A Critical Analysis of Ireland's Circular Material Use Rate (CAIR)

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Identifying pressures

This research examines Ireland's progress towards a Circular Economy (CE). Ireland has consistently registered a poor score in terms of its Circular Material Use Rate (CMUR) – a key CE metric of the EU. Moreover, Ireland's policy ambitions are to surpass the EU average CMUR by 2030. The task for this research was to interrogate Ireland's CMUR score – the second lowest in the EU as at 2020 – to determine why it has been so poor, and to identify potential pathways for improving Ireland's circularity performance.

To this end, a number of research tasks were undertaken, including:

- Reviewing the methodologies underpinning the CMUR metric and the data it draws upon;
- comparing Ireland's data and data collection methods with those of Austria, Croatia and the Netherlands;
- developing proposals of action for Irish policy-makers to ameliorate the situation;
- engaging with sectoral stakeholders to refine those proposals.

Informing policy

This research has specific relevance to developing policy for advancing the CE in Ireland. The research specifically illustrates the following points:

- To utilise CE metrics for policy decision-making, it is important to understand the processes, methodologies and data underpinning those metrics.
- Any given metric is limited in its scope and should be used in conjunction with other metrics and/or points of information. For instance, the CMUR metric is mass based and therefore does not directly consider other environmental pressures such as greenhouse gas emissions.
- The data underpinning the CMUR metric are important resources that, when explored in depth, can help to identify areas for policy intervention. In the case of this research, examining data underpinning Austria's and Croatia's CMUR scores led to the identification of effective policy interventions in the areas of (1) construction and demolition and (2) bioenergy generation, respectively.

Developing solutions

This research involved analysing data relating to Ireland's CMUR score, interrogating the methodologies involved in data collection and considering alternative datasets. This is the first study to carry out a comparison of CMUR scores between EU countries in terms of data and data collection. This led to a number of key recommendations, which are detailed in the report. In summary, Irish policy-makers should:

- pursue targeted sectoral interventions to achieve a CE, with reference to available data and best practice examples from across the EU, and in consultation and collaboration with relevant stakeholders.
- engage with Eurostat and other relevant EU institutions to further the development and improvement of environmental indicators.