



Interreg
Danube Region



Co-funded by
the European Union

WE.Circular

Best Practices

Manual



Collection of best practices and case studies for women entrepreneurs' circular and digital transition



<https://interreg-danube.eu/projects/wecircular>

December 2025

Authors: Emilija Stručić, Technology Park of Varazdin
Mariya Zlateva, Regional Agency for Entrepreneurship and Innovations - Varna

Contributors: Ajda Habjanič, Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Stajerska
Alica Cikatricisová, Slovak Business Agency
Amir Hujić, Foreign Trade Chamber of Bosnia and Herzegovina
Ana Raceanu, Ropot Botique Ltd
Diana Gašparík, Slovak Business Agency
Doroti Eva, Pannon Business Network
Dunja Pavlovic, RAPIV
Iva Moneva, Varna Free University "Chernorizets Hrabar"
Lija Stojković, Assosiation of Business Women of Serbia
Martina Kubíková, IREAS – Institute for Structural Policy
Max Gemmeke, bwcon GmbH
Sandra Mur, Technology Park of Varazdin
Sandra Weiss-Wallner, Innovation Region Styria Ltd.
Valentina Morosan, Organization for Entrepreneurship Development, Moldova
Zina Miočić Lisjak, Technology Park of Varazdin

Credits: All photographs and visual materials used in this publication were kindly provided by the organisations featured in the Good Practices and Case Studies. Selected photographs were sourced from WE.Circular project. Selected visuals were sourced from Freepik - www.freepick.com

This document is supported as part of WE.Circular, an Interreg Danube Region Programme project co-funded by the European Union.



Manual for best practices and case studies for women entrepreneurs' circular and digital transition

© 2025 Regional Agency for Entrepreneurship and Innovations - Varna

Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>



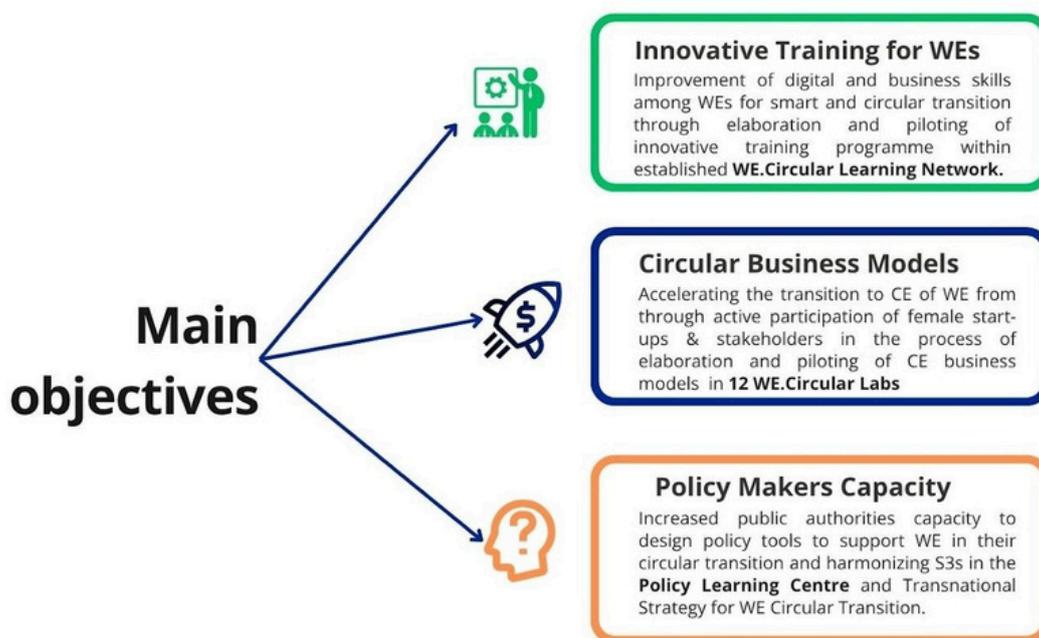
Table of contents:

About WE.Circular	4	Green Circular Academy	25
Scope of the Manual	5	BSB-CIRCLECON - Knowing Circular Economy in Black Sea Basin	27
Methodology applied	6	Circular Black Forest	29
Best practices	7	Romania ClimAccelerator	31
GREENPACT	7	Women Entrepreneurship in Circular Economy	33
FEMTECH for Resilience	9	Case studies	35
Girls Go Circular	11	Cool Bazaar - Circular shopping experience	35
Circular Economy Forum Austria	13	FoodoBox	36
Programme “EWA – Empowering Women in Agrifood”	15	EcoHaus	37
Womenture - Boosting female entrepreneurship through joint services and activities	17	Empress	38
ADVANCE CIRCULAR	19	Auterra Materials	39
Up2Circ	21	Conclulsion	40
Green KAIT	23	Annex 1 A full list of WE.Circular good practices	41

About WE.Circular project



WE.Circular – Boosting Digital and Industrial Capacity for Sustainable Circular Transition of Women Entrepreneurs in the Danube Region is an international initiative co-funded by the Interreg Danube Region Programme. The project enhances the digital, business, and circular skills of women entrepreneurs and key stakeholders, enabling their transition toward Industry 4.0 and sustainable innovation. Bringing together 15 partners and 11 strategic associates from 12 countries, WE.Circular builds an inclusive ecosystem connecting entrepreneurs, policymakers, academia, and business support organisations. Through training, policy integration, and transnational cooperation, it fosters circular entrepreneurship and drives the green and digital transformation of the Danube Region.



WE.Circular

Best Practice Manual

Scope of
the
Manual

presents a collection of proven initiatives and case studies that demonstrate how circular and digital transformation can empower women entrepreneurs and SMEs across the Danube Region. Developed through the collaboration of partners from 12 countries, it serves as a practical reference and inspiration for applying circular economy principles in real business and policy contexts. By highlighting innovation, collaboration, and inclusion, the Manual supports peer learning, knowledge transfer, and policy integration - showing that even small local actions can create significant impact when scaled across regional and European networks.



Key Objectives



Showcase
success



Promote
learning



Support
action

Methodology

Applied

The selection of Good Practices and Case Studies within WE.Circular followed a structured, participatory, and evidence-based process defined in the WE.Circular Good Practice Guide (2024). The aim was to identify initiatives that are relevant, replicable, and impactful in advancing women's entrepreneurship and circular transformation across the Danube Region.

In total, 33 good practices and 12 case studies were collected, with 14 and 5 respectively validated by the WE.Circular Advisory Board.

