CirculUP!

Final Evaluation Report

January 2026

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Executive summary

The CirculUP! project was implemented between 2023 and 2025 with the objective of supporting Armenia's transition towards a green, sustainable, and circular economy through a systemic, ecosystem-based approach. The project was funded by the European Union and implemented by Impact Hub Network, Impact Hub Yerevan, and the Environment and Health NGO (EHNGO). The project addressed circular economy development simultaneously at civil society, entrepreneurial, public awareness, and policy levels.

Purpose and approach of the final evaluation

The final evaluation aimed to assess the extent to which CirculUP! achieved its intended results and contributed to systemic change. In particular, it examined the project's effectiveness in strengthening capacities across civil society, entrepreneurial, and institutional actors; its contribution to improved public understanding and policy dialogue on circular economy; and the sustainability of results beyond the project lifecycle. The evaluation also sought to identify enabling and constraining factors, capture lessons learned, and recommendations to inform future EU-funded circular economy and green transition initiatives. The assessment draws on quantitative monitoring data, beneficiary reports, focus group discussions, and interviews with key stakeholders.

Key achievements

1. Empowerment of civil society actors

CirculUP! mobilised a broad set of actors and strengthened implementation capacity through training, coalition building, and subgrants. CSO representatives received dedicated circular economy training, with reported learning gains evidenced by trainees indicating increased knowledge following the training programme. Ten CSOs received subgrants and delivered awareness raising or advocacy actions that translated circular economy concepts into applied learning formats, with reported integration of circularity topics across 1,134 educational institutions. A central outcome was the establishment and operationalisation of the Armenian Circular Economy Coalition (ACEC) with 15 members, providing a structured multi-stakeholder platform for coordination, joint planning, and collective advocacy.

2. Entrepreneurial ecosystem advancement

The project combined training and financial support to enable translation of circular economy principles into business practice. In total, 103 startups and 23 SMEs completed training, and 10 startup subgrants plus 6 SME subgrants were awarded, totalling €383,295. Survey findings indicate improved knowledge among trained startups and SMEs. ESOs also strengthened their capacities, with 15 ESOs represented in training and post-training survey responses indicating improvement in knowledge on CE. Across funded enterprises, circularity self-assessments point to progress across multiple dimensions, alongside reported employment effects of 38 new opportunities, including 33 jobs and 5 service contracts.

Subgrantees implemented a diverse mix of circular initiatives across sectors and maturity levels. SME subgrantees largely advanced resource recovery and added value within existing production systems, including by-product reuse in processing, circular practices in greenhouse and hospitality supply chains,

compost-based organic fertiliser solutions, and textile value chain revitalisation. Startup subgrantees piloted both service and technology-oriented models, ranging from rental and reuse schemes and safer waste management solutions to low-carbon prototyping, organic waste valorisation, circular materials and textile waste recovery, nature-based water reuse demonstrations, and applied research on complex residues to identify viable reuse pathways.

3. Improved public understanding

The project achieved high visibility and produced communication and knowledge assets intended to remain in use beyond project closure. In 2025, communications reached more than 4.7 million people and generated more than 1.4 million digital interactions, supported by 22 television and radio interviews. The project funded 10 CSOs to deliver decentralised awareness campaigns (EUR 12,500 each), trained media and governmental representatives on circular economy principles, and produced a portfolio of materials including 20 professional videos. Knowledge products expected to remain accessible include an Armenian-adapted Circularity Toolkit, two research outputs, and an Issue-based Ecosystem Building Playbook, alongside CSO-developed learning resources.

4. Systemic learning and long-term change

The project demonstrated policy influence and legacy potential through coalition engagement and institutional anchoring. The coalition contributed inputs to the Framework Action Plan on Green, Sustainable and Circular Economy (up to 2030), endorsed by the Prime Ministerial Decree in Nov 2025. A central legacy is institutionalisation of the coalition through registration as a formal non-profit entity, which stakeholders view as essential for sustainability and future resource mobilisation. Importantly, subgrantees also reported intentions to sustain circular economy actions beyond the project lifecycle. Additional legacy elements include Impact Hub Yerevan's certification as a CIRCO Hub, the expansion of circular economy content within higher education, and continued interest in follow-up initiatives from other actors.

Beneficiary feedback from CSOs, SMEs, and startup subgrantees highlights a set of enabling factors and constraints that shaped the implementation of circular economy initiatives.

- **Enabling factors** included the combination of practical training, mentoring, and applied exposure to circular models, which strengthened beneficiaries' technical and methodological capacity to translate circularity concepts into operational plans, products, and outreach formats. Subgrants were repeatedly cited as a critical enabler because they reduced early-stage financial barriers and made it possible to test equipment, prototypes, and community-level infrastructure. For CSOs, coordination and peer exchange also acted as an enabling condition, with coalition structures and multi-actor collaboration supporting knowledge-sharing, joint problem-solving, and stronger networks for sustaining action beyond individual projects.
- **Reported constraints** were concentrated around time, delivery conditions, and structural ecosystem barriers. Beneficiaries noted that short subgrant implementation periods limited the ability to demonstrate mature results, particularly for procurement-intensive investments, seasonal activities, and interventions aimed at behaviour change. CSOs highlighted disruptions linked to academic calendars and summer periods, which required rescheduling, compressing activities, or shifting to online delivery. SMEs and startups noted operational complexity when

initiatives expanded across multiple sites or required coordination with several partners and suppliers. Finally, across stakeholder groups, beneficiaries pointed to enabling environment gaps, including limited incentives for circular investments and uneven waste and resource management systems, as factors that constrained scaling even where pilots showed promising results.

Recommendations

- **At project level,** stakeholders recommend extending subgrant timeframes beyond six months and embedding flexible extension mechanisms, particularly for procurement-heavy or seasonal interventions; conducting comprehensive ecosystem mapping at inception; formalising government engagement through defined mechanisms and targeted training for technical staff; strengthening collaborative awareness models by supporting multiple organisations to deliver unified messaging; broadening awareness and advocacy audiences beyond students to include young professionals and small business owners; expanding practical modules, mentorship, peer exchange, and study visits for CSOs and enterprises; providing more technical workshops and matchmaking for SMEs; expanding financial mechanisms and incentives for circular investments; and frontloading administrative and compliance capacity building for first-time grantees.
- **At policy level**, recommendations focus on developing financial and regulatory incentives (including grants, tax relief, and reduced import duties for circular technologies), leveraging public procurement to create demand for circular solutions, strengthening national or local waste collection and management systems to reduce operational barriers for circular ventures, mainstreaming circularity within SME support schemes, expanding coalition engagement to additional ecosystem actors (such as business associations), and sustaining narrative building that frames circularity as value creation and competitiveness rather than only recycling.

Overall, the evaluation finds that CirculUP! has made a substantive contribution to advancing circular economy understanding, practice, and institutionalisation in Armenia. The project successfully operationalised an ecosystem-based model that generated mutually reinforcing effects across civil society empowerment, entrepreneurial innovation, public awareness raising, and policy engagement. This integrated approach represents a key added value of the intervention and aligns closely with EU priorities on systemic green transition.

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List of Acronyms

Acronym	Full Meaning
ACEC	Armenian Circular Economy Coalition
CE	Circular Economy
CSO	Civil Society Organization
ESO	Entrepreneur Support Organization
EHNGO	Environment and Health NGO
FSTP	Financial Support to Third Parties
IH	Impact Hub
IHY	Impact Hub Yerevan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
ToT	Training of Trainers
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure

1. Introduction

Final Evaluation Report provides a comprehensive overview of the implementation, achievements, and lessons learned from the CirculUP! project. It aims to **summarise the project's overall performance, results**, and contribution to Armenia's transition towards a circular economy, while **identifying the key success factors, challenges, and lessons** that can inform future circular economy initiatives and programming in the country.

CirculUP! was implemented over a three-year period, from January 2023 to December 2025 led by Impact Hub Network, Impact Hub Yerevan, and the Environment and Health NGO (EHNGO), and funded by the European Union. CirculUP! adopted an ecosystem based approach to circular economy development which aimed to empower civil society actors to actively promote and implement circular economy practices, strengthen Armenia's entrepreneurial ecosystem by supporting the adoption of circular business models, and increase public awareness and engagement around circularity related topics.

Project activities were structured around four interrelated components:

1. **Capacity building and training**, which equipped civil society actors, entrepreneurs, and innovators with the knowledge and practical tools needed to understand and apply circular economy principles. This component included workshops, seminars, and training sessions designed to strengthen skills, encourage innovation, and support peer learning across diverse stakeholder groups.
2. **Incubation and acceleration support**, targeting early stage entrepreneurs and startups. Selected participants received mentoring, guidance, and access to tailored resources to support the development, testing, and scaling of circular business ideas, contributing to the growth of circular initiatives within Armenia's entrepreneurial ecosystem.
3. **Awareness and outreach**, which aimed to broaden understanding of circular economy concepts among the wider population. Activities included public awareness campaigns, community engagement initiatives, educational actions, and public events designed to improve knowledge of circularity and encourage more sustainable practices in everyday life.
4. **Policy advocacy and collaboration**, which supported the creation of a more enabling environment for circular economy solutions. The project engaged with policymakers, government agencies, and institutional stakeholders through dialogue, consultations, and collaborative platforms, while fostering partnerships with local and international organisations to strengthen institutional awareness and support for circular economy principles in Armenia.

Table 1 below highlights the expected results that CirculUP! activities aimed to contribute to, according to the project's logical framework.

The scope of the final evaluation report is to consolidate and analyse the project's final outcomes and performance against the planned results. It draws upon evidence collected through monitoring data, evaluation tools, and stakeholder feedback gathered throughout the implementation period of the project. The report further identifies key enabling and constraining factors that have shaped the project's trajectory and provides reflections and recommendations for sustaining and scaling circular economy initiatives in Armenia beyond CirculUP!.

Table 1 - Expected results

Result level	Description
Impact Statement	A systemic shift in the Armenian economy and society at large towards circularity.
Expected Outcome	The population, civil society, and enterprise ecosystem demonstrate an improved understanding and application of circular economy principles.
Expected Outputs	→ **Output 1:** Civil society organisations are empowered to promote and implement circular economy practices. → **Output 2:** Armenian startups and SMEs consciously develop and adopt new circularity initiatives. → **Output 3:** Armenian citizens have enhanced understanding and sensitivity toward circularity and environmental sustainability.

1.1 Activities

Throughout the project, CirculUP! implemented a comprehensive set of activities aligned with the three main outputs presented in Table 1, with the overarching objective of fostering systemic change toward circularity in Armenia.

Activities under Output 1: Empowered Civil Society Organisations

Activities focused on strengthening the role of civil society organisations (CSOs) as key drivers of circular economy awareness, advocacy, and implementation.

- Firstly, the project began with a **mapping of Armenian CSOs** active in sustainability, innovation, and related fields. This mapping informed a targeted outreach process that culminated in a public launch event introducing circular economy concepts and initiating the establishment of the **Armenian Circular Economy Coalition (ACEC)**. Subsequently, a series of **multi stakeholder meetings** supported the definition of the coalition's scope, structure, and working methods. This resulted in the selection of **15 core coalition members** in Dec 2023 through a transparent, participatory voting process based on the principles of "deep democracy," ensuring a diverse and representative membership.
- During the second year of implementation, the coalition's internal functioning was further developed through the organisation of four coalition meetings. These meetings combined learning sessions, strategic discussions, and practical exercises, including the drafting of action plans and clarification of roles. During this process, the coalition agreed on a governance structure comprising a Steering Committee and **three thematic working groups: Policy, Communication, and Technical Assistance**. Each working group defined its mandate, responsibilities, and planned activities, while the Steering Committee assumed coordination and oversight functions.
- To strengthen advocacy and policy engagement capacities, the project organised a **five day in person advocacy and policy training** for coalition members in July 2024. Delivered by an

international expert, the training combined theoretical inputs with interactive workshops and case based exercises, covering the advocacy cycle, stakeholder analysis, message development, and planning of advocacy actions within national and international policy contexts.

- In addition, the project facilitated a **one week international training and study visit in the Netherlands** in May 2024, in collaboration with Impact Hub Amsterdam. The programme included training sessions, workshops, site visits, and meetings with circular economy practitioners, policymakers, researchers, investors, and entrepreneurs, focusing on circular economy policies, business models, financing approaches, data driven tools, and sector specific applications.
- During the third year of the implementation, the members of the Circularity Coalition received **training on strategic communication** and the effective use of social media as a campaigning tool. The training also engaged media representatives and government spokespersons, who additionally received an introduction to circular economy principles. A hands-on workshop supported participants in identifying key challenges and exploring potential collaboration opportunities.
- Coalition meetings continued in 2025, and included procedural and administrative sessions supporting the formal registration of the coalition as a non profit non governmental organisation, initiated at the request of coalition members and facilitated by the project team.
- Finally, the project team used available contingency funds to conduct a major research study on fostering an inclusive circular economy in Armenia, identifying priority sectors for transition, assessing existing practices, and proposing scalable models for sustainable development.

Figure 1 - Training sessions in the Netherlands on circularity for the members of the Circularity Coalition (Photo taken at DOEN Foundation building).

Figure 2 - Multi-stakeholders meetings: Smaller group discussions to define the scope and structure of the coalition.

Activities under Output 2: Advancing the entrepreneurial ecosystem

Activities focused on integrating circular economy principles into Armenia's startup and SME ecosystem through the development of practical tools, capacity building for entrepreneurship intermediaries, structured grant mechanisms, targeted training for SMEs, and ecosystem level knowledge exchange.

- The first activity started with **translating and adapting the Impact Hub Network Circularity Toolkit into Armenian**[1]. The adaptation process included contextualisation for Armenia's socio economic and sectoral conditions and the integration of 10 Armenian case studies to illustrate locally relevant circular applications.
- To support uptake within the entrepreneurship support ecosystem, the project organised a **Training of Trainers programme** in July 2023 for key intermediaries, including incubators and accelerators. The training introduced circular economy foundations and provided practical guidance on applying the Circularity Toolkit within entrepreneurship support programmes. Following the Training of Trainers, participating entrepreneurship support organisations (ESOs) were supported to develop circular economy modules that could be integrated into existing startup support programmes. Implementation support included CirculUP collaboration calls,

[1] For circularity toolkit refer: https://circulup.am/resources/

integration into the Circularity Community of Practice, and on demand mentoring, complemented by ongoing technical support from the project team.

- In parallel, the project established and managed **startup and SME sub grant mechanisms**. For the grants, the team developed Standard Operating Procedures outlining eligibility, evaluation criteria, and selection procedures, launched a public call, and organised an applicant information session. An independent jury, including coalition and ecosystem experts, assessed applications using standardised scoring tools and confidentiality and impartiality safeguards.
- For both startups and SMEs receiving financial support, the project organised a dedicated **reporting and compliance training** in December 2024. The training covered EU financial and narrative reporting requirements, logframe and impact reporting, procurement guidance, and the use of the Circularity Check toolkit for pre and post assessment and roadmap development.
- Complementary ecosystem strengthening activities included a **three month research process** on the **state of circularity in Armenia's SME sector.** The research combined desk review and focus group discussions held in different regions, and findings were disseminated through the project launch event and additional stakeholder engagements, including sharing with relevant ministries.
- For SME capacity building, the project organised multiple rounds of **CIRCO training in Armenia**, including open calls for participation, eligibility screening, and delivery in Armenian with a translated digital workspace. Training cohorts were structured around CIRCO's workshop track and supported the development of circularity ambition statements and roadmaps.
- To reinforce continued learning and exchange, the project launched a **Circular Economy Community of Practice** in October 2023. Sessions were held regularly to support knowledge exchange among Impact Hubs globally and Armenian ESOs, focusing on circular economy programme design, business support tools, ecosystem building, and peer learning.
- The project organised a **Circulathon event** in October 2024, a two day collaborative event bringing together coalition members, university students, innovators, entrepreneurs, CSOs, and other stakeholders. The event included keynote inputs, workshops by experts, mentorship sessions, team based solution development, and a final pitching session evaluated by a jury, supported by a structured agenda and facilitation process.
- The adapted Circularity Check Toolkit was applied to assess the circularity performance of startup and SME sub grantees. To support more systematic assessment, the tool was further refined through the introduction of tailored pre and post assessment sheets, enabling a more structured evaluation of sub grant activities. Prior to the launch of their sub-grant projects, all 10 startup and 6 SME sub-grantees participated in a dedicated training session, where they were introduced to the toolkit and its application.
- All 16 sub grantees subsequently implemented their projects, during which mid term and final monitoring visits were conducted. In parallel, all 16 organisations completed the Circularity Pre and Post Check, developed their Circular Roadmaps, and identified concrete steps to advance circularity during the six month sub grant implementation period and for one year beyond the sub grant timeframe.

Figure 3 - Circulathon Event

Figure 4 - Circo Training for SMEs in Armenia - Round 1

Activities under Output 3: Raising public awareness

Activities focused on raising public awareness of circular economy principles and environmental sustainability through structured grant schemes for civil society organisations, multimedia communication tools, and a nationwide awareness campaign targeting both citizens and businesses.

- The project launched an **open call for CSOs and NGOs** to design and implement innovative awareness raising initiatives on circular economy concepts. The call was announced publicly through the project website, social media channels, and coalition partners, and was supported by a pre application **information session** explaining eligibility requirements, evaluation criteria, and implementation expectations. Applications were assessed through a multi stage process, including eligibility screening, scoring by an independent Selection Committee, and short interviews with shortlisted applicants. Based on this process, **10 CSOs were selected** and received grants to implement locally grounded awareness campaigns using a range of formats, including community events, educational activities, media outreach, and digital engagement to raise public awareness of circular economy principles and promote behavioural change towards sustainability.
- To complement grassroots campaigns, the project invested in **multimedia communication materials**. Existing circular economy video content produced within the Impact Hub Network was identified, translated into Armenian, and scheduled for regular dissemination through Impact Hub Yerevan's social media channels.
- In parallel, the project coordinated the **production of short video stories** showcasing circular economy initiatives from across Europe, which were translated and released on a rolling basis to introduce key concepts and practical examples. Moreover, in 2025, videos were produced showcasing Armenian entrepreneurs integrating circular economy principles into their businesses.
- In addition, the project implemented a range of **awareness raising campaigns** targeting citizens and the business sector. Guided by a communication strategy developed at the outset, outreach activities were conducted across multiple channels, including social media, television, radio, and online media platforms. Project staff and coalition members participated in interviews, talk shows, and news features to explain circular economy concepts and promote project activities. Media coverage was systematically tracked, and links and engagement metrics were documented to support monitoring and evaluation.
- The awareness component was reinforced through CSO-led campaigns funded under the grant scheme, which expanded outreach to schools, universities, local communities, and sector specific audiences. These activities complemented national level communication efforts by grounding circular economy concepts in local contexts and everyday practices, ensuring sustained visibility throughout the project period.
- In June 2025, the project team organised the first **International Circular Economy Forum** Armenia, convening innovators from diverse countries to accelerate the global transition to sustainable systems.
- The CirculUP **closing event** focused on the presentation of project results, a panel discussion with coalition members, and a forward-looking dialogue on next steps for EU investment in circular economy in Armenia.

