

The Drive Towards the Circular Economy: Mitigating the Challenges Faced by Albania

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Achieving a circular economy is a must for attaining sustainable development and Albania has recognized its importance since 2015 when adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, being a European Union candidate country, Albania is locked into the membership process which bears some clear requirement in regard to the circular economy, too. Such requirements for a transition towards a circular economy are especially set out in the Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans 2018.

However, Albania is facing challenges in achieving this objective, and this paper intends to discuss these challenges, explore the reasons why they arise and refer to the experience of other countries in the region as the possible way ahead.

Albania is faced with some particular challenges in relation to the drive towards achieving a circular economy. The research undertaken here as part of this study, as well as various other studies conducted in the past, indicate that these changes appear in the form of inadequate regulatory framework, low resource productivity, improper waste management, limited awareness of the circular economy, etc.

In general, there is a low awareness and understanding about the circular economy concepts among both the public at large and businesses. It must be noted that about 70 percent of Albanians do not know anything about the concepts of the circular economy. This leads to a lack of support from the public and from the business entities for implementing circular economy initiatives. The regulatory framework is also not complete. Albania has undertaken steps to achieve the circular economy rather late compared to European Union countries and, subsequently, all the needed laws, regulations and policies are not in place. Previous studies also indicate that, sometimes, the efforts undertaken by Albanian public institutions lack a unified approach, thus obstructing effective implementation. The lack of a unified approach is also evident among the public institutions, businesses and the civil society, something which is important for a successful policy implementation. Furthermore, the country lacks the adequate and sufficient infrastructure for effective waste management, recycling and material recovery. About 80 percent of the municipal waste is still processed in landfills, without undergoing through the recycling process at all. In the European Union countries, the waste recycling rates are by far higher.

Addressing these challenges requires coordinated and unified policy interventions from public institutions, increased investment and better infrastructure, as well as a wide-ranging strategy for raising public awareness, and this study intends to offer alternatives based on best practices of other countries.

Recent policy roadmaps and research highlight three main directions for circular economy development: use of economic instruments, promotion of circular business models for small and medium enterprises, as well as targeted solutions for waste management.

The public at large and the business entities should be motivated in order to undertake circular economy initiatives. Therefore, the relevant public institutions of Albania should implement subsidies, taxes and other mechanisms to promote adoptions of circular economy practices. Such measures would improve resource management, waste

management, material security, etc. On the other hand, achieving a successful transition towards circular economy will require strong legal and regulatory frameworks, enhanced engagement of all the stakeholders concerned, greater investments in infrastructure, etc.

In principle, circular economy represents an economic system based on the reuse and regeneration of materials or products, especially as a means of continuing production in a sustainable and environmentally friendly way. This economic system underscores a shift toward renewable energy and materials, as we all requiring a radical change of supply chains, product design, business models, etc. Challenges faced by the whole world in regard to climate change and sustainable development have made transition to circular economy a must and Albania should adopt the measures successfully taken by other European countries.

Keywords

Albania, challenges, circular economy