

**Interreg  
Danube Region**



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# O.3.1. Regional Action Plan – Romania

05/2026

Ropot Boutique

## Versioning and Contribution History

Version	Date	Author/Editor/Contributor	Description/Comments
1	29.10.2025	Ropot Boutique	Draft of the RAP
2	23.04.2026	Ropot Boutique	Final version

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## Abbreviations and glossary of terms

ASP	Associated Strategic Partner
CE	Circular Economy
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
NSHG	National Stakeholder Groups
RAP	Regional Action Plan
S3	Smart Specialisation Strategy
WE	Women Entrepreneurs

## 1. Introduction

This Regional Action Plan (RAP) is developed within the framework of the WE.Circular project, an Interreg Danube Region Programme initiative aimed at empowering women entrepreneurs in the Danube Region by fostering their circular and digital transitions.

The WE.Circular project recognizes that Romania faces both unique opportunities and significant challenges in supporting women-led businesses to adopt circular economy principles and digital technologies. This RAP builds upon the findings of key project activities and consultations with the National Stakeholder Group (NSHG), ensuring its strong analytical foundation and national relevance.

Specifically, the Romanian RAP leverages the findings of the following WE.Circular activities:

**Activity 1.1: Transnational Skills Gaps and Needs Analysis** – The analysis identified gaps in digital, circular, and entrepreneurial skills among Romanian women entrepreneurs, highlighting barriers related to access to finance, awareness of circular economy opportunities, and limited participation in specialized training programmes.

**Activity 3.2: Transnational Policy and Legislative Framework Analysis** – This activity examined Romania's policy environment, noting alignment with EU directives on gender equality, digital transformation, and sustainability. However, it also emphasized the need to improve implementation and coordination among institutions to ensure effective support for women entrepreneurs.

**Recommendations from National Stakeholder Groups (NSHGs)** – During consultations with representatives from ministries, chambers of commerce, universities, and business associations, the project validated key national challenges and identified areas where women entrepreneurs require stronger policy and financial backing.

The proposed actions in this RAP are designed to address these specific needs through practical, achievable measures that enhance access to finance, strengthen digital and circular skills, and promote inclusive networks. By implementing the RAP, Romania aims to foster a more inclusive and sustainable circular economy and ensure that women entrepreneurs are key contributors to the country's green and digital transition.

All proposed actions build on and further develop the tools, resources, and results already created within the WE.Circular project. The plan prioritizes the adaptation,

scaling, and dissemination of existing solutions to ensure feasibility, efficiency, and long-term sustainability.

## 1. Strategic Background and Foundations of the Regional Action Plan

Romania, located in Southeast Europe, is the seventh most populous member state of the European Union, with a diversified economy where SMEs account for over 99% of enterprises. Women represent around 36% of entrepreneurs nationally, yet their participation remains uneven across sectors. Female-led businesses are more concentrated in services and retail, with limited representation in technology, manufacturing, and green industries.

Despite progress, the transition toward a circular and digital economy presents several structural challenges. These include bureaucratic barriers, limited access to finance, and persistent cultural stereotypes that restrict women's participation in innovation-driven sectors. Rural regions face particular disadvantages, with fewer support networks and training opportunities compared to urban areas.

### Policy Framework and Institutional Landscape

Romania's policy and legislative framework is generally well-aligned with EU priorities on gender equality, entrepreneurship, and sustainability. Key national strategies relevant to this RAP include:

- **National Strategy for Promoting Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (2021–2027)** – aims to increase women's participation in the labour market and entrepreneurship through training, mentoring, and financial support.
- **National Strategy for the Circular Economy (2020–2030)** – sets the direction for transitioning toward a resource-efficient, low-waste economy, emphasizing SME involvement and innovation.
- **Romanian National Strategy for SME Development (2021–2027)** – supports competitiveness, digitalization, and sustainability among small businesses, including female-led enterprises.

- **Operational Programmes** (Human Capital 2021–2027, Competitiveness 2014–2020 extended to 2023, and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan) – provide financial mechanisms to advance digital skills, entrepreneurship, and innovation.

While the policy architecture is comprehensive, implementation remains inconsistent. Stakeholder interviews revealed that many women entrepreneurs encounter difficulties in accessing financial resources and navigating complex administrative procedures. There is also limited coordination among ministries and local authorities regarding the circular economy and women's entrepreneurship.