Figure 5 - First International CE Forum Armenia - UWC Dilijan

Figure 6 - Closing Event: CirculUP Community

1.2 Structure

The rest of the report is structured as follows:

- **Section 2: Evaluation methodology** outlines the evaluation framework and methodology. It describes the final evaluation objectives, key evaluation questions, as well as the data collection methods, tools, and stakeholder groups consulted. The section also presents the evaluation matrix highlighting the key evaluation dimensions, along with output and outcomes indicators.
- **Section 3: Results** presents the evaluation findings, structured according to the evaluation dimensions. The analysis covers outputs, outcomes, and cross-cutting aspects, drawing on quantitative and qualitative evidence to assess performance, and examine early signs of sustainability and systemic change.
- **Section 4: Learnings** highlights key lessons learned, identifies enabling and constraining factors and presents actionable recommendations at project and policy levels to inform future circular economy initiatives.
- **Section 5: Conclusions** synthesises the evaluation findings and assesses the project's overall contribution to Armenia's transition toward a circular economy.

2. Methodology

The CirculUP! logical framework (Table 2) details a comprehensive strategy to drive a systemic shift toward a circular economy in Armenia, measuring success from high-level national impact down to specific sectoral outputs. As articulated in the project's Logical Framework Matrix, the CirculUP! project seeks to contribute to the following overarching results:

Table 2 - Logical Framework of the Project

Result level	Results chain	Indicators
Impact (Overall objective)	Systemic shift in the Armenian economy and society at large towards circularity.	Armenia's score in the Green Growth Index[2]
Outcome (Specific objective)	The population, civil society and enterprise ecosystem show understanding and apply principles of circular economy	Increased number of enterprises, incubators and accelerators integrating circular economy in their business models and support programs
Outputs	EO1. Civil society organisations are empowered to promote and implement circular economy practices.	→ Indicator 1.1: Number of Civil Society sector representatives involved in EU funded Circular economy Dialogue Platforms and/or Mechanism (Armenian Circularity Coalition) disaggregated by sex
		→ Indicator 1.2: Number of CSOs representatives reporting increased knowledge on circular economy disaggregated by sex
	EO2. Armenian startups and SMEs consciously develop new circularity initiatives	→ Indicator 2.1: Number of ESOs that are trained to use a new module on Circular Economy within their support programmes
		→ Indicator 2.2: Number of startups trained on Circular Economy (CE) by ESOs with the newly added CE module
		→ Indicator 2.3: Number of SMEs assisted in the adoption of Circular Economy Business models and practices disaggregated by sex and age group of the owner, enterprise size
		→ Indicator 2.4: Amount of financial support used to develop new circular initiatives
	EO3. Armenian citizens have a sound understanding and greater sensitivity about circularity and the environment	→ Indicator 3.1: Number of people reached through the awareness campaign focusing on circular economy
		→ Indicator 3.2: Number of TV shows and Radio channels interviewing project team and stakeholders

[2] The impact indicator referring to Armenia's score in the Green Growth Index has not been analysed in the main body of this report. Given the macro level and systemic nature of the index, and its sensitivity to multiple structural and policy factors, it is not methodologically feasible to attribute changes directly to the project's interventions within a three year period. For completeness and alignment with the logical framework, the most recent available figures along with other indicators are included in the final logframe presented in the Annex 1.

2.1 Final Evaluation Objectives

The Final Evaluation aims to document the CirculUP!'s key achievements and understand the underlying **why and how of change** through an evidence-based approach. It assesses the **project's performance** while also **identifying the enabling conditions, challenges, and lessons** that have shaped its contribution to Armenia's transition toward a circular economy.

The final evaluation framework was explicitly grounded in the project's Logical Framework which serves as a primary reference point for structuring the evaluation objectives, ensuring coherence between the project's original design and the assessment of its results. The evaluation framework (Table 3), is organised around **four interrelated dimensions.** The first three evaluation dimensions directly correspond to the three expected outputs defined in CirculUP!'s Logical Framework. These dimensions assess changes related to the empowerment of civil society actors, the advancement of the entrepreneurial ecosystem, and improvements in public understanding of circular economy principles. The fourth evaluation dimension focuses on systemic learning and long-term change which examines how and why change occurred, organised across three sub dimensions: a) policy influence, b) legacy, and c) knowledge transfer. It captures cross-cutting learning, enabling and constraining factors, and early signals of institutionalisation and legacy, thereby complementing the results-based assessment with a deeper understanding of the project's contribution to systemic change.

Each dimension combines evidence synthesis from project monitoring and evaluation data with qualitative analysis to understand the mechanisms, enabling factors, and lessons underlying observed results. The dimensions selected are as follows:

Table 3- Dimensions for the final evaluation

Dimensions	Description
1. Empowering civil society actors	Report on the **changes in knowledge, skills and capacities of** civil society actors related to the circular economy and its adoption due to the project activities. It also examines the role of the Armenian Circular Economy Coalition in fostering collaboration and collective action among CSOs and other ecosystem actors, and in strengthening civil society's capacity to promote, implement, and advocate for circular economy approaches.
2. Advancing the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem	Assess the **changes in capacities and the creation of new circular economy initiatives**, partnerships, or collaborations among ESOs, startups and SMEs supporting systemic change. Analyse how relational capital and multi-actor networks have strengthened the circular economy ecosystem.
3. Improved public understanding	Report on the project's contribution to **increasing public understanding of circular economy** principles through outreach, communication, and knowledge-sharing activities.
4. Systemic learning and long-term change	Assesses the project's contribution to policy influence, sustainability of results, and knowledge transfer supporting long-term circular economy transition. It comprises the following **sub-dimensions**:
4a. Policy influence	Assess the project's role in **influencing policy dialogue**, stakeholder coordination, and institutional support for the circular economy in Armenia.

4b. Legacy	Examine the **sustainability and scalability of the project's results**, networks, and partnerships. Analyse whether these continue to contribute to long-term systemic change and a lasting circular economy ecosystem.
4c. Lessons and knowledge transfer	Capture **what worked well** and **what proved more challenging** during project implementation. Analyse the enabling and constraining conditions that led to these changes. Document **key lessons and transferable or good practices** that can inform future projects and partner interventions on the circular economy and green transition.

2.2. Evaluation Matrix

The Evaluation Matrix serves as a **guiding and systemic framework** for conducting the final evaluation of the CirculUP! project. The matrix operationalises the evaluation objectives by translating them into a structured set of evaluation questions, indicators, data sources, and target groups for each selected dimension.

Table 4 - Evaluation Matrix

Dimensions	Evaluation Questions	Indicators (Outputs and Outcomes)	Data source	Target groups
1. Empowering civil society actors	EQ1.1 To what extent did the project strengthen civil society actors' knowledge and skills on CE? EQ1.2 To what extent did the project strengthen CSOs' capacity to design and implement advocacy, awareness-raising, and community engagement actions related to CE? EQ1.3 To what extent did the ACEC function as a recognised and effective coordination mechanism that strengthened civil society's collective action on CE?	• Number of CSO representatives trained in CE (disaggregated by sex) • Number of CSOs representatives reported increased knowledge on CE • Number of CSOs receiving financial support to advance CE initiatives • Number of CSO representatives engaged in project activities (Trainings, meetings, events) • Number of educational institutions integrating CE topics into curricula. • Number of CSOs advocating or applying CE principles in their work • Reach and uptake of circular economy awareness and advocacy actions delivered by CSO subgrantees • Number of members comprising the ACEC • Evidence that the ACEC functions as a recognised multi-stakeholder governance mechanism • Percentage of coalition members reporting inclusive decision-making	Subgrantee reports, Monitoring and evaluation surveys carried out within the project period, and Focus Group discussions.	CSOs and ACEC

Dimensions	Evaluation Questions	Indicators (Outputs and Outcomes)	Data source	Target groups
2. Advancing the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem	EQ2.1 To what extent did the project strengthen entrepreneurial actors' (SMEs, startups, ESOs) knowledge, skills, and organisational capacities to implement CE principles and models? EQ2.2 What new circular economy initiatives, partnerships, or collaborations emerged due to the project, and how do they contribute to strengthening the circular economy ecosystem?	• Number of startups trained in CE principles and models • Number of startups receiving financial support to develop circular business models • Number of SMEs trained in CE principles and models • Number of SMEs receiving financial support to develop circular business models • Amount of financial support used to develop new circular initiatives • Number of ESOs trained to integrate CE in entrepreneurship support programmes (disaggregated by sex) • Number of ESOs integrating integrating circular economy in their programs • Improved knowledge and skills on CE among startups, SMEs and ESOs • Implementation of CE principles and models • Circularity assessment results • Number of new jobs created • Increased partnerships or collaborations	Subgrantee reports, Monitoring and evaluation surveys carried out within the project, and startup survey.	SMEs, Startups, and ESOs.
3. Improved public awareness	EQ3.1 To what extent did the project contribute to increased public understanding of circular economy principles?	• Number of people reached through TV, radio, print, and social media campaigns. • Number of social media interactions and engagements • Number of TV and radio interviews • Number of CSOs implementing awareness raising campaigns • Number of media representatives and governmental representatives trained on CE • Number of TV shows and Radio channels interviewing project team and stakeholders • Types of communication materials produced and disseminated • Number of videos created • Raised awareness on circular economy • Increased public understanding and discourse regarding CE concepts	Subgrantee reports and Focus Group Discussion	ACEC, Project Partners, and CSO.

Dimensions	Evaluation Questions	Indicators (Outputs and Outcomes)	Data source	Target groups
		• Effectiveness of communication channels, messages, and storytelling formats in influencing public engagement		
4a. Policy influence	EQ4.1 To what extent did the project contribute to policy dialogue and agenda-setting on the circular economy in Armenia?	• Policy engagement and integration of circular economy principles into national frameworks • Perceptions of CirculUP's influence among policy-makers • Reported barriers and enabling factors related to policy engagement • Perceived policy relevance of CirculUP! for future EU or donor-funded CE programmes • Evidence of ongoing dialogue or collaboration between coalition members/partners and government institutions beyond the project period	Focus Group Discussion.	ACEC, Project partners, and Public or EU actor
4b. Legacy	EQ5.1 To what extent are the project's results, networks, and partnerships being sustained beyond project completion? EQ5.2: To what extent has CirculUp! strengthened Armenia's circular economy ecosystem through improved capacities, partnerships, and cross-sectoral collaboration?	• Tangible resources generated by the project • Enhancement in capacities and circular economy awareness of ecosystem actors engaged • Evidence of ongoing activities by supported enterprises (SMEs, startups and CSOs) after project end • Evidence of partnerships maintained post-project • Evidence of institutionalisation of CE principles • Evidence that CE recommendations have been integrated into policy frameworks • Emerging initiatives inspired by the project • Stakeholders' reflections on CirculUp's unique added value	Project documents, Monitoring and evaluation surveys carried out within the project, Questionnaire, Focus Group Discussion.	Project Partners ACEC: SMEs with funding, maybe CSOs

Dimensions	Evaluation Questions	Indicators (Outputs and Outcomes)	Data source	Target groups
4c. Lessons and knowledge transfer	EQ6.1 What were the main success factors and challenges encountered during project implementation? EQ6.2 How can the lessons and good practices emerging from CirculUp inform future circular economy and green transition initiatives?	• Knowledge-sharing across partners, regions, or sectors • Enabling factors and constraints to raising awareness on CE principles among CSO grantees • Enabling factors and constraints for implementing CE principles, initiatives and models among startup and SME subgrantees • Enabling factors and challenges in raising public awareness about circular economy concepts and practices • Lessons learned • Good practices emerging from the project • Recommendations generated to inform future programming or circular economy development	Project documents, Monitoring and evaluation surveys carried out within the project, Questionnaire, Focus Group Discussion.	Project partners ACEC

2.3 Data collection framework

The Data Collection Framework outlines the **data sources, tools, target groups, and timeline** guided the data collection for the final evaluation of the CirculUP! project. Data collection involves a diverse range of actors: civil society organisations (CSOs), SMEs, startups, Entrepreneur Support Organisations (ESOs), project partners, ACEC working groups and relevant actors from public institutions. Where possible, the evaluation capitalises on data gathered through implemented monitoring and evaluation tools throughout the project. For example, several beneficiary groups, such as CSOs, SMEs, and startups, have been engaged through project surveys and reporting mechanisms. These existing data sources have been reviewed and synthesised to inform the evaluation objectives. Complementary data collection activities (Table 5) have been undertaken to address remaining information gaps and capture additional quantitative and qualitative insights.

To ensure a robust evaluation of the CirculUp project's impact, the data collection framework utilized a multi-stakeholder approach, drawing from both qualitative and quantitative sources.

- **Subgrantees' reports**: A total of **26 Final Narrative Reports** were analyzed. The report is a comprehensive document submitted by each subgrantee at the conclusion of their funding period. Its primary purpose is to provide a detailed qualitative and quantitative account of the grantee's implementation, faced challenges, results, and overall impact. For the CirculUP! project, these reports serve as the key evidence for evaluating how well the individual subgrantees met their circular economy objectives. Following final narrative reports were analysed to inform the evaluation findings:
    - 10 reports from CSOs
    - 10 reports from startups
    - 6 reports from SMEs
- **ESO Survey**: A survey developed by the project partners was conducted with the ESOs following the CirculUP! Embedding Circularity Training. Out of participating ESOs, a total of **8 participants** responded. The survey assessed participant satisfaction, perceived learning outcomes, and readiness to apply circular economy concepts within future Community of Practice activities, mentoring, and piloting support initiatives under development.
- **Startup Survey**: A survey was conducted to assess the effectiveness of training activities provided to startups, with **48 startups** responding. The questionnaire aimed at assessing changes in knowledge and skills following CirculUP training, the extent to which circular economy models or practices were being applied, factors supporting or hindering implementation, examples of circular economy initiatives developed by respondents, and good practices identified through project participation Among respondents, 56% were women and 44% were men. Startups represented a range of sectors, including agriculture (31%), construction or industry (27%), energy, technology or services (29%), and other sectors (13%). Most respondents were small scale organisations, with 69% employing one to five people and 31% employing six or more employees.
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGD)** and **Written Feedback:** the focus group discussions were conducted with the **three ACEC coalition working groups** and the **project partners.** Furthermore, the framework accounted for external evaluative input through written feedback

from public actors and a representative from the European Union, ensuring that the project's outcomes were validated against both grassroots operational realities and high-level institutional objectives.

Overall, these diverse data points offer a comprehensive overview of the project's reach and the overall effectiveness of the support provided to the circular economy ecosystem.

Table 5 - Additional data collection activities

Data collection tool	Target group	Objective	Timeline
1. FGD	Project Partners - IHA, IHYerevan & EHNGO	To evaluate internal project management, coordination effectiveness, and the lessons learned.	Nov 25
2. FGD	ACEC - Technical assistance working group	To assess the quality and impact of technical support provided to subgrantees and identify gaps in technical capacity building.	Nov 25
3. FGD	ACEC - Communication working group	To measure the effectiveness of the project's visibility strategy and the success of awareness-raising efforts.	Nov 25
4. FGD	ACEC - Policy working group	To gather insights on policy barriers and the effectiveness of advocacy efforts.	Nov 25
5. Interview	Public actors	To obtain external validation of the project's relevance to local/national development goals and public sector alignment.	Dec 25
6. Interview	EU Policy Officer	To assess the project's alignment with EU circular economy directives and its contribution to regional policy objectives.	Jan 26
7. Questionnaire	Startups	To collect quantitative and qualitative information on participants' learning progress, adoption of circular economy (CE) practices, enabling and constraining factors, and perceived good practices emerging from the project.	Nov 25

3. Results

This section presents the evaluation findings across the first three dimensions of the evaluation framework. For each dimension, results are reported at both output and outcome levels. The subsections follow the structure defined by the evaluation dimensions presented in Table 1 and outline the key outputs, observed outcomes, and evidence of progress under each dimension.

3.1 Empowering civil society actors

3.1.1 Outputs

The project generated measurable results in civil society engagement, capacity strengthening, and the uptake of circular economy principles through CSO-led actions.

In total, **35 representatives** (22 female, 13 male) **from 25 organisations** across civil society, media, academia, and the private sector **contributed to project activities**, indicating broad multi-actor engagement. Participation resulted in structured opportunities for learning, coordination, and peer exchange through training, multi-stakeholder meetings, and project events. A key output supporting sustained coordination was the establishment of the **Armenian Circular Economy Coalition (ACEC)**. Through a transparent selection process, **15 members were selected** to comprise the coalition, creating a formal platform for collaboration, joint planning, and collective advocacy on circular economy priorities.

Capacity strengthening was supported through targeted **circular economy training**. **Twenty four representatives** received dedicated training on circular economy approaches, including 15 representatives from coalition member organisations and 9 representatives from CSO subgrantees, strengthening a core group able to apply circularity concepts within their respective mandates and outreach activities. In addition, training feedback and follow-up reporting indicate that **15 participants reported increased knowledge** following the training programme in the Netherlands, demonstrating a documented improvement in understanding of circular economy principles among trainees.

The project also generated concrete implementation capacity through financial support mechanisms. **Ten CSOs received subgrants (Annex 1)** and, as an output of this support, implemented circular economy initiatives that translated training content into applied awareness raising and advocacy actions. These initiatives expanded the reach of circular economy messaging and practice into formal and non-formal education and community settings. Reported results show that CSO-supported actions contributed to the **integration of circular economy topics into a wide range of educational institutions**, including 1,093 secondary public schools, 23 colleges and high schools, 7 primary schools, 7 universities[3], and 4 private educational centres.

[3] Yerevan State University, French University in Armenia (UFAR), Armenian National Agrarian University, Eurasia International University, Russian Armenian University, Gyumri Branch of Armenian State University of Economics and the NASRA International Educational Center.

Table 6 - Outputs

Outputs	No.
Number of CSO representatives engaged in project activities (Trainings, meetings, events)	35 representatives from 25 different CSOs
Number of CSO representatives trained in CE	24 (15 coalition members + 9 from subgrantee CSOs who received training)
Number of CSOs representatives reported increased knowledge on CE	15 people reported increased knowledge
Number of CSOs receiving financial support to advance CE initiatives	10
Number of educational institutions integrating CE topics into curricula.	In total 1134 ➔ 1093 secondary public schools ➔ 23 colleges & Highschools ➔ 7 primary schools ➔ 7 Universities ➔ 4 private educational centers
Number of CSOs advocating or applying CE principles in their work	10 subgrantees
Number of members comprising the ACEC	15

3.1.2 Outcomes

Reach and uptake of circular economy awareness and advocacy actions delivered by CSO subgrantees

All ten CSO subgrantees delivered circular economy CE awareness-raising or advocacy actions that translated CE concepts into applied learning and community engagement. Their results spanned education and communication, alongside practical themes such as resource reuse, composting, circular design, and wider public outreach. Collectively, these interventions supported CSO objectives related to strengthening CE literacy among youth and early-stage entrepreneurs, encouraging behavioural change, embedding CE in entrepreneurship education, advancing environmental protection, fostering youth and international cooperation, and reinforcing community participation in sustainable practices.

