



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life

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**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

Regional Dialogue on Accelerating the Transition to Circular Economy for Climate Resilience in the Arab Region

Amman, 22-23 November 2023

**INFORMATION NOTE - Draft****1. BACKGROUND**

The current linear economic model has led to extensive environmental degradation, resource depletion and uneven wealth accumulation, which is now threatening the function of ecosystems and the wellbeing of humans and the planet. The linear economic model is based on extraction, usage, and disposal of resources as a result of systemic coupling of economic growth and environmental degradation. Research shows us that 90% of biodiversity loss, 50% of emitted greenhouse gases, and 90% of water stress globally are due to our unsustainable use of resources<sup>1</sup>. Further, we are currently on our way to a 3.5°C increase by 2100, compared to pre-industrial levels<sup>2</sup>, and in the Arab region the progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals is too slow and none of the goals are currently on track of being reached by 2030<sup>3</sup>.

Circular economy has been highlighted as an imperative for sustainable development and a sustainable resource use by global actors, international organizations, national stakeholders, and by the academia. Since many of our environmental challenges are connected to how we use resources, a circular economy can mitigate the triple planetary crisis – climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution<sup>4</sup>. The main idea of a circular economy is to keep resources within the economy for as long as possible, minimizing waste and the need to extract new raw materials. Resources can, through circular processes (8Rs: Redesign, Rethink, Reduce, Refuse, Reuse, Repurpose, Recycle, and Recover) circulate within the economy. The circular model can actualize sectors and societies decoupling of environmental degradation and economic growth, and at the same time build environmental resilience, social equity, and economic prosperity.

In the Arab region there is currently a certain traction of interest towards the circular economy, and a recent mapping carried out by ESCWA concluded that all Arab states are in one way, or another engaged in the circularity of resources and material use<sup>5</sup>. Even though recent interest and progress, municipal solid waste generation has reached 2.7 kg per person per day in some Arab states, and 90-95% of all municipal solid waste created in the region goes to landfills<sup>6</sup>. The water stress, low energy efficiency, air pollution and cost due to land degradation in the region are also reaching new highs, speeding up the increased vulnerability to climatic changes.

<sup>1</sup> IRP. (2019). *Global Resources Outlook 2019: Natural Resources for the Future We Want*.

<sup>2</sup> IPCC. (2023). *Synthesis Report of the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report: Summary for Policymakers*.

<sup>3</sup> ESCWA. (2023). *Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals in the Arab region*.

<sup>4</sup> UNFCCC. (2022). *What is the Triple Planetary Crisis?*

<sup>5</sup> ESCWA. (2023). *Transitioning to a Circular Economy: Status and Enablers in the Arab region*.

<sup>6</sup> Thabit, Qahtan & Abdallah, Nassour & Nelles, Michael. (2022). *Facts and Figures on Aspects of Waste Management in Middle East and North Africa Region*. Waste (1). 52-80. 10.3390/waste1010005.

There are currently several factors aligning for the transition to a circular economy in the Arab region: the exacerbated unsustainable environmental degradation resulting in steadily increasing cost adding pressure on government's budgets; the already developed best practices that have been tried out through pilot projects now ready for adaptation and scaling-up; the current strong agenda towards climate change mitigation and adaptation which can be channeled towards circularity; the new international environmental standards encouraging Arab states to follow implementation to continue being a part of global trade; and the rapid urbanization and advancement of technology that can be seen as enablers for introducing economically viable and far-reaching circular solutions.

To capture these aligning factors and progress towards circular economy in the Arab region ESCWA is developing an evidence-based policy advice directed towards executives and facilitating cooperation and awareness raising. The creation of an economy, where positive and negative externalities are accounted for building resilience and mitigating climate change, enabling an economy which is regenerative and restorative, is seen as a priority for the region.

As a part of these efforts, and in preparation for UNFCCC COP 28, scheduled to be held in the United Arab Emirates from 30 November to 12 December 2023, with a primary focus on translating commitments into tangible actions, ESCWA is organizing a regional dialogue on pathways to accelerate the transition to circular economy in the Arab region, in partnership with the Regional Program Energy Security and Climate Change of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS-REMENA) and with the support of the Government of Sweden. This dialogue represents a proactive response to the COP's call for action, recognizing that circular economy offers a crucial opportunity for addressing climate change and expediting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. It serves as a concrete step towards initiating action.

The goal of the event is to analyze and map out the current policies and plans needed for the transition, as well as the bottlenecks and solutions to sustain and accelerate circularity in key sectors, energy, industry, tourism and hospitality, textile and agriculture at country and regional levels.

## **2. OBJECTIVES**

This regional dialogue on Accelerating the Transition to Circular Economy for Climate Resilience in the Arab Region aims to gather multiple stakeholders in the region to initiate a dialogue on bottlenecks and accelerators of sustainable transition to circular economy. The dialogue is framed around the strong potential of circular economy in addressing the major development challenges of climate resilience, biodiversity loss, pollution and equitable and sustainable development.

The dialogue has the following specific objective:

- 1. To analyze the current status based on best practices and failures from sectors and stakeholders' standpoints:**
  - a. Build a common understanding on circular economy and build awareness around a common taxonomy for circularity in the Arab region.
  - b. Identify factors that hamper a fast transition including investments, regulations, institutions endorsing policies.
  - c. Determine the key capacities and governance framework necessary to accelerate the transition.
- 2. To identify a concerted stepwise process to mainstream circular economy through a whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach and how next steps could look like for Arab states and the Arab region.**

- a. Provide examples of linkages to national and regional policies in motion that could drive and lift up the circularity.
  - b. Share experiences from different countries regarding the scale of the transition, whether it be at the local-municipal-sector level or specific material streams, to understand the impact at scale.
- 3. To exchange on access to finance and effective governance to shift from project-based actions to holistic transformation of economies with social and nature positive impacts.**
- a. Evaluate potential risks and identify measures to mitigate them, promoting and accelerating investments in circularity.
  - b. Explore the opportunities presented by multilateral and bilateral climate, biodiversity, and ESG finance for a sustainable transition that accelerates circularity in the region.
  - c. Define the necessary forms of governance to adopt a systemic approach that is inclusive and equitable.
- 4. To discuss ways to ensure sustainability of the dialogue and to set a framework for promoting the transition to circularity in the Arab Region.**

### **3. PARTICIPANTS AND REGISTRATION**

Representatives of relevant ministries responsible for areas such as the environment, climate change, energy, water, industry, economy, and sustainable resource management, are invited to participate in the regional dialogue and to contribute to the discussions, as well as representatives of financial institutions, private sector enterprises, civil society and non-governmental organizations.

Invited participants are kindly requested to complete their registration by **Wednesday 15 November 2023** through the following link:

<https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJMIdeyvqzosGNMLui32-gcJhPOYa53p4D2e>

### **4. ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES**

#### ***Date and Venue***

The dialogue will be held at the Kempinski Hotel in Amman, Jordan from 22 to 23 November 2023. The meeting will begin at 9.00 am on Wednesday 22 November 2023 and conclude by 2.30 pm on Thursday 23 November 2023.

The meeting will be held in-person. Those who are unable to attend physically can follow online streaming of the meeting through a dedicated site that will be provided to registered participants.

#### ***Language of the meeting***

The meeting will be conducted in the Arabic and English languages. Interpretation between both languages will be provided for on-site participants.

## 5. CORRESPONDENCE

Kindly reach out to the following focal points should you have any queries related to the meeting:

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