### Key Needs and Challenges

Based on the WE.Circular analyses and NSHG consultations, the main challenges for women entrepreneurs in Romania are:

- **Access to finance:** High investment costs and limited gender-sensitive financial products hinder women's capacity to adopt circular technologies and digital tools.
- **Skills gaps:** Many women entrepreneurs lack access to specialized training on circular economy practices, digitalization, and innovation management.
- **Awareness and outreach:** There is low awareness of Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3), funding opportunities, and available support programmes.
- **Cultural and social barriers:** Traditional gender roles continue to influence career choices and limit participation in technology-intensive sectors.
- **Limited networks and mentorship:** Few structured networks exist for women entrepreneurs to exchange knowledge, access mentors, or connect with investors.

### Good Practices and Opportunities

Romania benefits from several positive developments that can support the RAP's implementation. Initiatives such as **Start-Up Nation**, the **Operational Programme for Competitiveness**, and EIB-backed financial schemes provide essential funding opportunities for women-led enterprises. Increasing attention to sustainability and circular innovation within the **National Recovery and Resilience Plan** also offers an opportunity to integrate gender-sensitive criteria in future calls. Moreover, Romania's

growing digital ecosystem — particularly in cities like Cluj, Bucharest, and Timișoara — presents fertile ground for developing digital and circular skills programmes.

## Summary of Findings

Romanian women entrepreneurs show high motivation to engage in green and digital transitions but face systemic barriers that impede progress. The national framework provides a strong policy foundation, yet targeted, gender-responsive actions are needed to ensure real impact. This RAP thus focuses on three priorities:

- Enhancing women entrepreneurs' access to finance and training for circular and digital transitions.
- Building collaborative networks and mentorship structures to strengthen participation in Smart Specialisation sectors.
- Aligning national initiatives with EU-level priorities to ensure long-term sustainability and inclusivity.

## 2. Visions for 2026-2030: Envisioning the Region in a Circular and Digital Future - Alignment with Transnational Strategy for WEs Circular Transition

This section aligns the Romanian Regional Action Plan with the broader objectives of the Transnational Strategy to Accelerate the Transition Towards a Circular Economy in the Danube Region, developed within the WE.Circular project. The strategy seeks to ensure that all participating countries — including Romania — contribute to a cohesive and impactful regional transition toward circularity, digitalization, and gender-inclusive entrepreneurship.

By 2030, Romania envisions a national ecosystem where women entrepreneurs are active drivers of circular and digital innovation, contributing to sustainable growth, resource efficiency, and social inclusion. The Romanian RAP thus directly supports the overarching goal of “The Danube Goes Circular”, focusing on three interconnected strategic directions:



## 1. Contributing to Resource Efficiency and Sustainability

Romania's transition toward a circular economy remains at an early stage, with significant potential for growth. The activities under this RAP aim to stimulate resource efficiency within women-led SMEs by introducing practical tools, training, and financial mechanisms that enable the reduction of waste, reuse of materials, and improved design of sustainable products and services.

By integrating circular principles into women-led enterprises, Romania will contribute to national targets on waste reduction and sustainable production, aligning with the objectives of the **National Circular Economy Strategy 2030** and the **EU Green Deal**.

## 2. Advancing Strategic Pillars of the WE.Circular Framework

The Regional Action Plan for Romania focuses on advancing the following strategic pillars, all with a strong emphasis on women's empowerment and innovation:

- **Promoting Circular Business Models:**

The RAP will foster the development and uptake of circular business models among women entrepreneurs in key sectors such as food, textile and fashion, tourism, and manufacturing. This includes promoting eco-design, reuse, repair, and recycling practices through dedicated training and pilot initiatives.

- **Enhancing Digital Transformation:**

Romanian women entrepreneurs often demonstrate motivation but face skills and confidence gaps in digitalization. Through capacity-building actions and collaboration with universities, digital innovation hubs, and business accelerators, this RAP aims to enhance their ability to adopt and use digital tools — including e-commerce, data management, and automation technologies — to improve competitiveness and sustainability.