Evidence of **uptake** is reflected in the shift from standalone messaging to structured, **replicable learning and engagement formats**. Subgrantees implemented school-based composting and recycling programmes, established youth-led content production and CE ambassador networks, delivered circular design workshops and courses, organised study visits, and ran demonstrations on reuse and upcycling. These approaches were designed to inform audiences and to enable participants to apply CE principles through practical exercises and locally relevant examples.

In terms of **reach and learning outcomes**, subgrantees reported strong engagement among youth, students, educators, and wider community audiences. Youth were positioned as multipliers or key agents in several initiatives. For example, one subgrantee trained 30 young participants from Gavar and Sevan on CE, resulting in 11 Young Ambassadors (9 women and 2 men) who contributed to awareness materials, short videos, and a community-level awareness campaign plan, while sustaining peer exchange through online groups.

A further marker of uptake was the **integration of CE into formal and non-formal education settings**. One CSO reported reaching more than 800 students across 20 schools, cultural centres, and camps, with over 90% of participating students demonstrating correct understanding of CE principles through quiz-based assessment. Results also indicate **institutional anchoring within higher education**. A subgrantee delivered two university sessions engaging 65 students, while consultancy support contributed to the integration of CE topics into the curricula of four universities. A notable outcome was the establishment of a Master's degree programme in Circular Economy and Governance at Eurasia International University, developed through mentorship and collaboration between a CSO subgrantee and coalition members. 4 out of 8 students joined this masters program as a result of the awareness raising campaign of the CSO sub-grantee. In parallel, one subgrantee mapped and contacted 18 higher education institutions and established 12 close contacts to support longer-term integration of CE themes in academic programmes.

Finally, CSO subgrantees complemented formal and non-formal education activities with **community-based and experiential approaches** that translated circular economy concepts into visible local practice and, in some cases, durable community infrastructure. For example, one subgrantee established 13 community composting bins and initiated local Compost Clubs, creating practical entry points for sustained participation and behaviour change beyond the project's direct activities. Across the CSO portfolio, outreach combined public-facing formats such as **community events, competitions, pop-up exhibitions,** and study visits with digital knowledge platforms that extended access to information and facilitated wider engagement. Practical learning was further reinforced through **hands-on formats such as zero-waste courses and field visits**, which enabled participants to directly observe circular practices, test solutions in real settings, and connect environmental principles to everyday decision-making.

The table 7 below presents a case example illustrating results achieved by one CSO subgrantee.

Table 7 - CSO Subgrantee Case Example

Organisation	**Ughecuyc Educational, informational, youth and community development non-governmental organization**
Established in 2018, Ughecuyc is a youth and education focused civil society organisation working on education, science, and sustainable development. Its activities actively engage young people and educators and align with the Sustainable Development Goals, with emphasis on knowledge creation and dissemination.	
Objectives of grant	
CirculUP support enabled the organisation to implement activities focused on raising awareness of circular economy principles among students and educators across Armenia. Activities included student workshops,	

lecturer training, development of educational materials, and the creation of online content and articles.
Key results achieved
• **10 circular economy workshops** conducted in **13 educational institutions.** The total number of **student participants was 300**, and the workshops covered 8 different regions of Armenia: Lori, Shirak, Gegharkunik, Kotayk, Ararat, Armavir, Aragatsotn, and Yerevan. • **50 student articles on circular economy** published online, strengthening youth led knowledge production. • **54 instructors engaged** in circular economy concepts through training sessions. • Development of Circular Economy Educational Manual. • CSO highlights that both students and lecturers highly appreciated the program's practical and innovative approach. The **majority of lecturers and students noted that it was the first time they had encountered the concept of "circular economy,"** which sparked new interests and professional directions for them. The lecturers emphasized that the methodological materials and examples provided during the program will be useful in their teaching process.

Increased organisational capacity among CSO subgrantees

All ten CSO subgrantees showcased **strengthened skills and organisational readiness to plan and deliver CE awareness or advocacy actions**. Capacity gains were expressed through the ability to translate CE concepts into structured and replicable formats, such as youth training models, courses, and media-based learning products. Subgrantees demonstrated increased technical and methodological competence by producing tangible outputs such as a two-part training manual for instructors, a composting booklet, a six-episode CE crash course, and multiple short video campaigns. They also **strengthened outreach mechanisms** by establishing multiplier structures such as Youth Ambassadors and ongoing peer-learning communities, implementing training programmes for teachers with sustained participation, and embedding CE content within educational institutions and curricula-related processes. Importantly, subgrantees showed adaptive implementation skills by responding to contextual constraints, for example academic calendar disruptions and digital platform limitations, while still meeting awareness and dissemination goals through alternative channels and revised delivery formats.

> *"The CirculUP FSTP has enabled our organization to engage relevant experts to enhance not only the capacities of young people in this field, but also of our NGO, and to strengthen the NGO's impact in the communities. Thanks to the support of the program, a network of young ambassadors has been created, where innovative ideas are born, and also how to bring these ideas to life." - CSO Subgrantee*

> *"The support we received through the CirculUP grant gave us the opportunity to bring circular economy education to life in a new and engaging way. It allowed us to go beyond awareness-raising and create a fully structured learning experience that combined education, gamification, and outreach. Thanks to this support, we were able to produce high-quality content in Armenian, develop an interactive contest platform using Telegram, and reach out to more than a thousand schools across the country." - CSO Subgrantee*

> *"The CirculUP program has strong potential and we recommend expanding its scope to reach a broader audience beyond students, including young professionals and existing small business owners who are already operating but may lack awareness of circular practices." - CSO Subgrantee*

Establishment of Armenian Circular Economy Coalition (ACEC)

The project generated clear outcomes in terms of strengthened civil society leadership, coordination, and sustained capacity to promote circular economy principles beyond discrete project activities. The most significant outcome was the **consolidation of the Armenian Circular Economy Coalition as a functioning multi-stakeholder platform** with an objective to drive a systemic shift toward circularity by coordinating efforts across civil society, government, and the private sector. The coalition moved from initial engagement to an operational structure with 15 members that enabled regular coordination, joint planning, and cross-sector collaboration, contributing to a more connected civil society presence in the circular economy space.

Importantly, members were able to **define concrete functions and role**s through an agreed governance structure, including coordination responsibilities and thematic roles that supported division of labour, continuity of action, and clearer accountability across coalition workstreams. This outcome is reflected in the coalition's ability to operationalise its mandate through: a **Steering Committee** that provides overall coordination and oversight, and three **thematic working groups** with defined functions:

- **Policy sub-group** facilitates dialogue with the Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Environment to advocate for regulatory changes and institutionalize circular economy policies.
- **Communication sub-group** focuses on raising public awareness and engaging media to promote circular concepts among citizens and businesses.
- **Technical Assistance sub-group** provides practical support, consultancy, and capacity-building to help local enterprises and institutions in implementing concrete circular solutions.

Coalition members **strengthened their capacities for policy engagement and circular economy implementation** through structured capacity-building support that combined advocacy training with applied exposure to functioning circular ecosystems. In particular, the advocacy and policy Training strengthened skills related to the advocacy cycle, stakeholder engagement, and the development of strategic advocacy plans. This was complemented by an international study visit and training programme that enhanced members' understanding of how circular economy principles are translated into practice through policy instruments, business models, and governance approaches. Workshops and site visits to established circular initiatives such as Blue City in Rotterdam and the United Repair Centre, provided concrete examples that informed members' ability to identify and adapt relevant practices to the Armenian context. As a result, coalition members developed an actionable draft advocacy strategy, and identified relevant stakeholders, and platforms for circularity efforts which guided their work during the project implementation.

Coalition members reported that regular engagement through joint planning and knowledge-sharing **improved collaboration, expanded professional networks, and supported organisational capacity to advance circular economy objectives**. This perceived strengthening of collaboration and

organisational capacity is reflected in how members assessed the coalition's internal functioning. Survey responses from coalition members indicate that the **coalition's working methods were experienced as inclusive and trust-based**. Specifically, all respondents (100%) stated that decision-making is inclusive, while most reported feeling heard when expressing differing perspectives (94%). The same proportion (94%) agreed that the coalition includes the right stakeholders and that relationships are built on trust, and a large majority (88%) indicated that controversial issues are addressed effectively. Members described the coalition as highly collaborative and driven by a shared vision, which was identified as a key enabling factor for advancing circular economy discourse. The **multi-sectoral composition of the coalition**, bringing together educational institutions, startups, civil society organisations, and international experts, was highlighted as particularly valuable. This **diversity facilitated cross-sectoral knowledge transfer**, enabling circular economy methodologies to circulate between actors such as startups, CSOs, SMEs and public authorities. Members emphasised the **value of peer-to-peer learning**, describing the group as a space for connecting with like-minded practitioners and jointly addressing technical challenges. Collectively, participants perceived that the coalition succeeded in fostering a community of circular thinkers, moving beyond isolated initiatives towards the development of a diverse and resilient ecosystem.

A major achievement of the coalition was its direct contribution to the **Framework Action Plan on Green, Sustainable and Circular Economy (up to 2030)**, a national level strategic document endorsed by a Prime Ministerial decree (N1028L). In particular, the Policy Working Group provided recommendations on the draft of this strategic plan as well as the green taxonomy strategy document. The advocacy efforts resulted in the inclusion of a full pillar dedicated to the circular economy within the Framework Action Plan.

A further result with clear legacy potential is the **institutionalisation of the ACEC as a formal legal entity.** As the project concludes, the coalition has moved toward registration as a separate non-profit organization to ensure that its work and impact continue beyond the project's specific grant cycle. This transition to a formal legal status is viewed as essential for long-term sustainability, enabling the coalition to apply for future grants and secure ongoing support. Furthermore, members perceive that this institutionalization will improve collaboration channels and increase the seriousness with which the coalition is treated by external organizations and public actors.

3.2 Advancing the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

3.2.1 Outputs

CirculUP activities delivered targeted capacity building and financial support across three stakeholder groups: startups, SMEs, and Ecosystem Support Organisations (ESOs). In total, **103 startups and 23 SMEs completed training on circular economy** principles and business models. The intervention also reflected a clear focus on gender inclusion, with 16 of the 23 supported SMEs being women-led. In parallel, the project further strengthened enabling structures by training 20 participants from 15 ESOs, with high female participation at 16 out of 20 participants (80%), supporting the integration of circularity into future entrepreneurship support services.

Financial support complemented the training component through competitive subgrant schemes. For startups, 69 eligible applications were received and 10 startups were selected for financial support through a rigorous and transparent process. For SMEs, 46 eligible applications were received and 6 SMEs were selected for funding to support their transition toward circular business models. Overall, **10 startups and 6 SMEs received subgrants to implement circular transitions**, totalling €383,295.

Table 8 - Outputs

Outputs	No.
Number of startups trained in CE principles and models	103 startups received training to integrate CE in their business models
Number of startups receiving financial support to develop circular business models	10
Number of SMEs trained in CE principles and models	23 (16 female led + 7 male led)
Number of SMEs receiving financial support to develop circular business models	6
Amount of financial support used to develop new circular initiatives	A total of €383,295 ➔ 10 startups for a total of €95,500 ➔ 6 SMEs for a total of €287,795
Number of ESOs trained to integrate CE in support programmes (disaggregated by sex)	15 ESOs were represented, with 20 participants (16 female and 4 male) actively engaged in the training
Number of ESOs integrating integrating circular economy in their programs	10 ESOs out of 15[4] = 66% 10 ESOs have carried out some sort of CE training/event/mentoring/consulting for startups.

[4]Originally, 14 ESOs were trained in 2023. In 2025, one of the sub-grantee CSOs, which is also an ESO, integrated the Circular Economy contest developed for schools into its business platform, reaching 1,700 active learners.

3.2.2 Outcomes

Improved knowledge and skills on CE

Among the **six SME subgrantee**, all reported an improved understanding of the topic of CE. The subgrantees reported a more precise and more comprehensive understanding of circular economy principles. **Many moved from seeing circularity mainly as waste reduction to recognising it as a broader systems approach** that encourages continuous resource use, stronger value chains and long-term sustainability. Several enterprises noted that circularity can be applied in any business sector and that new opportunities often emerge once companies begin rethinking their processes. Others highlighted that working with partners, sharing knowledge and engaging communities are essential for making circular practices viable. Overall, the experience helped SMEs view circularity as an environmental practice and a means to improve resilience, create value, and support future collaboration within their sectors.

Similarly, among the **ten startups subgrantee**, all reported an improved understanding of CE principles. Participants highlighted that CirculUP! **enhanced their conceptual grasp of circularity,** distinguishing circular models from linear ones and demonstrating how product and process decisions influence environmental impact. The combination of training, peer learning, and hands-on experimentation through subgrants contributed to improved awareness, deeper knowledge, and readiness to apply CE principles internally and in interactions with customers, partners, and communities. Some startups noted that the program also reinforced their belief in the value of circularity, prompting them to integrate CE approaches into communication, operational planning, and organisational strategy.

Moreover, **103 startups participated in training sessions** on circular economy principles and business models. A total of 48 participants responded to the post-training survey, including 27 women and 21 men. The results indicate an improvement in participants' capacity to apply circular economy principles following the CirculUP! training. A **majority reported a significant improvement in their circular economy related knowledge**, corresponding to 52.1% of respondents, while 37.5% indicated a moderate improvement. A smaller proportion, 10.4% (5 out of 48), reported only a slight improvement, and no respondents reported no improvement.

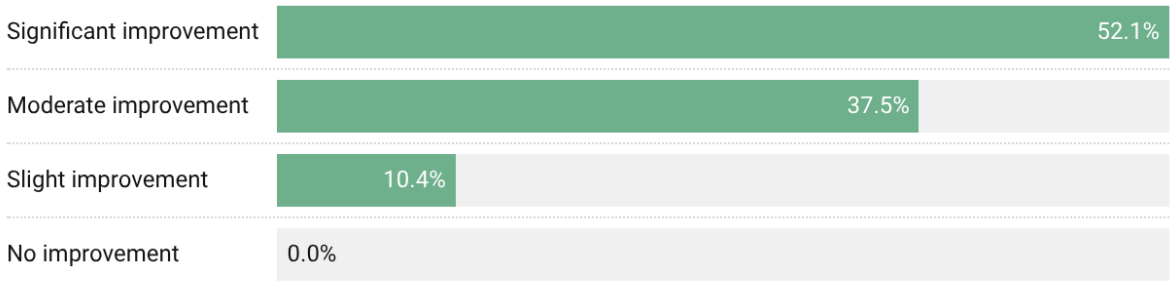


Figure 7 - Improved startups' CE knowledge after the training

Similarly, **15 ESOs enhanced their capacities on circular economy** through project-supported training. While the project initially aimed to train 7 ESOs to apply a new circular economy module within their support programmes, participation expanded and 15 ESOs were ultimately represented, reflecting broader uptake among ecosystem intermediaries

The post training survey, completed by **8 ESOs**, indicates an improvement in knowledge and skills related to CE. Self-assessed post-training knowledge ratings were consistently high, with **most respondents (37.5%) reporting a significant improvement in CE knowledge**, while 25% indicated they are now able to apply CE principles to their life or work and another 25% that they are confident discussing the topic of circular economy. Lastly, 12.5% of the respondents reported having a basic knowledge of CE after the training. As a result of the training participating ESOs created circular economy modules within their existing programs, supporting 103 startups in eventual adoption of circular business practices. They integrated circularity into their consulting practices, such as IMC Armenia, and GIZ Armenia and TUMO Labs launched a Green Incubation Program. One ESO, Develop Armenia NGO, actively sought mentorship, signalling continued demand for technical support to strengthen circular entrepreneurship programming.

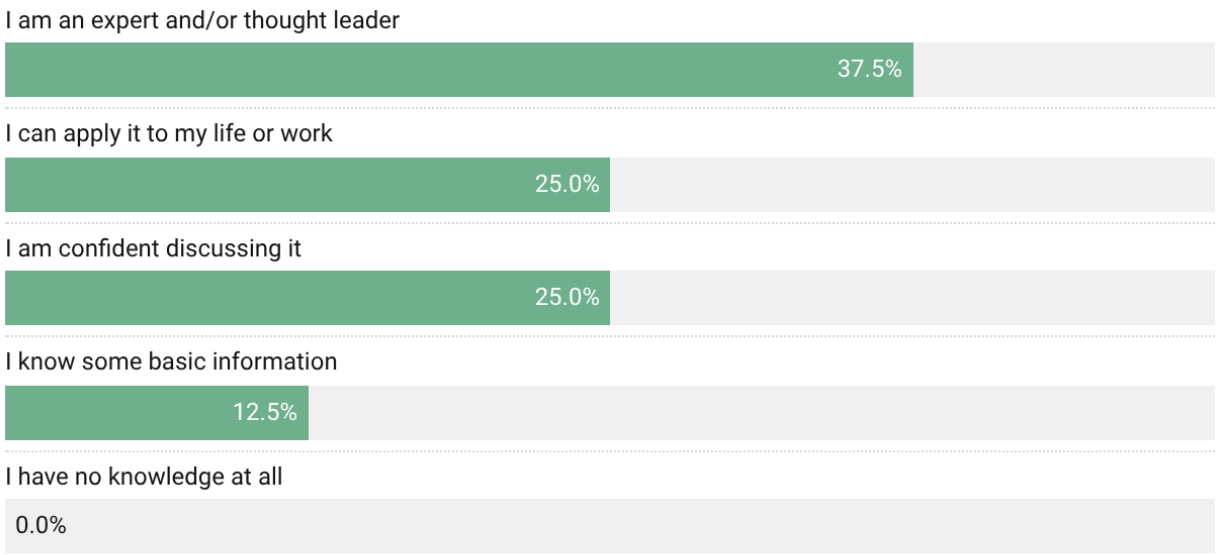


Figure 8 - Improved ESOs' knowledge of CE after the training

Implementation of CE principles and models

The **SME subgrantees** **implemented a diverse set of circular economy initiatives** across multiple sectors, including **herbal processing, greenhouse operations, interior design and furniture production, organic fertiliser development,and textile value chain revitalisation**. These initiatives reflect practical applications of circular economy principles through waste reduction, resource recovery, and value creation. Concrete examples from SME subgrantees include the production of plant extracts,

oils, and cosmetic products through the reuse of residual materials from herbal tea processing, as well as the extraction of value-added products such as oils and snack items from fruit kernels and peels. In the textile sector, a sustainable wool production model was introduced to strengthen local value chains. In agriculture, animal manure was transformed into organic liquid fertiliser using a natural composting process, providing an alternative to chemical inputs. Additional initiatives involved recycling green waste from rose greenhouses into biodegradable slipper soles for the hospitality sector and repurposing leftover wood and textiles from furniture production into new products.

