

WOMEN GOING GREENER
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Women Going Greener Action Plan

The Roadmap to a Greener Future



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Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving business landscape, sustainability has become a key priority for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). While environmental responsibility is gaining momentum, women-led businesses often face unique challenges in adopting green practices, accessing sustainable financing, and integrating eco-friendly innovations into their operations. Recognizing this gap, the Women Going Greener (WGG) Action Plan has been developed to provide a structured roadmap for supporting female entrepreneurs in their transition towards a more sustainable and resilient business model.

This Action Plan is a result of the "WomEn Going Greener – Reducing the Environmental Footprint of Female Entrepreneurship" project, implemented by WEnCoop, Rinascita, and Elektropionir. It serves as a comprehensive guide for policymakers, business support organizations, financial institutions, and women entrepreneurs, offering practical steps, policy recommendations, and resources to enable greener business practices.

Purpose of the Action Plan

The WGG Action Plan aims to:

- Provide clear guidance and tools to help women-led SMEs integrate sustainability into their business strategies.
- Map out existing policies, legal frameworks, and institutional measures that support green entrepreneurship.
- Highlight barriers and opportunities for female entrepreneurs in the green economy.
- Showcase best practices and case studies from Greece, Italy, and Serbia to inspire action.
- Offer a toolkit of resources, including funding options, green checklists, and self-assessment tools.

Target Audience

This Action Plan is designed for:

- Female entrepreneurs and SMEs seeking to incorporate sustainable practices into their businesses.
- Business support organizations and networks that promote female entrepreneurship.
- Policymakers and government institutions working on sustainability and gender equality.
- Financial institutions and investors interested in supporting green and women-led businesses.

Background Context

The European Union’s Green Deal, Circular Economy Action Plan, and Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) have set ambitious goals for a climate-neutral economy by 2050. These policies create both challenges and opportunities for women-led businesses, as they navigate new regulations, funding mechanisms, and sustainability requirements.

Despite progress, female entrepreneurs remain underrepresented in key green sectors such as renewable energy, cleantech, and circular economy initiatives. They also face higher barriers to accessing finance, networking opportunities, and sustainability training. Addressing these challenges requires targeted policies, institutional support, and knowledge-sharing initiatives—elements that this Action Plan seeks to address.

By equipping female entrepreneurs with the right tools, knowledge, and financial resources, the WGG Action Plan strives to bridge the gap between women’s entrepreneurship and the green economy, fostering a more inclusive, sustainable, and competitive business environment.

Current Landscape Analysis

Policy & Legal Framework

Greece

The policy and legal framework supporting sustainable business practices in Greece is shaped by both European Union (EU) regulations and national laws aimed at fostering environmental responsibility, energy efficiency, and circular economy principles among businesses, particularly SMEs.

EU Legal and Policy Framework

At the EU level, sustainability legislation has evolved significantly, with major initiatives driving corporate responsibility and environmental protection. Key frameworks include:

- The European Green Deal – A strategic roadmap aiming for carbon neutrality by 2050, with policies encouraging businesses to adopt green practices, increase energy efficiency, and invest in renewable energy.
- The Circular Economy Action Plan – A policy package promoting sustainable product design, waste reduction, and resource efficiency, including regulations on eco-design and sustainable consumption.
- Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) – A voluntary framework helping businesses improve environmental performance and regulatory compliance.
- Directive 2014/95/EU (Non-Financial Reporting Directive) – Requires large companies to disclose information on environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors, influencing supply chains and SME practices.
- EU Taxonomy Regulation – Establishes criteria for sustainable investments, guiding businesses and financial institutions toward green investments.

National Legal and Policy Framework in Greece

Greece has integrated these EU directives into its legal system while developing national policies and incentives to promote sustainability among SMEs:

- Law 4409/2016 (GRI Standards Implementation) – Encourages businesses to adopt sustainability reporting, enhancing transparency and ESG compliance.
- National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) – Aligns with EU climate goals, setting targets for emissions reduction and renewable energy adoption, with incentives for SMEs investing in green technologies.
- National Strategy for Circular Economy – Introduced by the Ministry of Environment and Energy, this plan promotes waste reduction, recycling initiatives, and sustainable production practices.
- Subsidy and Financing Programs – Initiatives such as the “Exiconomo” program (for energy-efficient building upgrades), grants for renewable energy investments, and green loans help businesses adopt sustainable practices.

- National Recovery and Resilience Plan (Greece 2.0) – A €35.95 billion initiative funding projects in green energy, sustainable mobility, and digital transformation, benefiting SMEs.
- Employment Program for the Green Economy and Women – Supports female entrepreneurs in sustainable industries, fostering inclusive green business growth.

The combination of EU regulations and national policies provides a strong foundation for sustainable business development in Greece. However, challenges such as bureaucratic complexity, funding limitations, and technological gaps remain. Continued investment in financial incentives, simplified regulatory frameworks, and enhanced collaboration between institutions and businesses will be essential for accelerating Greece’s transition to a greener and more resilient economy.

Italy

EU Legal and Policy Framework

Italy aligns with EU policies that support female entrepreneurship and sustainability through various initiatives:

- European Innovation Council (EIC): Supports women entrepreneurs through funding, mentoring, and programs like WomenTech EU and the Women Leadership Programme.
- Single Market Programme (SMP): Provides business support, funding advice, and partnerships to women-led SMEs.
- Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs: Facilitates exchanges between new and experienced entrepreneurs.
- EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025: Focuses on reducing gender disparities in STEM fields and promoting women’s participation in the green economy.
- Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD): Requires businesses to disclose sustainability-related financial and social data, improving transparency and corporate responsibility.

National Legal and Policy Framework in Italy

Italy has introduced laws to promote sustainability and female entrepreneurship:

- Legislative Decree 254/2016 (now updated to align with CSRD 2022/2464):
 - Mandates sustainability reporting for large enterprises, with a gradual extension to smaller companies by 2028.
 - Requires firms to report on gender equality, environmental impact, and worker rights.
 - Banks and financial institutions are encouraged to integrate sustainability criteria into investment decisions.

- NRRP (National Recovery and Resilience Plan) – Mission 5:
 - Allocates €400 million to fund at least 2,400 women-led SMEs by 2026.
 - Smart&Start Italia: Provides €100 million to support innovative startups, particularly those led by women.

Serbia

As a candidate country for EU accession, Serbia is gradually harmonizing its laws with EU directives, including the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), EU Taxonomy Regulation, and Waste Framework Directive. Serbia has adopted some policies inspired by the EU Green Deal, particularly in renewable energy, waste reduction, and SME support. However, in the legal sense, the transposition of legal norms is still ongoing..

National Legal and Policy Framework in Serbia

Serbia has established a comprehensive legal framework governing SMEs, sustainability, and environmental protection:

- Law on Environmental Protection – Establishes environmental responsibility for businesses, including pollution prevention and control and resource efficiency.
- Law on Waste Management – Regulates waste disposal, recycling, and extended producer responsibility.
- Law on Packaging Waste – Governs the management, reduction, and recycling of packaging waste, establishing producer responsibility and sustainability requirements.
- Waste Management Strategy (2022-2031) – Prioritizes waste reduction, recycling, and circular business models.
- Law on Climate Change – Regulates measures for climate mitigation and adaptation, including emissions reduction, carbon trading, and climate resilience strategies.
- Law on Renewable Energy Sources – Encourages investment in renewable energy, enabling incentives for solar and wind energy projects.
- Law on Energy Efficiency and Rational use of Energy – Defines energy efficiency and related terms, promotes energy-saving measures and stipulates periodic energy audits for some types of businesses.
- Law on Social Entrepreneurship – Supports social enterprises, providing financial aid and mentorship.
- Law on Gender Equality – Mandates equal opportunities across all sectors, including entrepreneurship.

- Roadmap for Circular Economy in Serbia (2020) – A strategic document outlining goals, key sectors, and measures for transitioning to a circular economy.
- Circular Economy development program 2022-2022 - strategic framework aimed at transitioning from a linear to a sustainable economic model, focusing on waste reduction, resource reuse, and recycling. The program's goal is to enhance environmental responsibility among businesses, improve waste management, and promote innovation in the green economy sector.

Institutional Measures

Greece

To support the transition of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) towards sustainability, Greece offers a range of funding programs, subsidies, and financial incentives aligned with EU policies and national strategies. These initiatives aim to enhance energy efficiency, promote renewable energy adoption, and encourage circular economy practices.

1. EU-Funded Programs and Grants

- Horizon Europe – The EU’s flagship research and innovation program (2021–2027) provides funding for green technologies, energy efficiency, and sustainable business solutions, particularly for SMEs innovating in the environmental sector.
- European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) – Offers financial support for SMEs investing in sustainable energy, eco-innovation, and circular economy initiatives.
- EU LIFE Program – Provides grants for projects that contribute to environmental protection, climate action, and the circular economy, with a focus on business sustainability.
- NSRF (National Strategic Reference Framework) 2021-2027 – Allocates EU structural funds for SMEs, including grants for green innovation, energy efficiency upgrades, and sustainability training programs.

