



Webinar Summary

Advancing a just transition towards circular economy

On 18 June 2025, the European Environment Agency hosted a webinar addressing the social dimensions of transitioning to circular economy. The event brought together experts from the EEA, the Joint Research Centre (JRC), the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL), and the European Topic Centre for Circular Economy and Resource use (Wuppertal Institute) to share insights on justice, socioeconomic impacts, and policy approaches. The webinar attracted around 150 participants from across Europe.

Opening Remarks

Daniel Montalvo, Head of Unit - Circular economy, finance and indicators unit, at the EEA, opened the webinar by emphasizing the importance of addressing social aspects alongside environmental goals in circular economy transitions. He highlighted the necessity of ensuring fairness, inclusion, and citizen engagement within Europe and globally.

Following him, Martina Bisello, sustainability transitions expert at the EEA, framed the discussion within the broader [EEA work on justice in sustainability transitions](#). Martina introduced three key justice dimensions—distributive, procedural, and recognition—and stressed the importance of integrating them into circular economy policies. She also pointed to ongoing EEA research into employment potential and measurement of circular jobs.

Sanna Due, Circular Economy expert at the EEA, concluded the opening session by underscoring that a successful circular economy must be not only green and efficient but also just and inclusive. She stressed the need for early anticipation of social impacts, broad stakeholder participation, and avoiding negative global spillovers.

Presentation 1: A Just Transition to a Circular Economy

Presented by Burcu Gözet, Wuppertal Institute

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Burcu presented the newly published EEA/ETC report [A Just Transition to Circular Economy](#), which investigates social implications of circular economy measures through case studies of batteries, plastics, and textiles value chains. The report integrates justice principles—distributive, procedural, and recognition justice—within a conceptual framework emphasizing justice aspects such as intersectionality and temporality across the entire value chains to prevent deepening inequalities.

Key findings include:

- › Batteries: Extraction harms low- and middle-income countries through environmental degradation, labor abuses, and displacement of indigenous peoples.

- › Plastics: Global Waste processing involves hazardous conditions in the Global South, with informal workers playing a vital, yet undervalued role.
- › Textiles: Production and waste disproportionately burden low-and middle-income regions; women, migrants, and local communities face poor conditions and limited influence.

The report reviews policy instruments—such as regulation, taxation, extended producer responsibility (EPR), and reporting standards—that can support a just transition to circular economy. It emphasizes that achieving justice outcomes depends on inclusive stakeholder engagement and deliberate policy design. Burcu concluded by calling for more research, better data, and monitoring tools to track progress toward a just circular economy.

Q&A Highlights from Presentation 1

- The report adopts a global conceptual approach rather than focusing on specific countries.
 - The social and economic role of second-hand textiles, especially in African countries, was emphasized.
 - Informal workers' contributions and exclusion from decision-making were discussed.
 - The analysis focuses on current linear battery extraction impacts, with future circular approaches acknowledged as important but outside the present scope.
 - Participants highlighted the importance of anticipating winners and losers in circular business models and designing inclusive, multilateral policies.
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Presentation 2: Towards a More Comprehensive Assessment of Socioeconomic Impacts of Circular Economy Policy

Presented by Gillian Foster, Joint Research Centre (JRC), European Commission

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Gillian Foster shared JRC's recent research to enhance understanding and assessment of socioeconomic impacts of circular economy policies. The study reviewed 33 EU policy impact assessments and a global literature sample, developing a typology of 12 socioeconomic impact dimensions—including employment, health, justice, and consumer behaviour—and proposed nine recommendations to improve future assessments.

Key insights:

- › Employment, health and well-being, and social justice are the most frequently addressed impacts.
- › Some important dimensions, like food safety, housing access, and property rights, are underrepresented in EU assessments.

- › SME impacts, regional disparities, and external (non-EU) effects require better documentation.
- › Recommendations include improved transparency, expanded use of qualitative and quantitative models, alignment with EU social goals, and long-term monitoring.

Gillian highlighted that this work complements ongoing just transition efforts and invited stakeholders to utilize the typology and collaborate further.

Presentation 3: Exploring Justice Dimensions in Circular Economy Policy – The Case of the Netherlands

Presented by Astrid Mangnus, Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL)

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Astrid Mangnus presented a national perspective from the Netherlands, focusing on justice integration in circular economy policy. She outlined the Dutch national circular economy programme aiming for full circularity by 2050, noting strong environmental and economic goals but limited social equity considerations, which tend to be framed internationally.

Her ongoing research analyses justice implications across three Dutch policy instruments:

- › Deposit schemes for cans and bottles (recycling)
- › Bio-based housing construction (redesign)
- › The right to repair (repair) — presented as a detailed case study

Using justice principles—recognition, procedural, and distributional justice—mapped along the policy development process, Astrid highlighted the participatory design of the right to repair directive. While promising normalization of repair and job creation, concerns remain over its limited product scope and accessibility for vulnerable groups.

Key reflections included:

- › Justice requires an integrated, systemic approach within circular economy policy.
- › Policy design is inherently political and demands transparency on values and trade-offs.
- › Justice serves both as a guiding principle and a corrective tool in policymaking.

The project aims to produce a practical guidebook for policymakers to embed justice in circular economy strategies.

Q&A Highlights from Presentation 3 and Closing Discussion

- Concerns were raised about potential job losses in manufacturing due to longer product lifespans and how labour shifts to repair sectors might be managed. Labour

authorities in the Netherlands anticipate and support this shift, though data gaps remain.

- The need for proactive (versus reactive) justice integration in policy was discussed, with early signs of forward-looking approaches emerging.
- Research priorities include developing data and indicators addressing job quantity and quality, health, and access to training.
- The importance of second-hand markets for vulnerable populations and risks related to outsourcing repair jobs outside the EU were noted.
- Broader issues of sufficiency, labour time reduction, and inclusive participation, especially for lower-income groups, were emphasized.

Closing Remarks

Daniel Montalvo thanked all participants for their engagement and reaffirmed the EEA's commitment to advancing the understanding of just transitions within circular economy policies. The event highlighted the rich, interdisciplinary dialogue necessary to design socially equitable circular economy transitions in Europe and beyond.