Across the **SME subgrantees**, achievements point to **strengthened readiness to operationalise circular business models** through a combination of cost-efficient investment, technical validation, and early scaling pathways. SMEs reported that new equipment and infrastructure enabled a shift from concept to production testing using secondary raw materials, alongside the establishment of internal workflows for sorting, recycling, and traceability that support continuity beyond the grant. In agriculture, results were reported through completed field trials across multiple crops and regions, supported by laboratory testing. Other SMEs highlighted **progress toward market uptake** through the development of new product lines and prototypes, improved positioning through branding and transparency tools, and the formation of partnerships, including international knowledge exchange, to strengthen optimisation and future expansion.

Among the **startups** that received the training. The results indicate a good level of engagement with the circular economy concepts introduced. Out of the 48 respondents, **47.9% report that their startups have already begun implementing new circular economy initiatives** within their work, demonstrating an uptake of the concepts introduced. An additional 14.6% indicate that they plan to implement circular economy practices in the future, while 29.2% state that although they have not yet applied specific models or principles, they are actively exploring opportunities to do so. Only a small share (8.3%) report that they have not begun applying circular economy approaches, suggesting that overall engagement and intention to act remain high across the participant group. Examples provided by respondents of the survey highlight: transforming waste into new resources, recycling cigarette waste into agricultural soil mixtures and producing hotel slipper soles from recycled green waste.

More specifically, **startup subgrantees** implemented a diverse set of circular economy initiatives across multiple domains: **service based consumption models, waste management** and pollution prevention**, clean technology innovation, organic waste valorisation, sustainable materials** and textiles**, nature based infrastructure,** and applied research on complex residues. Startups reported increased experience, **strengthened scientific and technical capacity,** and strong educational or public interest in their models. Concrete examples include rental models that reduce unnecessary purchases, safer collection and management of used oil waste to limit environmental harm, and prototype development for portable low carbon energy solutions. Initiatives focused on converting organic residues into biohumus, compost, and fertilisers, while others advanced circular materials through plant fibre research and textile waste shredding for reuse as filling material. Additional interventions demonstrated water conserving, chemical free infrastructure such as natural self cleaning pools, alongside upcycling approaches that transformed waste into marketable goods and exploratory pilots that assessed reuse pathways for challenging residues such as tobacco waste.

By implementing the CE initiatives, startups demonstrated **early signs of market traction alongside**

strengthened communication and outreach capacity. For example, one startup reported a growing customer base during the reporting period and a marked expansion in digital visibility, with rapid growth in social media following and strong organic reach. Customer validation also strengthened through an increase in publicly available reviews that remained consistently positive, suggesting high user satisfaction and improving service credibility. Startups also reported tangible technical progress, demonstrating the feasibility of circular and low carbon solutions. For example, one startup validated the functionality of a portable energy prototype through controlled testing.

Multiple **startups demonstrated tangible circular outcomes** through waste diversion and resource recovery. One startup established stable collaboration with four sources, collected and processed over 12 tons of waste into compost and mulching material, and reported behavioural change among partners, who began checking for reuse needs before discarding waste. Another startup collected 2 tons of textile waste through awareness and collection efforts and translated recovered material into new products, producing 800 towels, 50 oven gloves, 400 pillows, and 800 pot holders, with initial sales already recorded. A further initiative produced 200 kg of compost and reported new technical linkages, including connections with a microbiological enterprise in Armenia.

> *"The CirculUP grant gave us the resources and momentum to take our vision to the next level. It allowed us to formalize the Armenian Wool brand, introduce cutting-edge transparency through blockchain, and scale our work in a way that's visible, traceable, and impactful. Without this support, we would not have been able to invest in the tools, training, and storytelling needed to position Armenian wool on the global stage." - SME Subgrantee*

> *"The program is a very important and timely initiative, bringing small and medium-sized producers closer to the principles of the circular economy." - SME Subgrantee*

> *"With the help of CirculUP FSTP, the acquisition of equipment not only succeeded in the composting process but also promoted the idea of a circular economy through the efficient use of recyclable materials. Additionally, the high professionalism and willingness of the CirculUP team contribute to the formation of new collaborations, which not only facilitate further work but also expand the impact and effectiveness of the program." - Startup Subgrantee*

Circularity assessment results

The self-assessment results from the startups and SMEs indicate measurable changes across **six main dimensions** of circular performance.

1. **Enablers and digitalisation:** defined as the degree to which a company acts as an ambassador for circular economy practices within its sphere of influence. Out of the 16 SMEs and startups, **15 reported an increase** of this dimension, up to +60%**.**

2. **Circular business models**: referring to the degree to which a company's product–service system creates incentives to optimise resource efficiency. Of the 16 total startups and SMEs, **3 reported a progress of this dimension** of +20%.
3. **Material use**: defined as the degree of non-virgin material use and waste recycling at the company level. A number of **8 startups and SMEs** reported improvements of this factor that go from +25 to +75%.
4. **Circular product design**: measures the extent to which circular design criteria are integrated into company processes. Between SMEs and startups subgrantees, **5 organisations** recorded an increase of this dimension between +20 and +50%.
5. **Energy and mobility:** defined as the degree to which renewable electricity and energy-efficient logistics are utilised. Out of the 16 SMEs and startups, **9 reported an increase,** with post-check values that go from +20% up to +80% when compared to the initial pre-check values.
6. **Social impact:** referring to the importance placed on diversity, inclusiveness and local employment, with a total of **8 subgrantees** recording an improvement under this aspect shifting between +17% and +50%.

Tables 9 and 10 below present case examples of an SME subgrantee and a startup subgrantee, respectively. Moreover, refer to Annex 2 and Annex 3 for detailed circularity results across the subgrantees.

Table 9 - SME Subgrantee Case Example

Organisation	Lukashin
The Lukashin Agricultural Association Consumer Cooperative was founded in 2005. The cooperative is engaged in the cultivation, processing, cold storage, and sale of agricultural products. It collaborates with local and international organizations and also implements community programs.	
Objectives of grant	
CirculUP support enabled the organisation to increase the material assets of the cooperative members and allow members to participate in community social programs. Moreover, the CirculUp grant helped the organisation to obtain high-value products from production waste, such as fruit kernels and peels and reduce the use of harmful substances in production, such as caustic soda and sulfur dioxide.	
Key results achieved	
• Cold storage warehouse has been completed, equipped with its aggregate and **3.8 kW solar panels** • **30%** of production increased • **18 people** were hired after receiving the grant • Additional **3 permanent and 5 seasonal jobs** will be created	
Circularity Check	
Lukashin showed **significant progress** across several dimensions after the circularity check. Specifically, the most substantial increases were seen in **Energy and mobility,** improving **+80%** and **Material use, + 75%**, **Circular product design** also recorded a relevant improvement by **+50%**, the same as **Social impact**.	

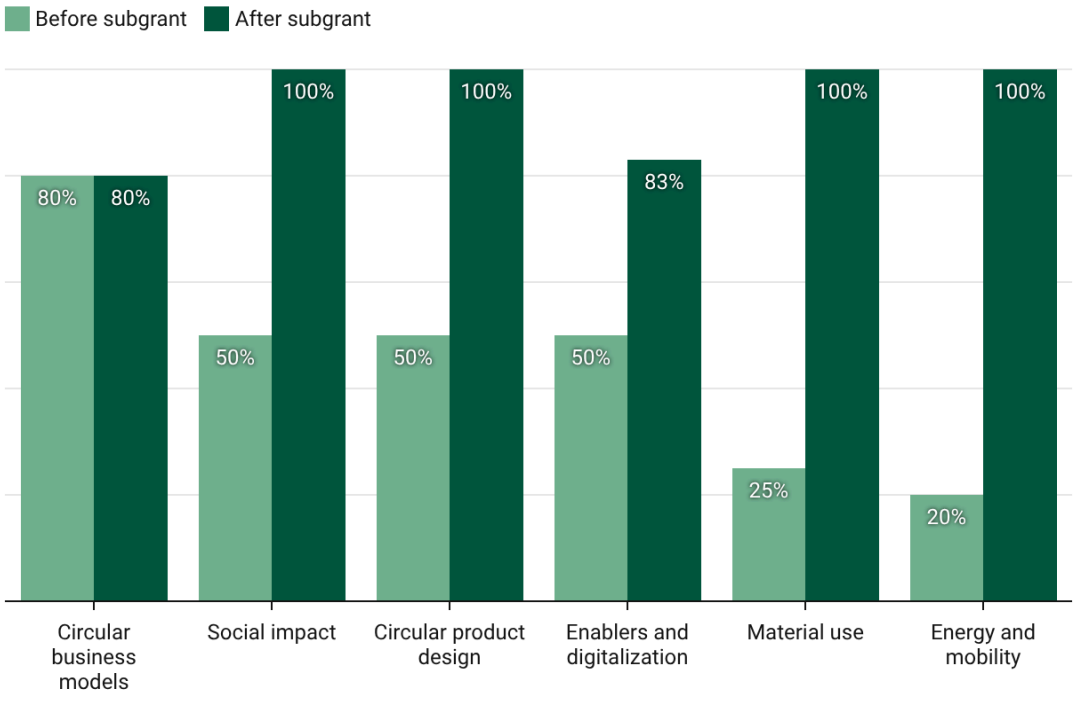
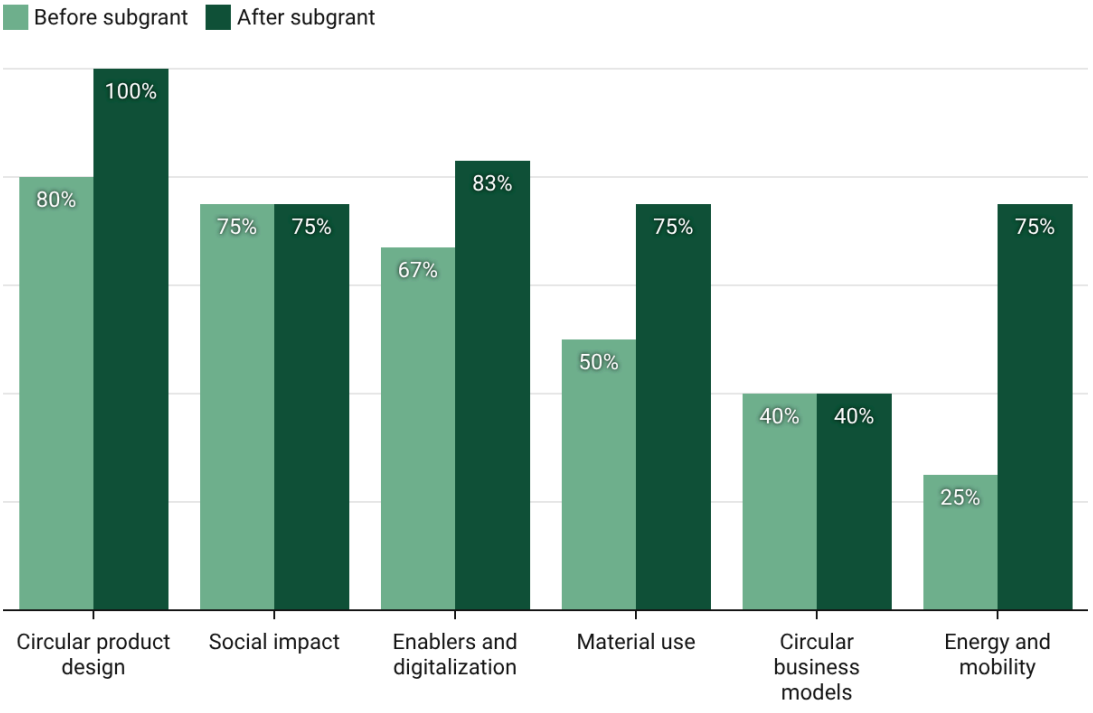


Table 10 - Startup Subgrantee Example

Organisation	**By Botany**
By Botany LLC, founded in 2022 is implementing a biological and production research project based on nettle (Urtica dioica L.) with the aim of developing an ecologically clean fiber prototype using local raw materials and minimal chemical-water input.	
Objectives of grant	
CirculUP support enabled the organisation to develop a prototype for obtaining ecologically clean fiber from local sources, which can serve as a foundation for sustainable local production. Moreover, the CirculUp grant helped By Botany to raise public awareness and activate the educational component related to sustainable fashion and the use of plant-based fibers.	
Key results achieved	
• **Establishment of an agricultural experimental base.** An experimental sowing of nettle was successfully conducted on a **100 m² plot** in the Aragatsotn region using organic cultivation methods. • **Expansion of educational and public awareness activities**. **Four seminars** were conducted at various venues in Yerevan. **More than 100 participants** from different age groups and backgrounds (school students, university students, designers, and aspiring entrepreneurs) attended the seminars. • **Over 36 publications** were made on social media platforms covering sustainable fashion and the circular economy, ensuring broad public awareness of the project.	
Circularity Check	
The circularity check results demonstrate a high performance across most categories. Specifically, the category **Energy and mobility** saw the largest increase, improving **+50%**, followed by **Material use,** improved **+25%** . Other relevant improvements regarding **Circular product design** increased **+20%** and **Enablers and digitalization** improved **+16%**.	



New jobs created

Across the SME and startup subgrantees, the project contributed to the creation of **38 new employment opportunities**, comprising 33 new jobs and 5 service contracts.

- Among **SME subgrantees**, the project contributed to the creation of new employment opportunities**.** In total, the SMEs reported **15 new permanent jobs,** alongside **5 seasonal jobs** generated through their circular initiatives. Individual enterprises created between one and three new roles, while one SME expects additional growth as activities expand.
- Among the participating **startup subgrantees**, the project contributed to the creation of new employment opportunities. In total, the startups reported **18 new job positions** and **5 service contracts** generated through the financial aid of the CirculUP! grant.

Increased partnerships or collaborations

SME subgrantees reported **forming or strengthening several partnerships** through their participation in CirculUP. In some cases, SMEs **deepened cooperation with local actors** such as farmers, artisans and designers, which supported material sourcing, product development and improved value chain coordination. One SME reported strengthened collaboration with a wider group of sector stakeholders, including community members and technical experts. SMEs also noted early-stage international connections. For example, one SME initiated preliminary partnerships with several international companies to exchange knowledge and explore potential collaboration on filtration technologies and production optimization.

The grant period facilitated expansion in strategic partnerships across **startup subgrantees** as well**, enhancing operational capacity and market reach**. For instance, a startup reported the establishment of crucial agreements for sourcing raw materials. Similarly, another subgrantee expanded its supply chain, contracting 122 new suppliers for used cooking oil collection. Collaborative efforts also extended to the technical and educational sectors, with startups forming alliances with engineering hubs, universities, and creative labs to drive research and prototyping. Furthermore, service-oriented businesses strengthened their local integration by establishing referral networks with hospitality providers and tourism agencies, effectively embedding circular models into the broader regional economy.

3.3 Improved public understanding

3.3.1 Outputs

CirculUP! **generated substantial public visibility and engagement**, alongside a set of communication and knowledge products that remain available beyond the project period. In 2025, **project communication reached more than 4.7 million people** through a combined mix of television, radio, print, and social media, and generated more than 1.4 million digital interactions. This level of exposure was reinforced by 22 television and radio interviews in which project representatives and stakeholders discussed circular economy concepts and project results, helping to position circularity as a public and policy-relevant topic.

In parallel, the project strengthened **decentralised outreach capacity by funding 10 CSOs to implement awareness-raising campaigns** (EUR 12,500 each), thereby extending communication beyond central channels into local contexts. Targeted learning outputs also supported professional uptake, with 8 media and 4 governmental representatives[5] trained on circular economy principles. Communication deliverables included a broad portfolio of outputs such as videos, brochures, infographics, training manuals, social media content, articles, and research products. Notably, the project produced 20 professional videos, comprising **10 international inspiring stories and 10 Armenia-based success stories**, creating accessible reference materials for continued dissemination. Beyond visibility, the project generated knowledge resources that remain accessible and in use, including an Armenian-adapted Circularity Toolkit, two research studies: SME circularity landscape and inclusive circular economy opportunities, and a Issue-based Ecosystem Building playbook documenting ecosystem-building lessons.

Table 11 - Outputs

Outputs	No.
Number of people reached through TV, radio, print, and social media campaigns	**+4.7 Million** people reach in 2025
Number of social media interactions and engagements	**+1.4 Million**
Number of TV and radio interviews	**22** TV & Radio interviews about CE and the project
Number of CSOs implementing awareness raising campaigns	**10 CSOs received funding** for awareness campaign up to 12,500€/each
Number of media representatives and governmental representatives trained on CE	→ 8 media representatives → 4 governmental representatives
Number of TV shows and radio channels	**22**

[5] Government participants represented the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, and the Deputy Prime Minister's Office, while media participants included Regions TV, Hetq, Mediamax, Public Radio, Boon TV, Regional Post, the Media Initiative Center, and Freedom of Information.

interviewing project team and stakeholders	
Types of communication materials produced and disseminated	Videos, brochures, infographics, training manuals, social media posts, articles, research report
Number of videos created	In total **20**: ➔ 10 International inspiring videos created ➔ 10 success story videos from Armenia
Number of resources, tools and new knowledge created by the project that remain accessible and in use	➔ 1 Circularity toolkit adapted in Armenian ➔ 2 research outputs (SME circularity landscape research and research on the inclusive circular economy) ➔ 1 community playbook

3.3.2 Outcomes

Raised awareness on circular economy

Across the CSO subgrantees, awareness raising on circularity was delivered through a combination of education-based outreach, youth-led approaches, and multi-channel communication. Collectively, all ten CSO subgrantees implemented awareness raising activities that reached school, community, and higher education audiences and translated circular economy messages into accessible learning formats and public-facing content.

Mass media and digital channels were used to extend outreach beyond direct participants. CSOs produced audiovisual materials, educational video series, documentaries, and social media content, ensuring sustained visibility of circular economy messages at a wider public level. For instance, video lessons in the Armenian language, a campaign that produced over 49 pieces of content (videos, posts) across Instagram and Facebook and a 22-minute documentary, among others. One of the subgrantee produced a six-episode audiovisual crash course which achieved wide dissemination, with more than 400,000 combined views across Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

Print and written outputs further supported awareness efforts. For instance, a 96-page special issue on CE was produced by a grantee, and was prepared for a multilingual print to extend accessibility across Armenian and international audiences. One of the subgrantee produced Circular Economy Educational Manual and to further enhance the sustainability, visibility, and educational impact of this manual, it is proposed to submit it to the Scientific Council of Eurasia International University for endorsement as an approved teaching resource for use in educational institutions.

