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WE.Circular

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Abbreviations and glossary of terms

ASP	Associated Strategic Partner
CE	Circular Economy
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF+	European Social Fund Plus
IoT	Internet of Things
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
L-Bank	Landeskreditbank Baden-Württemberg
NSHG	National Stakeholder Group
RAP	Regional Action Plan
RIS3/S3	Research and Innovation Smart Specialisation Strategy
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
VC	Venture Capital
WE	Women Entrepreneurs
WE.Circular	Women Entrepreneurs in Circular Economy

1. Introduction

The WE.Circular project is an Interreg Danube Region Programme initiative that aims to empower women entrepreneurs across the Danube region by fostering their circular economy and digital transitions. One key component of this project is the development of Regional Action Plans (RAPs) for each partner region. This RAP focuses exclusively on Baden-Württemberg, Germany, outlining targeted actions to support women-led businesses in adopting circular practices and leveraging digital technologies. Baden-Württemberg is known for its strong industrial base and vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem, yet women entrepreneurs in the region face significant challenges in adopting digital and circular practices. These challenges stem from barriers such as high costs of innovation, skills gaps, and limited awareness of support programmes, which this RAP seeks to address. This plan builds upon thorough analysis and stakeholder engagement conducted under WE.Circular. It leverages findings from Activity 1.1: Transnational Skills Gaps and Needs Analysis and Activity 3.2: Analysis of Existing Policy and Legislative Framework, along with recommendations validated through National Stakeholder Group consultations. In Germany–Baden-Württemberg, the NSHG brought together representatives from regional ministries, business support organisations, academic experts, and women’s entrepreneurship networks to ensure the RAP is evidence-based and tailored to regional needs. The proposed actions herein directly respond to the key issues identified through surveys, interviews, and stakeholder meetings in Baden-Württemberg, translating the project’s overarching goals into concrete measures for the region.

All actions in the RAP are designed following SMART principles – they are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound – to ensure tangible impact within the project timeframe. The RAP is structured according to the methodology provided by IREAS (Aug 2025), encompassing a clear strategic background, defined vision, and a set of three core measures: Training & Upskilling; Financing & Advisory Support; and Awareness & Outreach. In line with the peer-review feedback, the present final version retains the overall scope and depth of the RAP while simplifying selected implementation arrangements, sharpening operational definitions, and strengthening the plausibility of the delivery model. The plan remains implementation-focused and policy-oriented, intended for use by regional ministries, business support agencies, and women’s entrepreneurship networks in Baden-Württemberg to drive measurable progress by 2028.

2. Strategic Background and Foundations

Regional Context: Baden-Württemberg is a southwestern German state with a robust economy and a strong tradition of innovation. It has a population of about 11 million and is renowned for its industrial strength in automotive, engineering, and advanced manufacturing. Stuttgart, the state's capital, is a major innovation hub. The region also boasts a highly educated workforce and numerous R&D institutions. In recent years, Baden-Württemberg has promoted initiatives supporting entrepreneurship and digital innovation, including programmes targeting women. The female entrepreneurial ecosystem in Baden-Württemberg is growing, supported by networks such as the Baden-Württemberg Women's Business Forum and the Female Founders Network, which provide mentoring, networking, and access to resources. Women entrepreneurs in the region are increasingly active in emerging sectors such as ICT, life sciences, and environmental technologies, aligning with regional Smart Specialisation Strategy priorities in areas such as advanced manufacturing and sustainable technology. Despite these favourable conditions, women remain underrepresented in business ownership and continue to face persistent structural barriers.

Policy Framework Summary: Germany has established a strong legislative and policy framework supporting the circular economy and digital transition, with attention to sustainability and gender equality. Key national laws and strategies provide an enabling backdrop for circular business models. There are also federal initiatives encouraging female entrepreneurship, such as FRAUEN unternehmen, which offers a network and visibility for women business owners. However, the practical implementation of these policies in Baden-Württemberg reveals important gaps. Many support programmes are not sufficiently tailored to the specific needs of women entrepreneurs in circular sectors. Bureaucratic complexity and unclear guidance make it difficult for small women-led firms to navigate regulations and access funding. While various funding programmes already exist, women entrepreneurs often struggle with complex application procedures and a lack of targeted information. The regional innovation strategies emphasize digitalization and sustainability, but translating these into ground-level support for women-led SMEs remains challenging. This RAP is therefore grounded in a critical reflection of these policy insights and in the effort to align proposed measures with both national strategy and regional innovation plans while ensuring realistic and workable implementation.

