



UNITED NATIONS
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION



Economic Cooperation Organization

SUMMARY RECORD

**Joint Accelerator Session on
“RESCUE Initiative in the ECO Region:
Goals, Opportunities, and Challenges”
at the World Circular Economy Forum 2025**

15 May, 2025

Online

About the initiative

RESCUE is a collaborative initiative launched by the ECO to contribute to a more sustainable, circular and regenerative economic models among its Member States in the region. Its overarching objective is to establish a regional cooperation platform that advocates for a just transition to a resource-efficient, circular, and regenerative economy. This initiative seeks ways and means to support coherent policies for circularity and more sustainable management of natural resources, aligning with global sustainability trends and addressing challenges unique to the ECO region. The RESCUE initiative was officially launched during the UN Climate Change Conference (COP29) on November 16, 2024, in Baku, Azerbaijan, as part of the COP29 Presidency Events. RESCUE has the potential to create in the long run a more sustainable future by balancing environmental, economic, and social well-being in the ECO region and benefit the region as a whole through positive impacts on resource efficiency and recovery, waste reduction, climate change mitigation, biodiversity conservation, sustainable and innovative materials, job creation, community engagement, social equity, cost savings, innovation, and new business models.

Objective of the accelerator session

The session was organized jointly by the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) to bring together diverse stakeholders to explore and unlock the potential of the circular economy transition within selected Caucasus, South, West and Central Asian countries-members of ECO, focusing on the goals of the Regional Initiative on Resource Efficiency, Sustainability, and Circular Economy (RESCUE), launched in 2024 during COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan. This exercise thus took up how the RESCUE could contribute to positioning the ECO region as a proponent of a just, inclusive, and sustainable transition to circularity and lower-carbon economies in the international arena. This accelerator session aimed to serve as a catalyst for sustainable economic transformation, through the efficient and circular use of materials and other natural resources, unlocking the economic, social and environmental potential of the circular economy in the ECO region, highlighting the role of international assistance in driving the implementation of the RESCUE Initiative and providing policy recommendations to forge regional partnerships through circular solutions.

Category

Details

Total registered participants

78 (Approx. 40% male, 60% female)

Speakers' gender ratio

14 (11 men, 3 women)

Registered audience & speakers

35 countries from Europe, Asia, Africa, South and North America. Registered participants/speakers from the following ECO Member States: Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Total YouTube views

81

Summary Record

1. The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Secretariat and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) jointly hosted an online Accelerator Session on May 15, 2025, titled 'RESCUE Initiative in the ECO Region: Goals, Opportunities, and Challenges'. The session, held alongside the World Circular Economy Forum 2025, brought together around 70 stakeholders and experts from the ECO Member States, academia, multilateral entities and international financial institutions. The delegates from the ECO Secretariat and UNIDO also participated in the subject meeting. ECO region was represented for the first time in the World Circular Economy Forum, which is the major global platform for circular economy.

Opening Session

2. Ms. Tatiana Chernyavskaya, representing UNIDO, opened the session by highlighting the RESCUE Initiative's focus on resource efficiency and sustainability. She emphasized UNIDO's mission to promote inclusive and sustainable industrial development globally, with a strong emphasis on environmental protection and efficient resource use. Ms. Chernyavskaya underscored the alignment of the Regional Initiative on Resource Efficiency, Sustainability and Circular Economy in the ECO Region (RESCUE) with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) and Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). She reaffirmed UNIDO's commitment to leveraging its decades of experience in resource-efficient production to foster sustainability through collaborative projects in the ECO region.

3. H.E. Dr. Asad Majeed Khan, ECO Secretary-General, while acknowledging the ECO-UNIDO collaboration, highlighted the urgent need to address resource efficiency and regenerative production in the ECO region through the RESCUE Initiative. Dr. Khan outlined the severe climate challenges encountered by the region, including water scarcity and pollution, while emphasizing the transformative opportunities these challenges present. He reaffirmed ECO Member States' commitment to reducing fossil fuel dependency and building resilient circular economies, underpinned by the ECO Strategy for Energy Cooperation 2030. Dr. Khan announced a feasibility study to assess the region's readiness for circularity, aiming to guide future actions and drive regenerative growth. He underscored the huge scale of transformation requires unprecedented collaboration, and therefore extended an open invitation to all development partners, financial institutions, and technical experts to join ECO in making 2025 the breakthrough year for circular transition in the region.