2. National Funding and Subsidy Programs

- National Recovery and Resilience Plan (Greece 2.0) – A €35.95 billion initiative, partially funded by the EU, supporting projects related to renewable energy, green mobility, and digital transformation for SMEs.
- “Exiconomo” (Save) Program – Provides subsidies for energy efficiency improvements in buildings, such as insulation upgrades, solar panel installations, and heat pump adoption.
- “Save – Be Independent” Program – Supports SMEs and individuals in reducing energy dependence through the adoption of renewable energy sources (RES).

- Green Loans & Financing Mechanisms – Greek banks, in collaboration with the state, offer preferential loans for businesses investing in sustainability, such as the Green Loan Program, which funds solar panel installations, energy-efficient equipment, and waste management solutions.
- Employment Program for the Green Economy and Women – Encourages female entrepreneurship in renewable energy, circular economy, and sustainable agriculture by providing funding and mentorship.

3. Institutional Support and Resources

- Enterprise Greece – Assists SMEs in accessing green investment opportunities, funding sources, and market expansion strategies.
- Public Employment Service of Greece (DYPA) – Offers training and support programs to enhance the skills of employees in sustainability-related fields.
- Chambers of Commerce & Industry – Provide business advisory services, funding guidance, and networking opportunities for SMEs looking to transition to green practices.

While Greece offers substantial funding and resources to support SMEs in their green transition, bureaucratic challenges and access to financing remain key barriers. To maximize the impact of these programs, increased awareness, simplified application procedures, and stronger institutional collaboration will be essential. SMEs that proactively engage with these funding opportunities can enhance competitiveness, reduce costs, and contribute to Greece's sustainable economic growth.

Italy

Italy's institutional support for female entrepreneurship and sustainability is growing, involving both public and private sectors:

- Chamber of Commerce and Unioncamere: Collect data and promote gender equality in entrepreneurship.
- Intesa Sanpaolo Bank: Provides a €500 million fund to support female entrepreneurs and innovation.
- GammaDonna Award: Recognizes and accelerates the growth of women-led startups.
- Ecosystem Support: Institutions collaborate with incubators, accelerators, and investment networks to bridge the funding gap for women-led businesses.

Serbia

Serbia has developed some institutional support mechanisms for SMEs and women entrepreneurs, led by government agencies, financial institutions, and international donors.

Government-Led Support

- Ministry of Economy & Development Fund of Serbia – Provides financial incentives, startup grants, and entrepreneurship training.
- Serbian Chamber of Commerce – Offers networking events, training programs, and funding access for women entrepreneurs.
- Coordination Body for Gender Equality – Oversees policy implementation and ensures that female entrepreneurs receive equal access to funding and resources.
- Horizon Europe – The EU’s flagship research and innovation program (2021–2027) provides funding for green technologies, energy efficiency, and sustainable business solutions, particularly for SMEs innovating in the environmental sector.

Financial Support & Green Transition Programs

- Entrepreneurship Development Program – In 2023, Serbia allocated €5.1 million in grants for women-led businesses, six times more than previous years.
- Support Program for the Development of Women's Entrepreneurship in Rural Areas – In 2024 A total of 30 million dinars was available for financing the purchase of new equipment and raw materials. The grants cover 100% of the investment costs, ranging from 300,000 to 500,000 dinars
- Green Transformation Program – Encourages sustainable business models in areas like energy efficiency, waste reduction, and circular economy.
- Sustainable Reboot Program (EBRD) – Provides subsidized loans for SMEs investing in green technologies.

Collaboration & Networking Initiatives

- Women’s Entrepreneurship Section – Established by the Chamber of Commerce, fostering business-to-business (B2B) collaborations.
- WISE Serbia Network – Promotes women’s involvement in sustainable energy and climate action.
- Center for Women in Green Business – Provides mentorship, training, and advocacy for female entrepreneurs in the circular economy.
- Digital Platform for Circular Economy (CE-HUB) - Supports companies by providing business models, best practice examples, and tools to facilitate the implementation of circular business models. It helps reduce the carbon footprint in production processes and products, ensuring competitiveness in the European and international markets.

Despite these efforts, institutional gaps remain, particularly in awareness, financial accessibility, and implementation of sustainability measures at the SME level.

Barriers and Opportunities

Greece

Greece faces several barriers in advancing sustainable business practices among SMEs, despite the increasing focus on green growth. One of the most significant challenges is limited funding and financial constraints, as many small businesses struggle to secure the capital needed for investments in energy-efficient technologies and sustainable production methods. Bureaucracy and regulatory complexity also hinder the adoption of green practices, with many businesses finding it difficult to navigate government incentives and comply with environmental regulations. Additionally, lack of awareness and technical knowledge prevents many SMEs from recognizing the long-term benefits of sustainability, leading to slow adoption of circular economy models and eco-friendly innovations. The country's infrastructure limitations, particularly in waste management and renewable energy distribution, further complicate the transition, while dependence on fossil fuels continues to be a structural challenge.

Despite these obstacles, there are numerous opportunities that can drive sustainable transformation for SMEs in Greece. The country has access to EU funding programs, national subsidies, and green financing mechanisms that encourage businesses to invest in sustainability. With increasing emphasis on renewable energy development, circular economy policies, and digital transformation, Greek SMEs have the potential to become more competitive while reducing their environmental footprint. The growth of green entrepreneurship and successful examples of businesses integrating sustainability into their core operations indicate a shifting landscape where innovation and eco-conscious strategies can lead to new market opportunities. Investments in solar energy, sustainable mobility, and eco-friendly product design are gaining momentum, and with stronger institutional support and private-public collaboration, SMEs in Greece can play a crucial role in shaping a greener economy.

Italy

Despite significant progress, female entrepreneurs and SMEs in Italy still face notable challenges. One of the primary barriers is limited access to finance, as women-led businesses often struggle to secure funding due to stricter collateral requirements from banks. Many female entrepreneurs are discouraged from applying for bank loans, fearing rejection, with only 20% of women-led businesses seeking financial support. Even when they do apply, their chances of receiving adequate funding are lower compared to their male counterparts, reinforcing the financial gap that hinders their growth and sustainability efforts.

Another major challenge is bureaucracy and regulatory complexity, particularly in the context of sustainability reporting. Italian SMEs, especially smaller businesses, find it difficult to navigate the intricate legal framework surrounding corporate sustainability disclosures. The evolving requirements of the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), which will soon apply to more companies, further complicate compliance efforts. Many businesses lack the resources or expertise to meet these

obligations, making sustainability a daunting task rather than an accessible opportunity.

Gender disparities in the STEM and green economy sectors also create an obstacle for women who wish to enter fields that are essential for sustainability-driven innovation. Women remain significantly underrepresented in technology, engineering, and environmental sciences, which limits their ability to contribute to and benefit from the green transition. Without targeted support, their participation in cutting-edge industries such as renewable energy, cleantech, and circular economy initiatives will continue to lag behind.

Additionally, a lack of awareness and specialized training presents another challenge. Many women entrepreneurs and SMEs are unaware of green investment incentives, EU funding programs, and support mechanisms available to them. Without proper knowledge and mentorship, these businesses miss opportunities to integrate sustainable practices and leverage financial support designed to help them transition to greener operations.

Despite these challenges, Italy offers several opportunities for women-led businesses and SMEs embracing sustainability. EU and national funding programs are actively promoting female entrepreneurship and the green transition. The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) has allocated €400 million to support at least 2,400 women-led businesses by 2026, demonstrating a strong financial commitment to empowering female entrepreneurs. Additionally, initiatives such as Smart&Start Italia, with a dedicated €100 million fund, provide targeted financial support to innovative startups, particularly those focused on sustainability and technology.

The growing female startup ecosystem in Italy further highlights the potential for progress. Between 2022 and 2023, the number of women-led innovative startups increased by 40%, indicating a positive trend in female entrepreneurship. The emergence of support networks, accelerators, and mentorship programs is helping women entrepreneurs gain the necessary skills, knowledge, and connections to thrive in the business world.

Moreover, sustainability itself has become a competitive advantage for businesses. Companies that adopt strong ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) strategies are better positioned to attract investment, secure funding, and build consumer trust. As sustainability becomes a key market driver, businesses that integrate eco-friendly practices can differentiate themselves, enhance their brand reputation, and tap into emerging green markets.

While the road to achieving full gender equality and a greener economy remains challenging, the combination of financial incentives, regulatory support, and evolving market trends offers a promising path forward. By continuing to invest in women-led businesses and sustainability-driven SMEs, Italy can strengthen its economic resilience and accelerate the transition toward a more sustainable and inclusive future.

Serbia

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Women entrepreneurs and SMEs in Serbia face significant challenges in adopting green business practices and securing financial stability.

One of the biggest barriers is limited access to financing, as green investments often require high upfront costs. Women-led SMEs, in particular, struggle to obtain bank loans, as financial institutions favor traditional business models over sustainable initiatives. Furthermore, limited renewable energy subsidies and tax incentives exist, however bureaucratic complexity makes them nearly impossible to access.

Another critical challenge is the lack of awareness and technical expertise in green technologies. Many SMEs do not fully understand the economic benefits of energy efficiency, waste reduction, and ESG compliance. In rural areas, environmental awareness is especially low, and institutional support is limited or inaccessible.

