

D.3.5.1 Concept for Transnational Policy Learning Centre

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1. Executive summary

The Concept for the Transnational Policy Learning Centre (TPLC) has been developed within the WE.Circular project as a strategic response to the need for stronger policy learning, knowledge transfer, and institutional capacity building in support of women entrepreneurs' circular, digital, and smart specialisation transition in the Danube Region. The TPLC is conceived as a transnational mechanism that connects project evidence, practical experience, and policy-oriented learning in order to support the design, improvement, and transfer of more responsive policy tools and support measures.

The rationale for the establishment of the TPLC is grounded in the findings of the WE.Circular project, which show that women entrepreneurs across the Danube Region face a combination of structural and practical barriers in their circular and digital transition. These include fragmented support ecosystems, limited access to tailored finance and advisory support, insufficient digital and circular skills, weak networking and mentoring opportunities, and gaps between policy ambitions and implementation realities. Within this context, the TPLC is positioned as a practical bridge between policy, project learning, and business reality.

The Concept defines the overall aim of the TPLC as strengthening the capacity of public authorities, policy makers, business support organisations, and other relevant stakeholders to design, adapt, and implement more effective policy tools and support measures for women entrepreneurs. To achieve this, the Centre will capture and structure knowledge generated through the project, support transnational exchange and collaborative learning, develop policy-oriented learning content, and contribute to the uptake of project results in Regional Action Plans, the Transnational Strategy for Women Entrepreneurs' Circular Transition, and broader policy frameworks.

The TPLC is designed to serve a broad range of target groups, including public authorities, policy makers, business support and innovation ecosystem organisations, academic and research institutions, experts, civil society organisations, women entrepreneur networks, and NGOs. Although the Centre is not a direct business support instrument, its wider beneficiaries are women entrepreneurs and women-led SMEs, who are expected to benefit indirectly from more responsive support systems, stronger policy coordination, and improved framework conditions for circular and digital transition.

A central part of the concept is the TPLC conceptual model, which presents the Centre as the policy learning and knowledge-transfer pillar of the WE.Circular framework. Its core

activities include knowledge capture and systematisation, development of learning content and tools, knowledge diffusion and transfer, support for policy reflection and improvement, and transnational networking and collaborative learning. The learning approach is based on structured reflection, transnational exchange, transferability, and adaptation to different national and institutional contexts. In this respect, the Concept also demonstrates that the TPLC builds on policy-learning formats already tested within the project, including the Co-design Workshop in Prague, the peer-review of Regional Action Plans, and the Policy Making Camp in Budapest.

The Concept further clarifies the role of the Virtual Toolbox as a complementary digital knowledge-sharing platform, linked to the TPLC and intended to support long-term access to policy-relevant resources, findings, methodologies, and good practices. Through this connection, the TPLC combines institutional and methodological functions with digital accessibility and knowledge diffusion. Sustainability is further supported through the free availability of the concept and resources, institutional anchoring, wider dissemination through policy platforms and networks, and the transferability of the model to regions beyond the current partnership.

Expected results include the establishment of a functioning transnational policy-learning mechanism, stronger policy makers' capacity, improved accessibility and usability of project knowledge, stronger links to Regional Action Plans and the Transnational Strategy, and enhanced transferability of project results. At impact level, the TPLC is expected to contribute to more informed and implementation-oriented policymaking, better alignment between policy ambition and support realities, and improved framework conditions for women entrepreneurs in the circular and digital economy. Potential risks related to participation, continuity, transferability, and policy uptake are identified in the concept together with mitigation measures aimed at ensuring the longer-term value and practical relevance of the Centre.

2. Background

Women entrepreneurs across the Danube Region are increasingly interested in integrating circular economy principles and digital solutions into their businesses. The WE.Circular project has shown that many women-led SMEs are motivated to adopt more sustainable practices, improve resource efficiency, redesign products and services, and explore new business opportunities linked to circularity and innovation. At the same time, project findings confirm that motivation alone is not enough to enable transition. Women entrepreneurs often face practical barriers¹ that limit their capacity to move from interest to implementation. These include limited access to tailored finance, lack of specialized knowledge and advisory support, insufficient digital and circular skills, weak access to networks and mentoring, and low awareness of relevant strategic frameworks and support opportunities².

To promote the introduction of new, European-level, circular and zero net emission economic models, it is of utmost importance to specifically involve, address and communicate with women entrepreneurs in the planning and implementation of economic development programmes. The experiences of the Hungarian Economic Development Agency (MGFÜ) also confirm – especially in the context of international projects – that women entrepreneurs are significantly open to future-oriented, environmentally conscious forms of operation. As a result, women entrepreneurs are a key target group in current economic development initiatives, including the implementation of ESG aspects, voluntary sustainability commitments and programmes aimed at the transition to a circular economy.

The Transnational Policy Analyses prepared within WE.Circular also show that support ecosystems in the participating countries are often fragmented. Existing measures tend to address entrepreneurship, circular economy, digitalisation, or innovation separately, while women-led SMEs need integrated support that connects these areas in a practical way. In many cases, policy frameworks are already in place, but their implementation does not yet sufficiently respond to the concrete needs of women entrepreneurs, especially those operating with limited internal capacity, limited time, and limited access to specialized expertise. This creates a clear gap between policy ambitions and the real ability of SMEs to apply circular and digital solutions in everyday business practice.

The WE.Circular Labs were developed precisely to respond to this gap. Their concept³ is

¹ Joint Transnational Skills Needs and Gaps Analysis, 2024, WE.Circular project

² Report from the Policy Analysis, 2024, WE.Circular project

³ WE.Circular Labs – Concept, 2026, WE.Circular project

based on a Living Lab approach, which creates a structured environment for co-creation, experimentation, testing, and validation of circular and digitally enabled business models in real-life conditions. The pilot testing phase confirmed⁴ that women-led SMEs benefit most when support is practical, step-by-step, and adapted to their business reality. The pilots showed that companies were able to make progress when they received targeted mentoring, expert guidance, and a safe “test before invest” environment. At the same time, the testing also highlighted that many promising actions require stronger ecosystem support, better coordination, and more systematic knowledge transfer to become scalable and replicable.

WE.Circular Co-design Workshop in Prague was organised to co-create the methodology for Regional Action Plans and to develop realistic and practical actions for supporting women entrepreneurs in their circular and digital transition. The workshop was designed not as a theoretical discussion, but as a hands-on process helping partners and stakeholders define challenges, select measures, assign responsibilities, consider timelines and budgets, and translate ideas into draft action plans. Its results showed that participants benefited from a clearer understanding of how to structure strategic action, how to distinguish between key components of policy documents, and how to connect stakeholder roles, monitoring, and implementation.

