

THE EU-GCC COOPERATION ON  
GREEN TRANSITION PROJECT



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مجمع الشارقة للبحوث  
والتكنولوجيا والابتكار  
Sharjah Research Technology  
& Innovation Park



# EU-UAE BUSINESS BREAKFAST ON CIRCULAR ECONOMY

## Reducing Single-Use Plastics

Policy, Innovation & Business Solutions

**EVENT SUMMARY REPORT**  
MAY 2026

# EU-UAE Business Breakfast on Circular Economy

## Reducing Single-Use Plastics: Policy, Innovation & Business Solutions

10:30 - 10:40

### Opening Segment

#### Opening Remarks



H.E. Lucie Berger  
Ambassador  
European Union Delegation to  
the United Arab Emirates

#### Keynote Speech



HE Hussain Al Mahmoudi  
CEO  
Sharjah Research, Technology and  
Innovation Park (SPARK)

10:40 - 11:00

### High-Level Keynotes: Regulatory Pathways to Reducing Single-Use Plastics

#### Framing Interventions

##### EU Perspective

Implementation of the  
Single-Use Plastics  
Directive and the  
Packaging & Packaging  
Waste Framework



Angeles Jimenez  
Redondo  
Policy Officer,  
DG Environment  
European Commission  
(online)

##### UAE Perspective

Advancing the Circular  
Economy in the UAE: From  
Policy to Implementation  
for Sustainable Growth



Eng. Aisha  
Mohamed Alabdooli  
Director of Green  
Development and  
Environment Affairs  
Department,  
Ministry of Climate Change  
and Environment, UAE

11:00 - 11:40

### Panel Discussion: Enabling Circular Transition – Policy, Governance and Recycling Systems

#### Panel Discussion

Moderator



Fatima AlBanna  
Senior Manager Projects  
Beeah Recycling &  
Treatment



Panelists



Monir Bou Ghanem  
Advisor – Environment  
Policy and Regulations,  
Integrated Environment  
Policy and Planning  
Environment Agency –  
Abu Dhabi



Mark Siddorn  
Strategic Planning and  
Business Performance  
Director  
Tadweer Group



Saleh Al-Obayed  
Recycling & Business  
Development Manager-KSA  
Alpha Group

11:40 - 12:15

### Fireside Chat: Advancing Circular Solutions – Innovation, Materials and Scalable Business Solutions

#### Panel Discussion

Moderator



Leila Naguib  
Gulf Cooperate Affairs  
Manager  
Mars



Panelists



Daker El Rabaya  
CEO of Recycling  
BEEAH



Jes Jensen  
Vice President, Food &  
Beverage Biosolutions – Head  
of Middle East, India & Africa  
Novonesis

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The EU–UAE Business Breakfast on Circular Economy: Reducing Single-Use Plastics – Policy, Innovation & Business Solutions was held on 6 May 2026 at Sharjah Research, Technology and Innovation Park (SPARK). The event was organized by the EU-GCC Cooperation on Green Transition Project, funded by the European Union, in partnership with the Delegation of the European Union to the United Arab Emirates and SPARK, the UAE's first member of the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN), reinforcing its role as a bridge between the UAE and European innovation and business ecosystems.

The event brought together representatives from government, industry, the private sector, academia, innovation actors, and the wider sustainability community to exchange perspectives on circular economy implementation, single-use plastic reduction, recycling systems, regulatory pathways, material innovation, and scalable business solutions.

Opening remarks by H.E. Lucie Berger, Ambassador of the European Union to the United Arab Emirates, and H.E. Hussain Al Mahmoudi, CEO of SPARK, framed circular economy as both an environmental priority and an economic opportunity. They emphasized that reducing single-use plastics requires more than bans; it calls for rethinking systems, from product design and material use to collection, recycling, innovation, and market incentives.

The keynote segment presented EU and UAE perspectives on policy and implementation. The European Commission outlined the EU's shift towards a full life-cycle approach to packaging, covering recyclability, recycled-content targets, safer materials, traceability, and compliance. The UAE keynote highlighted the UAE Circular Economy Policy 2021–2031, the role of the UAE Circular Economy Council, and national efforts to advance waste diversion, recycling, sustainable consumption, and the phased reduction of single-use plastic products.

The panel discussion on Enabling Circular Transition – Policy, Governance and Recycling Systems explored the practical conditions needed to scale circularity, including stronger governance, extended producer responsibility, source segregation, recycling infrastructure, market demand, and coordination across the value chain.

The fireside chat on Advancing Circular Solutions – Innovation, Materials and Scalable Business Solutions focused on how industry can move from ambition to implementation through product design, investment, advanced recycling, bio-solutions, reusable systems, organic waste treatment, and commercially viable circular business models.

Across the discussions, participants emphasized that circular economy must be approached as a systems challenge, requiring policy, infrastructure, investment, technology, market demand, and behavioural change to move together. The event reaffirmed the importance of EU–UAE cooperation in supporting knowledge exchange, regulatory dialogue, innovation partnerships, and practical solutions that can help accelerate the transition from circular economy ambition to implementation.



## Opening Remarks

### H.E. Lucie Berger, Ambassador, European Union Delegation to the UAE

In her welcome remarks, H.E. Lucie Berger opened the EU–UAE Business Breakfast on Circular Economy by underlining the timely relevance of the discussion on reducing single-use plastics and advancing circular economy approaches. She also gave special recognition to SPARK as the UAE’s first member of the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN), highlighting its growing role in strengthening links between the UAE and European innovation and business ecosystems. She highlighted that the transition away from single-use plastics is no longer only an environmental urgency, but increasingly a practical policy priority, a business challenge, and an innovation opportunity.

