

WEBINAR SERIES:

EU Green Deal Policies and their  
Relevance in Asia-Pacific

# Global Gateway and the Circular Economy

Webinar Insights

switchasia



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## Context

The **EU SWITCH-Asia Policy Support Component** and the **European Environmental Bureau** held a **webinar** on the 6 June 2025 about the **EU's Global Gateway: The Importance of EU-Asia Partnerships**. This was part of a **series of webinars**, which seeks to explore the implications of EU policies related to Sustainable Consumption and Production for its partner countries, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. It aims to understand the goals of these policies, their relevance in specific contexts, and their implications for stakeholders in the Asia-Pacific, particularly concerning legislation that has emerged from EU policies. This brief aims to capture the ideas shared during the webinar but is not a comprehensive analysis of the policy. It will describe the context of the webinar topic and the key ideas discussed. The webinar focused on clarity and diversity of views, rather than comprehensiveness.

## Key Messages

Circularity is a necessary lever linked to the commitment towards clean industries, climate neutrality by 2050, limiting global warming within the boundaries of the Paris Agreement, and living well within planetary boundaries.

The EU has committed to a more circular future, through various action plans and the promise of an upcoming Circular Economy Act. Due to the interconnected nature of European supply chains, the interpretation and implementation of EU circular policies will have an impact on markets and supply chains across the Asia-Pacific.

Many countries in the Asia-Pacific region are investing in closed loop manufacturing, upgrading recycling facilities and upskilling workers in material efficiency principles. Companies from both the EU and Asia agree with the potential of the circular economy but highlight the resource gap. It is therefore key that international partnerships and initiatives such as the Global Gateway are leveraged towards a common understanding of what circularity means and setting joint standards for circular principles.

## Introduction

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The **EU SWITCH-Asia Policy Support Component** and the **European Environmental Bureau**, held the webinar, ***The EU's Global Gateway: The Importance of EU-Asia Partnerships for a Circular and Competitive Europe*** to facilitate a multifaceted conversation about how the implementation of the EU's Circular Economy Action Plan and the external dimension applicable to the Asia-Pacific region. During this event, several leading experts convened to discuss the importance and responsibilities for the interconnected trade in products, recyclates and waste, and what the EU and the Global Gateway are doing to facilitate the collective upskilling and valorisation of the circular economy.

As mentioned by Dr. Zinaida Fadeeva, Team Leader SWITCH-Asia Programme in her introduction: *"It cannot be repeated often enough that we meet at a time with a high need to transform our economies. Resource extraction, climate disruption and supply chain fragility remind us every day that business as usual is no longer an option. The circular economy offers a new direction [...] enabling us to create value while reducing waste, regenerating resources and by doing that, protecting the future".*

The powerful potential of circularity and hope for a circular future was shared by all participants, who nevertheless pointed to several hurdles we need to overcome in order to get there.

## The EU needs global partners for circularity

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Framing the discussion, Mr. Quinn, Deputy Head of Unit at DG Environment said: *"the EU itself is only 5% of the world's population, on a small peninsula on the Eurasian land mass. At the same time, the challenge of the Circular Economy is global, and needs a global solution"*. He highlighted that the EU is exporting waste as well as its environmental footprint, and that future generations would find it *"absurd"* that we are currently not valorising valuable raw materials to the scale that we should. He highlighted three key guiding principles: First – inform. The European Commission wants its partners to have good information about what is happening, what the next steps are, and what they have to do to comply. Second – adapt. The Commission is keen to support the EU's trading partners in adapting to the new requirements, highlighting the role of Switch Asia and the Global Gateway. Third – inspire. The Commission would like for its green standards to help inspire partner countries, and would like their knowledge to inspire future EU work.

The EU has a wide range of requirements for ecodesign, criteria that have existed for decades and that are continuously evolving – the Ecodesign For Sustainable Products Regulation being the latest evolution, with implementation ongoing across key product groups such as textiles, tyres, furniture + horizontal requirements for repair, recyclability and recycled content. With these rules, the same set of standards apply to domestic producers as for imports, so should not be seen as protectionism but as a lever to raise design standards. And, Mr. Quinn noted, it makes sense to align those standards, because companies are operating in a global context. For example, on Digital Product Passports, it would not make sense for companies to have 20 different versions asking for 20 different sets of data. At the same time, many Asian countries are in some ways ahead of Europe, so it would make sense to expand the dialogue and listen to each other.

Mr. McGuinness from the Permanent Representation of Ireland to the EU noted that his country *"may be a small cog in a global system but an activist member state in the area of circularity"*. While the circularity rate is presently only around 2%, going from 2 to 8% circularity rate will by their estimates obtain a 30% reduction in emissions, which really *"dwarfs what other sectors are doing"*. Harmonisation of circularity policies, digital circularity passport, extended producer responsibility schemes, end of waste criteria will be important to achieve this scale. We need to not *"just shift the numerator in terms of what we are recycling but also the denominator down in terms of what actually needs recycling"*. Getting to a 24% circular materials use rate in Europe has to be done with relationships across the world.