Summary of Needs and Challenges (Baden-Württemberg):

- **Skills Gaps:** Many women entrepreneurs lack foundational knowledge in circular economy principles and digital technologies. There is a clear need for practical training in areas such as digital literacy, Industry 4.0 tools, and sustainable business models. Without these skills, women-led businesses struggle to innovate and adopt new practices.
- **Financial Barriers:** High costs of adopting advanced technologies and circular practices are a primary barrier, especially for small businesses. Women entrepreneurs often have limited access to finance, and existing funding programmes are difficult to navigate or not sufficiently tailored. Upfront investment costs deter innovation and limit the ability to implement circular solutions or invest in digital upgrades.
- **Limited Advisory Support:** The ecosystem of support services for women in cutting-edge sectors remains insufficient. Stakeholder input highlighted a lack of tailored advisory services to help women entrepreneurs develop digital and circular roadmaps for their businesses. Women often do not know where to turn for expert guidance on compliance, technology adoption, or business model transformation.
- **Low Awareness of Opportunities:** A significant awareness gap exists regarding available support programmes, training opportunities, and strategic initiatives. Around 89% of surveyed women entrepreneurs were unaware of the region's Smart Specialisation Strategy priorities. Many are also not fully aware of funding opportunities, innovation hubs, or networks that could support their endeavours.
- **Networking and Visibility Challenges:** Women entrepreneurs report feeling excluded from traditional innovation networks. Access to mentorship, investor networks, and peer learning opportunities is limited, especially for those in rural areas. Fragmented communication and few women-centric forums impede knowledge exchange and collaboration.
- **Regulatory and Administrative Hurdles:** Compliance with environmental and circular economy regulations can be complex. Smaller female-run businesses struggle with navigating these requirements and bureaucratic procedures. The lack of clear, accessible guidance and the administrative burden can discourage engagement in circular initiatives.

- **External Shocks and Resilience:** Recent crises have disproportionately affected SMEs. Women entrepreneurs expressed a need for better crisis support mechanisms and resilience-oriented guidance, as shocks strained finances and operations. Building resilience through diversification, stronger digital capacities, and better access to support is therefore an important complementary need.

These needs and challenges form the baseline that this RAP seeks to address. They were identified through evidence-based research in Baden-Württemberg and validated by stakeholders, ensuring that the plan focuses on the most pressing regional issues for women-led businesses.

3. Summary of Recommendations

To tackle the above challenges, the prior analyses and stakeholder consultations converged on several key recommendations for Baden-Württemberg. These recommendations provide the strategic direction for the RAP measures and have been refined in accordance with the peer-review feedback, which called for clearer goals, more realistic delivery arrangements, more precise monitoring, and a stronger focus on feasible implementation through existing structures.

- **Boost Training and Upskilling:** Strengthen practical learning opportunities for women entrepreneurs in circular economy and digital transformation. This includes integrating CE and digital modules into entrepreneurship education, incubators, and advisory services, while ensuring that formats are accessible, application-oriented, and directly linked to business needs.
- **Enhance Access to Funding and Advisory Services:** Improve women entrepreneurs' access to existing public and private funding opportunities through clearer guidance, structured advisory support, stronger application preparedness, and investor-readiness support. The focus should be on helping women entrepreneurs identify suitable existing programmes, understand eligibility conditions, refine business plans, and improve their ability to engage with investors and funding institutions. This approach is more feasible and more consistent with the regional support landscape than establishing a new dedicated funding mechanism.
- **Strengthen Networks and Collaboration:** Foster collaboration through existing entrepreneurship, innovation, and women's business networks. Stakeholders emphasized the need for stronger linkages between women entrepreneurs, support agencies, academia, investors, and established firms. This can be

achieved through better coordination and more systematic use of current regional ecosystems rather than by creating additional standalone structures.

