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European Commission targets end to 'throwaway culture' and targets maximum recycling



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Europe's throwaway society will come to an end by 2030 under a wide-ranging set of proposals by the European Commission to create what it calls a circular economy.



The plans include lots of recycling to get maximum value out of every raw material, redesigning to make sure what one buys does not become obsolete in a few years; and better design to make goods easy to repair.

It will also set tough targets for countries, including Ireland, to vastly reduce the amount of waste sent to landfills and touch every aspect of life, from fertilisers to food, and cars to washing machines and phones.

The new targets are slated to save consumers and producers billions of euro a year, create jobs and products, and make a real contribution towards protecting the environment and fighting climate change.

Changes in the design of products like phones, which contain tiny amounts of valuable but scarce minerals, should also improve Europe's competitiveness in the battle with China and other countries for a share of these precious products.

"Today we are saying that Europe is the best place to grow a sustainable and environmentally friendly business," said commission vice-president Jyrki Katainen.

"This transition towards a more circular economy is about reshaping the market economy and improving our competitiveness. The job creation potential of the circular economy is huge, and the demand for better, more efficient products and services is booming."

His colleague Frans Timmermans acknowledged the proposals will be subject to harsh criticism, with some saying they do not go far enough and others that they go too far. "Our planet and our economy cannot survive if we continue with the 'take, make, use, and throw away' approach. The circular economy is about reducing waste and protecting the environment, but it is also about a profound transformation of the way our entire economy works," he said.

The targets for cutting the amount of waste that goes to landfill to 10% by 2030 will be legally binding, with countries having problems given an extra five years.

After lagging for years, Ireland is catching up with the EU's current waste rules, with the Environmental Protection Agency saying the country is on track to reduce landfill to 35% of waste.

It will also have some work to increase the amount of municipal waste being recycled from the current 35% to 65%, and for packaging waste to 75%.

Waste prevention, eco- design, reuse, and similar measures will bring savings of €600bn, or 8%, of annual turnover for business in the EU and cut greenhouse gas emissions by 2%-4%.

Changes to phones to make them easier to take apart and recycle could save over €1bn while refurbishing light commercial vehicles, rather than recycling them could save €6.4bn a year.