

**Interreg  
Danube Region**



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# **O.3.1 Regional Action Plan – Slovenia**

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CCIS

## Versioning and Contribution History

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|         |            |                           |                          |
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# 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 Slovenia faces unique challenges and opportunities in supporting women-led businesses in adopting circular economy principles and leveraging digital technologies. This RAP builds upon a foundation of thorough analysis and stakeholder engagement, ensuring its relevance and effectiveness for the region.

Specifically, this RAP leverages the findings of the following key activities within the WE.Circular project:

- **Activity 1.1: Transnational Skills Gaps and Needs Analysis:** This analysis, conducted across all partner countries, identified the specific skills gaps and needs of women entrepreneurs in the region regarding digital technologies, circular economy principles, and smart specialization strategies.
- **Activity 3.2: Analyzing of existing policy and legislative framework:** This activity mapped the existing policy and regulatory landscape at both the national and regional levels, identifying existing support mechanisms and potential barriers to the circular and digital transition of women-led businesses.
- **Recommendations from National Stakeholder Groups (NSHGs):** Throughout the project, the project team has consulted with a National Stakeholder Group comprised of University of Ljubljana, University of Maribor, Digital Innovation Hub Slovenia, Scientific Research Centre Bistra Ptuj, Slovene Enterprise Fund and others with the aim to validate existing data and gather relevant feedback in key action areas.

The proposed actions in this RAP are designed to address the specific challenges identified through these activities and are tailored to the unique regional context. The implementation of this RAP aims to contribute to the broader objectives of the WE.Circular project, fostering a more inclusive and sustainable circular economy within the Danube Region.

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

Slovenia, located in southern Central Europe, is a country characterized by a mountainous and forested landscape, covering 20,271 square kilometres. As of 2023, Slovenia has a population of 2.1 million, with a nearly equal gender distribution. Slovenia is among the European countries with a pronounced aging population, attributed to low birth rates and increasing life expectancy. The share of female entrepreneurs has decreased from 37% in 2022 to 25% in 2023. Major barriers include limited access to finance, inadequate mentorship and networking opportunities, and challenges related to digital transformation.

Slovenia has several policy frameworks aimed at supporting women entrepreneurs and addressing gender disparities. These initiatives align with broader EU directives and strategies aimed at promoting gender equality and sustainable development.

Slovenia Key strategies include the **National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2023–2030)**, which aims to promote gender equality in various sectors, and the **Slovenian Industrial Strategy (2021–2030)**, which encourages entrepreneurship among target groups, including women. The **Digital Slovenia 2030** strategy focuses on promoting digital inclusion and reducing gender gaps, particularly in ICT education and employment. **Slovenia's Smart Specialisation Strategy (S4)** identifies national strategic development priorities and niches, which are, in practice, supported by a focused, comprehensive and tailored policy mix. In the Strategy it is also mentioned the development and implementation of services for specific target groups (e.g., young people, women, culture and creative sectors). Despite these policies, women entrepreneurs still encounter significant challenges, particularly in accessing finance and navigating digital transformation.

Based on the WE.Circular project findings, consultations with the NSHG, and the co-creation workshop in Prague, the main needs and challenges for women entrepreneurs in Slovenia in relation to the circular economy include:

- Access to finance is a major barrier, as many women struggle to secure the **necessary funding** for digital transformation and the adoption of circular economy principles.
- While some training programs exist, they are often not sufficient enough to meet the evolving demands of a digital and circular economy. There is a lack of **tailored training** that addresses specific needs and there is no data-base to find specific and knowledge-based training programs, especially for **digital skills**.
- There is a noticeable **gap in networking opportunities and available support structures**. This limits women entrepreneurs' ability to access resources, share knowledge, and gain valuable insights.

To address these needs and challenges, the following recommendations have emerged:

- Increase public support through **financial aid**, such as implementing **tailored financial instruments** for women entrepreneurs.
- Implement more **targeted training programs** that focus on essential business and technical skills such as specific technical skills, like improving **digital literacy** to better prepare women entrepreneurs for **digital transformation**.
- Create **platforms to facilitate connections** among women entrepreneurs, industry experts, and investors.
- Create an **enabling environment** for women-led businesses, including policies that address system benefits.