Ambassador Berger stressed that reducing dependency on single-use plastics requires more than banning products. It calls for a wider rethink of systems, including how products are designed, how materials are used, how waste is collected and managed, and how markets can support more sustainable and circular alternatives.

She highlighted in particular:

- The importance of shifting from a linear “take, make, dispose” model towards more sustainable resource management and circular systems.
- The EU’s experience in advancing circular economy through legislative frameworks, improved waste management, stronger recyclability requirements, and policies that support demand for recycled materials.
- The need for circular economy approaches to address the full value chain, from design and production to collection, recycling, market incentives, and safer material use.
- The EU’s commitment to supporting global efforts to address plastic pollution, including through a legally binding global treaty on plastics.
- The strong potential for EU–UAE cooperation on policy and regulatory design, recycling and recovery systems, sustainable materials, and business partnerships that can help scale circular solutions.
- The importance of collaboration across governments, industries, research institutions, innovation actors, and the private sector to move circular economy from ambition to practical implementation.

Ambassador Berger also placed the discussion within the broader context of the strong EU–UAE partnership, noting the scale of bilateral trade and investment links and the UAE’s role as a key economic hub connecting Europe with the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and beyond. She concluded by emphasizing that circular transition will depend on implementation, innovation, investment, and cooperation across the value chain.

Opening Remarks



**H.E. Hussain Al Mahmoudi**  
CEO  
Sharjah Research, Technology  
and Innovation Park (SPARK)



## Opening Remarks

### **H.E. Hussain Al Mahmoudi, CEO, Sharjah Research, Technology and Innovation Park (SPARK)**

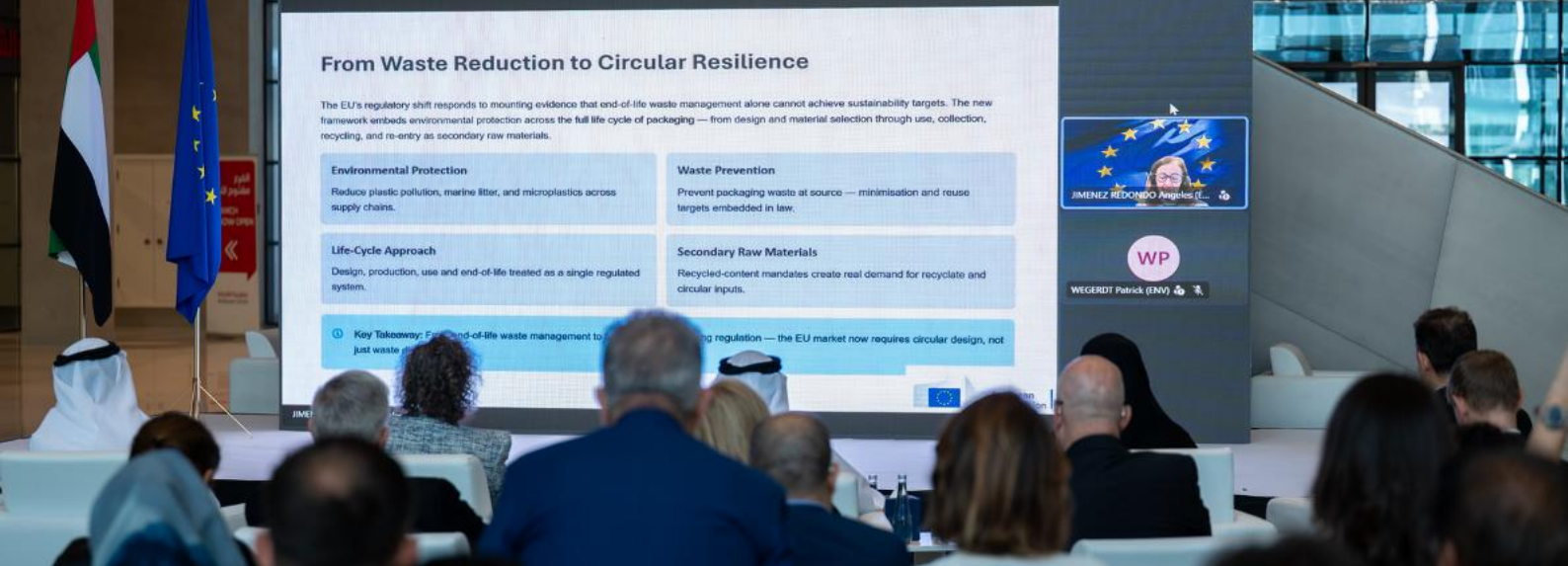
In his welcome remarks, H.E. Hussain Al Mahmoudi welcomed participants to SPARK and emphasized the importance of the circular economy as a core part of the UAE's sustainability direction. Building on the remarks of H.E. Lucie Berger, he highlighted the UAE Circular Economy Policy 2021–2031 as a clear national framework guiding the country away from the traditional "take, make, waste" model towards a system that maximizes resource efficiency and minimizes waste.

Speaking from the Sharjah perspective, H.E. Al Mahmoudi underlined that sustainability is deeply embedded in the Emirate's development approach, balancing social, environmental, technological, and cultural priorities. He referred to Sharjah's growing ecosystem of government, industry, academia, and innovation actors, noting the important role of local institutions, companies, and universities in supporting sustainable development and environmental technologies.

