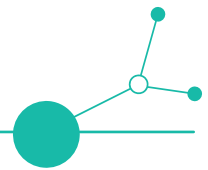


CREDIT4CE

D.1.1.1 and D.1.1.2 CREDIT4CE Project Strategy and Action Plan



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1. Introduction

1.1. Overview of the CREDIT4CE Project

CREDIT4CE is a joint effort to support manufacturing SMEs in Central Europe on their path to decarbonisation and help the region meet its climate goals. Although SMEs are responsible for 63% of the EU's emissions, many regions—like Burgenland in Austria or Bratislavský kraj in Slovakia—still lack targeted support to help them decarbonise.

To fill this gap, CREDIT4CE connects 10 partners—from public agencies and universities to startup hubs and climate-focused investors. These include SIEA, REGEA, WUST, UASB, PTP, PPNT, CONFEMI, GREENTECH, ZICER, and GFO. Together, they are combining their know-how and networks to launch a regional Decarbonisation Hub that will offer hands-on support and tools for SMEs.

The project includes two pilot programmes and five practical solutions aimed at supporting green-tech startups, boosting technology transfer, and making decarbonisation know-how more accessible to SMEs. By addressing both the supply and demand for decarbonisation solutions, the project aims to accelerate the transition to a low-carbon economy.

This Strategy Plan sets out a clear framework for making sure the CREDIT4CE project stays aligned with key European goals and delivers meaningful results. It outlines the project's goals, values, and actions—from helping SMEs decarbonise and supporting innovation to contributing to wider EU climate and economic targets.

1.2. Goals and Objectives

This Strategy Plan aims to:

1. **Establish Clear Objectives:** Define the specific goals and expected outcomes of CREDIT4CE, particularly in relation to SME decarbonisation, technology transfer, and regional climate impact, ensuring alignment with the European Green Deal and other EU strategies like the Territorial Agenda 2030 and the New European Innovation Agenda.
2. **Guide Implementation:** Provide a clear roadmap for executing the project's activities, including timelines, responsibilities, and resource allocation. This helps ensure that all partners are aligned and working towards common goals, effectively contributing to shared EU priorities like cutting carbon emissions, supporting circular economy, and enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs.
3. **Stay aligned with Core Values and EU Strategies:** Make sure that the project activities reflect ESG principles and fit into broader EU strategies, including the EU Strategies for the Danube, Adriatic and Ionian, Baltic Sea, and Alpine regions.
4. **Encourage Collaboration and Inclusivity:** Build a strong framework for collaboration among the consortium partners, while making sure decarbonisation know-how is shared fairly across regions. The aim is to reflect the spirit of the Territorial Agenda 2030 and make full use of the wide range of experience across the consortium.
5. **Measure and Evaluate Progress:** Use clear indicators to see what's working, what needs adjustment, and how the project is helping meet big EU goals like climate neutrality and the green/digital transition.



This Project Strategy Plan is essential for guiding the implementation of CREDIT4CE, ensuring that all stakeholders are aligned and that the project not only meets its specific goals of helping SMEs transition to a low-carbon economy but also contributes to the EU's broader sustainability strategies and climate ambitions.

2. Core Values and Principles

CREDIT4CE is built on a set of core values that reflect key European strategies and priorities. These values guide how the project is implemented and ensure it contributes in a meaningful way to wider EU goals. Below is an overview of the project's core values and how they align with key EU strategies and documents.

2.1. Commitment to EU Climate Goals and Strategies

CREDIT4CE supports the EU's climate goals, especially those set out in the European Green Deal, by focusing on the decarbonisation of SMEs—one of the biggest contributors to emissions and a key pillar of the European economy. SMEs are currently responsible for 63% of the EU's total emissions.

Through its activities, CREDIT4CE contributes to the Green Deal's ambition of making Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. By working on both the supply and demand sides of the decarbonisation challenge, the project speeds up the adoption of innovative low-carbon solutions among high-emission manufacturing SMEs. At the same time, it encourages circular economy practices and supports economic growth that isn't tied to increased resource use.

It also contributes to the Territorial Agenda 2030 by making sure decarbonisation knowledge and expertise are shared fairly across regions—helping SMEs become more competitive and supporting balanced territorial development. The project's virtual Decarbonisation Hub supports cross-border collaboration, helping regions stay competitive while transitioning to a Green Europe with reduced emissions.

CREDIT4CE's activities directly contribute to several priorities of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), particularly in sustainable energy, environmental risk management, and the competitiveness of enterprises. By driving uptake of renewable energy solutions and equipping SMEs with the necessary skills for decarbonisation, the project helps strengthen the sustainability and resilience of the Danube region's economy.

The project also supports the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) by coordinating climate action and encouraging stronger cooperation across countries. This helps drive economic growth and connectivity while boosting the resilience and competitiveness of local SMEs.

Through its Austrian and Slovenian partners, CREDIT4CE also contributes to the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP), especially in areas like economic growth, innovation, and energy efficiency. Its scalable decarbonisation models - combined with the opportunity for increased visibility during Slovenia's upcoming EUSALP presidency, ensure that CREDIT4CE's outputs and results will have a lasting impact across the Alpine region and beyond.



2.2. Innovation and Technology Transfer

It aligns with the New European Innovation Agenda by promoting the uptake of innovative green-tech solutions and enhancing the commercialization capacities of R&I actors. CREDIT4CE supports deep-tech entrepreneurship through venture creation programmes and mentoring, helping the new technologies reach businesses across Central Europe and beyond.

2.3. Collaborative and Inclusive Approach

CREDIT4CE's ultimate goal is to accelerate the adoption of climate-positive solutions by SMEs in Central Europe, and this goal is reflected in every part of the project's design and implementation. A collaborative and inclusive approach is central to this effort, ensuring that all target groups, from SMEs and early-career researchers to academic staff and startup teams, can access the same opportunities and support. By putting principles of equality and non-discrimination into every aspect of the project, CREDIT4CE makes sure that its support services are accessible, transparent, and fair to everyone.

The project is designed to be responsive to the diverse needs of participants across different regions, ensuring that content and support are relevant and tailored to local contexts. This commitment also extends to underrepresented groups.