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

This section of the Regional Action Plan is crucial for aligning regional efforts with the broader objectives of the WE.Circular project, as guided by the principles outlined in the

Transnational Strategy to Accelerate Transition Towards a Circular Economy in the Danube Region. The strategy is designed to facilitate a collaborative and unified approach across the Danube region. The RAP is specifically structured to support the overarching goals of "The Danube Goes Circular" by:

- **Contributing to Resource Efficiency:** The activities outlined in this RAP are designed to contribute to increased resource efficiency within the region, supporting the broader transition to a circular economy in alignment with the Transnational Strategy. Through initiatives focused on empowering women-led enterprises, this RAP will help ensure that this sector is a key driver of these improvements.
- **Advancing Strategic Pillars:** The RAP includes specific actions designed to advance the following strategic pillars, all with a strong emphasis on supporting women entrepreneurs:
  - **Promoting Circular Business Models:** The RAP actions will foster the development and adoption of new, circular business models among women-led enterprises, ensuring sustainable practices are at the core of their operations.
  - **Enhancing Waste and Resource Management:** RAP interventions focus on improving waste and resource management practices within women-led businesses, promoting closed-loop systems and reducing environmental impact.
  - **Raising Awareness and Building Capacity:** This RAP involves activities aimed at raising awareness and building capacity among women entrepreneurs regarding circular economy principles, digital transformation, and sustainable business practices.
- By implementing these activities, the RAP will contribute to greater coherence and synergy across the Danube region, ensuring that women entrepreneurs are at the forefront of the transition to a sustainable and circular economy by 2030.

## 3. Regional Action Plan Measures

### 3.1 Measure 1: Capacity building for digital skills

Pillars: Measure 1 contributes to the strategic pillars

- Digital transition

#### Challenges, barriers and gaps:

Slovenia's basic digital skills rate trails the EU average (Digital Decade reporting), so a significant part of the population needs upskilling, especially this affects women. WE.Circular national analyses specifically identify women founders in Slovenia as having gaps in digital and circular-technology competencies and difficulty accessing sector-specific e-skills.

The Slovenian plan Digital Slovenia 2030 and the Digital Decade set goals and measures, but national coverage and targeted programs for female entrepreneurs (sector-specific, flexible, regional) are still uneven. As a result, many women are outside structured training programs. The inability to attend live courses (time, travel, cost) is a recurring obstacle.

Few sector-technical digital programmes tailored to smart-specialisation and circular-economy business models (eco-design tools, data for resource efficiency, digital traceability). Most courses are generic digital marketing or basic ICT.

Digital skills improvement programs are not transparent, it is not clear what level of knowledge they are prepared for, nor do they include direct business pilots, customer connections, or mentoring to convert skills into contracts/sales.

#### Policy alignment of the Measure:

This measure is aligned with national and regional frameworks:

- **Digital Slovenia 2030 explicitly prioritises digital skills for people and businesses**, including measurable targets for basic and advanced digital competences — a national tool that maps training supply and gives entrepreneurs a tailored self-assessment directly supports those goals.



- The EU Digital Decade / country reporting flags Slovenia's digital-skills gap, so an initiative that systematically maps offerings and helps SMEs/women entrepreneurs find the right upskilling is exactly the kind of action the country needs to hit 2030 targets.
- **National business support programmes** (e.g., SPIRIT Slovenia) fund entrepreneurship training and women-targeted measures, making it realistic to integrate a mapped catalogue + self-assessment into existing service offers or calls.

## Actions for Implementation of Measure 1

**3.1.1 Mapping of existing courses and trainings for digital skills**, connecting with educational institutions, with existing training courses for digital skills.

**3.1.2 Developing digital skills self-assessment tool** is a tool, that helps self-assess, which level of knowledge of digital skills WE has, and which programmes are suitable for them.

**3.1.3 Platform for digital skills** with the ability to search for a suitable program based on needs, level of required prior knowledge, field of work, etc.

Figure 1: Implementation of Measurable 1

| Action   | Responsible Organization | Supportive Organizations              | Time-frame | Impact                                  |
|--|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------|---|
| Mapping of existing courses and trainings for digital skills | DIHS                     | <i>Academies, training centres</i>    | 6 months   | Number of courses and training gathered |
| Developing digital skills self-assessment tool               | DIHS                     | <i>Business support organizations</i> | 6 months   | Prepared self-assessment tool           |

|                            |     |      |   |         |   |
|----------------------------|-----|------|---|---------|---|
| Platform<br>digital skills | for | DIHS | <i>Business<br/>support<br/>organizations</i> | 2 years | Number of<br>users<br><br>Number of<br>added<br>courses |
|----------------------------|-----|------|---|---------|---|