Each example was evaluated for innovation, measurable results, and transferability potential. These validated practices now serve as the foundation for upcoming project outputs - the Transnational Training Programme, Regional Action Plans, and the Virtual Toolbox - ensuring that the lessons learned are shared, scaled, and applied across borders.

01

Mapping and analysis of the current state

Examining the landscape of women's entrepreneurship and circular-economy initiatives, identifying policies, programmes, and gaps

02

Defining needs and gaps

Craft a compelling message that connects emotionally and delivers clear value to users

03

Identification and collection of Good Practices

At least 3 examples per country using a standard template capturing context, methodology, results, and transferability potential

04

Evaluation and validation

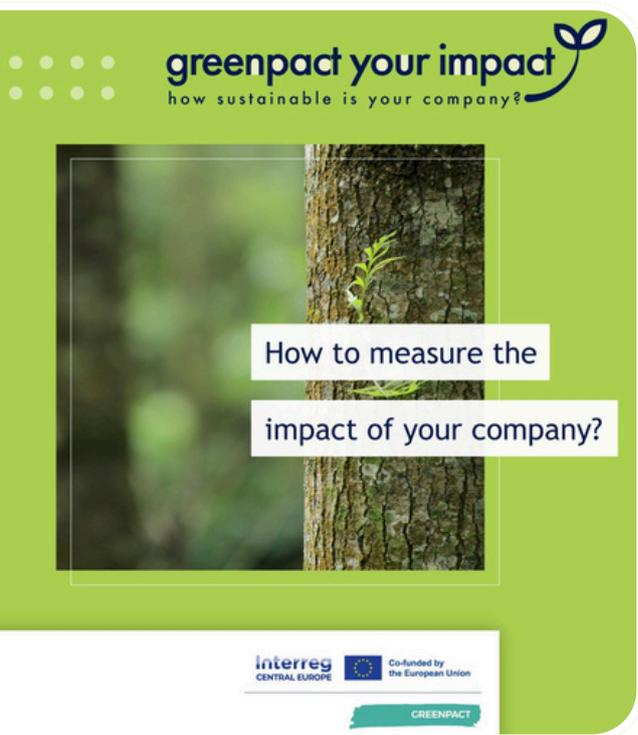
Through peer review during Transnational Learning Events, where practices were assessed for relevance, innovation, impact, and scalability against shared criteria

05

Classification and dissemination

All validated examples are made publicly available via the WE.Circular website and the Virtual Toolbox, enabling users to explore and adapt them across different themes and sectors.

Futurepreneurs and SMEs for a Sustainable Central Europe



Context & needs

GREENPACT responds to the urgent **need for sustainability and innovation in Central Europe's creative and tourism sectors**. SMEs in these industries often lack the skills, tools, and mindset to transition towards circular and impact-driven business models. The project bridges this gap by fostering collaboration between generations, linking young "futurepreneurs" with experienced entrepreneurs to drive sustainable transformation.

Why is this a good practice?

The initiative stands out for its **innovative intergenerational model that links creativity with experience**. It empowers SMEs to adopt circular strategies, promotes inclusive and gender-balanced participation, and strengthens local innovation ecosystems.



Croatia, Germany, Italy, Czech Republic, Slovakia



Project



April 2023 – March 2026



Green Skills
Circular Economy Transition



Owner:
Stuttgart Media University (HdM), Germany

Description of the best practice

GREENPACT is an Interreg Central Europe project (2023–2026) which applies a collaborative, intergenerational methodology that blends innovation, education, and entrepreneurship.

Through Collaboration Labs (dynamic, hackathon-style events) and Buddy Boosting Training Programmes, young talents and SME owners work together to develop circular business models, experiment with design thinking, and strengthen sustainability competencies. The project also designs self-assessment tools to help SMEs measure their sustainability progress and a certification scheme that recognises impact-driven enterprises.

By combining creativity, co-learning, and practical experimentation, GREENPACT creates an environment where businesses can rethink their operations and actively contribute to a greener Central Europe.

Achievements

- Implemented intergenerational **training programmes in 5 Central European countries.**
- Developed **self-assessment tools to help SMEs measure sustainability progress.**
- Designed a **transnational certification system** for sustainable business practices.
- Inspired **regional action plans and pilot projects promoting** collaboration between academia, industry, and local authorities.

Transferability Potential

- Adaptable **partnership and training model** for diverse regional contexts.
- Practical **policy and sustainability framework supporting circular entrepreneurship.**
- Promotes **cross-generational collaboration** and **innovation** in green business.

FEMTECH for Resilience

Best Practice #2

Promoting the use of digital technologies to make women's enterprises resilient

Context & needs



ASSOCIATION OF
BUSINESS WOMEN
IN SERBIA

During the COVID-19 crisis, many women-led businesses in Serbia faced severe disruptions and limited digital capacity to adapt to new market conditions. The Association of Business Women in Serbia recognized the urgent need to enhance digital skills among women entrepreneurs to maintain business continuity, competitiveness, and visibility. Although Serbia's tech sector is growing rapidly, gender inequality persists—women remain underrepresented in ICT-related fields and often lack access to digital transformation opportunities.



Serbia



Project



February - September 2022



Digital skills, Business skills,
Mentoring

Owner:

Association of Business Women, Serbia

Why is this a good practice?

FEMTECH stands out as a **rapid and impactful response to crisis-driven digital needs**. It empowered women to adopt technology as a tool for resilience, innovation, and growth, while also building a community of role models and mentors. Its comprehensive mix of education, visibility, and investment readiness created lasting benefits beyond the project's duration.

Description of the best practice

FEMTECH for Resilience, funded by the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), was implemented from February to September 2022 to strengthen the digital readiness of women-owned SMEs and start-ups. The project combined training, mentorship, and peer learning through an innovative Digital Skills Online Academy.

Its methodology included:

- A series of five webinars covering key aspects of digital transformation - from digital marketing and customer management to remote work and strategy development;
- A mentoring programme providing one-on-one consultancy by certified digital transformation experts;
- Five podcasts featuring inspiring women entrepreneurs who successfully integrated digital tools into their businesses;
- Pitching sessions connecting top participants with business angels and potential investors;
- A session on online harassment to promote safer online working environments.

Achievements

- **50+ women entrepreneurs** trained and mentored through digital capacity-building activities.
- **5 webinars organized; 5 podcasts produced broadcast on 22 local TV stations** and major online platforms.
- **3,100+ stakeholders reached** through a targeted visibility and awareness campaign.
- Significantly **increased digital transformation awareness among** women-led SMEs in Serbia.