Increased public understanding and discourse regarding CE concepts

Project partners highlighted that activity design responded to actor specific needs, particularly in Armenia where circular economy concepts previously had limited visibility outside environmental and technical communities. This targeted approach contributed to improved public understanding of circular economy principles. **All subgrantees reported increased understanding of circular economy concepts** among participants following engagement in project activities. Partners identified training programmes as a

central mechanism for strengthening knowledge and supporting practical application among ecosystem organisations, SMEs, start ups, and CSOs

Coalition members further noted that **youth-focused engagement activities in schools and cultural centres contributed to broader community-level awareness**, as knowledge was shared within families and local networks. Teachers and students demonstrated strong interest in applying circular economy concepts in local contexts. Participants also recognised that several everyday practices in Armenia, such as reusing containers and passing down clothing, already reflect inherent circular behaviours. This recognition helped reinforce the relevance of circular economy principles by linking them to existing practices and environmental benefits.

With regard to **public discourse**, project partners observed a gradual increase in public awareness of circular economy concepts over the past two years. They noted that prior to CircuIUP!, the concept was largely confined to environmental or technical communities and rarely featured in broader public discourse. Through outreach activities such as **media content produced with the support of sub-grantees, circular economy topics began to appear more frequently in mainstream communication channels** such as television, radio, and online news platforms. Project partners highlighted that these materials reached audiences beyond the project's immediate networks, indicating expanded public visibility.

Partners also observed qualitative shifts in how circular economy concepts were understood by civil society organisations, educators, and some SMEs. Feedback suggested a **growing recognition of circularity as a business and economic approach rather than one limited solely to waste management** or environmental protection. While levels of awareness and understanding varied across target groups, partners reported a modest shift towards acknowledging the organisational, economic, and innovation-related dimensions of circular practices. Overall, the discourse on the circular economy in Armenia appears to have become more nuanced, with a broader range of actors expressing interest in the relevance of circular approaches to their professional activities.

Similarly, coalition members further emphasised the project's contribution to raising general awareness of circular economy concepts. They highlighted that prior to the project, circularity was largely unfamiliar, particularly among younger audiences. The **project was perceived as instrumental in reframing circularity** from a predominantly non-profit or environmental topic to one associated with economic opportunity, entrepreneurship, and innovation. Moreover, at the policy level, coalition members highlight increased awareness and understanding of circular economy concepts among government actors. This shift is supported by the adoption of the Framework Action Plan on Green, Sustainable and Circular Economy, which is expected to further strengthen public visibility and institutional recognition of the topic.

Moreover, the **coalition's multi-sectoral composition enabled coordinated contributions across government, media, and policy spheres**. This breadth of engagement supported consistent messaging and reinforced learning across different levels, contributing to more widespread and sustained improvements in public discourse and perceptions of circular economy concepts.

Effectiveness of communication channels, messages, and storytelling formats in influencing public engagement

Project partners highlight that television segments, online videos, social media content and radio interviews produced by subgrantees were effective in reaching broad and diverse audiences. The **use of visual storytelling and real-life examples played a significant role** in capturing public attention and enhancing engagement with circular economy topics. Partners further highlighted that **locally grounded examples** were particularly influential. Videos featuring Armenian businesses demonstrated that circular economy practices are feasible within the national context, enabling audiences to better understand the practical relevance of circularity and its potential application in everyday economic activities.

In addition, CSO subgrantees working with students introduced circular economy concepts through **interactive formats such as competitions, workshops, and campus-based activities.** According to CSO subgrantees, these participatory approaches were effective in engaging younger audiences and encouraging active reflection on circular economy principles. This effectiveness was further enhanced by a shift toward a "success-story" narrative, as audiences demonstrated a more positive response to relatable, emotional, and solution-oriented examples rather than purely problem-focused messaging. By prioritizing simplicity, clarity, and visual storytelling, developed through early collaboration with creative experts, the project bridged the gap between complex theoretical frameworks and public understanding.

Ultimately, the implementation highlighted that while visual and practical stories drive awareness, the most profound engagement occurs when communities are given the opportunity to experiment and see the tangible results of circular practices firsthand, particularly within regional educational institutions where cultural specificities and community participation play a decisive role in shaping sustainable mindsets.

> *"Positive, solution-oriented stories proved far more motivating than problem-focused messages, inspiring viewers actively seeking ways to sort, recycle, and support circular initiatives." - Investigative Journalists NGO (Hetq)*

> *"Thanks to this support, we were able to produce high-quality content in Armenian, develop an interactive contest platform using Telegram, and reach out to more than a thousand schools across the country." - CSO subgrantee*

4. Learnings

This chapter synthesises the key learning processes and systemic changes generated through the implementation of the CirculUP! project. It moves beyond immediate outputs to examine how project activities contributed to longer-term transformation across policy, institutional, and ecosystem levels. Particular attention is given to factors that enabled or constrained change, the sustainability of results beyond the project lifecycle, and the relevance of these experiences for future circular economy initiatives in Armenia and comparable contexts.

4.1 Systemic learning and long-term change

The section is divided across three sub dimensions: **Policy influence, Legacy and Lessons and knowledge transfer** as stated in the evaluation framework.

4.1.1 Policy influence

Policy engagement and integration of circular economy principles into national frameworks

Project partners and coalition members, especially through the policy working group, actively facilitated dialogue with **two key ministries**, namely Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Environment, to advocate for policy changes. Over the course of the project, government representatives became increasingly involved in CirculUP! events or through bi-lateral meetings, indicating a gradual strengthening of institutional engagement with circular economy topics. For instance, the coalition provided written comments on the **Green Taxonomy Strategy paper** and engaged in technical exchanges with the Ministry of Economy during the document's development.

A key outcome of this engagement was the involvement of Armenian Circular Economy Coalition members in the development of the **Framework Action Plan on Green, Sustainable and Circular Economy** (up to 2030), a national level strategic document endorsed by a Prime Ministerial decree (N1028L) on 12.11.2025 which outlines actions related to the circular economy. The program aims at strengthening circular economy principles, including: conserving natural capital, optimizing resource use, and increasing system efficiency by identifying and removing negative externalities. Coalition members contributed inputs and recommendations during the drafting process, supporting the integration of circular economy considerations into the final policy framework.

Perceptions of CirculUP's influence among policy-makers

Policy stakeholders perceived CirculUP! as a relevant and constructive contribution to Armenia's transition towards a green and circular economy.

The Ministry of Economy highlighted the value of initiatives such as CirculUP! in strengthening the capacities of sector actors and increasing public awareness, both of which were considered necessary enabling conditions for circular economy development.

Similarly, the Ministry of Environment emphasised that CirculUP represents one of the key initiatives supporting circular economy development in Armenia, functioning as a platform that brings together civil society, the private sector, and policy making institutions. **The Ministry reported continuous engagement from project launch through implementation**, and noted that while delivery was primarily driven through civil society and private sector partnerships, **the project was closely aligned with the Ministry's strategic objectives**. In the Ministry's view, this cooperation contributes to creating a foundation for Armenia's environment, economy, and communities to move toward more efficient, responsible, and sustainable development models, in line with international approaches.

Within a policy context where the green and circular transition is a stated government priority, the Ministry of Environment reported that legal acts have been developed in recent years to support this direction and encourage behavioural change. Against this backdrop, **the Ministry observed increasing interest and awareness** of circular economy principles among both the general public and the private sector. **CirculUP! was perceived as having made a distinct contribution to this momentum** through active stakeholder engagement and the organisation of public and professional discussions that expanded visibility and encouraged dialogue.

> *"The CirculUP! Project has been an example of innovation, resilience, and collaboration." - Václav Štěrban, Deputy Head of the Cooperation Section of the EU Delegation, and representatives from the Ministry of Environment*

> *"The CirculUP! project represents a flexible and integrated approach to the development of the circular economy, combining entrepreneurship capacity building, responsible use of local resources, community engagement, and the promotion of innovation. Owing to this structure, the CirculUP! model can be regarded as a **best-practice example** from a practical perspective." - Ministry of Environment*

Reported barriers and enabling factors related to policy engagement

Policy engagement faced several challenges during project implementation as highlighted by the coalition members and project partners. In some instances, **varying levels of familiarity with circular economy concepts** among government stakeholders influenced the pace of discussions and alignment on priorities. Engagement with state agencies also **required extended timeframes**, reflecting standard administrative processes and periodic changes in roles and responsibilities within ministries. In addition, early engagement efforts were concentrated on a limited number of focal points, which highlighted the importance of broadening interaction beyond individual contacts to ensure continuity and institutional anchoring.

However, when it comes to enabling factors, the partners highlight that the policy engagement could be supported by participation of international experts in exchanges with government representatives, alongside the use of relevant data and evidence to inform discussions. The project experience further demonstrated the value of establishing **clearly defined engagement mechanisms from the outset**, with involvement across multiple levels of government. This approach could support more stable dialogue, reduce reliance on individual actors, and contribute to sustained policy engagement over time.

Perceived policy relevance of CirculUP! for future EU or donor-funded CE programmes

Policy stakeholders, particularly the Ministry of Environment, perceived CirculUP! as timely and policy relevant in a national context where circular economy adoption is expanding. The Ministry reported that the number of enterprises applying circular business models in Armenia is steadily increasing, driven by government endorsed strategic priorities alongside growing public interest. In this framing, circular economy principles were described as progressively more embedded in entrepreneurship and sustainable development agendas.

The Ministry emphasised that **public awareness and environmental education constitute enabling conditions** for effective implementation of circular economy programmes and for the long term uptake of circular practices. Environmental education was identified as particularly important, as it helps foster responsible attitudes toward environmental protection, sustainable consumption, and circular economy principles. Education based interventions such as courses, workshops, thematic lessons, and practice oriented initiatives across age groups and educational institutions, were viewed as mechanisms that facilitate knowledge transfer and support behavioural change. In this regard, CirculUP!'s focus on community engagement, youth participation, and awareness raising was considered consistent with a policy logic that links information, motivation, and practical exposure to sustained shifts in consumption and production behaviours. The Ministry also highlighted the relevance of initiatives that promote innovation, responsible use of local resources, and waste reduction, as these contribute to shaping an environmentally conscious society that values sustainable development and generates new solutions.

From a policy perspective, the Ministry indicated that the **results of CirculUP! may serve as a basis for future state policy development** in the sector, including legal frameworks and awareness raising measures. CirculUP! was characterised as applying a systemic approach that combines environmental education, support for innovative businesses, and analytical work. The project's broad stakeholder engagement, bringing together civil society, the private sector, and public institutions, was highlighted as a key strength. The project's adaptation of European approaches was considered particularly relevant for future EU or donor funded programming, as it provided practical reference points for policy design and mechanism development aligned with green economy objectives.

Finally, the Ministry identified several project approaches with relevance for shaping future circular economy policies and financing directions. These include the **promotion of Extended Producer Responsibility systems**, **development of data driven assessments and indicators, the piloting and scaling of practical circular models at the community level,** support for green and social enterprises, and the inclusion of civil society and the private sector in policy processes. These approaches were considered aligned with the Ministry's priorities and to provide a realistic foundation for future public programmes, partnership based cooperation, and the mobilisation of international financing.

Evidence of ongoing dialogue or collaboration

The institutionalisation of the coalition as a registered non governmental organisation provides a basis for continued dialogue and collaboration with relevant ministries and other government bodies beyond the project period. In this context, coalition highlights that Policy Working Group's action plan will serve as a reference framework to guide the coalition's future policy engagement and advocacy activities.

4.1.2 Legacy

Tangible resources generated by the project

Partners identified a range of concrete resources developed during the project that will remain available after its closure. These include:

Business and ecosystem support resources

- **The Circularity Toolkit,** originally developed by Impact Hub Network, was translated into Armenian to ensure accessibility for local entrepreneurs and businesses. The toolkit was adapted to the Armenian context, including 10 local case studies showcasing successful circular economy applications. This resource is publicly available and continues to serve as a reference for education, business development, and implementation efforts.
- In addition, **training materials and CIRCO modules** (translated and adapted in Armenian context) developed and used throughout the project for future application by certified trainers supporting SMEs and startups.

Educational and communication materials

- A set of **educational videos** was produced to support awareness raising and learning. This includes 10 International inspiring videos created and 10 success story videos from Armenia. Ten international short videos[6] were produced in collaboration with various Impact Hubs around the world. These videos feature inspiring and impactful stories of circular businesses, aiming to introduce key concepts and best practices to Armenian stakeholders. All videos were translated into Armenian to ensure broad accessibility.
- Furthermore, **learning materials developed by CSO grantees**, including teacher guidelines, educational modules, courses, media content, and school level resources, are now accessible across more than one thousand schools, extending the project's educational reach.

Knowledge sharing and institutional learning

- The project contributed to the development of an **Issue-Based Ecosystem Building playbook,** produced through peer to peer exchange among Impact Hubs worldwide. The playbook documents lessons learned from issue based ecosystem building projects and serves as a reference for future circular economy initiatives across the global Impact Hub network.

Research and evidence generation

- **Research Study on Circular Economy and SMEs in Armenia**: A three-month research initiative assessed the circularity landscape in Armenian SMEs, identifying key economic sectors with the potential to drive the transition. Identified Economic Sectors: The research highlighted three promising sectors with significant potential for circularity:
    - Agrifood Sector: This sector is pivotal to the Armenian economy, contributing

[6] For more information visit - https://impacthub.net/works/circulup/

approximately 9% of the country's annual GDP.
    - Tourism Sector: Representing 11.8% of GDP in 2019, tourism offers a wide range of opportunities for adopting sustainable practices.
    - Textile and Clothing Industry: This growing sector is important for employment, particularly in fostering women's inclusion in the workforce.

  The research also identified existing gaps in awareness, infrastructure, and policy frameworks while highlighting opportunities for innovation, collaboration, and investment in circular practices.
- Ongoing research titled **"Study on the Opportunity of an Inclusive Circular Economy for Armenia"** is being conducted to inform continued policy dialogue with the Ministry of Economy. The study examines practical pathways for Armenia's transition from a linear economic model toward a more inclusive circular economy, with a focus on identifying opportunities that support sustainable growth and broader socio-economic benefits. The study is expected to be available in early 2026. The findings are expected to further strengthen the advocacy and policy engagement capacity of the newly registered Armenian Circular Economy Coalition.

Enhancement in capacities and circular economy awareness of ecosystem actors engaged

The results indicate that the project adopted and operationalised an **ecosystem approach that targeted capacity building interventions**, generating mutually reinforcing effects across civil society, entrepreneurship support structures, SMEs, startups, institutional and internal stakeholders. This systemic design represents a key strength of the project, as it enabled circular economy awareness and capacities to develop in a coordinated and interdependent manner rather than within siloed actor groups. Capacity building support was tailored to actor specific roles within the ecosystem.

For **CSOs**, interventions emphasised circular economy awareness raising, education, and community engagement, supported through structured training, subgrants, and coalition based collaboration. All ten CSO subgrantees translated learning into practice by implementing awareness raising, educational, and community based circular initiatives, indicating strengthened ability to communicate circular economy concepts and mobilise local participation.

For **SMEs and startups**, the project combined training with financial support to enable the practical translation of circular economy principles into business models and market practices. All six SME subgrantees reported a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of circular economy as a systems approach rather than as a concept limited to waste management. This enhanced capacity supported the implementation of circular solutions across sectors including agriculture, textiles, furniture, and manufacturing. Similarly, all ten startup subgrantees reported improved understanding of circular economy principles, moving from predominantly linear interpretations towards a systems based perspective that emphasises resource loops, value chain integration, and long term sustainability. This shift was reinforced through a combination of targeted training, peer learning, and hands-on experimentation enabled by grant support.

In parallel, coalition members and **ESOs** reported increased circular economy knowledge and awareness through targeted training activities, strengthening the enabling environment for business and community

uptake. A key example was the **Circo Methodology[7] Training** for SMEs. Three Armenian professionals obtained Circo certification through an intensive training in Amsterdam, strengthening national capacity to deliver structured support for circular business model development. Following certification, the trainers facilitated multiple rounds of Circo training in Armenia, with 23 SMEs participating in these sessions.

Overall, the **project strengthened conceptual understanding and applied capacity across ecosystem actors**, supporting a shared and increasingly coherent interpretation of circularity that links public engagement, enterprise innovation, and ecosystem coordination.

Evidence of ongoing activities by supported enterprises (SMEs, startups and CSOs) after project end

Evidence from subgrantees suggests that project supported enterprises intend to sustain and expand circular economy activities beyond the project lifecycle, indicating potential for continued application and consolidation of results. Across SMEs, startups, and CSOs, respondents described concrete continuation plans that build on equipment investments, skills development, and community engagement structures established during implementation.

Among **SME subgrantees**, a common trajectory is the **continued expansion of circular solutions** through increased utilisation of newly acquired equipment, the development of additional circular product lines, and deeper integration of waste recovery into routine operations. Several **SMEs reported ambitions to move towards closed loop systems**, using bio products such as wool remnants, filtration residues, or agricultural waste to create new materials and products, including soil enhancers and insulation solutions. SMEs also anticipated that these activities would strengthen long term economic resilience through new revenue streams, reduced production costs, improved storage and processing capacity, and enhanced competitiveness. Several enterprises reported intentions to scale production, access new markets, participate in international exhibitions, and develop partnerships to stabilise raw material supply chains and support growth. In addition, some SMEs **emphasised the importance of peer learning and sector level diffusion,** with aspirations to share knowledge and build a critical mass of enterprises that could collectively advocate for enabling policies and broader circular innovation. Over the longer term, SMEs anticipated environmental and social benefits, including reduced waste disposal, improved soil health, increased use of natural dyes, strengthened sustainable livelihoods, and deeper community engagement. Subgrantees also expected that behavioural shifts among producers and consumers stimulated by the project could sustain demand for circular products and reinforce responsible resource use.

CSO subgrantees similarly described continuation pathways, focused on **maintaining and expanding awareness raising, education, and community based initiatives** after project closure. Several organisations reported plans to keep circular economy communities active through ongoing engagement tools such as challenges, quizzes, blogs, and digital learning platforms. Others indicated intentions to replicate and scale training using manuals and educational resources developed during the project, including continued delivery of trainings in schools and communities and regular updates to online

[7] For more information see: https://www.circonl.nl/international/methodology/

knowledge hubs to maintain accessibility and relevance. In the longer term, CSOs expected sustained behavioural change driven by youth, educators, and local communities, with initiatives such as compost clubs, school based programmes, and community farming activities functioning as permanent learning spaces that embed circular practices into everyday life. Media oriented CSOs anticipated continued influence through the ongoing availability and potential rebroadcasting of circular economy content on digital platforms, supporting sustained public dialogue. Collectively, CSOs framed the anticipated legacy as the gradual consolidation of youth driven community networks, an expanded pool of trained instructors, continued student-led initiatives, and permanently accessible educational materials that normalise circular thinking beyond the project period.