#### Year 1:

- Collecting educational institutions, with existing training courses for digital skills.
- Mapping of existing courses and trainings for digital skills
- Developing digital skills self-assessment tool, cooperating with experts
- Start preparing activities for creation of Platform for digital skills, concept
- Development of platform
- Preparing promotional plan for platforme
- Lauching platforme for users

#### Year 2:

- Promotion of platforme
- Monitoring the operation of the platform (users, added courses)
- Prepare analysis of platforme and ongoing plan

### 3.2 Measure 2: Regional Council of Women Entrepreneurs Podravje

- Entrepreneurship support and ecosystem strengthening
- Women's economic empowerment
- Circular transition

#### Challenges, barriers and gaps:

Regional structures such as the Regional Council of Women Entrepreneurs Podravje, led and coordinated by CCIS, play a key role in connecting women entrepreneurs,

yet their potential is not fully leveraged within national support programmes. Many women founders are unaware of available regional networks, mentorship channels, or thematic opportunities—particularly in areas related to circular economy and sustainable business models.

Although CCIS regularly organizes high-quality activities for women entrepreneurs, including thematic networking events, these are often fragmented across regions, lacking a unified mechanism that would systematically link insights, contacts, and knowledge back into structured entrepreneurship pathways. Women entrepreneurs frequently report:

- limited access to circular-economy know-how tailored to SMEs,
- insufficient opportunities for regional cross-connection,
- and unclear visibility of programmes relevant to their business maturity level.

As a result, strong regional communities like Podravje generate valuable knowledge and momentum, but this is not consistently translated into follow-up training, thematic mentoring, or opportunities for circular innovation pilots. Without structured integration, a large share of ecosystem potential remains underutilised.

#### **Policy alignment of the Measure:**

This measure is aligned with national and EU frameworks that emphasise collaboration, women's empowerment, and circular transition:

- Slovenian Entrepreneurship Support Environment encourages regional–national alignment and coordinated delivery of services. Integrating regional women-entrepreneur networks supports this objective directly.
- The EU Gender Equality Strategy and SME Strategy emphasise women's access to networks, knowledge, and market opportunities — which this measure operationalises by systematising CCIS-led activities.
- National circular economy and S5 smart-specialisation strategies prioritise knowledge transfer and ecosystem cooperation. Regional councils, when

systematically connected to RAP, become natural delivery points for circular-economy skills and business support.

- SRIP frameworks call for better stakeholder integration between industry, research organisations, and entrepreneurial support structures — which this measure strengthens by embedding regional councils into programme pipelines.

## Actions for Implementation of Measure 2:

**3.2.1 Strengthen the role of regional women-entrepreneur councils (e.g., Regional Council of Women Entrepreneurs Podravje)** by integrating their activities, events, and stakeholder networks into RAP programming.

**3.2.2 Build structured cooperation with CCIS as the national leader**, ensuring that regional initiatives feed into national upskilling opportunities, circular-economy learning modules, and mentoring schemes.

**3.2.3 Introduce targeted circular-economy content** into regional networking events, including practical tools, case studies, and sector-specific knowledge transfer tailored to women entrepreneurs.

Figure 2: Implementation of Measurable 2

| Action   | Responsible Organization | Supportive Organizations  | Time-frame | Impact   |
|--|--------------------------|---|------------|--|
| Mapping of regional women-entrepreneur programmes and initiatives (including Regional Council of Women Entrepreneurs Podravje) | CCIS                     | <i>Regional Councils, Chambers, local business support actors</i> | 6 months   | Comprehensive overview of regional networks and programmes             |
| Structured integration of recurring CCIS events (e.g., Women Entrepreneurs Conference) into RAP                                | CCIS                     | <i>Regional Councils, event partners</i>                          | 6 months   | Number of integrated activities; improved visibility and participation |

|  |      |                                |                 |   |
|--|------|--------------------------------|-----------------|---|
|  |      |                                |                 |   |
| Annual synthesis of regional council outcomes feeding into RAP | ccis | <i>Regional Councils, SRIP</i> | Ongoing, yearly | Qualitative insights; improved policy alignment |

### Year 1: Foundation and Integration

- Mapping of regional women-entrepreneur networks, programmes, and events.
- Establishing cooperation with Regional Council of Women Entrepreneurs Podravje and other regional councils.
- Integration of CCIS flagship events (e.g., Women Entrepreneurs Conference) into RAP activities.
- Development of a structured follow-up mechanism (mentoring pathways, circular-economy know-how sessions, targeted matchmaking).
- Preparation of a communication plan to strengthen visibility of regional support structures.
- Launch of coordinated activities with regional councils through CCIS leadership.

