

# Summary of the Launch webinar for the bounCE4ward project: “Circular Economy: a recipe for more strategic autonomy?”

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## ***Background***

The launch event on 22 April constituted the first milestone in the execution of the latest JRC [CAS](#) Project, bounCE4ward. The project has its roots in the COVID-19 crisis, which exposed the EU’s vulnerability to sudden shocks in the global supply chain. It builds on the idea that the transition to a true Circular Economy, with less waste and better resource use, will not only help achieve the EU’s climate ambitions under the European Green Deal and ensure a green recovery under NextGenerationEU, but will also reduce the EU’s susceptibility to supply disruptions. This project aims to investigate to what extent the Circular Economy could provide resilience and strategic autonomy for priority supply chains, how circular the EU economy currently is for various sectors, and what actions are most urgently needed.

## ***Introduction***

More than 50 experts from industry, government, NGOs and academia from across Europe participated in the webinar.

The event was opened by Ms Jutta Thielen-Del Pozo (Head of Unit – Scientific Development Unit, JRC), who gave an overview of the role of the Centre for Advanced Studies as an incubator for new research avenues with high policy relevance. Ms Carmen Mena Abela (Head of Unit – Circular Economy and Industrial Leadership Unit, JRC) then further explained the importance of the project for the Commission’s political agenda. Mr Mikel Landabaso Alvarez (Director - Growth and Innovation Directorate, JRC) outlined the initiatives taken by the JRC in the context of resilience, strategic autonomy and circular economy, marking a shift in economic thinking from “Just in time” to “Just in case”.

Hans Saveyn (Project Officer – Circular Economy and Industrial Leadership Unit, JRC) concluded the introduction section by providing an overview of the project scope, objectives and timeline.

## ***Panel discussion sessions***

The event centred on three main discussion sessions, each around a central question, with the aim to better understand the possible relationship between circular economy and open strategic autonomy. The discussions were moderated by Hans Saveyn.

### *Question 1:*

*In which sectors can the Circular Economy provide resilience and open strategic autonomy?*

For this discussion session, a number of key sectors were highlighted by several experts, each with an important strategic autonomy dimension. They included:

- food/Agriculture, focusing on food waste reduction and better use of bio-waste;
- textiles, including technical textiles;
- plastics;
- medical equipment;
- energy systems, including mobile/stationary batteries and photovoltaic panels;
- electronic equipment, ranging from portable devices to large installations;
- capital equipment; and
- construction materials.

Participants also explained the importance of implementing circular economy principles in transversal sectors, such as logistics, waste management and digital applications.

*Question 2:*

*How circular are the EU's economic sectors and what is the potential for more circularity?*

The webinar experts identified substantial untapped potential for more circularity in most of the industrial sectors that had been discussed in the first session. According to them, this untapped potential could be harnessed in the following ways:

- improving design for circularity;
- boosting recycling;
- avoiding export of resources via waste and retaining residual value in Europe;
- extension of the technical lifetime of products (upgradability/reparability);
- transforming business models from product ownership to service provision;
- looping of resources between sectors and products.

Experts also pointed out that preference should be given to short resource loops (e.g. re-use), rather than bigger loops (e.g. recycling), to maximize the circularity potential. Moreover, the E-commerce sector was highlighted as a possible enabler for more circularity (e.g. pick-up of end-of-life products), but for which certain issues still need to be cleared out (e.g. Extended Producer Responsibility schemes).

Finally, it was emphasised to also include the business-to-business sectors and not only business-to-consumer sectors in the future project.

*Question 3:*

*What actions are most urgently needed to make the EU economy more resilient through more circularity?*

For the final panel discussion, participants focussed on actions that were most urgently needed. This related both to direct policy actions, as well as to actions for more research to better understand the possible link between circular economy and open strategic autonomy.

Following actions were identified by the experts:

- keeping residual value of materials and products in Europe by avoiding exports of waste and end-of-life materials;
- mapping of (raw) material flows and impacts at global level;
- keeping industry in Europe (or bringing it back to Europe), reducing stocks in society and keeping the supply chains short;
- lifting legal/financial/societal barriers for reuse/repair/remanufacturing, in particular regarding intra-EU cross-border shipments for take-back of end-of-life products;
- performing research into business economics, with a focus on making circular economy models more attractive than linear ones at company level;
- establishing targets for circular procurement;
- developing life cycle assessment inspired tools available for consumers to allow them to make informed decisions about the products and services they purchase;
- developing safeguards and mechanisms that ensure trust in used products;
- creating financial incentives for circular products and business models, e.g. via the sustainable finance instruments;
- pricing water, carbon and externalities in the cost of products and services;
- switching the focus from the forward part of manufacturing and supply chains to the return part of logistic chains for resources.

Moreover, participants explained that a circular economy, in contrast to a linear economy, is a data-hungry economy. Hence, a transition to a circular economy will inevitably be a digital transition as well.

Finally, experts agreed that all new initiatives and policy instruments that will be developed to reap the benefits of the circular economy for open strategic autonomy should be coherent, also with existing ones.

### *Next steps*

The project will run for a period of three years, with a core team of four researchers and be hosted by the JRC's Circular Economy and Industrial Leadership Unit. The next milestone will be the recruitment of the Lead Scientist. Interested candidates should keep an eye on <https://recruitment.jrc.ec.europa.eu/?site=SVQ>