

47th SESSION

Fostering a circular economy at local and regional levels

Recommendation 512 (2024)¹

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (“the Congress”) refers to:

a. the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No.122, “the Charter”), in particular its Articles 3, 4 and 9;

b. the Priorities of the Congress 2021-2026, in particular Priority d: Environmental issues and climate action in cities and regions;

c. Congress Recommendation 510 (2024) “Local and regional responses to natural disasters and climate hazards: from risk preparedness to resilience”;

d. Congress Recommendation 484 (2022) “A fundamental right to the environment: a matter for local and regional authorities. Towards a green reading of the European Charter of Local Self-Government”;

e. the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development of the United Nations, in particular SDG 1 “End poverty in all its forms everywhere”, SDG 3 “Good health and well-being”, SDG 6 “For clean water and sanitation for all”, SDG 11 “Sustainable Cities and Communities”, SDG 12 on “Ensuring Sustainable Consumption and Production patterns”, SDG 13 “Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”, SDG 14 “For life below water” as well as SDG 16 “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”.

2. The Congress underlines that:

a. the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic have exposed significant weaknesses in the global supply chain; coupled with the ongoing consequences of climate change and resulting global warming, these developments underline the urgency of reimagining various aspects of economies and making them more resilient to current political realities and future challenges, notably, climate change;

b. the “take-make-waste” linear model used throughout the 20th century causes significant harm to the environment and social justice and is no longer viable;

c. the circular economy, a restorative model that decouples economic growth from natural resource use, and emphasises longevity, reuse, and recycling, has emerged as an alternative to the linear economy;

¹ Debated and adopted by the Congress on 15 October 2024 (see document CG(2024)47-14, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Linda GILLHAM, United Kingdom (L, ILDG) and Kristoffer TAMSONS, Sweden (R, EPP/CCE).

d. the circular economy has the potential to boost economic efficiency and resilience at local level and to foster equality, enabling redistribution and addressing resource scarcity;

e. a multi-level and multidisciplinary strategic approach is required for making the ambition of a circular economy a reality. Community involvement is crucial for the success of circular initiatives;

f. local and regional authorities are uniquely well-placed to contribute to the development of resilient economies rooted in the particular needs of their communities and foster circular policies.

3. In the light of the above, the Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers to invite the respective national authorities of the member States of the Council of Europe to:

a. adopt and implement national policies and legislation that incentivise the development of circular economy, including subsidies for circular business models, tax breaks for sustainable practices;

b. foster collaboration across different levels of government, the private sector, and the civil society to develop and implement circular economy strategies supporting human rights, democracy and social inclusion; develop platforms for knowledge sharing and joint problem-solving;

c. adopt and promote the use and verification of existing harmonised standards and certifications for circular products and services to ensure quality and facilitate trade in a circular economy, helping consumers make informed choices and driving business towards more sustainable practices; where such standards or certificates are not available nationally, develop and adopt them;

d. invest in the necessary infrastructure to support circular practices, such as recycling centres, anaerobic digestion and composting facilities and systems for the separate collection and prevention and treatment of waste (to ensure waste is managed more effectively and turned into material resources as a priority and energy is recovered and used rather than landfilling residues);

e. support demand for recycled and sustainably produced goods by adopting and implementing green procurement policies and practices;

f. support research in technologies that enable circular economy practices, such as advanced recycling technologies, sustainable materials, and systems for product life extension; promote partnerships between academia, industry, and government to foster innovation;

g. provide platforms and funding for local authorities to pilot innovative circular economy projects, scaling up successful projects and promoting them across regions;

h. implement educational initiatives at all levels to raise awareness about the circular economy; include circular economy concepts in the national curriculum and provide training programmes for professionals transitioning from traditional to circular industries and for the public at large;

i. ensure monitoring and evaluation of circular economy policies, tracking progress in meeting sustainable development goals; use data to refine and update circular policies;

j. support international cooperation and partnerships to promote circular economy practices in Europe and beyond; adopt and contribute to the development of relevant international standards and support the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

4. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to take account of this recommendation and its explanatory memorandum in their activities relating to Council of Europe member States.