

## Project Brief

# Empowering the Disadvantaged Through Green and Digital



### Project Overview

The Empowering the Disadvantaged through Green and Digital (EDGD) project has an environmental rationale, as it seeks to reduce pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and energy poverty in the region. It aims to create economic opportunities for marginalized groups and expand its impact across the Western Balkans while addressing common waste management constraints and economic challenges.

This project has a twofold approach:

- ▶ The first component is designed to diversify service and promote digital advancements for disadvantaged entrepreneurs. It is managed by RECONOMY in partnership with REDI NGO, creating opportunities for marginalized groups in waste management across North Macedonia, Albania, and Serbia.
- ▶ The second component is related to circular economy and waste management collaboration. In partnership with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, the Chamber of Commerce of North Macedonia, the Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Albania, and the Chamber of Commerce of Montenegro, this project fosters closer cooperation between the Western Balkans Chambers of Commerce — key entities that support the private sector, especially women-led MSMEs — working in circular economy and waste management.

### Geographical Focus



North Macedonia |  
Serbia |  
Montenegro |  
Albania

### Duration

April 2023 – December 2026

### Target Group

- ▶ Women and youth, including the most disadvantaged, providing them with income-generating opportunities in waste management, circular economy, and digital economy.
- ▶ Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) — particularly female-led — will benefit from improved access to information and stronger circular economy practices.

## Development Model

### Waste Management Component

1. Support the social enterprise REDI NGO in exploring diverse waste streams that present new job opportunities and add value to collected waste.
2. Strengthen entrepreneurial skills of MSMEs and provide digital solutions to help expand their businesses.
3. Scale the initiative beyond the initial market, focusing on expansion into Serbia and Albania. Address region-specific waste management challenges and integrate disadvantaged communities into formal, sustainable employment.

### Cross-Country Collaboration with Chambers of Commerce

1. Facilitate opportunities for knowledge exchange and joint initiatives among Western Balkans Chambers of Commerce on strategies, policy, and green transition.
3. Provide technical expertise on waste management, circular economy, and advocacy to strengthen the capacities of the Chambers of Commerce.
3. Transfer know-how practices and processes on waste management and circular economy to MSMEs — especially female-led businesses.

## Expected Impact

- ▶ The project is rooted in uplifting skills within communities engaged in waste management, ensuring they have the right tools and support mechanisms for informed decision-making.
- ▶ By supporting collaboration among various stakeholders, services and support structures can be customized to meet the unique needs of the waste management sector, fostering a more favorable business environment.
- ▶ Through enhanced skills and cross-country collaboration, the project aims to strengthen circular economy practices, promote environmental sustainability, and facilitate a green transition aligned with the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans.



## Updates Q3 and Q4 2025

**EDGD** strengthened collaboration across the recycling value chain, and continued efforts to formalise informal waste collectors. In 2025, through strategic collaboration on waste collection and purchasing, two partner companies leveraged significant additional private investments to strengthen their operational capacities. One company invested approximately EUR 255,000 in new equipment. The other invested around EUR 325,000 in a new operational location (EUR 300,000) and additional equipment of EUR 25,000. Its income increased from CHF 2.2 million in 2024 to CHF 2.7 million in 2025, marking a growth of CHF 500,000. These expansions also generated positive spillover effects across the supply chain, engaging around 60 new suppliers (e.g. plastic bags, jumbo bags, promotional materials). The Western Balkans Circular Economy Hub

established a regional platform for knowledge exchange and partnerships. In 2025, the WBCEH was formally established in cooperation with Chambers of Commerce across the Western Balkans to meet growing private-sector demand for support in the green and circular transition. With support from Cradlenet, the Hub adapted Nordic good practices to the regional context and positioned itself as a regional platform for knowledge exchange and private-sector engagement. It delivered 5 regional events, 9 thematic sessions and 6 member meetings, reaching over 100,000 people. Within eight months, it grew to more than 2,000 LinkedIn followers and over 100 members. The Circular Economy Awards 2025 recognised leaders across seven categories, while at least 8 companies received direct support to adopt circular economy solutions.