Additionally, regulatory enforcement remains weak. While Serbia has a solid legal framework for sustainability, significant implementation gaps persist, with many businesses bypassing environmental reporting obligations. Even among the 42% of Serbian businesses that fully comply with waste management laws and bylaws, systemic issues remain due to inadequate recycling infrastructure. The lack of proper waste collection and processing facilities means that, despite compliance efforts, much of the waste still ends up in unsanitary landfills, contributing to pollution and environmental degradation.

Furthermore, Serbia's businesses could face an additional challenge with the EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), which imposes carbon tariffs on imports from countries with less stringent environmental standards. As Serbia's environmental regulations evolve and infrastructure lags behind, local industries may find it difficult to meet the EU's carbon and sustainability requirements, potentially hindering their competitiveness in European markets. Lastly, gender disparities in entrepreneurship remain an issue. Although the share of women entrepreneurs increased from 28.9% to 31.2% between 2011 and 2021, women still face lower investment rates, limited networking opportunities, and barriers in STEM-related industries.

Opportunities for Growth and Sustainability

Despite these challenges, several opportunities exist for women entrepreneurs and sustainable SMEs in Serbia.

One of the biggest opportunities lies in EU-aligned funding and investment programs. The Green Transformation Program and EU for the Green Agenda in Serbia provide financial support for businesses adopting energy-efficient and circular economy models. Serbia's startup ecosystem is also growing, with initiatives such as the Startup Portal offering mentorship, networking, and funding opportunities.

Another key opportunity is increasing consumer demand for sustainable products and services. As global markets shift towards eco-friendly solutions, Serbian SMEs can differentiate themselves by investing in renewable energy, green manufacturing, and sustainable packaging. Businesses that integrate ESG principles into their models can attract international partnerships and green investors.

Additionally, collaboration with international organizations such as UN Women, EBRD, and the European Investment Bank (EIB) offers Serbian women entrepreneurs access to grants, networking events, and training programs. The rise of female-led sustainability initiatives like the WISE Serbia Network and the Center for Women in Green Business further strengthens the ecosystem for women in green entrepreneurship.

By addressing funding limitations, regulatory enforcement, and awareness gaps, Serbia can unlock greater economic potential for female entrepreneurs and green SMEs, fostering a more sustainable and resilient economy.

Best Practices and Case Studies

GREECE

Several Greek companies have successfully integrated sustainability, circular economy principles, and green innovation into their business models. These organizations demonstrate how businesses can reduce their environmental footprint while remaining competitive and profitable.

COCO-MAT has embraced sustainable mobility by producing eco-friendly bicycles to promote low-emission transportation. The company also adheres to responsible sourcing by ensuring that all its wooden furniture and bed frames are made from FSC-certified wood, supporting sustainable forestry practices.

KORRES, a leader in natural cosmetics, has adopted a closed-loop production system, reducing waste and prioritizing recyclable packaging. The company invests in sustainable ingredient sourcing, working directly with Greek farmers to cultivate herbs and medicinal plants through eco-friendly agricultural practices.

BioAgros has built its business around organic food production, emphasizing strict quality controls and eco-friendly farming. The company minimizes waste by using all organic leftovers as animal feed or for electricity production, ensuring that resources are utilized efficiently.

Mills of Thrace has integrated sustainable agricultural practices into its production process by working with local farmers to promote responsible wheat cultivation with optimized fertilization and plant protection techniques. The company also supports small-scale farms and sustainable crop management, reducing the environmental impact of its supply chain.

MEGA Personal Hygiene Products S.A. has implemented the Act Green Sustainability Program, focusing on eco-friendly product design, carbon footprint reduction, and sustainable packaging. The company has committed to replacing synthetic fibers with plant-based alternatives and significantly reducing water consumption in its manufacturing processes.

Vivechrom, a major player in the paint industry, has invested in waste management and pollution control technologies. The company operates a solvent recovery unit and collaborates with recycling firms to minimize the environmental impact of its products. It has also adopted energy-efficient production methods, reducing water and energy consumption while maintaining product quality.

BioAroma Crete is dedicated to zero-waste production in the organic cosmetics industry. The company cultivates its own herbs using sustainable farming practices, processes them with solar-powered distillation, and packages products using biodegradable materials. It also turns plant residues into compost, closing the sustainability loop.

CHITOS S.A., a leading bottled water company, has transitioned to 100% renewable electricity to power its operations and adopted hybrid fuel technology in half of its

transport fleet, significantly cutting CO2 emissions. The company has also enhanced its water conservation efforts, ensuring responsible water use in its bottling process.

Coca-Cola 3E Greece has innovated with its "Twist" bottle, a lightweight plastic bottle designed to be compressed easily for recycling, reducing plastic waste and improving recyclability. The company continuously works to reduce plastic content in its packaging while maintaining durability and product safety.

Olive Green Hotel in Crete is an example of sustainable tourism and smart hospitality, operating as an energy-efficient, eco-friendly hotel. The building features advanced insulation, solar panels, and a Building Management System (BMS) that optimizes energy use. The hotel also follows Green Key recycling policies, engaging guests and staff in sustainability initiatives.

These businesses showcase a variety of sustainable approaches, from waste reduction and renewable energy use to eco-friendly product design and circular economy principles. Their success demonstrates that integrating sustainability into business operations can enhance brand reputation, reduce costs, and contribute to long-term environmental and economic resilience.

ITALY

Italy has seen a growing number of women-led businesses that integrate sustainability, innovation, and social impact into their operations. These companies are pioneering new business models in technology, circular economy, and social entrepreneurship, demonstrating that female entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in the country's green transition. Below are some standout examples:

- Genuine Way (Amelia Bassini) – Uses blockchain technology to enhance supply chain transparency, helping ethical brands showcase their environmental and social values.
- Ettomio (Paola Bernardotto) – Designs sustainable, long-lasting children's furniture, reducing waste while promoting social inclusion through partnerships with social cooperatives.
- UGO (Michela Conti & Francesca Vidali) – A digital caregiving platform that provides personalized elderly care, combining technology with human support.
- Relief (Gioia Lucarini) – Develops an innovative urinary incontinence device, reducing medical waste while improving patients' quality of life.
- BioTitan NanoTechnology (Beatrice Iaia) – Produces eco-friendly nanotechnology coatings, reducing water use and chemical cleaning agents in industries.
- Picnic Chic (Antonietta Acampora) – A digital booking platform for eco-friendly tourism experiences, promoting sustainable gastronomy and outdoor leisure.
- Family+Happy (Cinzia Tessarolo) – Uses AI to match families with certified caregivers, supporting work-life balance and home care solutions.

- GCE (Silvia Costa) – A sustainable waste management company that promotes circular economy practices by converting waste into energy.
- De Sanctis Group (Francesca De Sanctis) – Focuses on renewable energy infrastructure, particularly in hydropower and sustainable construction.

SERBIA

Serbia is witnessing a growing number of women-led businesses that integrate sustainability, circular economy, and social responsibility into their operations. These companies demonstrate how female entrepreneurship can drive innovation, economic growth, and environmental impact. Below are some standout examples:

- Pletisanka – A company that combines traditional weaving techniques with sustainable textile production, empowering women artisans while promoting eco-friendly fashion.
- COZY2WEAR – A women-led fashion brand that prioritizes local production, ethical labor practices, and sustainable materials, reducing the industry's carbon footprint.
- Darovi Lužnice Cooperative – A women's agricultural cooperative supporting organic farming, fair trade, and rural women's economic empowerment in Serbia.
- SAMO VIŠNJE – A sustainable food business focusing on cherry production using environmentally friendly practices, reducing chemical inputs and promoting local sourcing.
- ECOSEREIN – A green enterprise specializing in eco-friendly household products, reducing plastic waste and toxic chemicals in everyday consumption.
- Arum Deč – A family-owned agribusiness, specializing in agricultural products and services. The company has invested in energy-efficient equipment, such as electric forklifts, reducing CO₂ emissions by 1.9 tonnes annually.
- Homeland in the Jar – this company transforms food waste from ajvar production into bio-soaps and facial masks, promoting environmental sustainability and creating year-round employment opportunities for women in rural areas.
- Bio Idea – Established in 2015, Bio Idea empowers women in southeastern Serbia's mountainous regions by providing training in eco-friendly soap production using leftover cooking oil, fostering social entrepreneurship and environmental stewardship.
- MOĆNO Mikrobilje – this small business specializes in microgreens, contributing to sustainable agriculture and healthy food options.
- Mare-Vela – A sustainable fashion brand, offering handmade, unique pieces crafted by local women, promoting eco-friendly fashion.

- Green Pharmacy Davidovac – An enterprise participating in initiatives that empower women entrepreneurs, focusing on natural products and sustainable practices.

Practical Steps for Greening SMEs

As the world increasingly focuses on sustainability, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are in a unique position to make a significant contribution to environmental preservation. While sustainability has historically been associated with large corporations, more and more SMEs are adopting green practices that bring economic, social, and environmental benefits. Research from Nielsen suggests that 73% of global consumers are willing to pay more for products from sustainable brands, highlighting the competitive advantage that environmentally responsible practices can offer.

Adopting sustainability practices not only reduces a business’s environmental impact but also can lead to cost savings, improved brand loyalty, and access to new markets. As consumers, regulators, and investors place increasing pressure on businesses to act responsibly, adopting green practices is no longer optional—it has become essential. Here’s how SMEs can take practical steps toward sustainability.