- **Increase Awareness and Outreach:** Improve awareness of support programmes, training opportunities, and regional strategic priorities such as S3 through a coordinated and realistic outreach model. This should combine multi-channel communication, digital information formats, partner-based dissemination through existing networks and organisations, and stronger integration of RAP content into existing regional entrepreneurship and innovation channels.
- **Policy Advocacy and Enabling Environment:** Promote a more supportive policy environment for women's circular entrepreneurship by encouraging gender-responsive implementation of existing support instruments, simplifying access conditions where possible, and improving institutional coordination. Stakeholders also highlighted the importance of clearer guidance on compliance and better alignment between policy objectives and practical support for women-led businesses.
- **Crisis Resilience Measures:** Strengthen the resilience of women-led SMEs through advisory support, peer learning, and practical guidance on business continuity, risk management, and adaptation. These aspects complement the RAP's core measures and help ensure the longer-term sustainability of results.

The three core measures of this RAP – Training & Upskilling; Financing & Advisory Support; and Awareness & Outreach – have been formulated directly from the first four recommendation areas above. The remaining areas of policy advocacy and crisis resilience are incorporated as supplementary action fields. Collectively, these recommendations aim to create a supportive ecosystem in which women entrepreneurs in Baden-Württemberg can thrive in the digital and circular transition, while keeping implementation realistic, coordinated, and resource-efficient.

4. Vision 2026–2030 (Baden-Württemberg)

By 2030, Baden-Württemberg envisions itself as a leading regional hub for women-driven innovation in the circular and digital economy. This vision aligns with the transnational WE.Circular Strategy, “The Danube Goes Circular,” which seeks a collaborative and inclusive transition to sustainability across the Danube region. For Baden-Württemberg, successful RAP implementation will mean that women entrepreneurs are increasingly equipped to adopt resource-efficient business models,

leverage digital technologies, and contribute substantially to green growth and job creation in the region.

- **Contributing to Resource Efficiency:** By scaling up circular practices in women-led enterprises, Baden-Württemberg will increase resource productivity and waste reduction, supporting broader climate and environmental goals. Women entrepreneurs, empowered with knowledge and support, will contribute more actively to recycling, reuse, sustainable design, and resource-efficient business development.
- **Advancing Digital and Circular Innovation:** Women-owned businesses in 2030 are envisioned to be increasingly agile and digitally capable. Through improved digital skills, stronger access to guidance, and better use of available support instruments, these enterprises will be better positioned to develop innovative solutions, from circular supply chains to clean-tech services, reinforcing the region's role in smart specialisation fields.
- **Inclusive Networks and Collaboration:** A more inclusive innovation ecosystem should be in place. Stronger cooperation between public agencies, chambers, universities, startup actors, and women's entrepreneurship networks will help ensure that women entrepreneurs have more equal access to mentorship, investor networks, expertise, and sectoral collaboration. The RAP therefore aims not to create parallel structures, but to make existing structures more accessible, more coordinated, and more responsive to women-led enterprises.
- **Raised Awareness and Capacity:** The vision includes a practical and cultural shift: greater awareness of circular economy opportunities among SMEs in Baden-Württemberg, stronger visibility of women entrepreneurs in sustainability and innovation, and broader understanding of available support pathways. Through targeted communication, digital information tools, partner-based dissemination, and better signposting of existing opportunities, more women entrepreneurs are expected to align their development strategies with regional priorities and make greater use of available support schemes.

Achieving this 2030 vision contributes to the Danube region's collective goal of a circular economy that is not only greener but also more inclusive. Baden-Württemberg's RAP measures are designed as realistic stepping stones toward this future state. By implementing the actions by 2028, the region will build momentum for women entrepreneurs to serve as key drivers of circular and digital innovation, ensuring that the benefits of the green transition are shared more equitably and that policy objectives

translate into practical, institutionally anchored support. In essence, Baden-Württemberg strives to be a model region where women's entrepreneurship and circular economy progress go hand in hand within a prosperous and sustainable regional economy.

5. Regional Action Plan Measures

The following sections detail the three core measures of the Baden-Württemberg RAP, each addressing a cluster of challenges identified in the analysis. Each measure is presented with a brief description of the challenges and needs it addresses, its alignment with strategic pillars, and a table of proposed actions. All actions are formulated to be achievable by 2028, with clearly designated stakeholders, budgets, timelines, and success indicators to ensure effective implementation and monitoring. In line with the peer-review feedback, the revised action portfolio places stronger emphasis on feasibility, clearer operational focus, reduced implementation complexity, and more precise definitions of expected outputs and impacts.

