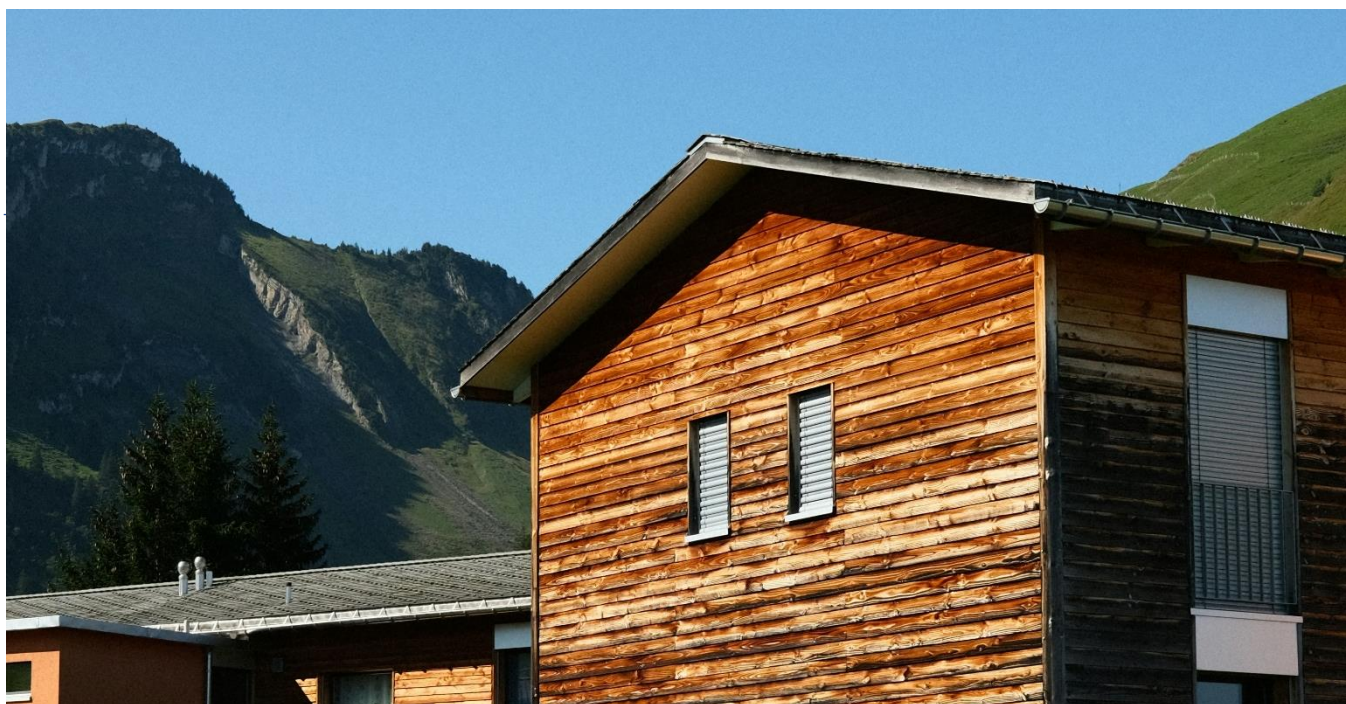




FACTSHEET: BOOSTING CIRCULAR ECONOMY IN THE ALPINE REGION

Alpine initiatives and the European policy landscape



Sustainable use of wood is a key enabler for circular construction. Source: Unsplash