He highlighted in particular:

- Sharjah's commitment to integrating sustainable development into its economic and innovation ecosystem.
- SPARK's role as a platform connecting government, academia, industry, startups, and technology providers.
- The importance of moving from innovation to deployment, ensuring that promising solutions do not remain at pilot stage but are tested, adapted, and scaled in real-world settings.
- The growing role of AI as core infrastructure for circular economy, helping industries reduce waste, optimize systems, improve efficiency, and allocate resources more effectively.
- SPARK's focus on sustainable manufacturing, infrastructure, transport, and food systems as key areas where innovation can support cleaner production and a competitive green economy.
- The need for policy, investment, talent, and technology to move at the same speed in order to create the right environment for scalable circular economy solutions.

H.E. Al Mahmoudi also highlighted SPARK's engagement with European innovation ecosystems, including the use of European technologies and support for EU startups operating through the SPARK AI Hub. He concluded by stressing that the day's discussion was not only about concepts, but about turning circular economy into a practical, investable, and scalable reality for the UAE and beyond.



## High-Level Keynote

### EU Perspective: Implementation of the Single-Use Plastics Directive and the Packaging & Packaging Waste Framework

**Angeles Jimenez Redondo, Policy Officer, DG Environment, European Commission**

In her keynote presentation, Ms Angeles Jimenez Redondo provided the European Commission's perspective on the implementation of the Single-Use Plastics Directive and the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation, explaining how the European Union is moving from an end-of-life waste management approach towards a full life-cycle framework for packaging.

She underlined that plastic pollution, packaging waste, climate change, biodiversity loss, and pressure on natural resources are shared global challenges that cannot be addressed by one country or region alone. Circular economy policies were therefore presented not only as environmental tools, but also as a basis for dialogue, exchange of good practices, market development, and practical cooperation with partner countries.

Ms Jimenez Redondo highlighted that the EU's regulatory approach is increasingly focused on the entire packaging value chain, including product design, material selection, prevention, use, collection, recycling, and the re-entry of materials into the economy as secondary raw materials. She explained that the objective is to reduce environmental impacts and packaging waste, while also improving recyclability, strengthening reuse, and creating stronger markets for recycled materials.

Key points highlighted in her intervention included:

- The EU's shift from managing waste at the end of a product's life to regulating the full life cycle of packaging.
- The complementary roles of the Single-Use Plastics Directive and the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation.
- The Single-Use Plastics Directive as a targeted instrument focused on specific single-use plastic products, particularly those linked to marine litter and plastic beverage bottles.
- The Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation as a broader framework applying to all packaging placed on the EU market, across all materials and formats.
- The importance of recycled-content targets in creating demand for recycled materials and transforming recycling from a waste-management cost into part of an industrial supply chain.
- The need for evidence, traceability, documentation, and conformity requirements to support market access and compliance.
- The relevance of the EU framework for non-EU operators exporting packaging or packaged goods to the European market.

Ms Jimenez Redondo also outlined the importance of the upcoming implementation timeline, noting that the new regulatory framework introduces obligations in phases. She emphasized that the period leading up to 2030 represents a critical preparation window for businesses, exporters, recyclers, and public authorities, particularly in relation to recyclability, recycled-content targets, PFAS restrictions, reuse obligations, minimisation rules, and documentation requirements.

A central message of her intervention was that alignment with EU circular economy rules can create opportunities in secondary materials, recycling markets, and circular value chains. At the same time, she stressed that future market access will increasingly depend on proof, traceability, and the ability to demonstrate compliance, rather than on declarations alone. Ms Jimenez Redondo concluded by emphasizing that the EU's circular economy framework creates both challenges and opportunities for partner countries. While it requires preparation, documentation, and stronger traceability systems, it can also support more resilient circular value chains, higher-quality recycling, and stronger cooperation on shared environmental objectives.

Link to Ms Jimenez Redondo's presentation can be downloaded [here](#).





## High-Level Keynote

### **UAE Perspective: Advancing the Circular Economy in the UAE — From Policy to Implementation for Sustainable Growth**

**Eng. Aisha Mohamed Alabdooli, Director of Green Development and Environment Affairs Department, Ministry of Climate Change and Environment, UAE**

In her keynote address, Eng. Aisha Mohamed Alabdooli presented the UAE perspective on circular economy implementation, highlighting the country's progress in translating national policy ambition into practical action across sectors. She emphasized that the EU–UAE dialogue comes at a pivotal moment, where cooperation between regions is essential to accelerate the global transition towards sustainable and resource-efficient economies.

Eng. Alabdooli stressed that the circular economy is no longer a conceptual ambition, but a practical pathway to resilience, competitiveness, and environmental protection. Echoing the messages delivered in the opening remarks, she highlighted the need to move away from the traditional “take, make, dispose” model towards systems that prioritize resource efficiency, innovation, reuse, recycling, and sustainable design.

She outlined the UAE Circular Economy Policy 2021–2031 as the country's comprehensive national framework for embedding circular economy principles across key priority sectors, including sustainable manufacturing, green infrastructure, sustainable transport, and sustainable food production and consumption. She also emphasized that the policy is not only a strategic vision, but an implementation-driven framework designed to guide coordinated action across federal and local levels.