Mr. Chowdhury from Eunomia Research & Consulting complemented the discussion by highlighting three angles – the risk for the planet overall, the risk for Europe and the risks for Asia, for not having enough action on circularity. He noted that 50% of emissions today come from production and consumption, which

is why the upstream relationship (where Asia exports products to EU and imports waste from Europe) is so important. He said that *“if Asia does not catch up with EU rules, they will not be able to send products to Europe. Europe may only be 5% of the world’s population but it is a big market. So if they lose one third of that global export market they’ll lose competitiveness”*. Extracting primary raw materials in many cases have a higher input cost. Where Asia has built competitive advantage over the last 20-30 years, the situation now means that unless they continue to be more circular in their product design and production this advantage could be lost.

## EU-Asia partnerships for circularity and competitiveness

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The second panel dived deeper into the points made on EU-Asia competitiveness and partnerships, with perspectives from businesses in Bhutan, EU businesses in Vietnam, and from the points of view of the European Commission and a research-to-policy institute. Ms. Beomonte-Zobel from the European Commission set the scene with a strong imperative: *“We are both on a quest for sustainable economic growth and competitiveness which are impossible to achieve alone. This makes the EU and Asia natural partners because the European Union and the Asian region represent more than half of the world population and economic output. We are deeply interconnected through trade”*.

Vietnam is one example, as the country has recently adopted a circular economy framework with the main objective to transition to a sustainable production and consumption model, integrating circular economy principles. As noted by Mr. Bouflet from EuroCham Vietnam, targets include an increase in renewable energy share to 47% of total primary energy, ensuring that 95% of urban solid waste and 80% of rural waste is collected and treated, and reducing direct landfill disposal to below 50%. He noted that these are very ambitious targets considering that Vietnam is practically *“starting from scratch”*. That said, Vietnam is one of the few countries in ASEAN which has adopted Extended Producer Responsibility legislation, which is now in force. He also noted that the imperative to collaborate is strong, referring to chapter 13 on sustainability in the EU-Vietnam trade agreement, as one vehicle binding Vietnam and the EU together.

With regard to digitalisation in Vietnam specifically, Mr. Sivanandan from the digital sector committee of EuroCham Vietnam noted that this is a pathway to *“enable European companies operating in Vietnam or Vietnamese companies that want to sell to Europe to comply with the European Green Deal at a reasonable cost”*. He noted that digital technologies are extremely important enablers, because if the costs get too high, ASEAN countries *“are going to trade with the U.S. or China and not Europe, which is going to be detrimental to us.”*

Reflecting further on this, Mr. Dahal from Drukholding Ltd said that Bhutan is probably the first sovereign country in the world to have a decentralised identity, which is mirrored in the intention of [eidas 2.0](#) in Europe. He noted that the national digital identity infrastructure can enable a lot of circular economy actions. He also described the unique front-runner position of the small country, stating that *“Bhutan is known for being carbon negative, almost about 8 million tons carbon negative. Our philosophy of gross national happiness is rooted not just in economic prosperity but holistically through the lens of good governance, culture, tradition, environmental conservation. We pledge to remain carbon neutral for all times to come”*. The constitution mandates 60% forest cover and Bhutan is at about 70% today. The collaboration potential through the Global Gateway and with SWITCH-Asia is in his view important to in order to continue to work towards a regenerative and sustainable economy.

Dr. Archer noted that she is working on a four-year project funded by the EU via the Danish Embassy in Indonesia, that will look at accelerating ASEAN member countries’ transition to a circular economy through streamlined and strengthened governance capacities, policy and implementation processes. Referencing the ASEAN framework for Circular Economy from 2021, she noted that the programme will set up a community of practice of key policy makers from each of the ASEAN countries to participate in an ongoing process of training, information sharing and collaboration. She concluded with an important reflection: *“the massive role played by the informal sector in ASEAN who represent a large proportion of small and medium enterprises [is a] a big difference to the EU, and we have to ensure that these informal businesses are also included in the transition to a circular economy approach in ways that allow them to remain competitive.”*

## Conclusion

EU-Asia partnerships are necessary for a functioning circular economy, and the Global Gateway is one instrument in the toolbox for the EU to partner with non-EU actors and better understand the requirements for market access. With a target to mobilize €300 billion by 2027, it is not merely infrastructure-focused but a comprehensive strategy promoting climate action, digitalisation, and inclusive growth. It aims to enhance global value chains by embedding circularity principles, and to support partner countries to adapt to EU standards while fostering transparency, fairness, and resilience in investments.

As Dr. Fadeeva said in her concluding remarks: *“One of the greatest opportunities and at the same time challenges of the circular economy today lies less in its conceptualisation, which continues to evolve, and more in its effective implementation. Circularity, when applied thoughtfully, can contribute to climate goals and strengthen economic resilience. Sustainability principles are already finding their way into trade regulations and public procurement; rather than rewriting these frameworks, our task is to integrate circular economy principles into them, ensuring that ongoing processes move us toward systemic change”.*

While there are key differences and similarities in the EU and the Asia Pacific regions, collaboration can only lead to better outcomes and learnings for all parties.

## References

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