

Circular economy: the importance of re-using products and materials

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The average European consumes 14 tonnes of raw materials and generates five tonnes of waste a year. These figures look alarming considering our resources are limited, but there might be a solution. Many products and materials can be reused or repaired, thus reducing waste. On Wednesday MEPs debate in plenary a proposal by the European Commission aiming to create a circular economy, where products are designed in order to facilitate reuse.

The traditional economy is based on buying a product and then replacing it when it no longer works, but in the circular economy the life cycle of products is extended. This could be for example due to improved durability, more efficient waste management or a better design that makes it easier to repair, reuse or remanufacture old products. However, it could also involve new business models based on leasing, sharing or selling pre-owned products.

Another example could be to repair a broken household appliance rather than replacing it. However, in a poll on our different Twitter accounts two thirds of respondents said that if their toaster didn't work anymore, they would buy a new one rather than fix it.

In a [resolution](#) adopted on 9 July, MEPs called for a binding target to increase resource efficiency in the EU by 30% by 2030 compared with last year. This would boost the EU's gross domestic product by nearly 1% and create an additional two million jobs, according to estimates by the Commission.

Report author Sirpa Pietikäinen, a Finnish member of the EPP group, said: "This is a paradigm shift, a systemic change that we are facing, as well as a huge, hidden, business opportunity. It can be created only by helping a new business ecosystem to emerge,"

The Commission presents its action plan and new legislative proposal on the circular economy on Wednesday 2 December.

Find out more

- Video of the debate: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/ep-live/en/plenary/video?debate=1449070565376&streamingLanguage=en>
- Steps of the procedure: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?reference=2014/2208\(INI\)&l=en](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?reference=2014/2208(INI)&l=en)
- Briefing on moving towards a circular economy: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_ATA%282015%29564365
- Briefing on the new circular economy package: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2015/572795/EPRS_ATA%282015%29572795_EN.pdf
- European Commission webpage: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/circular-economy/index_en.htm
- Environment committee: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/envi/home.html>
- Sirpa Pietikäinen : <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/40599.html>
- Source of the diagram: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1415352499863&uri=CELEX:52014DC0398R%2801%29>
- Press release on Parliament's input into circular economy package (9 July 2015): <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20150702IPR73644>
- MEPs welcome new circular economy proposals but regret weaker waste targets (2 December 2015): <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20151201IPR05540>