Key points highlighted in her intervention included:

- The UAE's commitment to decoupling economic growth from resource consumption while advancing innovation and green growth.
- The role of the UAE Circular Economy Policy 2021–2031 in improving resource efficiency, reducing waste generation, and supporting sustainable production and consumption.
- The establishment of the UAE Circular Economy Council as the national coordinating body for circular transformation.
- The importance of public-private partnerships in translating circular economy policy into measurable outcomes.
- Progress in expanding waste diversion and recycling systems, reducing landfill dependency, and recovering valuable materials.
- The growing adoption of circular approaches across construction, industry, food systems, and sustainable consumption.
- The UAE's phased national approach to reducing and ultimately phasing out single-use plastic products.

Eng. Alabdooli also highlighted the UAE Circular Economy Landscape Report as an important knowledge product that captures progress made by public and private stakeholders across the country. She noted that the report showcases achievements in waste diversion, recycling, construction materials, industrial resource efficiency, food loss and waste reduction, organic waste treatment, and public awareness.

A major focus of her intervention was the UAE's regulatory progress on single-use plastics. She explained that the country has introduced a phased national approach, beginning with restrictions on single-use plastic bags and advancing towards a broader roadmap covering additional disposable plastic products. The second phase of the single-use plastic ban expands the scope of regulated items, particularly across retail and food service sectors, while strengthening the shift towards reusable systems and more sustainable consumption patterns.

Eng. Alabdooli emphasized that plastic pollution is not only a waste-management issue, but also a behavioural-change challenge requiring awareness, education, technology transfer, and knowledge exchange. She also noted the need to recognize the different circumstances, capacities, and national priorities of countries when developing and implementing policies related to plastics and circular economy.

She concluded by reaffirming the UAE's commitment to advancing the circular economy agenda in close cooperation with international partners, including the European Union, and emphasized that future progress will depend on collective action, effective policy design, innovation, and the acceleration of circular systems across all sectors.

Link to Eng. Alabdooli's presentation can be downloaded [here](#).





## Panel Discussion – Enabling Circular Transition: Policy, Governance and Recycling Systems

### Moderator:

Fatima AlBanna, Senior Manager Projects, Beech Recycling & Treatment

### Speakers:

- Monir Salem Bou Ghanem, Advisor – Environment Policy and Regulations, Integrated Environment Policy and Planning, Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi
- Mark Siddorn, Strategic Planning and Business Performance Director, Tadweer Group
- Saleh Al-Obayyed, Recycling & Business Development Manager – KSA, Alpla Group

This panel discussion examined how policy frameworks, governance approaches, recycling systems, and market mechanisms can support the transition away from single-use plastics and help translate circular economy ambitions into practical implementation. The session focused on the enabling conditions needed over the next two to three years to make circular transition work in practice across systems, markets, infrastructure, and operations.

### Moderator’s Framing – Fatima AlBanna

Ms Fatima AlBanna opened the discussion by framing the circular economy challenge as one of implementation. She noted that as the UAE and EU move from ambition to action, the key question is no longer only what should be done, but whether the systems, markets, and governance structures are ready to deliver circularity at scale.

She positioned the discussion as practical and forward-looking, focusing on what needs to be enabled, strengthened, and addressed to move circular economy from policy direction into operational reality.

### Speaker Highlights

#### ***Monir Salem Bou Ghanem, Advisor – Environment Policy and Regulations, Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi***

Mr Monir Salem Bou Ghanem emphasized the need to move beyond a narrow focus on “single-use plastics” and towards a broader focus on single-use products and packaging systems. He noted that modern life depends heavily on plastic across many sectors, and that the core challenge is not plastic itself, but the way products are designed, used once, discarded, and treated as waste.

Drawing on Abu Dhabi’s experience, he highlighted important progress made in reducing single-use products, including major reductions in single-use plastic bags, large-scale plastic bottle collection, and the introduction of single-use-product-free approaches across a growing number of government entities.

Key contributions included:

- Stressing the need to move from regulating single-use items towards addressing packaging more broadly.
- Highlighting Abu Dhabi's experience in reducing single-use plastic bag consumption and increasing plastic bottle collection.
- Emphasizing that community readiness, government commitment, and private-sector responsiveness are essential to policy implementation.
- Pointing to reusable systems as a critical next frontier, particularly in closed environments such as events, campuses, and hospitality settings.
- Noting that the larger challenge will be scaling reusable systems in open environments such as shopping malls, food courts, and delivery platforms.
- Underscoring the importance of market maturity, as businesses will increasingly need to adapt to global circular economy and packaging requirements to remain competitive.

Mr Bou Ghanem also highlighted that policy must be accompanied by practical market signals. He noted that companies need to understand that future competitiveness will depend on adapting business models, not simply continuing to sell products in the same way. In this context, he pointed to the shift from selling bottled water to providing reusable water solutions as an example of how circular economy can reshape markets.

***Mark Siddorn, Strategic Planning and Business Performance Director, Tadweer Group***

Mr Mark Siddorn provided the waste-management and operations perspective, emphasizing that circular economy requires looking at the full value chain, from what is generated and collected to how materials are sorted, recovered, recycled, or converted into value. He highlighted Tadweer Group's role in managing waste across Abu Dhabi and stressed that a clear understanding of waste composition is essential for designing effective recovery and recycling systems.

He noted that Abu Dhabi handles significant waste volumes annually and that achieving circularity depends on reliable data, infrastructure investment, policy alignment, and public participation.

