
4 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND LIFESTYLE CHOICES

We are committed to adopting and facilitating the prudent and efficient use of resources and to encouraging sustainable consumption and production.

Current production and consumption patterns make an unsustainable use of material and energy and cause the depletion of the Earth's renewable and non-renewable resources. Future development must focus on ways to provide goods and services using fewer resources and preventing waste. To achieve this goal, however, a commitment from industrial and commercial sectors is needed, as well as from consumers. Public administrations must thus stimulate the demand for greener products on the market and encourage sustainable consumption and production.

We will therefore work, throughout our community, to:

1. avoid and reduce waste, and increase re-use and recycling.

Our traditional economic growth model builds on a rather linear economy, where society mainly extracts, produces, consumes and discards resources. Nevertheless, our planet is a limited resource and such a model is unsustainable. Next to a rapid depletion of natural resources, human activities cause a continuous generation of waste, which accumulates in the environment and causes many forms of pollution. Environmental risks are therefore one concern. Furthermore, waste entails high disposal costs. However, the system also reflects an inefficient use of resources. Thus, as stated in the 6th Environmental Action Plan, the European Union's approach to waste management is to prioritise waste prevention and reduction, followed by an increase in re-use and recycling.

However, current economic drivers are towards greater consumption and cheap, disposable products. Of course, it is not easy to break this vicious circle. Local authorities can certainly not control what products are put on the market and thus, waste prevention at local level is rather difficult.

Nevertheless, local authorities can do much in the field of recovery and recycling. And indeed, it is a practice which is constantly increasing and which helps to reduce environmental impacts of waste. More and more local authorities promote source separation and recycling of waste streams such as composting, plastic, glass, paper, aluminium, batteries, packaging, end-of-life vehicles, electrical and electronic equipment ([waste inventory](#), [composting and separate collection](#), [waste prevention success stories](#)). Again, successful recycling and re-use actions need to be backed-up by awareness-raising campaigns addressing citizens ([10 easy ways to prevent waste](#), [waste communication and citizens](#)). Above all, it is important to set up an adequate local waste management plan ([Preparing a waste management plan](#), [A methodological guidance on waste](#)).

Surely, the problem of waste management can no longer be dealt as a sectoral issue. The debate on waste prevention and recycling needs to be integrated into our production and consumption models from the start. Aalborg Commitment 3 deals with the preservation of natural resources, while Aalborg Commitment 4.4 and 4.5 aim at greening the market through market forces. Aalborg Commitments 1 and 2 are also useful, since local waste management plans deliver strategic objectives to the local authorities involved.

4 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND LIFESTYLE CHOICES

2. manage and treat waste in accordance with best practice standards.

Waste treatment and disposal cause many environmental impacts, especially air, water and soil pollution. Clearly, solving the problem of waste generation at the source implies greening the life-cycle of most products found on the market. This is, of course, a very complex and slow process of economic restructuring. However, the increasing quantities of waste generated in Europe need to be managed and treated. Waste that cannot be re-used and recycled must be safely disposed. In its 6th Environmental Action Plan, the European Union has set incineration as a priority and considers land filling only as a last resort.

Both incineration and land filling are methods which need close monitoring and control because of their potential for causing severe environmental damage and posing human health risks. However, landfills additionally take up valuable land space and make it unavailable for many years. Furthermore, they contribute to the emission of carbon dioxide and methane into the atmosphere, two major greenhouse gases causing climate change. Chemicals and pesticides may filter through the soil and pollute groundwater, generating additional environmental and health risks to both humans and plants and animals.

Moving away from landfill as a waste management option will still take some time. In fact, many Member States still dump a significant part of their wastes on landfill sites. However, for municipal or regional waste planning, local factors, such as the availability of existing waste management facilities and duration of waste management contracts, markets for recyclables, geographic and socio-economic factors, exert the dominant influence.