Transferability Potential

- **Modular format** combining training, mentoring, and outreach adaptable to any region.
- Emphasis on digital upskilling and gender equality in entrepreneurship.
- Collaborative framework linking business associations, experts, and policymakers.

Girls Go Circular

Best Practice #3

Empowering girls with digital and entrepreneurial skills for a sustainable future

Context & needs



Across Europe, women remain underrepresented in STEM and digital fields. Only 34% of STEM graduates and 18% of ICT specialists are female. Recognising this gap, Girls Go Circular empowers schoolgirls aged 14–19 with the digital, entrepreneurial, and green skills needed for a sustainable future. The initiative responds to the need for early interventions that inspire girls to pursue careers in technology and sustainability while fostering awareness of circular economy principles.

Why is this a good practice?

Girls Go Circular is a pioneering model that merges digital education with circular economy learning. It empowers young women to become confident innovators and sustainability leaders, bridging gender gaps in STEM while strengthening the skills needed for Europe's green transition.



35 countries in Europe



Initiative



2020-2025



Green skills, Circular economy, Digital skills



Owner:

EIT Community; EIT Raw Materials

Description

of the best practice

Launched in 2020 by EIT Raw Materials and the EIT Community, and implemented in Romania by Junior Achievement Romania, the project aims to reach 50,000 girls by 2027. At its core lies the Circular Learning Space (CLS) - an open-source, multilingual online platform offering 18 interactive modules on topics such as sustainable fashion, plastics, and electronic waste.

The platform combines learning-by-doing and challenge-based activities, encouraging participants to identify business opportunities, design circular solutions, and collaborate in teams. Teachers are supported through tools that track progress and facilitate interactive classes. By completing modules, learners earn certificates recognising their acquired skills in digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and sustainability. In 2025 the platform changed its name and now is known as "Girls Go STEM".

Achievements

- **Trained over 38,000 students** across Europe, with 60% female participants.
- **Engaged 1,000+ schools and 290 teachers in Romania.**
- Developed **18 interactive learning modules available in 16 languages.**
- Recognised as an EntreComp Champion and finalist in the European Digital Skills Awards 2023 for advancing women in ICT.

Transferability Potential

- **Flexible and scalable model** easily adaptable to different learning environments and audiences.
- **Modular online platform** allows integration of new topics, including entrepreneurship and vocational training.
- **Open-source and multilingual resources** provide a ready-to-use framework for promoting digital, entrepreneurial, and sustainability skills globally.

Circular Economy Forum Austria

Best Practice #4



Context & needs

Austria's transition to a circular economy requires strong cooperation between businesses, policymakers, researchers, and civil society. Yet, the landscape of actors and initiatives has long been fragmented. The **Circular Economy Forum Austria** (CEFA) was established to address this gap by fostering collaboration, mapping key players, and supporting companies in adopting circular strategies that balance economic growth with environmental responsibility.

 Austria

 Initiative

 2020

 Green skills; Digital skills; Circular transition; Policy support



Owner:
Circular Economy Forum Austria

Why is this a good practice?

CEFA demonstrates how a coordinated, inclusive network can drive transformation by connecting stakeholders and promoting circular innovation. Its model enables businesses to align with national sustainability targets while fostering knowledge exchange and collaborative problem-solving across sectors.

Description

of the best practice

Founded in 2020 and formally registered as a non-profit association in 2023, CEFA is Austria's largest independent multi-stakeholder platform dedicated to accelerating the circular transition. Acting as a "network of networks," CEFA connects businesses, academia, policymakers, and innovators through initiatives that build knowledge, strengthen cooperation, and promote systemic change. Its key activities include:

- The **Circular Innovation Eco-System Map**, a living digital tool that visualises national actors, projects, and business models;
- The **Circular Innovation Labs**, which facilitate cross-sector pilot projects and applied research;
- The **Circular Innovation Academy**, offering interdisciplinary training and executive education;
- **Regular Circular Innovation Talks and Journeys**, promoting dialogue and international exchange;
- The **Circular Insider Magazine**, sharing best practices and new developments in circular design, policy, and business.

Achievements

- Built a **national network of over 1,700 companies, 42 partner organisations, and 38 international partners**.
- Established as Austria's **one-stop hub for circular economy expertise**.
- Acts as a **strategic partner in national and EU-level projects**, policy dialogues, and innovation programmes.

Transferability Potential

- **Scalable and adaptable framework** for developing regional circular innovation ecosystems.
- **Combines stakeholder mapping, cross-sector collaboration, and open-access knowledge tools** applicable in various contexts.
- Serves as a **blueprint for establishing circular economy hubs** across Europe and beyond.

Empowering Women in Agrifood



Context & needs

Women entrepreneurs in the agrifood sector often face limited access to finance, mentorship, and visibility in traditionally male-dominated environments. In many countries with emerging innovation ecosystems, these gaps hinder both individual growth and sustainable sectoral transformation. The **EWA - Empowering Women in Agrifood programme**, initiated by EIT Food, addresses these challenges by equipping women with business, innovation, and networking skills to strengthen their role in the green and circular agrifood transition.

Why is this a good practice?

EWA **combines education, mentorship, and funding to empower women-led agrifood start-ups**. It not only enhances business growth and innovation but also promotes circular thinking and sustainability across the sector. Its strong community-building component ensures long-term impact through collaboration, peer learning, and visibility in the European innovation ecosystem.

 14 countries in Europe/ annually

 Initiative

 2020 - on-going

 Green skills; Digital skills; Circular transition; Mentoring; Funding



Owner:
EIT Food

Description

of the best practice

Launched in 2020, EWA is an annual programme providing six months of tailored mentoring, training, and networking for women entrepreneurs across 14 countries, including Bulgaria and Romania. Locally implemented by partners such as RAPIV (Bulgaria) and Impact Hub Romania, the programme follows a structured model - from open calls and selection through the F6S platform, to personalised mentoring, business masterclasses, and final pitching competitions.

Each participant receives individual mentorship (20 hours), access to the EWA virtual community of more than 650 women entrepreneurs and experts, and opportunities for exposure to investors through pitching events and the Women in Agrifood Summit. Financial prizes of up to €15,000 are awarded to the best business ideas, while all selected entrepreneurs gain access to EIT Food's extensive European innovation network.