Key contributions included:

- Emphasizing the need to treat waste as a resource and economic opportunity, rather than only as a disposal challenge.
- Highlighting the importance of data analysis to understand waste streams and identify which materials can be recycled, recovered, or converted into higher-value uses.
- Referring to Abu Dhabi's target of achieving 80% diversion from landfill by 2031.
- Stressing the role of material recovery facilities, chemical recycling, composting, and waste-to-energy as part of a wider integrated waste-management system.
- Calling for stronger policy tools, including extended producer responsibility and producer/importer-pays principles, to make recycling economically viable.
- Underlining the need for greater alignment across the UAE to avoid fragmented approaches between different Emirates.
- Emphasizing awareness and education as essential to improving source segregation and supporting behavioural change.

Mr Siddorn also highlighted that clean material collection is critical to effective recycling. He noted that stronger segregation at source, including future multi-bin collection systems, would help improve the quality and value of recyclable materials and reduce the cost and complexity of downstream treatment.

### **Saleh Al-Obayyed, Recycling & Business Development Manager – KSA, Alpla Group**

Mr Saleh Al-Obayyed focused on the packaging and industry perspective, emphasizing that circularity cannot be achieved by policy alone. He stressed that effective recycling systems require full integration between policymakers, waste-management operators, collectors, recyclers, producers, brand owners, and investors.

Drawing on ALPLA's international experience, including lessons from European systems, he highlighted that extended producer responsibility and deposit return schemes should not only finance collection, but help stabilize the entire value chain. This includes creating demand, supporting infrastructure, enabling investment, and ensuring that recycled materials can return into packaging systems.

Key contributions included:

- Emphasizing that system integration and accountability are the most important enabling conditions for circular transition.
- Stressing that policy, infrastructure, incentives, market demand, and recycling capacity must move together.
- Highlighting that producers and brand owners need to understand their role in creating demand for recycled material.
- Noting that recycling is not simply a design claim, but an outcome of a functioning system.
- Calling for closer coordination between policymakers, brand owners, recyclers, and investors at early stages.
- Underlining that without market demand and volume commitments from brand owners, investment in recycling infrastructure becomes difficult to justify.

Mr Al-Obayyed concluded that the success of packaging circularity depends on linking design, collection, recycling, regulation, and market demand into one integrated system. He stressed that commitments from brand owners are essential to create the investment case for recycling facilities and to move from isolated initiatives to a functioning circular economy.



## Key Takeaways from the Panel

- Circular transition requires a system-wide approach, connecting policy, infrastructure, collection, recycling, market demand, and consumer behaviour.
- The challenge is not only single-use plastics, but the broader design and management of single-use products and packaging systems.
- Extended producer responsibility, deposit return schemes, and producer/importer-pays models can help create the economic conditions needed for recycling investment.
- Source segregation, clean collection streams, and public awareness are essential to improving recycling quality and reducing treatment costs.
- Reusable systems offer significant potential, particularly in closed environments, but require further testing and scaling in open consumer settings.
- Brand-owner commitment and market demand are critical to creating a viable recycling industry.
- Greater policy alignment across the UAE can help reduce fragmentation and support a more consistent circular economy framework.
- EU-UAE exchange can provide valuable lessons on regulatory design, implementation pathways, and the development of scalable circular economy systems.

Overall, the panel underscored that circular economy implementation depends on moving from isolated initiatives to integrated systems. Policy direction, operational infrastructure, investment, industry accountability, and behavioural change must advance together to make circularity practical, economically viable, and scalable.





## **Fireside Chat – Advancing Circular Solutions: Innovation, Materials and Scalable Business Solutions**

### **Moderator:**

Leila Naguib, Gulf Corporate Affairs Manager, Mars

### **Speakers:**

- **Daker El Rabaya, CEO of Recycling, BEEAH**
- **Jes Jensen, Vice President, Food & Beverage Biosolutions – Head of Middle East, India & Africa, Novonesis**

This fireside chat explored the business, innovation, and materials dimension of the circular economy transition, with a focus on how industry can move from ambition to practical implementation. The discussion examined how circular solutions can be scaled commercially, how material innovation can support the transition away from single-use plastics, and what conditions are needed to make circularity both environmentally effective and economically viable.

### **Moderator's Framing – Leila Naguib**

Ms Leila Naguib opened the session by building on the earlier discussions on policy, regulation, and recycling systems, shifting the focus towards industry implementation. She framed the conversation around a central question: how can businesses translate circular economy ambitions into practical action through innovation, stronger collection streams, alternative materials, technology, and commercially feasible solutions?

She emphasized the importance of balancing environmental objectives with market realities, including cost, consumer behaviour, infrastructure readiness, and the ability of companies to scale sustainable solutions in ways that work across the full value chain.

### **Speaker Highlights**

#### ***Daker El Rabaya, CEO of Recycling, BEEAH***

Mr Daker El Rabaya presented BEEAH's practical experience in advancing waste management, recycling, and circular economy solutions in Sharjah and across the UAE. He explained that BEEAH has treated zero waste as a strategic priority for many years and has developed an integrated recycling and recovery ecosystem to prevent valuable materials from being lost to landfill.

He highlighted that BEEAH's approach goes beyond recycling alone, combining material recovery, preparation for recycling, waste-to-energy, and the development of new facilities to address different waste streams. He noted that BEEAH has already supported significant landfill diversion, including 1.6 million tonnes of material avoided from landfill in Sharjah and returned to the economy.

