

European Social Partners' project on Circular Economy

Regional seminar with Spain, Finland, the Netherlands, Slovenia

28 January 2021

Background paper

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1.1 Introduction

The project at hand on Circular Economy is jointly commissioned by the European social partners (European Trade Union Confederation - ETUC, BusinessEurope, SMEUnited and CEEP). The main purpose of the project is to investigate the consequences of the shift to the Circular Economy on the world of work. As such, the project aims at developing a joint understanding of this phenomenon and to anticipate the impacts it may have on the world of labour: on employment, on skills and on working conditions.

Aside from interviews, the findings of which are outlined below, the Social Partners together with consultants from Trinomics B.V, organise a regional seminar to discuss the impacts of the transition to circular economy on labour and working conditions in four EU Member States (Netherlands, Finland, Spain and Slovenia) and to exchange good practices, including of effective collective agreements and public policies.

1.2 A brief presentation of the Circular Economy

The Circular Economy was defined by the European Commission in its Action Plan 2015¹ as

“where the value of products, materials and resources is maintained in the economy for as long as possible, and the generation of waste minimised”.

The transition to this economy is a central component of the EU’s efforts to develop a sustainable, low carbon, resource efficient and competitive economy.

Typically, a transition to a Circular Economy would include the following:

- Durable goods being designed and manufactured for longer lifetimes, and for more intense maintenance and repair, and thus replaced less frequently;
- Durable goods being used more intensely, e.g. via sharing, lending or leasing models, and thus being less numerous to serve the same market;
- Industrial goods including in their composition a higher proportion of recycled materials or of sustainably-sourced renewable materials, and thus less primary, non-renewable raw materials (i.e. coming directly from the mine or the oil well);
- A higher proportion of waste being recycled or prepared for direct re-use.

A transition to a circular economy is not only likely to incur environmental and economic impacts, but also impacts on the **labour market**: overall employment numbers, but also on qualifications of workers, on the location of their jobs, on the organisation of work and on health & safety at work.

1.3 State of knowledge

1.3.1 Literature review

The literature review examined the **impact of circular economy (CE)** on of the following: (national) labour markets, changes in qualifications and skills required, technologies, and working conditions.

Impacts on employment volume

Creation of new jobs and destruction of existing jobs

There is a general consensus that both within countries and in Europe as a whole, the transition to Circular Economy will create jobs. These new jobs are expected because the CE is labour and technologically intensive.² The following sectors will especially benefit from the CE transition in terms of job growth: trade and repair/maintenance activities, the production of electricity by solar photovoltaics, recycling, sectors capitalising on reuse (i.e. mainly repurpose, refurbish and re-process/manufacture), and research and development (R&D).³ Conversely, important job losses are anticipated in the construction sector. To a lesser extent, the extraction and processing of raw materials, the production of durable goods (e.g. electronics, with a knock-on effect on plastics), machinery, cars and accommodation, as well as agriculture and food manufacturing (with a knock-on effect on chemicals) will experience losses.⁴ It should however be noted that the overall figures for job

¹ EC COM (2015) 614 final, Closing the loop - An EU action plan for the Circular Economy

² Circle Economy (2020) <https://www.circle-economy.com/insights/jobs-skills-in-the-circular-economy-state-of-play-and-future-pathways>

³ - ILO (2018) https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_628654/lang-en/index.htm;

- Willegheims, G. and Bachus, K. (2018) <https://vlaanderen-circulair.be/en/summa-ce-centre/publications/employment-impact-of-the-transition-to-a-circular-economy-literature-study>;

- Cambridge Econometrics, Trinomics and ICF (2018) https://circulareconomy.europa.eu/platform/sites/default/files/ec_2018_-_impacts_of_circular_economy_policies_on_the_labour_market.pdf

⁴ Cambridge Econometrics, Trinomics and ICF (2018)

gains and losses remain small, specifically when compared to the impact of other mega-trends (e.g. digitalisation, de-carbonation of energy-intensive industries).

Net change in a number of jobs

The gains are expected to outweigh the losses,⁵ with a net positive effect of CE predicted in Europe (from around 250,000 by 2030 under continuity of current CE developments, to 520,000-700,000 assuming transformational expansion),⁶ although with variations per country. A net positive effect is expected in all EU countries, except for Slovakia and Croatia where a small negative effect is modelled, and with a very small positive effect in Finland and Hungary. Most growth (as a percentage from the base employment) is expected in Austria, Spain, Malta, Bulgaria, the Netherlands and Sweden. This variation reflects the different economic structures and labour intensities of the main CE activities across the EU.⁷

Impacts on qualification and skills

Expected opportunities

The CE transition is said to present opportunities at all skills levels, depending on the activity. The waste management sector relies on low-skilled employment for collecting, handling and processing materials for recycling, while higher-skilled employment will be required for technical sorting systems and logistics.⁸ In reuse and repair, many opportunities will require low- to medium-skills.⁹ A variety of other jobs will be created in servitization, notably in customer support and sales (low skilled), engineering and servicing (medium-skilled), and IT and leadership roles (high-skilled).¹⁰ These new opportunities could affect the job balance in sectors such as electronics, in which a shift may occur from assembler to trades roles.¹¹ In remanufacturing and biorefining, opportunities will mostly arise for skilled and highly educated employees.¹² Other jobs requiring low to medium skills are also expected in biorefinery (e.g. plant and crop development, cultivation and harvesting, transport, distribution and storage of feedstock, plant design, and deployment).¹³ Finally, jobs in the renewable energy sector tend to require a highly educated workforce, with the obtention of a university degree being more important than practical work experience.¹⁴

Future-proof skills

When anticipating the skills needed in a transition to Circular Economy, these anticipations are made for a job market which does not exist yet, thus creating uncertainty. This is leading to the growing

⁵ - Chateau, J. and Mavroeidi, E. (2020) <https://www.oecd.org/environment/the-jobs-potential-of-a-transition-towards-a-resource-efficient-and-circular-economy-28e768df-en.htm>;

