

CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Moving From Linear to Circular Cities

Brief

Some trends are clear. We will be a more urbanized society over time and we will consume more resources. Yet the environmental cost of creating these resources will soon be too much for the planet to bear. In this scenario, [circular economy](#) offers an alternative to our take-make-dispose society by redeploying and reusing resources as well as turning waste flows into inputs for further production.

[Cities represent a key enabling environment](#) to drive the circular economy agenda forward to generate prosperity and economic resilience. Some are already taking opportunities to improve efficiency and environmental impact by embedding circular economy principles in urban infrastructure and services, from mobility to energy to healthcare.

However, this transition is a complex journey that involves reform at a system level, product level and consumer level. It will not happen overnight. All in all, it requires collaboration and coordination between local governments, businesses, technologies and resources. In this sense, the political context is key to identifying and initiating circular change in areas where there is strong political will and economic interest.

Still, there are [several barriers which must be overcome](#): Legislative, technological and logistical issues pose challenges for circular change. In fact, most regulatory frameworks are poorly defined and focus on 'waste management' rather than 'materials management'. In addition, accurate data and information systems are needed for tracking waste flows and identifying raw materials. Eventually, the linear economy inertia has a major bearing on the process. The 'take-make-dispose' model is so embedded in the global economy and society that steering away from the norm may be difficult as it requires a combined effort from all the stakeholders and a correct alignment of incentives throughout the supply chain.

Yet, in a climate emergency scenario, enhancing circularity of the economy can help us pursue a low-carbon growth path to build thriving, liveable, and resilient cities. It's a [golden opportunity](#) we can't let go to waste.

Outcomes

Participants will:

- Discover the challenges and opportunities to move from linear to circular models in cities.
- Discuss the fiscal support for businesses transitioning to circular economy models.
- Debate on the importance of research and innovation in the transition towards circular economy.
- Explore the opportunity to move directly to circular economy in developing countries.

Guiding questions

- What does the implementation of circular economy principles in cities look like?
- What can urban policymakers do to accelerate the transition to a circular economy?
- What are the solutions to provide incentives to both consumers and producers to put circular economy principles into action?
- How can we set up a large overhaul of industrial systems, to fully enable a closed resource loop and ensure full resource productivity?
- What are the barriers to be overcome?
- What are international organizations doing on the topic of circular economy and cities?

Keywords

Circular economy; low-carbon growth; waste reduction; resilience; product-service system; lifecycle products; looping of components and materials