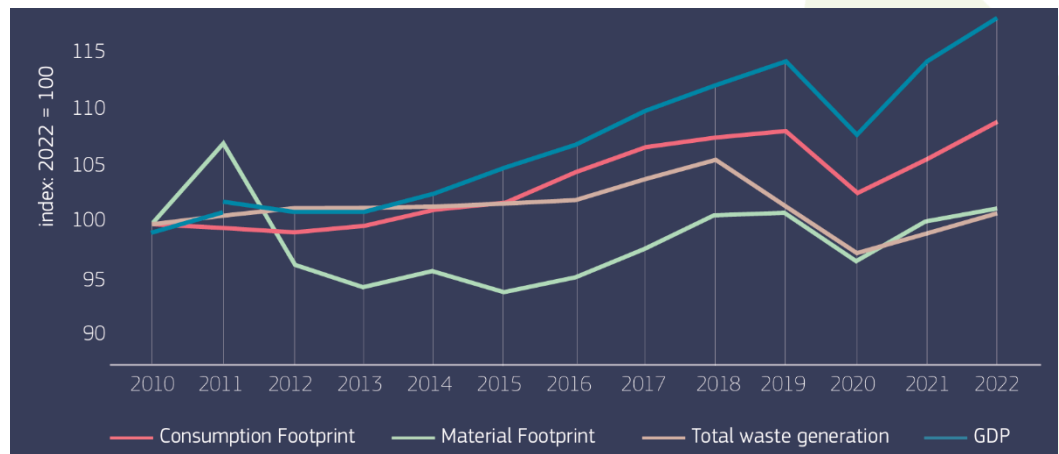
The circular economy is a model of production and consumption, which involves sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing and recycling existing materials and products for as long as possible, extending the life cycle of products and reducing waste to a minimum. Public policy has often been inspired by the so-called 'waste hierarchy' whereby preventing waste is the preferred option and sending waste to landfill the last resort. To further guide policy-making in this area, the EU has elaborated four overarching ambitions: decoupling economic growth from resource use; reducing total waste generation; reducing EU consumption footprint and; keeping EU resource consumption within planetary boundaries. While the EU has been able to partially decouple economic growth from resource use over the past decade or so (see graph below), its material footprint (the amount of raw materials extracted from nature to provide all goods and services) and consumption footprint (the environmental and climate impacts of all goods and services) continue to trend upwards, aside from during the COVID-19 pandemic. The amount of raw materials extracted to manufacture goods and services consumed in the EU reached 14.8 tonnes per capita in 2022, more than 20% above the world average.

As a cross-cutting topic, touching all economic sectors, the circular economy represents a great opportunity for the Alpine region. Circular approaches can support local economies by encouraging reuse, local production, and sustainable tourism, all while helping to preserve the natural beauty and biodiversity that make the region special. This factsheet highlights some of the outstanding circular economy initiatives in the Alps.

EU Policy, Initiatives and Funding

The EU has long been an international leader in the promotion of a circular economy. A key pillar of the 2019 [EU Green Deal](#), the importance of the circular economy was recently reconfirmed through the creation of the [EU's first Commissioner for a "competitive circular economy"](#) within Ursula von der Leyen's 2024-2029 Commission.

Currently, the [Circular Economy Action Plan](#) is the main guidance document at EU level. The plan, last updated in 2020, aims to make sustainable products the norm, empower consumers and public buyers, and make circularity work for people, regions and cities. Seven sectors were identified as having a high potential for circularity and prioritised for



Evolution of Consumption Footprint, Material Footprint and total waste generation compared to GDP in the EU
Source: European Commission

intervention (electronics and ICT, batteries and vehicles, packaging, plastics, textiles, construction and buildings, and food, water and nutrients). The new EU Commission has promised to deliver a first **Circular Economy Act**, expected in 2026, with measures to create market demand for secondary materials and establish a single market for waste, especially critical raw materials. The [Waste Framework Directive](#) sets the basic concepts and definitions related to waste management, including definitions of waste, recycling and recovery. A [recent revision](#) to the Directive will increase actions to reduce textile waste and sets targets for food waste reduction.

The [European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform](#) has been created to bring together circular economy stakeholders in Europe. Acting as a network of networks, it bridges existing initiatives at local, regional and national levels. EU funding for circular economy projects can be found predominantly within the [Horizon Europe](#) programme and [LIFE](#), which has a [sub-programme dedicated to circular economy](#), but also through Cohesion policy funds such as the [European Regional Development Fund \(ERDF\)](#) and [Interreg programmes](#). The European Investment Bank has also launched the [Circular City Centre - C3](#) to support cities in identifying and preparing sound circular projects for financing. A funding one-pager focused on circular construction is available on the EUSALP website.

