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# From strategies to grassroots actions in circular economy



# SUSTAINABILITY

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**This article sums up the policy situation of circular economy strategies in six European regions. It is based on a study which was conducted by the CECI project partners to find out the status of circular economy strategies and their relation to citizen involvement among partner countries. The strategies were examined on three levels: national, regional and municipal. Further on, the study describes the role of the stakeholders in circular economy implementation. CECI countries and regions have different starting points so there is plenty of room for sharing knowledge, learning opportunities and benefitting from the expertise of partners and their networks.**

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## CECI project connects regions

An Interreg Europe funded project CECI – Citizen involvement in circular economy implementation enhances circular economy solutions focusing especially on sharing economy. The essential idea is to develop the local, regional and national cooperation, and support the regions to generate circular economy strategies and solutions, where citizens have a key role. The CECI partnership consists of partners from Finland, France, Czech Republic, Spain, Bulgaria and Belgium. (Interreg Europe 2020a.)



Picture 1. CECI Master picture (Oravakangas 2019 )

## Citizens and Circular Economy in National, Regional and Municipal Strategies

An online survey was conducted in April 2020 among the CECI partners regions and cities: Päijät-Häme (Finland), Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (France), Moravian-Silesian (Czech Republic), Aragon (Spain), Varna (Bulgaria) and Mechelen (Belgium). The aim of the survey was to map out how citizen involvement in circular economy is included in strategies and implemented in grassroots activities. (CECI 2020.)

### National Level

In 2020, the European Commission approved a new Circular Economy Action Plan, which is a key part of the European Green Deal – agenda for sustainable growth. The Action Plan addresses the entire life cycle of products, targeting, for example, their design, promoting circular economy processes and sustainable consumption, and aiming to ensure that the

resources used are kept in the EU economy for as long as possible. The first EU Circular Economy Action Plan was launched in 2015. (European Commission 2020.)

On the national level, at least 14 EU countries have adopted circular economy strategies (European Union 2020). Of the six countries looked at in this study, Belgium, Finland, France, and Spain have their national-level strategies, and both the Czech Republic and Bulgaria are currently preparing them, as seen in Table 1. For example, in the Belgian strategy, citizens are acknowledged as one of the stakeholders for a just and sustainable transition, as an actor in the municipal waste recycling, as well as a consumer who steers the demand for circular production. (CECI 2020.)

<b>National level</b>	<b>Belgium</b>	<b>Bulgaria</b>	<b>Czech Republic</b>	<b>Finland</b>	<b>France</b>	<b>Spain</b>
<b>Relevant national strategy</b>	Belgium as a frontrunner of the circular economy	Waste management program	Operational Program Environment 2014 – 2020	The critical move – Finland’s road map to the Circular Economy 2.0	Circular Economy Road Map	España Circular Economy 2030
<b>Validity period</b>	2014-2030	2015-2020	2014-2020	2016-2025	2018-2030	2020-2030
<b>Circular economy included</b>	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Citizen involvement included</b>	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 1. Current situation of the national level circular economy strategies (CECI 2020).

## Regional level

Five of the regions studied have in place regional level circular economy strategies or development strategies (Table 2). In these strategies, citizen involvement is addressed in different ways. In the Päijät-Häme region’s roadmap, citizens are seen mainly as active

consumers making choices on, for example, sustainable transportation via a personal carbon trade, car sharing, use of tool libraries and uptake of urban farming. In Flanders, citizen involvement is promoted in various ways. The Circular Flanders' steering group members include all organisations from the business world, academia, civil society, and governments. Campaigns towards citizens are mainly organized by civil society associations. (CECI 2020.)