CREDIT4CE also promotes gender equality by using inclusive language, encouraging diverse representation, and aiming for gender balance among experts and decision-makers. This inclusive mindset goes hand in hand with the project's sustainability goals. By empowering a diverse group of stakeholders, CREDIT4CE helps ensure that more people can take part in creating and applying climate-friendly solutions across Central Europe.

2.4. Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Integration

CREDIT4CE was designed with environmental sustainability at its core. Travel will be minimized through the use of digital communication tools. Wherever possible, partners are encouraged to use digital communication instead of travelling. When travel is needed, we promote sustainable options to reduce the carbon footprint. For in-person events, we aim to minimise environmental impact by choosing venues that use renewable energy, offer sustainable catering, and avoid single-use items.

The project is strongly committed to ESG principles, recognizing that environmental sustainability, social responsibility, and good governance are all key to the success. Reducing the carbon footprint of SMEs is central to our mission. On the social side, we prioritise inclusivity—making sure that decarbonisation solutions are accessible to SMEs of all sizes, in all regions. When it comes to governance, CREDIT4CE promotes transparent, ethical, and accountable practices in how we manage the project, engage with stakeholders, and support technology transfer.

2.5. Long-term Impact and Scalability

CREDIT4CE is built with long-term impact and scalability in mind, making sure its decarbonisation strategies can be replicated and expanded across sectors and regions. By working on both the supply and demand sides, the project offers a flexible framework that can be adapted to different industries—not just manufacturing SMEs.



CREDIT4CE focuses on practical, scalable solutions that are tailored to Central Europe but can also be applied in other regions across Europe—and beyond. The tools, methodologies, and best practices developed through CREDIT4CE are designed to serve as a blueprint for other, similar initiatives and help drive broader uptake of climate friendly solutions.

Thanks to a diverse consortium of partners and stakeholders, CREDIT4CE can share its knowledge, tools, and innovations widely across the region.

2.6. Conclusion

CREDIT4CE's core values and principles are not only central to the project's success but are also closely aligned with key European strategies and policies. This alignment ensures that the project contributes meaningfully to the EU's overarching goals, from achieving climate neutrality to fostering innovation and regional cooperation. By putting these values into practice throughout the project, CREDIT4CE is well-placed to drive meaningful and lasting change across Central Europe's manufacturing sector—and beyond.

3. Project objectives

3.1. Overall Project Objective

The overall objective of the CREDIT4CE project is to set up a Decarbonisation Hub - a practical, all in one platform that connects SMEs looking for decarbonisation support and companies offering these solutions. By targeting both the 'demand' and 'supply' sides of the decarbonisation process, CREDIT4CE will deliver tailored services, from capacity-building and consultancy for SMEs, to startup support and research commercialisation for green-tech innovators. This integrated approach aims to accelerate Central Europe's transition towards a Net Zero society, ensuring meaningful and sustainable change across the region's economic and innovation ecosystems.

The project includes two pilot programs—one for manufacturing SMEs in need of decarbonisation solutions and another at innovators offering these solutions. Furthermore, the project will develop five key solutions, including a Carbon Calculator, a Catalogue of Decarbonisation Solution Providers, and a Decarbonisation Support Model. These tools/outputs will benefit manufacturing SMEs, HEI/research organizations, and green-tech startups by enhancing technology transfer, supporting innovation, and making decarbonisation knowledge and tools accessible across the region.

By targeting both the supply and demand sides of decarbonisation, CREDIT4CE aims to speed up Central Europe's transition to a low-carbon economy. The project helps make knowledge and technologies more accessible to SMEs, wherever they are. It also supports the development and market introduction of new green technologies, and empower research and innovation actors to support the broader ecosystem in achieving a Net Zero future.



3.2. Specific Regional and Transnational Objectives of the Project

3.2.1. CREDIT4CE Regional objectives

- **Support the decarbonisation of manufacturing SMEs in Central Europe:** Focus on reducing emissions from manufacturing SMEs in Central European regions, which are significant contributors to EU emissions. This involves developing and implementing innovative decarbonisation strategies tailored to the specific needs of SMEs.
- **Address the Lack of Targeted Support:** Fill the gap in targeted decarbonisation support for SMEs in Central Europe by offering specialised tools, funding, and skills to help them make the shift to low-carbon business models.
- **Boost Regional Innovation and Technology Transfer:** Strengthen cooperation between SMEs, research institutions, and other local actors to help companies adopt advanced decarbonisation technologies and remain competitive in the market.
- **Align with Regional and National Climate Goals:** Support the SME in meeting regional and national climate targets by promoting circular economy principles and reducing value-chain emissions.
- **Increase Decarbonisation Strategy Adoption:** Increase the number of SMEs with concrete strategies. This involves moving from actions to comprehensive, strategic business planning that fully integrates decarbonisation objectives.
- **Provide Financial and Educational Resources:** Make financial support, funding, and advisory services accessible. Additionally, raise awareness about decarbonisation opportunities, technical innovations, and best practices, particularly in areas where such support is currently lacking or limited.

Given the diverse economic profiles, energy mixes, industrial traditions, and levels of climate readiness across the six partner countries, the CREDIT4CE decarbonisation strategy needs to reflect both shared challenges and national specifications. The following priorities and proposed actions are based on the findings of Deliverable 1.2.1 and reflect an evidence-based approach to supporting SMEs in each region.

Austria shows strong alignment with national and EU climate goals, and larger companies have already taken steps in energy efficiency, waste reduction, and emissions monitoring. However, many SMEs—especially those in more carbon-intensive regions like Lower Carinthia—lack the internal capacity to transition effectively. CREDIT4CE activities in Austria should focus on scaling successful practices from large to small enterprises, supporting the use of the Carbon Calculator, and fostering cross-sector mentoring schemes between advanced and less mature SMEs. Regional training hubs and integrating decarbonisation topics into local innovation policies can help bridge the implementation gap.

In **Croatia**, the main priority is raising awareness and building basic readiness. Although national policies and renewable energy targets are progressing, many SMEs do not see decarbonisation as a priority. Less than a third monitor emissions or consider climate criteria in sourcing decisions. Transport and logistics remain high-emission sectors with limited action. CREDIT4CE should help Croatian SMEs develop first-time decarbonisation roadmaps, introduce basic GHG monitoring tools, and provide tailored advisory on funding opportunities. Support should also be provided for integrating sustainability criteria in procurement and for identifying quick wins in waste reduction and energy management.

