

UNESDA – Soft Drinks Europe calling for Roadmap on New Circular Economy Action Plan to build on existing EU legislations to accelerate the transition towards a circular model while ensuring legal and regulatory stability

From linear to circular – speeding up the transition

UNESDA and its members have been driving sustainability throughout their value chain for the past 30 years. We fully supported the Circular Economy Package adopted by the EU in 2017 and its objectives to build a circular economy, and we continue to support this objective. We also welcome the publication of the communication on the European Green Deal and its ambition of making Europe the world's first climate-neutral continent by 2050.

We agree with the identified challenges listed in the Roadmap: indeed, empowering consumers, boosting sustainable products policies, reducing waste generation, creating a well-functioning secondary raw materials market and speeding up the transition from a linear model to a circular one will all be key to create a circular economy. The transition has already started: we will use 25% recycled content in packaging in the next five years, and our members are committed to going significantly beyond if the supply of food-grade quality rPET is secured accordingly. UNESDA pledged to increase collection rates and to reuse packaging, e.g. refillable bottles, where it makes environmental and economic sense. Collection rates for PET are already above 80% in a number of EU countries (Sweden, Belgium) and even above 90% in others (Denmark, Norway, Germany) and efforts are accelerating in other countries to achieving similar collection rates.

Implementing existing EU legislations and reinforcing the principles of circular economy

We consider that it is crucial to first implement rules that were just adopted – in particular the review of the Waste Framework Directive, the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive and the Single-Use Plastics Directive – whilst ensuring there is space for further innovation and solutions to make business and consumers practices more sustainable.

Going further will also require protecting the very principles of circular economy, meaning that a product that is easily recyclable, collected and recycled, must be considered as a full and legitimate part of that circular thinking. We support all EU legislations ensuring that only safe and sustainable products can be put on the market and we reaffirm the need to maintain the spirit of the Circular Economy package, implementing science-based measures and considering reuse, repair and recycling as different tools that each contribute, when optimised, to achieving circularity of the EU economy. For example, swift actions from the Commission must be taken on authorising plastic mechanical recycling processes positively evaluated by EFSA as well as on creating a supportive legal framework for alternative plastic recovery technologies like enhanced recycling and feedstock recycling. These alternative technologies are complementary to mechanical recycling processes and can boost the internal market for safe secondary raw materials.

Circularity involves everyone and requires a holistic approach

Achieving a circular economy requires a multi-stakeholder approach, requiring the full mobilisation of industry, governments, consumers, academia and civil society. We invite the Commission to reference existing platforms such as the Circular Plastics Alliance, working towards boosting the uptake of recycled plastics. All parties should be involved in a proportionate way: contributing to strengthening waste collection systems must be a collective effort, as well as funding clean-up costs for litter which should not fall solely on specific stakeholders.

Our members are working hard to be frontrunners in making both our products and packaging more sustainable and we welcome all initiatives from the Commission to fast-track the transition from a linear to a circular model in the years ahead.