Presentations on Circular Economy

4. Dr. Fuad Farzalibeyov, ECO Director of Energy, Minerals and Environment, delivered a detailed presentation on the RESCUE initiative developed in collaboration with Azerbaijan. While recalling the resolve of ECO decision-making and sectoral bodies in the gradual transition to resource-efficient and low-emission economies, he underscored the need in acceleration of this process in high-impact sectors through

circularity and resource-efficiency policies. In this context, he apprised the audience of the overall objective of RESCUE Initiative to establish a regional cooperation platform advocating for a just transition to resource-efficient and circular economies, which fits well into ongoing transition efforts. Dr. Farzalibeyov further highlighted the outcomes of the Ministerial Meeting on Circular Economy during COP29 in Baku, which led to the Joint Statement on Launching RESCUE. This statement, among others, calls for developing a needs assessment/feasibility study of the ECO region for a just transition to a resource-efficient and circular economy.

5. Dr. Rene Van Berkel, UNIDO Senior Advisor and member of the International Resource Panel, underscored the urgent need to transition from a linear economy based on the take, make, use, and throw away model to a circular economy that prioritizes take, make, use, and recover. He emphasized that recycling, while important, should be a last resort, advocating for waste prevention strategies instead. Mr. Van Berkel noted that global material use has tripled in the last 50 years, driving climate emissions, biodiversity loss, and pollution, with unsustainable material extraction being a key challenge, especially in the ECO region. He also addressed the disparities in material consumption among ECO Member States, alarming the stagnation in material productivity improvements and the need to decouple economic growth from environmental harm.

6. Dr. Van Berkel attributed circular economy as an umbrella concept, and outlined the transformative potential of a circular economy in the ECO region, including reduced pollution, improved resource efficiency, and economic opportunities. He referenced the World Bank reports identifying actionable steps in sectors like construction and agriculture, which could yield significant economic and environmental benefits, stressing the importance of industrial symbiosis, green chemistry, and resource efficiency programs. He called for a concerted effort to scale up circular economy practices. Dr. Van Berkel framed this transition as both a necessity for environmental sustainability and a major business opportunity for the region.

7. Afterwards, the interaction featured three panel discussions that explored key aspects of advancing the circular economy in the ECO region. The panels focused respectively on sharing national experiences and best practices, identifying capacity-building needs and enabling factors, and addressing the financial challenges and opportunities for circular economy investments together. These discussions provided a comprehensive overview of the progress, barriers and actionable strategies to promote sustainable development through circular economy principles.

Panel 1: Circular Economy Good Practices and Examples

Moderator:

Dr. Rene Van Berkel,

Senior Advisor and member of the International Resource Panel and International Faculty of School of the Global Studies, Thammasat University

8. The panel showcased diverse national efforts to embed circular economy (CE) principles into legislative, industrial and social frameworks. Countries in the ECO region are pursuing CE through legal reforms, national strategies and sector-specific initiatives, including eco-industrial zones, water resource management, and textile recycling and legislative taxonomies. Despite facing varied challenges, ranging from financial limitations to geopolitical constraints, there is a shared commitment to transitioning toward sustainable practices by leveraging innovation, education and collaborative governance.

Panel's Highlights:

- i. Develop and adopt national circular economy strategies and taxonomies to provide clear regulatory direction and attract investment.
- ii. Promote cross-sectoral collaboration (public-private-academic) to scale successful initiatives like eco-industrial parks and material recovery programs.
- iii. Invest in capacity building and education through dedicated institutions to ensure a skilled workforce capable of implementing CE principles.
- iv. Enhance financing mechanisms by engaging both domestic and international investors, including concessional funding and green bonds, since finance is the most important factor for countries in the region.
- v. Implement monitoring frameworks to measure CE performance and identify opportunities for policy refinement.

