

# CirculAbility

## PI4

White Paper  
for the valorisation and recovery of  
unsold food and the socio-professional  
inclusion of people with disabilities



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# 01 | A project for our future

According to Article 15 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights<sup>1</sup>, everyone has the right to engage in work and to pursue a freely chosen or accepted occupation. The right to work is a fundamental right enshrined in article 26 of the same Charter (social and occupational integration) and in the Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD.) However, this is far from being a reality for millions of people with disabilities who want to work: at EU level alone, only 50.8% of people with disabilities are employed, compared to 74.8% of people without disabilities. Moreover, certain categories like women with disabilities, young people with disabilities and people in need of support, are even more likely to face discrimination and excluded from the labour market.

Therefore, at European level the unemployment rate of people with disabilities is higher than that of the rest of the population. So, there is a strong interest towards all initiatives that can create good working conditions as unemployment can lead to poverty and social exclusion. Ensuring access to employment is a key issue, and it is crucial for the economic and social inclusion of more than 100 million people with disabilities in Europe. The barriers that prevent access to the labour market are mostly based on misconceptions and wrong judgments about a person's abilities.

An effective response to the employment problems of disadvantaged groups can come from the circular economy and the fight against food waste. Historically linked to the social economy, the circular economy is based on a model that focus on making the most of the material resources available to us by applying three basic principles: reduce, reuse and recycle, and therefore increasing the efficiency in the use of resources by reducing the impact on the environment. In the circular economy model, waste does not exist as nothing is lost, everything is transformed: unsold bread can become beer, food waste can be transformed into animal feed or biogas. A second life is possible for most of our waste.

Indeed, the classic linear economic model, based on production, distribution, consumption, and waste management, seems to have reached its limits due to the shortage of resources, the increase of the world population, and the growing environmental impacts of human activities. In response to these challenges, the circular economic model represents a tremendous opportunity to support the energy and ecological transition and foster its development. The fight against food waste is part of this model and seeks to end food losses linked to edible foods thrown away or lost without having been consumed. This phenomenon, caused by overconsumption, poor storage conditions, and confusion between different expiry dates, does not concern only the wasted food, but also all the resources part of its production.

The fight against food waste is therefore a big environmental, economic and social problem, both at national and global level, and an important part of the United Nations Sustainable

<sup>1</sup>[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text\\_en.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf)

Development Goals (SDGs) as well as a priority for the European Union, which aims to reduce food waste by 50% by 2030 “at retail and consumer level”<sup>2</sup>.

The circular economy and fight against food waste represent as well an important opportunity for the social integration of the most disadvantaged groups, particularly if in the context of the social economy (SE). Indeed, SE companies are more inclined to experiment and tend to organise employment around activities that are likely to affect society as a whole. The social dimension of their operations makes them more sensitive towards the green transition and therefore more interested in operating in a way that considers the impact on the environment.

These considerations led a group of very committed organisations active in the social dimension to develop the “CirculAbility” project, which has set itself the task of exploring a common ground between the fight against food waste, the fight for people with disabilities’ rights and the fight for a sustainable and inclusive economy. As a consequence, these three important themes have come together around a particular activity: the recovery and valorisation of unsold food by people with disabilities. The aim of CirculAbility is therefore to offer professionals of the disability field an educational support to help them set up projects for the recovery and valorisation of unsold food, through the analyses of successful and convincing initiatives and the creation of appropriate training for professionals.

Convinced of the quality of its results and the cause that generated them, the CirculAbility partnership has decided to present this White Paper to raise awareness among the various stakeholders on the challenges and opportunities presented by the green transition and the fight for the social inclusion of people with disabilities, through an adapted training offer allowing the development of activities for the recovery of unsold food, and to formulate specific recommendations for each of these target audiences. Taking the form of a practical guide, this White Paper aims to provide element to raise awareness and better understand the issues at stakes, but also formulate concrete recommendations to make the socio-professional inclusion of persons with disability via the green transition a concrete possibility.



<sup>2</sup><https://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/policies/food-losses-waste/>

## 02 | Social and Sustainable Development

The CirculAbility experience has allowed the partnership, composed of organisation strongly engaged in the social dimension, to immerse itself into the core of the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>3</sup> (SDGs) and to develop a training programme for operators of the social sector for the implementation of realities aimed at promote the circular economy and the fight against food waste.

The Sustainable Development Goals have been a constant reference for CirculAbility throughout its design and implementation. By developing a training programme focused on the circular economy and food recovery for the staff of structures employing people with disabilities in the hotel and agri-food sector, the project and its long-term impact aim to contribute to the reduction (see elimination) of hunger and ensure a certain food security by promoting an approach aimed at reducing food waste (SDG n2). In this sense CirculAbility aims as well at promoting the employability of people with disabilities through sustainable economic activities, and therefore promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth (SDG n. 8). Another important element of the project has been sharing the idea that we can “do more and better with less” by promoting and strengthening sustainable consumption and production patterns for a more sustainable use of the environment and natural resources (SDGs n.12). Last but not least, the project has helped highlighting the importance of partnerships for the success of innovative and sustainable projects, acting in partnerships at all levels to create synergies (SDG n. 17).

