

Press release, 1 December 2021, 1pm

Plenty of untapped potential for the Swiss circular economy First representative study on the state of the Swiss circular economy

The circular economy in Switzerland has great potential: this is shown by the data from the first representative BFH/KOF study of Swiss companies. Switzerland, as a location for innovation with a well-educated workforce and high quality standards, is well placed to make better use of the opportunities offered by the circular economy in the future. The study published today is based on a representative survey conducted jointly by the KOF Swiss Economic Institute at ETH Zurich and Bern University of Applied Sciences (BFH, Department of Economics). The status report on the Swiss circular economy, which is based on this data, was prepared with the support of Circular Economy Switzerland and the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN).

Only 10 per cent of Swiss companies today conduct substantial activities in the field of the circular economy and generate a significant proportion of their revenue from it. Many firms have not undertaken any circular economy activities in the last three years or have only done so to increase efficiency. Efficiency-enhancing measures are an important first step. However, more is needed for a functioning circular economy. What is required is activities that close the loop (e.g. renting instead of buying, reprocessing of products) and extend the life of products (e.g. reparability, product upgrades). As the study published today shows, such activities are currently hardly being undertaken.

The study also describes the companies that are active in the circular economy and the obstacles that currently prevent firms from conducting these activities. Based on this, conclusions are drawn about how the transformation to a circular economy could be stimulated. This confirms that the circular economy is an innovation challenge. However, there is currently a lack of opportunities and expertise to adapt existing products and services to a circular economy. Small firms in particular often struggle to overcome these hurdles on their own. What is needed, therefore, is an attractive economic policy framework, especially given that companies are integrated into networks of suppliers and customers and thus need cross-company initiatives in order to make progress during the transformation process.

However, the initial conditions for accelerating the transformation to a circular economy in Switzerland in the future are encouraging. As one of the most innovative countries in the world, Switzerland has comparative advantages during the transformation process, enabling it to gain a lasting competitive edge. In addition, there are already lighthouse projects in many sectors, demonstrating that a successful transformation is certainly possible.

The subject of the circular economy is highly topical internationally: at COP 26 in Glasgow the circular economy was discussed as an integral part of the solution to combatting climate change and achieving the goals set out in the Paris Agreement. Moreover, the circular economy offers opportunities for new, innovative business models, conserves resources and strengthens regional value creation. The circular economy therefore promises great potential – especially for Switzerland, with its limited supply of resources. The parliamentary initiative entitled ‘Strengthening the Swiss Circular Economy’ is intended to create new framework conditions for a modern, environmentally friendly circular economy in Switzerland. It has been adopted by the Commission for the Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy and is in the consultation phase until 16 February 2022.

Further information

Study methodology

In 2020 the approximately 8,000 firms in the KOF Business Panel, which is representative of Switzerland, were surveyed in writing based on a specially devised concept for mapping the circular economy at company level. The extent to which these firms achieved measurable changes during the period from 2017 to 2019 was surveyed with respect to 27 specific activities in the area of the circular economy. The data collected allows comparisons to be made between industries, regions and firms of different sizes and thus presents a representative and nuanced picture of the spread of circular activities at companies in Switzerland for the first time.

About the participating organisations

Bern University of Applied Sciences (BFH), Department of Economics, is an application-driven university that focuses on a sustainable and creative economy for the business of tomorrow. The Sustainable Business Institute studies sustainable entrepreneurship, focusing on corporate responsibility, the circular economy and social innovation/entrepreneurship. <https://www.bfh.ch/business/en/>

The **KOF Swiss Economic Institute** is a Swiss economic research institute based at ETH Zurich. Its research focuses on the Swiss economy, the international economy, labour markets and structural change. <https://kof.ethz.ch/en/>

Circular Economy Switzerland is a coordination and exchange platform that operates as a network involving various projects and events to provide impetus for a new, Switzerland-wide circular economy movement. <https://circular-economy-switzerland.ch/?lang=en>

The **Federal Office for the Environment** is a federal authority of the Swiss Confederation. It is Switzerland's environment agency and forms part of the Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications (DETEC). <https://www.bafu.admin.ch/bafu/en/home.html>

Circular economy in brief

“The circular economy is a model adopting a resource-based and systemic view” allowing society “to achieve well-being within planetary boundaries.” The aim of the circular economy is to design a system in which as few resources as possible are used repeatedly and efficiently to produce the highest possible value in cycles that are as closed as possible. In a circular economy “goods and services are powered by renewable energy and rely on materials that are either renewable through biological processes or can be safely kept in the technosphere, requiring minimum raw material extraction and ensuring safe disposal of inevitable waste and dispersion in the environment.”

Source and further information at <https://circular-economy-switzerland.ch/about-circular-economy/?lang=en>

Further links

[Circular Economy Switzerland \(CES\)](#)
[The Swiss Federal Office for the Environment](#)
[Ruedi Noser's postulate: Breaking down the barriers to resource efficiency and the circular economy \(DE\)](#)

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