

CIRCULAR ECONOMY PROGRAMME IN GEORGIA 'TO MAP CIRCULAR ECONOMY IN GEORGIA'

The transition to a circular economy requires a radical change in the way we produce and consume. In a circular economy, products are designed for durability, upgradeability, reparability and reusability, with a view to reusing the materials from which they are made after they reach the end of their life. In the use phase, products are managed with a view to maximising their utilisation capacity and extending their useful life, thus maintaining their value for as long as possible. This is made possible by companies that develop new business models generating revenue streams from services rather than products while making a more efficient use of resources and/or giving new value to end-of-life products and materials. Consumers use products efficiently and discard them in such a way that they can be reused or, if this is technically or economically unfeasible, recycling operators turn them into secondary materials that can enter a new production-consumption cycle. This needs to be supported by the whole system, from enabling technologies and infrastructures to a form of market organisation that facilitates collaboration along and across value chains and a form of governance and regulation that encourages companies to adopt circular approaches to social norms that make the circular production-consumption patterns socially preferable.

With the general objective of replacing the 'end-of-life' concept with an economic system that closes material loops, Georgia has recently embarked on an accelerated path to transition to the circular economy. With the concerted efforts of the GoG, civil society organisations, academia and international partners, Georgia has initiated the development of the circular economy strategy and roadmap based on a comprehensive multidimensional approach that covers production, consumption, waste management, secondary raw materials, innovation, investments as well as ongoing initiatives in different sectors implemented by different players that are at different stages of the value chain or different stages of development.

The first step in the accelerated transition to circularity is the mapping how circular is the economy of Georgia and developing recommendations for the Circular Economy Strategy. This initiative has already commenced as a part of the ongoing programme implemented by CSO Georgian Society of Nature Explorers "Orchis" (GSNE "Orchis") in close cooperation with the Government of Georgia in the framework of Keep Georgia Tidy Project supported by the Government of Sweden. The key objectives of the circularity mapping call for a close cooperation of the international and local group of experts and the representatives of the Government of Georgia (GoG) to adequately assess the current level of circularity, to establish appropriate national quantitative circular economy policy targets and circular ambitions, to identify sectoral opportunities and to define sector-specific policy options and subsequently develop recommendations for the Circular Economy Roadmap and Strategy of Georgia.

The implementation of the programme is led by the International Expert in the Circular Economy who is supported by the local experts having a sound knowledge of the Georgian economy and environmental, social, governance and sustainable development issues. In March 2021, before launching the circularity mapping process, the Government of Georgia formed an inter-ministerial working group (the Coordination Board of the GoG) of the key representatives of different government departments to ensure broad expertise as well as early buy-in from these key departments.

The first kick-off meeting in the frames of the initiative 'To Map Circular Economy in Georgia', which had introductory character, took place on 23rd April 2021. Subsequently, the First Plenary Meeting of the both groups of experts was organized on 1st July 2021, when aspects and challenges of the circular economy mapping in Georgia, the ongoing status of the mapping process, the roles of the GoG's Coordination Board and Task Team of GSNE "Orchis", following steps and key tasks were discussed. Then on 12th November 2021, on the Second Plenary Meeting the Coordination Board of the GoG and the Task Team of GSNE "Orchis" discussed progress made and results achieved since the 1st Plenary Meeting, specifically: the results of the preliminary research, which reflect the importance of different sectors of the economy in the economic structure of the country according to macroeconomic and employment indicators; waste generation assessment methodology by sectors and regions, results of the preliminary waste assessment (interim results) and current level of recycling; circularity potential, related mainly to the ability to recycle waste (interim description); a future plan to complete the ongoing evaluation process; new, additional study plan; and a preliminary analysis of the corrections to be made in the working process to identify promising approaches and complete the task of circular economy mapping.

The feedback received from the first two plenary meetings helped the Task Team of GSNE “Orchis” to better plan the following steps and make necessary corrections in the ongoing circularity mapping process. Now the 3rd Plenary Meeting of the GoG’s Coordination Board and Task Team of GSNE “Orchis” is planned on 4th March 2022 to discuss progress made since the 2nd Plenary Meeting, specifically the preliminary results of the complex assessment of the circularity level of the Georgian economy and the perspective of circularity development. The findings are based on the collection and analysis of statistical data stored in the databases of various Georgian agencies as well as the intensive consultations held with different governmental agencies, municipalities, business associations and representatives of private businesses since the 2nd Plenary Meeting with the aim: to properly assess the importance and development perspective of different sectors of the economy in the unified economic structure of Georgia; to get deep understanding with waste streams and management systems; to assess the effectiveness of natural, infrastructural and energy resource management; to comprehensively assess the current level of circularity using multifactorial analysis and various quantitative or semi-quantitative indicators; and to identify promising directions and schemes for the development of circularity in Georgia. Another objective of the 3rd Plenary Meeting is to discuss the Circularity Gap Report 2022 to ensure that the Coordination Board and the Task Team are familiar with the linkage of the circular economy and climate change, global trends in terms of circularity, the circularity gaps of individual sectors and strategies that can be used to address challenges.