Join the CCRI community of practice on Circular Water Management

Water is a critical yet often overlooked natural resource in the circular economy transition, especially for cities and regions facing growing water stress as urbanisation intensifies and climate change amplifies droughts and floods. Cities and regions must urgently integrate circular approaches to enable a more efficient, resilient, and sustainable water management. Recognised in the EU's 2020 Circular Economy Action Plan and in the recently adopted European Water Resilience Strategy, integrated water management is essential to achieving circularity across different sectors, but also to enhance water security for people and the environment. In this context, the EU Commission will expand public financing instruments and encourage private investments, for example by supporting the EIB in the establishment of a new Water Programme and Sustainable Water Advisory Facility.

Circular principles applied to water management aim at:

- **Design out waste and pollution:** Upgrade networks and integrate green buffers (rain gardens, bioswales) to prevent leaks and filter contaminants at source.

- **Keep water in use:** Deploy decentralised treatment for on-site reuse and foster industrial symbiosis so one sector's discharge becomes another's inputs.

- **Regenerate natural systems:** Use aquifer recharge, watershed restoration, and blue-green corridors to rebuild groundwater, buffer floods, and restore ecosystems.

Circular water management enhances **resource conservation** and sustainable water practices by maximising reuse, recycling, and efficiency to conserve freshwater and reduce waste. It strengthens **urban resilience** through green infrastructure and energy-efficient systems that mitigate emissions, manage floods, and secure supply in droughts. By recovering nutrients from wastewater, it also supports the **food-water-energy nexus** through local fertiliser production, closing critical resource loops.

Circular water management

This community of practice will explore how circular economy principles can be integrated into water management. At the same time, water — from supply to end-of-use management — is a domain where local and regional governments hold particularly strong competencies, especially compared to other resources, products, or services.

Key areas of focus will include:

- **Water reuse and recycling.** Circular water systems maximise the reuse of greywater, rainwater, and industrial effluents, helping territories reduce freshwater withdrawals, cut treatment costs, and ease pollution burdens on rivers and ecosystems, while boosting water self-sufficiency.
- **Closing loops in the food–energy–water nexus.** By recovering nutrients (such as phosphorus and nitrogen), and energy from wastewater and linking water systems to renewable energy and agriculture, cities and regions can reduce dependence on imported fertilisers, lower emissions, and support local food and energy security. Other secondary materials such as cellulose or bioplastics can also be valorised and redirected to biorefinery activities.

- **Upgrading infrastructure with smart and efficient systems.** Circularity drives investment in modern, smart water infrastructure: from leak detection and digital metering to precision irrigation, helping cities reduce losses (often 30–40%), improve efficiency, and safeguard water supplies in the face of drought and over-extraction.
- **Integrated governance and regulation.** Implementing circular systems requires breaking down silos. Coordinated policies and regulations across sectors and scales are key to unlocking investment, aligning incentives, and harmonising water standards across Europe's diverse local contexts.
- **Public engagement and community participation.** The success of circular water initiatives depends on engaged citizens who support behavioural change, steward local water resources, and help build the political momentum needed to scale circular solutions.
- **Balancing decentralised innovation with centralised systems.** Circularity enables hybrid water management models that combine the flexibility and responsiveness of local initiatives with the stability and reach of centralised utilities, offering both innovation and resilience, particularly in diverse urban-regional contexts.
- **Green infrastructure for climate adaptation and mitigation.** Incorporating nature-based solutions like green roofs, permeable pavements, bioswales, and wetlands helps cities manage stormwater, reduce flood risks, lower urban heat, and cut emissions, making them more resilient to climate extremes while restoring natural cycles.

Building on these areas, the community may also focus on advancing water reuse by addressing **social acceptance**, implementing the **EU Water Reuse Regulation**, and exploring **supportive measures** such as financial incentives and tariff structures. Another potential area is **resource-oriented sanitation**, which seeks to recover water, nutrients, and energy from waste streams. The community of practice aims to draw from leading examples from across Europe, which can serve as inspiration for cities seeking to implement context-specific circular water management approaches.

