

Transition to a circular economy

Transition to a circular economy brings new challenges to all industries. We support our clients in navigating this landscape as they develop innovative and pragmatic solutions that contribute to a thriving circular economy.

The issue

A circular economy relies on sustainable production and consumption to preserve natural resources and biodiversity by reducing waste and encouraging repair and reuse of products. In 2020, the European Commission adopted a new Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP), one of the main blocks of the European Green Deal, which announced several initiatives affecting the whole life cycle of products. Individual EU member states are taking action to implement the plan.

These initiatives aim to fundamentally change companies' approach to production, design, and consumer behaviors, notably by changing laws to promote:

- Eco-conception of products to make them sustainable, including designing products with reduced energy consumption and lifetime emissions in mind, and considering first use incorporation of raw materials, reparability, reuse and recycling at end of life
- Responsible consumption by ensuring that consumers have reliable evidence-based information about the green credentials of products
- Responsible waste management for better recycling to create new resources

The CEAP is one limb of the EU's response to UN Sustainable Development Goal ("UN SDG") 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). In 2020, the UK transposed the legislative aspects of the EU's 2020 Circular Economy Package into UK law. France also adopted an ambitious Anti-waste law in February 2020 notably imposing new obligations on producers to promote a circular economy. New and proposed circular economy and waste legislation in India, Mexico and South Africa look to further accelerate the adoption of circular economy practices.

What we do

We advise on all aspects of the Circular Economy Action Plan, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, provide horizon scanning of hard and soft law, risk mapping, and assessments to help clients to implement compliant and business-oriented solutions.

In addition, we have a leading business-oriented practice with a dedicated global products team, supported by an in-house Science Unit advising clients on the circular economy transition and ensuring regulatory and legislative compliance.

Work for clients often includes advice on:

- compliance with new sustainability obligations undertaking product evaluations to highlight potential adaptations to design manufacturing and packaging
- helping clients provide clear consumer information through product markings, labelling and packaging
- compliance with new consumer protection laws and regulations promoting product durability, reparability and longevity
- advising on end-of-life product recycling obligations, waste, recycling, and flagging specific laws
- providing assistance in regulatory issues related to the requirements on single-use plastic products arising in national law
- complying with new obligations applicable in the construction sector as a result of national provisions adopted to promote circular economy

Our impact

We have assisted many clients to adapt their business towards a circular economy transition, including:

- Advising a leading sports equipment manufacturer on draft regulations anticipating new regulatory requirements and their implementation
- Providing guidance on technical criteria and methodologies to help clients communicate evidence-based information about the environmental footprint of their organisation, services and products
- Advising on laws applicable to data-centre energy consumption and equipment use
- Delivering bespoke training to a global telecoms company about existing and new laws relevant to emissions tracking, disclosure obligations and sustainability
- Advising a leading technology hardware manufacturer on the markings, labelling, packaging and in-box materials for its electric and electronic consumer products to comply with applicable regulations and provide the required information to its clients
- Assisting a retail giant on regulatory issues related to the requirements on single-use plastic products arising from the French Anti-waste law
- Advising a leading logistics development and asset management platform in identifying the new obligations relating to sorting of materials and demolition waste traceability applicable in the construction sector as a result of the French Anti-waste law

Useful links

- [French anti-waste law](#)
- [EU Circular Economy Action Plan](#)

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