

# SUMMARY

WCEFONLINE SUMMARY

## **WCEFonline** *in brief*



SITRA

# ONLINE

## The first fully online WCEF

**The year 2020 marks a year of change** and adaptation. The COVID-19 pandemic has washed across the world and damaged our economies. At the same time, a rapid transition to a circular economy is more important than ever. The whole world needs to find ways to get back on its feet, and we have a unique opportunity to support the sustainable recovery of our economy with circular solutions.

While the annual main event was postponed by a year, this unusual situation inspired us to organise the first fully virtual event as part of the World Circular Economy Forum. WCEFonline took a dive into why and how a circular economy can help reboot and build resilience in the economy.

Circular economy change-makers from around the world shared practical examples that help us rebuild our economies stronger, greener and better. The recordings of all sessions were available for two weeks after the event and reached a wider audience than any WCEF before.

**The Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra** organised WCEFonline together with the African Circular Economy Alliance, Circular Economy Leadership Coalition, Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform, Ellen MacArthur Foundation, the European Commission, Platform for Accelerating the Circular Economy, the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, in collaboration with the Governments of Canada, Finland and the Netherlands, and WCEF2021 partners including the International Chamber of Commerce, Nordic Innovation and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

WCEFonline offered a modern circular economy venue, consisting of 6 sessions over 2 days, with 50 top speakers from around the globe and over 70 side events spread over 4 months, spiced with keynote speeches, panel discussions, videos, networking opportunities and a chance to take part in the discussions from anywhere on Earth.

Over 4 200 participants from 123 countries participated live and over 4 300 views of the session recordings were made after the event.

**See you soon in the next WCEF events, live or virtually!**

- WCEFonline side events continue until the end of December 2020.
- WCEF+Climate will take place on 15 April 2021 in the Netherlands.
- WCEF2021 will be held in Toronto, Canada, on 13-15 September 2021.



The World Circular Economy Forum brings together business leaders, policymakers and experts to present the world's best circular economy solutions. It examines how businesses can gain a competitive advantage through a circular economy and how the circular economy contributes to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The WCEF is a global initiative of the Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra.



*“There is no way we can address the life-threatening climate crisis and biodiversity crisis without a circular economy.”*

**FRANS  
TIMMERMANS**  
Executive Vice-President,  
European Commission



# REVIEW

## WCEForum online in review: a crisis is an opportunity

COVID-19 gives us an opportunity to build back our economies stronger, better, fairer and circular.

### **Circular solutions can help a sustainable recovery**

The World Circular Economy Forum Online on 29-30 September 2020 explored a variety of circular economy solutions and how they impact our economic and social well-being. An important point which was referred to again and again in the six sessions was that circular solutions can help us right now, in the unique situation we find ourselves in today.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an unprecedented global recession. Policy-makers and business leaders struggle to find ways to mitigate the

recession and return to growth as soon as possible. Now we have an opportunity to focus on sustainable growth and increase circularity in our economies, instead of returning to the wasteful linear model. By adopting circular solutions we can simultaneously reboot our economies and fight the climate and nature crises. The circular economy is more relevant than ever and it offers a pathway to redefined growth and enhanced resilience to weather future shocks.

What is most important about the pandemic is its effect on humanity. It has created a human tragedy on a huge scale and foreshadows the greater challenge we face in the coming years as the climate



*“The circular economy is a vital tool in our efforts to tackle the planetary crises – climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. It is an opportunity we simply cannot afford to miss when rebooting our economies.”*

**INGER ANDERSEN**  
Executive Director,  
United Nations Environment  
Programme



and nature crises escalate. Additionally, there are suggestions that the pandemic itself is a result of the nature and biodiversity crises and humanity's exploitation of nature. These are global, existential challenges that need a systemic response with the circular economy. The brilliance of the circular economy lies in the fact that it tackles the root causes of global challenges and turns the economy into a solution.

## **Circularity is vital for building resilient businesses**

The pandemic has not hit our economies uniformly. For example, the travel industry has been devastated while the communications platform sector has soared. This has consequences on the rate at which companies will achieve their circular ambitions.

Speakers were optimistic for the corporate adoption of circularity because the current business model is ultimately unsustainable. Yet the private sector needs encouragement. We need to use regulations to create demand and incentives for more sustainable business models. Because of COVID-19 countries are forced to stimulate their

economies, which gives us an opportunity to encourage the circular transition in business.