Getting Started: Assessing Current Practices

The first step in greening your business is to assess your current environmental practices. Begin by conducting a sustainability audit to understand your energy usage, waste management systems, supply chain sustainability, and overall carbon footprint. This will help you identify areas that need improvement and allow you to set a baseline for future progress. Tools like the Carbon Trust’s Carbon Footprint Calculator or Energy Star’s Portfolio Manager can provide valuable insights by measuring energy consumption, tracking emissions, and identifying inefficiencies in your operations.

Table 1: Common Areas for Sustainability Audits

Category	Key Areas to Assess
Energy Use	Electricity, heating, lighting efficiency
Waste Management	Recycling, waste production, single-use plastics
Supply Chain	Sustainable sourcing, transportation emissions
Carbon Footprint	Greenhouse gas emissions, carbon offset potential
Water use	Water intake, water discharge

For example, a small retail business might analyze how much energy is consumed on lighting and heating. By identifying inefficiencies in lighting and heating, they could realize the benefits of switching to energy-efficient lighting and reducing their energy

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consumption, which in turn would lower both costs and emissions. In fact, SMEs in the EU contribute to around 60% of industrial emissions (depending on methodology), making it all the more critical for small businesses to act.

Once you've completed your audit, it's time to set clear, actionable goals. Using the SMART framework—specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound goals—will help you create realistic targets for reducing environmental impact. A business might decide to cut energy consumption by 20% over the next two years, reduce water usage by 30%, or decrease carbon emissions by 15% annually. These goals should be tailored to your business's specific needs and challenges. For example, energy-efficient technologies can lead to cost reductions of up to 30% for SMEs, offering a strong financial incentive for taking action.

Sustainability is not something that can be achieved by management alone. It requires buy-in from all stakeholders—employees, customers, and suppliers. Engaging these groups through brainstorming sessions, workshops, and surveys ensures that everyone feels involved in the process, leading to stronger commitment and innovative ideas. When employees are involved, they're more likely to take ownership of the changes, leading to better implementation of green initiatives. Studies show that employees at sustainable companies are significantly more satisfied with their work and feel more engaged in company initiatives.

Implementing Green Practices

Once you've assessed your current practices and set goals, it's time to put those plans into action. Implementing green practices across various aspects of your business will not only reduce your environmental footprint but also improve efficiency and cut costs.

One key area to focus on is energy efficiency. By switching to energy-efficient appliances and lighting, businesses can significantly reduce their energy consumption. For example, installing LED lights instead of traditional bulbs can cut energy use by up to 75%, and these light sources also have a longer lifespan, reducing replacement and maintenance costs. Small businesses might also explore renewable energy solutions, such as solar panels, to further reduce their carbon footprint and costs of electricity. Many companies, like The Green Home Company in the UK, have seen their energy costs drop by as much as 40% through solar panel installation.

Waste reduction is another critical area for SMEs. Establishing a recycling program is a simple but effective way to reduce waste. Businesses can set up separate bins for paper, plastics, and metals to ensure that recyclable materials don't end up in landfills. Some companies even partner with recycling facilities to turn waste into a source of income. Additionally, adopting a circular economy approach—where production waste is minimized, reused, or recycled—can help businesses lower material costs and build a more sustainable operation. Companies like Patagonia are leading the way with the use of recycled materials in their products, which not only benefits the environment but also builds customer loyalty.

When it comes to sourcing, partnering with sustainable suppliers is key. Look for suppliers that share your commitment to environmental responsibility, such as those who use responsibly sourced materials or implement ethical production methods. Local sourcing can also help reduce transportation emissions, which is a major contributor to carbon footprints. For instance, a local café might choose to source fresh produce from nearby farms, reducing the environmental impact of long-distance transportation.

Another effective strategy for reducing environmental impact is conducting a Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) of a product. LCA involves evaluating the entire life cycle of a product—from raw material extraction to production, use, and disposal—by analyzing its environmental impacts at each stage. By understanding the full scope of a product's impact, businesses can identify key areas for improvement in the supply chain, such as sourcing more sustainable materials, optimizing production processes, or reducing energy consumption. Implementing LCA helps companies make data-driven decisions that minimize waste and emissions while also improving resource efficiency. This approach aligns with sustainability goals and can enhance a company's reputation for environmental responsibility, fostering trust among customers and stakeholders. For example, companies like Unilever use LCA to assess the environmental footprint of their products, helping them to innovate and reduce the impact of their supply chains.

Moreover, businesses can design green products that are both environmentally friendly and appealing to customers. Using biodegradable or recyclable materials for packaging can reduce waste, and offering products that customers can reuse or refill minimizes the need for single-use plastics. For example, companies like Lush Cosmetics have eliminated plastic packaging from many of their products, a move that not only reduces waste but also attracts eco-conscious consumers.

“Benefits of Sustainable Public Procurement”

Source: <https://www.organicseurope.bio/library/benefits-of-sustainable-public-procurement/>

Integrating Green Practices into Business Strategy

Sustainability should be integrated into the very core of your business strategy. This means embedding green principles in your mission statement and long-term business plan. By doing so, you send a clear message to your employees, customers, and stakeholders that environmental responsibility is a fundamental value of your business.

Adopting GRI (Global Reporting Initiative) reporting and ESG certification brings significant advantages for businesses, especially in today's market where sustainability and ethics are becoming key priorities. By openly disclosing environmental, social, and governance practices through the GRI framework, companies can establish trust with customers, investors, and other stakeholders. ESG reporting helps organizations identify risks, enhance operational efficiency, and gain

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a competitive advantage as more consumers and investors prioritize companies with strong sustainability and ethical practices.

ESG certification further bolsters a company’s reputation, showcasing its commitment to social responsibility and potentially leading to increased customer loyalty and a stronger brand. Moreover, companies that align with ESG standards, such as the GRI, are better positioned to access sustainable investment opportunities and can demonstrate their resilience to regulatory changes, thus reducing the risk of non-compliance. In the long term, implementing ESG practices contributes to organizational sustainability, ensuring that businesses remain resilient while appealing to a growing base of ethically-minded investors and consumers.

To finance your sustainability initiatives, consider sustainable finance options like green loans, grants, or crowdfunding. For example, the European Union’s Green Deal has allocated significant resources to support businesses that adopt sustainable practices. Financial institutions often offer incentives such as tax rebates for businesses that invest in renewable energy, providing additional financial incentives to go green.

Building Awareness and Capacity

Building awareness and capacity within your organization is crucial to the success of your green initiatives. Regular training for employees on environmental issues and green practices fosters a culture of sustainability within your company. This type of training can help employees understand the impact of their actions on the environment and how they can contribute to reducing the company’s footprint. Companies that invest in sustainability training see a noticeable increase in employee engagement, which leads to greater innovation and more effective implementation of green solutions.

Engaging your customers in your sustainability efforts is just as important. Educating your customers about your green initiatives and encouraging them to make sustainable choices can help you build a loyal customer base. You might offer incentives, such as discounts for customers who bring reusable bags or containers, or run marketing campaigns highlighting the environmental benefits of your products. Studies show that consumers are more likely to support businesses that demonstrate a genuine commitment to sustainability, and these efforts can help differentiate your brand from competitors.



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Consumer Behavior and Sustainable Marketing Development in Online and Offline Settings
 Source: <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/16/7/2829>

Monitoring and Reporting Progress

To ensure that your sustainability efforts are on track, it's essential to establish Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that allow you to measure progress. These might include metrics such as energy consumption, waste production, water usage, and carbon emissions. Tracking these KPIs regularly helps you stay focused on your goals and identify areas where further improvements can be made.

Table 2: Suggested Sustainability KPIs for SMEs

KPI	Measurement
Energy Consumption	kWh used per year
Waste Production	Kilograms of waste reduced/recycled
Total GHG emissions	Carbon Footprint (CO ₂ e
Water Usage	Liters of water saved

Regularly updating stakeholders through sustainability reports or annual reviews helps keep everyone informed about the progress you've made. Use clear, visual tools like graphs and charts to communicate your progress effectively and ensure that your achievements are recognized.

Environmental Sustainability KPI Dashboard Showing Social...



This graph/chart is linked to excel, and changes automatically based on data. Just left click on it and select 'Edit Data'.