- Horbach, J., Rennings, K. and Sommerfeld, K. (2015)

http://conference.iza.org/conference_files/environ_2015/horbach_j11332.pdf;

- Laubinger, F., Lanzi, E. and Chateau, J. (2020)

[http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=ENV/WKP\(2020\)9&docLanguage=En](http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=ENV/WKP(2020)9&docLanguage=En);

- Willeghems, G. and Bachus, K. (2018)

⁶ Morgan, J. and Mitchell, P. (2015)

<https://wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/Employment%20and%20the%20circular%20economy%20summary.pdf>

⁷ Cambridge Econometrics, Trinomics and ICF (2018)

⁸ Willeghems, G. and Bachus, K. (2018)

⁹ - Morgan, J. and Mitchell, P. (2015); Montalvo, C., Peck, D. and Rietveld, E. (2016)

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/579000/IPOL_STU%282016%29579000_EN.pdf;

- Willeghems, G. and Bachus, K. (2018)

¹⁰ Willeghems, G. and Bachus, K. (2018)

¹¹ Cambridge Econometrics, Trinomics and ICF (2018)

¹² Willeghems, G. and Bachus, K. (2018)

¹³ Morgan, J. and Mitchell, P. (2015)

¹⁴ Circle Economy (2018) <https://www.circle-economy.com/insights/circular-jobs-skills-in-the-amsterdam-metropolitan-area>

appreciation of ‘future-proof’ skill-sets tailored to flexibility and adaptability, including creativity, social and people skills, and complex problem solving. These cross-cutting competences are also well-suited to many CE jobs for which workers will need to be adaptable.¹⁵ The transition will also require a fundamental shift in mindsets, to ensure that workers adopt an extended responsibility and a growing recognition of products as services (i.e. holding responsibility for products after their purchase by customers).¹⁶

Training needs

The nature of knowledge and skills needed will vary from an occupation to the other.¹⁷ And the higher the level of skills required in a Circular Economy context, the more difficult the training is likely to be. The take-up of CE should also be seen in the broader context of technological advances and the shift to high-skills jobs in certain sectors (e.g. increasing demand for STEM-related skills).¹⁸ For jobs related to repair and extending the lifetime of products and materials, practical and technical skills acquired through on-the-job training are predominantly needed. In waste management, few specific skills will be needed. For jobs linked to renewable energy, technical knowledge and skills mainly gained through practical experience will be needed (e.g. for installing/maintaining equipment).¹⁹

Impacts on technologies

CE is widely viewed as being technologically-intensive²⁰ and requires the use of some specific (new) technologies (e.g. technology platforms to buy and sell goods and services). However, existing literature provides scant evidence documenting the technological shifts in occupations deriving from the increasing circularity of economies.

Impacts on working conditions

There is also little evidence of the CE transition’s effects on working conditions.²¹

The emergence of Circular Economy as an important component of the EU policy agenda has elicited the publication of reports on the existing working conditions in the waste management sector. Waste management is the most visible and best known part of the Circular Economy concept - but does not represent the whole set of activities that will be affected by this transition (as seen above). The outcomes of our literature review should thus be read by keeping in mind that:

- The reports represent the situation in one segment only of the activities that will be transformed by the transition to a Circular Economy;
- They represent the situation as of the writing of this background note (2020). Further evolutions of the waste management sector (described in the interview reports below § 1.3.2) tend to show that the transition to the Circular Economy would induce a trend towards the automation and industrialisation of the sector, with improved working conditions.

¹⁵ - Cambridge Econometrics, Trinomics and ICF (2018);
- Circle Economy (2018) <https://medium.com/@circleeconomy/arming-the-workforce-for-a-circular-revolution-skills-and-labour-in-a-circular-economy-6da4a15f65cb>

¹⁶ Circle Economy (2020)

¹⁷ Circle Economy (2020)

¹⁸ Cambridge Econometrics, Trinomics and ICF (2018)

¹⁹ Circle Economy (2018) <https://www.circle-economy.com/insights/circular-jobs-skills-in-the-amsterdam-metropolitan-area>

²⁰ Willeghems, G. and Bachus, K. (2018); Circle Economy (2020)

²¹ Wegmann, V. (2017)

<https://www.epsu.org/sites/default/files/article/files/Waste%20Management%20in%20Europe.%20Good%20Jobs%20in%20the%20Circular%20Economy%20for%20web.pdf>

The few existing studies discussing working conditions in the Circular Economy thus focus on waste management and informal employment. Workers in Material Recovery Facilities for municipal solid waste can face ‘hard’ and ‘dirty’ work in a noisy and smelly environment, with very long shifts and few breaks.²² Similarly, in some textile recycling plants, work is physically demanding and is carried out in a smelly and dusty environment. Health effects were observed due to insufficient use of appropriate gear (e.g. allergies and skin irritation).²³

Informal or less-regulated work, prevalent in some core CE sectors such as waste management and construction,²⁴ exacerbate these problems. Poorly regulated work results in short-term contracts, precarious working conditions, and long working hours. Informal recycling is taking place in Eastern and Southern Europe, but also in Northern European Countries (e.g. bottle collectors in Germany and Denmark). Informal workers do not receive a wage and are exposed to greater health and safety risks. In addition, this work is mostly performed by vulnerable people (e.g. elderly, homeless, refugees, migrants or minority groups).²⁵

1.3.2 Stakeholder interviews

Next to the literature review, a number of stakeholder interviews have also been conducted.

Scoping interviews

At the very initial stage of the project, so called **scoping interviews**, in which the consultants deepened their understanding of the subject (next to the literature review) and which further helped to lay foundation for further tasks.

- Stakeholder agree that shift to circular economy will bring about a **big change**, in general. At the same time, stakeholders expect more **qualitative**, rather than quantitative, change.
- Stakeholders expect no major change in relation to employment volume, however **changes in skills** are anticipated. It was suggested that the nature of skills is likely to change, given that workers will likely have to deal with irregular and inhomogeneous secondary raw materials. This will require **adaptability and autonomy of workers**.