Italy performs very well in the circular economy, particularly in recycling and packaging reduction. However, many SMEs still lack structured climate strategies, and emissions monitoring is not widespread. This shows a gap between national-level ambition and actual SME practice. Hence, CREDIT4CE in Italy should work to connect circular practices with carbon monitoring, for example by helping SMEs quantify the emission impact of their recycling and reuse measures. Activities should also focus on helping SMEs



use the Carbon Calculator, incorporate climate risk into their business strategies, and establish climate KPIs aligned with national decarbonisation goals.

In **Poland**, the energy transition is more complex due to the country's continued reliance on coal and limited circular economy uptake. While some SMEs are starting to diversify their import strategies and adopt solar power, many still do not monitor emissions or plan for net-zero targets. CREDIT4CE partners in Poland should focus on supporting coal-dependent SMEs in energy-intensive sectors through tailored consultations and help them access Just Transition and Clean Air Programme funding. There is also a potential to promote circularity through pilot projects on waste reduction and reuse, supported by local innovation centres and public-private partnerships.

Slovakia presents a mixed picture: many SMEs have conducted energy audits, but these are not always translated into action. Emissions monitoring is limited, and the circular economy remains underdeveloped, despite national support schemes such as the Green Investment Scheme. CREDIT4CE partners should focus on helping SMEs move from diagnosis to implementation, using the Carbon Calculator to build decarbonisation roadmaps based on existing audits. There is also a need to simplify access to national and EU funding, increase SME participation in green public procurement, and promote peer exchanges with Slovak SMEs that have already started their decarbonisation journey.

Slovenia has a strong national policy framework and high recycling rates, but many SMEs are not yet implementing structured decarbonisation practices. Few companies monitor emissions, and there is limited evidence of circular economy or industrial symbiosis initiatives at the SME level. CREDIT4CE efforts in Slovenia should focus on bridging the gap between policy and SME practice. This includes building SME capacity in emissions monitoring, offering light-touch climate planning tools, and promoting cross-border learning with Italian or Austrian peers. Regional decarbonisation roadmaps and thematic workshops (e.g. low-carbon logistics, green finance) could support wider adoption of climate action across SME networks.

3.2.2. CREDIT4CE Transnational Objectives

- Support Cross-Border Decarbonisation Efforts: Encourage collaboration across the partnering Central European countries by sharing best practices, resources, and technologies. This joint approach will strengthen the overall impact of decarbonisation efforts across the region.
- Strengthen Global Competitiveness of Central European SMEs: Support the competitiveness of manufacturing SMEs in Central Europe by fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and technology transfer at a transnational level. This will help SMEs not only meet local and regional decarbonisation goals but also succeed in the global marketplace.
- Align Climate Goals Across Central Europe: Coordinate decarbonisation efforts across borders to make sure SME strategies are in line with broader EU climate targets and that progress is consistent throughout Central Europe.
- Address Disparities in Decarbonisation Support: Make decarbonisation services more accessible and consistent across countries. CREDIT4CE aims to provide just access to necessary resources and expertise for SMEs, regardless of their location within the region.
- Promote Transnational Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Building: Facilitate knowledge exchange and capacity building between countries, so that SMEs benefit from each other's experience, tools, and successful approaches to decarbonisation.

Despite the regional differences, several common opportunities and needs emerged across all partner countries:

- SMEs across Central Europe need **simple, accessible tools** to understand and reduce their emissions— this highlights the value and importance of the Carbon Calculator.



- **Awareness of available funding is low.** Many SMEs are unaware of national and EU support schemes. The Decarbonisation Hub should offer clear, regularly updated information on funding opportunities.
- There are **skill gaps in key areas** such as climate planning, data handling, and green procurement. Joint training programmes and cross-border webinars could help bridge these gaps.
- There is interest in **peer-learning formats** (e.g. case studies, regional showcases, cross-border SME exchanges), which should be expanded throughout the project.

By adapting the implementation strategy to these regional differences while using shared resources and tools, CREDIT4CE can maximise its impact and ensure that all SMEs—regardless of their starting point—are equipped to contribute to Europe’s climate neutrality goals.

4. Activities and Timeline

The CREDIT4CE project is structured into three main work packages (WPs), each focusing on specific aspects of the project’s overall objectives. These work packages are essential components of our strategy to support manufacturing SMEs in Central Europe in their decarbonisation efforts and to enhance regional competitiveness while meeting climate targets.

4.1. WP1: Establishment of the Decarbonisation Hub

WP1 focuses on setting up the Decarbonisation Hub, which is crucial for providing targeted support to manufacturing SMEs. This work package involves developing a comprehensive strategy, understanding SME challenges, setting up necessary infrastructure, and engaging key stakeholders. It also reflects the need to align the strategy with mapping data and carbon footprint calculation methodologies. The outcomes of WP1 will provide the foundation for the hub’s operations.

4.1.1. Key activities and timeline:

1. Development of a detailed strategy and action plan, outlining the vision, activities, timelines and target audiences (Period 1, Months 1-6)
2. Decarbonisation readiness mapping of manufacturing SMEs in a form of data collection to understand the challenges SMEs face, engaging a minimum of 150 SMEs (Period 1, Months 1-6)
3. Creation of an accessible online Carbon Calculator for manufacturing SMEs (Period 1, Months 1-6)
4. Creation of at least 30 educational and training content (training materials and good-practice examples) tailored for manufacturing SMEs (Period 2, Months 7-12)
5. Setting-up of a database of 400+ local decarbonisation solutions providers (Period 2-3, Months 7-18)

4.2. WP2: Accelerating Decarbonisation of Manufacturing SMEs

Work Package 2 (WP2) is dedicated to accelerating the decarbonisation efforts of manufacturing SMEs by providing them with tailored support and practical tools. The goal is to test and refine practical activities that help companies build the skills and confidence they need to reduce emissions—and to access the funding to make it happen.