Achievements

- Supported **370 women entrepreneurs from 12 countries between 2020–2023**.
- Provided **€560,000 in awards** and helped attract **over €12 million in private investment**.
- In Bulgaria, 30 women entrepreneurs were mentored, and half of them integrated circular economy principles into their business models.
- In Romania, 30 women were trained in developing innovations in food recycling, regenerative agriculture, and sustainable production.

Transferability Potential

- **Replicable and scalable framework** for supporting women's entrepreneurship across sectors and regions.
- **Modular structure combining open calls, mentoring, online learning, and funding** adaptable to local contexts.
- Provides a **ready-to-implement model for inclusive innovation and circular entrepreneurship** in emerging markets.



Boosting female entrepreneurship through joint services and activities



Context & needs

Despite growing innovation potential, women-led start-ups in Central and Eastern Europe still face structural barriers such as limited access to funding, mentoring, and visibility within innovation ecosystems. In 2020, women-founded start-ups received only 1% of investments in the region. **Womenture was launched to change this reality by empowering women innovators, strengthening support networks, and building an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem across Europe.**



39 European countries



Project



January 2023 - January 2025



Mentoring, sustainability, skills



Owner:
Design Terminal, Hungary

Why is this a good practice?

Womenture stands out for its **hands-on, international, and structured approach. It combines soft-skill development, investment readiness, and community building** - elements often missing from conventional business accelerators. By prioritising mentorship, peer exchange, and collaboration, Womenture provides women with the confidence, knowledge, and networks to grow their start-ups and influence systemic change.

Description of the best practice

Implemented between January 2023 and January 2025, Womenture is coordinated by Design Terminal (Hungary) with partners in Czechia, Germany, and Estonia. The initiative combines research, capacity-building, and business support to boost female entrepreneurship.

Its flagship activity, the **Pre-Acceleration Programme**, offers a 7-week intensive support framework tailored to idea-stage, female-founded start-ups. The programme includes **107 hours of mentoring and training, one-on-one coaching, peer-learning sessions, and skill-building workshops**.

Beyond training, Womenture fosters strong **networking and visibility** opportunities through its **Innovation Ecosystem Hub, ambassador programme, and international events** such as the Joint Innovation Ecosystem Summit. This integrated approach ensures participants not only gain business knowledge but also connect with investors, mentors, and policy actors to scale their ventures sustainably.

Achievements

- Engaged **1,109 innovators and received 247 applications from 39 countries**.
- Selected **20 start-ups** for intensive acceleration and mentoring support.
- Mobilised **19 ambassadors and hosted 15 networking events**.
- Delivered 107 hours of mentoring and training to participating founders.
- Built an active **community of 113+ members on the Womenture Innovation Hub**.

Transferability Potential

- **Adaptable and scalable framework for promoting** women's entrepreneurship and innovation.
- **Modular methodology combining mentoring, acceleration, and ecosystem networking** applicable to various regions.
- Supported by a **digital platform and ambassador network** ensuring flexibility and continuous evolution across contexts.



Advance Circular

Best
Practice
#7

Linking tourism industry with VET to embrace circularity



TRANSNATIONAL REPORT FOR
Analysis 1
"Are we ready for Circularity?"
Activity A2.2.

June, 2024

Developed by:
e-Zavod and BAAR



Context & needs

The tourism sector faces mounting pressure to reduce waste, optimise resources, and transition toward circular models. However, most tourism businesses and vocational education and training (VET) institutions lack the skills, collaboration, and tools to make this shift. **The Advance Circular project** responds to these needs by linking the tourism industry with VET systems to accelerate the adoption of circular economy principles through education, innovation, and cross-sector partnerships.



Romania, Spain, Bulgaria, and
Slovenia



Project



October 2023 – September
2025



Green skills; business skills; CE
transition



Owner: National Institute of Research and
Development in Tourism, Romania

Why is this a good practice?

Advance Circular represents a holistic and practical model for embedding circular principles into tourism and education. It bridges the gap between training and business application, enabling professionals to acquire green skills while co-creating solutions that drive sustainability and competitiveness in the sector.

Description of the best practice

Advance Circular project's core mission is to equip tourism professionals and VET providers with the knowledge and tools needed to integrate circular economy principles into their work. Its methodology combines research, co-creation, and training, resulting in three main tools:

- **Circular Economy Guidelines** – “Moving from Theory to Practice”, offering step-by-step guidance for circular operations;
- **Skill Taxonomy, defining 26 green skills across five CE domains;**
- **Digital Cards based on the 5Rs** (Rethink, Redesign, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle), making CE concepts engaging and accessible.
- A modular **Training Pack (five modules + self-learning section) and Transnational Training Programme** were developed to strengthen practical learning through Design Thinking, peer learning, and case-based exercises. These are applied in national “Train-the-Trainer” sessions, ensuring sustainability and wide dissemination.

Achievements

- Conducted **2 transnational studies** identifying key skill gaps in tourism and education, **engaging over 320 stakeholders**.
- Developed **3 practical tools – Circular Economy Guidelines, a Skill Taxonomy of 26 green skills, and Digital 5Rs Cards**.
- Created a **modular training programme** translating circular principles into practical application.
- Strengthened **collaboration between businesses, educators, and policymakers** to advance sustainable tourism across Europe.

Transferability Potential

- **Ready-to-adapt model** replicable across various sectors and regions.
- **Co-created tools and modular training pack** easily updated to meet evolving needs.
- Built on research, stakeholder engagement, and transnational cooperation, offering a strong framework for integrating circular economy concepts into education and industry.

Boosting the uptake of circular business model, product and process innovation

Context & needs



Many SMEs **lack the resources, expertise, and technical support needed to adopt circular economy practices**. This limits their ability to innovate, reduce environmental impacts, and stay competitive in markets increasingly shaped by sustainability standards. Up2Circ addresses this gap by helping SMEs shift from linear to circular models through targeted awareness, skills development, and financial support.

Why is this a good practice?

Up2Circ combines **financial incentives, expert mentoring, and skill development in one coherent model**, enabling SMEs to overcome barriers to circular adoption. Its strong international network, inclusive approach, and focus on measurable results make it an exemplary initiative for supporting business transformation toward sustainability.