Many traditional business sectors, like cement manufacturing, need a push towards circular solutions. Safety comes first, but circularity comes next. Now is the time to accelerate the shift to circularity by investing in R&D.

Priorities become clear during times of crisis and there have been encouraging developments by corporations. For example, 3M has made the commitment to customers and shareholders to deliver positive results on climate, circularity and community action through science and innovation. The company is now integrating circularity into their core strategies. Other major corporations, like IKEA, are also adopting circular solutions.

## **The current state of the circular economy transition**

There are significant differences in regional development towards a circular economy.

The European Union continues to lead the way in the evolution towards a circular economy. The



*"We have an unprecedented opportunity to reimagine our economies in order to promote sustainability, clean growth, and circularity."*

**JONATHAN WILKINSON**  
Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Canada



EU has realised that this immense challenge is also an opportunity. The EU Green Deal and the use of EU recovery funding to promote circular solutions throughout Europe will return us to growth, improve resilience and advance us a major step towards a sustainable circular economy. Many European businesses have also been keen adopters of circular solutions.

The situation in North America is more challenging. North America relies heavily on natural resources, unlike some early adopters of the circular economy. The circular economy is perfect for building resource efficiency, which could make it the path for creating a sustainable North American economy.

Canada has set the ambitious target of having zero plastic waste by 2030, beginning by banning single-use plastics next year and boosting recycling. The Canada Plastics Pact will soon launch with a goal to decouple waste and pollution from economic growth. The Circular Economy Leadership Coalition has introduced a Circular Economy Solution Series which will bring together leaders and innovators from the public and private sectors to seize this economic opportunity.

The political situation in the United States does not currently favour the adoption of national policies to promote the circular economy. However, the circular economy could develop in North America thanks to the actions of cities and companies, as the circular economy business models are proving to be appealing. Canada and the US have a vital role to play in the global green recovery due to their influence, natural resources and environmental impact.

There is good news also in other parts of the world, such as how Columbia became the first country in Latin America with a firm strategy to develop a circular economy.

Japan is already one of the most circular nations on the planet. They have limited space and limited natural resources, which have led them to adopt some of the most ground-breaking circular solutions.

Now more than ever, the circular economy offers a viable option to adopt a sustainable development model for Africa that supports resilience building through economic diversification. The work of the African Circular Economy Alliance will improve



*“With 1.2 billion people and a 3.4 trillion-dollar economy the market is there. We just must make sure that circularity is ingrained therein.”*

**JOY  
KATEGEKWA**  
Strategic Adviser to the  
Assistant Administrator and  
Regional Director, United Nations  
Development Programme



the way in which people produce and consume goods and services, reduce waste, create jobs, empower women, mobilise youth and contribute to sustainable development. Participants pointed out the opportunities the circular economy provides to women and youth are particularly important.

Businesses can take the lead in the circular transition to a circular economy even if regulations are lacking.

## **Solutions exist – adopt them and scale them up**

We don't need to create new inventions or ways of working to transition towards a circular economy. Many of those solutions already exist and have been proven. Now is the time for them to be adopted and massively scaled up to achieve significant gains.

The circular economy had already been growing around the world, but COVID-19 suddenly and drastically changed the priorities of businesses. Some corporations see circular solutions as a way out of the economic crisis, but others have put circularity on hiatus as they struggle to survive. Post-

COVID-19 circularity must become a business strategy, not simply a concept in the sustainability department. The circular economy must be global in scope but local in implementation. Resources must be priced according to their true costs.

WCEFonline highlighted 39 inspiring circular economy solutions from around the world. These are not only clever ideas, but solutions which are on the cusp of major growth and major impacts on our sustainability and circularity.

## **Partnering is key**

Collaboration is necessary for a sustainable recovery. This includes partnering across all segments of society: governments, transnational organisations, non-profit groups, businesses, academia and private citizens. There is no time for short-term fixes in the hope that “something better” can be done later. Courageous, caring and collaborative partnerships are essential elements of a circular economy.

The European Commission has previously said they wanted to create an intergovernmental group that would include companies and NGOs. The EU



*“The Finnish Government is committed to designing our economic recovery measures in line with the climate neutrality target to 2035.”*

**KRISTA MIKKONEN**  
Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, Finland



wants to work with international partners who share their ambitions, as well as to convince others to join as well.