This practical orientation was already embedded in the concept of the Co-design Workshop itself. The workshop methodology was built around identifying priority challenges, matching them with measures and actions, sequencing them by feasibility and impact, and transferring them into a Regional Action Plan canvas with stakeholders, resources, timelines, and indicators. Importantly, the concept stressed that the Regional Action Plans had to remain realistic and implementation-oriented, rather than overly ambitious documents disconnected from the actual capacity of the project partners and stakeholder ecosystems.

At policy level, the same pattern became visible during the peer review of the Regional Action Plans (RAPs). The peer-review process was used to assess, validate, and improve the RAPs prepared by project partners and to ensure that they are coherent, feasible, measurable, and aligned with the broader WE.Circular strategic framework. Across countries, the peer review identified several recurring needs: stronger use of existing WE.Circular outputs, clearer implementation frameworks, better assignment of roles and responsibilities, more robust monitoring and KPIs, broader stakeholder ownership, and stronger focus on feasibility and resource planning. These findings are highly relevant for the Transitional Policy Learning Centre (TPLC) concept, because they show

⁴ Pilot Resting Report, 2026, WE.Circular project

that public authorities and ecosystem actors need not only policy ideas, but also structured support for turning those ideas into implementable and monitorable measures.

A further important step was the Policy Making Camp organised in December 2025 in Budapest. The Camp was designed as an immersive co-design environment for policy makers and stakeholders, with the aim of increasing their knowledge on innovative circular business models, their impacts, supportive policy frameworks, and use of funding opportunities. Its structure moved participants from understanding systems, gaps, and perspectives on the first day to designing gender-smart circular and digital policy solutions on the second day. The Camp focused on analysing existing policy frameworks, identifying systemic barriers affecting women entrepreneurs, exchanging good practices, co-creating policy tools and measures, and formulating actionable proposals with responsibilities, resources, and expected effects. This progression from diagnosis to hands-on policy design is especially relevant for the TPLC, because it demonstrates that the project has already tested concrete formats for policy learning, knowledge exchange, and policy co-creation that can now be further systematised and continued through the Centre.

Taken together, these activities show that WE.Circular has already generated substantial practical and policy-relevant knowledge through analysis, experimentation, co-design, peer review, and policy dialogue. At the same time, they also highlight the need for a more structured mechanism to capture, organise, and transfer this learning beyond the immediate implementation of individual project activities. Without such a mechanism, there is a risk that valuable knowledge, tested approaches, and methodological lessons generated through the project will remain fragmented or lose visibility after project closure. The TPLC is intended to fill this gap by providing a more permanent and structured framework for policy learning, knowledge diffusion, and transfer of project results into future policy and support practice.

In this sense, the establishment of the TPLC represents a necessary next step in the WE.Circular support architecture. While the Labs focus on business transformation at company level, the Centre is designed to strengthen learning, exchange, and policy uptake at system level. Its role is to collect and structure knowledge generated through the project, translate practical experiences into usable learning content, and support public authorities and stakeholders in developing more responsive policy tools for women entrepreneurs' circular and digital transition. In this way, the TPLC links policy learning with real project evidence and ensures that the lessons emerging from the WE.Circular network and Labs are not lost after pilot implementation, but instead

transformed into guidance, tools, and practices that can be used across the Danube Region and beyond.

The TPLC can therefore be positioned not as a new stand-alone structure, but as a continuation and consolidation of learning processes already initiated within the project. The Labs generated practical evidence from real SME testing; the co-design workshop created a shared methodology and practical planning logic; the peer review generated quality assurance, common recommendations, and cross-cutting lessons; and the Policy Making Camp tested transnational policy learning and co-creation in practice. Building on these steps, the TPLC can provide the long-term framework needed to capture, organise, transfer, and further develop this knowledge for use by policy makers, public authorities, and other stakeholders.

The TPLC will therefore serve as a practical bridge between policy, project learning, and business reality. It will contribute to know-how generation, knowledge diffusion, transfer of good practices, and stronger policy capacities in support of circular women entrepreneurship. Through its connection to the transnational learning network, the WE.Circular Labs, and the Virtual Toolbox, it will help ensure that project results are translated into a more structured and lasting support framework for policymakers and ecosystem actors working on circular economy, innovation, and women's entrepreneurship.

3. Aim and specific objectives of the TPLC

3.1 Overall aim

The overall aim of the Transnational Policy Learning Centre (TPLC) is to **strengthen the capacity of public authorities, policy makers, business support organisations, and other relevant stakeholders to design, adapt, and implement more effective policy tools and support measures for women entrepreneurs in their circular, digital, and smart specialisation transition.**

The TPLC will serve as a transnational learning and knowledge-transfer mechanism within the WE.Circular framework. It will build on evidence, practical experience, and tested project results in order to support more informed, realistic, and practice-oriented policymaking. In this way, the TPLC will contribute to bridging the gap between policy ambition and implementation reality, while helping transform project learning into lasting support capacity for the Danube Region and beyond.

3.2 Specific objectives

To achieve its overall aim, the TPLC will pursue the following specific objectives:

1. **To capture and structure knowledge generated through the WE.Circular project**, including findings from the transnational analyses, WE.Circular Labs, pilot testing, co-design processes, peer review of Regional Action Plans, and the Policy Making Camp, and to transform this knowledge into accessible learning content for policy and ecosystem actors.
2. **To strengthen public authorities' and stakeholders' understanding of the challenges and support needs of women entrepreneurs** in circular, digital, and smart specialisation transition, with particular attention to implementation barriers, ecosystem gaps, and conditions for practical uptake.
3. **To support the design and improvement of policy instruments and support measures** by promoting more realistic, coordinated, measurable, and gender-sensitive approaches that respond to the actual needs of women-led SMEs and the realities of regional innovation ecosystems.
4. **To facilitate transnational knowledge diffusion, exchange of experience, and transfer of good practices** among WE.Circular partner countries and beyond, enabling policy makers and stakeholders to learn from tested approaches, validated actions, and common lessons emerging across the Danube Region.
5. **To provide a practical learning space for policy co-creation and reflection**, where project partners, public authorities, associated strategic partners, and other stakeholders can jointly explore policy gaps, discuss possible solutions, and develop more actionable responses for women entrepreneurs' circular transition.
6. **To ensure continuity and sustainability of project results** by linking the TPLC with the Virtual Toolbox and using both structures as complementary instruments for know-how generation, knowledge organisation, and long-term access to relevant methods, policy content, findings, and good practices.
7. **To contribute to stronger policy integration and future strategic development** by supporting the uptake of WE.Circular results in Regional Action Plans, broader policy frameworks, and future initiatives related to circular economy, digitalisation, innovation, and women's entrepreneurship.