4.2.1. Key activities and timeline:

1. Capacity building activities for SMEs (Period 3-5, Months 13-30)
2. Assistance to manufacturing SMEs in securing funding for decarbonisation initiatives in a form of workshops and individual consultations (Period 3-5, Months 13-30)
3. Tailored individual consultations and demonstration visits to high-tech and low-tech facilities to support advanced manufacturing SMEs in adopting carbon-reduction measures (Period 3-5, Months 13-30)
4. Creation of a summary report presenting a comprehensive decarbonisation support framework for manufacturing SMEs, consolidating key learnings and outcomes from the pilot activities, with annexed sub-activity reports (Period 5, Months 25-30)

4.3. WP3: Supporting green-tech innovators

WP3 focuses on bridging the gap between academic research and commercialisation in Central Europe. Despite a strong STEM foundation, many innovations still struggle with bringing research advances to market. WP3 seeks to pilot interventions designed by academics, venture capitalists, and business experts to boost entrepreneurial competencies among those developing solutions to accelerate industry decarbonisation.

4.3.1. Key activities and timeline:

1. Development and delivery of a venture creation program for early-career researchers, designed to enhance entrepreneurial competencies through a series of foundation, intermediate, and advanced modules, along with guest lectures from successful entrepreneurs, aiming to upskill PhD candidates and early-career researchers in Central Europe (Period 3-5, Months 13-30)
2. Development and delivery of comprehensive workshops aimed at empowering researchers, scientists, and university staff with technology transfer and research commercialization competencies (Period 3-5, Months 13-30)
3. Provision of dedicated business support and mentoring to startups, enhancement of their investment readiness, facilitation of connections with venture capital and angel investors, and access to specialized research facilities (Period 3-5, Months 13-30)
4. Production of a summary report integrating key activities and outcomes from the green-tech innovator support framework.

5. TASKS and RESPONSIBILITIES

Detailed tasks to be carried out

The CREDIT4CE project follows a structured 30-month timeline with key milestones tied to major deliverables. In the first six months, partners focus on stakeholder engagement, conduct the SME readiness assessment (D1.2.1), and develop the prototype of the Carbon Calculator (D1.3.1). By Month 12, the Joint Strategy (D1.1.1) and Action Plan (D1.1.2) are finalised, and the Decarbonisation Hub goes live, accompanied by training materials and the Catalogue of Decarbonisation Solution Providers



(D1.5.1). From Month 13 onwards, pilot actions for SME support and green-tech venture development are launched under WP2 and WP3. Around Month 18, partners carry out a mid-term review to assess tool usage, training quality, and the early results of startup mentoring. In the final phase, between Months 24 and 30, the focus shifts to evaluation and sustainability. Final deliverables include SME support summaries (D2.4.1, D2.4.2), innovation impact reports (D3.4.1, D3.4.2), and policy recommendations, helping ensure that the project's outputs remain usable and relevant beyond the funding period.

5.1. Work package 1

As a first step, CREDIT4CE partners carried out a comprehensive mapping of the state of affairs of manufacturing SMEs in all six participating territories in respect to decarbonisation. The assessment combined desk research and active engagement with SMEs to produce an evidence-based understanding of the current situation.

The desk research consisted of a review of national decarbonisation policies, funding schemes, regulatory frameworks, and sector-specific challenges using sources such as Eurobarometer, EIB Investment Survey, IEA, OECD, and NECPs.

As for the active SME engagement, a standardised questionnaire was developed and reviewed by all partners under CONFEMI's lead. It was translated into the national languages and distributed online via Microsoft Forms. Each partner used tailored outreach strategies, including social media (LinkedIn), newsletters, participation in trade events, and direct email contact through industry networks. SMEs were assisted where necessary to complete the survey. Over 150 SMEs from Austria, Croatia, Italy, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia participated. Responses were collected over a defined period and screened for quality and completeness. CONFEMI led the data aggregation and comparative analysis, highlighting SME readiness, perceived barriers, and regional trends. Results were validated by all partners and summarised in Deliverable 1.2.1, serving as a knowledge base for further project implementation.

During the analysis, a number of risks were identified. A primary concern was the risk of low engagement from SMEs. Despite initial interest, many companies hesitated to participate due to limited time or uncertainty about the relevance of decarbonisation. Financial limitations were another major barrier, with many SMEs stating they lacked the resources to pursue low-carbon technologies. Furthermore, language barriers—such as the need for translations to local languages—hindered participation and understanding.

To address these risks, the project implemented several mitigation strategies. The partners engaged SMEs through established business associations, chambers of commerce, and innovation networks. CONFEMI, PPNT, GREENTECH, REGEA, PTP, and SIEA played key roles in these efforts, using their presence in regional ecosystems and close ties with manufacturing SMEs. Support was also provided to help SMEs identify and access financial and technical assistance. Furthermore, all project materials were made available in local languages, and the development of accessible digital tools helped ensure inclusivity and ease of use.

The mapping revealed that only 37% of SMEs are currently aware of their climate footprint. Fewer than 20% use any form of emissions tracking or carbon monitoring tool, and only 17% have a decarbonisation roadmap or net-zero target. The most commonly reported sources of emissions were energy consumption, transportation, and waste. Barriers included limited internal awareness, lack of access to financing, and skill shortages. However, the survey also revealed strong interest among SMEs in practical support measures, including digital tools, peer learning, and advisory services.



Across the six participating countries, findings varied significantly. In Croatia, decarbonisation levels among companies remain limited. While renewable energy is present in the national mix, fossil fuels still dominate. Only a minority of companies monitor transport-related emissions, and fewer than one-third consider supplier emissions. In Italy, SMEs appear partially aligned with national progress on emission reductions, but survey responses indicate that corporate-level initiatives—especially in monitoring and transport—are not yet widespread. Italian SMEs also need to further integrate circular economy models. Polish SMEs face challenges in moving away from coal, although some show commitment to diversifying supply chains. Emissions monitoring and circular practices remain weak. In Slovakia, while companies acknowledge energy transition needs, few track emissions, and circular economy practices are largely underdeveloped. Slovenian SMEs show growing interest in renewables, but minimal adoption of emission tracking or circular economy initiatives was observed, despite strong national recycling statistics. Finally, due to low response rates from Austria, no solid comparative insights were drawn, although desk research suggests relatively stronger awareness and infrastructure.

This mapping exercise has laid the groundwork for WP2, ensuring that future project activities respond to real gaps and barriers identified in the field. Participating SMEs have been invited to further engage through the Decarbonisation Hub, which will support advisory services, tool implementation, and training.

