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Up2Circ – Boosting the Uptake of Circular Business Model, Product and Process Innovation

Horizon Europe 2021-2027

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The Up2Circ-Client journey to circularity

A guideline for Up2Circ multipliers

[14.12.2023]

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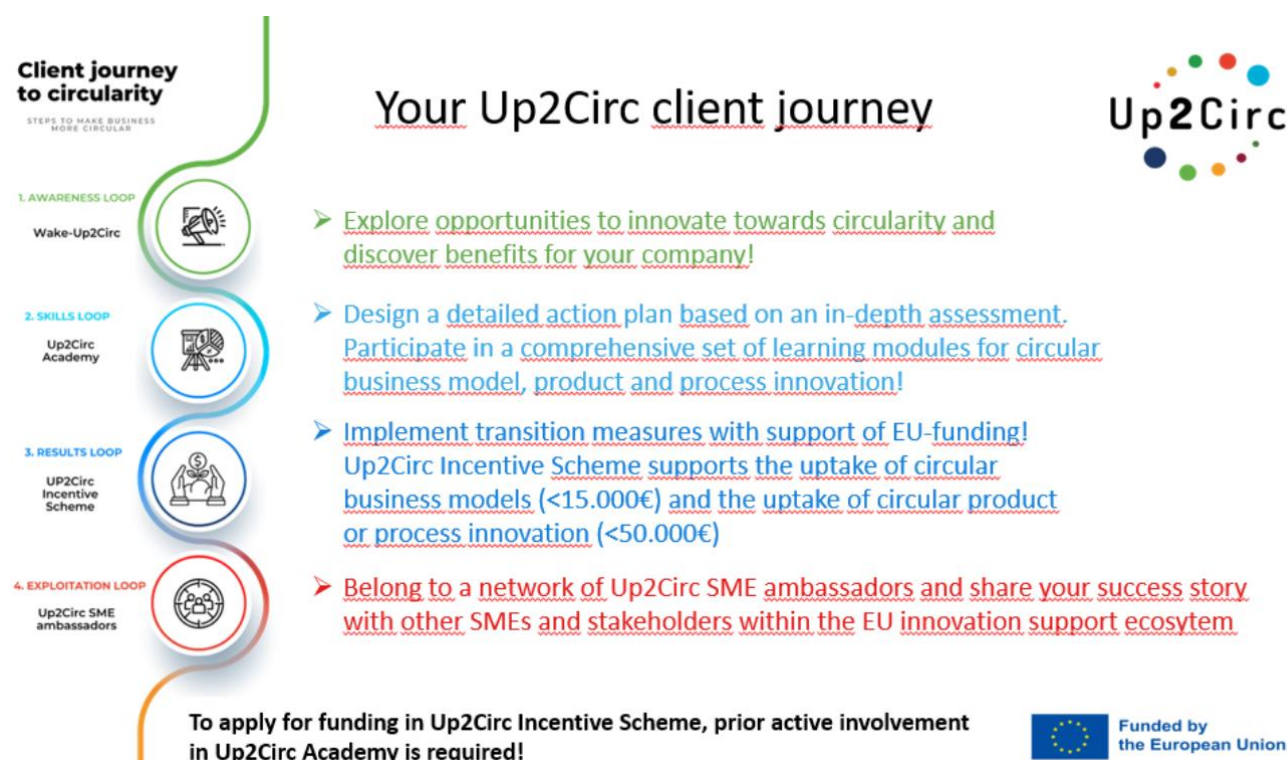


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Up2Circ-Accelerator: The Up2Circ client journey

Within Up2Circ-Accelerator, advisory services and funding are offered to small and medium sized companies (SMEs, [according to the EU SME definition](#)) as a comprehensive package, with the aim to mobilise and enable SMEs for the uptake of circular business models, circular product design and circular processes. Main target group of Up2Circ are traditional SMEs of all sizes and sectors. The Up2Circ client journey accompanies SMEs with a client-centric, customised advisory approach from exploration of opportunities to concrete implementation projects along the circular strategies to narrow (use less), slow (use longer), close (use again), regenerate (make clean) and inform (use data) material and energy flows.



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1. Awareness Loop: Wake-Up2Circ

The Up2Circ-client journey to circularity starts with Loop 1 “Wake-Up2Circ”, showing **what** opportunities circular innovation can offer to SMEs. On the open-access scheme this contains outlining political framework, challenges and opportunities of a circular economy and information on the support and incentive scheme offered within Up2Circ, summarised in Up2Circ Info-kit. On the customised level this information is complemented with client intake. The advisor shall get first insight into the current status of business of the SME and the ambitions and existing knowledge with regard to sustainable innovation and circularity. The SME receives first feedback on suitable opportunities to innovate towards circularity and their potential benefit. The advisor will give an overview of customised services provided at each stage of Up2Circ and a sound overview of further suitable EU innovation support offers.