- **Building Inclusive Ecosystems and Policy Alignment:**

The RAP promotes inclusive ecosystems that connect women entrepreneurs, policymakers, financial institutions, and educational actors. This multi-stakeholder approach will strengthen women's representation in Smart Specialisation areas and

facilitate the mainstreaming of gender equality principles into circular and digital policy frameworks.

### 3. Strengthening Awareness and Capacity Building

Awareness remains one of the key barriers for Romanian women entrepreneurs. This RAP envisions a country-wide effort to raise awareness on the benefits of circular and digital transitions through workshops, mentorship, and national campaigns. By 2030, women entrepreneurs should have access to a visible, coordinated network of support services and digital training opportunities.

The capacity-building component of the RAP is aligned with the **Digital Romania 2030 Strategy**, which promotes digital inclusion and upskilling, and the **Smart Specialisation Strategy (RIS3)**, which identifies priority sectors where women entrepreneurs can innovate — including food, health, ICT, energy efficiency, and creative industries.

### 4. Contribution to the Danube Region's Synergy

Romania's RAP complements and reinforces the efforts of other Danube countries by providing replicable practices in financial access, network building, and circular innovation. The national actions will feed into the transnational learning process, enabling cross-country collaboration, exchange of best practices, and joint policy development.

Through these contributions, Romania will play a central role in ensuring that women entrepreneurs across the region become active agents of change in the circular and digital transformation process.

### 3. Regional Action Plan Measures

Implementation responsibilities are distributed among project partners and supporting institutions based on their operational capacity, with public authorities primarily involved in coordination, policy alignment, and long-term sustainability of actions.

#### Measure 1: Network and Mentorship Platform for Women Entrepreneurs in Circular and Digital Sectors

##### Pillars:

- Circular Economy Transition
- Digital Transition
- Smart Specialisation

##### Challenges, Barriers, and Gaps:

Romanian women entrepreneurs face fragmented access to business networks, insufficient visibility in innovation ecosystems, and limited mentorship opportunities. Although several entrepreneurial communities exist, few are gender-responsive or focused on circular and digital transitions.

According to the WE.Circular analysis, women in Romania report:

- **Lack of access to networks and mentors**, especially in digital and technology-driven sectors;
- **Low awareness of Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3)** — over 80% of surveyed women entrepreneurs were unfamiliar with the S3 framework and related funding opportunities;
- **Limited collaboration** between policy institutions and business associations, leading to poor dissemination of information on funding, innovation, and sustainability programmes;
- **Concentration of opportunities in major cities** (Bucharest, Cluj, Timișoara), leaving rural and small-town entrepreneurs disconnected from digital and circular innovation hubs.

This measure addresses these challenges by establishing a national mentorship and networking platform dedicated to women entrepreneurs active or interested in circular and digital business models. The platform will enable collaboration between women-led SMEs, mentors, financial institutions, academia, and public stakeholders to facilitate capacity building and visibility in Smart Specialisation sectors.

#### Policy Alignment:

- This measure supports and complements the following national and EU frameworks:
- **Romanian National Strategy for Promoting Equal Opportunities (2021–2027)** – by facilitating equal access to entrepreneurial support and training.
- **National SME Development Strategy (2021–2027)** – by promoting inclusive innovation and sustainable competitiveness.
- **Smart Specialisation Strategy (RIS3)** – by integrating women-led enterprises into priority areas such as ICT, food, creative industries, and circular manufacturing.
- **Digital Romania 2030** – by enhancing women’s participation in digital skills and innovation networks.
- **EU Gender Equality Strategy (2020–2025) and EU Green Deal** – by promoting gender-responsive innovation in sustainable economic sectors.

Action	Responsible Organization	Supportive Organizations	Time-frame	Budget	Impact
1.1 Establishing a National Network for Women Entrepreneurs in Circular and Digital Sectors	Ropot Boutique / Impact Hub Bucharest	Ministry of Economy, Regional Development Agencies, Chambers of Commerce	6 months	€10,000	Number of participating organisations and entrepreneurs; Number of partnerships formed