The measures are:

- **Measure 1: Training & Upskilling (Digital & Circular Economy Skills)**
- **Measure 2: Financing & Advisory Support (Access to Funding and Guidance)**
- **Measure 3: Awareness & Outreach (Visibility and Communication)**

Each measure contributes to multiple WE.Circular strategic pillars and is grounded in the specific context of Baden-Württemberg. The tables below follow the standardized RAP format, listing for each action the specific challenge addressed, the measure and action, lead and supporting stakeholders, required funding, timeframe, key performance indicators, and intended impact.

Measure 1: Training & Upskilling

Relevant Pillars: Circular Economy Transition; Digital Transition; Smart Specialisation (skills alignment).

Challenges Addressed: Women entrepreneurs in Baden-Württemberg face significant skills gaps in both digital technologies and circular economy practices. Many lack access to training opportunities covering emerging concepts such as Industry 4.0, digital marketing, sustainable design, or compliance with CE standards. This limits their capacity to innovate and adopt new business models. Additionally, current

entrepreneurship education often does not sufficiently integrate circular economy or advanced digital content, leading to a pipeline issue where new women entrepreneurs start without these critical skills. Work-life balance constraints further hinder women's ability to attend traditional training, meaning flexible and targeted upskilling approaches are needed. Without intervention, these skill deficits will continue to prevent women-led SMEs from fully engaging in Baden-Württemberg's digital and green transformation.

Alignment with Policy: This measure supports Germany's emphasis on digital skills and lifelong learning and aligns with the state's goals under its Smart Specialisation Strategy to build capacity in high-tech and sustainable sectors. It also complements existing programmes by infusing them with circular economy and gender-inclusive training content. By improving competencies, Measure 1 directly addresses EU and national policy calls for inclusive digital upskilling and contributes to a more skilled workforce driving the circular economy.

The following table outlines the proposed actions under Measure 1, aimed at closing the knowledge and skills gap through targeted training initiatives:

Actions	Responsible organization	Supportative organization	Time-frame	Budget	Impact
1.1 Integrate CE and digital innovation content into entrepreneurship education. Collaborate with universities, vocational training centres, and startup incubators to embed circular economy modules and digital skill-building into their programmes for entrepreneurs. Develop a "train-the-trainer" initiative to equip instructors and mentors with CE and digital transition knowledge. Encourage incubators to include sustainability and Industry 4.0 topics in coaching services for women-led startups.	Universities (Entrepreneurship Centers), State-Level Startup Accelerators	Ministry of Science & Arts BW; startup incubators (e.g. Startup BW initiatives); vocational training providers; industry experts (as guest lecturers)	1–3 years	€0 (the necessary organizational structures are already in place)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 5 major universities/incubators adopt new CE/digital modules - 20 trainers/mentors trained on CE and digital topics - Sustainability/tech topics integrated into at least 3 annual startup programmes or contests by 2027

1.2 Organize annual “Women in Circular Innovation” hackathons or innovation labs. These formats bring together female entrepreneurs, students, and experts for focused hands-on sessions to solve practical challenges using circular and digital approaches. Participants form teams to develop prototypes or practical business ideas. Mentoring will be provided during the events, and promising ideas will be connected to existing incubator, coaching, or advisory offers for light-touch follow-up support.	Regional economic development agencies or state-level funding institutions (e.g. BW_i, Environmental Technology BW, L-Bank)	Tech park/innovation labs; corporate partners; women’s networks; municipal economic development offices	2026–2028 (one innovation format per year)	€30,000 per year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3 innovation formats held by 2028 - 100+ total participants across events, with at least 50% women - 6 project ideas or prototypes developed by women-led teams, of which at least 2 enter follow-up support or incubation
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Measure 1 Total Budget Estimate: €90,000 over 2026–2028. This measure’s investments will build a stronger base of women entrepreneurs with practical skills in circular and digital innovation, directly addressing one of the main barriers identified in the regional analysis.