The food and consumption system need to change for a more responsible and sustainable society, able to feed the millions of people who today suffer from hunger and famine. The CirculAbility project goes in this direction, partners have agreed that:

1. The circular economy represents an important opportunity of sustainable growth for the social sector and for the employability of people with disabilities. SE operators are at the forefront when it comes to offering innovative solutions to the main economic, social and environmental challenges of our time and contributing to the achievement of key EU objectives. They are the engine of a just transition, both social and environmental. But their staff must be trained and able to support the development of new services aimed at social inclusion and improving the quality of life of persons with disabilities.
2. The circular economy and the fight against food waste can offer an ideal economic model for developing economic activities employing people with disabilities;
3. Professionals of the social sector must be trained and qualified to offer adequate support and innovative perspectives to the needs of those involved in their services.
4. It is therefore necessary to foresee adequate and innovative training courses for the profes-

<sup>3</sup><https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

sional of the social sector and staff of support services for people with disabilities to enable services to develop new viable economic activities aimed at unsold food recovery and allowing a sustainable socio-professional inclusion of persons with disability;

5. A person with a disability must remain the main protagonist of his/her life projects. As mentioned in the new European Strategy for persons with disability and stressed by the UNCRPD, the socio-professional integration of persons with disabilities improves the socio-economic progress of the society, and consequently the quality of life of all citizens;
6. Working in partnership with all stakeholders involved and in a co-productive way is the key to success for all innovative initiatives in the social support sector for people with disabilities. The establishment of effective partnerships is the most crucial factor for the success of a project to recover unsold food that employs people with disabilities. Moreover, it is also important to establish good relations with the local administration: being part of a supportive community and having a good relationship with the local administration is very important and can generate many opportunities for collaboration;

Thinking in an inclusive and circular way by respecting the principle of eco-production and eco-design. Applying the precepts of the circular economy to a business model can be an important way for maximizing the resources available on the territory, while fostering a more sustainable economy. This can be achieved from the design of the product. Eco-design is a principle of the circular economy that mean making products, from the first stages of their conception, with a circular approach.

## 03 | Conclusion

The social economy and the circular economy are two sides of the same coin, a coin that will be the currency of the years to come. The social economy places people at the center and directs its activities towards objectives of solidarity and social utility, while the circular economy and the fight against food waste represent a way of operating aimed at reducing the impact of human activities and that sees products and materials retain their value for as long as possible: waste and resource use are minimized, and when a product reaches its end of life, the resources that make it up are kept in the economic cycle to be used again and again to recreate value.

The structures and enterprises of the social economy are deeply connected to the territory where they operate, and the approach they follow is generally based on sustainability on the side of energy consumption, with new buildings built with the latest approaches in terms of ecological footprint, and on a circular approach aimed at reducing food waste with regard to the food sector (for example: bars and restaurants employing people with disabilities who only serve local products prepared in a sustainable way). These structures tend to operate often under public contracts for the development of social services at the local level and there is therefore a natural interest in the collective well-being of the community in which they operate.

Being social means also promoting the community where one operates, as well as its environmental and food sustainability. The innovativeness of the circular economy approach leads operators to explore new markets neglected by the traditional economy, allowing them to generate unexpected profits where others would have seen only waste that should have been disposed of. This is all the more relevant as it comes at a time with relevant opportunities.

Social service providers for people with disabilities, particularly in the form of Social Economy enterprises, are more prone to experimentation and tend to organise employment around activities capable to impact the society as a whole. The social dimension of their operations makes them more sensitive to the green transition and therefore more interested in operating considering the impact on the environment.

The principles of solidarity and responsibility, typical of SE enterprises, act strongly towards society and are reflected in the environment in terms of sustainability and reduction of food losses. The social economy is a natural vector for ecological transition and sustainable development as it is able to reconcile the environment, the fight against food waste, social utility and economic activity.

Social economy organisations have traditionally played a major role in the social and professional inclusion of people with disabilities, particularly in providing training and working opportunities for disabled workers who wish to access the open labour market.

Social service providers play therefore a key role in the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and in the professional integration of people with disabilities. Article 27 of the UNCRPD speaks of the right to work on an equal basis with others in an open, inclusive and accessible labour market. This labour market should also be sustainable in the long term from an environmental point of view. People with disabilities have the right to a decent quality of life and independent living, and this means living in a sustainable environment. This approach is also in line with the new European Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disability 2021-2030, which aims to address the various challenges faced by people with disabilities, and to ensure that concrete progress is made in all areas covered by the UNCRPD both at EU and National level.

The Social Economy is deeply connected to the organisation of services for people with disabilities, operating with its organisations for their social inclusion and improvement of the quality of life. The circular economy, historically linked to the social economy, allows the development of new economic activities by moving from a linear model that extracts-consumes-throws away to a circular model that “aims to increase the efficiency of the use of resources and to reduce our impact on the environment”<sup>4</sup> and which requires a greater need for labour workforce. Thanks to their connection with civil society and their social commitment, SE organisations are

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<sup>4</sup><https://www.territoires-climat.ademe.fr/ressource/72-26>

therefore at the forefront when it comes to offering innovative solutions to the main economic, societal and environmental challenges of our time and contribute to the achievement of key EU objectives.

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