1.2 Organisation of Awareness-Raising and Networking Events	Ropot Boutique / National Stakeholder Group	Universities, business accelerators, digital innovation hubs	1–2 years	€20,000	Number of events; Number of participants; Share of rural participants
1.3 Launching a Mentorship Programme Focused on Circular and Digital Business Development	Impact Hub Bucharest	Ministry of Economy, Women's Entrepreneurship Platform, private mentors	1–3 years	€40,000	Number of mentors and mentees matched; % of mentees reporting increased knowledge or business growth
1.4 Use and expansion of existing WE.Circular digital platforms for continuous exchange and knowledge sharing	Ropot Boutique / Impact Hub Bucharest	IT partners, Digital Innovation Hubs, universities	2 years	€15,000	Number of active users; Number of interactions and shared resources; Percentage of users from non-urban areas

## Implementation of the Task for the Specified Time-frame

### Year 1:

- Mapping of existing networks and potential partners.
- Creation of a stakeholder working group for the mentorship platform.
- Development of the online platform's concept and structure.
- Organisation of the first awareness event ("Women for Circular Innovation").

### Year 2:

- Launch of the national mentorship programme.

- Implementation of networking events across at least three regions (e.g., Bucharest, Cluj, Iași).
- Active recruitment of mentors and business experts from Smart Specialisation sectors.
- Start of online platform testing and feedback collection.

### **Year 3:**

Platform fully operational and integrated with regional development agencies.

Annual national conference on women and circular innovation.

Evaluation of mentorship outcomes and continuation strategy for post-project funding.

### **Expected Outcomes:**

- Increased visibility and connectivity of women entrepreneurs within Smart Specialisation networks.
- Stronger peer-learning and mentorship culture among Romanian women-led SMEs.
- Improved collaboration between business, academia, and policy sectors.
- A sustainable, digital tool for long-term networking and resource sharing.

## **Measure 2: Capacity Building for Digital and Circular Skills**

### **Pillars:**

- Digital Transition
- Circular Economy Transition
- Policy Improvement

### **Challenges, Barriers, and Gaps:**

The Transnational Skills Needs and Gaps Analysis identified significant disparities in digital and circular economy competences among Romanian women entrepreneurs.

While motivation levels are high, access to targeted training remains limited, and most existing programmes focus on generic digital skills rather than practical applications in circular business models.

The main gaps identified include:

- **Limited access to sector-specific training:** Most available courses cover basic ICT or marketing skills, not circular design, eco-innovation, or data-driven resource optimization.
- **Lack of flexibility and accessibility:** Training opportunities are often concentrated in urban areas, with few options for rural entrepreneurs or those balancing family responsibilities.
- **Low awareness of available programmes:** Women entrepreneurs often do not know which training schemes, EU funds, or national projects they can join.
- **Insufficient integration between training providers and business support structures:** Universities, incubators, and public agencies operate separately, resulting in duplicated efforts and fragmented learning opportunities.

This measure aims to develop a national mechanism for accessible and practical training focused on digitalization and circular economy skills for women entrepreneurs, using a blended approach (online/offline) and partnerships with academic, public, and private actors.

#### **Policy Alignment:**

This measure directly supports the following policy frameworks:

**Digital Romania 2030 Strategy** – prioritizing digital skills development and inclusion of underrepresented groups, including women.

**National Strategy for Circular Economy (2020–2030)** – promoting eco-innovation and sustainable SME growth.

**Operational Programme for Education and Employment 2021–2027** – supporting lifelong learning and digital upskilling.

**National SME Development Strategy (2021–2027)** – enhancing innovation and competitiveness.

**EU Digital Decade and Green Deal** – strengthening women’s contribution to Europe’s digital and circular transformation.

Actions for Implementation of Measure 2:

Action	Responsible Organization	Supportive Organizations	Time-frame	Budget	Impact
2.1 Mapping of Existing Digital and Circular Training Opportunities	Ropot Boutique / Impact Hub Bucharest	Universities, Digital Innovation Hubs, Regional Development Agencies	6 months	€5,000	Number of training programmes mapped; Number of institutions engaged
2.2 Update and national integration of existing WE.Circular training catalogue and self-assessment tool	Ropot Boutique / Impact Hub Bucharest	Ministry of Economy, Digital Innovation Hubs, universities	1 year	€10,000	Number of users accessing the platform; User satisfaction rate; Number of institutions contributing content
2.3 Adaptation and delivery of existing WE.Circular training modules to the Romanian context	Universities, Chambers of Commerce	Digital Innovation Hubs, NGOs, Women Business Networks	1-2 years	€20,000	Number of training sessions delivered; Number of participants; Percentage of participants completing training programmes