Measure 2: Financing & Advisory Support

Relevant Pillars: Circular Economy Transition; Digital Transition; Policy Improvement (support framework).

Challenges Addressed: A major barrier in Baden-Württemberg is the difficulty women entrepreneurs face in accessing finance and navigating complex support systems. Although Germany offers numerous funding programmes for innovation and SMEs, these are often not easily accessible to women-led businesses. Women entrepreneurs report challenges in identifying suitable funding opportunities and in completing demanding application procedures without guidance. High upfront costs for circular technologies and digital tools further exacerbate the problem, while advisory support on funding pathways, business planning, and compliance remains fragmented. This measure therefore focuses on improving access to existing funding and investment opportunities through clearer navigation, tailored advisory support, and stronger preparedness for applications and investor engagement. It does not introduce a

separate regional funding scheme, but instead strengthens women entrepreneurs' ability to make use of the programmes, advisory channels, and investor contacts that already exist.

Alignment with Policy: Measure 2 advances the objective of enhancing financial support for women entrepreneurs at both national and regional levels by improving the accessibility and usability of existing instruments. It aligns with broader policy goals of gender equality in entrepreneurship financing, improved uptake of innovation funds, and stronger integration of women-led businesses into regional development programmes. By simplifying access pathways and strengthening investor readiness, the measure also supports the objectives of Baden-Württemberg's regional development and innovation support systems while maintaining a financially plausible and operationally realistic implementation model.

The table below details actions under Measure 2, aimed at improving financial access and guidance for women entrepreneurs:

Actions	Responsible organization	Supportative organization	Time-frame	Budget	Impact
2.1 Establish a "WE Finance Navigator" helpdesk. Create a dedicated advisory service (online and in-person) to assist women entrepreneurs in Baden-Württemberg with navigating funding opportunities for digital and circular projects. The helpdesk will maintain an updated overview of relevant grants, loans, and investor options, and offer one-on-one consulting on eligibility, application preparation, and business plan refinement. It will also provide guidance on basic regulatory and procedural requirements relevant to accessing funds and will refer entrepreneurs to the most suitable existing regional, national, and EU support instruments.	Baden-Württemberg State Agency for Entrepreneurship or regional development bank	Chambers of Commerce; business support organisations; financial advisors/volunteers; NSHG members	Pilot start 2026; full operation Q3 2026–2028	€180,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 300 advisory consultations provided by 2028 - 100 women-led businesses supported in preparing funding applications or investment materials - At least €3 million in external funding or investment successfully accessed by supported businesses by 2028
2.2 Organize annual "Women in Green Tech" pitch events. These formats connect women-led startups and SMEs in circular economy and technology with potential investors such as	Startup BW (state startup initiative)	Angel investor networks (e.g. Baden-Württemberg Business	Pilot start 2026; annual implement	€20,000 per year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3 pitch formats held by 2028 - 10+ women-led ventures pitch each year - At least 5 startups per

business angels, venture capital representatives, corporate innovation funds, and public support actors. Participants receive targeted pitch coaching beforehand to improve financial literacy, investment communication, and presentation quality. To reduce complexity, the format should preferably be embedded in or aligned with existing startup and innovation events in the region, rather than operated as a stand-alone event series.		Angels); impact investment funds; corporates; accelerators	entation 2026–2028		year secure investor follow-up meetings, mentoring contacts, or concrete investment interest - 50 women entrepreneurs trained in pitching and financial planning by 2028
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Measure 2 Total Budget Estimate: €240,000 over 2026–2028. This revised measure lowers the financial and procedural hurdles facing women entrepreneurs without introducing a new public funding scheme or additional complex support structure. Instead, it focuses on improving access to existing instruments, increasing the quality of applications and investor engagement, and creating a more navigable and credible support environment.

Measure 3: Awareness & Outreach

Relevant Pillars: Circular Economy Transition; Digital Transition; Smart Specialisation; (indirectly) Policy Improvement through stakeholder engagement.