4. Target groups and beneficiaries

The Transnational Policy Learning Centre is designed to serve a broad group of actors involved in shaping, implementing, supporting, and improving the framework conditions for women entrepreneurs in the circular and digital transition. As a transnational learning and knowledge-transfer mechanism, the TPLC will engage both direct target groups and wider beneficiaries at regional, national, and transnational level.

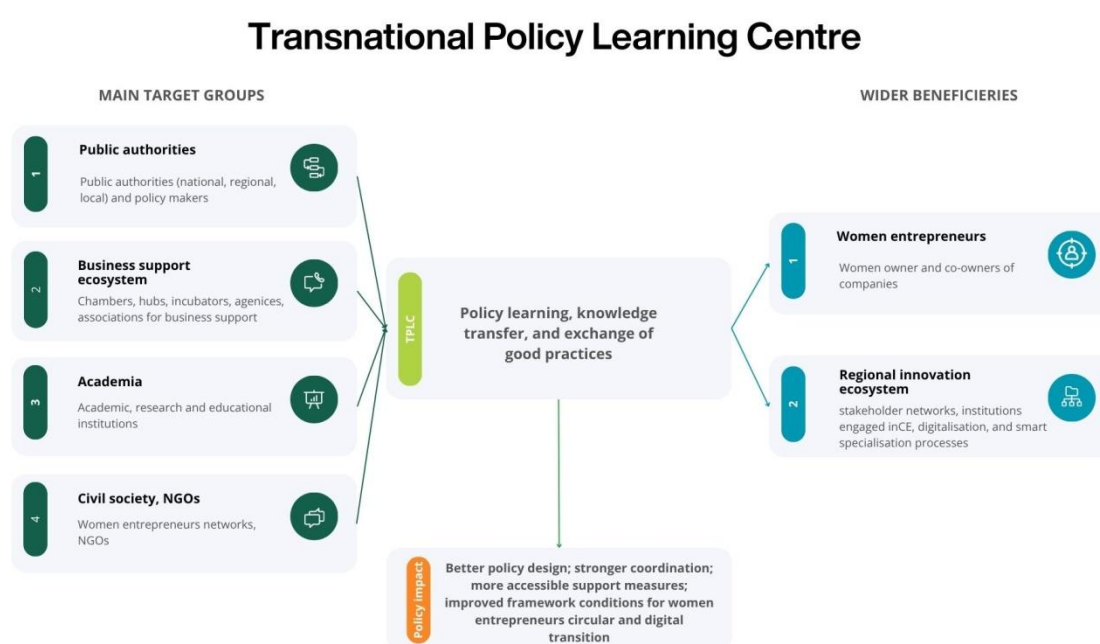


Figure 0-1: Structure of the main target groups and wider beneficiaries, TPLC, own illustration

The **primary target groups** of the TPLC are **public authorities and policy makers** at local, regional, and national level who are responsible for the design, implementation, coordination, or improvement of policies and support measures related to circular economy, digitalisation, entrepreneurship, innovation, smart specialisation, and gender equality. This includes ministries, regional administrations, municipalities, development agencies, and other public institutions involved in policy development and implementation.

A **second key target group** consists of **business support and ecosystem organisations** that play an intermediary role between policy and practice. These include chambers of commerce, clusters, innovation agencies, incubators, accelerators, digital innovation

hubs, training providers, financial support organisations, and other bodies supporting SMEs and entrepreneurship development. Their participation is important because they help translate policy measures into practical support services and can contribute valuable feedback on implementation conditions and business needs.

Another important target group includes **academic, research, and educational institutions**, as well as experts working in the fields of circular economy, digital transition, innovation policy, entrepreneurship, and gender equality. Their role is relevant both in contributing evidence and in supporting the development of learning content, methodological approaches, and knowledge-based policy recommendations.

The TPLC will also involve **women entrepreneur networks, and NGOs** that represent or support women entrepreneurs and inclusive innovation processes. These actors provide practical insights into the barriers faced by female businesses and help ensure that the policy learning process remains grounded in real needs and experiences.

Project partners, associated strategic partners, and Advisory board members are not considered as a separate target group, but rather participate in the TPLC within their respective institutional roles, such as public authorities, business support organisations, academic institutions, or civil society actors, etc. In this way, they contribute to the generation, validation, exchange, and transfer of knowledge while remaining embedded in the broader stakeholder structure of the Centre.

Although the TPLC is not primarily a direct support instrument for enterprises, the **wider beneficiaries** of its work are women entrepreneurs across the Danube Region and beyond. By improving the knowledge base, coordination capacity, and policy responsiveness of public authorities and support ecosystems, the TPLC is expected to contribute indirectly to better framework conditions, more accessible support measures, and more effective opportunities for circular and digital transition at company level.

In a broader sense, the TPLC will also benefit regional innovation ecosystems, stakeholder networks, and institutions engaged in circular economy, digitalisation, and smart specialisation processes. Through knowledge diffusion, exchange of good practices, and support for more coherent and implementation-oriented policy approaches, the Centre will contribute to stronger cooperation and more effective alignment between policy objectives and practical support structures.

5. TPLC Conceptual model

5.1 Role of the TPLC within WE.Circular

The TPLC functions as the policy learning and knowledge-transfer pillar of the WE.Circular project. Its role is to collect, structure, interpret, and transfer the knowledge generated through the project into formats that are useful for public authorities, policy makers, and stakeholder organisations involved in supporting women entrepreneurs in circular and digital transition.

Within the overall WE.Circular architecture, the TPLC creates the link between **evidence, practice, and policy learning**. It builds on the findings of the transnational analyses, the practical experience generated through the WE.Circular Labs and pilot testing, and the outputs developed through the co-design process, Regional Action Plans, peer review, and the Policy Making Camp. In this way, the TPLC ensures that project learning is not treated as isolated outputs, but as an evolving body of knowledge that can be reused, transferred, and further developed.

The TPLC complements the role of the WE.Circular Labs. While the Labs focus on company-level experimentation, testing, and business transformation, the TPLC focuses on system-level learning, policy interpretation, and transfer of practical insights into better support frameworks. It therefore acts as a bridge between entrepreneurial practice and policy improvement.

The Centre also strengthens the WE.Circular transnational learning network by providing a structured space for reflection, exchange of experience, identification of transferable lessons, and collaborative policy learning across countries. In this respect, the TPLC is not only a project activity, but a mechanism for consolidating and extending the long-term value of WE.Circular results.

5.2 Core activities

The TPLC will implement a set of interrelated activities aimed at supporting know-how generation, knowledge diffusion, and transfer of practical learning into policy-oriented formats.