The idea of a global circular economy alliance was greeted with enthusiasm at the event, and speculation was raised it could complement the WCEF movement. The alliance could offer non-European companies a way to grow their circular offerings in a situation where the EU is tightening requirements on circular products.

Businesses and investors in North America are identifying new business models and opportunities for collaboration. One key ingredient of the future circular economy is unexpected and unprecedented collaboration. In Africa, the new free trade agreement allows for significant collaboration. Closed loops call for co-operation in all phases of the cycle.

### **Wanted: policy and finance to enable an inclusive circular economy**

Policymakers and the financial sector are instrumental in creating the conditions for a successful

transition towards a circular economy. Governments can build a regulatory framework to encourage circular solutions, but we still need investments – both public and private – to develop and scale up those solutions.

Finland, with the assistance of Sitra, was the first country in the world to have a roadmap to a circular economy. To help others build their own roadmaps, a handbook was released on how to create their own plans and find a suitable path towards a circular economy. Even unsuccessful experiments can be useful if others learn from them.

The circular economy can be used for a number of different policy goals. As it is the secret weapon for solving climate change it should be promoted as part of climate negotiations. The circular economy can also offer enormous economic and job opportunities, particularly for vulnerable groups, but it needs to be supported with inclusive finance and policy reforms.

We need more investments, better policies, faster innovation deployment and collective action.



*“The circular economy is crucial to address climate change and a key pillar to the new European Green Deal. As the EU Climate Bank, the European Investment Bank has been a pioneer in financing the circular economy, developing new financial products jointly with the European Commission.”*

**SHIVA  
DUSTDAR**  
Head of Division, Innovation  
Finance Advisory, European  
Investment Bank



## Sustainable Development Goals

As many participants at WCEFonline emphasised, the circular economy is a way to sustainably develop. As such, it has links to many of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) listed by the UN. Some directly relevant goals include Clean water and sanitation (6), Affordable and clean energy (7) and Sustainable cities and communities (11). The African experts stressed in particular SDG 12, Responsible consumption and production.

Additionally, a circular economy can indirectly contribute to other SDGs, such as Zero hunger (2), Good health and well-being (3) and Gender equality (5).

An important point is that the SDGs are not only for national governments. They can be adopted by companies, organisations, transnational entities such as trade agreements or even individuals. Some of the participants of WCEFonline explained how their organisations have embraced SDGs in their strategies.

## Conclusions

Circular economy solutions can help reboot our economies after the COVID-19 pandemic and transition to more resilient societies. Strong leadership is necessary, while partnerships and collaboration can help us scale up our solutions. The circular economy can help mitigate climate change, which is the theme of the next WCEF event, as well as combat the nature and biodiversity crises. ●



*“Make no mistake: the circular economy is not simply recycling 2.0. This is about economic necessity and social and environmental accountability.”*

**JOHN COYNE**  
Vice President,  
External Affairs and  
Sustainability, Unilever  
Canada Inc.



# PROGRAMME

## Tue 29

12:00 - 13:15 (UTC+3)

**The circular economy as an accelerator for a sustainable recovery**

15:00 - 16:15 (UTC+3)

**COVID-19's consequences on corporate circularity**

18:00 - 19:15 (UTC+3)

**The journey to a circular economy in the Canada-US region**

## Wed 30

12:00 - 13:15 (UTC+3)

**Fostering inclusivity with circularity in Africa's post COVID-19 recovery**

15:00 - 16:15 (UTC+3)

**Partnering through change: new momentum in the emerging circular economy**

18:00 - 19:15 (UTC+3)