Key contributions included:

- Emphasizing that circular economy must be understood as an economic model, not only an environmental concept.
- Highlighting that circularity depends on both investment and consumption, with the objective of keeping materials in use rather than allowing them to become waste.
- Stressing that the challenge is not only plastic, but the habit of single use and the lack of systems that allow products and materials to circulate.
- Calling for stronger product design criteria, including requirements that products be designed from the outset for reuse, recovery, recycling, or circulation.
- Pointing to the importance of calculating the full cost of single-use products, including landfill, land value, environmental damage, and opportunity costs.
- Highlighting the need to support alternative models such as reusable systems, rental models, and second-hand markets.

Mr El Rabaya also addressed the complexity of biological and organic waste. He explained that BEEAH has been exploring technologies that fit the UAE and regional context, noting that composting alone is not sufficient to address organic waste at scale. He highlighted BEEAH's progress in ensuring zero green waste was sent to landfill in 2025, as well as plans to develop new dry-based technologies for food waste treatment that can produce energy sources such as methane without relying on water-intensive processes.

A key message from his intervention was that circularity must begin at the design stage. Products should not be designed for one-time use and disposal, but for circulation, reuse, and recovery. He stressed that without full-cost accounting, single-use products will continue to appear artificially cheap, making it difficult for more sustainable alternatives to compete.

***Jes Jensen, Vice President, Food & Beverage Biosolutions – Head of Middle East, India & Africa, Novonosis***

Mr Jes Jensen provided the bio-solutions and materials innovation perspective, highlighting how circularity is increasingly being seen not only as a regulatory requirement, but also as a source of business value and competitive advantage. He noted that companies are beginning to integrate circularity into their cost structures, brand positioning, customer relationships, talent attraction, and long-term value propositions.

He stressed that sustainable solutions must be economically viable in order to scale. If circularity remains only a corporate social responsibility exercise, it will not be adopted widely. Instead, it must be supported by regulation, investment, market demand, and business models that can operate at commercial scale.



Key contributions included:

- Highlighting the shift from circularity as a compliance issue to circularity as a competitive advantage.
- Emphasizing that sustainable solutions must reach commercial viability and scale to be adopted by industry.
- Noting the role of bio-solutions, including enzymes, microbes, and probiotics, in supporting more sustainable production and recycling pathways.
- Explaining the potential role of enzymes in enabling higher-quality PET recycling by helping recover material that can be reused in new packaging.
- Stressing that advanced recycling technologies must be proven at industrial scale before they can deliver broad market impact.
- Highlighting that regulation, capital, investor confidence, and market demand are all necessary to scale new circular technologies.

Mr Jensen also emphasized that circular economy solutions should not be limited to plastics alone. He pointed to wider opportunities in reducing food waste, including through bio-preserved that can extend shelf life and indirectly reduce associated packaging waste. He underlined that systems thinking is essential, and welcomed the fact that the UAE Circular Economy Council is linked to economic policy, reflecting the need to approach circularity as both an environmental and economic transformation.

### **Key Takeaways from the Fireside Chat**

- Circular economy must be treated as an economic model, not only an environmental agenda.
- Industry implementation depends on balancing sustainability goals with cost, scalability, consumer needs, and commercial feasibility.
- Product design is central to circularity; materials and packaging must be designed for reuse, recovery, recycling, or continued circulation.
- Single-use products often appear cheaper because their full environmental, infrastructure, landfill, and opportunity costs are not reflected in the price.
- Bio-solutions and enzyme-based technologies offer promising pathways for improving recycling quality and reducing waste, but must be proven at industrial scale.
- Circularity can become a competitive advantage when it is embedded into business models, cost structures, customer value, and brand positioning.
- Organic and food waste require tailored solutions that reflect regional conditions, including water availability, contamination levels, and infrastructure readiness.
- Scaling circular solutions requires regulation, investment, technology validation, market demand, and confidence from investors and industry.
- Reuse, rental, second-hand models, and alternative consumption systems can help reduce the need for single-use products and keep materials in circulation for longer.

Overall, the fireside chat highlighted that circular economy implementation will depend on practical business models that make environmental sense and economic sense at the same time. The discussion reinforced that innovation alone is not enough: solutions must be designed for real markets, backed by investment, supported by regulation, and scaled through cooperation across the full value chain.



## **Audience Q&A, Interactive Discussion and Closing Reflections**

**Led by:**

**Spyros Kouvelis, Team Leader, EU-GCC Cooperation on Green Transition Project**

Following the fireside chat, the event moved into an open forum and interactive discussion, allowing participants to raise practical questions on circular economy implementation, alternatives to plastics, market incentives, education, and waste treatment at source. The session created an opportunity to connect the policy, industry, innovation, and behavioural dimensions discussed throughout the morning.

Before the open discussion, Yasin Darkawi from YM Labs, a member of the SPARK AI Hub, returned to present the outcome of the interactive audience poll conducted earlier in the programme. Participants had contributed inputs on the object, setting, and storyline for a short awareness video on circular economy and single-use plastics. The final AI-generated video demonstrated how digital tools can help translate complex sustainability topics into accessible and engaging content, particularly for public awareness and behavioural change.

### **Audience Discussion**

The open forum reflected strong engagement from participants and raised several practical issues that are central to circular economy implementation.

