



World Circular Economy Forum

IOE-UNEP-ILO side-event concept note

Accelerating Circularity: The Role of Business in Moving from Linear to Circular Economies

7 October 2021

14:00-15:30 CEST

The International Organisation of Employers (IOE), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) are organizing a side-event in the context of the World Circular Economy Forum (13-15 September 2021), on the occasion of the launch of the GEO for Business Brief on Circular Economy and offering the latest insights on the employment and environmental aspects of circular economy from top UN officials as well as showcasing best practices and sharing successful examples from business leaders.

Background/Context

The reduction in economic activity triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic has led to the largest annual drop in energy-related carbon dioxide emissions since the Second World War, according to IEA data, equating to an overall decline of about 6% in 2020. The pandemic hit the global stage and amplified existing issues while raising novel concerns about the interconnected and fragile state of the global economy and the prospects for businesses and national economies to adapt and transform in an efficient and sustainable way. According to the IMF, global GDP contracted by 3.5% in 2020 and many employment and labour market indicators have hit record negative numbers, with the ILO stating this is the worst economic recession in the last 100 years. Based on its analysis, in 2020, 8.8% of global working hours were lost relative to the fourth quarter of 2019, equivalent to **255 million full-time jobs. Hundreds of million enterprises in the hardest-hit sectors worldwide are currently facing high risks of serious disruption.** More than half of these are in wholesale and retail trade as the impact across sectors varies greatly.

Transformative changes to reduce carbon emissions and loss of biodiversity between 2020 and 2050 could have significant positive impacts on the global economy and human health, **saving about US\$54.1 trillion**, according to UNEP's Global Environmental Outlook. Embracing a 'green' recovery post-COVID will certainly create more jobs in the short term and more sustainable growth in the long term. Among the six specific **climate positive steps** recommended by the UN Secretary General and the actions recommended by The Investor Agenda group **job creation** and human relief **appear at the top.**

On the other hand, according to ILO analysis, the creation of over 100 million jobs (in a sustainable energy and circular economy scenario) is conditional on additional training within already existing occupations as well as skilling for new occupations. Less than 40% of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) **include any plans for skills training to support their implementation, and over**

20 percent do not plan any human capital related activities at all. This should set **alarm bells ringing**, for commitments in the energy, agriculture, waste, manufacturing, transport, and tourism sectors set out in NDCs are all subject to the availability of relevant skills in these industries.

Resource productivity is a hugely underexploited source of possible future wealth, competitiveness and business revival. The circular economy can create employment, business opportunities and economic growth while increasing sustainability and resilience of companies and consumers. This event will take a deep dive into the practicalities of circular approaches for the private sector, why it is important for businesses to take this approach, the employment and labour market impacts of a circular shift, and the necessity of accelerating this action in the current global context of environmental and economic crises.

IOE action

IOE represents more than 50 million companies and more than 150 national employers' organisations, coordinates the Business and Industry Major Group at the High-Level Political Forum, among other policy and decision-making processes, and has been working closely with its membership on the 2030 Agenda through several partnership projects. IOE members are heavily involved in their respective national policy- and decision-making frameworks and they act as the bridge between local governments and private sector actors.

IOE and its partners are actively engaging with its network and other stakeholders to influence policymaking and create a sustainable and robust recovery that works for people and the planet; a set of [policy recommendations by IOE](#) provide a clear and concrete path for a sustainable recovery of employment and decent work. [Tackling informality, skills needs and increased support for SMEs](#) appear as crucial objectives in the short and medium term in order to [build back better](#).

UNEP action

Moving from linear to a circular economy and what this means for business

UNEP has launched this year, as part of its annual Global Environment Outlook (GEO) report, a series of specialized [Briefs for Business](#) that analyse the findings of GEO and refocus them specifically for the private sector. The first of the briefs, on transformation in a time of uncertainty, was launched earlier this year, followed by a launch of a brief on transforming food systems, just before the Food Systems Summit. Now the third brief, on the transition to a circular economy and what it means for business, is about to be launched with this event.

ILO action

As the only tripartite U.N. agency the ILO brings together governments, employers and workers of 187 member States to set labour standards, develop policies and devise programmes promoting decent work for all women and men. Through the vision of a just transition which couples climate action with social justice, the ILO is promoting a human centered approach to circular economy through research, policy development, regional, national, and sectoral interventions (e.g. e-waste, shipping, garments and textiles). A circular economy is a key topic of ILO research documents, which include; [World Employment and Social Outlook 2018: Greening with jobs](#) and [Skills for a greener future: a global view](#).

Objectives of the exchange

Present the environmental impact of today's linear economy and the business opportunities for a transformation to a circular economy. These messages will be amplified by examples of successful

private sector circular economy solutions from around the globe and the lessons learned, while creating an insightful and lively discussion around the challenges and opportunities of these transformations and how we can accelerate them through innovation and collaboration. UNEP and the authors of the brief will present the main findings and recommendations of its recent Brief, how circularity responds to some of the current global challenges, while ILO will provide the perspective on labour market impacts and projections.

Tentative agenda

Duration: 1h30

Duration	Agenda point	Speakers
2 min	Welcome	Moderator – Jonny Hughes, CEO of WCMC (TBC)
15min	Setting the scene	Context setting by UNEP, IOE and ILO (global perspective) Joyce Msuya, UNEP Deputy Executive Director (video statement) Alette Van Leur, Department Director, SECTOR, ILO: A human centered approach to circular economy Roberto Suárez Santos, IOE Secretary-General
15 mins	G4B Overview (2 speakers)	UNEP: GEO for Business findings on circular economy Dr Richard Swannell, WRAP International Director and GEO for Business author Dr Lerwen Liu, King Mongkut’s University of Technology Thonburi and GEO for Business Author
5 min	Audience engagement	Either through a poll or a word cloud “What is needed to boost business innovation in circular economy”
40 min	Circular economy in action (4 speakers)	Esther Finidori, VP Environment, Schneider Electric Indorama ventures, TBC Prof. Paul Ekins, Co-Chair of sixth edition of the Global Environmental Outlook (GEO-6) and of GEO-for-Business Sabrina de Gobbi, ILO Technical Specialist, RESEARCH on industrial symbiosis in Colombia and Argentina
10 min	Q&A	Questions from the audience
2 min	Wrap up	Moderator