Challenges Addressed: Insufficient awareness and fragmented communication remain critical barriers. Many women entrepreneurs in Baden-Württemberg are unaware of existing support structures, best practices in circular economy, or strategic priorities such as S3 that could benefit their businesses. Information about initiatives, funding, training, and support services is often dispersed across multiple websites and institutions. At the same time, women-led businesses – particularly outside urban centres – experience limited visibility and weak connection to innovation ecosystems. There is therefore a need for proactive, structured, and accessible dissemination that improves awareness of opportunities while avoiding unnecessary duplication of event structures. This measure addresses the awareness gap by improving information flow, strengthening the visibility of support opportunities, and using digital tools and partner channels to reach target groups efficiently. Content that would otherwise require separate stand-alone outreach structures will be integrated into the awareness

campaign and the online hub, and disseminated through existing regional events and communication channels.

Alignment with Policy: Measure 3 supports the communication and dissemination dimensions of Baden-Württemberg's and Germany's entrepreneurship and circular economy policies. It is consistent with existing initiatives that promote the visibility of female role models and facilitate networking and knowledge transfer. It also supports stakeholder engagement under Smart Specialisation Strategy implementation by ensuring that women entrepreneurs are better informed about regional priorities and opportunities. The revised design strengthens outreach while relying more systematically on existing channels, digital formats, and partner organisations, thereby improving feasibility and long-term sustainability.

Below are the actions under Measure 3, designed to raise awareness and connect women entrepreneurs through various outreach mechanisms:

Actions	Responsible organization	Supportative organization	Time-frame	Budget	Impact
3.1 Launch a multi-channel awareness campaign highlighting circular economy opportunities and support for women entrepreneurs. Develop compelling content including success story profiles of local women entrepreneurs in CE, simple guides on where to find support, and short explanation briefs on S3 and related opportunities. Disseminate via social media, newsletters of chambers and networks, local media, and partner channels. Include a podcast or webinar series where experts and women innovators discuss digital and circular transformation. Existing regional events and communication opportunities should be used wherever possible as dissemination channels, without establishing a separate roadshow or stand-alone outreach structure. Ensure materials are in plain language and accessible.	Ministry of Environment & Economic Affairs	FRAUEN unternehmen ambassadors; local media partners; Chambers of Commerce	Rollout from Q3 2026 until Q4 2028	€40,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 million cumulative impressions or reach by 2028 - 50 success stories or informative content pieces published - At least 10 digital information formats (e.g. webinars, podcast episodes, online briefings) delivered by 2028 - S3 awareness among surveyed women entrepreneurs rises from 11% to 50% by 2028

3.2 Develop a dedicated online portal ("WE Circular BW Hub"). This portal will serve as a one-stop information hub aggregating all relevant resources: current funding calls, training programmes, events, regulatory guidance, and a directory of support organisations. It will be regularly updated and user-friendly, ideally as a dedicated section on an existing platform. It should include a practical FAQ, clear referral pathways to existing support services, and downloadable communication materials that partner organisations can use in their own outreach. The hub will also support partner-based dissemination by enabling chambers, incubators, women's networks, and public support bodies to share consistent information through their existing channels.	Startup BW (state startup initiative)	State IT service provider; BusinessInfo Baden-Württemberg; women's networks; IHK and Handwerkskammer	Development in 2026 (beta launch by Q4 2026); full operation 2027–2028	€70,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Portal online by 2026 with 100+ curated resources listed - 5,000 unique visitors by 2028 - User satisfaction above 85%, and more than 50% of users report it helped them access a new resource or opportunity - At least 20 partner organisations use or disseminate hub content by 2028
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Measure 3 Total Budget Estimate: €110,000 over 2026–2028. This revised measure maintains a strong outreach ambition while replacing stand-alone roadshows with a more feasible model based on digital tools, coordinated messaging, partner dissemination, and integration into existing regional structures. As a result, more women-led businesses are expected to become aware of and use support opportunities, while the visibility of women in the circular economy increases through scalable and sustainable communication channels.

6. Timeline of Key Actions (2026–2028)

The following timeline provides a structured overview of the implementation logic across all measures of the RAP, including the supplementary fields. It ensures that activities are sequenced for maximum impact and monitored for timely delivery. The timeline has been refined to reflect the simplified implementation model under Measures 2 and 3.