One question focused on the challenge of replacing plastic with alternative materials that may appear more sustainable but still end up in landfill due to limited recycling or treatment pathways. In response, speakers emphasized that alternatives must be assessed through a full life-cycle lens. The discussion underlined that replacing single-use plastic with single-use non-plastic products does not necessarily solve the problem. What matters is the overall environmental impact of the product, whether it can be reused, recovered, recycled, composted, or circulated, and whether the necessary infrastructure exists to manage it properly.

Another question addressed how to make circular economy financially and economically attractive for businesses and wider market actors. Speakers noted that many single-use products appear cheap because their full costs are not reflected in the price. These hidden costs include landfill use, land value, infrastructure costs, treatment costs, environmental damage, and the opportunity cost of not keeping materials in circulation. The discussion highlighted the importance of full-cost accounting, stronger market incentives, and policy tools that make circular solutions commercially viable.

The discussion also touched on paper-based packaging lined with plastic, with participants noting the need to differentiate between plastic packaging and paper-based products that include plastic barriers. This raised broader questions around product design, material composition, recyclability, compostability, and the need for clear standards that allow innovation to scale while ensuring that new products can be properly managed at end of life.

A further intervention from a student highlighted the importance of education and awareness. The point was raised that sustainability language can sometimes feel repetitive or overly technical, particularly for younger audiences. Speakers emphasized that education must be more practical, relatable, and grounded in real-world impact. Understanding where products go after disposal, how waste accumulates, and what circularity means in everyday choices was presented as essential to building long-term behavioural change.

Participants also raised the potential of treating waste closer to source, including organic waste generated in households. This opened a discussion on the role of decentralized solutions, source segregation, biogas, composting, and the need to reduce the volume of waste entering centralised landfill and treatment systems.

### **Key Themes from the Open Forum**

The discussion highlighted several recurring messages:

- Circular economy must avoid simply replacing one disposable product with another.
- Alternatives should be assessed through life-cycle impact, not only material type.
- Product design is central to whether materials can be reused, recycled, composted, or recovered.
- Full-cost accounting is needed to reflect the real economic and environmental cost of single-use products.
- Better source segregation can reduce treatment complexity and improve recycling outcomes.
- Public awareness must move beyond broad sustainability messaging towards practical, hands-on understanding.
- Behavioural change requires both education and incentives.
- Circular economy solutions must be economically viable in order to scale across markets.





## Closing Reflections

### **Spyros Kouvelis, Team Leader, EU-GCC Cooperation on Green Transition Project**

In his closing reflections, Mr Spyros Kouvelis brought together the main messages emerging from the event, emphasizing that waste should no longer be viewed simply as a disposal challenge, but as a valuable resource. He highlighted that circular economy sits at the intersection of environmental protection and economic opportunity, and that long-term solutions must make sense both environmentally and commercially.

He noted that the discussions throughout the morning had reinforced the importance of moving from ambition to implementation. This requires clear policy direction, effective regulation, practical market mechanisms, technology deployment, investment, and behavioural change. He also underlined the EU's strong experience in circular economy policy and market-based approaches, while recognizing the UAE's growing leadership in advancing circular economy implementation in the region.

A key message from his remarks was the importance of behavioural change. Drawing on a personal example of household composting and recycling, he illustrated how individuals can significantly reduce waste when the right systems are in place. At the same time, he stressed that people need practical incentives and enabling conditions to make circular choices easier and more consistent.

Mr Kouvelis concluded by thanking SPARK for hosting the event, the European Union Delegation to the UAE, the EU-GCC Cooperation on Green Transition Project team, all speakers, moderators, partners, and participants. He emphasized that the project will continue building on this dialogue through further engagement on circular economy and wider green transition priorities.

## Key Takeaways

- Waste should be treated as a resource, not simply as a disposal problem.
- Circular economy is both an environmental priority and an economic opportunity.
- Implementation requires policy, technology, investment, market incentives, and behavioural change to move together.
- EU-UAE cooperation provides a strong basis for continued exchange on circular economy solutions.

## Media Coverage & Digital Visibility

The EU-UAE Business Breakfast on Circular Economy generated strong and wide-ranging media visibility across official European Union channels, UAE national media, Arabic press, regional business platforms, and sector-specialized outlets. Coverage highlighted the event's focus on reducing single-use plastics, advancing circular economy implementation, strengthening recycling systems, and scaling innovation and business solutions, while also reinforcing SPARK's role as the UAE's first member of the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN). The breadth of coverage across English and Arabic platforms helped amplify key messages on EU-UAE cooperation, policy dialogue, sustainability, and practical circular economy action.



Full list of media coverage and publication links available on the following page.