A first core activity is **knowledge capture and systematisation**. The TPLC will collect and organise relevant outputs, findings, tested practices, policy insights, and lessons generated through the WE.Circular project. This includes evidence from analyses, policy

reviews, Labs, pilot testing, co-design processes, RAPs, peer review, and policy dialogue formats.

A second core activity is **development of learning content and tools**. The Centre will translate project evidence into accessible materials for policy makers and stakeholders, such as thematic summaries, methodological guidance, practical recommendations, policy-oriented learning resources, case-based insights, and structured content for the Virtual Toolbox.

A third core activity is **knowledge diffusion and transfer**. The TPLC will support dissemination and uptake of project learning through exchange formats, policy discussions, cross-country sharing, stakeholder dialogue, and targeted use of the Toolbox as a publicly accessible repository of relevant policy and practice content.

A fourth core activity is **support for policy reflection and improvement**. Building on tested approaches and project evidence, the Centre will help stakeholders reflect on implementation challenges, identify gaps, and explore how existing or future policy measures can become more realistic, coordinated, measurable, and responsive to women entrepreneurs' needs.

A fifth core activity is **transnational networking and collaborative learning**. The TPLC will provide a framework for interaction between project partners, policy makers, associated strategic partners, experts, and other ecosystem actors, helping to strengthen mutual learning and the transferability of good practices across countries.

5.3 Learning approach and methodology

The learning approach of the Transnational Policy Learning Centre is based on the understanding that policy learning is a continuous and interactive process. It does not consist only of collecting information or presenting project results, but of enabling public authorities, policy makers, and relevant stakeholders to reflect on evidence, compare experiences, identify transferable lessons, and use this knowledge to improve future policy responses and support measures.

The TPLC is therefore conceived as a structured environment for policy-oriented learning and exchange. Its methodology supports the interpretation of existing knowledge, the identification of practical implications, and the translation of findings into more usable insights for policy development, implementation, and adaptation. In this sense, the Centre promotes a learning process that connects analysis, dialogue, reflection, and application.

Box 1: Co-design Workshop – tested methodology for elaboration of Regional Action Plans

The Co-design Workshop in Prague served as a practical testing ground for a structured methodology for the development of Regional Action Plans. The workshop was organised as a guided and participatory process based on the **WE.Build: Action Plan Game**, a facilitation tool developed to help participants move step by step from identified challenges to realistic policy actions. The methodology was built around a sequence of timed stages, including challenge prioritisation, selection of strategic pillars, development of measures and actions, stakeholder assignment, definition of timeframe and budget, transfer of results into a RAP Canvas, and final group presentation. This staged approach ensured that the discussion remained focused, comparative, and oriented towards concrete outcomes rather than general debate.



Photo 1: Co-design Workshop, Prague, Czech Republic, June 2025, credit: RAPIV

An essential element of the methodology was the use of structured game materials. Participants worked with a main game board and card sets representing challenges, strategic pillars, measures, actions, stakeholders, timeframes, and budgets, while blank cards allowed them to introduce additional context-specific ideas. The process was further supported by an **Impact-Feasibility Matrix**, used to prioritise actions according to their realism and expected effect, and a **Stakeholder Engagement Map**, used to assign responsibility and clarify ownership. Measures and actions had to be translated into SMART interventions, and each action had to be linked with a lead stakeholder, supporting actors, an indicative timeframe, and an estimated budget. This made the methodology especially relevant as a policy-learning tool, because it required participants to connect ambition with implementation conditions.

The game rules also reinforced the collaborative dimension of the methodology. Participants were pre-assigned to intentionally mixed groups bringing together different types of organisations and different levels of experience. Within each group, a note keeper documented all ideas, decisions, and justifications, while a presenter summarised the final results. This supported structured discussion, collective ownership, and traceability of the reasoning behind the selected actions. As a result, the workshop not only produced practical input for the Regional Action Plans, but also helped participants understand how policy challenges can be translated into strategic priorities, measures, responsibilities, and implementation

commitments. Feedback from the event further confirmed that the methodology helped clarify the development of strategic documents, supported knowledge exchange, and improved participants' understanding of the links between actions, stakeholders, and monitoring.

A central element of this approach is the combination of different sources of policy-relevant knowledge. The TPLC draws on analytical work developed within the project, including the transnational policy analyses and the broader evidence base on women entrepreneurs' circular and digital transition. It also builds on the experiences generated through policy-oriented project activities, such as the co-design workshop for Regional Action Plans, the peer review of RAPs, and the Policy Making Camp. These activities have already shown the importance of moving beyond general recommendations towards more realistic, better-structured, and more implementable policy approaches.

Box 2: Peer-review of the Regional Action Plans - structured quality assurance and mutual learning

The peer-review of the Regional Action Plans, carried out in October 2025 in Varazdin, Croatia, provides a second practical example of a tested policy-learning format relevant to the future functioning of the TPLC. Unlike the Co-design Workshop, which focused on co-creation of action plans, the peer-review methodology was designed to assess, validate, and improve already developed RAPs through a structured review process. Using a common peer-review questionnaire, the evaluation examined five main dimensions: overall strategy and relevance, coherence and complementarity, measures and actions, implementation and monitoring, and recommendations for improvement. In this way, the methodology created a common framework for comparing plans across countries and identifying both national specificities and cross-cutting policy lessons.

The peer-review process also demonstrated how policy learning can be strengthened through critical reflection and transnational feedback. Peers assessed whether the RAPs were aligned with WE.Circular strategic pillars, action-oriented and measurable, complementary and transferable, and sustainable and policy-relevant. The review generated concrete recommendations on issues such as clearer implementation frameworks, stronger monitoring and KPIs, broader stakeholder ownership, stronger use of existing WE.Circular outputs, and improved feasibility and resource planning. These findings are particularly relevant for the TPLC, because they show how structured review can help move policy documents from broad strategic intent towards stronger realism, accountability, and transferability.



Photo 2: Peer-review meeting, Varazdin, Croatia, October 2025, credit: TECHPARK

A further methodological value of the peer-review lies in the identification of cross-cutting themes across the partner countries. The report highlights recurring lessons related to sustainability of project results, alignment with wider strategic frameworks, clearer assignment of roles and responsibilities, robust monitoring systems, diverse stakeholder engagement, and stronger focus on feasibility. This confirms that peer-review is not only a quality check, but also an important learning mechanism through which countries can compare approaches, recognise common weaknesses, and improve policy design through shared experience. In this sense, the peer-review of the RAPs already functioned as a practical example of the type of mutual learning, validation, and policy improvement processes that the TPLC is expected to continue and institutionalise further.

The methodology of the TPLC is based on structured reflection and exchange among different stakeholder groups. By bringing together public authorities, policy makers, business support actors, experts, researchers, and civil society organisations, the Centre creates conditions for joint interpretation of challenges, comparison of policy responses, and discussion of what makes support measures more feasible, relevant, and transferable. This exchange is particularly valuable in a transnational setting, where countries often face similar issues, but operate under different institutional and policy conditions.