1.1 Up2Circ info kit

Objective: Provide a set of basic information materials on EU transition towards circular economy to be used in awareness raising webinars or events and as introductory part in Up2Circ client intake meetings

Format: Different versions prepared:

- PowerPoint-presentation including notes for the moderator (depending on timeframe all slides or only a selection can be used)
- Detailed more text-intense pdf-version for download or to be mailed to companies

1.2 Up2Circ client intake

Objective: Raise awareness about opportunities of circular innovation:

- The advisor gets first insight into the current status of business of the SME and the ambitions and existing knowledge with regard to sustainable innovation and circularity.
- The SME receives first feedback on suitable opportunities to innovate towards circularity and their potential benefit.

Format: Meeting/conference call moderated on the basis of Up2Circ light info kit presentation with additional slides to discover opportunities of circular economy customised to the company

Tool:

- PowerPoint-presentation as introductory part in Up2Circ client intake meetings based on info kit

Interview guideline for SME advisors:

1. **Preparation:** Before meeting the company, you should have a look at their website and social media presence and check official company data as far as available. A quick look into the sectorial catalogues of Up2Circ can help you to get insights to circular economy challenges and opportunities of the sector. Make a first mapping of the most important resource inflows and outflows of the company – your assumptions are a good starting point to discuss these later with your client.

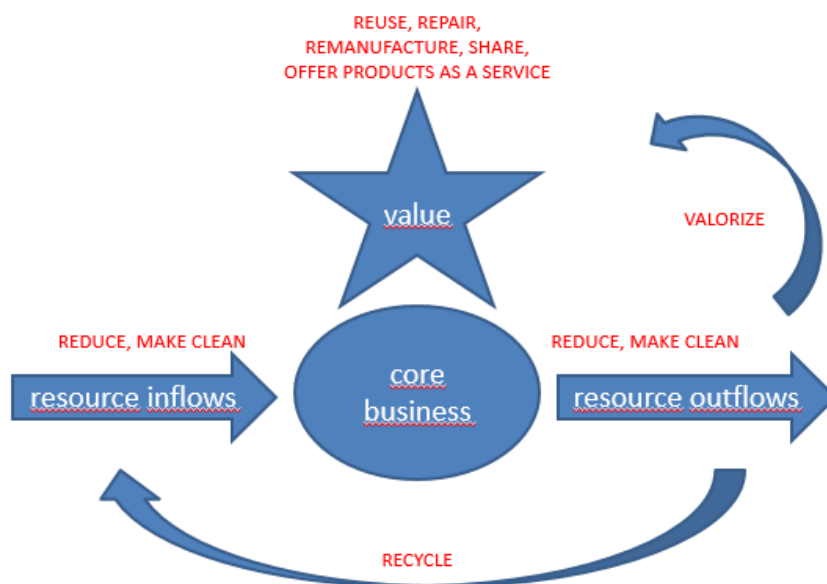



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2. **Introduction:** Introduce yourself and ask the company to present their core business, most important markets and their current main challenges – it can be valuable to catch up later on these aspects for showing opportunities related to circular economy, e.g.:

<i>challenge</i>	<i>opportunity</i>
Rising material and energy prices	Optimisation measures
Price-competition with low-quality products	Selling products as a service
Insecure supply chains	Remanufacturing, Recycling
Struggling to find employees	Gaining attractiveness as a sustainable SME
Losing customers	Reshaping the business model with servitization

3. **Presentation:** If the company already participated in an event, where the Up2Circ info-kit presentation was shown, slides 3-13 do not need to be shown again. In case this is the first contact with Up2Circ project, you should go through the slides to set the ground. From the best practice slides you could select only those you consider most interesting for your client.
4. **Discovering opportunities:** Slides 15-17 are intended to do a first reflection about innovation opportunities towards circular economy with the company. This shall not be an in-depth assessment but just stimulate first ideas and motivate for further steps.



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Key questions on opportunities:

Check with the company whether your first mapping of the companies' resources (inflows/outflows of energy sources and raw materials) is valid.

Could your resource inflows be reduced or could they be made more sustainable? (*REDUCE or MAKE CLEAN: e.g. optimisation of material and energy flows, replacing fossil materials with biobased ones, lightweight production, establishing circular supply chains, local supply, avoiding toxic substances...*)

Could your resource outflows be reduced, made clean, be valorised or recycled? (*REDUCE, MAKE CLEAN, VALORISE or RECYCLE: e.g. separation of materials, re-use of production waste, valorisation of by-products, reduction of waste and emissions.*)

Could you extend your value chain and contribute to keeping value of products and materials in the economy as long as possible? (*REUSE, REPAIR, REMANUFACTURE, SHARE, OFFER PRODUCTS AS A SERVICE, e.g. offer products as a service instead of selling them, offer repair services, establish processes for reuse and remanufacturing.*)

Reflect about capacities transition measures would require and key stakeholders you would need to involve! (*CAPACITIES: For example a company that used to sell goods needs to build up new capacities if it introduces repair services or needs to develop a far more intense customer relationship if it starts to offer products as a service. STAKEHOLDERS: Circular economy benefits from involving an ecosystem perspective and partnering with solution providers or other companies along the value chain is often key to increase circularity.*)

Key questions on possible outcomes for the company:

What would be the opportunity to transition towards circular economy?