Running in parallel with the decarbonisation readiness mapping, Activity 1.3 focused on the development of a digital self-assessment Carbon Calculator tailored to manufacturing SMEs. The aim was to provide companies with an accessible and user-friendly tool that approximates their carbon footprint and identify the main sources of emissions—so they can take the first step toward decarbonisation

The tool was developed as an interactive web-based application that will be hosted on the CREDIT4CE website. The initial version was completed by the end of Period 1, and is freely accessible to SMEs.

To support peer learning and encourage SME participation, CREDIT4CE is building a library of inspiring case studies and targeted training materials. Activity 1.4 focuses on collecting good-practice examples from SMEs across all partner regions—highlighting real companies that have adopted technologies or practices reducing their climate impact.

Partners are actively scouting both in-sector and cross-sector stories, engaging local businesses that demonstrate leadership in the net-zero transition. These examples are being transformed into short, accessible case studies—video testimonials, blogs, or story-style features—which will be published on the project website. They aim to show that decarbonisation is achievable and can benefit companies of all sizes.

At the same time, partners are developing and curating training materials for WP2. The content reflects findings from the readiness mapping (Activity 1.2) and is tailored to SME needs in each country. Where needed, partners are bringing in external experts to co-create content or deliver sessions. Training formats will vary—from in-person workshops and local events to online webinars and cross-border exchanges. The aim is to equip SMEs with practical know-how and tools they can apply directly in their business.

Activity 1.5 focuses on the creation of a Catalogue of Decarbonisation Solution Providers. The aim is to connect manufacturing SMEs with a wide range of practical, tested solutions that can support their transition toward lower emissions. During Period 2, partners reach out to technology providers—ranging from suppliers of solar panels and heat pumps to ESG monitoring systems and virtual power plants—and invite them to register to the catalogue. Each submission undergoes a basic quality screening before publication, with a clear disclaimer clarifying that the consortium does not certify or endorse the listed providers. Importantly, inclusion in the catalogue constitutes a form of indirect state aid valued at EUR



25 per company. This is transparently communicated to all providers during the registration process. The searchable online catalogue serves both as a practical matchmaking tool and a communication asset—highlighting the innovation capacity of Central Europe’s green economy. It promotes cross-sector collaboration, increases visibility of available solutions, and encourages SMEs to explore low-carbon technologies in a user-friendly, accessible way

5.2. Work package 2

Building on the outcomes of Work Package 1, Work Package 2 focuses on providing direct support to manufacturing SMEs through advisory services, training, and tailored tools. The aim is to equip companies with the practical knowledge, resources, and confidence to begin or accelerate their decarbonisation journey.

Activity 2.1 involves the delivery of capacity-building programmes for SMEs, reflecting the gaps and needs identified during the mapping. Each partner is responsible for designing and implementing training sessions adapted to their national or regional context. Training topics include carbon footprint basics, energy efficiency, financing options, and digital tools. Some sessions are delivered in person, while others are held online to ensure accessibility. Where necessary, partners engage external experts to support content delivery. In addition to theoretical input, training includes practical examples and encourages SMEs to start thinking about their own roadmap to decarbonisation.

To ensure that SMEs also receive hands-on guidance, Activity 2.2 offers tailored advisory support. Participating companies are matched with local or regional experts who help them interpret their Carbon Calculator results, identify low-hanging opportunities for emissions reduction, and develop basic action plans. Consultations are carried out one-on-one, online. The advisory process is structured but flexible, and focuses on practical steps that companies can take immediately—even with limited resources.

Activity 2.3 enhances peer learning through demonstration visits and expert consultations. SMEs are invited to visit companies that have already implemented successful decarbonisation measures. These visits showcase real-life solutions in energy efficiency, renewable energy, low-carbon logistics, and circular resource use. In addition to these visits, SMEs also have access to expert consultations through the Decarbonisation Hub, allowing them to ask questions, compare options, and learn from others.

All these efforts are summarised in Activity 2.4, which brings together data and experiences from across the partner countries. The results will be used to adjust the support model, ensure knowledge transfer between countries, and prepare recommendations for public authorities. Key indicators tracked during WP2 include the number of SMEs trained, the number receiving advisory support, and the number expressing readiness to move forward with decarbonisation.

Throughout WP2, the Decarbonisation Hub plays a central role as a digital interface where SMEs can access tools, download materials, request expert input, and follow updates. The Hub is designed to remain in operation beyond the project, serving as a permanent entry point for SMEs interested in low-carbon transformation.

By combining training, expert support, and visibility into real-life examples, WP2 helps SMEs shift from awareness to action. The activities are intentionally light-touch and flexible, recognising the capacity constraints of small businesses, while still maintaining structure and accountability.



5.3. Work package 3

While Work Package 2 focuses on building SME demand for decarbonisation solutions, Work Package 3 addresses the supply side—supporting green-tech innovators, researchers, and startups in bringing practical decarbonisation technologies to market. The aim is to strengthen the innovation ecosystem around low-carbon industry transformation and create new links between technology developers and manufacturing SMEs.

Activity 3.1 launches a dedicated venture programme aimed at early-career researchers and emerging innovators. The programme is designed to build entrepreneurial competencies and support the transition from research to market. Participants are guided through a structured curriculum covering business model development, customer discovery, value proposition design, and investment readiness. The programme is delivered in stages, combining online workshops, mentoring sessions, and peer exchanges. Partners leading this activity are drawing on their experience in startup acceleration and technology commercialisation.

In parallel, Activity 3.2 focuses on technology transfer. Workshops and training sessions are organised for researchers and university staff, particularly those working in fields relevant to energy, circular economy, and low-emission industry. The aim is to increase awareness of commercial pathways, encourage inter-institutional collaboration, and reduce the gap between academic innovation and SME needs. These sessions are tailored to the regional innovation context and are delivered in cooperation with research-oriented partners.

Activity 3.3 provides targeted support to selected green-tech startups. Startups that demonstrate strong decarbonisation potential and market relevance receive mentoring from experienced advisors, including technical and business experts. They are supported in refining their product-market fit, building investor presentations, and identifying pilot customers—ideally among the SMEs supported under WP2. The CREDIT4CE partners also help facilitate introductions to investors, public agencies, and potential corporate clients. This matchmaking is supported by tools hosted on the Decarbonisation Hub and coordinated by GFO.