Czech Republic, Italy, France, Poland, Germany, Spain, Estonia



Project



January 2023 – December 2026



Green skills; CE transition; Funding; Networking



Owner:
Chamber of Commerce of Turin, Italy

Description of the best practice

Up2Circ is a Horizon Europe project (2023–2026) led by the Chamber of Commerce of Turin (CCIAATO, Italy) with seven partners from across Europe, including JIC – South Moravian Innovation Centre (Czech Republic). The initiative provides a structured journey for SMEs through four main phases:

1. **Wake-Up2Circ (Awareness Loop)** – raising awareness about circular opportunities.
2. **Up2Circ Academy (Skills Loop)** – offering in-depth training on business models, product design, and process innovation.
3. **Up2Circ Incentive Scheme (Results Loop)** – providing financial support of €15,000–€50,000 for implementing circular solutions.
4. **SME Ambassadors Network (Exploitation Loop)** – sharing experiences and success stories across Europe.

Beyond business support, the project builds a network of advisors, stakeholders, and policymakers, promoting collaboration and sharing of best practices in circular innovation.

Achievements

- Launched a **pilot funding call attracting 46 SME applications**, with **7 projects funded**, including 2 women-led initiatives.
- **Mobilised hundreds of SMEs and experts across seven** European regions.
- Provided **training, mentoring, and funding to support** circular innovation and business model transformation.

Transferability Potential

- **Modular learning and tailored consulting** easily adaptable to national or regional contexts.
- **Loop-based methodology** (awareness → skills → implementation → outreach) applicable across sectors and countries.
- Provides a **replicable framework for supporting circular innovation and SME transformation worldwide**.



Building sustainability competencies through knowledge, action, innovation, and transformation

Context & needs



Young entrepreneurs often face challenges in turning sustainable business ideas into viable ventures due to limited access to funding, mentorship, and early-stage support. Recognising this gap, **Green KAIT** was launched to nurture green innovation and environmental awareness among students and aspiring entrepreneurs, helping them transform eco-conscious ideas into scalable and impactful business models.

 Austria

 Project

 August 2023 - August 2026

 Green skills; Business skills;
Mentoring; Funding



Owner: University of Applied Sciences
JOANNEUM (Fachhochschule JOANNEUM)

Why is this a good practice?

The initiative **bridges the gap between education and entrepreneurship, translating environmental awareness into action.** By combining business training, financial support, and mentorship, Green KAIT not only stimulates sustainable innovation but also strengthens local and regional green economies in line with Austria's climate goals.

Description of the best practice

Green KAIT is a **regional pre-seed accelerator programme** implemented by FH JOANNEUM, under the EFRE – Just Transition Fund (JTF). It provides a **structured mix of funding, mentorship, and training focused** on sustainable entrepreneurship and green technologies. Through cooperation with educational institutions, local government, and industry partners, Green KAIT supports students and early-stage founders in developing viable business models, validating concepts, and preparing for investment. Its activities include practical workshops, pitch events, and sustainability-focused networking sessions that connect young innovators with experienced mentors from academia and business.

Achievements

- Integrated sustainability into higher education curricula
- Established partnerships between academia and industry
- Delivered interdisciplinary projects addressing real environmental challenges
- Promoted early sustainability education by building knowledge and awareness among secondary school students.

Transferability Potential

- **Adaptable for other educational institutions** through locally tailored sustainability projects.
- **Scalable by building networks** with regional stakeholders and innovation actors.
- **Flexible model that aligns with local environmental and economic contexts.**



Green Circular Academy

Best Practice #10

Training the next generation for a circular future



Context & needs

The transition to a circular economy requires not only new technologies but also education, awareness, and collaboration across sectors. In Slovakia, there has been a **lack of structured training to equip professionals, policymakers, and entrepreneurs with the knowledge and practical tools needed to lead this transformation.** The Green Circular Academy addresses this gap by empowering participants through education, experience, and networking focused on circular economy principles.

 Slovakia

 Project

 October 2021 - September 2023

 Green skills, Circular economy awareness, Mentoring, and Networking



Owner:
Institute of Circular Economy, Slovakia

Why is this a good practice?

By bridging knowledge and action, the Green Circular Academy strengthens Slovakia's capacity for green innovation. It not only raises awareness but also builds tangible skills and networks that enable participants to implement sustainable practices in their workplaces and communities. The initiative's inclusive approach supports women entrepreneurs, providing them with tools and confidence to integrate circular strategies into their businesses.

Description

of the best practice

The **Green Circular Academy** is an **educational initiative** organised by the Institute of Circular Economy (INCIEN) in partnership with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES). It offers a comprehensive learning programme combining theory with practice.

Through a series of lectures, workshops, and field excursions known as **"Trash Tours"**, participants gain hands-on experience in waste management, resource efficiency, and sustainable innovation. The Academy attracts a diverse audience from municipal officials, entrepreneurs, and representatives from public to private institutions, creating a platform for cross-sectoral dialogue and cooperation

Achievements

- Launched a **pilot funding call attracting 46 SME applications**, with **7 projects funded**, including 2 women-led initiatives.
- **Mobilised hundreds of SMEs and experts across seven** European regions.
- Provided **training, mentoring, and funding to support** circular innovation and business model transformation.

Transferability Potential

- **Modular learning and tailored consulting** easily adaptable to national or regional contexts.
- **Loop-based methodology** (awareness → skills → implementation → outreach) applicable across sectors and countries.
- Provides a **replicable framework for supporting circular innovation and SME transformation worldwide**.



BSB – CIRCLECON

Best
Practice
#11

Knowing Circular Economy in the Black Sea Basin



Context & needs

The Black Sea region faces specific environmental and economic challenges related to resource efficiency, waste management, and sustainable growth. Many stakeholders lack access to knowledge, networks, and tools that would enable them to adopt circular economy practices effectively.

 Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, Georgia, and Ukraine

 Project

 March 2021 - July 2023

 Green skills, Circular economy awareness, Policy support, Networking

Owner:
Varna Free University "Chernorizets Hrabar"

Why is this a good practice?

BSB-CIRCLECON stands out as a large-scale, cross-border initiative that integrates education, research, and policy engagement to foster circular transition. It combines practical training with digital learning, strengthens institutional capacity, and provides accessible tools for citizens, businesses, and policymakers to adopt sustainable practices.

Description

of the best practice

BSB-CILERON is a project which promoted the EU circular economy model by improving waste management systems, encouraging waste reduction and reuse, and fostering transnational cooperation for environmental protection.

Key activities included **regional studies on waste management and CE potential**, the establishment of Circular Economy Working Groups (CEWGs), and the creation of an **online multilingual educational platform** offering training modules on CE business models, EU environmental policy, and sustainable finance. Additionally, the project developed a **free smartphone app for learning and engagement** and initiated the creation of an **European Group of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)** to sustain long-term collaboration.