Startup subgrantees also reported **expectations of continued operations** and longer term impacts, reflecting the diversity of circular business models supported. Several startups anticipated sustained behavioural change among consumers and communities by promoting responsible consumption and environmentally conscious lifestyles. Others described ambitions for structural influence within key sectors, including renewable energy and green technologies, sustainable textiles and materials, and nature based solutions in the built environment. Startups operating in renewable and off grid applications expected continued product development and diffusion of export oriented green solutions that reduce dependence on fossil fuels. Those focused on sustainable textiles anticipated longer term contributions to local value chains by integrating circularity into production processes, increasing awareness of sustainable materials, and supporting employment opportunities, particularly in rural contexts. Nature based initiatives, such as natural swimming pool models, were expected to continue influencing construction and landscaping practices through demonstration effects, online dissemination, educational visits, and peer learning, with anticipated benefits for water conservation, microclimate quality, and public appreciation of sustainable design. Collectively, startups expect their work to **contribute to a broader cultural shift toward responsible business practices,** increased public awareness of circular economy solutions, and the emergence of locally rooted yet scalable innovations.

Evidence of partnerships maintained post-project

The **establishment and consolidation of the Armenian Circular Economy Coalition** is among the most significant achievements and legacy of the project. Coalition members effectively used the knowledge, tools and networks introduced in the first year and began actively applying them within their own institutions. Members extended circular economy awareness to academic settings, community groups and partner organisations. The coalition became a dynamic and self-sustaining structure that amplified project efforts and strengthened ecosystem-wide engagement and will continue to do so.

Impact Hub Yerevan initiated a new collaboration with UCOM following the participation of the company's Chief Executive Officer as a speaker at the project's international forum, which directly resulted in the **launch of a dedicated circular economy fellowship programme**[8].

[8] For more information see: https://yerevan.impacthub.net/ucom-2025/

In addition, the participation of a GIZ project manager in the Training of Trainers programme for ESOs led to the creation of the CirculAtia **incubation programme**[9], further institutionalising circular economy support mechanisms.

Evidence of institutionalisation of CE principles

One of the most notable legacy practices was the **certification of Impact Hub Yerevan as a CIRCO Hub**. Impact Hub Yerevan's formal role as a CIRCO Hub will remain in place, allowing continued delivery of circular business model training. Several team members became certified CIRCO trainers, connecting the organisation to a global network and enabling it to deliver ongoing circular business training in Armenia. Through CirculUP, three cohorts were trained, followed by additional cohorts delivered in collaboration with other institutions. This development was seen as a major long-term asset that strengthens local capacity for circular business transformation. Impact Hub Yerevan continued to partner with other actors, such as **TUMO**[10], to deliver additional CIRCO training cycles for entrepreneurs. This demonstrates the scaling potential of the methodology and the emergence of a shared training infrastructure beyond the project.

The project also achieved results through the integration of circular economy concepts into **higher education:**

- Eurasia International University launched a Master's programme in Circular Economy and Governance, supported by a dedicated scholarship, creating a formal academic pathway for advanced training in the field.
- The topic of Circularity was incorporated into the 'Basics of Ecology' course for first-year students at the Faculty of Pharmacy and the 'Environmental Law' course for students at the Faculty of Law at Yerevan State University, will remain part of their curricula, with potential expansion to other faculties.
- In the Academy of Public Administration starting this year, one of the topics in the "Fundamentals of Sustainable Development" module will focus on the circular economy.
- Yerevan State University, at the Faculty of Economics, Department of Environmental and Sustainable Development, the circular economy will be proposed as a topic for master's theses.
- At Yerevan State University, Faculty of Sociology, within the Strategic Communication Master's Program, one of the upcoming year's master's thesis topics will focus on the role of communication in the green agenda, using public awareness of the circular economy as a case study.

Evidence that CE recommendations have been integrated into policy frameworks

Evidence of integration is reflected in the development of the **Framework Action Program on Green, Sustainable and Circular Economy Development** (up to 2030), a national level strategic document endorsed by Prime Ministerial Decree No. 1028 L on 12.11.2025. The framework outlines actions related to

[9] For more information see: https://yerevan.impacthub.net/circulatia-incubation-program/

[10] The TUMO Center for Creative Technologies is a free-of-charge educational program that puts teens in charge of their own learning. For more information see: https://tumolabs.am/en/

circular economy development and was prepared in collaboration with Armenian Circular Economy Coalition members, who contributed inputs during the drafting process.

Additional evidence of policy relevant spillover effects includes the introduction of the Green Key certification scheme in Armenia by one of the coalition members. While this development cannot be attributed exclusively to the project, it occurred during a period of active collaboration and reflects the broader strengthening of the circular economy ecosystem. Moreover, the policy relevance of these developments and the project's approach has been explicitly acknowledged by the Ministry of Environment, which highlighted the alignment of project approaches with national priorities for green and circular economy development.

Emerging initiatives inspired by the project

Some follow up initiatives emerged during or shortly after the project period, indicating continued interest and engagement in circular economy topics. These include ongoing interest from UNDP in further collaboration on circular economy related activities in the coming year. In addition, a challenge fund implemented in partnership with the American University of Armenia was developed, building on coalition engagement and focusing specifically on circular economy themes. Further evidence of spillover effects includes a tourism focused circularity initiative (Circulatia) supported by GIZ, which was partly influenced by the participation of GIZ staff in CIRCO training activities conducted during the project period.

Stakeholders' reflections on CirculUp's unique added value

The partners viewed the **project's ecosystem-building approach as a standout practice**. Instead of working with entrepreneurs in isolation, the project engaged multiple actors: businesses, civil society organisations, media outlets, citizens, students and policymakers. This comprehensive approach enabled the project to address circularity from several directions simultaneously and helped cultivate the foundation for systemic change. The partners emphasised that this holistic engagement was instrumental in shaping a broader circular economy movement rather than isolated interventions.

4.1.3 Lessons and knowledge transfer

The section first outlines the main mechanisms that enabled knowledge exchange across partners, regions, and sectors. It then highlights the key enabling factors and constraints affecting implementation, covering awareness raising activities by civil society organisations, the application of circular initiatives by startups and SMEs, and broader efforts to increase public understanding. Building on this analysis, the section synthesises lessons learned from beneficiaries and project partners, identifies good practices that emerged during implementation, and concludes with practical recommendations to inform future programming and policy development in the circular economy.

Knowledge-sharing across partners, regions, or sectors

The project **contributed to strengthening cross regional and cross sector knowledge sharing** through structured platforms and applied learning formats that enabled the exchange of tools, practices, and partnerships. The Circular Economy Community of Practice (CoP) provided a sustained mechanism

for international peer learning and collaboration. It connected Armenian ESOs with Impact Hubs and circular economy practitioners across more than 100 global locations, enabling regular multi time zone sessions focused on practical approaches to circular business models, ecosystem building, policy engagement, and impact measurement. Through these exchanges, partners reported strengthened professional networks and collaborative links, including learning interactions with Nepal's Roots of Circularity project, supporting continuity of transnational relationships beyond the project period.

Knowledge transfer was further reinforced through experiential learning. An **international training and study visit** to the Netherlands exposed participants to established circular economy practices in policy, governance, and business model implementation. Workshops and site visits enabled direct engagement with leading actors and offered applied insights that extended beyond conceptual discussion, strengthening strategic understanding among Armenian stakeholders.

At the national and cross sector level, the project also facilitated structured innovation exchange through a two day **Circulathon**. The event convened university students, innovators, researchers, and entrepreneurs to co-develop circular solutions for SMEs through workshops, mentoring, and a final pitching process. In total, 16 startup teams developed circular solutions during the Circulathon, with the strongest proposals receiving seed funding from Impact Hub Yerevan to support further development. Collectively, these mechanisms contributed to a stronger culture of shared learning and collaboration across regions and sectors, linking international expertise with locally generated solutions.

Finally, knowledge sharing was further consolidated through the organisation of the **first International Circular Economy Forum** Armenia, which **convened 200 innovators from over 40 countries** to advance dialogue on the global transition to sustainable systems. The forum highlighted Armenia's CirculUP! initiative as a national model for circular transformation and included the launch of Impact Hub's Issue based Ecosystem Building playbook, providing Impact Hubs worldwide with actionable strategies for ecosystem development. Two panel discussions bridged local and international perspectives, and a dedicated networking session facilitated cross border exchange among participants.

Enabling factors and constraints to raising awareness on CE principles among CSO grantees

CSO subgrantees reported several **enabling factors** that collectively strengthened CSOs' capacity to implement innovative CE awareness raising approaches and support the objectives of nurturing student-led ideas, promoting knowledge exchange, and building long-term capacity in CE education.

- **Collaboration and complementary expertise:** Strong collaboration among organisations with complementary profiles emerged as one of the key enabling factors. Partnerships between CSOs specialising in education, youth work, entrepreneurship, media production, and sustainability enabled diversified outreach formats and improved content relevance.
- **Interactive and practice-oriented approaches:** Initiatives combining theoretical input with interactive methods, such as workshops, quizzes, content creation, and hands-on activities, achieved high engagement and learning outcomes. Youth participation was particularly strong when activities were structured and participatory.
- **Effective communication and storytelling:** Clear messaging and the use of audiovisual storytelling supported high audience engagement.

- **Integration within educational structures:** Embedding circular economy topics within existing school, university, and youth programmes increased reach and sustainability. Integration of content into curricula among universities and continued collaboration with schools supported longer-term awareness.
- **Planning and adaptive implementation:** Early planning, expert involvement, and coordination with partners facilitated implementation. Adaptation of formats and delivery methods allowed activities to be implemented across different regions and institutional settings.

The **challenges** reported by CSO subgrantees primarily relate to timing, coordination, and contextual conditions of implementation. Overall, these challenges influenced scheduling, delivery formats, and monitoring, rather than preventing the implementation of activities.

- **Timing and calendar-related challenges:** Several CSOs reported difficulties linked to project timing in relation to academic calendars. Late project start dates coincided with school closures, exam periods, or summer breaks, which reduced the availability of students and educators during certain phases. As a result, some CSOs adjusted implementation modalities by shifting activities to cultural centres, camps, or non-formal settings. Additionally, according to the subgrantees, project activities were unevenly distributed throughout the year, with a higher concentration in early autumn, particularly in September and October.
- **Institutional engagement**: Limited institutional engagement emerged as a structural challenge, particularly in relation to schools. CSOs reported low baseline interest or motivation among some institutions to engage with circular economy themes, reflecting the novelty of the topic within formal education and local governance contexts. In some regions, schools were unwilling to involve students without financial compensation, restricting participation and geographic coverage. Administrative constraints also affected implementation quality. Examples included failure to provide agreed attendance documentation, delayed confirmations, and the need for repeated follow-ups to secure institutional buy-in.
- **Content and capacity considerations:** The relative novelty of circular economy topics in the national context required additional introductory explanation for participants. Limited pre-existing research and teaching materials meant that CSOs had to invest extra effort in adapting or developing content. Some organisations noted that the breadth of topics covered required the involvement of multiple trainers. Short delivery formats, such as three-day camps, limited the depth with which some topics could be addressed; however, core concepts were still introduced and applied within the available timeframes.
- **Logistical and technical aspects:** Logistical considerations included decentralised locations that required participants to organise their own transport, which affected accessibility for some target groups. Technical issues, such as unreliable internet access at certain venues, were reported and necessitated on-site adjustments to activities.
- **Continuity and follow-up:** Some CSOs noted challenges related to sustaining engagement beyond the project period. These included varying levels of commitment from students to continue content-sharing activities and the need to maintain the engagement of ambassadors after formal project completion.

Enabling factors and constraints for implementing CE principles, initiatives and models among Startup subgrantees

Several factors supported successful CE implementation. Among the **startup grantees**, following factors were highlighted:

- **Early and continuous engagement with technical experts**, sector specialists, and suppliers enhanced design quality, operational efficiency, and troubleshooting capabilities.
- **Flexibility in planning and scheduling** allowed teams to address weather, seasonal, and site-specific challenges. Structured customer communication, clear pricing, and proactive information sharing improved operational efficiency and client interactions.
- **Hands-on experimentation, iterative prototyping, and direct community engagement** helped refine approaches, encourage behavioral change, and translate theoretical CE knowledge into practice.
- Regarding the 48 startups that participated in the post training survey, respondents most frequently identified **access to funding or financial support (37.5%), as the main enabling factor**, followed by mentorship or expert guidance (27.1%) and networking opportunities or partnerships (25%). Training or technical assistance played a smaller but still relevant role (12.5%), while institutional or policy support was reported by only a few organizations (6.3%).

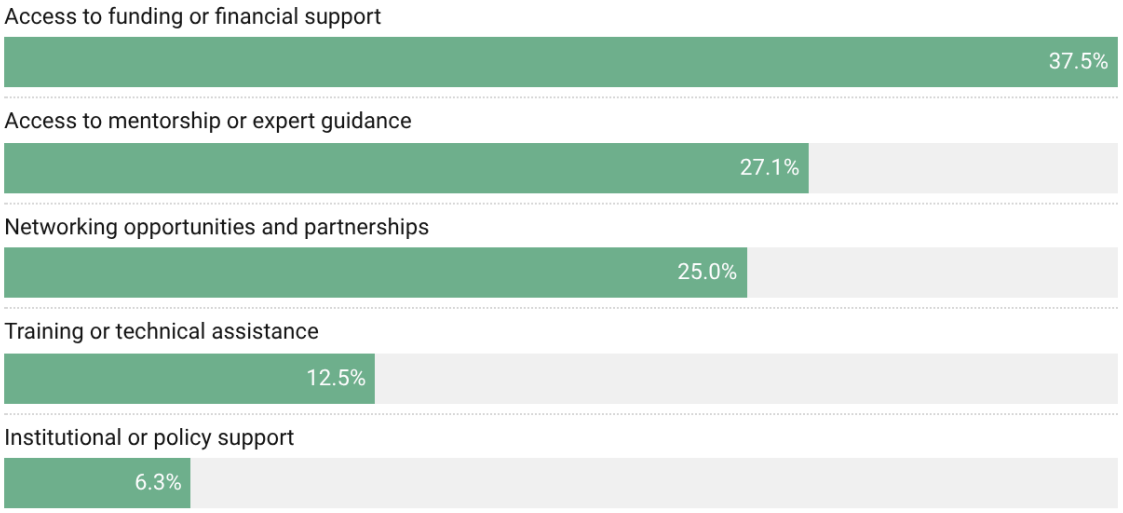


Figure 9 - Enabling Factors for implementing CE practices

The **startups' subgrantees** faced a range of financial, technical, operational, and market-related barriers, reflecting common structural challenges for early-stage CE initiatives.

- **Operational and inventory limitations** were frequently reported, particularly among service-oriented models, where peak season demand or last-minute requests strained logistical capacity. Supplier-related challenges emerged when partners were reluctant to adopt circular practices, due to space constraints, low awareness, or resistance to workflow changes.

- **Technical barriers were significant for startups developing hardware or specialized equipment**, including difficulties sourcing components locally, reliance on international suppliers with long shipping times, and the need for iterative design and testing.
- Environmental and seasonal factors, such as limited water access or adverse weather, introduced additional operational constraints, while **social and cultural barriers affected behavioral-change initiatives**, requiring persistent engagement to encourage adoption of CE practices. **Financial and regulatory obstacles**, including limited dedicated budgets and administrative complexities, further constrained scaling.
- The 48 startups who participated in the survey **reported financial issues as the main challenge**, with 62.5% of respondents citing lack of financial resources or access to funding as a key barrier. Other significant constraints included **limited market demand or customer awareness** (27.1%), limited technical expertise or knowledge (22.9%), and difficulty finding suitable partners or collaborators (20.8%). Institutional and policy-related obstacles were less frequently mentioned, with only 12.5% reporting insufficient policy support and 8.3% noting regulatory or bureaucratic barriers, while a small share (6.3%) indicated other challenges.

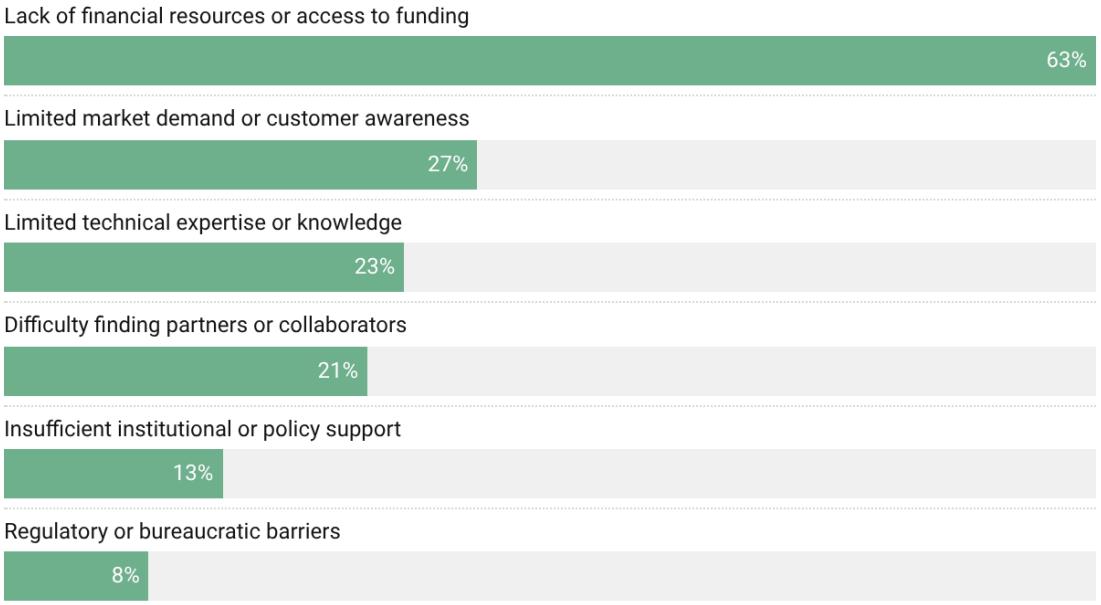


Figure 10 - Barriers to implementing CE practices

Enabling factors and constraints for implementing CE principles, initiatives and models among SME subgrantees

Among SME subgrantees a range of enabling factors supported their transition towards circular practices.

- **Access to grant funding** was highlighted as a critical enabler, as it allowed enterprises to invest in essential equipment and introduce new production processes.
- **Technical guidance, training, and ongoing support from external experts** strengthened teams' capacity to operate new technologies and refine their business models. Collaboration with partners, including suppliers, community actors, and international organisations, facilitated access

to specialised knowledge, secondary raw materials, and opportunities for piloting and improvement.

- In addition, they highlighted that **institutional support measures, such as tax exemptions and simplified procurement procedures**, could help reduce administrative and financial barriers to implementation.

SME subgrantees encountered a range of technical, operational, administrative, and external challenges during the transition towards circular business models.