(*e.g. economic benefits derived from efficient use of materials or reduction of energy use, differentiation strategy from competitors with the implementation of CE principles...*)

What could be the obstacles to transition towards circular economy?

(*e.g. difficulties to promote circular behaviour, challenging redesign of the value chain...*)

What would be the impacts and risks of staying in a linear economy? (*being further exposed to rising material and energy prices and the risk of supply chain interruptions, losing competitiveness, not being prepared for legislative/customer demands...*)

Vision: Ask the company to formulate a first vision. This might still be adjusted later in the client journey, but it is important that the company has a clear goal to start the process.

Outcome: First feedback on suitable opportunities and benefits to innovate towards circularity.



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2 Skills Loop: Up2Circ-Academy

After completing Loop 1 the clients willing to take further steps continue with Loop 2, the **Up2Circ-Academy**, outlining **how** SMEs can innovate to transform. As a first step the Up2Circ Circularity Assessment Tool shall help to get an overview of organisational readiness and help to discover challenges and opportunities linked to circular innovation. If possible, the assessment should be performed together with a regional advisor, who should complete it with a feedback meeting, where the advisor gives in-depth recommendations on opportunities for transition towards circular economy, focusing on concrete achievable measures suitable within the specific context of this SME, and can further support the SMEs with development of a detailed action plan. Companies not connected to a regional advisor can also perform the assessment on their own, using the online version available on Up2Circ website, and will receive an automated feedback mail, guiding them to next steps. To improve their circularity skills, with the Up2Circ Academy on thinkific-platform, clients can take a deep-dive into a comprehensive set of learning modules, each of them showing a detailed pathway towards implementation of circular business models, circular product design or circular processes and including expert knowledge on the uptake of advanced technologies and social innovation as enablers of circularity. Interactive sessions are offered and will regularly be announced in Up2Circ event calendar. Sectorial catalogues have been developed, giving detailed insights into sectorial challenges and solutions related to transition towards a circular economy.

2.1 Up2Circ Circularity Assessment Tool

Tool:

- [Online Assessment Form](#) with automated feedback mail
- Excel Assessment Form included report features

Objective / This tool will help you to:

- Become familiar with the circular economy (CE) and strategies that are practical for your business
- Score how well you integrate circular strategies into your business
- Discover opportunities for improvement and challenges to address
- Learn and/or improve your knowledge on CE topics
- Exchange with other companies
- Read inspirational case studies and examples of best practices

2.1.1 Assessment Questionnaire

Assessment of statements related to **current SME status** according to the following scale:

No development (0) / Exploring the options/possibilities/opportunities (1) / Partially operational (2) / Fully operational (3) / Not applicable


SME ambition will be **assessed in subsequent discussions** to reflect goals in the Action Plan and eventually evaluate progress towards circularity.

The assessment is carried out against the following statements:

1. We have set and published environmental and/or social goals for our company.
2. We measure the environmental footprint of our production / service provision.



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3. Our management team is interested in a transition towards circularity.
4. Our staff has competences or received training/guidance regarding circular economy.
5. We communicate about our sustainability performance (using networks, social platforms, other communication means).
6. We are aware about current and upcoming regulations regarding sustainability applicable to our business.
7. We know our stakeholders' (customers, contractors) expectations regarding sustainability.
8. We check our suppliers' compliance to sustainability principles and take sustainability criteria into consideration in procurement/purchase decisions.
9. We cooperate with partners that contribute to the circularisation of our products/services and the value chain.
10. We monitor the circular economy best practices in our sector for inspiration in order to utilise it.
11. We have mapped inefficiencies of our current business model that can be addressed by circular economy strategies.
12. We take measures to reduce our energy and material consumption.
13. We are using renewable energy sources.
14. We have decreased dependency on imported raw materials.
15. We prioritise the use of circular materials (bio-based, recycled, etc.).
16. We are aware about the types of waste we produce and how it could be reduced, valorised or recycled.
17. We use remanufactured, refurbished or repaired parts/components.
18. We consider ecological aspects with regards to packaging.
19. Our product is easily repairable (either by us, the user or a service provider).
20. We offer/are users of a maintenance/repair/upgrade services to extend product lifetime.
21. Our products can be returned and/or refurbished/remanufactured.
22. We provide information to consumers on the best disposal way of our product.
23. We offer/utilise product as a service (leasing, renting, pay-per-use, other types of "product access" vs. ownership, etc.).
24. We offer/utilise a sharing/collaborative models where products, equipment or infrastructure are co-used or exchanged.

