

DRAFT PROGRAMME

**Towards a Circular Economy
in the Western Balkans**



Regional Kick-off Event

19 April 2023
Istanbul, Türkiye



#OECDseeurope

Towards a Circular Economy in the Western Balkans

Regional Kick-off Event

- Spotlight theme: Combatting Plastic Pollution -

■ OBJECTIVES

The main purpose of this event is to launch the regional Circular Economy Peer Dialogue under the new project [*“Supporting Green Transition through Circular Economy Roadmaps”*](#) in the Western Balkans, funded by the European Commission under the umbrella action to reinforce competitiveness and sustainability in the Western Balkans and Türkiye. The regional Circular Economy Peer Dialogue will aim to facilitate exchange among government authorities, the private sector and civil society on how to design, implement and monitor progress in their circular economy transition efforts.

During the first part of the meeting, the main features of the project will be presented, followed by a tour-de-table of the circular economy representatives from each of the six Western Balkan economies to present the most recent developments related to circular economy in their respective economies. The kick-off will also represent the first regional peer learning meeting, as its second part will be dedicated to a pertinent circular economy theme: *Combatting Plastic Pollution*, followed by an on-site visit.

The purpose of the on-site visit is to share key learning points from Türkiye’s experience in introducing circular economy solutions. The study visit will allow policy makers from the Western Balkans to learn from Türkiye’s approaches and to discuss whether these approaches could be replicated in their economies. More specifically, some selected facilities in Istanbul will be visited, and their circular economy-related innovative methodologies will be showcased to the participants. Finally, the study visit will be an occasion for policy makers and practitioners from the Western Balkan region to explore opportunities for future collaboration, and to foster peer-to-peer learning.

■ BACKGROUND

Circular economy, a concept based on the principles of designing out waste and pollution, keeping products and materials in use for longer, and regenerating natural systems is still at a nascent stage in the Western Balkans, as shown in the OECD’s flagship publications [*Competitiveness Outlook 2021*](#) and [*SME Policy Index 2022*](#). Over the years, a constant increase in waste generation per capita in the region has been noted, with the recycling rate of municipal waste among the economies being very low, whereas resource intensity as a measure of efficiency of resource use has remained comparatively high. Enterprises in the region are also rarely aware of circular economy opportunities, such as reduced environmental impact, more sustainable use and preservation of natural resources, lower production costs, boosted innovation, increased competitiveness, higher resilience to external shocks through reduced resource dependency or the creation of new markets and jobs.

The COVID-19 pandemic showed that dependency on globalised linear supply chains and cheap virgin raw materials poses high economic risks, leading to production disruptions and revenue losses, rendering the current linear economic model (‘take-make-dispose’) unsustainable. In that context, the

pandemic has created a unique momentum to make the economic recovery more sustainable, with circular economy representing an optimal means to contribute to this endeavour.

A circular economy transition is part of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans and supported through the European Commission's Economic and Investment Plan (EIP) for the Western Balkans. The EIP aims to spur the long-term recovery of the region and foster sustainable and inclusive growth with up to EUR 9 billion of funding for investment flagships in the areas of transport, energy, green and digital transition. These documents underline the need to link economic growth and new business opportunities in the Western Balkans region to more sustainable production and consumption patterns, by encouraging waste prevention, reuse and recycling, decreasing waste production, increasing resource productivity and reducing pollution, to mention a few.

Plastic pollution is one of the great environmental challenges of the 21st century. While plastics have become an integral part of the global economy, being used in almost all economic sectors, the current plastics lifecycle is far from circular. Globally, the annual consumption of plastics, which has doubled in the past two decades and is projected to almost triple by 2060, results in a high production-related carbon footprint, high volumes of waste, persistent pollution and harm to wildlife and ecosystem. Only 9% of plastic waste is ultimately recycled, the rest being incinerated and landfilled, and more than 20% is disposed of in uncontrolled dumpsites, burned in open pits or leaked into the environment. Mismanaged plastic waste is the main source of plastic leakage and significant stocks of plastics have already accumulated in aquatic environments.