Box 3: Policy Making Camp – immersive format for policy reflection and co-creation

The Policy Making Camp organised in Budapest in December 2025 provides a third practical example of a tested policy-learning format relevant to the future work of the TPLC. The event was designed as a two-day immersive co-design environment for policy makers and stakeholders, aimed at strengthening their understanding of innovative circular business models, their impacts, supportive policy frameworks, and the use of funding opportunities. Methodologically, the camp was informed by the approach of the Cambridge Policy Boot Camp, with emphasis on evidence-based policymaking, stakeholder analysis, collaborative problem-

solving, and practice-oriented learning in a concentrated format.

A key methodological strength of the Camp was its deliberate progression from **understanding to action**. The first day focused on building a shared understanding of policy ecosystems for circularity, digitalisation, and inclusion through thematic presentations, an interactive panel, and group work on mapping the current policy landscape, including gaps, overlaps, and opportunities. The second day shifted towards practical policy design, with participants working in a policy co-creation lab to develop gender-smart circular and digital policy proposals, followed by policy pitch sessions and feedback. This staged structure ensured that policy solutions were grounded first in system understanding and only then translated into more concrete proposals.

The group methodology also contributed significantly to the learning value of the event. Participants were organised into balanced multi-stakeholder groups, bringing together public authorities, business support organisations, academia, and NGOs. Each group included a facilitator to guide the process, note takers to document the final action-plan details, and a presenter to share the joint outcomes. This ensured methodological consistency, active participation, and traceable outputs, while also reflecting the principle that policy learning is strongest when multiple perspectives are brought together in a structured way.

The Camp combined several complementary tools: thematic presentations to frame the challenge, panel discussion to gather insights on existing policy frameworks and gaps, workshops to compare policy landscapes and best practices, a co-creation lab for team-based design of policy proposals, and policy pitch sessions to test and refine ideas through feedback. Summary documents and recommendation packs were foreseen as outputs of the event and intended for use in the development of the Transnational Strategy and inclusion in the Virtual Toolbox. In this sense, the Camp did not only support learning during the event itself, but also created reusable policy-oriented outputs.

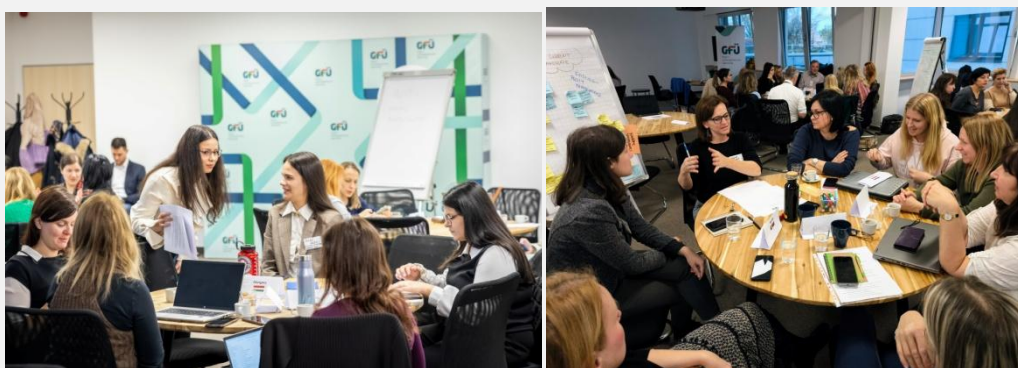


Photo 3: Policy Making Camp, Budapest, Hungary, December 2025, credit: MGfU

The event report further confirms the value of this format for future TPLC activities. Participants appreciated the clear structure of the programme, the practical orientation of the sessions, and the way in which the interactive methodology made complex policy-making concepts easier to understand. Group work and discussion were highlighted as especially valuable for knowledge exchange and collaborative learning. Taken together, these elements show that the Policy

Making Camp already tested a robust format for policy reflection, transnational exchange, and co-creation that the TPLC can further build on and institutionalise.

An important feature of the TPLC methodology is its focus on transferability and adaptation. The Centre is not intended to promote one uniform policy model, but rather to help stakeholders understand which approaches may be transferred, under what conditions, and with what adjustments. In this way, policy learning is treated not as replication, but as an informed process of contextual interpretation and adaptation.

The TPLC also supports policy learning through systematisation and reuse of knowledge. Findings, tested approaches, and practical lessons are captured, organised, and translated into learning content that can support future policy reflection and policy design. Through its connection with the Virtual Toolbox, this content can be made accessible in a structured way and used by policy makers and stakeholders beyond the immediate project activities.

5.4 Roles

The functioning of the Transnational Policy Learning Centre relies on cooperation between the project partners and the broader stakeholder network involved in WE.Circular. While the TPLC is conceived as a shared transnational structure, its coordination, content development, and knowledge transfer functions require clearly defined roles in order to ensure coherence, quality, and continuity.

A central role in the **establishment and hosting of the TPLC** is played by **PP9 – MGFU and PP3 - IRS** where the Centre is linked to an existing information, entrepreneurship, and knowledge management structure. This provides the TPLC with an institutional basis and supports its role as a mechanism for structured knowledge diffusion and transfer. In addition to its hosting function, MGFU has a coordinating role in ensuring the overall functioning of the Centre, the consistency of its conceptual framework, and its connection with the broader WE.Circular learning architecture. Besides, MGFU contributes to the digital and knowledge-transfer dimension of the TPLC through the development and management of the **Virtual Toolbox**. In this respect, MGFU has a key role in supporting the organisation, accessibility, and wider dissemination of policy-relevant content, findings, good practices, and strategic resources generated within the project. Through this connection, the TPLC is strengthened not only as a learning and exchange mechanism, but also as a practical entry point to structured digital knowledge resources.

The **project partners** contribute to the TPLC through their thematic knowledge, project experience, national and regional stakeholder connections, and practical results generated within the project. Their role is to provide relevant evidence, identify transferable learning, contribute to the development and validation of content, and support the exchange of knowledge across countries. In this sense, the partners act both as contributors to and users of the TPLC.

The **associated strategic partners, advisory board members, and invited experts** contribute according to their institutional role and thematic expertise. Their involvement supports the relevance, quality, and transferability of the learning process by bringing in additional perspectives from policy, practice, academia, business support, and civil society. They may support the Centre through participation in reflection and exchange processes, validation of policy-relevant content, and dissemination of results within their own institutional and professional networks.

The **public authorities and stakeholder organisations involved in the TPLC** are not only recipients of learning content, but also active participants in the policy learning process. Their role is to bring implementation experience, policy perspectives, and institutional knowledge into the exchange, helping to ensure that the Centre remains grounded in practical needs and realities.