KPI Dashboard Showing Global Carbon Emission and GDP Growth

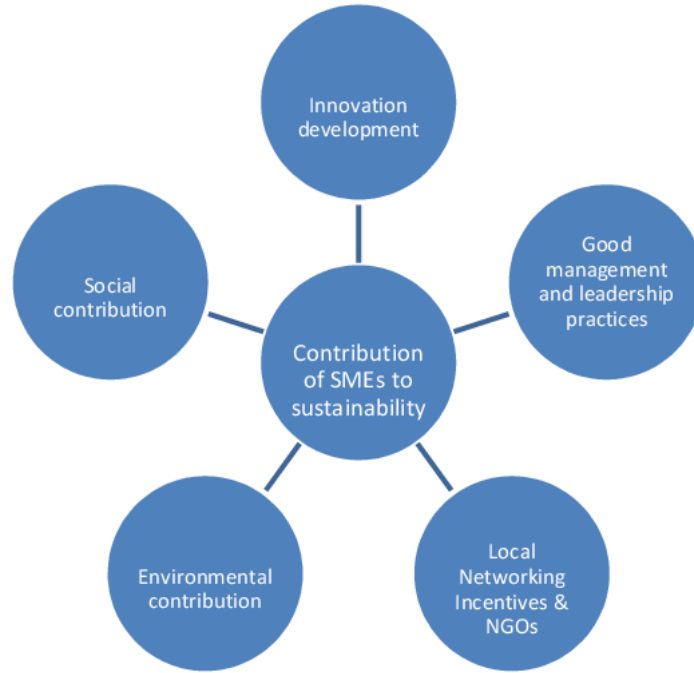
Source: <https://www.slideteam.net/blog/top-7-sustainability-dashboard-templates-with-examples-and-samples>

Scaling and Expanding Green Practices

Finally, as your business becomes more sustainable, look for opportunities to scale and expand your green initiatives. Collaborating with other SMEs, NGOs, and community groups can help amplify your efforts and share best practices. You might even form partnerships to negotiate better deals on renewable energy or sustainable materials.

Innovation is also important—continuously exploring new technologies, processes, and materials will help you stay ahead of the curve. Many successful SMEs are leading the way by adopting innovations in renewable energy, waste management, and product design, which not only reduce costs but also enhance operational efficiency.

As your sustainability efforts grow, you may also find opportunities to expand into new markets, particularly those with environmentally conscious consumers. Promoting your green practices globally can give you access to a broader audience and position your business as a leader in sustainability.



Contribution of SMEs to sustainability -own model based on analyzed case studies

Source: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Contribution-of-SMEs-to-sustainability-own-model-based-on-analyzed-case-studies_fig2_283346453

The transition to sustainable business practices is essential for SMEs looking to remain competitive and compliant in an increasingly environmentally aware marketplace. SMEs can start by assessing their current operations, identifying areas for improvement, and implementing green initiatives that align with their business goals. Integrating sustainability into business strategies and regularly monitoring progress can help reduce environmental impact while also improving cost-efficiency and brand image.

As consumer preferences shift and regulations around sustainability become stricter, it's important for SMEs to adapt proactively. By following these steps, businesses can minimize their ecological footprint and better position themselves to meet future demands, ensuring they stay competitive and responsible in a changing market.

Toolkit and Resources

Checklists and Self-Assessment Tools

A. Green Readiness Checklist

1. Energy Efficiency

- Have you identified major energy-consuming equipment and processes? (YES/NO)
- Have you analyzed historical energy consumption patterns? (YES/NO)
- Have you defined measurable energy reduction targets? (YES/NO)
- Are these goals aligned with the overall business strategy? (YES/NO)
- Have you upgraded to energy-efficient lighting and appliances? (YES/NO)
- Have you optimized HVAC systems for efficiency? (YES/NO)
- Have you installed monitoring systems to track energy use? (YES/NO)
- Do you regularly review and adjust energy practices based on performance data? (YES/NO)

2. Waste Management

- Have you identified the types and quantities of waste generated? (YES/NO)
- Have you analyzed existing waste management practices? (YES/NO)
- Have you set clear targets for reducing waste? (YES/NO)
- Do you work with certified waste management providers? (YES/NO)
- Have you conducted employee training on waste management? (YES/NO)
- Are employees actively involved in waste reduction initiatives? (YES/NO)

3. Sustainable Procurement

- Do you evaluate suppliers based on environmental criteria? (YES/NO)
- Do you request proof of sustainability certifications? (YES/NO)
- Have you created guidelines prioritizing eco-friendly products? (YES/NO)
- Have you communicated these guidelines to procurement teams? (YES/NO)

4. Employee Engagement and Training

- Have you created training materials on sustainability? (YES/NO)
- Are these materials regularly updated? (YES/NO)
- Do you organize events or initiatives to promote sustainability? (YES/NO)

- Have you set up teams to implement and monitor sustainability practices? (YES/NO)
- Do these teams have defined roles and responsibilities? (YES/NO)

5. Continuous Improvement and Reporting

- Do you conduct regular reviews of sustainability initiatives? (YES/NO)
- Are performance results analyzed and documented? (YES/NO)
- Do you compare your performance to industry benchmarks? (YES/NO)
- Do you consider emerging trends and innovations? (YES/NO)
- Do you produce sustainability reports? (YES/NO)
- Are these reports publicly accessible? (YES/NO)

B. Environmental Impact Assessment Template

To effectively assess and monitor your business's carbon footprint, the following resources can be helpful:

Vena's ESG Reporting Template & Checklist for Excel:

This free, customisable Excel template enables you to evaluate your company's Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) performance, specifically focusing on carbon emissions. It facilitates annual tracking of carbon emissions, aiding in the implementation of corporate responsibility practices [1].

Utilising these tools will enable your business to calculate its current carbon footprint accurately and track progress over time, facilitating informed decisions toward sustainability goals. More information about Carbon Footprint Calculators will be further down in the text.

C. Sustainability Compliance Checklist

Creating a Sustainability Compliance Checklist for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) involves understanding and adhering to various legal and policy requirements specific to your region and sector. Below is a general framework to guide SMEs, with a focus on European Union (EU) regulations:

1. Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) [2]:

- **Applicability:** As of January 5, 2023, the CSRD requires large companies and listed SMEs to publish regular reports on social and environmental risks, as well as the impact of their activities on people and the environment. Non-EU companies generating over EUR 150 million in the EU market are also subject to reporting.

- **Action items:**
 - Determine if your SME falls under the CSRD requirements.
 - Develop processes to collect and report relevant sustainability data.
 - Ensure the reported information undergoes assurance as mandated.
- 2. **Environmental Regulations [3]:**
 - **EU Environmental Standards:** SMEs must comply with EU environmental regulations pertinent to their industry, such as waste management, emissions control, and resource usage.
 - **Action items:**
 - Stay informed about applicable EU environmental laws and updates.
 - Implement necessary measures to ensure compliance, such as pollution control technologies and sustainable resource management practices.
- 3. **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) [4]:**
 - **Guidelines and support:** The European Commission provides guidelines to help SMEs implement CSR, including sector-specific advice.
 - **Action items:**
 - Develop and integrate CSR policies into your business operations.
 - Utilize available tools and resources to enhance your CSR initiatives.

Templates and Frameworks

Sustainability Action Plan Template

1. Company Information

- **Company name:** (Insert your company's full name)
- **Industry:** (Specify your industry sector)
- **Location:** (Provide your main office location and any other operational sites)
- **Contact person:** (Name, position, and contact details of the sustainability lead)
- **Date created:** (Specify the date the plan was drafted)

2. Sustainability Vision and Mission

- **Vision statement:** (Describe your company’s long-term sustainability aspirations, such as becoming carbon-neutral, zero-waste, or a leader in green innovation)
- **Mission statement:** (Explain your company’s approach to sustainability, including your commitment to environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and economic viability)

3. Sustainability goals

- **Environmental goals:** (List specific goals like reducing greenhouse gas emissions by a certain percentage, decreasing water usage, or enhancing recycling efforts)
- **Financial goals:** (Detail financial objectives such as cutting operational costs through energy efficiency, investing in renewable energy, or accessing green funding)
- **Social goals:** (Outline social aims including fostering employee well-being, promoting diversity and inclusion, and supporting local community initiatives)
[5]

4. Action Items and Strategies

KEY ACTION	DESCRIPTION	RESPONSIBLE PERSON/TEAM	RESOURCES NEEDED	TIMELINE	KPIs/MEASUREMENT

example:

KEY ACTION	DESCRIPTION	RESPONSIBLE PERSON/TEAM	RESOURCES NEEDED	TIMELINE	KPIs/MEASUREMENT
Minimize waste	Establish a company-wide recycling program and reduce single-use plastics	(names)	training materials, recycling bins	Q3 2025	50% waste reduction

5. Timeline and Milestones

MILESTONE	TARGET DATE	STATUS

example:

MILESTONE	TARGET DATE	STATUS
Conduct sustainability audit	March 2025	In progress
Develop an employee sustainability training program	June 2025	Not started

6. Monitoring and Reporting

- **Frequency of monitoring:** (Specify how often you will review progress, such as monthly, quarterly, or annually)
- **Reporting method:** (Describe how you will communicate results, like internal reports, sustainability newsletters, or public-facing reports)
- **Key metrics to track:** (Identify essential metrics such as energy consumption, carbon emissions, waste diversion rates, and employee participation in green initiatives) [6]

7. Participants in engagement

- **Internal:** (List key internal participants such as employees, management, and board members, and their roles in sustainability)
- **External:** (Identify external participants including customers, suppliers, investors, and community organizations)
- **Engagement methods:** (Specify engagement techniques like regular meetings, surveys, workshops, social media updates, and newsletters) [6]

Sustainable Procurement Framework

Sustainable procurement integrates environmental, social, and economic considerations into the procurement process. This guide provides a framework for evaluating suppliers and selecting environmentally friendly options, ensuring long-term sustainability and value [7]. Adopting a sustainable procurement framework ensures responsible purchasing decisions, enhances organizational reputation, and contributes to global sustainability goals.