### Year 2: Consolidation and Strengthening

- Active promotion of regional networking opportunities and circular-economy knowledge transfer for women entrepreneurs.
- Monitoring engagement levels (number of activities, participation, mentoring matches, circular-economy modules delivered).

- Continuous coordination between CCIS and regional councils to ensure coherence of support services.
- Annual synthesis of insights and implications for RAP planning, including emerging needs of women entrepreneurs.
- Adjusting the follow-up mechanism and regional cooperation plan based on lessons learned.

## 4. Monitoring of the Regional Action Plan implementation

## Measure 1: Capacity building for digital skills

- **KPIs linked to the actions:**
  - Number of courses and training gathered (as seen in figure "Implementation of Measurable 1")
  - Prepared self-assessment tool (as seen in figure "Implementation of Measurable 1")
  - Number of platform users, number of added courses (as seen in figure "Implementation of Measurable 1")
- **Frequency of monitoring:**  
Every 6 months
- **Tools to be used for monitoring:**
  - Report of gathered data of courses and training
  - Internal progress tracking of self-assessment tool
  - Web analytics (users, new courses)
  - Feedback from providers and users
- **Responsible for monitoring:**  
DIHS
- **Measures to be taken if KPIs are not achieved:**
  - Involve more educational institutions.
  - Strengthen coordination with educational institutions.
  - Seek additional expert for self-assessment tool.
  - Additional promotion activities for platform.
  - Involve more stakeholders to attract platform users.

## Measure 2: Regional Council of Women Entrepreneurs Podravje

- **KPIs linked to the actions:**
  - Number of mapped regional programmes, initiatives, and events supporting women entrepreneurs (as shown in figure "Implementation of Measure 2").
  - Number of integrated CCIS-led activities (e.g., Women Entrepreneurs Conference) incorporated into RAP pathways.
  - Number of women entrepreneurs engaged through regional council.
  - Annual synthesis reports produced and integrated into RAP planning.
- **Frequency of monitoring:**  
Every 6 months

- **Tools to be used for monitoring:**
  - Reports on mapped regional initiatives, councils, and events.
  - Event analytics (regional engagement).
  - Feedback from regional council.
- **Responsible for monitoring:**  
CCIS
- **Measures to be taken if KPIs are not achieved:**
  - Strengthen engagement with regional councils and local partners.
  - Expand outreach to underrepresented regions or women-entrepreneur groups.
  - Enhance promotion and visibility of activities through CCIS communication channels.
  - Involve additional experts for circular-economy and entrepreneurship capacity building.
  - Introduce targeted incentives to increase participation (e.g., thematic workshops, personalised follow-ups).
  - Improve coordination between CCIS and event partners to ensure stronger integration of activities.

## 5. Recommendations for Enhancing Long-Term Impact

### Measure 1: Capacity building for digital skills

To ensure the sustainability and transferability of the Digital Skills platform prepared under Measure 1, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Follow-up Implementation:** Ensure that the platform will exist further with continuous content updates
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Maintain active communication with key stakeholders (academies, training centres) throughout and after the project to ensure relevance and uptake of results.



- **Capacity building:** Encourage new training content to upgrade the platform with missing content
- **Transferability:** Explore replication of the platforms in other EU regions, especially those with similar challenges in gender-inclusive innovation ecosystems.

**Key stakeholders for sustainability and transferability:** *DIHS*

## **Measure 2: Strengthening Regional Networks of Women Entrepreneurs**

To ensure the sustainability and long-term impact of the initiatives developed under Measure 2, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Follow-up Implementation:**  
Ensure that the activities initiated through CCIS and regional women-entrepreneur councils continue beyond the project period, including regular updates of regional mappings, networking activities, and circular-economy content.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:**  
Maintain strong, ongoing communication with key regional actors — including the Regional Council of Women Entrepreneurs Podravje, other regional councils, chambers, and circular-economy experts — to preserve momentum, relevance, and continued participation.
- **Capacity Building:**  
Encourage the development of new content, workshops, and mentoring modules to address emerging needs of women entrepreneurs, especially in areas such as circular innovation, leadership, and sustainable business development.
- **Transferability:**  
Explore opportunities to replicate and adapt the model of regional women-entrepreneur councils and CCIS-led integration activities in other EU regions facing similar challenges in strengthening gender-inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystems.

**Key stakeholders for strengthening regional networks:** CCIS