

European Platform on Life Cycle Assessment

Supporting business and public authorities towards sustainable production and consumption

Responding to community needs outlined in the Integrated Product Policy (COM (2003)302), the European Platform on Life Cycle Assessment (EPLCA), developed and maintained by the European Commission, is based on extensive stakeholder consultations and interactions with European and non-European representatives. The Platform promotes the use of life cycle thinking and assessment through the availability of coherent, quality assured studies, methodologies, and data.

Life Cycle Approach: basis for several EU policies like e.g.

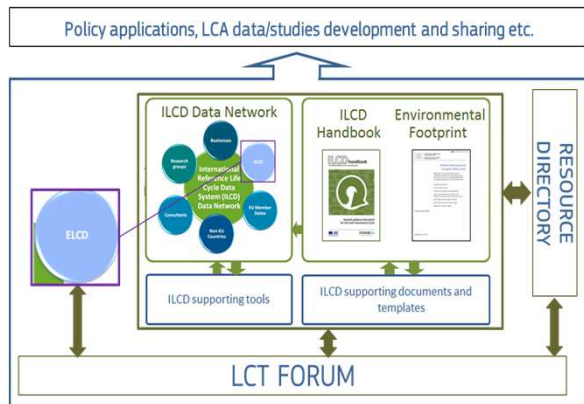
- The Sustainable Consumption and Production Action Plan
- Integrated Product Policy Communication
- Thematic Strategy on the Sustainable Use of Natural Resources
- Thematic Strategy on the Prevention and Recycling of Waste
- The single market for green products initiative (including the Environmental Footprint methods)

LCA is successfully used in the private sector for e.g.

- Continuous environmental improvement of products;
- Internal strategic decision support;
- Evaluating risks/opportunities along the supply chain;
- Communication on strategic aspects with stakeholders at company and association level;
- Communication with customers on products.

The EPLCA activities build on five guiding principles:

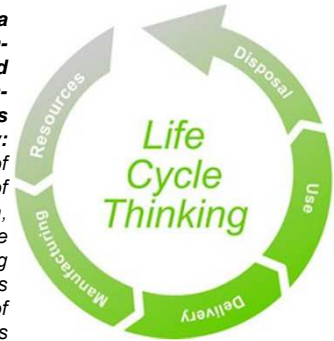
- Best attainable consensus;
- Existing practice and knowledge;
- Scientific robustness;
- Practicality and affordability;
- Providing long-term support



Current structure of the European Platform on Life Cycle Assessment, ILCD=International reference Life Cycle Data system; ELCD=European Reference Life Cycle Database, LCT= Life Cycle Thinking

Life Cycle Assessment is a structured and globally standardised (ISO 14040/44) method for the quantitative environmental evaluation of products (goods and services) by:

Considering the entire life cycle of a product from the extraction of resources, through production, use, and recycling, up to the disposal of waste; Providing indicators of the product's contribution to a wide range of environmental problems such as climate change, toxic pressures, and resource depletion. Life Cycle Thinking (LCT) and Assessment (LCA) seek to identify possible improvements to goods and services in the form of lower environmental footprints and reduced use of resources across all life cycle stages. This begins with raw material extraction and conversion, then manufacture and distribution, through to use and/or consumption. It ends with re-use, recycling of materials, energy recovery and ultimate disposal. All impacts are taken into account, irrespective of where they occur.



Tools available in the European Platform on LCA

The European Reference Life Cycle Database (ELCD) comprises of Life Cycle emissions and resource consumption Inventory (LCI) data from front-running EU-level business associations and other sources for key materials, energy carriers, transport, and waste management, to be used as source for secondary data.

The International Reference Life Cycle Data System (ILCD) Handbook is a series of technical guidance documents that provide practice-oriented guidance on LCA; providing a key input to the Environmental Footprint developments, as well as complementary support in relation to data and other application needs.

The Life Cycle Data Network: Based on the ILCD data format and nomenclature, aimed at providing a globally usable infrastructure for consistent and quality assured life cycle data.

The Resource Directory provides a structured repository for several types of life cycle-based documents and studies, as well as a worldwide list of life cycle support software packages and databases from suppliers/developers, and service providers.

The Life Cycle Thinking Forum acts as reference point for scholars and practitioners to discuss and share experiences on methods, data, events, etc. This tool is expected to be revised and released as a structured online public forum in the near future, in order to facilitate topic-oriented information exchange.

The Advisory Groups with business stakeholders and software developers are aimed at improving the usefulness of the European Platform in the EU and international context, towards the agreement on common strategies and harmonisation.

Contact European Platform on Life Cycle Assessment
European Commission, Joint Research Centre (JRC),
Institute for Environment and Sustainability (IES)
Sustainability Assessment Unit (H08)
TP 270, Via E. Fermi 2749, I-21027 Ispra (VA), Italy
Fax: +39 0332 78-6645 lca@jrc.ec.europa.eu,