your attention.

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