2.4 Certification and Mentorship Integration	Ministry of Education / NSHG	Academia, Impact Hub, private mentors	2-3 years	€20,000	Number of certified participants; Number of mentorships linked to training completion
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### Implementation Plan (per year):

#### Year 1:

- Conduct mapping of national and regional training initiatives on digital and circular economy topics.
- Create partnerships with educational institutions and training providers.
- Develop the architecture for the online training catalogue and self-assessment tool.
- Pilot 1-2 workshops for women entrepreneurs focusing on "Digital Tools for Circular Business Growth."

#### Year 2:

Launch the online catalogue and promote it through national and regional networks.

Implement at least 3 thematic training programmes (e.g., Eco-innovation, E-marketing, Cybersecurity, Circular Design Thinking).

Integrate mentoring sessions for graduates of each module.

#### Year 3:

- Introduce certification for participants completing both digital and circular training paths.
- Collect feedback, evaluate learning outcomes, and expand the content library.
- Strengthen collaboration with EU-level training networks to ensure sustainability and transferability.

### Expected Outcomes:

- Strengthened technical and managerial skills of women entrepreneurs in digital and circular economy areas.
- Improved access to flexible, blended learning formats and regional inclusion (with emphasis on rural and small-town participation).
- Increased integration between education, business support, and policy structures.
- Measurable rise in women-led businesses adopting circular business models or digital tools.

### Measure 3: Access to Finance and Innovation Tools for Circular and Digital Women Entrepreneurs

#### Pillars:

- Circular Economy Transition
- Digital Transition
- Policy Improvement

#### Challenges, Barriers, and Gaps:

The WE.Circular analyses revealed that access to finance remains the most significant barrier for Romanian women entrepreneurs adopting digital or circular models.

Although several funding instruments exist (such as Start-Up Nation, PNRR, and Operational Competitiveness Programme), women-led SMEs face difficulties in accessing them due to complex procedures, lack of tailored information, and insufficient financial literacy.

#### Key financial barriers include:

- **High investment costs** for acquiring digital technologies or implementing circular production models;
- **Limited awareness of available financial instruments**, particularly among early-stage or rural entrepreneurs;
- **Insufficient gender-sensitive financial products** and low representation of women in innovation grant schemes;
- **Lack of mentorship** and advisory services focused on financing innovation and sustainability transitions;

- **Fragmented institutional support**, where ministries, agencies, and banks operate separately without an integrated platform for information and guidance.

This measure focuses on adapting, updating, and scaling existing WE.Circular training resources, ensuring accessibility and relevance for Romanian women entrepreneurs rather than developing entirely new tools.

Action	Responsible Organization	Supportive Organizations	Time-frame	Budget	Impact
3.1 Mapping of Financial Instruments for Women Entrepreneurs	Ministry of Economy / Ropot Boutique	Romanian Agency for SMEs, Innovation and Export Promotion, Chambers of Commerce	6 months	€5,000	Number of funding instruments mapped; Number of institutions engaged
3.2 Development of a Financial Advisory Programme (Workshops + Individual Mentorship)	Impact Hub Bucharest / NSHG	Financial institutions, NGOs, universities	1–2 years	€25,000	Number of entrepreneurs trained; % of participants applying for funding after programme
3.3 Preparation and advocacy for a Circular & Digital Innovation Voucher Scheme in collaboration with public authorities	Ministry of Economy / Regional Development Agencies	Ropot Boutique, financial institutions, Digital Innovation Hubs	2–3 years	€15,000	Number of policy discussions initiated; Number of institutions involved; Development of a pilot concept proposal

3.4 Creation of a Funding and Investment Guidance Platform	Ropot Boutique / Tech Partner	Banks, public agencies, accelerators	2 years	€20,000	Platform launched; Number of users; Satisfaction rate of participants
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### Implementation Plan (per year):

#### Year 1:

- Map existing funding instruments at national and EU level (including PNRR, Innovation Norway, Horizon Europe, and national SME schemes).
- Design and launch the Financial Advisory Programme, providing group sessions on circular and digital investment planning.
- Establish cooperation with selected financial institutions and investors to support women entrepreneurs.

