

11 AVENUES. 11 PROPOSALS

CIRCULAR ECONOMY

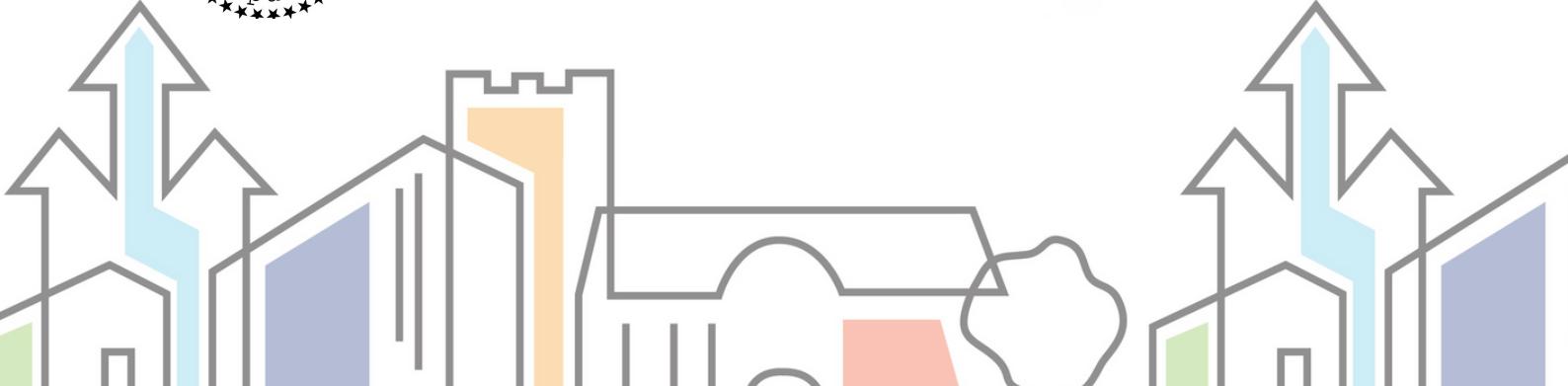
With the adoption of the EU Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-2027 accompanied by a unique Recovery Plan conditions have been created to develop a more just, resilient and sustainable Europe. A robust and new cohesion policy is one of the cornerstones of this ambitious endeavour.

The 'Meet the Citizen 2.0' project of the European House covers 5 countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CZ, HU, HR, RO and SK); all of them are massive beneficiaries of the EU Cohesion Fund. Our 11 working papers indicate possible avenues how to use effectively these financial instruments in remote, less developed areas of these countries highlighting not only the importance of EU assistance in daily life of citizens but simultaneously contributing to reducing the still significant gap between the citizens and the EU institutions.

Each paper of ours offers not only a brief analyses of an important aspect of cohesion policy in Central and Eastern Europe but proposes also practical solutions for the involvement of citizens, their organisations and other stakeholders in practising partnership for making cohesion policy a success.



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Discussion Paper 6

Transition to a circular economy creates for producers and recyclers a pressing need for new skills, competences and approaches. Citizens are end-users (consumers) of the circular economy and they should also be prepared for the changes. For this aim, more dialogue with other key stakeholders, information and educational campaigns are needed. Civil organisations must also play a key role in developing and expanding their professional and educational skills in the circular economy.

What does circular economy mean? A circular economy is a system in which producers, recyclers and distributors work together to ensure that all resources, materials and products with which they deal, will be kept in circulation and in the highest possible quality for the longest possible time. The benefits of recycling are impressive. The production of one ton of recycled plastic saves 5 barrels of oil. Adopting the principles of the circular economy can generate annual savings with a value of 1.8 billion EUR and an income of 600 billion EUR from 2030 onwards. Circular economy has the potential to create 2 million new jobs across Europe. The EU has already adopted an Action Plan to support the circular economy in each step of the value chain including production, re-use, recycling and consumption.

Achieving a circular economy is still at a primary stage in Central Europe. Successful entry of the region into the circular economy requires a long-term and continuous policy change that must take place with a greater involvement of stakeholders at all levels – from Member States, regions and cities to businesses and citizens. All Central European countries, except Germany, are below the European goal calling for a 65% recycling rate for 2035. This shows that much more effort has to be made. Central Europe is moving closer to the European targets for waste re-use and recycling but several of its regions are still lagging behind. The new Interreg programme for 2021-2027 identified concrete fields connecting to the transition to a more circular economy. In this line, civil society organisations in the region can join transnational projects and thus bring the needs and expectations of consumers into some of the fields as follows:

- raising consumer awareness to change consumption patterns;
- raising awareness and actively involving a broad range of stakeholders to create new ways of production, value creation, and consumption patterns;
- promoting prevention of food waste;
- promoting innovative waste management initiatives at urban level.



There are many best practices in the region that give an overview of concrete actions on circular economy and thus help civil actors to develop their own contributions to this issue.

- The European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform was a joint initiative by the European Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee. Between 2019 and 2020 the platform organized workshops and seminars among others in Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Romania. The aim was to prepare key stakeholders in production, consumption, innovation and investments for entry into the circular economy;
- A Hungarian clothing retail store in central Budapest introduced a business model focusing on circularity and the re-use of second-hand clothes. The company set up a membership loyalty mechanism designed to build a strong relationship with customers by encouraging them to choose sustainable options;
- A company in Czech Republic dealing with production of mineral waters launched its project to switch to recycling the maximum number of plastic bottles. As a result, the company introduced a new PET bottle produced from 50% recycled plastic;
- A company in Dambovita county, Romania started to collect waste food from supermarkets, hotels and restaurants on a 1000 m² composting platform. The collected waste food was used by an organic farm and green house of a social enterprise. The end-products for distribution were brought into a short supply chain to subscribers, mainly in Bucharest;
- In Nitra region, Slovakia a project was launched to address the problem of waste management in the surrounding municipalities. Plastics, paper and glass from households were brought to several Slovak and foreign processors. The recyclable part of the waste was crushed and modified by composting in a factory and then the end-products were returned back to the municipalities for different purposes such as treatment of public areas. Citizens as final users were also involved in this project;
- A “Circular Hotspot” was set up in Poland and run as a public-private platform that brought together national and local government bodies with businesses, entrepreneurs, researchers and also representatives of civil society.



The aim of the platform was to jointly develop and apply the concept of circular economy in Poland. With the support of the Dutch, Swedish, German, French and Danish embassies, concrete activities were carried out such as strategy-making, education, training, partnerships with business actors, exchange of knowledge, study visits and the organization of the national educational campaign "Polish Circular Week".

Follow-up, proposals

To develop a variety of civil actions to strengthen the social dimension of circular economy in Central Europe. These actions can be prepared at seminars and workshops at regional, national and transboundary level with a focus on:

- drafting strategies and roadmaps for sectors and addressing specific problems such as consumer protection;
- transparent mechanism of recycling and re-distribution;

- information campaigns raising public awareness of circular economy for citizens as end-users;
- linking education to circular economy by involving civil organisations – fostering innovative civil approaches to knowledge-transfer, development of skills, sectoral partnerships for practical circular solutions in relation to collection and recycling of waste food and electronic equipment (e.g., mobile phones). All these items could be relevant topics of adult education and that of other domains of life-long learning.

Following the good practices in the Central European region, organization of local, regional, national or macro-regional educational campaigns "Central European Circular Week" would be a suitable way to reach out to more citizens who are interested in circular economy issues.

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