

## **Procuring Change: Navigating the Circular Economy Through a Strategic and Social Lens**

**Introduction:** The session titled "Procuring Change: Navigating the Circular Economy Through a Strategic and Social Lens" convened to shed light on the critical role of public and private buyers in advancing circular practices. With a welcome by Maria Nikolopoulou, a member of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the event featured insightful discussions and case studies aimed at fostering a deeper understanding of circular procurement's strategic and social dimensions.

**Panel 1: Vision and Strategic Implementation of Circular Procurement Practices:** The first panel delved into the vision and strategic implementation of circular procurement practices, emphasizing the importance of engaging both public and private sectors. The discussion, moderated by Helena O'Rourke-Potocki of ICLEI, underscored the significance of collaborative efforts in driving circularity. Frank Geets from Het Facilitair Bedrijf highlighted the necessity for a strategic procurement vision, while Anneke Lenaerts of TRANSMOOVE/NNOF provided the viewpoint of a circular supplier. Jakob Lindvall of ALDAB stressed the need for sector engagement, and Lina Svensberg of Compare explored circular procurement within the context of the CSRD (Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive).

The session resonated with a unified message from various speakers, underlining the crucial role of action and collaboration in advancing circular procurement. Frank Geets urged proactive measures, emphasizing that tangible progress requires both swift action and collective collaboration. Together with Anne Lenaerts, they shed light on the Circular Economy Office (CEO) project, emphasizing the indispensability of public-private collaboration in propelling circularity initiatives forward. Jakob Lindvall's emphasis on demand acceleration underscored the urgency of the matter, urging a swift response to the pressing challenges ahead. His call to learn from failures highlighted the iterative nature of progress in this arena: *"move your ass and the rest will follow!"*. Lina Svensberg underscored the critical importance of integrating innovation into procurement practices, emphasizing the necessity of overcoming resistance to change. While innovation and procurement may seem like distinct concepts, their integration is not only challenging but also essential for achieving circular procurement goals. Her emphasis on innovation as a catalyst for transformation reinforced the session's overarching theme of proactive engagement and adaptation in navigating the circular economy landscape.

**Presentation of the Circularity4All Hierarchy:** Cynthia Reynolds of the Circular Economy Coalition introduced the #Circularity4All Hierarchy, emphasizing the importance of maintaining resources at their highest societal value. The discussion revolved around revitalizing economies globally, retaining value throughout the lifecycle of resources, and fostering networks to scale sustainable solutions.

**Panel 2: Socially Conscious Circular Procurement in Business Practice:** The second panel showcased real-world examples of socially conscious circular procurement in business practice. Moderator Anita Skog facilitated a dynamic discussion on practical approaches and challenges in implementing circular procurement initiatives. Speakers included Ines Sturm from the Austrian Federal Railways, Marieke Weerdesteijn from Rijkswaterstaat, Katrien Vanderwee from UZ Gent, and Jana Zurkova from RREUSE. Each presenter shared insights from their respective sectors, emphasizing the importance of commitment, legislation, collaboration, and innovation in driving sustainable procurement practices.

Ines Sturm provided valuable insights into the Austrian Federal Railways' steadfast commitment to circular procurement, showcasing how a public procurement entity can lead the charge towards sustainable practices. Marieke Weerdesteijn's discussion on the ICT sector shed light on the intricate supply chain considerations and the importance of addressing sustainability concerns in the pre-tender phase. Katrien Vanderwee's presentation focused on the healthcare sector, highlighting the formidable challenges it faces in terms of waste generation and the critical need for capacity and

innovative business models to drive change. Lastly, Jana Zurkova's insights into social circular procurement initiatives by RREUSE demonstrated the transformative power of inclusive practices, emphasizing not only environmental sustainability but also the creation of meaningful employment opportunities. Together, these presentations underscored the multifaceted nature of circular procurement and the collective efforts required across sectors to realize its full potential.

### **Key Takeaways and Insights:**

**Conclusion:** The session on "Procuring Change: Navigating the Circular Economy Through a Strategic and Social Lens" provided a comprehensive overview of the opportunities and challenges associated with circular procurement. By highlighting best practices and real-world examples, the event underscored the transformative potential of strategic and socially conscious procurement in advancing the circular economy agenda.

The session illuminated key principles pivotal for advancing circular procurement practices and realizing sustainable outcomes:

1. **Strategic vision:** A strategic procurement vision is indispensable for driving circularity, serving as a compass guiding organizations towards integrating circular principles into procurement processes effectively.
2. **Stakeholder engagement:** Engaging stakeholders across sectors and borders fosters collaboration, knowledge sharing, and innovation, laying the groundwork for a coordinated approach to achieving circularity objectives.
3. **Commitment and legislation:** Top management commitment coupled with supportive legislation creates an enabling environment for the adoption of circular practices, providing the necessary impetus for organizational transformation.
4. **Innovation and collaboration:** Embracing innovation and fostering collaboration are essential for overcoming challenges and maximizing the impact of circular procurement initiatives, unlocking new opportunities for systemic change.
5. **Integration of social criteria:** Successful integration of social criteria into procurement processes prioritizes social considerations alongside environmental and economic factors, contributing to job creation, social inclusion, and sustainable outcomes.

In essence, these principles underscore the holistic nature of circular procurement, emphasizing the importance of strategic vision, stakeholder engagement, commitment, innovation, and social responsibility. By adhering to these principles, organizations can navigate the complexities of the circular economy landscape and drive meaningful progress towards a sustainable future.