#### Year 2:

- Launch the Innovation Voucher Scheme to co-finance small-scale pilot projects on eco-design, waste reduction, and digitalization tools.
- Integrate the funding opportunities into an online searchable Funding and Investment Guidance Platform.
- Provide individual mentoring for women-led SMEs applying for financing instruments.

#### Year 3:

- Scale up the voucher scheme regionally and prepare an evaluation report on financial access outcomes.
- Develop policy recommendations for introducing a permanent gender-sensitive funding instrument under national programmes.

### Expected Outcomes:

- Increased access to finance for women-led SMEs engaging in circular and digital transitions.
- Improved financial literacy and capacity to apply for EU and national funding programmes.
- Strengthened collaboration between women entrepreneurs, investors, and financial institutions.
- Established mechanisms for sustainable, gender-responsive financial support beyond the project's lifetime.

The measure prioritizes feasible actions that can be implemented by the project partners, while more complex financial instruments will be approached through collaboration and policy advocacy with relevant public authorities.

## 4. Monitoring of the Regional Action Plan implementation

The monitoring process ensures that the implementation of the Regional Action Plan (RAP) in Romania remains results-oriented, transparent, and adaptable.

It allows stakeholders to track progress toward achieving the objectives of the WE.Circular project, measure impact, and identify potential areas for adjustment.

The monitoring system will follow the **SMART** principles — focusing on Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound indicators — and will rely on regular data collection, feedback from partners, and annual reporting to the project coordination team.

### Measure 1: Network and Mentorship Platform for Women Entrepreneurs in Circular and Digital Sectors

#### KPIs linked to the actions:

- Number of participating organisations and entrepreneurs in the network.
- Number of mentorships established and active.
- Number of regional networking events held.
- Percentage of participants from outside major urban centres.
- Number of policy or programme partnerships initiated through the platform.

- Frequency of monitoring: Every 6 months.

#### **Tools to be used for monitoring:**

- Attendance lists and participation reports from networking and mentorship events.
- Feedback forms and online surveys from mentors and mentees.
- Activity reports from the online platform (user analytics, engagement metrics).
- Meeting minutes and progress summaries from stakeholder coordination sessions.

#### **Responsible organisations:**

- Ropot Boutique (lead), Impact Hub Bucharest, and Ministry of Economy.
- Measures to be taken if KPIs are not achieved:
- Increase promotional efforts to attract new participants and mentors.
- Strengthen partnerships with local chambers of commerce and regional agencies.
- Adjust the format and frequency of events based on participant feedback.

### **Measure 2: Capacity Building for Digital and Circular Skills**

#### **KPIs linked to the actions:**

- Number of training programmes mapped and included in the online catalogue.
- Number of women entrepreneurs trained and certified.
- Percentage of participants reporting improved digital or circular skills.
- Number of partnerships with universities and training providers.
- User engagement indicators for the online catalogue and self-assessment tool.
- Frequency of monitoring: Every 6 months.

#### **Tools to be used for monitoring:**

- Attendance sheets and pre/post-training evaluation forms.
- Online analytics (users, engagement, downloads).
- Feedback surveys from training participants and partners.
- Annual progress report summarising activities and outcomes.

### **Responsible organisations:**

Impact Hub Bucharest, Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs), and Ministry of Education.

### **Measures to be taken if KPIs are not achieved:**

- Introduce additional regional training formats or online modules.
- Strengthen cooperation with universities and DIHs to expand outreach.
- Adapt the curriculum based on participant evaluations.

## **Measure 3: Access to Finance and Innovation Tools for Circular and Digital Women Entrepreneurs**

### **KPIs linked to the actions:**

- Number of funding instruments mapped and integrated into the guidance platform.
- Number of women entrepreneurs trained under the Financial Advisory Programme.
- Percentage of participants who apply for or receive funding following mentorship.
- Number and total value of vouchers issued through the pilot scheme
- Number of users accessing the Funding and Investment Guidance Platform.
- Frequency of monitoring: Every 6 months; final evaluation at the end of Year 3.

### **Tools to be used for monitoring:**

- Financial reports from responsible agencies.
- Platform analytics (users, searches, applications submitted).
- Feedback surveys from programme participants.
- KPI tracking spreadsheet updated quarterly.