Based on the questions (Q) above the following five domains are assessed for each company and shown in the feedback report graphics:

- Organisational readiness (Q 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6).
- Know your (circular) business (Q 2, 7, 10, 11 and 16).
- Less waste and emissions (Q 12, 13, 14, 18 and 22).
- Circular design and supply (Q 8, 15, 17 and 19).
- Circular business model and value proposition (Q 9, 20, 21, 23 and 24).

2.1.2 Guideline on analysis of results:


Recommendations (Results are automatically processed through an excel file for the weaknesses detected). The following general recommendations can be considered in the context of the 24 assessment questions.

Q1: We have set and published environmental and/or social goals for our company.

There is growing evidence that consumers are increasingly mindful of companies' sustainability credentials and are willing to pay more for sustainable goods, with factors such as environment, packaging, price, marketing, and claims around organic or health and wellness credentials coming into consideration. Businesses play a key role in sustainable development and human prosperity, and those



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with environmental and social goals can better benefit from new opportunities, increased customer loyalty and secure markets in what will be a more climate-secure, prosperous and equitable society.

Q2: We measure the environmental footprint of our production / service provision

The environmental footprint is an impact indicator that reflects the consequences of human and/or business activity on resources and the environment. The calculation of the environmental footprint applies a methodology based on life cycle analysis to quantify environmental impacts. In this way, the environmental impact of each phase in the process of obtaining raw materials, manufacturing, storage, distribution, consumption, etc., of each product or service can be known. Companies make efforts to objectively demonstrate that their products or activities have a reduced environmental impact and use this as a differentiating mechanism in the market.

Q3: Our management team is interested in a transition towards circularity

The understanding of the opportunities related to CE and the commitment of the management team to embed the sustainability in the company's values and strategy are crucial to progress towards a circular economy. Companies with a high sustainable engagement present in their accounts an operating margin three times higher than those with lower levels, as well as lower rates of absenteeism, greater innovation and fewer problems to retain their employees.

Q4: Our staff has competences or received training/guidance regarding circular economy.

Competence of the staff is a prerequisite to engage in CE. If there is a lack of internal competence regarding CE, companies can train their staff to increase their knowledge and skills. As previously mentioned, in order to achieve results when adopting circular economy strategies in the company, it is key to have a committed but also skilled team. Indeed, employees can provide ideas based on their specific areas of expertise, drive change towards innovation and determine the success of company's sustainability initiatives. In the meantime, companies can use external resources to advise them on the path towards circular economy.

Q5: We communicate about our sustainability performance (using networks, social platforms, other communication means).

Communication is a supporting tool to engage and raise awareness throughout the value chain about the benefits of a shift towards a more sustainable economy and to publicise the actions of the company's strategy. Companies that are already implementing design, production and reuse processes in their business and operating models should strategically incorporate them into their corporate communication policy..

Q6: We are aware about current and upcoming regulations regarding sustainability applicable to our business.

Knowledge of current and future regulations is important to anticipate opportunities and threats regarding your business. Regulations regarding sustainability are getting more ambitious in Europe. For example, companies are progressively subject to sustainability-related regulatory and reporting requirements that address impacts and performance in diverse areas across their full value chain. Regulatory watch can be implemented in order to make sure that your business meet the regulation applicable in your sector. But you can also anticipate these changes, trying to innovate with CE principles to get a sustainable competitive advantage.

Q7: We know our stakeholders' (customers, contractors) expectations regarding sustainability.

There is growing evidence that all stakeholders are increasingly mindful of companies' performance regarding sustainability principles. Higher expectations for sustainability standards are being set by those at the top of the chain to ensure alignment between their own commitments and the practices of their



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suppliers. The standards expected by companies at the top of the chain are not always imposed by law or regulation – companies and public bodies often lay down their own conditions that must be met by their trading partners. Same applies to finance, may it be public or private sources. Positive responses from finance providers will depend on specific criteria having been met. In line with EU taxonomy, sustainability principles are increasingly being included in the criteria set by these finance providers, with SMEs having to demonstrate their commitment to practices aligned with ESG principles and to disclosure of ESG related risks. Therefore, it is important to map the stakeholders to whom you consider yourself accountable, and understand their expectations.

Q8: We check our suppliers' compliance to sustainability principles and take sustainability criteria into consideration in procurement/purchase decisions.

ESG reporting standards and regulations are evolving fast especially regarding supply chains. The German Act on Due Diligence in Supply Chains, effective since January 2023, and a parallel EU initiative, the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, are part of a growing global drive to oblige companies to carry out human rights and environmental due diligence across their supply chains. As a result, SMEs that fall behind on ESG risk losing valuable opportunities with big companies, particularly where regulation or capital depends on it, unless they can match the ESG standards.