However, it is the production of waste in the first place which causes major environmental impacts. Local authorities can engage in waste minimisation, collection and management and set waste reduction targets ([Tool kit for urban decision-makers on waste](#)). Appropriate waste management options can help increase energy efficiency, as well as help reduce air pollution and climate change ([Waste management and climate](#)). As waste moves away from landfill, it will be channelled into a variety of options higher up the waste hierarchy, all of which will be better for the environment ([EU Focus on waste management](#), [Energie-Cites](#)).

Waste issues and their solutions are inevitably linked to production and consumption throughout all stages of the life-cycle of materials and the use of energy, an aspect dealt by Aalborg Commitments 4.4 and 4.5. Environmental impacts of waste and natural resource depletion are dealt by Aalborg Commitment 3. The high energy consumption of products and the emission of greenhouse gases through waste disposal are dealt by Aalborg Commitment 10.

4 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND LIFESTYLE CHOICES

3. avoid unnecessary energy consumption, and improve end-use energy efficiency.

The current energy challenge is to halt the depletion of non renewable energy resources and prevent climate change, as well as to ensure economic and social growth. However, next to curbing down growing dependence on imported, non renewable fossil fuels and reducing carbon dioxide emissions through an increase in the use of renewable energy resources, energy efficiency turns into a crucial factor. This is due to the fact that the demand for energy is continuously rising. The planet being a limited resource, growing pressures from population growth and economic development make energy a precious resource which should not be wasted and consumed unnecessarily.

Unfortunately, consumerist society and its underlying production system use energy in an inefficient way. Thus, it is important to promote energy-efficient technologies on the market and to raise consumers' awareness of the impacts of unnecessary energy consumption. Adequate information can effectively contribute to the greening of the market. In fact, consumer choice has the power to influence and to stimulate the environmental improvement of products. A good example is the mandatory EU energy label, which helps consumers to make an informed choice, as well as spurring manufacturers to improve their market models and to invest in environmental quality and innovation.

The most important barrier to increased energy efficiency is a lack of information on costs and availability of new technologies. Furthermore, avoiding unnecessary energy consumption is very much about personal behaviour and education - a sphere which is not always easily reached.

Heating, cooling, the use of lighting and electrical appliances such as office equipment and kitchen devices, represent a significant and ever-rising share of energy use. Here, local authorities can engage in activities to ensure a strong level of public awareness, understanding and support of energy saving, as well as being a good example ([Doing more with less](#), [A beautiful world starts with you](#), [Energy-saving actions in schools](#), [European Municipal Building Climate Campaign](#), [DEEP Project](#)). Local authorities can do much to promote energy efficiency and high performance technical solutions and low-cost installations in the transport sector, in buildings, in the lighting system and appliances and through co-operation with developing countries ([Energie-Cites](#), [EU Local Energy good practices](#), [Effizienzboerse](#)).

Aalborg Commitment 3 is concerned with natural resource depletion, while Aalborg Commitments 4.4 and 4.5 deal with promoting greener products on the market. Aalborg Commitments 5 and 6 can help influence the transport and construction sector in applying energy efficient technologies, while Aalborg Commitment 10 addresses all the issues related to climate change.

4 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND LIFESTYLE CHOICES

4. undertake sustainable procurement.

Although current production and consumption systems guarantee us high living standards, they have a significant impact on the environment. In fact, they rapidly use up natural resources, consume high quantities of energy and generate excessive waste. Impacts not only include environmental pollution, climate change and natural resource depletion, but also human health risks and a lower quality of life. However, businesses will only improve their environmental performance, if it is in their commercial interest. Thus, through buying greener products, consumers can make the difference. The challenge lies in using market forces and creating “green demand”. An important kick-off effect must come from public authorities, engaging as consumers in sustainable public procurement.

Sustainable procurement aims at integrating social, environmental and ethical concerns into purchasing decisions. As purchasing activities by the public sector are influential - they represent roughly 16% of total GDP in the European Union - a change of consumption habit by this compartment will send a strong signal and have a significant impact on the market. This approach will result in an incentive for companies to evaluate their supply chains, invest in research, innovation and review their employment policies. Furthermore, engagement in sustainable procurement by the public sector serves as a responsible consumption example for its citizens. In the long run, sustainable procurement reduces electricity, heating and water bills, as well as waste disposal costs, and turns environmental quality and innovation into a competitive advantage for companies that deliver such goods and services on the market.

