



THINK 2030

Paper summary

Curbing the multi-planet economic model through a low-carbon circular economy

How can the European Green Deal address overconsumption?

Considering planetary boundaries, the ways that we consume today in Europe are not sustainable. The 2018 Think2030 conference identified overconsumption as the single most important problem facing the European Union.

The scale of the challenge is immense: each European will have to reduce by 80% the amount of natural resource they currently use for nutrition, housing, mobility and leisure by 2050.

This paper attempts to analyse EU efforts to tackle overconsumption up until today, the main drivers leading to unsustainable levels of consumption and how the EU can more effectively address them.

Whereas our domestic material efficiency is improving, our material footprint is not and remains largely linked with economic growth. Overall, if Europe is to reach the 2050 climate

Lead authors:

Jesus Urios and Antoine Lucic

Co-author:

Mia Pantzar

Full paper



Institute for
European
Environmental
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neutrality goal set in the European Green Deal it must pay much more attention to consumption.

In addition, the adverse economic effects derived from COVID-19 also have put pressure on governments to elaborate recovery packages aiming to boost economic growth that might not go in line with the 2050 climate neutrality objective.

According to the EEA's 2020 Outlook, Europe has made some progress in relation to resource efficiency and the circular economy. Over the period 2003 to 2018, the EU economy grew (in terms of GDP) by 23.4% while domestic material consumption (DMC), measuring total amount of materials directly used by an economy, fell by 4.8%. In parallel, EU imports grew by 20% over the same period, signalling the risk of carbon leakage.

The EU has placed the responsibility for the transformational shift required on citizens' role as consumers, while market, institutional and societal levers remain set on encouraging increased levels of consumption. The EU legislative efforts have failed so far to push for economic instruments that make unsustainable choices less attractive, such as taxation on unsustainable behaviours.

Addressing over-consumption in Europe and beyond comes down to creating the societal context and levers to reduce consumption where needed and possible, and consuming better. This takes form of complementing efficiency-oriented policies with sufficiency policies, besides enhancing the consistency of the circularity of the economy.

The EU COVID-19 recovery offers a unique opportunity to rethink the economy and steer continued development by human and ecological well-being, rather than by material consumption.

Key policy recommendations:

- Develop a comprehensive European policy for sustainable consumption, as a complement to the current circular economy package, aiming at an 80% reduction in per capita material footprint by 2050. This also implies the mainstreaming of sustainable consumption challenges across all relevant communications or legislations.
- Develop clear EU-level targets to reduce the Union's ecological footprint with respect to use of material in absolute terms.
- Initiate an EU-wide green fiscal reform in a wider range of sectors.
- Provide incentives and support – and address remaining barriers – to genuinely circular and “disruptive” business models.
- Elaborate a “basket” of indicators to monitor overconsumption alongside the existing circular economy indicators via Eurostat.

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Think2030 is an evidence-based, non-partisan platform of leading policy experts from European think tanks, civil society, the private sector, and local authorities. Find out more at **Think2030.eu**.



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