Achievements

- Produced **5 regional studies and a comparative analysis** on waste management and circular potential.
- Conducted 12 workshops and 12 stakeholder sessions across partner countries.
- **Trained 94 experts from 8 countries** via the online platform.
- All 6 project partners **obtained ISO 14000 environmental management certification**.
- Established an **EGTC with 11 members** to support long-term regional cooperation.
- Developed a **mobile app** (iOS & Android) expanding access to circular economy knowledge and tools.

Transferability Potential

- Offers a **replicable blueprint** for regional and transnational circular economy collaboration.
- Uses **digital tools and open-access platforms** that support ongoing learning and adaptation.
- The **EGTC structure** ensures long-term cooperation and scalability across regions.

Circular Black Forest

Best Practice #12

A regional initiative driving circular transformation through collaboration



Context & needs

The Black Forest region in Germany needed a coordinated platform to connect stakeholders and support the transition toward a circular economy. The primary challenge was the lack of structured collaboration among municipalities, companies, and citizens, as well as the need to raise awareness and develop pilot projects that showcase circular solutions.



Germany



Initiative



2023 - on-going



Circular economy transition,
Circular economy awareness,
Networking; Mentoring



owner: Circular Black Forest GmbH, Baden-Württemberg, Germany

Why is this a good practice?

This initiative demonstrates how regional cooperation can translate circular principles into real economic and social value. By fostering trust-based partnerships and providing a platform for experimentation, Circular Black Forest accelerates innovation and strengthens regional resilience. Its participatory approach ensures that transformation happens inclusively.

Description

of the best practice

Circular Black Forest is a multi-stakeholder initiative that serves as a neutral coordination point for implementing the circular economy in the Black Forest, Baden-Württemberg. It operates as a dynamic **“DoTank”** that connects businesses, municipalities, research institutions, and citizens to co-create sustainable solutions.

Through **workshops, cluster networks, and pilot projects**, the initiative promotes cooperation across sectors and fosters practical innovation in areas such as manufacturing, construction, and food systems. Its main clusters are **Circular City Challenge, Manufacturing/Industry, Built Environment, and Circular Food Systems**. They support knowledge sharing, pilot development, and best practice exchange. The initiative also provides educational lectures, material flow analyses, and networking events that bring together policy, science, and industry to shape a more circular regional economy.

Achievements

- Established itself as the **central contact point for circular economy innovation** in the region.
- Created active **working clusters** and **launched local pilot projects** supporting circular solutions.
- Built strong **cross-sector connections** between politics, business, and academia.
- Developed a **transparent, trust-based network** that accelerates collaboration.
- Enabled SMEs and municipalities to **jointly test and scale** sustainable, circular practices.

Transferability Potential

- Replicable regional model for coordinating circular economy initiatives.
- Cluster-based methodology combining knowledge exchange, networking, and pilot actions adaptable to other regions.
- Balanced approach integrating community engagement, business innovation, and policy dialogue to build circular ecosystems.



Romania ClimAccelerator

Best
Practice
#13

Empowering climate-positive startups

Context & needs

As climate change and environmental degradation demand urgent solutions, Romania's startup ecosystem has struggled to access the tools, funding, and mentoring needed to scale sustainable innovations. The **Romania ClimAccelerator** was launched to bridge this gap, supporting startups developing technologies and business models that reduce emissions, promote circularity, and foster a greener economy.

IMPACT
HUB

Bucharest



Romania



Initiative



2021-2023



Green skills, CE transition,
Innovation, Training; Mentoring,
Networking, and Funding



Owner:

EIT Climate-KIC / Impact Hub Bucharest

Why is this a good practice?

ClimAccelerator has become Romania's most comprehensive green innovation accelerator, empowering startups to develop scalable climate solutions. By combining capacity-building, funding, and impact measurement, it strengthens the national green entrepreneurship ecosystem and fosters a culture of innovation aligned with EU sustainability goals.

Description of the best practice

The Romania ClimAccelerator is a national startup accelerator programme implemented by Impact Hub Bucharest in partnership with EIT Climate-KIC, Raiffeisen Bank Romania, and OMV Petrom. It provides tailored support to startups at different stages of development through two programme tracks: Early Stage (idea validation and business modelling) and MVP (market-ready prototype development and investment readiness).

The programme includes one-on-one **mentorship, thematic workshops, peer learning, and networking** with investors and key actors in the innovation ecosystem. Participants also benefit from exposure at Demo Days and access to specialized tools such as **Impact Forecast**, which helps startups measure and improve their environmental impact. Areas of innovation supported include urban mobility, waste management, clean energy, greentech, circular economy, and sustainable agriculture.

Achievements

- Supported **80 green startups**, including 30% women co-founders, across 14 Romanian cities.
- Provided **€400,000 in grants**, enabling startups to **attract €1 million in additional investment**.
- Engaged **90+ mentors and experts annually** and reached over 500,000 people through media and social outreach.
- **Awarded 3rd place in the Environment category at the CSR Awards 2023 for national impact.**

Transferability Potential

- Modular accelerator structure adaptable to different countries and sectors.
- Mentorship-based approach combined with environmental impact tools supports scalable climate innovation.
- Provides a proven ecosystem collaboration framework for circular and climate-focused startups across Europe.



Women Entrepreneurship in Circular Economy

Best Practice #14

From policy to practice: Supporting eco-friendly business



Context & needs

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Moldova account for a large share of industrial pollution yet have limited resources and incentives to adopt eco-friendly business models. The Women Entrepreneurship in Circular Economy programme, responds to this challenge by promoting sustainable, resource-efficient practices among SMEs, with a focus on women's participation in green innovation and entrepreneurship.



Moldova



Initiative



2019 - 2025



Green skills, CE transition, Policy support, Funding, Training & mentoring, and Networking

Owner:
Organization for Entrepreneurship Development, Moldova

Why is this a good practice?

This initiative is a model for integrating economic empowerment and environmental sustainability. It equips women entrepreneurs and SMEs with practical tools, funding, and knowledge to align profitability with ecological responsibility. Its multi-stakeholder approach ensures long-term impact on Moldova's sustainable growth and competitiveness.

Description of the best practice

This national initiative supports SMEs in transitioning to environmentally sustainable operations. It provides **grants of up to 500,000 MDL to encourage green investments, alongside training, capacity building, and policy advocacy**. The programme's methodology includes needs assessment, stakeholder engagement, technical assistance, and ongoing evaluation.