Panel 2: Capacity Building and Enabling Environment

Moderator:

***Ms. Tatiana Chernyavskaya,
Industrial Development Expert at UNIDO***

9. Under this panel, the discussion emphasized the critical role of capacity building in driving CE adoption. Effective CE implementation requires more than awareness. It demands systemic training, continuous dialogue and integration of digital tools to ensure long-term knowledge retention and application. The countries highlighted legislative improvements, such as extended producer responsibility and recognized economic and infrastructural gaps that hinder progress. There was consensus on the importance of combining educational initiatives with physical infrastructure and regulatory enforcement to create an enabling ecosystem for CE.

Panel's Highlights:

- i. Institutionalize ongoing training programs such as “Train the Trainer,” ensuring broad sectoral coverage and local multiplier effects.

- ii. Leverage digital technologies (e.g., e-learning, satellite monitoring) to enhance training effectiveness and enforcement capabilities.
- iii. Establish public-private partnerships (PPPs) to co-finance recycling and waste management infrastructure.
- iv. Enforce environmental legislation rigorously, using tools like remote sensing to detect violations and incentivize compliance.
- v. Integrate CE principles into national education systems to foster early understanding and cultural acceptance.

Panel 3: Financing for Circular Economy

Moderator:

Dr. Rene Van Berkel,

Senior Advisor and member of the International Resource Panel and International Faculty of School of the Global Studies, Thammasat University

10. The third panel focused on the financial landscape of CE initiatives, highlighting the contrast between circular and linear economy financing models. Panelists identified risk perception, lack of metrics, and institutional conservatism as primary barriers to CE investment. However, mechanisms like blended finance, concessional funding, and patient capital were discussed as effective tools to attract both public and private investment. The importance of strategic guidance from governments and international cooperation was stressed to create an enabling policy and market environment.

Panel's Highlights:

- i. High perceived risk for circular projects is a great challenge.
- ii. Deploy blended finance solutions to de-risk CE investments and catalyze private sector participation.
- iii. Strengthen financial institutions' capacity through technical assistance and dedicated CE investment frameworks.
- iv. Promote enabling policy environments that provide clarity, incentives, and risk mitigation for CE stakeholders.
- v. Map existing CE initiatives and investment opportunities to build a regional investment rationale and reduce information asymmetry.
- vi. Encourage national governments to lead by example, aligning CE financing strategies with broader development and climate goals.

Conclusion

11. This session underscored the vital role of regional and international cooperation, continuous capacity building and innovative financing mechanisms in accelerating the circular economy transition across the ECO region. The following points could be highlighted as the most significant outputs of this meeting:

- ECO and UNIDO announced their intent to conduct a needs assessment/feasibility study to assess circular economy opportunities and challenges across the ECO region. A comprehensive feasibility study will help validate findings, identify investment-ready opportunities, and align circular economy strategies with regional priorities.
- The ECO region is making gradual progress in circular economy adoption, with examples in resource efficiency, policy development, waste valorization, and industrial symbiosis. The ECO Member States have different entry points, requiring tailored financial solutions.
- Scaling up circular economy requires technical assistance, substantial investments in infrastructure, technology, and capacity building. IFIs and MDBs can play a pivotal role by providing blended finance mechanisms to de-risk private sector participation, supporting policy frameworks that incentivize circular business models, funding demonstration projects to showcase bankable circular economy solutions and facilitating knowledge and technology transfer.

Communication and Promotion materials and links:

ECO website: <https://eco.int/>

Event webpage: [The RESCUE Initiative in the ECO Region: Goals, Opportunities, and Challenges](#)

Social media posts: promotion of the session ([link](#)), reminder about the session ([link](#)), summary of the session ([link](#)),

Organizers' contact details

Morteza Khansari Bozorgi, Programme Manager, ECO, khansari@eco.int

Tatiana Chernyavskaya, Project Manager, UNIDO - t.chernyavskaya@unido.org