Sector-specific interviews

Aside from the scoping interviews, a number of **sector-specific interviews** have been conducted, both at the level of a whole sector and at company level, during which a thorough understanding in several sectors has been collected. Up to this point interviews with representatives of five sectors have been conducted, namely construction, automotive, chemicals, retail and waste management. The main points learned can be summarized as follows:

- An observation made by several interviewees was the potential for the Circular Economy to enhance the **attractiveness** of their sector to young and qualified workers. Contributing to making the economy more sustainable and to save resources is a task that appeals to this population. This is particularly important for the many sectors in industry and services that currently struggle to replace the older generations of workers that are leaving into retirement.

²² Gregson, N. *et al.* (2016) <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0969776414554489>

²³ Wegmann, V. (2017)

²⁴ Circle Economy (2020)

²⁵ Wegmann, V. (2017)

- A discussion point was raised by representatives of workers on the **scope of collective bargaining agreements**. When a company changes the nature of its activities because of the shift to a more circular economy (e.g. from the manufacturing of primary metal to the recycling of that metal, or from construction of buildings on-site to the pre-fabrication of building modules in an off-site factory), then the applicable collective bargaining agreement can be the purpose of debate, and can be detrimental to workers (because the collective agreement applicable in the more “circular” activity is less favourable to workers than that in the more “linear” one). The opinion of the interviewees was that this deserved being **placed on the agenda of social dialogue**, since it is potential hindrance to the uptake of Circular Economy by society as a whole.
- The representative of management in the **construction materials sector** indicated that recycling of their own waste and of waste from demolition sites has become a strategic orientation of the company, with a benefit in customer image. It noticed a difficulty in convincing the employees of the innocuity of the recovered materials. The employee representative did not experience any significant impacts on (most of) their labour conditions, however at the same time feels that employees have not been kept in the ‘loop’ and/or have not been consulted enough regarding the shift to circular economy.
- Workers in the **automotive industry** already, to some extent, **embrace the concept of circular economy**, namely principles of recycling (also for regulatory reasons) as well as prolonging lifespan of vehicles, which are already in place. However, the workers are **concerned by the emerging concept of car sharing** as it could lead to **potential loss of turnover**. With regards to qualification and skills, it is expected that **less mechanical skills** will be needed and there will be a **shift towards IT and soft skills**. In addition, the worker representative expects a need for an ‘intermediate’ organisation between the workers and the industry, to ensure that workers are properly reskilled.
- A new emerging technique is being developed for recycling of plastics in the **chemical industry** by taking mixed plastics, which are hard to sort and recycle conventionally, and to submit these to very intense (pyrolysis) heat to recover base material and thereby use the pyrolysis oil recovered and feed it back into plastic manufacturing. Management expects it to have **very limited impacts** on labour, because it is essentially a change in the raw material being used (from the primary naphtha to the secondary pyrolysis oil). In this change, the existing facilities would be used and, as such the skills, labour conditions or organization of work would not change.
- In the **retail sector no significant changes are expected** by employer representatives, with the exception of potential marginal changes in relation to required skills. In general, the retail sector has been part of the global shift for a number of decades and is quite flexible in adapting to changes. The sector considers itself as a stable one in terms of employment volume and its capacity to solve issues through social dialogue and collective bargaining.
- The sector of **waste management** is moving towards a more sophisticated treatment of waste and, as such, relying upon new technologies (robotisation), which is likely going to make some jobs obsolete. Within the sector they aim to focus on collaborative economy, between workers and technologies. **Increase of skills** will be required in the sector, for example for waste acquisition. **New skills** are also expected to be required, however this needs to be further evaluated. Regardless, there will be a need for **training programmes** for trade unions to improve the management of the transition. Impacts on working conditions depend on the occupation of workers, though there is an ongoing shift from manual to more mechanised work and as such, the ‘traditional’ health and safety problems are decreasing. Nevertheless, it is necessary that if the amount of waste sorting/recycling increases, the working conditions improve.

Interviews with national cross-sectoral social partners

Next to the scoping and sector-specific interviews, interviews with **cross-sectoral national social partners** are being performed. The main points learned as a result from the interviews performed to date are the following:

- In **Denmark** growth in servitisation and recycling of waste is expected. It is anticipated that subsequent services and repairs of products will become more prominent. With regards to waste management, new technologies for sorting are being developed, which could generate new jobs (in development and manufacturing of these technologies). With regards to skills, it is important that workers as well as employers have overall knowledge of Circular Economy and its concepts, and of materials and their use. However, it is not expected that everyday jobs of all workers will change; rather, business models as a whole will change to incorporate concepts of Circular Economy.
- In **Germany**, the shift to Circular Economy is expected to have positive employment effects on companies working with new technologies, while producers of raw materials will face negative effects. It is foreseen that new qualifications and skills will be needed, however it is not yet clear which. Once companies have a clear idea on which skills will be required, it will be possible to provide workers with the necessary trainings. Competitive position of circular companies could be improved if investments are made. There is an importance of collective bargaining; it can ensure there will be no negative effects on the forms of work and has the potential to have a positive effect on sustainability.
- In **Italy**, the shift to Circular Economy is still in early stages, therefore its impacts on the labour market are difficult to estimate. There is a general requirement for reskilling of workers as currently there is a gap between offer and demand. One interviewee observed that in general, in Italy the shift to Circular Economy is perceived as costly rather than beneficial. However, there is evidence that some sectors have benefited from the shift (e.g. textile). In general, Circular Economy is becoming an area of interest of public policy in Italy, which could benefit from being discussed more in social dialogue.
- In the **Netherlands**, employment in circular activities is on the rise, with 'repair' and 'recycling' being the most prominent. Circular Economy will require reskilling and, as such, there is a need for all workers to have access to trainings. Especially in manual jobs, there is a further need for life-long learning, knowledge of materials and access to apprenticeships. Currently, circular sectors in the Netherlands are not competitive. This often results from high prices of recycled materials, which make circular products more expensive.
- In **Slovenia**, Circular Economy has been on the agenda for several decades and, therefore, the national social partner interviewed does not expect that it will create drastic changes to the labour market. Instead, it is seen as an ongoing gradual process.