Quality assurance within the TPLC should be ensured through collaborative review, stakeholder feedback, and continuous reflection on the relevance and usability of the content developed. In this way, the roles within the Centre are not limited to formal task allocation, but contribute to an ongoing process of co-creation, validation, and knowledge transfer.

5.5 Integration with existing structures

The Transnational Policy Learning Centre is conceived as an integrated element of the broader WE.Circular support architecture rather than as a stand-alone structure. Its added value lies in its ability to connect and build on the project's existing learning and knowledge-transfer components, while providing a more structured framework for their long-term use and further development.

Within the WE.Circular project, the TPLC is closely linked to the Transnational learning network and the WE.Circular Labs. These structures provide the Centre with both content and functional relevance. The transnational learning network creates the basis for exchange, dialogue, and mutual learning across countries, while the Labs contribute practical experience and tested approaches emerging from real implementation

contexts. Together, these elements provide the TPLC with a strong foundation for structured policy learning and knowledge transfer.

The TPLC therefore acts as an integrating mechanism that helps connect these different project elements into a more coherent learning and transfer process. Rather than duplicating existing outputs, it supports their interpretation, systematisation, and reuse in a policy learning context. In this way, the Centre strengthens the continuity and usability of project results and contributes to turning separate activities into a more lasting and structured knowledge framework.

At institutional level, the TPLC is linked to the existing information, entrepreneurship, and knowledge management environment of **MGFU**, which provides the Centre with an operational basis and supports more effective knowledge diffusion beyond the immediate project cycle. This institutional anchoring is important for the sustainability of the Centre, as it connects the TPLC to an existing structure capable of supporting continuity and long-term relevance.

6. Virtual toolbox

6.1 Aim of the Virtual Toolbox

The Virtual Toolbox aims to function as a centralized and digital knowledge-sharing online platform mainly for policymakers and stakeholders to develop better national strategies for the Danube Region, policy instruments for women entrepreneurs to support circular and industry 4.0 and S3 transition. The available information in the toolbox focuses on national findings from the different policy analysis, identified policy measures and good practices from the WE.Circular project.

Since the Virtual Toolbox serves as a comprehensive platform for a variety of tasks, it is linked with the Transnational Policy Learning Center (TPLC) that offers essential tools for policy makers from the Danube Region and beyond, and know-how generation, knowledge diffusion and best practice transfer.

One of the main benefits of the Virtual Toolbox is its centralized and digital feature that makes it possible for target groups to easily reach the relevant data and information, as well as to search through various categorized and tagged sources or documents. At the same time, decision-makers can swiftly tap into expert opinions and case studies accessible in the platform. All the available information in the Virtual Toolbox is publicly available for interested parties.

6.2 Domain

From a technical point of view, the Virtual Toolbox is an online platform available under the wecirculartoolbox.eu domain and will be available for 5 years after project completion. Through the domain, users and administrators have access to reach the uploaded documents on the Virtual Toolbox platform.

6.3 Language

The used language on the Virtual Toolbox online platform is set mainly to English, therefore, the translation of the context and information for all the DR languages is not required. All project documents uploaded to the platform are also created in English language.

However, some of the relevant strategic documents available only in PP's languages will be uploaded in original languages in order to enable the local stakeholders to get familiar with the document.

6.4 Structure

The main menu points of the platform are determined in a way to fully support the policy making process for the target audience of the website.

1. Home
2. Countries
 - a. National strategies: Users can discover the national strategies and country specific analysis related to Circular Economy, Digitalization, Women Entrepreneurs, and Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3). Explore each topic below and dive deeper into the most relevant documents.
 - b. Policy instruments and incentives: this section provides an overview of key national policy tools and incentive mechanisms supporting women-led enterprises, the circular economy, Industry 4.0 and smart specialization objectives.
 - c. Regional action plan (RAP): the Regional Action Plans translate the regions', countries' WE.Circular project's related strategic objectives into concrete, region-specific actions, addressing key challenges and opportunities related to women-led enterprises, digitalisation, the circular economy and Smart Specialisation strategies
3. Policy landscape

a. European policy landscape

- i. European policies and strategies: Users can discover the key European policies and strategies shaping the future of Circular Economy, Digitalization, Women Entrepreneurs, and Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3). Explore each topic below and dive deeper into the most relevant documents.
- ii. Policy instruments and incentives: this section provides an overview of key policy tools and incentive mechanisms supporting women-led enterprises, the circular economy, Industry 4.0 adoption, and smart specialisation objectives across Europe.
 1. Funding and Access to Finance: Users can explore funding opportunities and financial instruments that enable innovation, growth and sustainable transformation.
 2. Taxation, Financial and Other Incentives: User can learn about tax measures and incentive schemes designed to stimulate green investment and circular competitiveness.

b. National policy landscape

4. Challenges

- a. European challenges: this section explores the current European challenges through the eyes of SMEs.
- b. Regional challenges: this section explores regional challenges in the Danube Region through the lens of women-led enterprises, digitalization, the circular economy, and Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3), with a focus on skills needs as well as relevant policy and legislative frameworks.
 - i. Joint Transnational Skills Needs and Gaps Analysis
 - ii. Transnational Analysis - Policy and Legislative Framework
- c. National challenges: this section explores national challenges in the Danube Region through the lens of women-led enterprises, digitalization, the circular economy and Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3), with a focus on skills needs as well as relevant policy and legislative frameworks.
 - i. Skills Gaps and Needs Analysis
 - ii. National Level Review - Policy and Legislative Framework