All WP3 results are synthesised in Activity 3.4, which captures lessons learned and defines a support model for innovation-based decarbonisation. This framework can be transferred to other projects, clusters, or innovation programmes beyond the CREDIT4CE partnership. Deliverables from WP3 will include a summary of startups supported, training content used, and recommendations for scaling similar initiatives.

By combining entrepreneurial support, technology transfer, and strategic matchmaking, WP3 strengthens the innovation value chain linked to low-carbon industry. It helps ensure that SMEs do not only have access to advice and awareness—but also to real solutions developed in their own regions. WP3 also contributes to the sustainability of the project by building a new generation of green-tech ventures with long-term impact.

6. Partner responsibilities

The Slovak Innovation and Energy Agency (SIEA) serves as the Lead Partner and holds primary responsibility for project management, coordination, quality assurance, and delivery of the project. This includes the development of the joint strategy and action plan, overall project governance, financial oversight, and ensuring alignment of project outputs with programme requirements. SIEA leads Activity 1.1 and plays a pivotal role in implementing the readiness mapping in Activity 1.2, contributing



also to the creation of educational materials and capacity-building content. Furthermore, SIEA leads WP2, managing the rollout of SME advisory services, decarbonisation roadmaps, and policy feedback, ensuring that all tools and support mechanisms developed are effectively deployed to SMEs across the participating regions.

CONFEMI acts as the Communication Manager and plays a cross-cutting role in communication and dissemination throughout the project. It is responsible for external visibility, social media, the website, newsletters, and project branding. CONFEMI also leads the readiness mapping process in Activity 1.2, ensuring that data collection tools are harmonised across countries and analysis is coherent. It further supports WP2 by mobilising its industrial networks to recruit SMEs for training and pilot testing.

PPNT leads Activity 1.3 and 1.4 and is responsible for the development of the CREDIT4CE Carbon Calculator. Based on its proprietary tools, PPNT customises and iteratively improves the calculator to suit SME needs. PPNT also plays a major role in WP3, focusing on support for green-tech startups and researchers. It contributes to the design and delivery of the venture programme and links startups with industrial partners and funding channels.

REGEA contributes substantially to WP1 by leading several case study collections under Activity 1.4 and supports training content development. It also plays a critical role in WP2 by leading Activity 2.1 REGEA's role extends to stakeholder engagement and policy feedback collection.

GREENTECH leads Activity 1.5, tasked with building the Catalogue of 400+ Decarbonisation Providers. It also contributes to Activity 1.4 and plays an outreach role in WP2 by connecting local solution providers with SMEs. GREENTECH supports communication by amplifying messages through its industry networks.

WUST technical aspects of tool development, testing the Carbon Calculator in collaboration with PPNT, and provides scientific expertise in WP3 on green-tech innovation. It leads training efforts focused on technology transfer (Activity 3.1) and provides guidance for researchers and early-stage startups.

UASB plays a similar technical and academic support role in WP1 and WP3, especially in relation to commercialisation of research and education-focused decarbonisation content. It engages in piloting the Carbon Calculator and contributes to regional case study collection.

ZICER participates primarily in WP2 and WP3, leading Activity 3.2 and supporting regional SME outreach and innovation scouting. ZICER hosts SME workshops, assists with startup mentoring, and plays a dissemination role within Croatia. ZICER also contributes to Activity 1.5 by collecting decarbonisation providers for the Catalogue. ZICER supports communication by amplifying project messages through its industry networks and other media channels.

PTP is a key partner in WP3, contributing to startup support and regional capacity building for innovation. It also supports communication and training delivery in WP2.

Finally, GFO brings its expertise in venture capital and startup acceleration to WP3. It leads Activity 3.3 by mentoring green-tech startups, facilitating investor connections, and assisting with technology commercialisation strategies. GFO also provides support to WP1 and WP2 through its networks and advisory services, especially in promoting best practices and identifying high-potential technologies for SMEs.

7. Coordination mechanisms

To ensure smooth implementation across all work packages and maintain alignment between partners, CREDIT4CE relies on well-structured coordination mechanisms. Regular project meetings are held online



on a monthly basis, bringing together all partners to review progress, discuss ongoing activities, and flag any challenges or needs for support. These coordination calls are led by the Lead Partner (SIEA) and include updates from WP leaders, as well as administrative and financial reminders when needed. In addition to monthly meetings, bilateral calls are arranged between WP leaders and individual partners to resolve specific issues, clarify deliverables, or provide targeted guidance. When appropriate, smaller thematic working groups are convened to focus on technical tasks—such as tool development, content validation, or training design. All partners use shared folders and document trackers to coordinate tasks, manage deadlines, and monitor deliverable completion. This combination of structured meetings, bilateral exchanges, and open communication helps maintain momentum, resolve bottlenecks early, and foster transparency across the consortium.

7.1. MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

7.1.1. Progress Evaluation Measures by Work Package and Activity

The CREDIT4CE project applies a robust, structured framework for monitoring progress and evaluating outcomes across all work packages and activities. Each component includes clearly defined performance indicators, timelines, quality review mechanisms, and stakeholder feedback loops to ensure that outputs are relevant, timely, and impactful.

In Work Package 1 (WP1), which focuses on the establishment of the Decarbonisation Hub and the development of core project tools and strategic guidance, progress is measured through both output-based and process indicators. For Activity 1.1, the Joint Strategy and Action Plan are evaluated through internal peer reviews and stakeholder validation processes. Deliverables D1.1.1 and D1.1.2 are checked for consistency, partner input, and alignment with EU strategies before submission. Activity 1.2, led by CONFEMI, is monitored based on the number of SMEs engaged in the readiness mapping (targeting at least 150 SMEs), the quality and completeness of national data collected, and the comparative synthesis delivered in D1.2.1. In Activity 1.3, the development and testing of the Carbon Calculator are tracked through two structured pilot rounds with SMEs from diverse sectors. The quality of the tool is validated through feedback surveys and technical usability assessments, culminating in its public launch and online availability. Activity 1.4, focused on collecting best-practice examples and preparing training materials, is evaluated based on the creation of at least 30 resources. These outputs undergo partner peer review and are assessed for practical applicability and country-specific tailoring. Activity 1.5 aims to populate a searchable catalogue of 400+ regional decarbonisation solution providers. This catalogue is evaluated for completeness, balance across sectors and regions, and usability through a feedback form integrated within the Decarbonisation Hub.