Key principles of sustainable procurement:

- **Environmental responsibility:** Minimizing environmental impact through resource efficiency, waste reduction, and sustainable sourcing.
- **Social responsibility:** Promoting fair labour practices, diversity, and ethical treatment of workers.
- **Economic viability:** Ensuring cost-effectiveness and long-term value for money. [8]

Supplier evaluation criteria:

1 Environmental performance

- Compliance with environmental regulations and standards.
- Implementation of environmental management systems (e.g., ISO 14001).
- Use of renewable energy and resource-efficient practices.
- Waste management and recycling programs. [8]

2 Social and ethical standards

- Adherence to labour laws and human rights standards.
- Provision of safe and healthy working conditions.
- Commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

3 Economic and operational capability

- Financial stability and long-term viability.
- Supply chain transparency and risk management.

Green Communication Plan Template [9] [10]

AIMS (What are you trying to achieve through your communications and how will you measure success?)	
AUDIENCE (Who are you trying to engage through your communications?)	
MESSAGING (Think about what messaging would resonate with your audience. How will you engage	

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this specific audience with your campaign/project?)	
CHANNELS (Think about how you would reach your audience. Where would they find your campaign/project/social media local events or community centres? What type of communications would they respond to-posters, graphics, newsletters?)	

Learning Resources

Guides and Manuals:

SME Guide to Energy Efficiency

This guide was written by the Department of Energy and Climate Change in 2015. It includes tips, measures to implement, guidance on engaging staff and support from the government. The bits of advice and ideas in this guide will help any business become more energy efficient. It will be especially helpful if you are an SME, you haven't looked at reducing your energy bills and energy management is not a core part of your job. Details can be found in a PDF document on the site of the aforementioned department [11].

An SME guide to financing energy efficiency projects

This guide provides insight into financing options for energy-efficient equipment, loans, asset-based financing, leasing, grants, tax incentives,... It also explains steps for energy and cost savings. Everything about that is available on the site of The Carbon Trust [12].

E-Learning Modules:

Green Entrepreneurship (2022)-Learning For Nature [13]

Duration: 6 weeks

Requirements: Internet connection

Partners: [United Nations Development Programme \(UNDP\)](#), [Convention on Biological Diversity](#), [EcoEnterprises Fund](#), [Fordham University's Gabelli School of Business](#),

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Lehigh University, Regional Activity Centre for Sustainable Consumption and Production, SEED, The GEF Small Grants Programme

Course highlights and outcomes:

- Gain the skills needed to turn environmental challenges into green business opportunities
- Join the community of green entrepreneurs
- Take a deep dive into rich learning materials
- Receive a certificate of completion from premier development institutions

Green and digital entrepreneurship for women-ITU Academy [14]

Duration: 5 hours

Organizer: International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

Supported by: Women's Entrepreneurship Accelerator

This training course is designed to economically empower female start-up and scale-up entrepreneurs by equipping them with the essential knowledge and skills for green digital entrepreneurship. The curriculum explores the benefits of green business models, the circular economy, and sustainability. Participants will also learn practical strategies for greening supply chains, leveraging digital technologies, and accessing green finance.

Green Entrepreneurship Training [15]

Partners: University of Paderborn (DE), University of Pitesti (RO), Small Firms Enterprise Development Initiative (UK), Meath Community Rural & Social Development Partnership (IE), European University Cyprus (CY), Future In Perspective (IE), Fundacion Universidad Empresa de la Region de Murcia (ES) and Innoventum Oy (FI)

Co-funded by: Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

This course fosters long-term business development and success by providing a comprehensive overview of green entrepreneurship. It covers everything from foundational principles of the Green Economy and eco-friendly business redesign to practical skills like idea generation, business opportunity identification, and effective leadership. It analyzes the green business environment, emphasizes strategic decision-making, and equips participants with the essential knowledge and abilities to successfully launch and manage environmentally sustainable ventures.

Case Studies Compilations

National Small Business-Environmental Assistance Program

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This resource offers a wide array of case studies categorized by industry to help businesses implement more sustainable practices. Industries covered include agriculture, aircraft, aluminium, autobody, chemicals, construction, dry cleaning, electric/power/energy, electronics/computers, food, forest products, furniture, general small business, hospitals/medical, hotels, iron and steel, janitorial services, laboratories/schools, landscaping, local government, machining, and metal finishing. These examples cover a variety of sustainability opportunities, from recycling to hazardous material substitution, and can help generate ideas and demonstrate how to implement new practices successfully. If you have a case study you'd like to share, you can email them. On site, you can find all published examples [16].

ARIES4 Case Book – sustainability in SMEs across Europe

Extant research shows a tendency to employ quantitative methods to retrieve insight into sustainability-related activities and competencies in SMEs. Thus, there is an apparent lack of studies focusing on it providing a holistic understanding of the phenomena at hand. This case book addresses this gap in research and presents explorative cases of SMEs distributed across the four regions involved in the ARIES4 project: Sweden, Bulgaria, Spain and Denmark. The cases explore what sustainability means, which efforts have been embraced and why, the motivations for sustainability activities, their perceived relevance etc. You can find a PDF online for more details [17].

Tools and Apps

Carbon Footprint Calculators:

As climate change continues to impact our planet, individuals and organizations are seeking ways to reduce their environmental impact. One essential step in this process is understanding and measuring carbon footprint—the total amount of greenhouse gases, particularly carbon dioxide, that are emitted directly or indirectly by an individual, organization, event, or product. These emissions result from various activities such as transportation, energy consumption and production processes. Carbon footprint calculators are user-friendly tools designed to help measure, monitor, and manage greenhouse gas emissions. They provide a straightforward method to assess environmental impact. By entering data related to energy usage, travel habits, and consumption patterns, users receive an estimate of their carbon emissions. This enables individuals and organizations to identify high-impact areas and implement effective strategies for reduction.

Key features of Carbon Footprint Calculators

- **Easy to use:** Designed for all users, including those with minimal technical knowledge.
- **Data input:** Covers energy consumption, transportation, waste generation, and more.
- **Instant results:** Provides immediate feedback on carbon emissions.

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- **Actionable insights:** Offers recommendations for reducing emissions based on user data.

Using carbon footprint calculators raises awareness about personal and organizational environmental impact, encourages accountability by tracking progress over time, leads to cost savings through reduced energy and operational expenses, and supports sustainability goals with data-driven decisions. These tools are often free, accessible, and tailored for different users, making them invaluable in the fight against climate change.

Popular Carbon Footprint Calculators

CoolClimate Calculator addresses the pressing climate crisis through innovative tools and programs designed to accelerate the transition to a clean energy economy. By combining advanced carbon footprint research with insights from behavioural sciences, CoolClimate develops tailored solutions that empower individuals, businesses, organizations, and communities to take meaningful climate action. Its tools identify unique opportunities for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and provide personalized strategies to support low-carbon decision-making. CoolClimate's research team consists of leading experts in carbon footprint analysis, behaviour change, and greenhouse gas mitigation policy, producing cutting-edge research that informs its tools and programs. The organization's comprehensive carbon footprint calculators, the first of their kind, account for emissions from all transportation, energy use, food, goods, and services consumed by households and businesses. This consumption-based greenhouse gas accounting method powers a suite of online tools that allow users to estimate their total carbon footprint, compare results with peers, and create customized action plans to lower their environmental impact [18].

Adopted by governments, businesses, and non-governmental organizations across the United States and internationally, CoolClimate's tools have become essential in driving climate solutions. In addition, its policy tools and interactive maps engage communities by identifying the most effective interventions for reducing emissions, ensuring that climate action is both impactful and accessible. Through collaboration with network members, CoolClimate also helps design local policies and programs that motivate and support widespread climate action [18].

GHG Protocol Tools and Guidance require you to first complete the Greenhouse Gas Protocol Technical Support Form where you need to give basic information about you and your company. The calculation tools are electronic Excel spreadsheets with accompanying step-by-step guidance documents. A guidance document includes:

- An overview of the protocol with information on the sector, sources, and processes that it covers;
- One or more approaches for determining CO₂ and other GHG emissions, e.g., direct measurement, mass balance, etc.;
- Guidance on collecting activity data and selecting appropriate emission factors;
- Likely emissions sources and the scopes they fall under (specific to a particular sector);

- Additional information, such as quality control practices and program-specific information.

The spreadsheets help carry out any necessary emissions calculations. These tools were developed in partnership with industry experts and represent best-practice quantification methodologies. The calculation tools are available on the GHG Protocol website and are meant to complement the Protocol and make calculations easier, but their use is not mandatory [19].

SME Climate Hub's Business Carbon Calculators are designed for small and medium-sized enterprises. These free calculators assist in measuring business emissions. They offer guidance on focusing on: Small Business, Advanced Business and Scope 3 emissions. They provide tools to identify emission hotspots, making them ideal for businesses beginning their carbon measurement journey [20].

Waste Management Apps:

In an era where sustainability is paramount, waste management apps have become essential tools for individuals, businesses, and communities aiming to minimize their environmental impact. These applications offer innovative solutions to track, reduce, and optimize waste, promoting more efficient resource use and supporting global sustainability goals.

Waste management apps provide detailed tracking systems that help users monitor the amount and types of waste they produce. By logging waste disposal activities and analyzing patterns over time, these apps offer insights into areas where waste reduction is possible. This data-driven approach empowers users to make informed decisions and take steps toward minimizing waste. Many waste management apps incorporate features designed to reduce waste at the source. These apps encourage users to adopt eco-friendly habits. Some applications also facilitate the sharing of surplus food, clothing, and other items, and support circular economy principles [21].