EU Circular Cities and Regions Initiative

The EU created the [Circular Cities and Regions Initiative](#) (CCRI) as part of the Circular Economy Action Plan 2020. The initiative supports cities and regions to improve circularity in their economic sectors, value chains and services through the provision of technical and financial support, and knowledge sharing.

Alpine Space

The CCRI works closely with 12 'Pilot' and 25 'Fellow' cities, who benefit from tailored support and capacity building including [Munich](#), [Podravje-Maribor](#), [Eurométropole de Strasbourg](#), [Grosuplje](#) and [Cluster Éa éco-entreprises](#). It also funds demonstration projects within Horizon Europe, so far involving the following Alpine territories:

- Baden-Württemberg ([ROBIN](#)) is developing regional governance models for circular bioeconomy
- Region Nordschwarzwald ([CSS Boost](#)) implements a pilot on conventional plastics and bioplastics recycling
- Klagenfurt ([InvestCEC](#)) is developing and testing a new investment model for local circular economy projects
- Turin ([Woodcircles](#)) valorises wood used in construction that is currently not recycled
- Grenoble-Alpes Métropole ([SOLSTICE](#)) is piloting circular strategies for textiles

The CCRI launches an annual call for proposals, with the latest topics being announced in May 2025.

Boosting circular economy in the Alps

Circularity is a key concept for achieving a sustainable Alpine economy. This has been recognised by EUSALP, which has made 'boosting the circular economy' a cross-cutting priority. It will be addressed by several EUSALP Action Groups, who will aim to create joint innovative actions, extend value chains, set up new tools, and develop cross-border financial instruments and projects that foster the sustainable use of limited Alpine resources. A subgroup on 'Circular Economy and Bioeconomy' has been created and an EUSALP roadmap for the circular economy is under preparation, as is a Circular Alp Hub.

The 2025 EUSALP Presidency, in the hands of Austria-Liechtenstein, has put the focus on circular construction, making the transformation of the sector one of its three priorities. It aims to make the Alps a model region for circular construction, by developing: common principles for the circular economy; methods for extending the life cycle of buildings; the use of regional raw materials; job profiles and training in circular construction; and guidelines for action and support measures for circular construction projects. This ambition is being supported by the Interreg Alpine Space project [BAUHALPS](#), which is developing and testing a model that combines New European Bauhaus concepts with sustainability measurements and indicators. Concretely, partners will create a toolkit for assessing the circular performance of buildings, and an action plan for the green transformation of the Alpine building sector.

Interreg Alpine Space is funding several other projects to boost circular economy in different economic sectors:



[AlpTextyles](#) is addressing circularity in the textile industry. By tapping into the rich textile heritage of the Alps, and the growing consumer interest for sustainable products, partners aim to foster more local production and consumption of textiles. The project will deliver a policy brief on heritage sensitive and circular Alpine textile value chains, with strategic recommendations for regions. A Massive Online Open Course (MOOC) focused on the living textile heritage of the Alps and its sustainable circular future is also in the pipeline.



The [CEFoodCycle](#) project focuses on the food sector. Partners will identify strategies to reduce waste and CO₂ emissions by mapping food streams and value chains. The project has created Circular Food Hubs in [Salzburg-Bavaria](#), [Südtirol-Alto Adige](#), [Piemonte](#), [Alpes Maritime](#), and [Gorenjska](#). The Hubs acquire, educate and supervise stakeholders in the defined food streams to close food cycles and facilitate sustainable decision making.



[Cradle-ALP](#) is targeting industrial manufacturing industries, and will raise awareness of cradle-to-cradle approaches and circular design, with the aim of replacing chemical, fossil or unsustainable materials with more circular, sustainable and biodegradable ones. [Cradle-to-cradle transformation roadmaps](#) have been produced for the textiles, composites, packaging, wood and furniture and chemistry and materials sectors. Next, transnational stakeholder groups will be formed, with the aim of transferring the roadmaps into industrial practice.



[ECOLE](#) aims to boost circular economy in industrial parks. Partners will collaborate to create a systemic thinking community model for the integration of circular economy in industrial parks. The model will then be demonstrated at 10 participating industry parks across the Alps.