5. Good practices

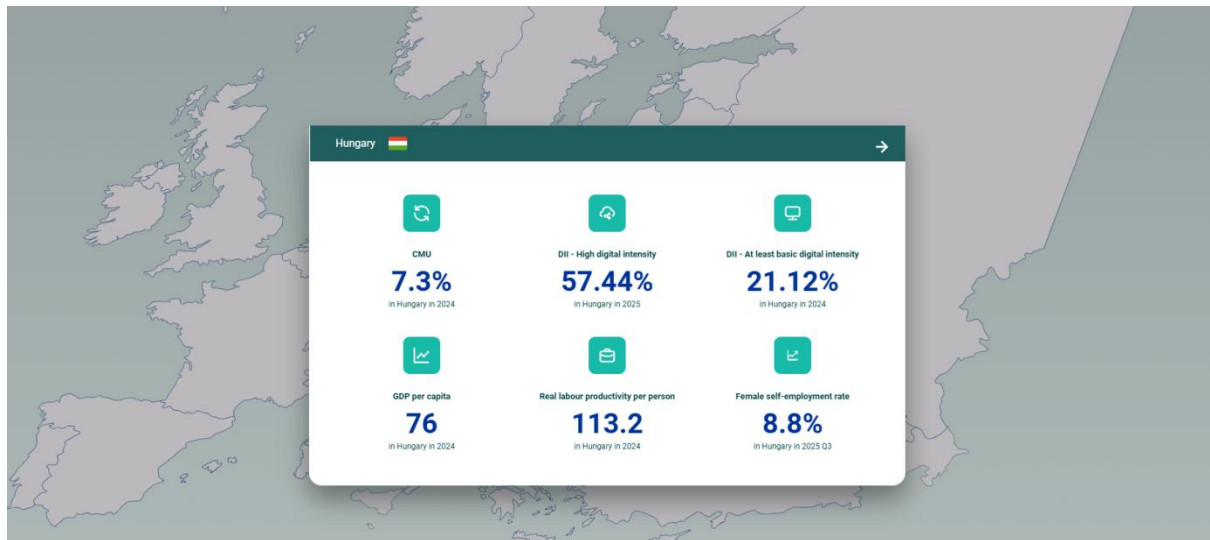
- a. Good practices collected by the Project Partners

- b. Action Plan: the Action Plans translate the project's strategic objectives into concrete, region-specific actions, addressing key challenges and opportunities related to women-led enterprises, digitalisation, the circular economy and Smart Specialisation strategies.
 - i. Methodology
 - ii. Country specific regional actions plans
 - c. WE.Circular Policy Proposals: this section presents a structured methodology and evidence-based policy proposals aimed at addressing key challenges at regional and national levels across the Danube Region.
 - i. Co-creation workshop methodologies
 - ii. WE.Circular Policy Proposal
 - d. Circular Business Models: through the active participation of female start-ups and stakeholders in the 12 WE.Circular Labs, six business models were developed within the WE.Circular project to accelerate the transition to a circular economy among women entrepreneurs. The validation process in the Labs has ensured that each model effectively responds to real business needs and supports the transition toward circularity.
 - 6. Networks and Contacts: Users can connect with key stakeholders, build strategic partnerships and unlock new collaboration opportunities across the ecosystem.
 - 7. Capacity building
 - a. Mentoring and Training Catalogues: Users can access tailored mentoring and training opportunities designed to build skills, strengthen capacities and support sustainable growth and innovation targeting women entrepreneurs.
 - b. WE.Circular Training Materials
 - 8. Data hub: Users can browse high-quality, reliable data and statistics on the circular economy, Industry 4.0, and women-led enterprises in the WE.Circular countries to support informed decision-making and effective strategic planning.

Clicking on "Country", it leads the user to a map where all WE.Circular countries can be found (12 in total). Selecting the country, it shows 6 major indicators and a small description about the current situation in connection to circularity, digitalization, economic performance, S3 and WE in the selected country. Further discovering the selected country is possible by choosing from the subcategories.

The indicators are the following:

1. CMU
2. DII – High digital intensity
3. DII – At least basic digital intensity
4. GDP per capita
5. Real labour productivity per person
6. Female self-employment rate



7. Sustainability

The sustainability of the Centre depends on its ability to remain relevant, accessible, and transferable beyond the formal implementation period of the WE.Circular project. In this context, sustainability is understood not only as the continuation of a project output, but as the longer-term use of the knowledge, methods, learning content, and policy learning approaches developed through the project.

A key basis for sustainability is the fact that services provided by the TLPC will be available free of charge. This gives the Centre value not only for the current partnership, but also for regions beyond it, which may draw inspiration from the model and adapt it for the development of new policies, strategies, instruments, tools, and measures supporting women entrepreneurs in circular, digital, and smart specialisation transition. In this sense, the TLPC is conceived as a transferable model that can contribute to broader policy learning and policy innovation outside the immediate project framework.

The sustainability of the Centre is also strengthened through its institutional anchoring within an existing information, entrepreneurship, and knowledge-management environment. This creates a basis for continuity that goes beyond temporary project arrangements and supports the longer-term relevance of the TPLC as a mechanism for structured knowledge diffusion and policy learning.

An equally important sustainability element is the connection between the TPLC and the Virtual Toolbox. Through the Toolbox, policy-relevant content, project findings, good practices, and methodological resources can remain accessible to users after the project closure. This digital continuity supports the longer-term visibility and usability of the knowledge generated through WE.Circular and increases the practical value of the TPLC for different stakeholder groups.

The transferability and sustainability of the TPLC will be further supported through active dissemination and promotion of project results among wider policy and stakeholder communities. The project foresees outreach through high-level dissemination and policy dialogue formats, including EU-level and transnational events, where the results will be presented, discussed, and shared with politicians, policy experts, businesses, civil society organisations, and academia. These forms of dissemination are important not only for visibility, but also for encouraging uptake of the model and its adaptation in other countries and regions.

Additional sustainability potential lies in the connection of WE.Circular results with wider macro-regional and thematic policy platforms. The promotion of project outcomes through relevant networks and strategic working groups creates opportunities to transfer the results to additional regions in the Danube Region and beyond. This contributes to the longer-term policy relevance of the TPLC and helps position it as part of a broader learning and exchange ecosystem.

The sustainability of the TPLC is also reinforced by its links with the wider WE.Circular framework. The WE.Circular Labs and the WE.Circular Learning Network will continue to function as important knowledge pools for interested stakeholders, and their results can feed into the longer-term use of the Centre. Their promotion through partner networks, national and international stakeholders, and public authorities supports the wider visibility of project approaches and increases the possibility that learning generated within the project will continue to be reused. Additional materials can be further developed and updated in order to attract new users, maintain relevance, and support the improvement of women's skills and employability prospects in relation to circular, digital, and innovation-oriented transition.

A further contribution to sustainability comes from the visibility of the project's practical results. The innovative business models, successful case studies, and experiences generated through pilot testing can continue to serve as reference points for other interested organisations and territories. Their promotion through related projects, initiatives, and stakeholder communities increases the likelihood that the approaches developed under WE.Circular will be replicated, adapted, or further developed in other settings.

The women entrepreneurs involved in pilot testing also represent an important sustainability asset. As direct users of the WE.Circular support activities, they can act as ambassadors of the project by sharing their practical experience within the wider female entrepreneurship community. Their role can help expand the outreach of the project, strengthen trust in the relevance of its methods and results, and support the transfer of learning to additional target groups and territories.

8. Expected results and impact

A more structured and accessible framework for policy learning, knowledge transfer, and exchange of good practices related to women entrepreneurs' circular and digital transition is expected to emerge through the establishment of the Transnational Policy Learning Centre. By bringing together project evidence, tested approaches, and policy-oriented learning processes, the Centre will help transform dispersed project outputs into a more coherent and usable body of knowledge for policy makers and stakeholder organisations.