Q9: We cooperate with partners that contribute to the circularisation of our products/services and the value chain.

Engaging with external partners (e.g. associations, clusters, other sectorial and professional organizations) is a great starting point for an SME looking to improve its approach to circular economy. To maximize the benefits of these relationships, SMEs should prioritize ongoing communication and collaboration with these organizations to stay updated on new developments and opportunities. SMEs should also actively seek out and participate in industry events, conferences, and training programs to broaden their understanding of circular economy principles and best practices. Additionally, SMEs can explore partnerships with other organizations to share knowledge, expertise, and resources for more effective circular economy initiatives.

Q10: We monitor the circular economy best practices in our sector for inspiration in order to utilise it.

SMEs may not have the economies of scale experienced by larger businesses, but they have the advantage of being agile and responsive to changing consumer trends, market demands and regulations that dictate changes to business practices. This agility is especially useful in areas such as branding, marketing and product development. It can be developed through market and technology watch, including CE best practices applicable in your business.

Q 11: We have mapped inefficiencies of our current business model that can be addressed by circular economy strategies.

After mapping the linear and circular aspects of your current business model, the next step is to prioritize areas of improvement and develop strategies to transition towards a more circular approach. Focus on redesigning products and services to align with circular principles, such as durability, modularity, and recyclability. Rethink your revenue model to incorporate new circular business models, such as product-as-a-service, sharing platforms, or take-back schemes. Collaboration is key, so seek partnerships with like-minded organizations to help scale circular initiatives and share expertise. Lastly, set clear targets and key performance indicators (KPIs) to track progress and ensure continuous improvement, allowing for regular evaluation and adjustments to maintain momentum in your circular economy journey.

Q12: We take measures to reduce our energy and material consumption.

Good energy management guarantees an improvement in specific consumption. Therefore, conduct regular energy audits to identify opportunities for improved energy efficiency in your operations, and invest in energy-saving technologies or process optimisations is an excellent option. The reduction of material consumption can be addressed through eco-design, which will reduce the environmental impact of the procurement stage of raw materials and components used in the manufacture of products.

Q13: We are using renewable energy sources.

Utilizing renewable energy sources is a positive step towards a circular economy, there are further actions your SME can take to enhance its commitment to sustainability. Consider expanding your renewable energy portfolio to include a diverse range of sources, which can increase resilience and reduce reliance on non-renewable resources. Collaborate with suppliers and partners to encourage them to adopt renewable energy solutions, thereby fostering a more sustainable value chain. Lastly, explore possibilities for energy storage and smart grid solutions, enabling your organization to optimize energy usage while minimizing waste and contributing to a more circular energy system.

Q14: We have decreased dependency on imported raw materials.

Transitioning to decreased dependency on imported raw materials brings benefits such as increased resource security, local job creation, improved trade balances, and enhanced competitiveness. However, challenges include significant investments in infrastructure and research, disruptions to existing supply chains, and potential economic losses. Balancing short-term costs with long-term benefits requires careful planning.

Q15: We prioritise the use of circular materials (bio-based, recycled, etc.).


Prioritizing circular materials in product design offers benefits such as reducing environmental impact, creating new business opportunities for companies that specialize in circular materials and recycling, and enhancing brand reputation. However, challenges include variable material availability and quality, increased costs, and longer development timelines. This shift requires collaboration between stakeholders, including manufacturers, suppliers, and consumers, to develop and implement effective circular strategies that prioritize sustainability. Only by working together and sharing knowledge and resources we can overcome the challenges associated with incorporating circular materials into product design and maximize the potential benefits.

Q16: We are aware about the types of waste we produce and how it could be reduced, valorised or recycled.

The recovery procedure will depend on the composition of the waste, so taking a holistic approach by conducting a waste audit to identify areas where waste can be reduced or eliminated is a key activity. Waste recovery starts with sorting the different types of materials and transforming them to give them a new use. But the process is much more complex and involves comprehensive waste management at different levels: from carrying out a detailed inventory of the waste generated, its origin, storage systems and associated costs, to analysing the best techniques and technological possibilities for the treatment of each type of waste, or carrying out economic studies to determine its market possibilities and profitability. Waste recovery is not only a recommendable activity, but has become an action of vital importance for the competitiveness of the company.

Q17: We use remanufactured, refurbished or repaired parts/components.

Waste recovery starts with sorting the different types of materials and transforming them to give them a new use. But the process is much more complex and involves comprehensive waste management at different levels: from carrying out a detailed inventory of the waste generated, its origin, storage systems and associated costs, to analysing the best techniques and technological possibilities for the treatment

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of each type of waste, or carrying out economic studies to determine its market possibilities and profitability.