**Enabling the circular economy: the role of policy and finance**



**KEY FIGURES** BY 15 OCTOBER 2020

**DAYS**

**2+120\***

**SESSIONS**

**6**

**SPEAKERS**

**50** **48%** Female  
**52%** Male

**SIDE EVENTS**

**86**

**LIVE PARTICIPANTS\*\***

**4.2 K**

**RECORDING VIEWS**

**4.3 K**

**REGISTRATIONS**

**6.5 K**

**INVITEES**

**20.5 K**

**COUNTRIES**

**123**

**BUSINESS REPS**

**29%**

**32%** in 2019

**33%** in 2018

**GENDER BALANCE**

**59%** Female

**41%** Male

**KEY FIGURES** STREAM VIEWS

**VIA ONLINE PLATFORM**

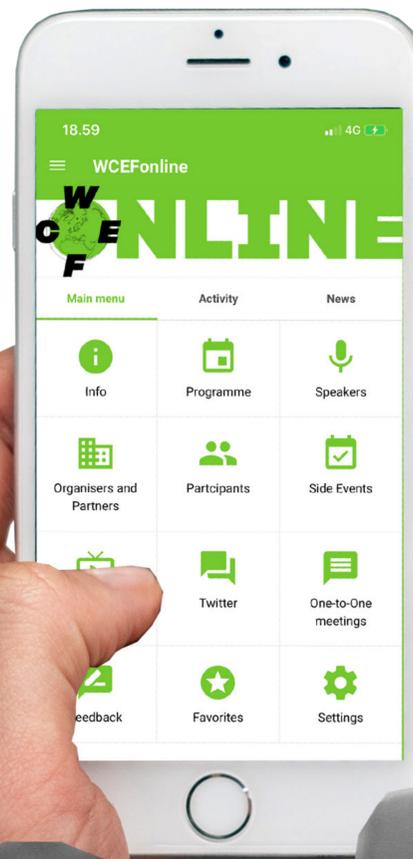
**3 022**

**VIA MOBILE APP**

**1 205**

**POST-EVENT  
RECORDING VIEWS**

**4.3 K**



## KEY FIGURES GEOGRAPHIC

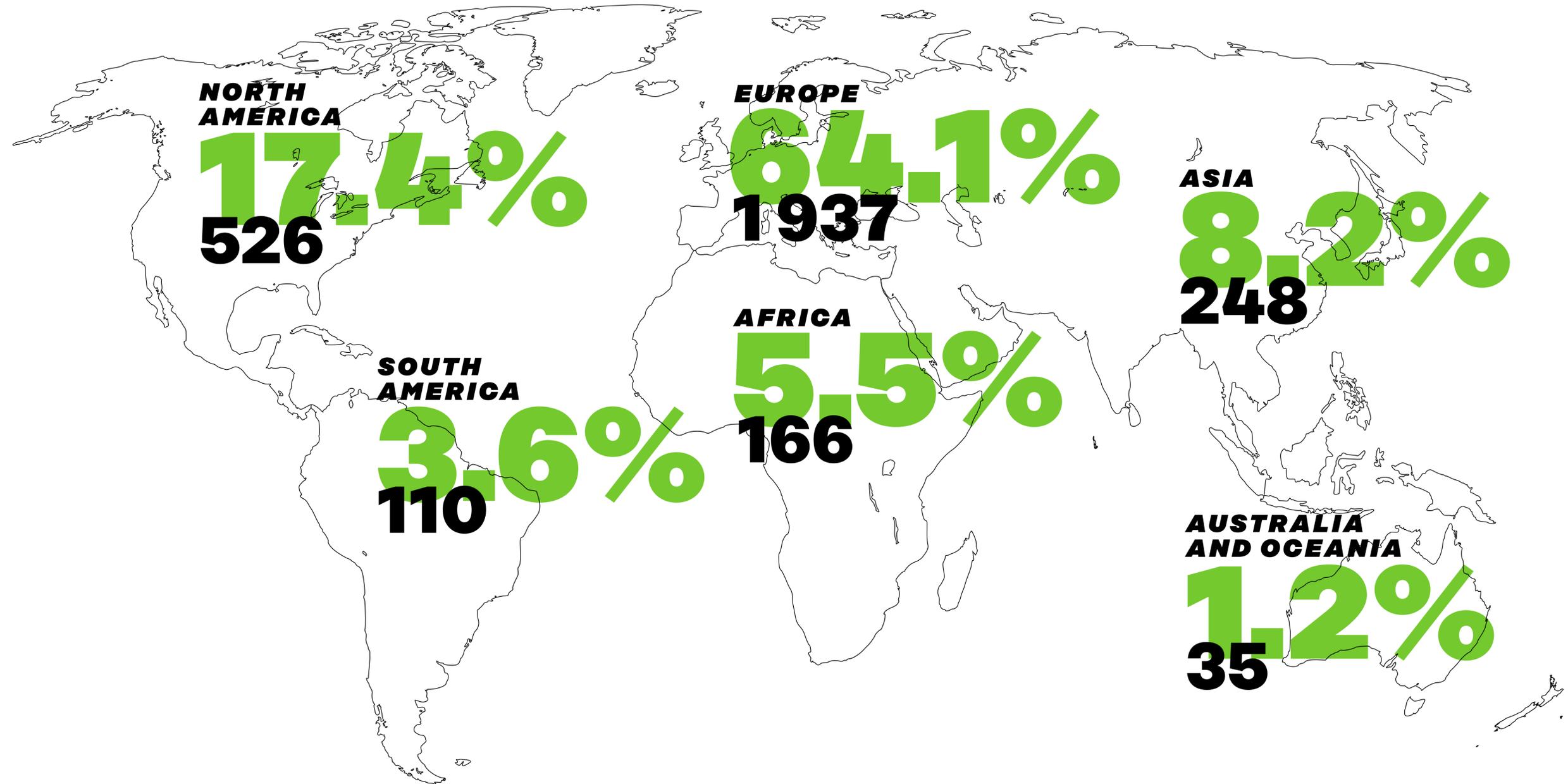
### COUNTRIES

# 123

### TOP TEN COUNTRIES BY PARTICIPATION VIA ONLINE PLATFORM

1. Finland **733**
2. Canada **379**
3. Netherlands **155**
4. UK **152**
5. Belgium **122**
6. USA **107**
7. Germany **103**
8. Sweden **88**
9. Japan **80**
10. France **71**

