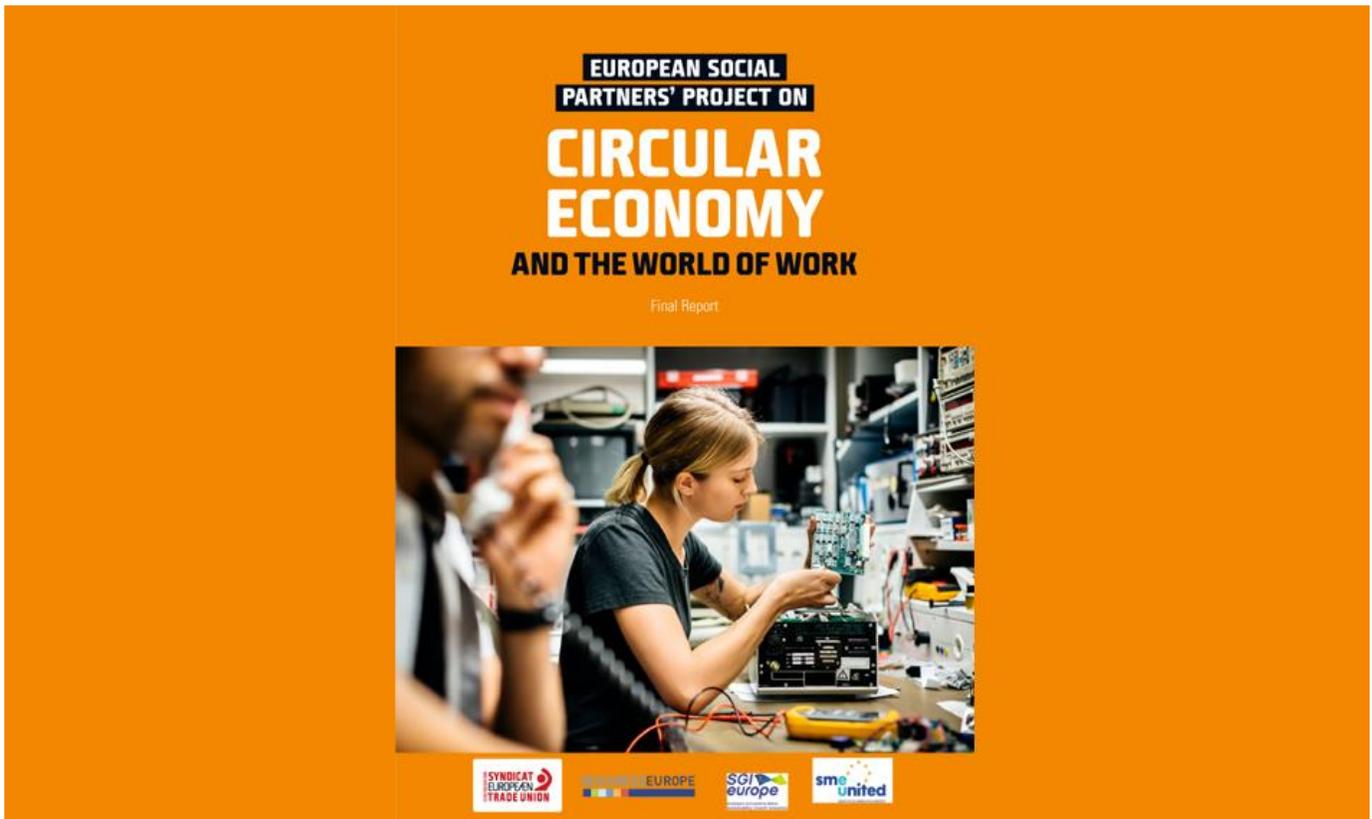


## Social partners discuss circular economy



(18 October 2021) The circular economy is a key part of the European Green deal. It can have a disruptive impact on workers in sectors of the economy. To explore this the European cross-sectoral social partners studied these consequences as part of their work programme. The results were presented in a webinar and showed the positive impact on employment in waste management. These confirmed the findings of earlier EPSU studies and positions. The recommendations of the project address employers and public authorities.