In Work Package 2 (WP2), the emphasis is on measurable improvements in SME awareness, capability, and access to support. For Activity 2.1, the delivery of training sessions is evaluated by the number of SME participants and events, with a goal of enhancing the climate-related competencies of at least 100 SMEs. Activity 2.2 focuses on improving SME access to funding, and progress is measured through the number of workshops held, consultations delivered, and SMEs reporting increased confidence in securing funding. Evaluation for Activity 2.3 includes the organisation of at least six demonstration visits and direct consultations with five pilot SMEs, tracked through SME feedback and consultant reports. Finally, Activity 2.4 synthesises the results of the pilot actions into a coherent support framework (Deliverables D2.4.1 and D2.4.2), evaluated by peer review and partner validation for scalability and regional adaptability.

Work Package 3 (WP3) evaluates progress in terms of startup engagement, training impact, and venture readiness. In Activity 3.1, the effectiveness of the green-tech venture programme is tracked through participant registration numbers and the number of lectures delivered. Activity 3.2 measures outcomes based on workshop attendance, and the creation of the technology and knowledge transfer handbook. In Activity 3.3, GFO track progress through the number of startups supported, investment raised, and partnerships initiated. Specific KPIs include supporting 20 startups, of which at least five attract



investment or secure pilot customers. Activity 3.4 synthesises all WP3 outcomes into Deliverables D3.4.1 and D3.4.2, which are evaluated via internal reviews and external feedback from programme participants.

Across all work packages, CREDIT4CE implements a transversal quality and evaluation approach. Monthly coordination calls and twice-yearly Steering Committee meetings are used to track progress against deliverables and milestones. Deliverables undergo internal peer reviews, and key outputs are subject to validation from SME users or stakeholders. A live tracking system is used to monitor completion of deliverables, adherence to timelines, and KPI progress. The importance of an integrated approach and continuity between the activities of the work packages is emphasized. This structured framework ensures that each work package remains on schedule and aligned with the project's overarching objectives.

8. Stakeholder Engagement Plan

CREDIT4CE is a stakeholder-driven project. The quality and relevance of our outputs depend on meaningful engagement with SMEs, policymakers, technical experts, business support organisations, research institutions, green-tech startups, and financial actors. This engagement is not limited to one work package—stakeholders are involved throughout the entire project: in data collection, tool testing, pilot activities, knowledge sharing, and policy feedback. This section outlines how we identify, engage, and maintain dialogue with key stakeholders throughout the project lifecycle.

Detailed Plan for Engaging Identified Stakeholders

Stakeholder mapping was conducted during the first six months of the project and is continuously updated. Partners identified key stakeholders based on their role in decarbonisation processes—either as decision-makers, influencers, solution providers, or target groups (such as SMEs and innovators). These stakeholders include:

- Manufacturing SMEs from various sectors and regions.
- Policymakers at regional and national levels (e.g., ministries, energy agencies, climate authorities).
- Industry and business associations (e.g., chambers of commerce, technology clusters).
- Research and higher education institutions.
- Green-tech innovators and startups.
- Financial institutions (banks, public funding agencies, investors).
- Multipliers such as media outlets and innovation hubs.

Each partner is responsible for building and maintaining relationships with stakeholders in their territory. Stakeholder groups are invited to take part in project activities, provide feedback, and disseminate results within their own networks.

Specific Activities for Each Stakeholder Group

Engagement activities are tailored to the role and interest of each stakeholder group. SMEs are primarily engaged through surveys, advisory sessions, training, and demonstration visits. They are also involved in testing tools like the Carbon Calculator and are featured in good-practice stories. Startups and innovators are supported through the venture programme and mentoring sessions.



Policymakers are engaged via targeted communication. Their feedback is collected to align project outputs with national decarbonisation goals and identify opportunities for scaling successful models. Research institutions contribute as trainers and advisors, and benefit from WP3 knowledge transfer activities.

Business associations and chambers help disseminate tools, recruit SMEs for pilots, and promote success stories. Financial institutions are involved in funding support workshops and are invited to co-create funding roadmaps. All groups are also involved as users of the Decarbonisation Hub, and will receive regular updates, invitations, and opportunities to contribute.

8.1. Timelines for Engagement Activities

Stakeholder engagement is ongoing throughout the project but follows a phased structure. During **Months 1-6**, the focus was on identifying stakeholders and involving them in the mapping (Activity 1.2) and tool development (Activity 1.3). From **Months 7-12**, stakeholders helped validate the tools, provided feedback on early outputs, and shaped the training and advisory content (Activities 1.4 and 2.1).

During **Months 13-24**, the focus shifts to deeper involvement through pilot actions, consultation sessions, venture programmes, and case study collection. This is the core phase for active engagement and co-creation. From **Months 25-30**, stakeholders will be involved in final evaluation, policy discussion, and sustainability planning to support the continuation of tools and services after the project ends.

Across all phases, stakeholder engagement is tracked through meeting notes, attendance lists, consultation summaries, and feedback forms. Results of the engagement are integrated into strategic documents and shared in final deliverables.

9. Communication Measures and Strategy

Effective communication, both internal and external, is a cornerstone of the CREDIT4CE project's success. The project applies a structured and proactive communication strategy that ensures smooth coordination among partners, continuous stakeholder engagement, and strong visibility of project outputs and outcomes. The communication strategy is managed centrally by CONFEMI as the Communication Lead, with all partners contributing to the dissemination of activities at regional and national levels.

Internally, the project uses a dedicated **Communication Activity Log**, a live document hosted on the shared project drive, as the central coordination tool for all communication and dissemination efforts. This log is regularly updated by all partners and serves as a real-time record of communication actions, including social media posts, event presentations, newsletter mentions, publications, and media outreach. Each partner is responsible for recording its own activities, ensuring transparency, tracking partner contributions, and enabling effective reporting to the programme authorities. The activity log captures the date, type, channel, partner involved, geographic reach, and target audience, providing a detailed picture of project visibility across the Central Europe region.