### PARTICIPATION BY CONTINENT VIA ONLINE PLATFORM



**KEY FIGURES**

**PARTICIPANTS BY SECTOR VIA EVENT PLATFORM TOTAL 3 022**

**BUSINESS**

**29%**  
**871**

**PUBLIC SECTOR**

**21%**  
**633**

**NGO OR ASSOCIATION**

**17%**  
**506**

**RESEARCH INSTITUTE**

**14%**  
**419**

**OTHER**

**11%**  
**337**

**THINK TANK**

**4%**  
**116**

**INVESTOR AND FINANCE**

**3%**  
**94**

**MEDIA**

**1%**  
**46**

**KEY FIGURES SOCIAL MEDIA**

**TWITTER REACH**

**26.7 M**

**TWEETS**

**2.4 K**

**FACEBOOK REACH  
WITH MARKETING**

**2.7 M**

**FACEBOOK REACH  
ORGANIC**

**11 K**

**INSTAGRAM REACH  
ORGANIC**

**7.5 K**

**LINKEDIN REACH  
WITH MARKETING**

**47 K**

**LINKEDIN REACH  
ORGANIC**

**24 K**

In addition, participants sent **2 078 chat messages** on the online event platform.



# KEY FIGURES PARTNERS

## HOSTS 8



## PARTNERS 13



Embassy of Finland  
Ottawa



Additional partners include the **European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform**.

**PAST AND FUTURE EVENTS**

**2017**  
HELSINKI,  
FINLAND



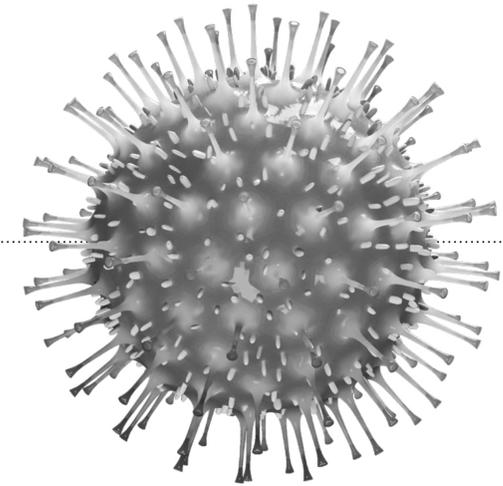
**2018**  
YOKOHAMA,  
JAPAN



**2019**  
HELSINKI,  
FINLAND



**2020**  
LOCKDOWN,  
COVID-19



Stay safe!

**2020**  
ONLINE,  
INTERNET



**2021**  
ONLINE,  
THE NETHERLANDS



**2021**  
ONLINE & TORONTO,  
CANADA