Year 1: 2026

- Launch preparatory activities: finalize stakeholder partnerships, define coordination roles, and prepare implementation templates for all three measures. Begin integrating CE and digital content into entrepreneurship education and initiate trainer capacity-building with universities, incubators, and support providers. Pilot the first innovation format under Measure 1.
- Launch the WE Finance Navigator helpdesk in pilot mode and establish an up-to-date mapping of the most relevant existing regional, national, and EU funding opportunities for women-led circular and digital businesses. Prepare standard advisory materials, referral pathways, and support tools for funding navigation and investor readiness under Measure 2.
- Initiate development of the WE Circular BW Hub portal, prepare awareness campaign materials, and define the communication logic for partner-based dissemination through existing networks and channels. Begin content production for success stories, practical guides, and short digital information formats linked to Measure 3.

Year 2: 2027

- Scale up implementation across all three measures: roll out regular training cycles and innovation formats, operate the Finance Navigator helpdesk at full scale, and organize the annual Women in Green Tech pitch format in alignment with existing regional startup and innovation events.
- Officially launch the WE Circular BW Hub with integrated content from all measures. Expand the awareness campaign across multiple channels and use chambers, women's networks, incubators, local economic actors, and public agencies as dissemination multipliers. Deliver the main cycle of digital information and communication formats linked to Measure 3.
- Collect mid-term data on KPIs and user feedback from all ongoing services and formats. Review progress through the RAP coordination structure and adjust implementation details where required.

Year 3: 2028

- Consolidate outcomes and mainstream successful models into existing state and regional support structures. Continue operation of the helpdesk, portal, and communication formats, with particular focus on institutional anchoring and long-term ownership by established organisations. Deliver the final annual

innovation and pitch formats and complete the planned awareness and dissemination cycle.

- Conduct a full impact evaluation, share best practices, and prepare scale-up and transfer options for the next funding period. Ensure sustainability of key outputs through institutional anchoring, for example continued operation of the helpdesk or online portal by public agencies, chambers, or integrated startup support platforms.

7. Monitoring of the RAP implementation

A robust monitoring and evaluation system will be implemented to ensure the RAP's actions are carried out effectively and to measure progress toward the stated objectives. In line with the peer-review feedback, the revised monitoring framework places stronger emphasis on clear, practical, and measurable indicators, while keeping the reporting burden manageable. Monitoring will be continuous and participatory, anchored by the following elements.

Defined Indicators & Baselines: For each action, clear KPIs have been established in the respective measure tables. Before implementation starts, baseline values will be documented where applicable, such as current levels of awareness, number of organisations already integrating CE and digital content, the starting point for portal usage, or the number of women entrepreneurs currently receiving targeted support. Baselines will provide the reference point against which progress is measured. Whenever possible, indicators will be grouped into three categories: outputs, immediate outcomes, and strategic progress indicators. This approach responds directly to the peer-review recommendation that indicators should be more precise, less vague, and more clearly linked to expected change.

Data Collection Plan:

- Measure 1 leads will document participating organisations, trainers, participant numbers, and follow-up support cases.
- The Finance Navigator under Measure 2 will record consultations, businesses supported, applications prepared, referrals made, and reported success in accessing existing funding or investor follow-up.

- The annual pitch formats under Measure 2 will document participation, coaching uptake, investor meetings, and follow-up outcomes.
- The WE Circular BW Hub under Measure 3 will use web analytics, content logs, and user feedback.
- The awareness campaign under Measure 3 will track reach, content outputs, digital information formats, and partner dissemination through existing communication channels.
- Data should be collected quarterly where feasible, using concise templates and clearly assigned responsibilities. This ensures that monitoring remains actionable without generating unnecessary administrative burden.

Periodic Progress Reviews: A RAP implementation committee, potentially linked to the NSHG or a dedicated sub-group, will convene twice per year to review progress reports. These reports, prepared by the lead stakeholders of each measure, will summarize activities completed, KPI values achieved, challenges encountered, and any corrective action needed. The review meetings will focus not only on whether activities took place, but also on whether they are reaching the intended target groups effectively and contributing to the RAP's strategic objectives.

