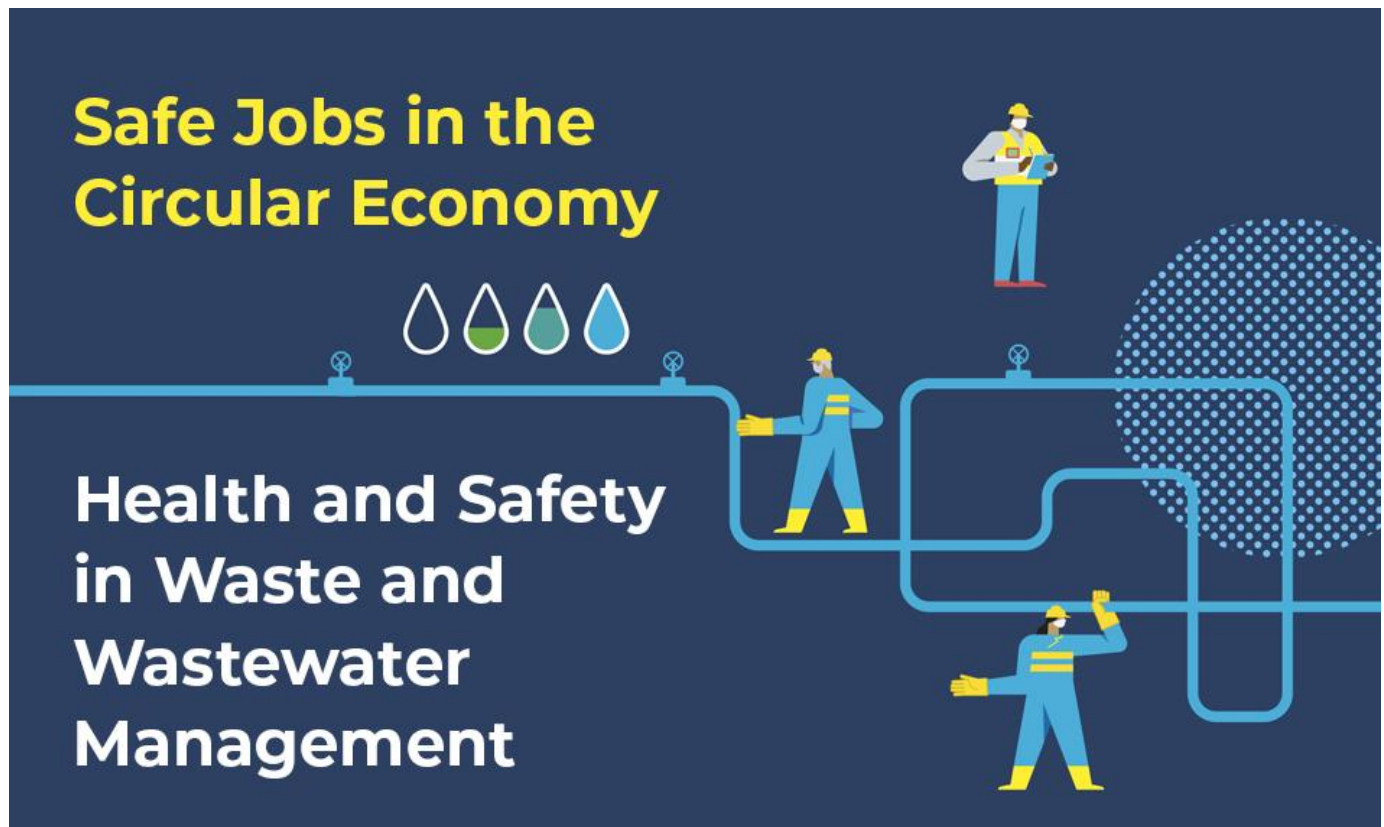


Safe Jobs in the Circular Economy. A new EPSU report



(3 September 2020) EPSU statement - The circular economy promises an important move away from a linear model of growth to a sustainable model, but it does not operate itself. A new report commissioned by EPSU highlights the crucial role and often high-risk labour of the workers involved, who have largely been ignored in both research and policies relating to the circular economy.

The invisible labour behind the informal waste sector is often performed by vulnerable and marginalised groups of workers, who receive low salaries and few employment rights, despite the hazardous conditions and health and safety risks posed by the job. As is stressed by the new report, there is a real need for this labour to be made visible and formalised, so that the workers can be properly remunerated, and their health and safety protected.

The high-risk nature of the jobs the circular economy depends upon was made devastatingly clear by the [deaths of three workers in the waste sector in February 2020](#)

, one in Portugal and two in Spain. However, in the EU's March 2020 Circular Economy Action Plan the workers that it relies upon are not mentioned, let alone any concern for their health and safety. If Europe truly wants to extend its circular economy activities, it is vital that policies and legislation are enacted to ensure safe and decent jobs, and prevent any more tragedies.

Jan Willem Goudriaan, EPSU General Secretary, commented that *'The design of the circular economy cannot just be based on environmental criteria. It must prioritise quality jobs based on collective bargaining which ensure necessary health and safety standards. A model in which the lives and well-being of the workers are at such risk is far from sustainable.'*

The new report, produced by Vera Wegmann of the Public Service International Research Unit, addresses the severe lack of research on the health and safety of circular economy workers, but far more attention needs to be given to these issues. The research gap is exacerbated by the fact that a number of recycling and re-use activities take place in the informal sector and/or have been exported to developing countries. There is a particular lack of knowledge about the working conditions and health and safety of workers in the recycling and re-use sectors – key pillars of the circular economy.

Jan Willem Goudriaan continued: *"The COVID 19 Recovery Plans and increased public investment announced as a means to limit the economic crisis provide an excellent opportunity for remunicipalisation. Municipal companies can stimulate reuse, repair and share to build the circular economy and put people and our planet before profits."*

[EPSU Report - Safe Jobs in the Circular Economy](#) - Health and Safety in Waste and Wastewater Management

[For the text of the article in Russian](#)

More information:

The report follows a report previously commissioned by EPSU in 2018, [Waste Management in Europe. Good Jobs in the Circular Economy?](#)

For the [European Commission's March 2020 Circular Economy Action Plan](#)

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