For businesses and municipalities, waste management apps offer advanced tools to optimize waste collection and disposal processes. These applications use real-time data to enhance route planning for waste collection services, reducing fuel consumption and operational costs. Additionally, apps can help track recycling rates, monitor landfill usage, and ensure compliance with environmental regulations, making waste management more efficient and cost-effective [21].

Features of waste management apps

- **Waste tracking:** Monitor waste generation and disposal habits.
- **Recycling guides:** Provide information on how to recycle different materials properly.
- **Collection schedules:** Send reminders for waste collection days and recycling pickups.

- **Sustainability tips:** Offer suggestions for reducing waste and living sustainably.
- **Inventory management:** Help businesses manage waste output and recycling efforts.
- **Data analytics:** Provide insights into waste patterns and highlight opportunities for reduction.

Popular Waste Management Apps

WasteTracker is an advanced waste management application designed to streamline the tracking and management of waste from collection to disposal [22]. Key features include:

- **Real-time tracking:** WasteTracker allows users to monitor waste movements in real-time, ensuring accurate documentation of waste handling at each stage. This feature enhances transparency and accountability within the waste management process.
- **Geo-tagging:** The app utilizes geo-tagging technology to track the entire journey of waste shipments, providing real-time updates on their transit. This helps prevent illegal disposal and ensures compliance with regulations.
- **User-friendly interface:** WasteTracker offers a centralized platform for waste management companies to manage routes, assign collection areas, and track progress easily. This simplifies operations for drivers and administrators alike.
- **Data management:** Users can create digital records of waste collections, which can be printed or exported as needed. This feature facilitates easier record-keeping and compliance with regulatory requirements.
- **Discrepancy reporting:** The app includes a feature for reporting discrepancies in waste records, allowing users to update information as needed to maintain accuracy throughout the waste chain [23].

Recycle Coach focuses on educating communities about recycling practices while providing practical tools for effective waste management [24]. Key features include:

- **Personalized recycling information:** The app tailors recycling guidelines based on local regulations, helping users understand what materials can be recycled and how to dispose of them correctly.
- **Collection reminders:** Recycle Coach sends notifications about upcoming collection dates, ensuring residents are informed about when to put out their recyclables.
- **Community engagement:** The app promotes community involvement by allowing users to report issues related to waste collection, schedule pickups, and access educational resources on recycling and sustainability.
- **User-friendly design:** With its intuitive interface, Recycle Coach makes it easy for users to navigate through features and access relevant information about their local waste management practices [24] [25].

More apps:

1. **My WM** provides trash collection, disposal, and recycling services for both residential and commercial needs. Users can manage services like bulk trash pickup and eWaste disposal through the app.
2. **MyWaste** automates waste management processes by allowing users to register waste collections, receive alerts, and generate documents. It is particularly useful for businesses looking to reduce manual handling of data.
3. **Taka Cycle** encourages recycling by rewarding users with coins for every kilogram of recyclables collected. It promotes good environmental habits and tracks users' positive impacts on the environment.
4. **TrashOut** allows users to report illegal dumping sites, helping authorities address waste issues more efficiently through crowdsourced data.
5. **Waste No Food** connects food donors with organizations that distribute surplus food, helping to minimize food waste while addressing hunger in communities [21] [26].

By leveraging technology, waste management apps contribute to a cleaner environment and a more sustainable future. They help reduce landfill waste, promote recycling, and encourage responsible consumption. For businesses, these tools enhance operational efficiency and support corporate social responsibility initiatives. For individuals, they simplify waste management tasks and foster eco-conscious behaviour. As the need for effective waste management grows, these applications continue to evolve, offering increasingly sophisticated features to tackle waste-related challenges. With their ability to track, reduce, and optimize waste, waste management apps are invaluable tools in the global effort to protect our planet.

Energy Efficiency Monitors:

Energy Efficiency Monitors are systems that continuously track, measure, and analyze energy consumption across buildings, facilities, or systems. They use advanced hardware and software to collect, process, and visualize data on energy usage patterns over time. The primary goal is to provide insights into energy consumption, identify inefficiencies, and find potential savings opportunities.

Benefits:

- **Improved operations:** Point inefficiencies to optimize operations, leading to reduced energy waste, improved equipment performance, and a smaller carbon footprint.
- **Predictive maintenance:** Detect potential equipment failures or performance degradation before they occur by monitoring energy consumption and analyzing deviations from expected norms. This enables proactive maintenance schedules, extends equipment lifespan, and reduces downtime.
- **Accurate reporting:** Assist in compliance and accurate reporting.

- **Informed decisions:** Provide users with data about their consumption patterns so they can make informed energy management decisions and maximize savings.
- **Real-time data:** Recognizes when an asset is not operating efficiently, and sends instant notifications can be sent to the maintenance team to rectify the situation before excessive amounts of energy are wasted. The continuous monitoring and analysis of equipment data means predictive maintenance can take place, so assets can continue to operate efficiently at all times with fewer failures [27] [28].

Here's how they work:

- **Functionality:** Energy monitoring systems use metering devices like electricity, gas, water, and thermal meters, as well as other sensors to measure energy consumption from various sources. Smart meters with communication capabilities are often used for real-time data collection and remote monitoring. The data is then transmitted to a central location or cloud-based platform through a data acquisition system.
- **Data analysis:** Energy monitoring software gathers energy consumption data, analyzes it, and provides useful information directly to the user's devices. This helps users understand their energy usage in detail, enabling them to point out inefficiencies and optimize operations for better energy efficiency [27] [28].

For small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) seeking to monitor and optimize energy consumption, several effective energy efficiency monitors and software solutions are available:

1. **Dexma Platform:** This Energy Management System (EMS) provides tools for measuring and monitoring energy consumption. It helps SMEs prioritize areas for improvement and analyze energy usage to detect anomalies, ensuring timely corrections. The platform is designed to enhance overall energy efficiency and cost-effectiveness [29].
2. **CLEMAP Energy Monitor:** This device offers comprehensive electricity monitoring tailored for SMEs, industries, and commercial properties. It is easy to integrate into existing infrastructures without disrupting operations, making it a reliable solution for continuous energy monitoring [30].
3. **Nanoprecise NrgMonitor:** This software uses real-time data analytics to track energy consumption patterns, identify inefficiencies, and predict potential issues. It supports various equipment types and integrates seamlessly with IIOT sensors, providing a robust solution for energy management in SMEs [31].
4. **EnergyCAP SmartAnalytics:** This platform turns raw data into actionable insights through machine learning analytics. It provides real-time monitoring of energy consumption and offers intuitive dashboards for better visualization of energy usage patterns, helping SMEs make informed decisions about their energy management practices [31].

5. **Mobile Energy Monitoring Systems (Mobile EMS):** These systems allow SMEs to conduct short-term measurements of energy consumption across different areas of their operations. They facilitate the analysis of specific consumer data, such as refrigeration systems in supermarkets, using a submetering approach to identify inefficiencies [31].

By implementing these solutions, SMEs can effectively track their energy usage, identify areas for improvement, and ultimately reduce operational costs while contributing to environmental sustainability.

Funding and Financial Resources

Green Financing Opportunities:

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) across Europe have access to a variety of European Union (EU) and national funding programs designed to support green initiatives. These programs offer grants, loans, and other financial instruments to promote sustainability and environmental responsibility.

EU funding programs

- **European Investment Bank (EIB)** provides long-term loans and equity investment to support projects aligned with EU priorities, including environmental sustainability. SMEs can access the funds through local financial intermediaries [32].
- **European Investment Fund (EIF)** offers guarantees and equity investments to facilitate SME access to finance, particularly for green and sustainable projects. EIF is part of the EIB Group [33].
- **InnovFin – EU Finance for Innovators** provides a range of financing tools and advisory services to support investments from the smallest to the largest enterprises in research and innovation [34].
- **Green Action Plan (GAP) for SMEs** aims to help SMEs turn environmental challenges into business opportunities by promoting eco-innovation and facilitating business partnerships focused on sustainability [35].

Grants

- **Horizon Europe** allocates a significant portion of €95,5 billion budget from 2021 to 2027 for green projects. SMEs can apply for grants supporting sustainable innovations across various sectors.

- **LIFE Programme** offers approximately €5.4 billion in funding for the 2021-2027 period. It supports projects focusing on nature conservation, environmental protection, and climate change mitigation.
- **European Investment Fund (EIF)** access to finance for SMEs by providing guarantees and equity investments, particularly for green and sustainable projects. SMEs can explore funding options through financial intermediaries associated with the EIF.
- **EEA and Norway Grants** aim to reduce economic and social disparities in the European Economic Area, these grants have allocated over €450 million for green projects in 13 EU member states during the 2014-2021 period. SMEs can benefit from funding in areas such as renewable energy, energy efficiency, and environmental protection.
- **National Initiatives:** Many EU member states offer national grants and funding programs to support SMEs in their green transition. For instance, Spain has allocated €4.5 billion from EU recovery funds to modernize SMEs, focusing on digital transformation and green initiatives. SMEs should consult their respective national business support organizations or government portals for country-specific opportunities [36].

