

# Executive summary

In Umeå, Sweden, the circular economy represents a new socioeconomic paradigm to stimulate businesses, while achieving the environmental goal of carbon neutrality by 2040. Umeå is the fastest-growing urban centre in Northern Sweden and will host 200 000 inhabitants by 2050, thus increasing the demand of infrastructure including the housing stock, schools, roads and green areas, as well the demand for natural resources, energy and food. This expected growth is an opportunity to move from “business as usual” to a more circular approach whereby construction materials can be used and reused, energy and water efficiency can increase in buildings, food minimised and innovation promoted for closing loops across value chains.

The Strategic Plan 2016-28 set the objective for Umeå to become a leader in the circular economy. A number of actions are in place: from the Circular Economy Business Accelerator North Sweden, a collaboration platform for business advisors to build knowledge and business model innovation, to the network “Green Umeå” supporting the implementation of local sustainable projects for the green transition, sustainable mobility and sharing economy.

Importantly, the future of the circular economy in Umeå can count on a wide range of stakeholders that build and share knowledge, while enhancing innovation and experimentation. In particular, civil society and business, in particular, have been increasingly contributing through their activities to minimise food waste, make mobility cleaner and increase the use of recycling materials in the building sector. Umeå is a knowledge hub for the region and hosts a young and highly educated community. Moreover, the business and innovation scene is vibrant and environmentally friendly: there are five incubators involving start-ups, universities, the municipality and public companies. Municipal companies apply innovative *cleantech* solutions, consisting of using alternative clean energy, reducing water consumption, green chemistry and promoting sustainable construction and transport.

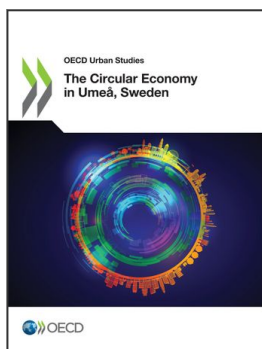
Going forward, a full-fledge transition towards the circular economy will require overcoming a number of challenges:

- **Clarifying roles and responsibilities** within the municipality to reach the objective stated in the Strategic Plan 2016-28 to enhance leadership and accountability;
- **Creating synergies across existing projects** and initiatives that are making Umeå a green, smart and sustainable city;
- **Matching the human and technical capacities** to the needs brought about by the circular economy to enhance the legitimacy of the municipality in leading and managing the transition;
- **Engaging stakeholders to identify opportunities** within the circular economy, beyond the use of the concept as a synonym for recycling.

The report recommends concrete actions to improve Umeå’s ability to promote, facilitate and enable the circular economy. In particular:

- **To promote the circular economy**, the municipality could:

- map existing circular initiatives and future jobs and skills required for the circular transition;
- perform a metabolism analysis;
- develop a strategy on the circular economy and link it with existing long-term plans;
- promote circular business through guidelines for specific sectors, as well as labels, certifications and awards;
- foster a circular economy culture.
- **To facilitate collaboration among a wide range of actors** to make the circular economy happen on the ground, the municipality could:
  - set up co-ordination mechanisms within the municipality;
  - coordinate further with the national and the regional government;
  - collaborate with universities, existing business and start-ups, and;
  - strengthen territorial linkages between urban and rural areas.
- **To enable the necessary governance and economic conditions**, the municipality could:
  - identify the regulatory, fiscal and economic instruments that need to be updated to foster the transition to the circular economy;
  - implement green public procurement;
  - foster capacity building for the circular economy, and;
  - develop a monitoring and evaluation framework of the circular economy strategy.



**From:**  
**The Circular Economy in Umeå, Sweden**

**Access the complete publication at:**

<https://doi.org/10.1787/4ec5dbcd-en>

**Please cite this chapter as:**

OECD (2020), "Executive summary", in *The Circular Economy in Umeå, Sweden*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/233eb715-en>

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