

Output Factsheet

Output title: O.2.1 Innovative Business Models for Circular Transition of Women Entrepreneurs

Summary of the output (max. 2500 characters)

The output presents 6 circular business model pathways developed within the WE.Circular project to support women entrepreneurs in the Danube Region in their circular and digital transition. It responds to the practical needs identified through the WE.Circular Innovation Contest, national co-creation activities, WE.Circular Labs, peer review and pilot testing. It translates real business challenges into transferable and easy-to-understand business model pathways that can be adapted by women-led SMEs from different sectors and countries. The six business models are:

- Circular Design Accelerator – supporting companies to redesign products, services and customer experiences according to circular economy principles;
- Resource Champions – helping companies use materials more efficiently and create value from secondary, recycled, bio-based or waste-derived resources;
- Production Optimizers – supporting improvements in production, packaging, refill, return and logistics systems;
- Smart Digital Enablers – showing how digital tools, data, traceability and smart technologies can support circular operations;
- Market Educators – helping companies raise awareness, build trust and communicate the value of circular products and services;
- Collaborative Ecosystems – supporting partnership-based circular solutions, shared resources and ecosystem cooperation.

The output explains the logic of circular business models through 3 main elements: creating value, delivering value and capturing value. It also highlights the role of digitalisation as a cross-cutting enabler for traceability, customer engagement, data management, impact measurement and new service development. The business models are presented as public and transferable pathways, not as individual company business plans. Sensitive company-specific information is removed, while practical examples are anonymised. This makes the output useful for a wider group of women entrepreneurs, business support organisations, innovation actors, municipalities, policymakers and other stakeholders working on circular economy, SME development, digitalisation and inclusive entrepreneurship. The output contributes to the wider WE.Circular support framework by providing practical models that can be used together with the WE.Circular Labs approach, the CE Business Models Toolkit, Regional Action Plans and the Transnational Strategy.

Contribution to the programme and project objectives, output and result indicator, as

well as to the targets set for the Priority Area concerned (max. 2000 characters)

The output contributes directly to the WE.Circular project objective to increase the digital and business skills of women entrepreneurs for circular transition and to equip stakeholders with practical tools and knowledge needed to support smart specialisation, Industry 4.0 transition and circular economy approaches in the Danube Region.

It supports the programme objective of strengthening a more competitive, innovative and smarter Danube Region by providing practical, transferable and transnationally relevant business model pathways for women-led SMEs. The output helps bridge the gap between circular economy concepts and real business implementation by showing how companies can redesign products, improve resource use, optimise production, apply digital tools, educate markets and build collaborative ecosystems.

The output contributes to the project output indicator by delivering the planned innovative circular business models developed through transnational cooperation, co-creation and validation. Although the project originally planned three business models linked to the key thematic areas of secondary raw materials, production and consumption, and waste management, the co-creation process showed that women entrepreneurs' needs were more diverse. Therefore, six complementary models were developed, while still contributing to the original thematic areas.

The output also supports the project result indicator by strengthening the capacity of women entrepreneurs, business support organisations, innovation actors and policy stakeholders to apply and promote circular and digital business transformation. It provides a common framework and language for supporting women-led SMEs across different sectors and countries.

At Priority Area level, the output contributes to inclusive innovation, SME competitiveness, circular economy uptake, digital transformation and gender-responsive business support. It supports better integrated policies and practical solutions by linking company-level needs with wider ecosystem and policy learning in the Danube Region.

How can the output be used and by whom (target group), what is the benefit and the impact for these target groups and the target area / Danube Region? (max. 1500 characters)

The output can be used by several target groups.

Women entrepreneurs and women-led SMEs can use it to identify where to start their circular transition, select the most relevant business model pathway and understand possible actions related to design, resources, production, digitalisation, market communication or cooperation.

Business support organisations, innovation hubs, chambers of commerce, training providers and mentors can use the models as a basis for advisory services, mentoring,

workshops, acceleration programmes, innovation contests, peer-learning and circular economy training.

Municipalities, policymakers and regional development actors can use the output to better understand what type of support women-led SMEs need in order to move from interest in circular economy to real implementation. The models can inform support schemes, voucher programmes, pilot actions, digitalisation measures, mentoring initiatives and regional innovation strategies.

Universities, experts and stakeholder networks can use the output as a practical reference for cooperation with SMEs and for integrating circular business model thinking into training, research and ecosystem-building activities.

The main benefit is that the output translates circular economy and digital transformation into practical, adaptable business pathways. For the Danube Region, it supports stronger SME competitiveness, reduced resource dependency, improved circular economy uptake, better cooperation between ecosystem actors and more inclusive participation of women entrepreneurs in the green and digital transition.

How can the sustainability of the output be ensured and where and to whom is it going to be transferred? (max. 1500 characters)

The sustainability of the output can be ensured by integrating the six business models into existing services, programmes and networks instead of treating them as a one-off project result. The models can remain in use after the project through WE.Circular Labs, business support services, innovation hubs, chambers of commerce, women entrepreneur networks, training programmes, mentoring schemes and future transnational cooperation projects.

The output should be transferred to women entrepreneurs, business support organisations, innovation actors, municipalities, universities, policymakers, regional development agencies and circular economy stakeholders across the Danube Region. It can also be shared through the WE.Circular Learning Network, project website, policy events, training activities and follow-up initiatives.

The models can support the implementation of the Regional Action Plans and the Transnational Strategy for Women Entrepreneurs Circular Transition by translating strategic priorities into concrete support directions for women-led SMEs.

Long-term sustainability also depends on keeping the models flexible and open to update, as circular economy policies, digital technologies and market requirements continue to evolve. Their practical and adaptable structure allows them to be reused, combined and further developed according to local needs, sectoral priorities and the readiness level of women-led SMEs.