Plastic pollution is a particularly important challenge in the Western Balkan economies, where waste management is based on a linear model with waste separation at source being almost non-existent. Moreover, as wastewater treatment in the region is very poor or non-existent, the rivers in the Western Balkan region carry disproportionate loads of litter to the Adriatic and to other seas. Litter from fishing, shipping and coastal tourism further adds to the problem. As much as 90% of the marine litter in the Adriatic Sea is made up of plastics. In addition to aligning policies with the EU single-use plastic legislation, circular solutions (design out waste; reduce, reuse, and recycle plastics) are necessary to reduce plastic pollution in the Western Balkans, as it comes along with critical risks for the region's ecosystem, human health, and economic activities such as tourism and fishing.

■ FORMAT & PARTICIPANTS

The Regional kick-off event aims to bring together policy makers and practitioners from the Western Balkans and OECD member countries working on circular economy transition as well as experts from the European Commission, OECD and other international institutions. The total number of participants is estimated at around 40.

Contacts

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WEDNESDAY, 19 APRIL 2023

08:30 – 18:00

08:30 – 09:00 SIGN-IN TO THE MEETING

*Venue: OECD Istanbul Centre
İstiklal Caddesi No. 142, Beyoğlu*

09:00 – 09:05 WELCOME ADDRESS

- **Ms. Seda Sevgi**, Deputy Head of the OECD Istanbul Centre

09:05 – 09:20 INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

- **Ms. Anita Richter**, Deputy Head, OECD South East Europe
- **Ms. Sandrine Beauchamp**, Policy Officer - Private sector and Green Economy, DG NEAR, European Commission

09:20 – 10:10 PRESENTATION OF THE NEW CIRCULAR ECONOMY PROJECT

- **Ms. Jovana Pavlovic Djukic**, Team Lead – Green Economy and Sustainability, OECD South East Europe
- **Tour-de-table:** Western Balkans Circular Economy Co-ordinators

10:10 – 10:30 COFFEE BREAK

10:30 – 12:15 POLICY DISCUSSION ON COMBATTING PLASTIC POLLUTION AND GOOD PRACTICE EXCHANGE

Moderator: Ms. Anita Richter, Deputy Head, OECD South East Europe

Setting the scene: policy solutions in combatting plastic pollution

- **Mr. Peter Borkey**, Circular Economy Lead, OECD Environment Directorate

Hungary's circular economy transition and policy responses to reducing plastic pollution

- **Mr. László Uhri**, Waste Management Expert, Ministry of Energy of Hungary

Italy's circular economy transition and policy approach to addressing plastic pollution

- **Ms. Rovena Preka**, Expert, National Agency for New Technologies, Energy and Sustainable Economic Development of Italy

The case of Türkiye: circular economy and fight against plastic pollution

Government actions

- **Ms. Sadiye Bilgiç Karabulut**, Head of Waste Treatment Department, Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation and Climate Change of Türkiye

Business sector initiatives

- **Ms. Konca Çalkıvık**, Executive Director, Business Council for Sustainable Development (BCSD) of Türkiye

Discussion

12:30 – 13:45 **LUNCH**

13:45 ***Transfer to the site by bus***

14:30 – 18:00 **ON-SITE VISIT**

Circular Economy champion: Elif packaging solutions

Visit to the production plant of Elif – a company that is a pioneer of sustainable flexible packaging solutions for brands that are part of people's everyday life around the world. Elif is an active member of Türkiye Circular Economy Platform and Business Plastics Initiative.

Participants will be showcased Elif's sustainable products aiming at combatting plastic pollution, its circular economy business model and its contribution to different circular economy initiatives.

18:00 ***Transfer from the site by bus***

19:30 ***Networking Dinner on the Bosphorus – Restaurant Oligark***

21:30 ***Transfer to the Marmara Pera Hotel***

