

Concept Note
for a resolution at UNEA-6 on
Stepping up efforts for enhancing the circular economy transition
domestically, regionally and globally

Proposal by the European Union and its Member States

1. Introduction

In 2019, the International Resource Panel (IRP) pointed out that one third of health impacts, about half of the climate change impacts (not including climate impacts related to land use), and more than 90 per cent of global biodiversity and water stress impacts are due to the extraction / cultivation and processing of material resources (biomass; metals; non-metallic minerals; fossil fuels)¹. These findings are expected to be confirmed in the Global Resources Outlook 2024 that the IRP will present at UNEA-6.

The way in which materials are sourced and produced is thus key from an environmental viewpoint. By moving from linear to circular production and consumption patterns, underpinned by circular business models and circular product design, material resources stay for longer in the economic cycle, fewer virgin resources are needed, and resources, including materials, are used more efficiently. A circular economy (CE) thus leads to energy savings, reduced pressure on ecosystems and fewer polluting emissions, thereby contributing to addressing the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, and achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the Global Framework on Chemicals, the BRS Conventions² and other relevant multilateral environmental agreements.

Circular economy has also other benefits than the environmental ones outlined above. The transition to a circular economy can address inequalities, institutional instability and economic challenges caused by the linear economy. Circular economy and business models provide employment and new green job opportunities as well as improve resource efficiency. Circular economy is a way to accelerate and leapfrog the slow growth to pull countries out of poverty.

The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) has in the past directly tackled the issue of sustainable consumption and production (SCP) in [UNEA Resolution 4/1](#) and how the circular economy could contribute to it ([UNEA resolution 5/11](#)). Other UNEA resolutions, for example [UNEA Resolution 4/19](#) on mineral resource governance, [UNEA Resolution 5/12](#) on environmental aspects of minerals and metals management and [UNEA Resolution 5/14](#) to end plastic pollution are also relevant in this context. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) made reference to the UNEA SCP/CE resolutions in [UNGA Resolution 77/162](#). None of these resolutions have however included aspects related to a circular and sustainable bioeconomy, that is the use of renewable biological resources from land and sea to produce food, materials and energy in a circular and sustainable manner.

The state of progress on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 12 on sustainable consumption and production is limited, with no progress, and even regression, on one third of the targets and

¹ IRP (2019), Global Resources Outlook 2019, p. 68; IRP (2019), Global Resources Outlook 2019. Summary for Policymakers, pp. 15-17.

² The Basel Convention on the control of transboundary movements of hazardous wastes and their disposal; the Rotterdam Convention on the prior informed consent procedure for certain hazardous chemicals and pesticides in international trade; and the Stockholm Convention on persistent organic pollutants.

sluggish progress on another third³. This can be explained by a number of factors, including the all-encompassing nature of SCP and CE, which are about making the whole economy circular and sustainable, thus requiring a whole-of-government approach and joined-up thinking and action across ministries and stakeholders, including civil society.

2. Objective

Against the background of the focus of the sixth session of the Assembly, which is dedicated to ‘Effective, inclusive and sustainable multilateral actions to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution’, the European Union and its Member States propose a resolution on stepping up efforts for enhancing the circular economy transition domestically, regionally and globally, contributing to sustainable economic development, including employment and poverty reduction.

2.1 General aspects

This resolution is meant to speed up the achievement of SDG 12 and related SGDs, in particular SDG target 8.4 on decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation, as well as relevant goals and targets in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, notably ‘significantly reducing overconsumption’ and the consumption footprint, as called for in Target 16 and Goal B. It would furthermore help leverage the considerable, but currently underutilised climate change mitigation potential of the circular economy and resource efficiency, as pointed out by the latest IPCC synthesis report⁴. The resolution would aim to do that through **a number of elements linked to the follow up of previous resolutions 4/1 and 5/11**, such as a) providing momentum to the development and implementation of national action plans or strategies on circular economy, including by asking UNEP’s Executive Director (ED) to facilitate the organisation of best-practice workshops at regional level; b) continue working, in cooperation with the private sector in public private partnerships and multistakeholder coalitions⁵, to enhance the design of toxic free products, taking into account life-cycle assessments, to favour product lifetime extension and value retention processes, including repair and re-use, and easier recycling, as well as prioritising the use of renewable resources according the principle of a circular and sustainable bioeconomy including the cascading use of biomass; c) exchanging on measures, standards and digital tools for sharing relevant product information along supply and value chains including information for consumers, including by asking the ED to facilitate such exchanges by stimulating the participation of relevant UN bodies and agencies, international standardisation organisations and relevant stakeholders; and d) supporting the development of comparable metrics, monitoring and reporting protocols and related environmental accounting principles for supporting increased resource and energy efficiency and circularity of supply and value chains, as well as supporting increased disclosure, to reduce the burden associated with different and divergent reporting frameworks and in support of Target 15, point a) of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

2.2 Specific aspects

The resolution would also address a number of more specific issues.