### **Responsible organisations:**

Ministry of Economy (lead), Ropot Boutique, Regional Development Agencies, and NSHG.

### **Measures to be taken if KPIs are not achieved:**

- Increase outreach to financial institutions and women-led SMEs.
- Adjust eligibility or procedures of the voucher scheme to improve accessibility.
- Enhance the advisory component by adding one-on-one financial mentoring.

## 5. Recommendations for Enhancing Long-Term Impact

The long-term sustainability of the Regional Action Plan (RAP) for Romania depends on maintaining institutional commitment, ensuring continuity of activities beyond the WE.Circular project, and integrating gender-responsive approaches into national and regional policies.

The following recommendations aim to maximize the RAP's impact and facilitate its replication in other Romanian regions and Danube countries.

### Measure 1: Network and Mentorship Platform for Women Entrepreneurs in Circular and Digital Sectors

To ensure sustainability and long-term effectiveness of the national network and mentorship system, the following actions are recommended:

- **Institutional anchoring:** Integrate the mentorship and networking platform within existing national structures such as SPRIET Romania or the Agency for SMEs, Innovation and Export Promotion, ensuring stable management and visibility.
- **Public-private partnerships:** Encourage continued involvement of private companies, chambers of commerce, and universities to co-fund and co-organize mentoring events.
- **Regular updates and expansion:** Maintain and periodically update the online networking platform to include new success stories, tools, and partner organisations. Expand the network to regional innovation ecosystems beyond Bucharest and Cluj.
- **Transferability:** Promote the replication of the network model in neighbouring Danube countries or in Romania's less developed regions (e.g., Northeast, South Muntenia) through EU-funded cross-border initiatives.



- **Policy mainstreaming:** Advocate for inclusion of gender-responsive networking and mentorship components in future SME and innovation strategies.

**Key stakeholders for sustainability:**

Ropot Boutique, Ministry of Economy, Chambers of Commerce, Regional Development Agencies, Impact Hub Bucharest.

**Measure 2: Capacity Building for Digital and Circular Skills**

For the long-term success and transferability of the training and skill development initiatives:

- **Integration into national training ecosystems:** Embed the digital and circular training catalogue and self-assessment tool within the Ministry of Education's and Ministry of Economy's digital platforms to ensure permanent access for SMEs.
- **Continuous content updates:** Maintain collaboration with universities and Digital Innovation Hubs to regularly refresh course content in line with new technologies and market trends.
- **Partnerships for certification:** Establish an accreditation system that allows courses developed under this RAP to be officially recognized as part of national lifelong learning programmes.
- **Inclusive approach:** Expand access to rural and disadvantaged areas through blended learning formats and local training centres, ensuring equitable participation of women entrepreneurs across Romania.
- **European replication:** Explore collaboration with European training initiatives such as the EU Pact for Skills and EIT Digital Academy to scale the Romanian model regionally.

**Key stakeholders for sustainability:**

Impact Hub Bucharest, Ministry of Education, Digital Innovation Hubs, Universities, National Stakeholder Group.

Measure 3: Access to Finance and Innovation Tools for Circular and Digital Women Entrepreneurs

To guarantee financial continuity and further enhance women's access to innovation funding:

- **Institutionalization of the Voucher Scheme:** Transform the pilot Circular & Digital Innovation Voucher into a permanent funding instrument under the Romanian SME Development Strategy or Operational Competitiveness Programme.
- **Creation of a National Fund for Women Innovators:** Advocate for a dedicated funding line for women-led SMEs investing in sustainable technologies and digital transformation.
- **Partnerships with private investors:** Engage venture capital funds, impact investors, and banks in co-financing mechanisms to multiply the funding base for women entrepreneurs.
- **Financial literacy integration:** Ensure the continuation of financial training and mentorship modules through public-private collaborations (banks, universities, and accelerators).
- **Replication and EU alignment:** Share best practices with other Danube countries and connect the funding guidance platform to EU-level tools like InvestEU Portal and Access2Finance.

**Key stakeholders for sustainability:**

Ministry of Economy, Ropot Boutique, Financial Institutions, Regional Development Agencies, National Stakeholder Group.