



# The Brussels Donut: Shifting the economy towards an ecological and fair transition



## Brussels-Capital Region, Belgium

### IN A NUTSHELL

*The Brussels-Capital Region is working on shifting its economy to align it with its climate ambitions and ensure a just transition. As part of this effort, they have recently adopted the Doughnut Model as a guiding framework to transition to a fairer and greener economy.*

### **Doughnut Model for an economic transition aligned with climate and social goals**

The Doughnut Model is a conceptual framework that visualises sustainable development by representing a “safe and just space for humanity” between planetary boundaries and social boundaries. This model aims to guide policymakers and communities towards achieving both ecological sustainability and social equity. The Brussels-Capital Region has embraced the Doughnut Model as a guiding framework for transitioning towards a more circular and equitable economy while respecting planetary boundaries. At the core of this transition is the will to align the region’s economic objectives with its ambitious climate goals. This approach seeks to translate vision into action by providing a new perspective, using the doughnut as a compass for policymaking.

### **Defining exemplarity in business**

A key part of this strategy has been to take a comprehensive view of economic policy, defining what constitutes an “exemplary business model”: one that, because it respects the social foundation and ecological ceilings of the Donut, generates a positive economic, environmental and social impact. To reinforce this commitment, several concrete actions have been taken. In 2023, the regional government passed a law defining criteria that businesses must meet to receive support from the government, comprising two key pillars: environmental exemplarity and social exemplarity. To facilitate this shift, the Brussels-Capital Region has laid out a regional strategy for economic transition, setting a clear target: by 2030, regional economic instruments (financing, supporting and

## BRUSSELS-CAPITAL REGION



Mont des Arts, Brussels. Photo by solotravel\_photalkgraphy via Unsplash.

<b>Population:</b> 1,222,637 (2022)	<b>Area:</b> 162.4 km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Signatory to the Covenant of Mayors since:</b> 2008	<b>Overall CO<sub>2</sub> emission reduction target:</b> 47% GHG emissions reduction by 2030 Carbon neutrality by 2050

housing businesses) will only be available to business models that meet these exemplary standards. Supporting businesses in their essential economic transition is also crucial as a communications tool, using success stories to raise awareness among economic actors around concrete sustainable practices and to convince businesses to embrace the shift towards sustainability and circularity.

## The broader Shifting Economy strategy

The Donut Model helped the region come up with the concept of environmental and social exemplarity. This concept is at the heart of the region's broader strategy for economic transition, Shifting Economy, which projects a shift towards a decarbonised, regenerative, circular, social, democratic and digital economy in the Brussels-Capital Region. The strategy, adopted in 2022, has several strategic objectives, including creating new economic opportunities for entrepreneurs in the Brussels-Capital Region, preserving both natural and human capital, promoting the equitable distribution of economic gains and contributing to high-quality employment for the local population. To achieve these goals, the strategy aims to reform economic policies, develop a supportive framework for Brussels-based businesses to achieve social and environmental exemplarity and stimulate the creation of high-quality jobs.

## The governance behind the Doughnut

In terms of governance, the Brussels-Capital Region recognises that transitioning the economy requires a multi-level approach that breaks down silos between different public agencies. The initiative, as part of the Shifting Economy strategy, is led by the State Secretary for the Economic Transition, in collaboration with the Minister of the Environment. The "Donut Team" is now part of the Shifting Economy facilitators consortium, and they assist the individuals responsible for developing the pillars of the Shifting Economy within government administrations.

## Challenges and next steps

Implementing the Donut Model in the Brussels-Capital Region is not without challenges, primarily due to the limited human resources within the regional government. While they have displayed openness to adopting Doughnut principles and have integrated the Donut Model into their work, particularly in assisting businesses, expecting them to lead proactive Donut projects is a bridge too far for now, given their existing workload. As a result, the Donut Team has reoriented its focus to engaging mainly with businesses, and plans to present examples of best practice to the regional government at a later date. It is crucial to recognise that the transition to a more sustainable economy cannot be achieved in isolation. Fashion is a good example: Brussels is committed to supporting slow-fashion entrepreneurs through Shifting Economy, but global competition remains a significant challenge. Large fashion brands often disregard the social and environmental impacts of their production, creating an unfair playing field for slow-fashion entrepreneurs. Brussels emphasises the need for robust supranational legislation to ensure fair competition.

### KEY FIGURES

31 March 2022: Shifting Economy strategy adopted as part of reforms in the Belgian National Plan for Recovery and Resilience

4 Pilot administrations and 12 regional departments involved in Shifting Brussels

Brussels Donut launched in 2020

2 employees working for Brussels Donut



### FINANCING THE PROJECT

- + **Brussels Donut:** €311,350 for 2020-2024
- + **Shifting Economy:** €200,000,000 covering all regional economic instruments and supporting around 7,000 businesses

### USEFUL LINKS

- » [https://shiftingeconomy.brussels/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/ExecutiveSummary\\_ShiftingEconomy\\_EN.pdf](https://shiftingeconomy.brussels/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/ExecutiveSummary_ShiftingEconomy_EN.pdf)
- » <https://donut.brussels>



### CONTACT

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