1.3.3 Conclusion on the current state of knowledge

As a conclusion, the transition to a Circular Economy is likely to deeply transform our productive systems, and thus the nature and the conditions of work.

From what is currently known, the transition to a Circular Economy is not anticipated to change significantly the total number of hours worked, and if at all, it should increase it slightly. However, shifts are likely within companies or sectors (towards more work in the after-sales functions) and between sectors (towards more work in maintenance, repair and services such as leasing and sharing).

Higher skills are likely to be requested, to work on more diverse materials, and with higher quality requirements (e.g. to achieve longer lifetimes). Jobs in the waste management sector, which traditionally experienced difficult working conditions (and still does in some Member States or segments), are likely to be transformed towards higher requirements for the quality of the output, with the support of technology.

1.4 Statistical overview - how far are we in the transition to the Circular Economy?²⁶

Since the Circular Economy Action Plan of 2015, the European Union monitors its transition to a Circular Economy. The Commission mandated [Eurostat](#), the official statistical body of the European Union, to monitor a [set of indicators](#) describing this transition along some of its key aspects. These indicators provide a quantitative indication of how far the economy of the European Union has evolved on its transition towards a Circular Economy.

We hereby present a selected set of these indicators, for the whole European Union, and for the four Member States represented in this workshop, namely Belgium, Czechia, Denmark and Germany.

A general conclusion to be drawn from these statistical indicators is that the transition towards a Circular Economy is still only at its **very initial stages**, even in the most advanced Member States of the EU. This explains why the impacts being observed on the labour market are so far rather limited, and why most analyses collected above (in the literature and in interviews) are prospective, based on foreseeable trends, rather than retrospective and based on historically observed facts.

1.4.1 *Material flow diagrams*

Material flow diagrams illustrate visually where the materials come from, how they are processed, and where they end up. They present a high-level overview of the degree at which the economies of the EU as a whole, and of the four Member States represented at the workshop, are circular: a circular state would be represented by a flow of materials being completely circular, with no input from extraction (on the left hand side of the graph), no accumulation in stocks and no releases of waste in the environment (on the right hand side).

²⁶ All information under this section are available at the Eurostat database at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database?p_p_id=NavTreeportletprod_WAR_NavTreeportletprod_INSTANCE_nPg_eVbPXRmWQ&p_p_lifecycle=0&p_p_state=normal&p_p_mode=view&p_p_col_id=column-2&p_p_col_pos=2&p_p_col_count=3.

Figure 0-1 Material flows in the EU-27 in 2017 in Gt (billion tonnes)

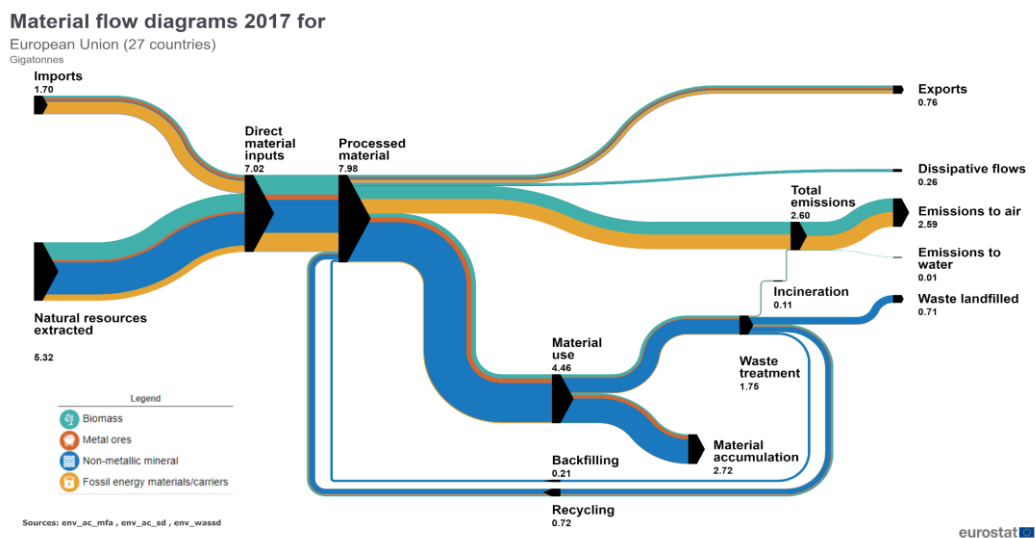


Figure 0-1 illustrates the flows for four broad categories of materials:

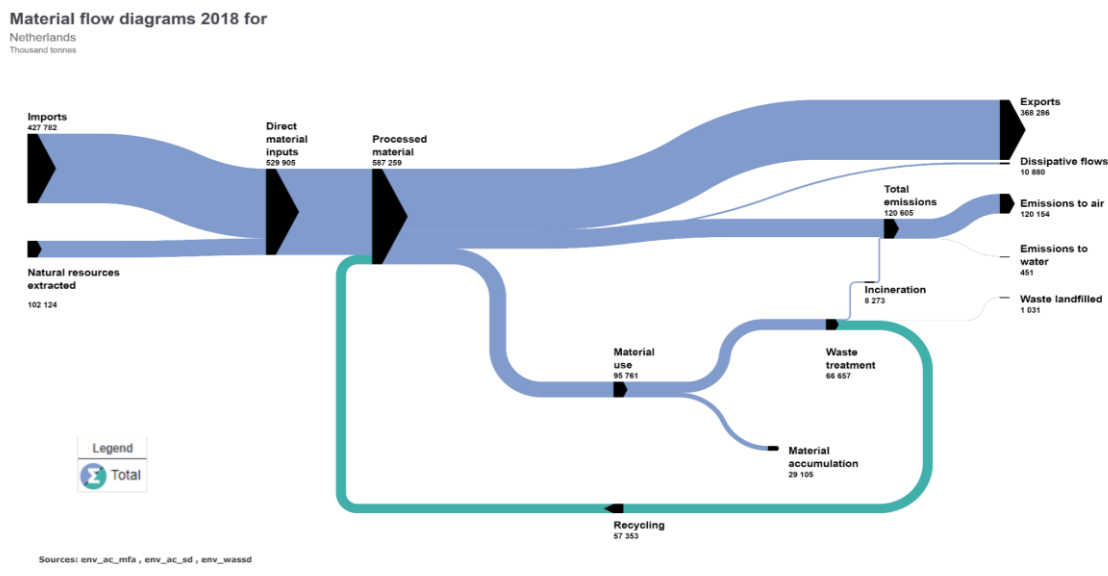
- biomass;
- metal ores;
- non-metallic mineral materials such as cement, gravel, bricks; and
- fossil energy material carriers such as oil, coal and gas.