However, sustainable procurement is a very innovative practice. It therefore inevitably requires some initial financial and organisational investment. Higher costs, need of expertise and guarantee of supply may pose some problems at the beginning. Thus, strong political commitment is necessary to defend long-term savings and environmental benefits.

For local authorities, the promotion and strengthening of sustainable procurement activities can be very successful if integrated into Local Agenda 21 processes ([Local environmental management systems and procurement](#), [Greening of the French market](#), [Survey on Green Public Procurement](#)). Sustainable procurement of local authorities can cover many issues: energy supply, the efficiency of the electrical appliances they source, the food/catering services that supply facilities and schools, the way the public transport fleet is managed, the principles upon which public buildings are constructed or the cleaning services they contract. Here, environmental and social impact can be factored in to the procurement process - specification, tendering, purchasing ([Handbook on public procurement](#), [Buying green!](#), [Procura+](#)).

Responsible purchasing practices can make a significant contribution to delivering strategic objectives to the local authority involved. Aalborg Commitment 1 and 2 deal with this issue. As sustainable procurement touches a whole range of policies, from environmental protection to social inclusion, equal opportunities, employment, global solidarity, sustainable development, and improved services to the public, all Aalborg Commitments, from 3 to 10 are somehow linked to this sub-commitment.

4 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND LIFESTYLE CHOICES

5. actively promote sustainable production and consumption, in particular of eco-labelled, organic, ethical and fair trade products.

Goods and services lie at the heart of our production and consumption system and produce wealth and quality of life. However, when a product is bought, current purchasing decisions usually do not take into account environmental and social factors such as what material they are made of, where they have come from and who has made them. In our consumerist society, people often don't even question whether the purchase needs to be made at all. A new culture and growth paradigm, based on sustainability principles, is needed.

As a matter of fact, there is an entire life-cycle behind each good and service: from the extraction of natural resources, to the manufacturing process, trade, distribution, sale, use and final disposal as waste, products have significant environmental, social, economic and ethical impacts. Consumers must become aware of these impacts and must learn to consider the entire product's life-cycle during purchase decisions. The power of consumer choice, in turn, can help stimulate the greening of the market. Thus the need to actively promote eco-labelled, organic, ethical and fair trade products. Environmental and social labels are a useful tool to initiate positive social change. Above all, they help foster civil society's understanding of the issues they address, and contribute to building a new culture, based on sustainability principles.

However, sustainable products have higher costs and are incentive-based. Thus, they are a voluntary scheme and rely on consumer choice. Active information and promotion therefore plays a crucial role for initiatives to develop further.

Next to encouraging producers to develop environmentally friendlier products through sustainable public procurement, local authorities must actively inform consumers on the environmental, social and ethical characteristics of these labelled sustainable products. This can be achieved through communication and information campaigns and events, in close co-operation with local associations, NGO's, companies, retailers, schools and consumers ([Fair Trade Financial Society](#), [Responsible Procurement](#), [Talk the walk](#), [Last Minute Market](#), [Greening of the French market](#)). Information needs to be credible, relevant, understandable and consumers must have easy access to it ([The European Eco-label catalogue](#)). Local authorities can promote many activities in schools, where children represent Europe's future consumers or engage in public procurement ([Adopting a vegetable garden](#), [Fair Trade Cities Campaign](#), [Procurement and sustainable development](#)).

Eco-labelled, organic, ethical and fair trade products are the products of the future: they use less resources and energy, pollute less and prevent waste generation. Next to having lower impacts and risks on the environment, these products guarantee social equity and are an important contribution to sustainable development. Thus, sustainable products are relevant to Aalborg Commitment 3 on preserving and protecting natural resources, Aalborg Commitment 7 on local action for health, as well as for the economic issues dealt by Aalborg Commitment 8 and social issues dealt by Aalborg Commitment 9.

To find further Resources relating to Aalborg Commitment 4, click here:

http://www.localresources21.org/theme_matrix.php?t=4