



# Policy Orientations for a Circular Economy in Switzerland

## Short Introduction

Switzerland has long been recognized as one of the most advanced countries in the areas of waste management and recycling policies, thanks to a strong policy framework established in the 1980-90s. Yet, the country also has a high level of raw material consumption and is among the first OECD countries when it comes to the production of municipal waste per capita. As a small country with high per capita income, Switzerland should now develop a coherent set of policies to move towards a circular economy in order to reach sustainable patterns of production and consumption and climate neutrality. These policies should provide a supportive framework for Swiss companies enabling them to benefit from a growing circular economy market, and allowing them to thrive on international markets rapidly evolving towards circular economy, especially in the EU.

Circular Economy Switzerland's mission is to promote circular economy in Switzerland. To reach this mission, the development and implementation of a supportive policy framework is required, allowing Switzerland to contribute to global sustainable development and strengthening its own position as a location for business.

Circular Economy Switzerland intends to contribute to the policy debate through science-based, transparent, and publicly available inputs, at the federal, cantonal and municipal levels. The broad orientations for these policy contributions are provided below. As the policy process is dynamic, these orientations will evolve, and specific contributions will be added over time. If you like to discuss or contribute to reach one of the policy orientations, please contact [sanu durabilitas](#) and Circular Economy Switzerland.

# Policy orientations from Circular Economy Switzerland

## 1. Move from “waste management” towards material management approaches

Environmental law in Switzerland has long been designed to mitigate “end-of-life” impacts of economic activities, i.e. to manage waste, contaminations and pollutions. A sustainable and circular economy asks for a completely different approach, centered on the idea of waste prevention, and dealing with products through their entire life-cycle and associated impacts. The question here is not anymore about managing waste and visible impacts, but about enabling sustainable modes of consumption and production within planetary boundaries. Circular Economy Switzerland asks for the development of a new generation of public policies centered on material instead of waste management. This requires dealing with issues previously addressed in separate regulations – from raw material extraction and resource management, to items’ production and consumption (including ecodesign), to waste treatment as a last resort – in a holistic manner.

## 2. Prioritize the higher option of value retention

Circular Economy is not a new label for traditional recycling or material valorization activities (referred to as “long loops”). Instead, this approach offers a large variety of strategies organized hierarchically depending on their ability to retain the value of a product or material in the economy. Broadly speaking, “short loops” strategies that allow extending the use life of a product (e.g. maintaining, repairing, reusing, refurbishing) are better than strategies aiming at closing the resource loops (e.g. recycling, cascading). For instance, reusing glass packaging for beverages at a local scale is better than recycling it. In the same way, long loops retain more value than mere incineration (referred to as energy valorization), which is until now for many materials the prevailing option in Switzerland. Circular Economy Switzerland urges policymakers to integrate the hierarchy of circular economy strategies in the Swiss legal framework by prioritizing short over long loops, and material valorization over energy valorization.

## 3. Extend producer responsibility

In a Circular Economy, the relationship between producers and customers is often different than in a linear economy and companies often adopt business models that include renting, leasing or pay per use services. Customers have access to the use of a product but often without owning it, whereas producers keep the ownership of the product and benefit from the value retained in products after use in the production of new offerings. Alongside these circular business models, producers can be held responsible beyond sales for the end-of-life of their products through the “extended producer responsibility” policy instrument. Broadly implemented in surrounding countries, this instrument exists in Switzerland but only for a few products. As an effective policy instrument, it should be expanded to new categories of products. In addition, pre-market responsibilities, establishing requirements upon placing products on the market, should gradually integrate measures to limit the environmental impacts of products and extend their lifetime (repairability index, availability of spare parts, recyclability, etc.). Circular Economy Switzerland advocates for a wider application of the extended producer responsibility mechanisms in Switzerland, as well as for a gradual development of pre-market responsibility framework.

## 4. Enhance transparency and information

Citizens and customers play a central role in the shift towards a Circular Economy. Circular consumption behaviors should be incentivized through various instruments (e.g. fiscal measures, awareness-raising campaigns, ecosystem building, etc.), and current framework conditions supporting linear consumption should be phased out. Information is one of the key requirements for supporting circular behaviors such as avoiding, choosing the long-lasting option, maintaining and repairing, sharing, leasing, buying second-hand, buying quality, and recirculating. Circular Economy Switzerland asks for enhanced provisions that facilitate customers’ access to circular economy relevant information so that they can make informed choices. This information can cover various dimensions (origin, composition, repair and dismantling options, energy consumption, operating instructions, etc.) and be enhanced through various means (labels, digital passports, QR codes, awareness raising, etc.), essentially improving market transparency. Beyond customers, this information can also be used to facilitate coordination and transparency within and along whole value chains and facilitate circular strategies.

## **5. Adopt innovative public procurement models**

Public procurement is widely considered as a key lever to steer the economy from a linear and recycling economy towards a sustainable and circular one. As a highly regulated field, public procurement in Switzerland has seen major reforms in previous years, allowing buyers to take into account environmental dimensions. Yet, concepts such as green public procurement or circular public procurement often remain vague, as well as the difference between the two approaches. This is due to a lack of clear criteria and requirements, and to a lack of innovative public procurement models. These models such as pre-commercial procurement, public procurement of innovative solutions, and innovation partnership, allow for a collaborative dialogue and process of developing circular offers between public procurers and suppliers. They also support innovation and lower risks for suppliers willing to develop their circular activities. Circular Economy Switzerland urges public authorities to become Circular Economy role models and try out new and innovative procurement models.

## **6. Strive for policy integration**

Circular Economy offers strategies in a large variety of policy fields – strategies that shouldn't be restricted to a single issue such as waste, a single law such as the Federal Act on the Protection of the Environment, or a single public administration entity such as environmental/waste departments. Instead, this approach can contribute to many sustainable development goals and policy objectives. The link between Circular Economy and climate change mitigation, adaptation and just transition should be established and reinforced. Beyond this issue, multiple links with the Swiss digital strategy, vocational training policies, innovation funding instruments, agriculture and food measures, sustainable development strategy...to name but a few, should be systematically explored and Circular Economy strategies exploited. In the same way and at all governance levels, Circular Economy should be treated as a cross-cutting theme that goes beyond the traditional division of labor between public administration departments, as well as between public and private organizations.

## **7. Set goals and targets and build multistakeholder processes**

Early Circular Economy strategies and roadmaps are being developed in Switzerland. Circular Economy Switzerland supports this process and recommend basing these blueprints on reliable and robust indicators, and to integrate clear goals and targets. Key priorities at different governance levels (municipalities, cantons and Confederation) should be established according to the local context and through a multistakeholder process in order to ensure a broad support from main groups of actors and enable a genuine transition. Business, professional and employers' associations, as well as consumers' associations, labor unions, and scientific experts are especially important in this regard. Exchanges and dialogues on lessons learned and best practices should be reinforced between public actors, and support should be provided to entities willing to develop Circular Economy strategies and action plans.

*Disclaimer: These broad orientations are released in the name of Circular Economy Switzerland (CES). They have been developed by sanu durabilitas and reviewed by the CES Executive Committee. However, this does not mean that every supporter, partner, or member of CES necessarily endorses or agrees with every orientation.*