It also shows how limited the circular part of our economy is (see the size of the arrow for recycling). The largest part of our material consumption goes to “emissions to air” (via the combustion of fossil fuels) and to the “material accumulation” in the form of accumulation of material goods and of new buildings.

At national level, the diagrams by Eurostat only deliver aggregated figures for all four types of materials.

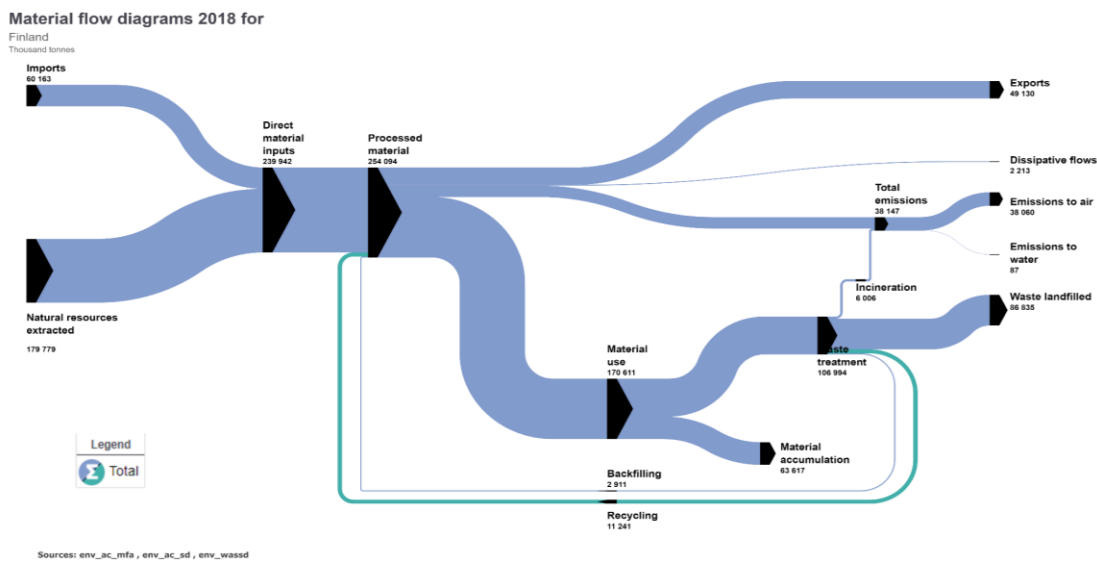
In the **Netherlands** (see Figure 0-2 below), the resource flows are dominated by imports and exports, illustrating how open the country’s economy is. The internal use of resources is very much dominated by the “material use”, in a context where the recycling rate is very good. In contrast to the EU27 as a whole, material accumulation represents a very limited share of the use of materials. This means that the stock of material goods and of buildings / infrastructure is mature and sufficient to deliver its amenities to the population.

Figure 0-2 Material flow diagram for Netherlands in 2018 in kt (thousand tonnes)



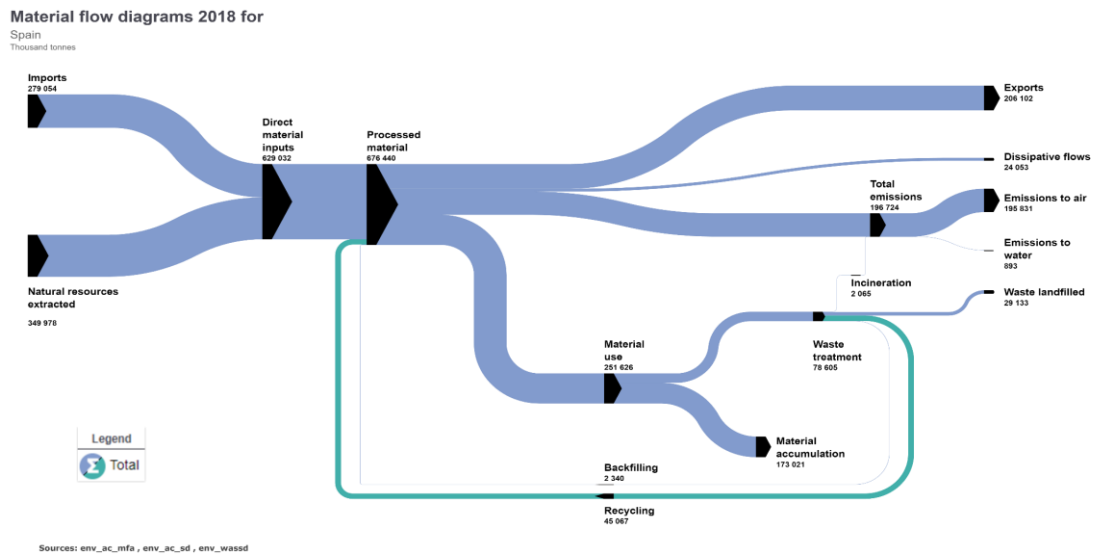
In Finland (see Figure 0-3 below), the resource flows are dominated by the “natural resources extracted”, the large share of which is landfilled. Recycling rate is surprisingly low, considering the high level of development of the country.