Q18: We consider ecological aspects with regards to packaging.

Waste recovery is not only a recommendable activity, but has become an action of vital importance for the competitiveness of the company.

Q19: Our product is easily repairable (either by us, the user or a service provider).

The right to repair is proposed EU legislation that advocates for good product design, accessible spare parts and tools, and documentation for product repairability. Companies that already comply with these aspects are well prepared for future legislation and contribute to reduce the amount of products that are discarded, often just because minor parts are broken.

Q20: We offer/are users of a maintenance/repair/upgrade services to extend product lifetime.

Focus on repairing products by offering warranties for the supply of replacement parts or better access to repair and maintenance information is an interesting strategy to extend the service life, as most breakdowns are often easily repairable by replacing components that are in poor condition, more stressed or more worn.

Q21: Our products can be returned and/or refurbished/remanufactured.

Many products have not reached their end-of-life when a consumer stops using them. Returned products can be refurbished and offered in a second use cycle. For companies, this can open up new revenue opportunities and access to new customer segments.

Q22: We provide information to consumers on the best disposal way of our product.

When company's goods are properly disposed of there is little to no risk that they will end up on the grey market. Company might also be rest assured that its liability will decrease, its competitors do not get an advantage and the quality of its product will remain at its highest value.

Q23: We offer/utilise product as a service (leasing, renting, pay-per-use, other types of “product access” vs. ownership, etc.).

To further improve your SME's approach to the circular economy while offering products as a service, consider refining your service offering to maximise resource efficiency and minimise waste generation. Servitisation offers the possibility to collaborate with customers to understand their needs and preferences, which will allow you to tailor your services and obtain more stable and long-lasting relationships with your customers over time.

Q24: We offer/utilise a sharing/collaborative models where products, equipment or infrastructure are co-used or exchanged.

To improve your SME's approach to the circular economy while using a sharing platform, consider implementing strategies that encourage and facilitate greater adoption of shared resources. This may include incentivising long-term users with loyalty programmes or offering discounts for eco-conscious practices. Collaborating with other organisations on the exchange platform to create complementary offerings that can maximise resource utilisation and reduce waste can improve resource flows by increasing your environmental performance and competitive edge. Finally, investing in user education and awareness campaigns to promote responsible sharing behaviours and the benefits of collaborative consumption, encouraging a change of mindset towards a more sustainable and circular economy.



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Suggested Improvements

This free text field can be used by the advisor to draft suggestions for possible Up2Circ Implementation projects.

Possible next steps

Depending on the score, possible next steps are automatically suggested by the excel report file:

Scoring: 0 – 25%

Up2Circ team is ready to help you in getting started!

- ✓ [Check out best practices in our sectorial catalogues](#)
- ✓ [Continue your circularity journey with your Up2Circ advisor](#)
- ✓ [Browse learning modules in our Academy](#)

Scoring: 25 – 50%

Up2Circ team is ready to support you in further exploring!

- ✓ [Check out best practices in our sectorial catalogues](#)
- ✓ [Be part of our circular community and exchange with others in online workshops and cross-innovation sessions](#)
- ✓ [Browse learning modules in our Academy](#)

Scoring: 50 - 75%

Up2Circ team is ready to assist you in becoming fully operational!

- ✓ [Be part of our circular community and exchange with others in online workshops and cross-innovation sessions](#)
- ✓ [Reach out to explore our EU Funding opportunities](#)
- ✓ [Browse learning modules in our Academy](#)

Scoring: 75 – 100%

Up2Circ team is ready to support you in keeping up the good work!

- ✓ [Browse learning modules in our Academy](#)
- ✓ [Reach out to explore our EU Funding opportunities](#)
- ✓ [Become an inspiration to others through our sessions or as SME Ambassador in our circular community](#)

2.2 Action Plan Development / Circular Economy Roadmap

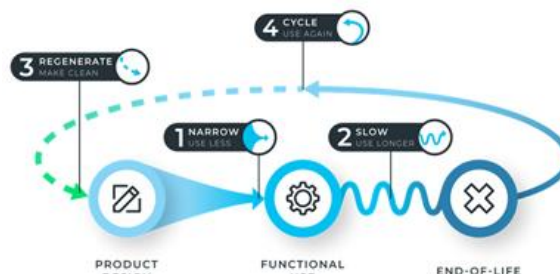
A detailed action plan including next steps and a timeline will help the companies to proceed with their Up2Circ transition project besides daily work. While some companies might already have a clear vision of what to do, others might need a more extended ideation phase:



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2.2.1 Ideation: Get a full picture of circular innovation opportunities

For many SMEs it is challenging to think out of the box about all the circular economy opportunities that could be relevant connected to their business. An excellent tool to facilitate this ideation process is the [Circularity Deck](#), designed by Jan Konietzko. The company can setup an own free [Miro-board](#) version and share the link with you as advisor. Using the circularity deck cards you can explore how the flows of materials, energy, water and nutrients within the influence of your business could be narrowed (use less), slowed (use longer), closed/cycled (use again) or regenerated (make clean).