Outlet / Platform	Format	Coverage Focus
<b>EEAS – EU Delegation to the UAE</b>	Official EU coverage	Published the official EU article on the event, highlighting practical pathways for reducing single-use plastics and accelerating circular economy implementation. ( <a href="#">European External Action Service</a> )
<b>Emirates News Agency – WAM English</b>	Official news	Covered SPARK’s cooperation with the EU, the role of EEN, policy dialogue, recycling systems, material innovation, and scalable business solutions. ( <a href="#">WAM</a> )
<b>Emirates News Agency – WAM Arabic</b>	Official Arabic news	Arabic coverage highlighting the event’s focus on reducing single-use plastics, circular economy implementation, and EU–UAE cooperation. ( <a href="#">WAM</a> )
<b>Al Khaleej</b>	Arabic press / print & online	Featured the event as an Emirati–European dialogue hosted in Sharjah to accelerate circular economy and reduce single-use plastics. ( <a href="#">صحيفة الخليج</a> )
<b>Gulf Today</b>	UAE national business press	Highlighted SPARK’s cooperation with the EU and the need for regulation, viable alternatives, incentives, recovery systems, and cross-sector collaboration. ( <a href="#">Gulf Today</a> )
<b>Sharjah 24</b>	Video/interview-style coverage	Featured H.E. Hussain Al Mahmoudi and highlighted SPARK’s role in sustainability, research collaboration, private sector engagement, and circular economy solutions. ( <a href="#">Sharjah24   الرئيسية</a> )
<b>Waste &amp; Recycling Middle East and Africa</b>	Sector-specialized media	Provided targeted industry coverage on circular economy policy, plastics reduction, recycling systems, and practical implementation challenges. ( <a href="#">Waste Recycling MEA</a> )
<b>Zawya English</b>	Regional business platform	Published the English press release on EU–SPARK cooperation on circular economy and plastics reduction. ( <a href="#">Zawya</a> )
<b>Zawya Arabic</b>	Regional Arabic business platform	Published Arabic press release coverage on the Emirati–European dialogue on circular economy and single-use plastics reduction. ( <a href="#">Zawya</a> )
<b>Sahm Capital / Zawya Arabic Syndication</b>	Arabic syndication	Reposted the Zawya Arabic release, extending visibility through a regional financial/business platform. ( <a href="#">Sahm</a> )
<b>UrduPoint</b>	International syndication	Republished WAM coverage for Middle East/UAE audiences, including key messages on EEN and EU–UAE cooperation. ( <a href="#">UrduPoint</a> )
<b>Pakistan Point</b>	International syndication	Republished the WAM story, extending visibility to South Asian and international English-speaking audiences. ( <a href="#">Pakistan Point</a> )
<b>Emirates7</b>	UAE digital news	Published coverage on the event’s policy, innovation, recycling, and business-solutions focus. ( <a href="#">emirates7</a> )
<b>Maa Gulf</b>	Regional digital platform	Published the event story under the title “SPARK Joins Hands with EU to Boost Cooperation on Circular Economy and Plastics Reduction.” ( <a href="#">Maa Gulf</a> )
<b>Magzter / Gulf Today</b>	Digital newspaper replica	Carried the Gulf Today article in digital newspaper format. ( <a href="#">Magzter</a> )
<b>Dailyhunt / Gulf Today Syndication</b>	Digital syndication	Republished Gulf Today coverage, extending the story through a wider content aggregation platform. ( <a href="#">Dailyhunt</a> )
<b>SPARK YouTube / Social Video Coverage</b>	Video highlights	Shared video highlights from the EU–UAE Business Breakfast, supporting digital amplification of the event outcomes. ( <a href="#">YouTube</a> )
<b>SPARK LinkedIn / Social Media</b>	Partner digital amplification	Shared event highlights, reinforcing messages on circularity, sustainability, innovation, and EU–UAE cooperation. ( <a href="#">LinkedIn</a> )

# ABOUT THE PROJECT

## THE EU-GCC COOPERATION ON GREEN TRANSITION PROJECT



Launched in August 2023, this project funded by the European Union marks a significant milestone in the long partnership between the European Union (EU) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). By addressing critical global challenges such as climate change and sustainable development, the project builds upon the EU-GCC Cooperation Agreement Document signed in 1989. The Joint Action Programme for 2022-2027 endorsed in February 2022 outlines the strategic framework for cooperation, emphasizing the need to join forces in addressing climate change and make progress on green transition. This project reflects the shared commitment to leveraging EU expertise to deepen cooperation and engagement, promote green policies and technologies, and create a conducive business environment for collaboration among energy-related and green tech companies in the Gulf.

### KEY OBJECTIVES

The project aims to strengthen political and technical relationships at regional and bilateral levels by:

- Deepening engagement towards green transition and climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- Promoting the uptake of green transition policies and technologies by the GCC countries.
- Facilitating a conducive business environment between EU and GCC green tech companies in the Gulf region.

### IMPACT

- Enhanced knowledge exchange on climate action and green transition.
- Raised awareness on climate change, sustainable practices and circular economy.
- Strengthened network for collaboration in green solutions and energy transition.
- Proactive EU Climate Diplomacy in the region.

### STAKEHOLDERS

- State and non-state institutions, business community, & environmental NGOs.
- Researchers, academia, youth groups, & media outlets.
- EU and GCC businesses, particularly SMEs.
- EU Member States present in the GCC.

### FOCUS AREAS



#### GREEN TRANSITION

Promote transformative change for green transition policies & practices within the GCC.



#### NET ZERO CARBON

Implement solutions for reducing carbon emissions in industrial & public sectors.



#### HYDROGEN MARKET

Support the development of a renewable hydrogen market in the Gulf region.



#### CLEAN-TECH SOLUTIONS

Foster innovations in renewable energy technologies & clean-tech industries.



#### CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

Strengthen resilience & adaptive capacities to climate-related hazards.



#### ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Launch initiatives to preserve biodiversity & natural habitats, including marine protection.



#### CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Encourage the adoption of sustainable waste management & resource efficiency.



#### SUSTAINABLE FINANCE

Engage financial institutions in channelling investment & finance in support of green transition.



Funded by  
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