Figure 0-3 Material flow diagram for Finland in 2018 in kt (Thousand tonnes)



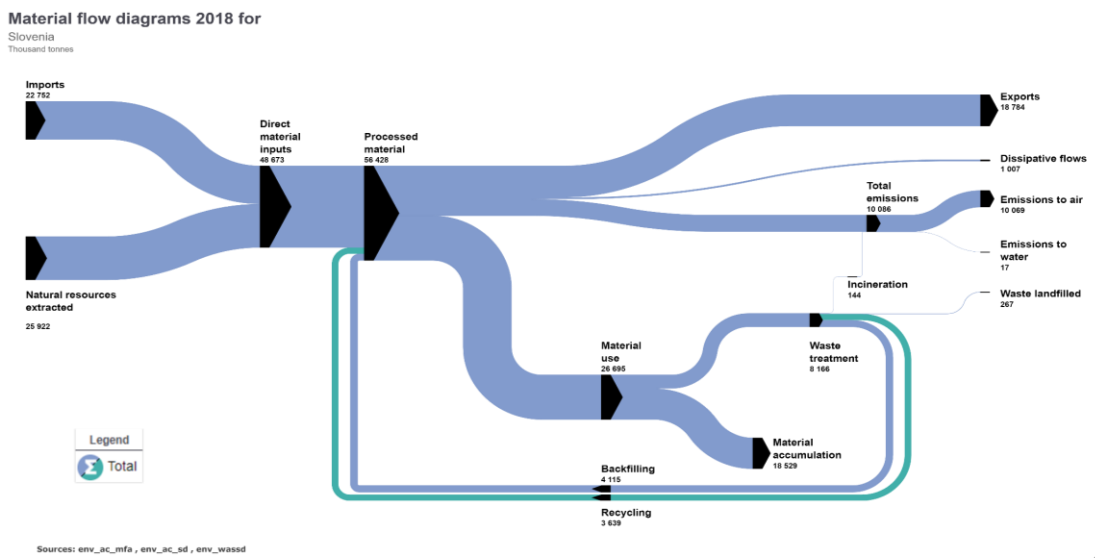
In Spain (see Figure 0-4 below), material accumulation is an important aspect of the resource flow. This illustrates the high activity in the construction sector, even after the end of the real estate boom. The performance in recycling is good.

Figure 0-4 Material flow diagram for Spain in 2017 in kt (thousand tonnes)



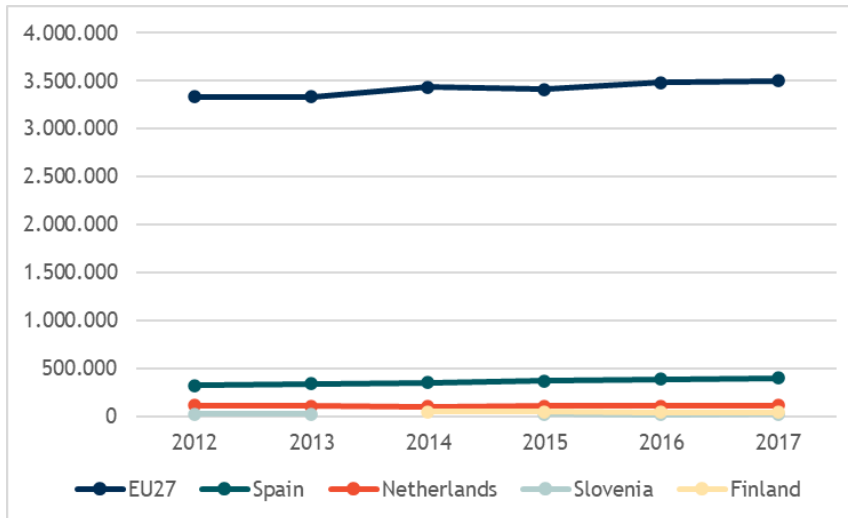
In Slovenia (see Figure 0-5 below), the dominant flow is that of material accumulation, illustrating the importance of the construction sector (buildings and infrastructure). The waste treatment is very efficient, with an equal share of recycling and of waste being re-used for back-filling in construction, and very limited flows towards landfilling or incineration.

Figure 0-5 Material flow diagram for Slovenia in 2018 in kt (thousand tonnes)



1.4.3 *Employment in circular economy sectors*

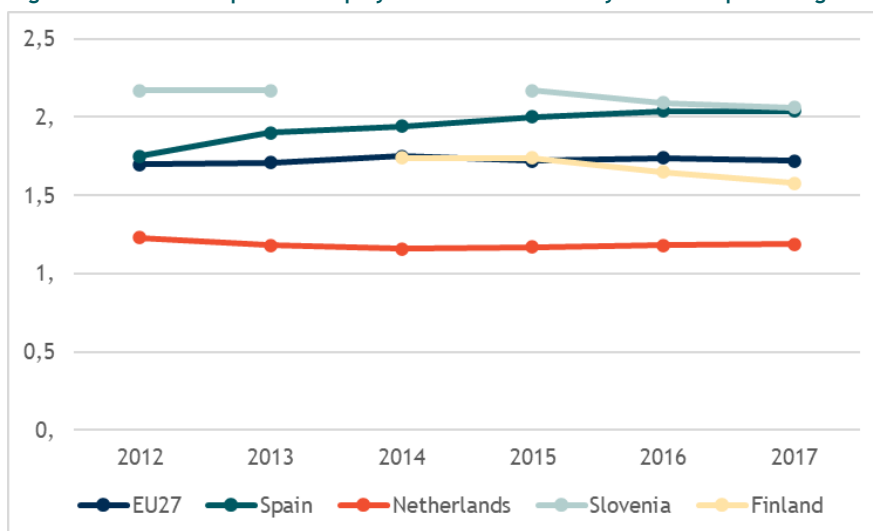
Figure 0-6 Number of persons employed in circular economy sectors



The number of persons employed in circular economy sectors is slowly growing across the EU and in Spain. It decreases in Slovenia and in Finland and stagnates in the Netherlands. Although absolute figures in the number of persons employed in circular economy-related sectors differ, the percentage of persons employed in those sectors as a proportion of total employment is similar across the four

Member States and EU27 average (between 1 and 2%).