<b>Regional level</b>	<b>Belgium</b>	<b>Bulgaria</b>	<b>Czech Republic</b>	<b>Finland</b>	<b>France</b>
<b>Relevant regional strategy</b>	Vision 2050. (A long-term strategy for Flanders)	The Waste Management Program of City of Varna 2015-2020	Development Strategy of the Moravian-Silesian Region 2019-2027	Towards Circular Economy – Päijät-Häme Circular Economy Road Map	Regional Economic Development, Innovation and Internationalization Scheme
<b>Validity period</b>	2016-2050	2015-2020	2019-2027	2017-2030	2017-2022
<b>Circular economy included</b>	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Citizen involvement included</b>	Yes	No	No	Yes	No

Table 2. Current situation of the regional level circular economy strategies (CECI 2020).

## **Municipal level**

On the municipal level, circular economy is included in the development strategies or the environmental program of Mechelen (Belgium), Lahti (Finland) and Marseille (France) as seen in Table 3. All of these strategies also include citizen involvement. There are two priority goals in Mechelen's strategy: stimulating circular and innovative entrepreneurship and involving citizens and businesses in the transition towards a circular economy. The environmental program of Lahti includes the Finnish Sustainable Communities network (FISU) roadmap towards resource wisdom. The long-term goals for the year 2050 are zero greenhouse gases, zero-waste city and sustainable consumption. (CECI 2020.)

<b>Municipal level</b>	<b>Belgium</b>	<b>Bulgaria</b>	<b>Czech Republic</b>	<b>Finland</b>	<b>France</b>
<b>Relevant regional strategy</b>	Multi-year planning 2020-2025. Strategic and financial policy plan	Waste Management Program of Varna Municipality 2015-2020	Strategic development plan of the city of Ostrava for the period 2017-2023	Environmental program of Lahti 2018	Regional waste prevention and management plan 2019
<b>Validity period</b>	2020-2025	2015-2020	2017-2023	2018-2050	2019-2025
<b>Circular economy included</b>	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Citizen involvement included</b>	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes

Table 3. Current situation of the municipal level circular economy strategies (CECI 2020).

## **Circular Economy Blooms through Regional Cooperation**

Policymaking is regarded as a comprehensive process that involves diverse players (Interreg Europe 2020b). Therefore, the role and active participation of the regional stakeholder group are essential for project implementation and the development in the region. The stakeholder group includes regional actors across different sectors as academia, business, authorities, and non-governmental organizations (Figure 1). Based on the survey (2020) among the CECI partners, universities play a key role together with local authorities, NGOs, and SMEs in steering the stakeholder group activities. The members of the stakeholder group are mapped and selected before the project launch and the group can be extended during the project.

Figure 1. Overview of the key representatives of the CECI regional stakeholder groups (CECI 2020)

All parties benefit from regional cooperation towards more sustainable lifestyles and better living environments. Variety of stakeholders with different expertise form local knowledge hub to boost the circular economy solutions in the region. This existing knowledge is shared among all CECI regions and further evolved to apt the local needs. The knowledge exchange includes identification of Good Practices in each region to inspire the design of the regional action plans (Interreg Europe 2020c).

Also, through the stakeholder's own channels and network, large groups of citizens interested in improving municipal/regional policies can be mobilized. These discussions between citizen and stakeholders could spark joint actions and projects related to circular and sharing economy. Through the citizen dialogue, CECI hopes to create a snowball effect on community circular and sharing economy thinking and to spur citizen involvement.

## **CECI enables measures for better collaboration between the municipality, business, and citizens**

To conclude, the regional policies could be further improved by implementing pilots with resident associations, organizing events in the neighbourhoods to meet up with residents and with open innovation platforms. Involving district coordinators and representatives could facilitate the discussions with residents. According to the CECI survey, improving the coherence and alignment of relevant policies towards the circular economy and citizen involvement is imperative.

In general, starting the discussion with citizens can be challenging, fortunately, there are some proven methods to activate participants and spur the dialogue. One way to improve cooperation is through feedback. Based on the CECI survey, most of the project partners

include feedback process either via online surveys, template, narratives, or emoji. To build trust is vital for further success and citizens willingness to actively participate in the communication. Also, the environment, atmosphere and the terminology used should be adjusted to the target audience. (Miller et al. 2020.)

This article reflects the authors' views; the Interreg Europe programme authorities are not liable for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

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