While resource efficiency and waste prevention are fundamental, **environmentally sound waste management** is still not a reality everywhere across the world. Aspects that could be potentially covered by the resolution include waste prevention starting already at the design-phase of products, services and business models, extended producer responsibility (EPR),

³ The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023, p. 8.

⁴ <https://www.ipcc.ch/assessment-report/ar6/>. See also <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-working-group-3/>.

⁵ E.g. GACERE, ACEA and LAC Coalition.

increasing the quantity and quality of refurbishing and recycling, capacity building for improved waste collection and treatment in developing countries, and welcoming the work done in the Basel Convention on some specific waste streams, for example plastics and electronics, as well as end-of-life vehicles.

Concerning **used vehicles**, the resolution would call for the introduction, strengthening and harmonization of regulations and standards in countries importing and exporting used light and heavy-duty vehicles to ensure their roadworthiness and to reduce their negative environmental and health-related impacts, including in relation to fuels. It is important to prevent unintended negative impacts of changes in trade flows and build on and introduce the polluter pays principle and measures promoting environmentally sound management, including the material recycling, of the traded used vehicles at their end-of-life stage. It is particularly important to encourage the exporting countries to introduce legislation that promotes the safe and sound export of used vehicles. The resolution would ask the ED to continue promoting the implementation of measures to improve roadworthiness and reduce environmental impacts, , building on and strengthening the successful outcomes of [UNEP Used Vehicles and Clean Fuels Programme](#).

One area where urgent action is needed are **textiles** as their impact on the environment continues to grow. As textile production and consumption are increasing globally, textile waste is growing enormously. The resolution would identify priority areas of action to increase sustainability, in particular addressing the entire life-cycle, which must include product design, new business models and the role of consumers, and enhancing traceability and transparency, including by exploiting the potential of digital product passports when it comes to trade in used textiles. The resolution would ask the ED to build on [UNEP Textile Roadmap](#) to further engaging stakeholders to reach a circular global textile value chain.

Given its growing importance across the globe and its potential benefits, achievements at international level, including by the Food and Agriculture Organization⁶ (FAO), as well its close link to the sustainable consumption and production of biological resources, the resolution should address the **circular and sustainable bioeconomy** to minimise negative impacts on people, including Indigenous Peoples, and rural communities, as well as on soil, land use, air, water resources, biodiversity and ecosystems. The resolution would address the contribution of a circular and sustainable bioeconomy to the Paris Agreement and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, as well as to recognising economic opportunities along the whole bio-based value chains. A circular and sustainable bioeconomy and its food and non-food bio-based sectors and measures respect the cascading principle of biomass use and go hand in hand with halting deforestation and forest degradation, in line with SDG target 15.2 and the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use.

International cooperation is required to achieve the targets set in SDG 12. developing countries have a lot of potential, innovation and knowledge when it comes to circular economy, given their traditional knowledge on reusing, repurposing and recycling products and local materials. Therefore, the resolution would ask the ED to facilitate sharing of best practice among Member States to support a global transition to a circular economy.

Given the importance of **science-based advice**, the resolution would ask the ED to ensure that UNEP, in particular the International Resource Panel, continues to regularly report to UNEA on current trends, impacts and emerging issues related to the use and management of natural

⁶ [Aspirational principles and criteria for a sustainable bioeconomy](#).

resources, including overconsumption, sufficiency levels and related governance aspects.

Finally, the resolution would note the current **lack of SCP and CE action at the global level** and would thus commend the [2022-2030 Global Strategy of the Board of the 10YFP](#) (10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns) and its Global Dialogue, and encourage Member States to implement such Strategy. The resolution would also invite UNGA to consider mandating a UN SCP Conference to bring all relevant stakeholders around the same table and kickstart a regular conversation on how to accelerate progress on SCP and CE and how to achieve SDG12.