The Circular Economy for the European Commission implies to maintain the value of products, materials and resources in the economy for as long as possible, and have the generation of waste minimised. This is in line with the waste hierarchy- prevent, reduce, reuse, recycle (recovering the materials) and if all that is not possible incineration (to recover the heat). EPSU supports this. The concept of cradle to cradle goes a step further. It sees waste as the raw material. All used materials should after their lives in one product become useful in another product and only go back to nature as nutrients. It is more fundamentally focused on the manufacture of products with the goal of lifecycle development. There should not be harm to the environment or to people. The circular economy therefore has a strong social fairness dimension for workers and our communities. There is a role for public companies for innovation and leading the transformation. It addresses inequalities and demands we will be respecting human and trade unions rights. The EPSU General Secretary underlined in his contribution that this social dimension is lacking in the way the European Commission addresses the circular economy. Esther Goodwin Brown of the Circular Jobs Initiative of the Circle Economy project [stressed how important it is to involve the social partners.](#)

The European cross-sectoral social partners presented the results of a joint project that looked at employment, skills, the competitive position of the sector, health and safety and forms and organisation of work. It includes a case study of the public company Abfallwirtschaftsbetrieb München (AWM Munich) and how it plays a role in the circular economy. During the seminar the positive experience of the Italian public water company Gruppo Cap (Milan) was presented. Other speakers included a representative of Euratex, our trade union colleagues of IndustriAll (the study looks at manufacturing, textiles, automotive sector) and the EPSU General Secretary. He underlined the importance of the public services such as reliable public administrations, public and municipal enterprise, public procurement and conditionalities and the supportive role of public infrastructure and public services.

EPSU affiliates organise workers in the water as well as waste sector across Europe. Our members work in public companies (mostly municipal), for non-profit organisations (think of cooperatives that do recycling and repair) and the private waste and water sector. This goes from small companies to large multinationals. In some European countries there is also an informal sector. It is estimated that up to one million people in Europe are occupied in the informal recycling and re-use economy. A key concern is that we need to ensure quality jobs and decent pay and conditions, high health and safety standards, fight against social dumping and develop social dialogue. These concerns are stressed in a series of reports of EPSU on [Safe Jobs in the Circular Economy](#) and on [Circular Economy in the waste management](#).

Employment in the waste management sector is increasing. We need to ensure quality jobs and decent pay and conditions and fight against social dumping. In several countries companies and employers do not abide by collective agreements. There is a failure to properly consider risk assessments and the health and safety of both formal and informal waste workers. Workers are often taken for granted. The pandemic has stressed how essential this work is. EU policies do not sufficiently recognize this. Furthermore, Europe's leading position in the circular economy has been dependent upon the exportation of waste management to developing countries with weaker labour and environmental standards.

The webinar took place 14 October 2021.

- [The report and recommendations for the social partners on the circular economy](#)
- [For the recommendations](#)
- [For further background and studies of the employers and unions on the circular economy](#)

## **For background**

[Basic Points of the EPSU Waste Policy](#)

[Health and safety in the waste industry \(special edition of Health and Safety Magazine ETUI with EPSU\)](#)

[For more on EPSU's work in the waste sector](#)

[Companies in the cooperative sector are often seen as part of the social economy.  
For work of EPSU on the social economy](#)

The European Commission will propose a right to repair. The European Parliament recently demanded this to be an [ambitious right](#)

A definition of the circular economy includes:

- The design and manufacture of products for longer lifetime, which includes designing and manufacturing products and the accompanying maintenance / repair infrastructure for easier and more efficient maintenance, repair, upgrade, re-use, re-manufacture and recycling;
- The maintenance, repair, upgrade, re-use and re-manufacture of products, which is made easier and more efficient when they have been designed and manufactured for that purpose;
- The recycling of materials, which is made easier, safer and with higher purity and quality when:
  - The products have been designed to facilitate the dis-assembly of parts and the separation of materials at end of life;
  - Hazardous chemicals have been removed from the product or are clearly isolated and designated;
- The use of recycled materials in new products, which is facilitated when the quality and quantity of the recycled material is sufficient;
- The use of sustainably sourced renewable materials in products;
- Asset sharing (e.g. car sharing) that increases the usage intensity of products, and is made more sustainable if products are designed to last long;
- Regenerative practices in agriculture and forestry.

## **Presentations**

[Esther Goodwin Lead of the Circular Jobs Initiative @Circle Economy](#)

[The Gruppo CAP Case Study](#)

[Trinomics Dr L. Zibell Presentation](#)

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