Figure 0-7 Number of persons employed in circular economy sectors in percentages

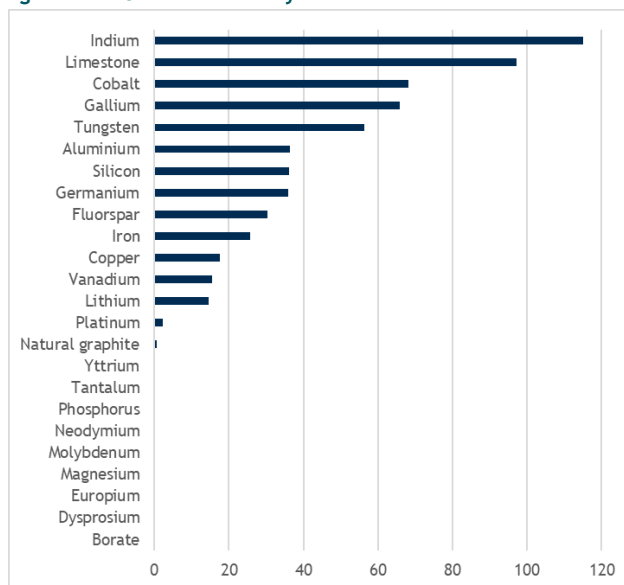


1.4.4 EU self-sufficiency for raw materials

The self-sufficiency of the EU economy in raw materials is an indicator of the level of advancement towards a fully Circular Economy, in which all these ratios should be equal to 100%.

They are also an indication of the level of strategic resilience of EU-based manufacturing to external shocks and disruptions in the supply of these raw materials. A vulnerability in this respect can have direct, and dramatic, impacts on the activity, and hence the employment volume, in whole industrial sectors, and specifically on the high-technology ones in which the EU places its competitive advantage.

Figure 0-8 EU-self-sufficiency for raw materials in 2016 in %

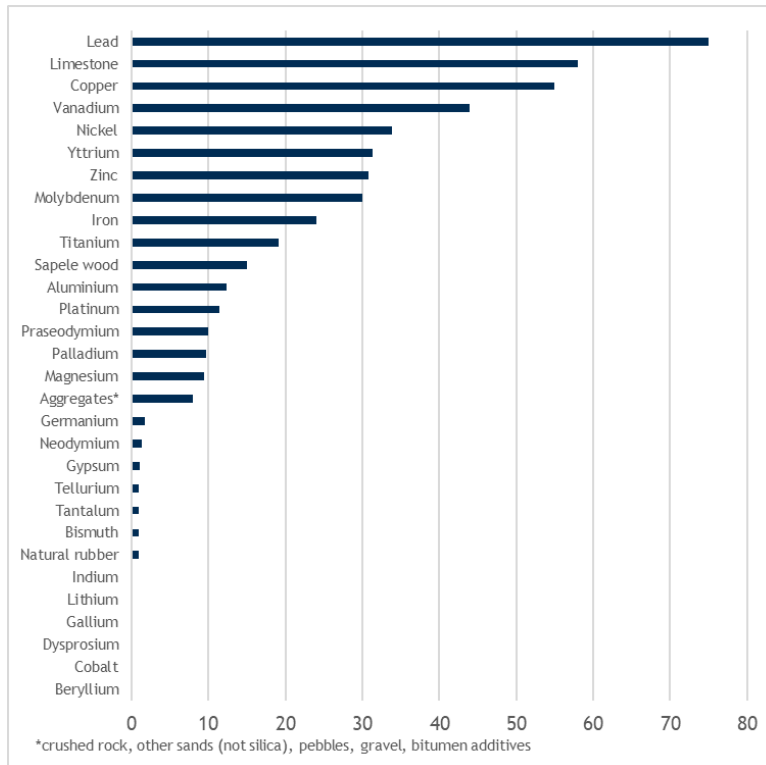


Raw materials are essential for the functioning of the EU's economy. A variety of industrial sectors depend on the secure supply of raw materials, typically in a diversified mix of domestic extraction, recycling and imports.

This figure represents the fraction of EU needs that is covered by domestic extraction or by recycling.

This fraction is high for some minerals used in high-tech industries (Indium, Cobalt, Gallium, Tungsten). It is medium for the most common metals (iron, aluminium and copper), and close to zero for a range of Critical Raw Materials.

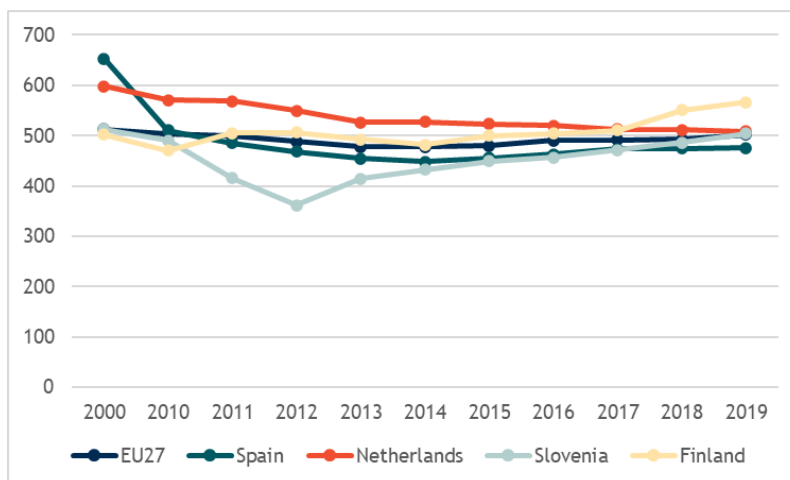
Figure 0-9 Contribution of recycled materials to raw materials demand in 2016 in %



In a world of increasing demand for raw materials, the use of secondary raw materials can help to improve the EU's security of supply, reduce the extraction pressure on natural resources - and therefore, reduce related pressures on the environment. This indicator refers to the fraction of the demand of EU-based factories that is covered by recycled materials. It does not cover the entirety of demand for the raw material in the EU (since the material can be produced elsewhere and then imported to the EU).