This community of practice offers **a dedicated space to explore these and other critical topics in a real-world context**, acknowledging the pressing water demands and resource constraints that cities and regions face. It aims at creating **a dynamic learning group connecting frontrunning cities and regions**. By joining, you will engage with peers, exchange knowledge, and co-develop solutions that accelerate the growth and impact of circular businesses in their communities.

What to expect?

As a member, you'll have the opportunity to tailor the community of practice to your needs and interests, co-designing the structure and activities alongside other participants. The following outlines some key aspects:

- **Size**: Each group will consist of 5 to 10 cities and regions, supported by experts.

- **Duration**: Each community of practice will run for a minimum of 12 months, with the option to extend until December 2026 or beyond, depending on interest.

- **Time Commitment**: Around one day per month, to attend at least five online meetings per year, exchange with peers, and take part in consultations on new materials to support cities and regions.

- **Activities**: The groups will organise online working meetings focused on the ongoing actions and projects of the participants.

- **Outputs**: You will work together to produce concrete, publishable deliverables.

- **Funding**: Participation is voluntary, and no funding is available to cover participation costs. There will be no travel required, as all activities will take place online.

Why join?

- **Learn from your peers**: Gain valuable insights from other cities and regions tackling the same challenges.
- **Find better solutions faster:** Collaborate with peers to address your needs more effectively.
- **Expand your network:** Connect with an international community of like-minded partners.
- **Gain fresh perspectives**: Discover best practices firsthand and bring proven strategies back to your own community.
- **Create real impact:** Work together on outputs such as case studies and policy briefs to support replication, inform policy decisions, and increase your visibility.

Who can apply?

We invite all European local and regional authorities, along with their agencies and publicly owned companies, to apply. This is a unique opportunity to be part of a collaborative network driving impactful change in the circular economy.

Participation will be assessed based on the following criteria:

- **Commitment**: Active engagement is key. As a member, you are expected to actively contribute to discussions, attend meetings, and help shape or review group outputs.

- **Relevant experience**: We are looking for participants who are already working on circular economy initiatives on circular water management and can bring valuable insights and experiences to the table.

- **Geographical diversity**: To foster a well-rounded exchange, communities of practice aim to include members from a variety of European regions, ensuring a broad perspective on the challenges and solutions in circular economy practices.

We welcome all applications. To give more cities and regions the opportunity to participate, priority will be given to those not already involved in one or more CCRI Thematic Working Groups or Communities of Practice.

How to express your interest

Simply complete the short application form online and we'll review your application. If needed, we'll reach out to you for clarifications. If you have any issues accessing or completing the form, please contact info@ccri-communities-of-practice.eu.

Apply now

Deadline for submission: 03/10/2025, 6:00 PM CET.

Any questions or doubts whether this is right for you?

Reach out to info@ccri-communities-of-practice.eu for more information or join our online Q&A on 23/09/2025 – 12.00 CET.

There are 3 more communities of practice now open for applications. Discover them all here

Circular
Cities & Regions
Initiative
Communities of Practice

Funded by
the European Union

Background

Funded by the EU as part of the Circular Economy Action Plan, the Circular Cities and Regions Initiative (CCRI) aims to bring the circular economy to life in cities and regions across Europe. The initiative supports the development of circular solutions that address different sectors and value chains, engage diverse stakeholders, and tackle a range of challenges, such as creating new business models and navigating regulatory impacts. It also seeks to drive positive change across social, economic, and environmental fields.

About CCRI Communities of Practice

The CCRI Communities of Practice's activities complement those already offered by the CCRI Coordination and Support office, the CCRI Knowledge Hub and other CCRI partners. They're all about bringing cities and regions together to share experiences, learn from each other, and exchange best practices. By fostering peer learning and networking, they aim to broaden the CCRI's impact to more European cities and regions.

Contacts

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