Adaptive Management: The monitoring system is designed as a feedback loop. If certain KPIs are not on track, or if unforeseen challenges arise, the committee will identify practical corrective actions. This could mean adjusting communication channels, refining advisory procedures under the Finance Navigator, revising the targeting of pitch participants, strengthening the use of partner dissemination channels, or improving the usability of the portal. The RAP allows flexibility to refine implementation approaches in response to evidence, while preserving the overall strategic logic and commitments.

Evaluation and Impact Assessment: In addition to monitoring outputs and intermediate outcomes, an evaluation will be conducted at the end of the implementation period in 2028. This evaluation will assess to what extent the RAP's overall goals have been met, including improved skills, increased access to existing funding opportunities, stronger investor readiness, and greater awareness and use of support measures. It will also capture lessons learned on feasible delivery models, stakeholder coordination, and long-term institutional anchoring. Success stories and data from this RAP will feed into the broader WE.Circular project's transnational evaluation, illustrating region-specific impact and transferable good practices.

The monitoring and evaluation effort will ensure accountability to stakeholders and funders while also creating opportunities to celebrate interim success and maintain momentum. By closely tracking the RAP, Baden-Württemberg's policymakers and partners can make evidence-based decisions and strengthen the RAP's legacy beyond 2028. This systematic M&E approach is integral to delivering a RAP that is not merely a plan on paper, but a practical and learning-oriented process driving real change.

8. Recommendations for Enhancing Long-Term Impact

To ensure that the Regional Action Plan for Baden-Württemberg delivers sustained benefits beyond the lifetime of the WE.Circular project, this section outlines strategic recommendations for securing the long-term durability and transferability of the RAP's results. The revised recommendations place particular emphasis on institutional anchoring, simplification, and continuity through existing structures.

Institutional Anchoring of Core Actions:

Wherever feasible, key RAP components should be integrated into existing public or semi-public structures. In particular, the WE Finance Navigator helpdesk and the WE Circular BW Hub portal should be embedded in Baden-Württemberg's established business support infrastructure, such as chambers, startup platforms, or regional development agencies. The annual Women in Green Tech pitch format should, where possible, continue through cooperation with existing startup and investor events in the region rather than through a separate permanent structure. This will ensure continued access and visibility for women entrepreneurs after 2028 and reduce the risk of project-dependent discontinuity.

Mainstreaming into Regional Programmes and Policies:

RAP activities and proven formats should be formally linked to regional economic development strategies and operational programmes. This includes ensuring that gender-responsive circular economy support is reflected in future Smart Specialisation Strategy updates, innovation support instruments, and ERDF or ESF+ implementation frameworks where relevant. Particular attention should be paid to integrating practical

support elements such as advisory services, investor-readiness formats, digital guidance, and partner-based communication into future programme design, rather than creating stand-alone parallel mechanisms.

Establishing Durable Partnerships:

The multi-stakeholder coalitions formed through RAP implementation should be formalized where useful into longer-term coordination arrangements or advisory groups. These do not need to become heavy governance structures; rather, they should provide light but reliable coordination between ministries, universities, women's networks, business support bodies, and innovation actors. Such cooperation can support future joint initiatives, coordinated dissemination, policy feedback, and continued identification of support needs among women entrepreneurs.

Open Access to Resources and Knowledge Outputs:

All materials, guidance documents, training modules, awareness content, and communication resources developed under the RAP should be openly accessible and, where possible, reusable by other regions and support actors. The WE Circular BW Hub can play an important role as a repository for these materials. Open access will increase transferability, enable low-cost continuation, and support replication by municipalities, networks, and intermediary organisations beyond the project period.

Impact Tracking Beyond 2028:

Even after formal project completion, it will be useful to maintain a lightweight impact tracking mechanism, for example through annual follow-up surveys, selected success-story documentation, and periodic updates of key usage data for the portal and advisory services. This should remain proportionate and feasible, but sufficient to understand how women entrepreneurs continue to benefit from the RAP's outputs and how regional support structures have evolved. Such evidence can inform future strategic adjustments and demonstrate continued relevance to funders and policymakers.

By implementing these forward-looking strategies, Baden-Württemberg can safeguard the outcomes of the WE.Circular initiative and position itself as a long-term leader in inclusive, circular innovation. Ensuring continuity through integration, partnership, and institutional commitment will maximize the RAP's contribution to systemic change beyond 2028 while remaining realistic in governance, financing, and delivery.