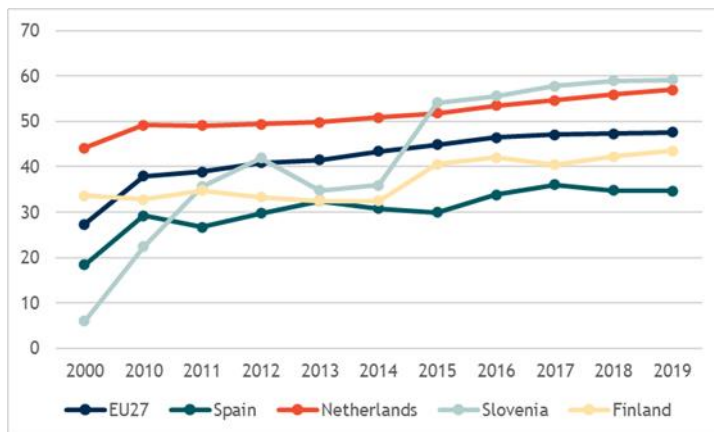
1.4.5 Municipal waste

Figure 0-10 Generation of municipal waste per capita in kg per capita



This CE indicator is used to monitor progress towards a circular economy regarding 'production and consumption'. It shows a worrying trend to a stabilisation of the generation of waste per capita over the last decade, and even to an increase in some Member States (FI and SI).

Figure 0-11 Recycling rate of municipal waste in %

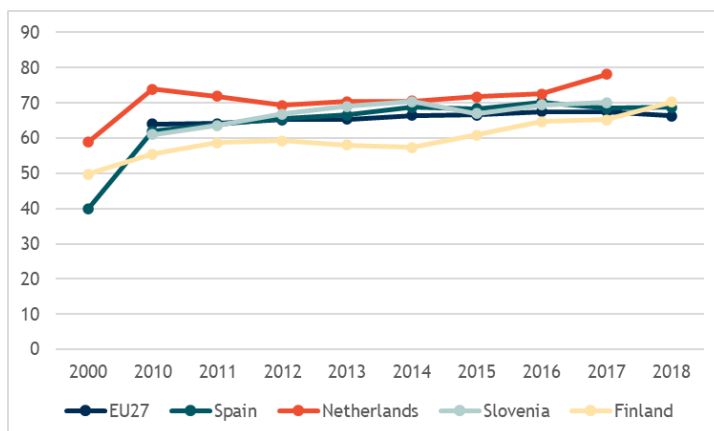


Recycling rate of municipal waste gives an indication of how waste from final consumers is used as a resource in the circular economy. It does not include the industrial waste (generated during the production process), nor the demolition waste of buildings, which represent considerably larger volumes. The improvement in recycling rate is general across the EU27, but slow. Slovenia has made

remarkable progress over the last 10 to 20 years, whereas Finland has been almost stagnating. Spain made limited progress and regressed over the last few years.

1.4.6 Recycling rates

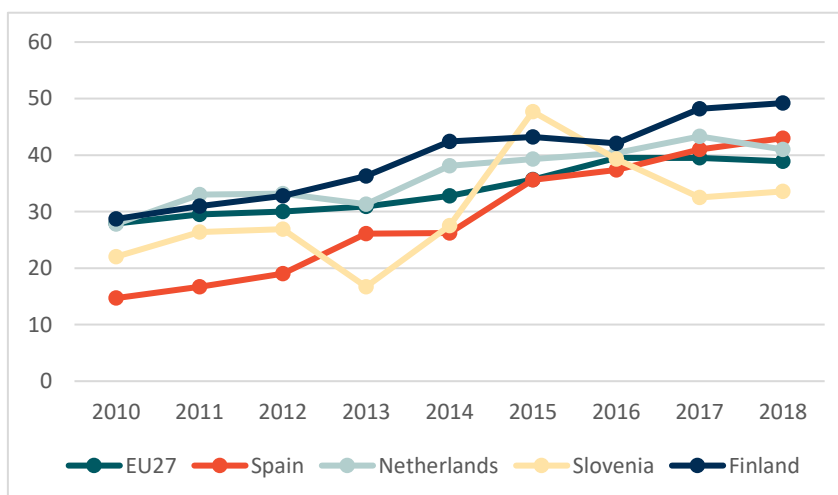
Figure 0-12 Recycling rate of packaging waste in %



One of the central pillars of a CE is feeding material back into the economy and avoiding waste being sent to landfill or incinerated, thereby capturing the value of materials as far as possible and reducing losses. The indicator is used to monitor progress towards the 55% packaging recycling target set for 2008 and the proposed 65% and 70% targets by 2025 and 2030 respectively. These targets were

reached by the EU27 and by the four Member States already in 2018 - but are stagnating since then.

Figure 0-13 Recycling rate of e-waste in %



Waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE), also known as e-waste, is one the fastest growing waste streams in the EU. WEEE include precious materials the recycling of which should be enhanced. In this area, progress is strong and rather general since

2010, starting from a low level of performance.

1.4.7 Conclusion on the statistical overview

As a conclusion from this statistical overview, we can see that the transition to a Circular Economy:

- is only at its beginning, specifically when considering the material flow diagrams and the fraction of EU raw material needs that are covered by recycling;
- is an area of policy where progress has been steady, but slow, as illustrated in the evolution of the recycling rates.

It is thus normal that its effects remain modest, with the share of jobs employed directly in the Circular Economy in the order of 1% of the total workforce.