- **Technological barriers** were particularly prominent among enterprises introducing advanced or unfamiliar processes. SMEs working with innovative extraction or recycling technologies required considerable time to understand the underlying scientific principles, assess potential risks, and evaluate alternative technical solutions offered by suppliers. This process involved extensive research, negotiations, and consultations with experts, which frequently led to implementation delays.
- **Administrative and financial challenges** were also widely reported. SMEs reported difficulties related to banking procedures, international payments, and customs regulations, which in some cases resulted in postponed procurement and slower implementation. These constraints were further compounded by external factors such as regional instability and disruptions in global logistics. Shipment delays of several months were reported, affecting planned timelines. The import of specialised machinery emerged as a bottleneck, as changes in customs clearance procedures and transportation schedules caused delays despite early supplier selection and procurement planning.
- **Market-related challenges** were particularly evident in sectors introducing new or less familiar materials. One of the SMEs needed to invest additional resources in building consumer awareness and market credibility, requiring expanded efforts in branding, outreach, and partnership development to strengthen recognition and demand.
- **Operational challenges also arose during the installation of new equipmen**t and the adaptation of existing production facilities. One of the SMEs reported the need to redesign production spaces, upgrade electrical infrastructure, or address technical issues during testing phases. In certain cases, older machinery required substantial refurbishment before becoming fully operational.
- Finally, **field-based innovations were affected by environmental and seasonal conditions.** Weather-related constraints, the need for specialised equipment, and difficulties in securing international technical partners introduced further delays and complexity, particularly during pilot and testing phases.

Enabling factors and challenges in raising public awareness about circular economy concepts and practices

Enabling factors identified for raising public awareness are as follows:

- Project partners highlighted that the establishment of a **broad network of ten civil society organisations implementing awareness-raising activities** was a key enabling factor for

extending circular economy messaging across diverse regions and audience groups. This decentralised approach allowed messages to reach communities beyond major urban centres and engage a wide range of stakeholders. Partners further noted that coordinated media engagement, supported through sub-grants and the involvement of dedicated media officers, amplified public visibility.

- According to coalition members, direct and participatory engagement formats were particularly effective. **Face-to-face events, hands-on activities, training sessions, and experience-sharing initiatives** were identified as the most impactful methods for fostering interest, understanding, and engagement with circular economy concepts among diverse audiences.
- Coalition members further highlighted that the **integration of business coaching within project activities** played a critical role in addressing prevailing mindset barriers. This approach supported a shift in perceptions of circularity towards a viable for-profit business model, helping to counter the view of circular practices as solely non-profit or environmentally driven. Moreover, the coalition's diverse influence across the education, policy, and media sectors simultaneously, enabled consistent and reinforcing messaging across different levels. This coordinated structure was perceived as essential for achieving broad and sustained influence.
- The **training-of-trainers approach** was highlighted as an effective long-term mechanism for disseminating foundational circular economy knowledge among student and startup communities. In addition, international exchanges and partnerships were identified as important enablers, facilitating exposure to best practices and establishing longer-term support networks for local green technology startups.
- **CSO subgrantees** highlighted the adoption of **multidisciplinary collaborations** as a primary driver of success. This factor merged the expertise of business support, education, and communication specialists to create more sustainable and far-reaching outreach initiatives. CSOs also identified that **early-stage strategic planning** and brainstorming with creative professionals were essential for producing visually appealing and high-quality content, such as videos and infographics, that simplified complex circular concepts for the general public. Furthermore, the use of **effective storytelling** proved to be a powerful tool for building emotional connections and inspiring behavioral change. The **practical and participatory nature** of the program served as another major enabler, with subgrantees noting that **genuine community engagement** was most successful when participants were given the autonomy to experiment and see the tangible results of their own work. This was particularly evident among youth, who demonstrated a high degree of receptivity when exposed to **structured, interactive learning** environments. The success of scalable NGO partnership formats, such as the Youth Sustainable Network Hub, demonstrated that leveraging educational institutions as primary platforms is the most effective way to drive long-term circular thinking.

Challenges reported in raising public awareness about circular economy concepts and practices are as follows:

- Project partners reported that a key challenge in raising public awareness was the **widespread tendency among audiences to equate the circular economy primarily with waste reduction**. Moreover, some stakeholders initially perceived circularity as a purely environmental issue rather than an economic opportunity, which constrained early buy-in from business-oriented actors and

policy stakeholders. Communicating the broader systemic perspective of circularity, including resource loops, innovative business models, and economic value creation, required sustained and repeated effort. Partners further highlighted that the **lack of well-established Armenian-language terminology for circular economy concepts** posed an additional barrier. Translating technical ideas into accessible, everyday language proved difficult, even during structured training sessions, limiting comprehension among SMEs and youth groups.

- Coalition members also highlighted **structural and contextual constraints** that further limited outreach efforts. They pointed to limited baseline knowledge and awareness of circular economy concepts among public authorities and some business actors. Coalition members also noted that the relatively **short grant duration of six months restricted the ability to extend outreach activities** to schools outside Yerevan and constrained the overall depth and geographic reach of awareness-raising efforts. Moreover, engaging younger audiences, particularly individuals aged 18 to 25 was challenging. According to coalition members, additional institutional support would be required to more effectively integrate circular economy concepts into school and university curricula.
- Coalition members emphasised challenges related to governance and institutional engagement. They highlighted **uncertainty and the absence of a clear vision or position on circular economy among some government stakeholders**, which slowed progress. Members also noted a prevailing mindset that circular economy initiatives require substantial upfront investment and are not perceived as tools for increasing corporate profitability or reducing operational costs. Communication with state agencies was reported to be slower than anticipated, partly due to frequent changes in ministerial positions. Coalition members reflected that an initial reliance on individual government contacts proved insufficient, underscoring the need for a more institutionalised approach to policy engagement.
- Coalition members further highlighted ongoing challenges in overcoming the dominant perception of circularity as synonymous with recycling. They reported difficulties in engaging target age groups by clearly demonstrating the tangible benefits of circular economy practices for daily life and the broader economy. A persistent **perception of circular businesses as a "luxury," non-profit-driven, or economically unfeasible**, which complicated efforts to shift narratives around profitability and scalability. According to coalition members, addressing these mindset barriers requires more targeted business-oriented communication and specialised coaching. Finally, they reported continued difficulties in engaging policymakers, linked to rapidly shifting national priorities, turnover in government personnel, and limited institutional knowledge or prioritisation of circular economy issues.
- **CSO subgrantees** observed that raising public awareness about the circular economy in Armenia is a multifaceted challenge, primarily rooted in the fact that **circularity remains an emerging and often misunderstood concept.** A significant barrier identified by CSOs is the **prevailing linear mindset**, which is difficult to shift due to a lack of systemic environmental education and a perceived disconnect between individual actions and institutional support. Furthermore, communication efforts are hampered by the technical complexity of CE principles; CSOs reported that without simple, visual, and relatable storytelling, the public often finds the topic abstract or irrelevant to their daily lives. This is compounded by cultural specificities, particularly in different regions, where traditional consumption patterns may conflict with circular practices. Practical engagement is also limited by external factors, such as inadequate waste management infrastructure, which creates skepticism regarding the feasibility of circularity. Finally, CSOs

highlighted that the success of awareness campaigns is often restricted by short project timelines, as six months is frequently insufficient to move beyond superficial interest and foster a genuine, long-term commitment to sustainable behavioral change across diverse community groups.

Lessons learned

Lessons from beneficiaries

- **CSO subgrantees** found that **collaboration among diverse actors**, business support organizations, educators, and communication professionals **strengthened the reach and sustainability of CE initiatives.** Early planning, clear communication, and the involvement of qualified experts were critical to smooth implementation. Activities targeting youth showed particularly strong engagement when learning was interactive, practical, and multidisciplinary, though a noticeable gap persists between youth interest and institutional awareness in schools and municipalities.
- Across all interventions, **storytelling emerged as a powerful tool**: relatable, positive, and clear narratives made CE concepts more accessible to the public. The experience also demonstrated that genuine community engagement, hands-on participation, and opportunities for people to see tangible results were essential for fostering lasting behavioral change**.** Finally, CSOs noted the importance of adapting awareness and educational activities to cultural and regional specificities to maximize their relevance and impact.ù
- The experience of **SME subgrantees** highlighted the **importance of in depth technical understanding when introducing new equipment, technologies, or materials**. Thorough exploration of technical options before implementation helped SMEs make more informed decisions, anticipate operational risks, and identify opportunities to utilize secondary raw materials more effectively. In particular, working with recycled or residual materials required additional experimentation due to natural variations in quality, reinforcing the value of piloting and iterative refinement.
- SMEs also highlight that **flexibility is essential during implementation**. Despite careful planning, installation, testing, and field trials frequently required on site adjustments in response to technical challenges, procurement delays, weather conditions, or changing market circumstances. This experience underscored the need for adaptive management practices and teams capable of responding quickly to unforeseen issues.
- SMEs observed that successful implementation depends not only on machinery or technology, but also on strengthened internal systems, including waste flow management, documentation, quality control, and coordination across teams. Circularity was therefore also understood as an organisational shift rather than a single technical intervention.
- The importance of early and sustained engagement with external actors also emerged. Close communication with equipment suppliers, technical experts, and local partners helped reduce delays, improve implementation quality, and build the practical skills required for new circular activities. In several cases, collaboration with communities and hands-on training contributed to stronger ownership and operational capacity.
- SMEs also recognised the **value of branding, storytelling, and market communication in supporting circular initiatives**. Clear narratives around sustainability, local value chains, and cultural heritage, such as in the case of Armenian wool, helped build consumer trust and

awareness. At the same time, many SMEs identified untapped potential to further transform production residues into new products, pointing to opportunities for future development and scaling.

- **Startups subgrantees** highlighted that **flexibility is essential when navigating early-stage markets**, as customer communication patterns, expectations, and decision-making varied widely. Making pricing and conditions publicly available reduced the volume of inquiries but enabled customers to self-assess before engaging, showing that transparency influences demand. From a technical and product-development standpoint, startups discovered that **prioritizing functional prototypes over perfection accelerates learning, while regular feedback from experts and users** leads to better design choices and prevents costly mistakes. In rural areas, low awareness of circularity highlighted the importance of **direct interaction and education to shift waste management behaviors**, which proved effective even within short periods. Startups also emphasized the need for realistic resource planning, and flexible timelines to manage external constraints such as weather or construction conditions. Continuous monitoring, particularly in processes like composting, generated valuable insights, illustrating the importance of learning-by-doing in CE innovation.

Lessons from the project members

- From a **project design perspective**, partners noted that a broader **initial research phase would have strengthened overall implementation**. While early research focused on SMEs, this proved too narrow to fully capture the diversity of the circular economy ecosystem. A more comprehensive mapping of actors, capacities, and entry points across sectors could have supported more targeted interventions and better alignment with project activities.
- A key lesson identified by project partners related to the institutional dynamics involved in sustaining engagement with public actors over time. While initial commitments were often established at senior levels, changes in leadership and evolving institutional priorities required engagement to be renewed at different stages of implementation. Partners noted that the **project could have been strengthened by a more formalised institutional engagement framework from the outset**, such as a Memorandum of Understanding with relevant ministries, to support continuity and reduce the effects of institutional transitions. This experience also underlined the value of engaging across multiple departments and levels, rather than relying on a single focal point, in order to support more resilient and sustained policy dialogue.
- Partners also observed that **varying levels of familiarity with circular economy concepts** within public institutions influenced the pace and depth of engagement. Circular economy approaches were not always positioned as immediate priorities, and they were sometimes associated with higher upfront investment requirements. These perceptions shaped early discussions and affected how the potential of circular economy measures to improve efficiency, reduce costs, and enhance competitiveness was understood. Over time, this highlighted the importance of continued dialogue and evidence based communication to support shared understanding.
- The experience of establishing the Armenian Circular Economy Coalition generated important institutional learning. Partners reflected that the **formalisation and legal registration of the coalition could have started earlier**, given the complexity of administrative and organisational requirements. Initiating this process during the second year of implementation would have allowed

sufficient time for consultation and compliance, while strengthening the coalition's capacity to sustain activities beyond the project period. At the same time, the coalition structure itself was recognised as a key enabling factor, successfully bringing together organisations and individuals with a shared vision and functioning as a platform for coordination and collective action.

- Several lessons emerged regarding **beneficiary readiness and differentiated support needs**. Partners noted that while CSOs and SMEs generally benefited from the circular economy training provided, **startups could have benefited from a longer and more structured incubation phase prior to receiving financial support**. Earlier engagement through mentoring, business development support, and technical guidance could have supported more realistic planning and smoother implementation. More broadly, the project demonstrated that different actor groups require tailored approaches: startups needed intensive hands on support, SMEs required technical and procurement assistance, CSOs were largely aligned with timelines except where affected by external constraints such as school holidays, and agricultural organisations faced seasonal limitations.
- Administrative capacity gaps among some subgrantees also generated learning. Limited experience in procurement, financial reporting, and accounting led to delays and increased demands on implementing partners. This reinforced the importance of **early and explicit capacity building in project management, reporting and compliance**, particularly for organisations implementing EU funded or technically complex activities for the first time.
- Partners highlighted that the global Circular economy assessment toolkit adapted during the project, would have been more effective if integrated from the beginning and validated together with local authorities. This would have created a **consistent framework for measuring circularity**, enabling annual tracking and clearer reporting of progress, while also supporting long-term adoption of circular practices beyond the project.
- Sustaining engagement over time emerged as another challenge. While initial training generated interest among SMEs, follow up mechanisms were limited for those not receiving financial support, affecting continued engagement. This highlighted the importance of designing structured follow up activities and touchpoints to help trained actors continue applying circular economy principles. For many SMEs, access to tailored support or financial incentives was a key factor in maintaining momentum.
- Finally, partners consistently noted that the **six month implementation period for sub grants was unrealistic in practice.** Delays related to customs procedures, procurement of specialised equipment, seasonal conditions, and limited administrative capacity frequently required extensions.
- Partners noted that **public understanding of circular economy concepts remains largely associated with recycling**, which underscores the need for continued communication efforts to convey the broader scope of circularity, including value creation, resource efficiency, and systemic business models. In addition, circular business models were at times perceived as **niche or primarily values driven**, rather than as commercially viable approaches. This observation highlighted the importance of targeted business oriented guidance and coaching to support entrepreneurs and SMEs in recognising and articulating the economic potential of circular practices.

Good practices emerging from the project

- **Coalition as an extended project team:** Partners noted that the coalition structure brought together actors from different sectors, backgrounds and areas of expertise. The diversity of the coalition proved to be a strong asset, functioning as an "extended project team" that could support outreach, training, awareness-raising and stakeholder mobilisation. This multi-actor coalition was considered one of the innovative and effective aspects of the project, enabling richer dialogue and more comprehensive ecosystem engagement.
- **Project's ecosystem-building approach:** The project's ecosystem oriented design was identified as another key good practice. Rather than focusing solely on entrepreneurs, the project engaged businesses, civil society organisations, media actors, citizens, and policymakers in parallel. This multi actor approach allowed circular economy issues to be addressed from multiple perspectives and contributed to the development of a more connected and systemic response, rather than isolated interventions.
- **Circular economy assessment toolkit:** The tool provided a structured way to assess circularity and supported more consistent understanding among partners and beneficiaries. Its potential for continued use beyond the project period was emphasised, suggesting it could serve as a long-term framework for monitoring circular performance if integrated more formally with relevant authorities.
- **Strategic media engagement:** Project's active collaboration with media representatives played a significant role in increasing public awareness of circular economy concepts. In addition to engaging CSOs through sub grants, the involvement of dedicated media officers supported more consistent messaging and sustained visibility, enabling the project to reach broader audiences beyond direct beneficiaries.
- **Early identification of capacity gaps:** Partners noted that the early identification of capacity gaps among some grantees, particularly in project management, reporting, and accounting, generated important learning. Recognising these needs during implementation enabled the consortium to adjust its support and underscored the importance of incorporating administrative and organisational capacity building components into future programmes.
- **Evidence-based policy dialogue:** Engagement of international experts in policy dialogue, supported by the provision of relevant data and evidence to government stakeholders, as a useful practice for strengthening the quality and credibility of policy engagement.

Recommendations generated to inform future programming or circular economy development

1. Project level recommendations

→ It is recommended to **extend grant periods to allow for deeper engagement**. A six month implementation cycle was considered insufficient for fostering lasting behavioural change, particularly for youth focused awareness raising and for technically complex circular business models. Longer programme timelines and more flexible grant periods would allow deeper engagement, iterative learning, and more realistic implementation. Future grant schemes should

therefore incorporate built in extension mechanisms, especially for initiatives requiring procurement, technical installation, agricultural cycles, or other time sensitive operational steps. The programme should also allocate dedicated time and resources for experimentation, piloting, and adaptation, recognising that work with new materials, technologies, or recycled inputs rarely follows a linear pathway and often requires adjustment based on practical testing and market feedback.

- **Design future initiatives with a broader ecosystem perspective from the outset.** Future initiatives should begin with comprehensive ecosystem mapping and research, covering businesses, CSOs, public institutions, educational actors, citizens, relevant actors, and market dynamics. This would enable more targeted interventions and better alignment with existing capacities and initiatives. Early multi actor engagement was seen as critical for building shared ownership, strengthening buy in, and enhancing ecosystem wide impact.
- Introducing a dedicated and formally **defined engagement component for government actors**, including targeted training activities, as the focus of the project was on the private sector. While CirculUP! effectively engaged public institutions at a strategic and consultative level, more structured and regular participation of public actors, particularly technical staff, would strengthen continuity and improve alignment between project activities and public sector processes. Formalising this engagement within the project design, alongside targeted training for government officers, was identified as a practical way to enhance technical familiarity with circular economy concepts and support more effective coordination and follow up during implementation.
- Partners recommend that **awareness campaigns** were far more impactful when **multiple organisations worked together**, rather than a single actor delivering isolated messages. Through the project's CSO grants, ten organisations carried out awareness activities, reaching diverse groups across regions and communities. Participants recommended formalising this collaborative model, as unified messaging from several actors increases visibility, credibility and reach.
- When it comes to the target group, CSOs recommended broadening the reach and duration of CirculUP to maximize its long-term impact on circular literacy and civic engagement. A key suggestion was to **expand the target audience beyond students to include young professionals, early-stage entrepreneurs, and small business owners** who could directly integrate circular practices into their operations when it comes to raising awareness and advocacy efforts. CSOs also stressed that youth-focused initiatives require **more time than a six-month cycle** to meaningfully shape circular thinking; extending the program and involving more educational institutions and teachers would build a stronger, more sustainable foundation for CE awareness.
- Strengthening the CSOs program with **additional practical modules, case-based workshops, and mentorship opportunities** would support participants in translating circular principles into real-world application. It was also emphasised to include **more opportunities for community engagement and knowledge exchange**, such as grantee meetups, study visits to CE enterprises, and shared learning sessions, which would foster collaboration, momentum, and collective problem solving across the network.
- SMEs emphasise that the grants could **offer additional technical workshops, expert consultations and matchmaking with international specialists** to help address technical challenges more quickly or access to shared services for specialised equipment procurement. SMEs expressed the need for **more practical guidelines, case studies, and real-world**

examples from companies that have successfully implemented circular models, which would help them avoid repeated mistakes and reduce trial-and-error phases. They also encouraged **stronger platforms for peer exchange**, enabling grantees to share solutions, resolve technical challenges collaboratively, and build a stronger CE community. Finally, SMEs emphasized the value of continuing and expanding such programs, noting that its flexible, well-designed structure has already delivered substantial benefits and should attract even more promising circular projects in the future.