To apply for these grants, SMEs should:

- **Identify relevant programs:** Assess which EU or national programs align with their project objectives.
- **Prepare proposals:** Develop comprehensive project proposals that meet the specific criteria of the chosen funding program.
- **Consult intermediaries:** Engage with local financial institutions or business support organizations that can provide guidance and assistance throughout the application process.

By leveraging these funding opportunities, European SMEs can advance their sustainability efforts, contributing to environmental preservation and enhancing their competitiveness in the green economy [36].

Green loans

- **BBVA Loan for SMEs & Green Initiatives** collaborates with the European Investment Bank to provide loans aimed at SMEs undertaking green projects. These loans support investments in energy efficiency, renewable energy, and other sustainable practices. SMEs can access these funds through participating banks in their respective countries [37].
- **Green Loan Portfolio** is offered by ProCredit Holding, a development-oriented banking group, that focuses on offering financial services to SMEs in various European countries. A significant portion of their loan portfolio is dedicated to green loans, financing projects in energy efficiency, renewable energy, and

environmentally friendly technologies. SMEs interested in such financing can approach ProCredit banks operating in their region [38].

Despite the availability of green loans, SMEs often face challenges in accessing sustainable finance. A European survey highlighted that current sustainable finance regulations may not fully meet SMEs' needs, emphasizing the necessity for simplified and tailored approaches.

Crowdfunding Platforms:

HeavyFinance

HeavyFinance is a regulated peer-to-peer investment platform connecting global investors with European farmers to promote sustainable land management and regenerative agriculture. By financing innovative, science-backed agricultural initiatives, HeavyFinance aims to reduce CO2 emissions, improve soil health, and enhance farm resilience to climate change. They directly originate loans in Poland, Portugal, Lithuania, Latvia, and Bulgaria, allowing investors worldwide (excluding those in sanctioned countries) to participate. Registration and investing are free. However, a 1% fee applies to sellers on the secondary market. The platform offers debt investments and has facilitated the return of €34.92 million in principal and €8.59 million in interest since its inception [39] [40].

Investor

This is a leading crowd-investing platform in Europe. It brings together innovative entrepreneurs and forward-thinking investors to accelerate the transition to a sustainable economy. Investor offers a range of investment opportunities tailored to meet the varying needs and preferences of investors, and they focus on markets in the DACH region (Germany, Austria, Switzerland), Benelux, and Scandinavia. Investment opportunities span various industries, all of which align with ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) and SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) principles [39].

On the Habitat Point site, you can find Green Crowdfunding Platforms such as [The Environmental Funders Network \(EFN\)](#), [Windcentrale](#), [Sunfunder](#), [Energy4Impact](#), [WorthWild](#) and more [39] [41].

Tax Incentives and Subsidies:

Green tax incentives are designed to encourage businesses to adopt environmentally friendly practices. By taking advantage of these incentives, businesses can contribute to a healthier planet and improve their financial bottom line. These incentives offer financial rewards for making green investments and can enhance a business's reputation and appeal to eco-conscious customers.

Types of Green Tax Incentives

- **Tax credits:** These directly reduce the amount of tax a business owes, making green investments more affordable.
- **Tax deductions:** These lower the taxable income, reducing the overall tax liability.
- **Grants:** These provide funding for businesses that invest in energy-efficient technologies, covering a portion of the costs [42].

Key Government Initiatives and Incentives

- **Green Investment Grants:** Provide funding for businesses that invest in energy-efficient technologies.
- **Enhanced Capital Allowances (ECAs):** Allow businesses to claim 100% first-year allowances on qualifying energy-efficient equipment, reducing taxable profits. Ireland's Accelerated Capital Allowance (ACA) scheme allows businesses to write off the cost of energy-efficient equipment in the first year.
- **Climate Change Levy (CCL) Exemption:** Businesses using renewable energy sources can be exempt from the CCL, offering significant savings.
- **Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI):** Provides payments to businesses that use renewable heating systems, reducing operational costs.
- **Research and Development (R&D) Tax Credits:** Companies developing new or improved environmentally friendly technologies may claim R&D tax credits. This covers sustainability-focused projects, such as energy storage or waste reduction solutions, and can provide a higher rate of relief on qualifying R&D expenditure.
- **Investment Tax Credits:** Available when purchasing qualifying equipment that adheres to specific performance and quality standards, such as solar energy property, qualified fuel cell property, and qualified small wind energy property.
- **Green Building Deductions:** Tax incentives for businesses that upgrade commercial buildings with high-energy systems[42] [43].

To maximize tax benefits from green practices, businesses should stay informed about evolving government regulations and incentives, conduct thorough energy audits to identify areas for improvement, and strategically invest in eligible technologies. Maintaining detailed records of all green investments and related expenses is crucial, as is consulting with tax professionals specializing in green incentives. Finally, planning for long-term sustainability beyond immediate savings will ensure continued eligibility and greater environmental impact.

By understanding and leveraging these incentives, businesses can reduce costs, improve efficiency, and enhance their environmental impact. Green taxes, cash grants, and tax incentives are increasing as governments aim to reach their environmental goals cost-effectively.

Networking and Support

Industry Associations and Groups:

Womenture: An international program supporting female-founded startups through mentoring and community building, aiming to strengthen female entrepreneurship in the European innovation ecosystem. The program runs until January 2025 and offers mentoring to those starting a business or developing an existing company [45].

The European Network of Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors: A network of around 270 entrepreneurs from 22 European countries who act as role models to encourage women of all ages to consider entrepreneurship [46].

The European Network of Mentors for Women Entrepreneurs: Provides advice and support to women entrepreneurs in the early phases of their businesses. Seventeen European countries belong to the Mentors Network: Albania, Belgium, Cyprus, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey and the United Kingdom [46].

European Women Association: A global platform that empowers female founders by establishing a strong and safe foundation for women-led projects and businesses [47].

EmpoWomen: A 2-year program (2024-2025) funded by the European Union through its Horizon Europe Research and Innovation program, supporting startups led by women in the deep-tech sector, particularly in emerging European countries. It provides equity-free funding and vouchers for mentorship [48].

Mentorship Programs:

Here are some mentorship programs that offer opportunities to connect with experts in sustainability and green entrepreneurship:

- **EGU-IEEP Policy Mentoring Scheme:** The European Geosciences Union (EGU) and the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) offer a 12-month hybrid mentoring scheme for early to mid-career scientists to work alongside IEPP members. This scheme provides hands-on experience and insights into how they interact and share information with Europe's policy community. The selected candidate will spend three weeks in Brussels, with travel expenses covered, to engage in IEPP's policy projects and network with experts [49].
- **EuroNatur Mentoring Programme:** This program is designed for employees of nature conservation organizations from across Europe and the Mediterranean Basin. Mentors should have at least seven years of professional experience and good communication skills. The program is held in English, and participation includes a financial contribution of 200 € to cover administrative expenses, with options for exemption [50].
- **Women in Sustainability (WiS) Mentoring Programme:** The Hertie School offers a small-group mentoring program for women-identifying students

interested in careers in climate, energy, and sustainability. It focuses on career-oriented guidance, support, and training for women pursuing careers in these male-dominated fields. Mentorship takes place in 3-5 small group sessions throughout the academic year [51].

- **BEFuture Acceleration Programme:** This program offers opportunities for mentors to support SMEs and other organizations in turning innovative ideas into reality within the business events sector, promoting sustainability, resilience, and inclusivity. Selected project beneficiaries will recruit verified mentors, with the costs of mentoring sessions funded through the program. Each project must foresee the support of one mentor for at least 20 hours [52].
- **Algae Accelerator Mentorship Programme:** AlgaeProBANOS has a mentorship program designed to help startups and SMEs in the algae value chain upscale their business strategies. Mentors share their practical expertise in the blue biotech industry to assist the next generation of algae entrepreneurs. The program compensates mentors for their support with a contribution of €10,000 and offers them the opportunity to connect with a global network of like-minded professionals [53].
- **Women in Cleantech & Sustainability Mentorship Program:** This is a 3-month, cohort-based program that supports women in advancing their careers in the cleantech industry [54].

Collaboration Platforms:

Here are some notable collaboration platforms and networks that support female entrepreneurs and facilitate knowledge sharing, resources, and opportunities:

- **Eurochambres Women Network (EWN):** This pan-European network connects women entrepreneurs, providing a platform for sharing knowledge, best practices, and strategic partnerships. EWN aims to address challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, promote successful initiatives, and share success stories to inspire others [55].
- **Female Founders Ambassadors Network:** This network fosters a community of female entrepreneurial minds across Europe. It offers online events, investment readiness accelerators, and leadership programs to increase diversity in the tech ecosystem while allowing ambassadors to share insights and support each other [56].
- **WEgate:** Launched by the European Commission, WEgate is an online platform designed as a one-stop shop for women entrepreneurs. It provides access to training, mentoring, advice, and networking opportunities, helping women start, run, and grow their businesses [57].
- **WeHubs:** This initiative supports women web entrepreneurs by providing resources, networking opportunities, and guidance to help them succeed in the digital economy [58].

These platforms offer valuable opportunities for female entrepreneurs in Europe to connect, collaborate, and access resources that can help them thrive in their ventures.

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