2.2.2 Focus: Prioritise and decide which ideas should be followed up

After drafting the full picture of opportunities, the company can prioritise the ideas along criteria such as feasibility, business opportunity and environmental impact. The company should decide which aspects they would like to further follow-up and what might qualify as focus topic of an Up2Circ implementation project.

2.2.3 Timeline

A calendar with next steps will help to keep overview

Activity	Date	Link
Circularity Deck workshop (or similar)		
Feedback meeting on Action Plan		
Learning module: Introduction to CE		
Learning module: XX		
Interactive session		
...		

2.2.4 Impact measurement

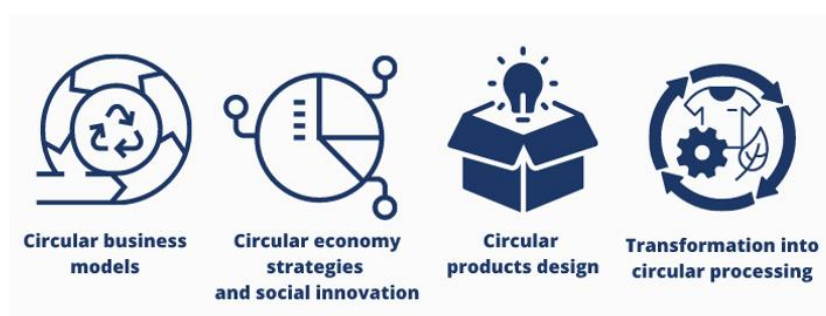
A circularity roadmap should make progress measurable. The company should decide on suitable Key Performance Indicators (KPI), analyse current status and set goals. In Up2Circ we recommend to use one or more of the following indicators:

CE indicator	SDG	Actual (if available)	Aim reduction (%)	Activities suggested	Timeline
Energy consumption	7				

GHG emissions	13				
Materials consumed	8				
Waste generated	12				
Economic indicator	SDG	Actual	Aim increase (%)	Activities suggested	Timeline
Jobs created/preserved	8				
Turnover	8				

2.3 Learning Modules of Up2Circ Academy

To provide easy access to relevant knowledge about Circular Economy we have prepared 4 e-learning modules on based on existing free online content:



Following the Circularity Assessment, the advisor should guide the SMEs to those contents of Up2Circ Academy that would be most relevant within their context. In addition, the Up2Circ Academy modules can be a good basis for SME advisors to increase own expertise on Circular Economy aspects. For access to the Up2Circ Academy a [registration](#) on the e-learning platform “Thinkific” is needed, this is free of cost.


Decription of contents:

In the introductory module you will learn about the concepts of the circular economy and about **circular business models**, their types and how to adopt them. We will discuss the opportunities and barriers in the transition to a more circular business model and provide many examples and case studies.

Circular business models do not operate in isolation. In the next module entitled **CE strategies and social innovation**, we will show how processes are designed to respect the environment and limited resources. The main strategies will be identified based on a circular economy approach and according to the ‘9Rs’ (refuse, rethink, reduce, reuse, repair, refurbish, remanufacture, repurpose, recycle, recover). The modules’ exceptionality lies in the methodological connection of social innovation and circular economy. At the end, you will be aware of your own companies’ consequences on the ecological and social environment. You will be able to identify crucial access points for a smooth transformation towards a more circular and social way of running a business.



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Did you know that about 80% of the environmental footprint of a product is already determined during design phase? We need to rethink product design in a way that includes considering the environmental impact of products throughout their whole life-cycle and extends their lifetime. The objective of the next learning module is therefore to provide companies with efficient know-how on how to **design circular products**.

The topic of the last module is **Transformation into circular processing**. In its lessons, you will find an overview of the different methods and technologies that can enable companies to transform themselves towards circularity, enhance their processes and therefore unlock productivity, innovation and sustainability. The first section is dedicated to circular processes and different implementation approaches. In the second section, you will learn about the role that technologies can play as enablers of circularity and the best available technologies for circularity.