Through collaboration between the Government of the Republic of Moldova, the European Union, and international partners such as UNIDO, UNEP, OECD, ILO, and the Global Green Growth Fund, the programme helps entrepreneurs improve energy efficiency, reduce waste, and adopt circular production models. Special emphasis is placed on supporting women entrepreneurs to access green funding, build capacity, and integrate sustainable practices into their businesses.

Achievements

- **Supported 120+ SMEs** in adopting eco-friendly and circular business models.
- **Provided over 30 million MDL** in grants for green investments.
- Delivered training and technical assistance to **500+ entrepreneurs, 40% of whom are women**.
- Achieved **15–20% reductions in emissions and waste** among participating companies.
- Strengthened SME competitiveness and market expansion through circular practices.

Transferability Potential

- Combines grants, training, and policy coordination, offering an adaptable model for green entrepreneurship support.
- Easily integrated into national SME or women entrepreneurship programmes through green funding, mentoring, and impact measurement.
- Provides a practical policy blueprint for advancing circular economy goals and women's economic empowerment across regions.



Cool Bazaar

Case
study
#1

Circular Shopping Experience



Cool Bazaar is the first initiative of its kind in Bosnia and Herzegovina, combining an online marketplace and live events to create a sustainable shopping and learning experience for families.

Founded by **Arijana Katana**, it provides parents with a platform to buy and sell gently used children's items (clothes, toys, books) while educating both parents and children about the value of reuse and waste reduction. The idea grew out of a simple challenge: families accumulate a large number of children's items that are quickly outgrown, while access to affordable, sustainable alternatives remains limited.

✓ Reuse and upcycling model

✓ Mini Bazaars

✓ Educational workshops



Bosnia and Herzegovina



Retail / Circular economy initiative



2025



Circular fashion, Waste reduction, Consumer engagement, Social enterprise

- Growing community of **eco-conscious families and partners**.
- **Waste reduction** and extended product lifespans.
- **10% monthly user growth** and **30% active participation** expected.
- **Circular skills for children via creative activities**.

Smart Solutions Against Food Waste



Foodobox is a Bulgarian start-up founded in 2020 by **Jane Dimitrova and Velin Kerkov**, two young entrepreneurs who returned home after several years abroad in Italy and Scotland. Motivated by a desire to create meaningful change, they launched the **first mobile app in Bulgaria dedicated to reducing food waste**. The app connects restaurants, bakeries, and retailers that have surplus food with consumers who can buy it at discounted prices. Their mission is simple but powerful — to help businesses cut waste and give consumers access to high-quality food at affordable prices, turning sustainability into a daily habit.

Thanks to its participation in the **EWA – Empowering Women in Agrifood programme** by EIT Food, Foodobox has expanded rapidly and strengthened its business model. The company has:

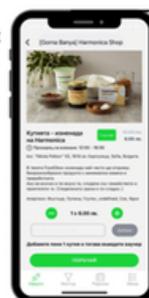
- **Grown by 52%** since the start of the programme;
- Added over **13,000 new app users**;
- Increased its network of partner retailers and restaurants by 35%;
- Successfully expanded beyond Bulgaria.

 Bulgaria

 Food and retail

 2020

 **ACTION**
Food waste reduction, Green innovation, Female entrepreneurship



For a Clean Future Without Compromises

EcoHaus CZ s.r.o. is a Czech company **founded and led by Petra Doubková**, an entrepreneur committed to reshaping the home care industry through circular and minimalist principles.

EcoHaus develops **eco-friendly household products**, such as highly concentrated laundry sheets, designed to reduce plastic waste, minimize water use, and simplify sustainable living. After years of experience in retail and sustainability, Petra launched EcoHaus to make responsible consumption effortless, affordable, and accessible for everyone.



EcoHaus applies circular principles across its entire business by producing ultra-concentrated, water-free laundry sheets that eliminate unnecessary plastic packaging, and by implementing a return-and-refill system where at least 60% of packaging is reused. The company promotes minimalism and multifunctional home care to reduce overall consumption, while AI-driven tools support customer engagement and fully digital, low-carbon operations.



Czech Republic



Consumer goods and retail / Sustainable home care



2022



Circular packaging, Sustainable home care, Green innovation, Female entrepreneurship, Digital solutions



Sheepa Innovative Healthy Underwear



Empress Ltd., based in Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina, is a textile company redefining health and sustainability in fashion through its innovative brand **Sheepa**. Founded by **Amela Alispahić**, the company combines traditional materials with modern design to create functional underwear made from organic wool and cotton, designed to support reproductive health and prevent inflammatory conditions. The idea originated from a desire to transform locally produced wool - often discarded or burned - into high-quality, eco-friendly products with health benefits..

Sheepa has been awarded the **BH Quality Mark** and **“Originally Domestic”** certification, highlighting its innovation and local value. The company has developed a patented health-oriented underwear line made entirely from certified natural materials, prevented wool waste incineration, and promoted domestic wool production. By integrating circular production and nearly zero-waste methods, Empress has positioned Sheepa as a national example of sustainable textile innovation.

 Bosnia and Herzegovina

 Textile

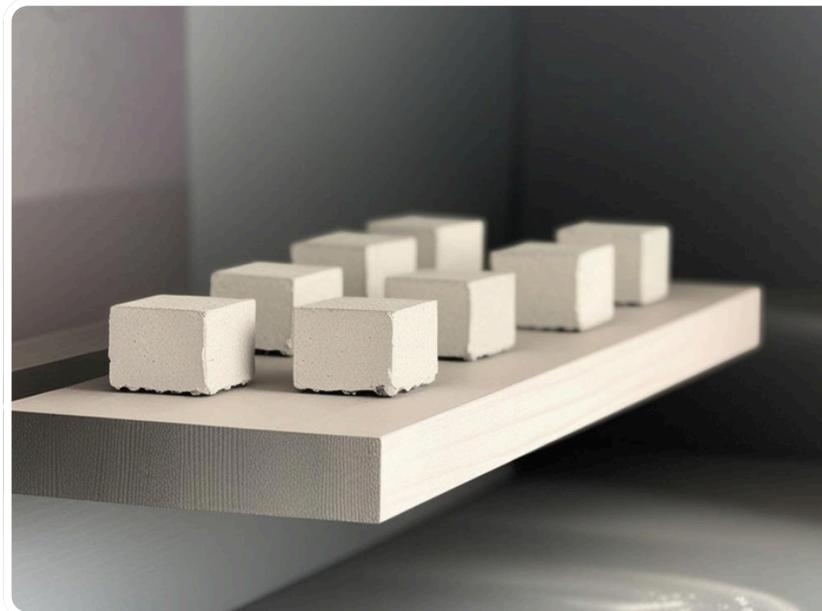
 2024

 Sustainable textiles, Circular design, Organic wool, Zero waste



Turning Construction Waste into Circular Value

AuTerra Materials d.o.o. is a Slovenian start-up founded by **Karin Shugal**, a civil engineer and entrepreneur driven by the goal of transforming the construction industry into a more sustainable and circular sector. After years of witnessing massive amounts of valuable materials ending up as waste, Karin decided to act. She founded AuTerra Materials to create a closed-loop system for construction waste - turning what is traditionally discarded into reusable, certified materials for new projects.