- Financial support was identified as a critical enabler for circular practices. Participants recommended **expanding grant schemes, offering targeted financial mechanisms or creating incentives** for circular business practices. This would help startups, SMEs or businesses overcome upfront investment costs, especially in sectors that require specialised equipment or where procurement is time-sensitive.
- Need for **early and structured capacity building in administrative and compliance requirements**, especially for beneficiaries implementing EU funded or technically complex projects for the first time. Embedding this support at the start of implementation would reduce delays and improve delivery quality.

2. Policy level recommendations

- At the policy level, partners and coalition members highlighted the importance of **strengthening financial and regulatory incentives to support the uptake of circular practices** among SMEs or startups. There was a strong call for government led incentives such as targeted grant schemes, tax relief measures, or reduced import duties for circular technologies and equipment. These policy instruments were seen as particularly important for addressing high upfront investment costs that often discourage SMEs from adopting circular solutions. In addition, the strategic use of **public procurement policies that prioritise circular products and services** was highlighted as a powerful demand-side mechanism. Such policies can create initial markets for circular solutions, reduce risk for early adopters, and signal long term government commitment to sustainability and circular economy principles.
- A central recommendation concerned the need for **a national or local waste collection and management system**. The absence of such systems creates significant barriers for startups and SMEs trying to develop circular solutions. Many entrepreneurs had promising ideas for upcycling or reuse, but without predictable access to sorted waste, they were forced to manage collection themselves, adding logistical and financial burdens. Establishing baseline waste infrastructure would therefore create an enabling environment for circular innovation and lower operational barriers for new ventures.
- Continuing the promotion of green practices and circular business models at the national level among SMEs. This includes providing specific technical and financial support for green practices and supporting government efforts to enhance **technical and financial toolkits that enable SMEs to adopt circular approaches.** To effectively promote circularity, it was noted that existing SME support schemes should incorporate targeted measures and initiatives focused on sustainable practices, which are currently limited. A combination of grants, knowledge, practical tools, and consumer awareness was identified as essential for supporting SMEs' transition toward circularity.

- From an institutional and coordination perspective, partners recommended **maintaining strong collaboration with government institutions**, even where formal coalition membership is not feasible, and expanding the coalition's network to include additional actors such as business associations and recycler unions. This broader engagement would support sector wide coordination and policy alignment.
- It was highlighted that **communication and narrative building are essential policy support mechanisms**. Continued investment in **storytelling, practical demonstrations, and narratives** that move beyond recycling and emphasise value creation, competitiveness, and local relevance can strengthen public understanding and market acceptance of circular economy approaches. From a sustainability perspective, such communication strategies support behavioural change, social acceptance, and demand for circular solutions, complementing regulatory and financial policy measures.

5. Conclusion

The final evaluation of CirculUP! demonstrates that the project has made a **substantive contribution to advancing circular economy thinking and practice in Armenia**. Over its three-year implementation period, CirculUP! successfully combined civil society empowerment, entrepreneurial support, public awareness raising, and policy dialogue into a coherent ecosystem approach that addressed circularity as a systemic transition. The involved beneficiaries consistently highlighted the programme's value in strengthening understanding of circular economy concepts, supporting experimentation, and translating principles into practical action.

At the societal level, the project strengthened understanding of circular economy concepts beyond recycling, particularly among civil society organisations, youth, educators, entrepreneurs, and media actors. Through targeted training, grants, and awareness campaigns, CSOs translated circular economy principles into educational, community-based, and communication initiatives with broad geographic reach. These efforts **contributed to gradual shifts in public discourse, increased visibility of circular practices,** and the normalisation of circular thinking within both formal and non-formal education contexts.

Within the entrepreneurial ecosystem, CirculUP! played a catalytic role by combining capacity building with direct financial support. Startups and SMEs reported **clearer understanding of circular economy as a systems-based approach and demonstrated concrete adoption** through new products, services, and business models. Grant funding emerged as a decisive enabler for experimentation and implementation, while training, mentoring, and peer learning supported learning-by-doing. At the same time, the project generated important lessons on the need for flexible timelines and stronger integration of technical, managerial, and organisational capacities to sustain circular practices.

At the policy level, CirculUP! **contributed to elevating circular economy concepts within national strategic frameworks**. Engagement through the Armenian Circular Economy Coalition facilitated structured dialogue with key ministries and enabled input into the Framework Action Program on Green, Sustainable and Circular Economy Development up to 2030. While policy influence remained gradual and consultative in nature, the project strengthened awareness, familiarity, and openness to circular economy approaches among public actors, laying foundations for longer-term institutional uptake.

The institutionalisation of the **Armenian Circular Economy Coalition** represents one of the project's most significant legacies. The coalition has **functioned as a multi-actor platform** connecting civil society, businesses, experts, media, and policymakers**, fostering trust, shared learning, and coordinated action**. Its transition toward formal legal status enhances prospects for continuity, positioning the coalition as a **credible partner for government institutions, the European Union, and international donors** in future circular economy and sustainability initiatives. Coalition emphasised that its long term viability depends on its culture of collaboration and trust, developed through joint work during the project which is widely perceived as the foundation that can allow the coalition to evolve into a stable institution. At the same time, ensuring a stable organisational structure, adequate resources, and a long term strategic plan will be critical to sustaining circular economy coordination beyond the project period.

CirculUP! has generated momentum around circularity in Armenia, while also noting that **continued investment through follow up projects, additional funding streams, or new calls will be essential to sustain engagement**. Without such continuity, there is a risk that progress may slow and that emerging actors may disengage before circular practices become fully embedded.

Looking ahead, the **EU4Green Recovery East programme (2025–2028) represents a significant opportunity** to build on the foundations established by CirculUP!. With its strong focus on circular economy, resource efficiency, policy alignment with EU standards, data systems, and institutional capacity building, the programme provides a coherent framework for scaling and sustaining circular economy initiatives in Armenia. In particular, EU4GreenRecoveryEast can reinforce multi stakeholder cooperation, support the mainstreaming of circular economy principles across education and business support systems, and strengthen waste and resource management infrastructure. Leveraging the experience, networks, and institutional assets developed through CirculUP!, including the Armenian Circular Economy Coalition, can enhance the long term impact and sustainability of future EU supported interventions.

Overall, CirculUP! illustrates the value of an ecosystem-based approach that integrates awareness, capacity building, financial incentives, and policy engagement. The project generated momentum, practical experience, and institutional learning that can inform future EU or donor-funded programmes. Sustaining and scaling these results will require continued investment, longer-term programming, and strengthened institutional anchoring, but the foundations established by CirculUP! provide a credible basis for Armenia's ongoing transition toward a green, sustainable, and circular economy.

6. Annex

Annex 1 - CircuIUP! Logframe

Results	Results chain	Indicator	Baseline Jan 2023 [1]	Target	Year 1 (Dec. 2023) [2]	Year 2 (Dec. 2024)	Year 3 (Dec. 2025)	Current Value
Impact (Overall objective)	Systemic shift in the Armenian economy and society at large towards circularity.	Armenia's score in the Green Growth Index	**54.7**	55.4	54.83	54.89	54.89	54.89
Outcome (Specific objective)	The population, civil society and enterprise ecosystem show understanding and apply principles of circular economy	Increased number of enterprises, incubators and accelerators integrating circular economy in their business models and support programs	0	3	ESOs: 8% SMEs: 0 Startups: 0 *14 ESOs and 5 SMEs participated in the program in Y1, it is early to measure, but already 1 ESO (Tumo Labs) is using circular principles for their incubator program.*	ESOs: 5 Startups: 63 Total of 18 SMEs received the training	4 more ESOs + New ESO got training: Innobiz Business Support Center has created Green Fox Circular Economy Contest published on Zero to Business platform with 1,700 active learners **10 ESOs out of 15 = 66%**	**10 ESOs out of 15 = 66%** 10 ESOs have carried out some sort of CE training/event/mentoring/consulting for startups 23 SMEs and 103 startups received training to integrate CE in their business models. 16 enterprises receieved financial support.
		Indicator 1.1: Number of Civil Society sector representatives involved in EU funded Circular economy Dialogue Platforms and/or Mechanism (Armenian Circularity Coalition) disaggregated by sex	0	25 representatives of CSOs	35 unique participants (22 female + 13 male) 25 different organisations from CSOs, Media, Academia, Private and Investment sectors	Same as Year 1	35 unique participants (22 female + 13 male) 25 different organisations from CSOs, Media, Academia, Private and Investment sectors	35 unique participants (22 female + 13 male) 25 different organisations from CSOs, Media, Academia, Private and Investment sectors

Results	Results chain	Indicator	Baseline Jan 2023 [1]	Target	Year 1 (Dec. 2023) [2]	Year 2 (Dec. 2024)	Year 3 (Dec. 2025)	Current Value
		Indicator 1.2: Number of CSOs representatives reporting increased knowledge on circular economy disaggregated by sex	0	15 CSOs representatives	NA	15	15 from coalition members + 9 from subgrantee CSOs who received training	15 people reported increased knowledge (Total of 12 females + 5 males participated in the 1 week CE training)

Results	Results chain	Indicator	Baseline Jan 2023 [1]	Target	Year 1 (Dec. 2023) [2]	Year 2 (Dec. 2024)	Year 3 (Dec. 2025)	Current Value
	EO1 Empowered Civil Society Organisations	Indicator 1.3: Educational Institutions (Secondary schools, universities) reached as a result of the campaigns by CSOs	0	5	NA	2	1093 secondary public schools across Armenia 24 colleges & Highschools 7 primary schools 4 new University (French University in Armenia (UFAR) by Fair NGO, Armenian National Agrarian University, Eurasia International University, and the NAS RA International Educational Center by Freedom of information center) 4 private educational centers Eurasia International University Started a masters degree for Circular Economy and Governance with a scholarship. Link here: https://www.facebook.com/100064877850300/posts/1195623915943526/?rdid=r0s9XgtaIrOLI8cw#	1093 secondary public schools 23 colleges & Highschools 7 primary schools 7 Universities (Yerevan State University, French University in Armenia (UFAR), Armenian National Agrarian University, Eurasia International University, Russian Armenian University, Gyumri Branch of Armenian State University of Economics and the NAS RA International Educational Center) 4 private educational centers Eurasia International University Started a masters degree for Circular Economy and Governance with a scholarship. Link here: https://www.facebook.com/100064877850300/posts/1195623915943526/?rdid=r0s9XgtaIrOLI8cw#

Results	Results chain	Indicator	Baseline Jan 2023 [1]	Target	Year 1 (Dec. 2023) [2]	Year 2 (Dec. 2024)	Year 3 (Dec. 2025)	Current Value
Outputs	EO2. Armenian startups and SMEs consciously develop new circularity initiatives	Indicator 2.1: Number of ESOs that are trained to use a new module on Circular Economy within their support programmes	0	7 ESOs	14 ESOs	Same as Year 1	14 ESOs	14 ESOs
		Indicator 2.2: Number of startups trained on Circular Economy (CE) by ESOs with the newly added CE module	0	100	NA	63 Startups	40 Startups	103 Startups
		Indicator 2.3.: Number of SMEs assisted in the adoption of Circular Economy Business models and practices disaggregated by sex and age group of the owner, enterprise size	0	20	5 Circo round 1 training: 3 female led + 2 male led SMEs Round 1 Circo Training	18 SMEs 13 female led + 5 male led	23 SMEs 16 female led + 7 male led	23 SMEs 16 female led + 7 male led

Results	Results chain	Indicator	Baseline Jan 2023 [1]	Target	Year 1 (Dec. 2023) [2]	Year 2 (Dec. 2024)	Year 3 (Dec. 2025)	Current Value
	EO3 Armenian citizens have a sound understanding and greater sensitivity about circularity and the environment	Indicator 3.1: Number of people reached through the awareness campaign focusing on circular economy	0	500,000	1,392,722 people reached, out of which ~6,500 people engaged with views, clicks, shares etc.	860,859 people reached, out of which ~15,500 people engaged	Y3: 4,717,581 reached, ~1,487,166 engaged	Y1: 1,392,722 people reached, ~6,500 engaged Y2: 860,859 people reached, ~15,500 engaged Y3: 4,717,581 reached, ~1, 487,166 engaged
		Indicator 3.2: Number of TV shows and Radio channels interviewing project team and stakeholders	0	5	7	6	9	22

Annex 2 - CSO subgrantees

Name	Location	Main objectives
Innobiz	All across Armenia	Promote awareness and understanding of CE among youth and early-stage entrepreneurs
Blejan	Gegharkunik region	Support environmental protection and promote social, agricultural, and economic development.
Boon	All across Armenia	Create open sources for e-learning and platforms for the civil society actors to advocate their democratic agendas
Develop Armenia	Regions Ararat, Armavir, Tavush, Kotayk	Introduce CE concepts to youth across urban and rural areas and encourage creative, practical problem-solving through group brainstorming
EYP Armenia	Regions Aragatsotn & Lori	Promote circular economy principles among regional youth while increasing awareness on CE-related policy
Fair NGO	All across Armenia	Increase public and institutional awareness on circular economy concepts in Armenia
FOI center	All across Armenia	Promote understanding of CE among students and universities and provide journalists with knowledge and tools to cover CE topics
Investigative Journalists	All across Armenia	Educate the public about CE and waste reduction strategies while highlighting practical examples of sustainability in Armenia
Organic Armenia	Abovyan	Promote CE concepts in education and engage communities in sustainable agriculture practices
Ughecuyc	Yeghvard	Promote circular economy awareness among students and lecturers

Annex 3 - SME subgrantees

Name	Location	Main objectives
Antaram	Gegharkunik	To complete the circular economy model by creating new products (cosmetic preparations, extracts, and oils) from production residues and waste
HDIF	Shirak region	To revitalize Armenia's wool sector through a fully traceable, transparent, and sustainable value chain that empowers rural women and promotes ethical production
Lukashin	Lukashin Village, Armavir	To increase the material assets, services, skills, and ideas available to the members of the Lukashin Cooperative and the local population, by participating in local economic development initiatives
Maquaponics	Gegharkunik	Research and development of a liquid organic fertilizer using an Aqueous Vermiculture (AV) process. The final goal is to offer a sustainable and high-performance alternative to chemical fertilizers for Armenian agriculture and beyond.
RedLine	Yerevan	To reduce waste in the local market, promote sustainability, and create new income opportunities through a waste recycling initiative (mainly wood and textiles) from their interior design and custom furniture production business
Trimaran	Aragatsotn	To recycle green waste generated from rose greenhouses to produce new sheet material (soles) for single-use hotel slippers

Annex 4 - Startup subgrantees

Name	Location	Main objectives
Baby Gear	Yerevan	To encourage families with young children to travel to Armenia without sacrificing safety, convenience, and comfort by renting strollers, car seats, cribs, and other gear for babies, toddlers, and children.
Bio Oil	Yerevan	To ensure that oil waste generated in the southern regions of Armenia was disposed of properly, thereby reducing environmental risks.
Biocirc	Yerevan	The main goals of this grant project are to create a sustainable and environmentally friendly portable energy solution, reduce dependence on fossil fuels, and provide reliable and accessible energy in remote areas..
Biohumus	Vayots Dzar	To contribute to climate change resilience and promote the concept of a circular economy in other communities of the region by reducing agricultural organic waste
By Botany	Aragatsotn	To study and evaluate the fiber potential of nettle (Urtica dioica L.) growing in Armenia. To develop a prototype for obtaining ecologically clean fiber from local sources, which can serve as a basis for sustainable local production
Natural SC Basin	Kotayk	To introduce the culture of natural pool construction and operation into Armenian pool practices, emphasizing water conservation and reuse, as opposed to the multiple water use and pollution associated with conventional pools, artificial ponds, and decorative pools
Permaculture	Tavus Province	To promote the reuse of waste by transforming it into new valuable products.
Rug Code	Yerevan	Find and refurbish old looms and spinning wheels from villages in the Noyemberyan region to use for rug making, rather than building new ones using raw materials.
Skesoor Mama	Yerevan	To expand the atelier's main activity and launch the production of home textile accessories. However, the atelier's environmental efforts do not end here.
Tobacco Waste	Tavush	Comprehensive study of tobacco waste and the compost derived from it. Production of organic fertilizers. Extraction of other materials from tobacco waste and exploration of their potential applications.

Annex 5 - SME subgrantees' Circularity Assessment Results

Dimension	Antaram		HDIF		Lukashin		Maquaponics		RedLine		Trimaran	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Enablers and digitalization	67%	83%	67%	83%	50%	83%	50%	83%	40%	80%	33%	67%
Circular business models	40%	40%	40%	40%	80%	80%	80%	80%	20%	40%	80%	40%
Material use	100%	100%	75%	100%	25%	100%	100%	100%	25%	75%	100%	100%
Circular product design	100%	100%	80%	80%	50%	100%	100%	100%	60%	100%	100%	80%
Energy and mobility	80%	100%	20%	20%	20%	100%	60%	80%	40%	60%	20%	60%
Social impact	75%	75%	100%	100%	50%	100%	50%	75%	75%	100%	75%	75%

Annex 6 - Startup subgrantees' Circularity Assessment Results

Dimension	Baby Gear		Bio Oil		Biocirc		Biohumus		By Botany		Natural SC Basin		Permaculture		Rug Code		Skesoor Mama		Tobacco Waste	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Enablers and digitalization	40%	75%	83%	100%	100%	100%	33%	100%	67%	83%	67%	100%	50%	83%	17%	40%	50%	67%	50%	75%
Circular business models	60%	60%	80%	100%	60%	60%	80%	80%	40%	40%	20%	20%	100%	100%	20%	40%	40%	40%	40%	40%
Material use	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	50%	75%	100%	100%	75%	100%	25%	50%	25%	100%	33%	100%
Circular product design	N/A	N/A	50%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	80%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	20%	40%	60%	60%	67%	67%
Energy and mobility	0%	0%	40%	80%	100%	100%	20%	60%	25%	75%	40%	60%	20%	20%	0%	0%	33%	33%	20%	20%
Social impact	50%	67%	50%	100%	100%	100%	50%	100%	75%	75%	50%	75%	50%	100%	25%	50%	75%	75%	25%	25%