2.4 Sectorial Catalogues

The [sectorial catalogues](#) shall provide both the SMEs and the advisors with relevant practical sector-specific information on circular transition opportunities. To make best use of synergies between Up2Circ and Enterprise Europe Network, we decided to follow the same structural setup as EEN sector groups with the 14 EU industrial ecosystems plus the Maritime Industries. All Up2Circ sectorial catalogues follow a similar structure including:

- Short introduction to the industrial ecosystem / content focus
- Challenges for the sector with regard to sustainability demands, including a brief overview of relevant regulations
- CE opportunities for the sector, including best practices
- Overview of tech-savvy SMEs that develop/offer solutions to increase circularity in the sector
- Links to sector specific online contents, including sector specific funding opportunities

2.5 Interactive Sessions

Up2Circ interactive sessions shall give SMEs the opportunity to receive experts advise on specific topics and to share experiences with other companies. Peer-to-peer sessions shall facilitate exchange among Up2Circ-clients working on similar transition aspects (e.g. circular product design) and shall also involve SMEs that have already implemented these measures. Cross-innovation sessions shall challenge participants in a creative cross-sector setting applying social innovation methodology to think out of the box about opportunities to innovate and transform. The sessions will be announced in [Up2Circ event calendar](#).

3 Results Loop: Up2Circ Incentive Scheme


Objective: To provide financial support to a minimum of 92 SMEs for implementation projects focusing on the uptake of circular business model, product or process innovation. Financial support will be provided to single SMEs that have been actively involved in the Up2Circ academy activities and prepared application documents of sufficient quality before the open call deadline.

Duration: Each call is open for the period of 2 months, after which there is a dedicated time of up to 2 months for evaluation. After the evaluation, the grantees can begin with the implementation of their projects.

- A pilot call eligible only for SMEs from the 7 Up2Circ partner regions was opened on September 13th, 2023 and closed on November 15th 2023.



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- Two open calls eligible for SMEs from all countries eligible in Horizon Europe Programme are planned along the following timeline:

First open access call: Involvement of clients in Up2Circ loop 1 & 2 starts from 12/2023 on, call deadline is 31.05.2024

Second open access call: Involvement of clients in Up2Circ loop 1 & 2 starts from 6/2024 on, call deadline is 5/2025

Scope: SMEs can apply for two different funding schemes based on the maturity of their transition projects:

Small scale projects: Feasibility studies

Funding: small scale projects of up to €15.000

Project scope: In-depth validation of technical, economic and social aspects of adoption of circular business models, considering desirability, feasibility, viability and environmental aspects. Projects should focus on one or several circular business models such as circular supply chain, sharing platforms, product as a service, product life extension, recovery and recycling.

Expected outcome: feasibility study including a business plan

Project duration: max. 6 months

Large scale projects: Piloting and demonstration

Funding: large scale projects of up to €50.000

Project scope: Pilot and demonstration activities to implement concrete transition measures towards circularity through the implementation of certain technologies, introduction of new products, processes and services. Projects should focus on prototyping, pilot testing, implementation of new business processes, solutions and systems.

Expected outcome: validated prototype

Project duration: max. 12 months

Eligible Costs: Eligible costs are subject to the basic eligibility rules of Horizon Europe as defined in Art. 6 of the Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement. Only costs generated within the duration of the action are eligible.

Eligible costs must be declared under the following budget categories:

- Personnel costs: employees or equivalent, natural persons under direct contract, seconded persons, SME owners and natural person beneficiaries
- Subcontracting costs (based on beneficiary's usual purchasing practices and ensuring best value for money and no conflict of interests)
- Purchase costs: travel and subsistence
- Purchase costs: equipment, infrastructures and other assets (calculated on the basis of the costs actually incurred and written off in accordance with international accounting standards and the beneficiary's usual accounting practices)
- Purchase costs: other goods, works and services



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- Indirect costs are added by applying the 25% flat rate to the direct costs that qualify for indirect costs, these are all cost categories listed above except for subcontracting.

Launching of Open Calls: Call Announcement will be published on the official [Up2Circ website](#). Guide for Applicants, Guide for Evaluators, and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) will be also available on Up2Circ website.

Application: Applicants will apply via an online form embedded on the Up2Circ website.

Evaluation and Selection: Application that passed the initial admissibility and eligibility check (performed by Up2Circ consortium) will be evaluated by 3 independent evaluators. More information on evaluation criteria can be seen in the [Guide for Evaluators](#).

Signing of subgrants agreements and payments: Applicants selected in the evaluation will be invited to sign a subgrant agreement. 50% of the grant is paid out after signing the subgrant agreement and 50% after the validation of the final report.

Reporting: The Final Report must be submitted by the Beneficiary within 30 days after the end day of the action, detailing the work progress towards the project objectives, defined milestones and deliverables set in the Agreement, major achievements and impact and next steps.

The Final Report must include the following:

- Technical report – an overview of the activities implemented and results of the action linked to identified milestones and KPIs
- Financial report –the total costs spent and request for balance payment

4 Exploitation Loop: Up2Circ SME ambassadors

As success stories and first hand experiences of other entrepreneurs are usually most convincing to motivate follower SMEs, best practices of Up2Circ will be sustained with publication in a catalogue, visualisation in one video per partner region and maintained on a personnel level within a network of Up2Circ SME ambassadors, who can be approached by stakeholders of EU innovation support ecosystem to share their best practices.



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