

MEETING THE
SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS REQUIRES
STRONG CIRCULAR
ECONOMY POLICIES



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EUROPEAN SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS FEDERATION

Adoption of circular practices is necessary to achieve the SDGs

ECOPRENEUR.EU, the European Sustainable Business Federation, welcomes the high priority given to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the EU.¹ A joint statement from the Commission's Multi-Stakeholder Platform on SDGs in 2018 demonstrated broad support for an ambitious EU approach across civil society, business and think tanks, including our sister organisation CSR Europe.² Tracking the progress towards the SDGs has finally broadened the international political dialogue about economic development from the narrow focus on the GDP into the social and environmental domain.

In 2019, various stakeholders including the European Parliament urged the European Commission to develop an SDG implementation strategy, including the integration of monitoring and assessment of progress on the SDGs into the European Semester.^{3,4} While the July Council Conclusions showed no progress on these matters,⁵ a recent promising development is the instruction by president-elect Ursula von der Leyen to each Commissioner to ensure the delivery of the SDGs within their policy area, with the European Commission as a whole responsible for their overall implementation.⁶

(for references see page 5)



Building on these high-level commitments, what more is needed to actually meet the Sustainable Development Goals?

First, there is a need to make them more directly actionable and measurable in terms of impact.⁷ As a contribution to this, our German member UnternehmensGrün launched a project on the implementation of SDGs by SMEs.⁸ Likewise, our Dutch member MVO Nederland has launched several actions since 2017 including membership of the Dutch SDG Charter⁹ and a tool, the SDG Relevance tracker, that is now being developed into an SDG Impact tracker.¹⁰

The SDGs need to be made more actionable for businesses

Second, there is a strong link between the SDGs and the circular economy. Circular economy practices can be applied as a 'toolbox' for achieving a sizeable number of SDG targets: not only for SDG 12 – Sustainable production and consumption, but also for SDG 13, Climate Action,¹¹ SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation, SDG 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy, SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 15 – Life on Land, and indirectly, many others.^{12,13} For the EU, the circular economy can generate € 1.8 trillion per year and 2 million net jobs by 2030,¹⁴ avoid hundreds of millions of tonnes of waste per year and 296 million tons CO₂ per year by 2050,¹⁵ reduce our dependency on the import of resources, while helping us globally to meet future water demands,¹⁶ increase transparency throughout value chains, and bring 18 million net new jobs worldwide by 2030.¹⁷

Moreover, the adoption of circular practices will be necessary to achieve the SDGs.^{18,12} Recent research suggest that it is impossible to obtain all SDGs by global accelerated economic growth or by a stronger focus on achieving them, and that tougher interventions are needed that address the problems head-on.¹⁸ Only the transition to a circular economy can create such a systems change.



Ecopreneur.eu recommends strong measures using financial incentives, procurement, innovation, regulation, trade policies and voluntary actions

Tougher interventions are needed to address the problems head-on

Measures to accelerate and mainstream the circular economy therefore deserve a central place in the EU SDG agenda. Ecopreneur.eu has published clear proposals for introducing circular economy policies at the EU level, the national level, for plastics, and recently also for fashion, as the first example of how to make a sector circular.^{19,20} The measures proposed are financial incentives (extended producer responsibility, low VAT and a tax shift from labour to resources), procurement, innovation, regulation, trade policies and voluntary actions. Implementing these measures during the next policy cycle requires rapid political action by all EU and member states institutions. As we already concluded in our recent paper on climate and the circular economy,¹¹ it's about time to get all hands on deck!

ABOUT ECOPRENEUR.EU

Ecopreneur.eu sets a course toward sustainable economic policies on the European level to support the economic and societal transformation across Europe and beyond. Ecopreneur.eu aims at opening solidified structures and brings sustainable matters to European policy makers.



ECOPRENEUR.EU is a non-profit non-governmental organisation that now holds six associations from different countries of the European Union. Together they represent over 3000 green businesses, mostly SMEs.

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