AuTerra Materials has already made a tangible contribution to circular construction in Slovenia by:

- Implementing mobile recycling systems that cut down on landfill dependency and emissions;
- Producing CE-certified recycled aggregates, recognized for their environmental and economic value;
- Reducing the transportation footprint of construction waste by enabling local reuse;
- Advancing research and testing of recycled concrete materials, with prototypes currently in development;
- Gaining recognition as one of the few women-led enterprises in the construction recycling sector, paving the way for greater gender diversity in green industries.



Slovenia



Construction



2021



Construction waste, Circular materials, Recycling innovation, Women entrepreneurship, Sustainable construction



Conclusion

The **Manual for selected best practices and case studies** represents one of the key outcomes of the WE.Circular project, capturing and sharing successful approaches, methods, and models that promote circular and digital transformation among women entrepreneurs and SMEs in the Danube Region. By documenting concrete examples of innovation, collaboration, and inclusion, the Manual serves not only as a reference tool but also as a foundation for the project's forthcoming capacity-building and policy outputs.



The knowledge and experiences



compiled here will directly influence development of:

- **Transnational Training Programme** integrating selected good practices and case studies as **practical learning modules**;
- **Regional Action Plans** - policy lessons from these examples to **guide the development of measures, incentives, and support frameworks**;
- **Transnational Policy Learning Centre** and **Virtual Toolbox** will provide **open access to all identified Good Practices and Case Studies**, enabling continuous peer learning, knowledge transfer, and collaboration among policymakers, educators, and entrepreneurs across the Danube Region.

The full list of the WE.Circular good practices

good practice #	owner	focus
1. GREEN KAIT	University of Applied Sciences JOANNEUM	project/ skills
2. "Vision Circular Economy 2050" – Strategy for the Region of Styria	Regional Government of Styria	policy measure
3. Circular Economy Forum Austria	Circular Economy Forum Austria	initiative/ skills
4. Production of recovered carbon black	RCB Nanotehnologija d.o.o	project/ skills
5. Innovative healthy underwear – Sheepa by Empress	Empress Ltd Zenica	business model
6. Cool Bazaar	Cool Bazar	business model
7. Programme "EWA – Empowering Women in Agrifood"	EIT Food	initiative/ skills
8. BSB-CIRCLECON - Knowing Circular Economy in Black Sea Basin	Varna Free University Chernorizets Hrabar"	project/ skills
9. Governmental support measures for digitalization and circular economy	Ministry of Innovation and Growth of the Republic of Bulgaria	policy measure
10. City Circle	City Municipality of Varaždin/ Development Agency North – DAN Ltd.	project/ skills
11. GREENPACT – Futurepreneurs and SMEs for a Sustainable Central Europe	Stuttgart Media University (HdM), Germany	project/ skills
12. Circular DigiBuild	Business Agency Association, Bulgaria	project/ support
13. Academy for Entrepreneurial Women	CzechInvest (Business and Investment Development Agency)	project/ skills
14. Up2Circ	Camera di commercio Industria Artigianato e Agricoltura di Torino – Turin, Italy	project/ skills/ support
15. Women in Tech 2023	Huawei Technology Society	initiative/ skills
16. Start-up BW Female Accelerator	Start-up BW Female Accelerator	project/ skills
17. Green Tech BW	Umwelttechnik BW GmbH	policy measure
18. Circular Black Forest	Circular Black Forest gGmbH	initiative/ skills
19. VISA SHE'S NEXT HUNGARY	VISA and IFundWomen	initiative/ skills
20. Start IT up Győr - Art & Business Compass Workshop	Start IT up Győr	initiative/ skills
21. Womenture: Boosting female entrepreneurship through joint services and activities	Design Terminal	initiative/ skills
22. Implementation of green economy in the frame of companies by developing competencies and abilities through trainings and mentorship services	Organization for Entrepreneurship Development, Moldova	policy measure

The full list of the WE.Circular good practices

good practice #	owner	focus
23. Women in Business Support Program	Organization for Entrepreneurship Development, Moldova	policy measure
24. Women Entrepreneurship in Circular Economy	Organization for Entrepreneurship Development, Moldova	project/ skills
25. Girls Go Circular	EIT Community Education	project/ skills
26. Romania ClimAccelerator	EIT Climate-KIC/ Impact Hub Bucharest	project/ support
27. Key measures on digitalization within Romania's National Strategy and Action Plan for the Circular Economy	The Department for Durable Development of The Romanian Government	policy measure
28. Program for development of Circular Economy in the Republic of Serbia	Ministry of Environmental Protection of the Republic of Serbia	policy measure
29. Organizational Capacity Building Support for the Association of Business Women in Serbia	Association of Business Women in Serbia	project/ skills
30. FEMTECH For Resilienea	Association of Business Women in Serbia	project/ skills
31. Green Circular Academy	Institute of Circular Economy	initiative/ skills
32. Aj Ty v IT	Aj Ty v IT Civic Association	support model
33. Digital Coalition - The National Coalition for Digital Skills and Jobs of the Slovak Republic	Digital Coalition	initiative/ skills
34. ABC Entrepreneurship Program for Aspiring Women Entrepreneurs	Employment Service of Slovenia, SPIRIT Slovenia	policy measure
35. ADVANCE CIRCULAR	National Institute of Research and Development in Tourism (Romania)	project/ support
36. Academy of Women Entrepreneurs program	CEED Slovenia	project/ support





Interreg
Danube Region



Co-funded by
the European Union


WE.Circular



Get in Touch with us

We look forward to keeping in touch with you and discussing how we can grow together towards a sustainable future.

Regional Agency for Entrepreneurship and Innovations - Varna



Phone

+359 882 809 178



Address

6 Prof. Asen Zlatarov, str. office 3, Varna,
Bulgaria



Website

<https://interreg-danube.eu/projects/wecircular>



Email

office@rapiv.org