An important result will be the creation of a functioning transnational mechanism for capturing, organising, and transferring policy-relevant knowledge generated through the WE.Circular project. This includes analytical findings, practical lessons, methodological approaches, and examples of tested solutions that can support better-informed policy reflection and support design.

Improved accessibility of this knowledge for the main target groups is also expected. Through the connection with the Virtual Toolbox and the wider WE.Circular framework, policy makers, public authorities, business support organisations, researchers, and other stakeholders will gain easier access to structured content, transferable learning, and practical resources relevant to women entrepreneurs' circular, digital, and smart specialisation transition.

A particularly important expected result concerns **the strengthening of policy makers' capacity to further develop and improve policy measures and tools for women entrepreneurs' circular transition**. The policy learning processes supported through the Centre are expected to contribute directly to the implementation, refinement, and future use of the already developed Regional Action Plans, helping ensure that these plans remain grounded in project evidence, practical experience, and stakeholder input. In this way, the TPLC is expected to support the further development of more realistic, coordinated, and implementation-oriented policy measures in compliance with the strategic priorities and measures set in the Transnational Strategy for Women Entrepreneurs' Circular Transition.

The Regional Action Plans already developed within the project represent an important policy result in them and provide a concrete entry point for the practical use of the TPLC. The strategic directions emerging from the WE.Circular Labs are expected to continue feeding the implementation and future improvement of these Regional Action Plans, strengthening their relevance and grounding them in practical testing and stakeholder experience.

Another major expected result is the elaboration of the **Transnational Strategy for Women Entrepreneurs' Circular Transition**. This document is expected to build on the full range of project results, including piloted business models, the WE.Circular Labs, the Learning Network, the Policy Learning Centre, and the already developed Regional Action Plans. It will provide a more consolidated policy framework at transnational level and include clear measures and an action plan for further development of support for women entrepreneurs' circular transition. The Strategy is also expected to include a dedicated section on the sustainability of the Policy Learning Centre and on the continuity and further use of the Regional Action Plans.

Stronger transnational exchange and collaborative learning among partner countries and wider stakeholder groups represent another important result. By supporting comparison of experiences, interpretation of practical lessons, and identification of transferable approaches, the Centre will contribute to stronger mutual learning and a better understanding of how support measures can be adapted across different policy and institutional contexts.

At impact level, stronger policy capacity is expected among public authorities and stakeholder organisations involved in designing and implementing support measures for women entrepreneurs. Better access to knowledge, tested approaches, and policy learning resources should support more informed, realistic, and implementation-oriented decision-making.

A further effect should be better alignment between policy ambition and practical support conditions. By drawing on project evidence and implementation experience, stakeholders will be in a stronger position to understand which policy measures are feasible, where stronger coordination is needed, and how support frameworks can become more responsive to the real needs of women entrepreneurs.

In a broader perspective, the transferability of WE.Circular results beyond the immediate partnership is also expected to increase. Because the concept, methods, and learning resources developed through the Centre will be accessible and reusable, they may inspire other regions and institutions to adapt similar approaches in their own policy and support contexts. This gives the Centre relevance not only as a project output, but also as a model for wider policy learning and replication.

Indirectly, improved framework conditions for women entrepreneurs may also result from stronger policy learning, better coordination, and a more responsive support environment. Although the Centre does not provide direct business support in the same way as the Labs, its influence on policy learning, Regional Action Plan implementation and improvement, and transnational strategic development is expected to contribute to more favourable conditions for women-led businesses engaging in circular and digital transition.

9. Risk and mitigation measures

The effective functioning and longer-term value of the Transnational Policy Learning Centre depend on several conditions related to stakeholder engagement, content relevance, coordination, accessibility, and continuity. As a transnational learning and knowledge-transfer mechanism, the Centre may face risks linked both to implementation during the project and to its sustainability beyond the project period. For this reason, potential risks need to be addressed through a combination of clear coordination, practical organisation, and integration with the wider WE.Circular framework.

Potential risk	Description of the risk	Potential to happen	Mitigation measures
Limited engagement of policy makers and stakeholders	The TPLC depends on the active involvement of public authorities, policy makers, and intermediary organisations. If participation remains low, the Centre may have reduced practical relevance and	Medium	Use existing WE.Circular partner and stakeholder networks for targeted outreach; clearly communicate the practical value of the TPLC; connect learning content to

Potential risk	Description of the risk	Potential to happen	Mitigation measures
	weaker uptake of its learning content.		concrete policy needs and existing strategic processes.
Weak continuity after project closure	If the TPLC is not sufficiently institutionally anchored or its resources are not maintained, its longer-term value may decrease after the project ends.	Medium	Ensure institutional embedding of the TPLC in an existing structure; provide digital continuity through the Virtual Toolbox; promote reuse of materials and continued accessibility of resources.
Limited transferability across regions	Policy measures and learning approaches may not be directly applicable in all countries due to different institutional, policy, and ecosystem conditions.	High	Present results as adaptable practices rather than fixed models; provide contextual guidance; promote interpretation and adjustment of lessons to regional realities.
Weak uptake of TPLC results in policy practice	Even if learning content is produced, it may not be sufficiently used in the development, implementation, or improvement of policy measures and tools.	Medium	Link TPLC outputs to Regional Action Plans, the Transnational Strategy, and other policy processes; promote practical applicability; involve policy makers in validation and exchange activities.
Perception of the TPLC as a project-only structure	External users may see the TPLC as relevant only within WE.Circular and not as a reusable model for other regions and institutions.	Medium	Ensure free accessibility of the concept and key resources; promote the TPLC through dissemination events, networks, and macro-regional platforms; position it as a transferable model for policy learning.
Low visibility beyond the partnership	If dissemination remains limited, the TPLC may not reach wider stakeholder groups or inspire replication in other countries and regions.	Medium	Use EU, transnational, national, and regional dissemination channels; promote results through partner networks and relevant policy platforms; use successful cases and ambassadors to widen outreach.
Limited updating of content over time	If no additional materials or updates are made, the TPLC may gradually lose relevance for future users.	Low	Periodically update and enrich content where possible; reuse materials developed through related activities and future initiatives; keep the Toolbox structured and user-oriented

Resources

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Report from the Policy Analysis / Transnational Analysis – Policy and Legislative Framework. WE.Circular project, 2025.

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WE.Circular Labs – Concept (D.2.1.1). WE.Circular project, 04/2026.

Pilot Testing Report (D.2.4.2). WE.Circular project, 04/2026.

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WE.Build: Action Plan Game. WE.Circular project, 05/2025.

Report from Peer-review of the Regional Action Plans (D.3.3.2). WE.Circular project, 11/2025.

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