Internal communication is further supported through monthly online partner calls, thematic WP coordination meetings, and a central file repository. These mechanisms ensure that all partners are informed of project progress, deadlines, and upcoming dissemination opportunities. The Lead Partner (SIEA) and CONFEMI jointly monitor communication consistency and branding compliance, supported by guidelines developed at the start of the project.



Externally, the project's communication strategy aims to raise awareness of the project's objectives, promote tools such as the Carbon Calculator and the Decarbonisation Hub, and build visibility for pilot actions and policy outcomes. The strategy targets several stakeholder groups: manufacturing SMEs, policymakers, researchers, regional authorities, business support organisations, and the wider public.

- The **CREDIT4CE website**, which serves as the central hub for project information, tools (like the Carbon Calculator), case studies, news, and updates.
- **Social media platforms**, especially LinkedIn, which is used for regular storytelling, SME highlights, partner achievements, event announcements, and EU-level campaign participation.
- **Partner websites and newsletters**, through which each organisation amplifies CREDIT4CE messages within its local and sectoral networks.
- **Events and conferences**, where partners present project outcomes, tools, and insights to strategic audiences.
- **Media releases**, which are coordinated for key milestones, such as the launch of the Decarbonisation Hub or the release of policy recommendations.

Branding and visual identity are harmonised across all materials in line with programme and project guidelines. Templates for presentations, newsletters, and social media visuals were developed early in the project and distributed to partners. CONFEMI oversees compliance and supports partners with visual content and messaging alignment.

To enhance reach and legitimacy, CREDIT4CE engages with a variety of media outlets and amplifiers. Media outreach is coordinated around key moments—such as the launch of the Decarbonisation Hub, publication of the SME mapping report, and final policy recommendations. Partners draft press releases in local languages and liaise with regional media, including sustainability-focused portals, innovation newsletters, and national energy agencies.

In addition, amplifiers such as business associations, chambers of commerce, energy clusters, startup hubs, and university innovation offices are leveraged to multiply the impact of communication. These entities help promote project calls, distribute newsletters, and co-host events. CONFEMI coordinates with partners to compile a network of multipliers who commit to sharing project outcomes throughout the lifecycle.

Finally, the communication strategy includes periodic reflection and adjustment. Based on stakeholder feedback, analytics from the website and social media, and project progress, partners meet semi-annually to review communication performance and adapt their approach. This ensures that messaging remains relevant, engaging, and impactful throughout the project lifecycle.

10. Critical Path and Risk Management

A well-defined approach to risk and critical path management is essential to the successful delivery of the CREDIT4CE project. The project's complexity—spanning six countries, 10 partner organisations, and multiple stakeholder groups—necessitates proactive planning, real-time coordination, and flexible response mechanisms. This section outlines how CREDIT4CE defines its critical path, identifies potential risks, and manages mitigation.

10.1. Definition of the Critical Path

The critical path of CREDIT4CE includes the core activities and milestones whose timely completion is essential for the success of the entire project. These include: the development of the project's Joint



Strategy and Action Plan (Activity 1.1); the completion of the decarbonisation readiness mapping (Activity 1.2); the creation and testing of the Carbon Calculator (Activity 1.3); the launch of the Decarbonisation Hub (end of WP1); the delivery of training and support services for SMEs (WP2); and the implementation of the green-tech venture programme (WP3). If any of these core activities are delayed—particularly those that serve as inputs to later work packages—it could create a cascading effect and compromise the achievement of the project’s objectives within the 30-month timeframe.

Project management activities, including monthly coordination meetings and the internal communication log, are closely tied to the critical path to ensure constant monitoring and adaptation. Dependencies between tasks—such as the link between the readiness mapping and the tailoring of WP2 training content—are tracked continuously. Buffer time is built into key transition phases (e.g., between tool testing and pilot deployment) to mitigate schedule pressure.

10.2. Identification of Potential Risks

A structured risk identification process was carried out during the proposal phase and further updated in the inception phase. Risks are categorised into operational, strategic, technical, and external domains. Among the key potential risks are:

Low SME engagement, particularly in pilot activities, due to limited awareness, internal capacity, or perceived complexity of decarbonisation tools. In the later phases of the project, these include limited technical readiness of SMEs and a lack of human and financial capacity.

- **Delays in technical tool development**, particularly the Carbon Calculator, due to integration challenges or feedback from testing requiring rework.
- **Fragmentation in partner coordination**, which may lead to uneven progress or gaps in knowledge sharing across countries.
- **Regulatory or policy misalignment**, where sudden changes at the national or EU level could affect the relevance of selected support mechanisms.
- **Insufficient visibility or uptake of project outcomes**, particularly if communication efforts are not sustained or tailored to the needs of target audiences.

10.3. Mitigation Measures

To mitigate **low SME engagement**, the project uses proactive outreach via chambers of commerce, clusters, and local business networks, coordinated by all partners. Incentives such as visibility, peer learning, and direct support are communicated clearly to SMEs. For **technical delays**, the project adopts an agile development methodology, with PPNT and WUST implementing feedback-driven improvement cycles during calculator prototyping. In case of **coordination gaps**, work package leads hold regular check-ins and bilateral meetings with slower partners to align timelines and expectations. **Policy risks** are mitigated by maintaining active dialogue with national agencies and aligning outputs with emerging EU strategies like the Fit for 55 package and REPowerEU. For **visibility concerns**, the communication activity log ensures all partner outputs are recorded and tracked, while CONFEMI oversees reinforcement campaigns before and after major deliverables.

Overall, CREDIT4CE’s risk management approach is embedded across all levels of the project and supported by practical tools and a collaborative mindset. The focus is not only on identifying and



preventing risks, but also on building organisational resilience and adaptability to turn challenges into opportunities.

10.4. Measures to Evaluate Progress

CREDIT4CE uses a practical and structured monitoring and evaluation framework to track implementation, identify what works, and adapt where needed. The goal is not only to monitor outputs, but to ensure that the project delivers real, measurable benefits to SMEs, innovators, and stakeholders. Progress evaluation is embedded across all work packages, with clear responsibilities, defined KPIs, and a strong emphasis on feedback and improvement.

The project's **Monitoring and Evaluation Framework** is built around three levels: outputs (what is delivered), outcomes (what changes as a result), and long-term impact (how the project contributes to broader goals). Each WP and activity has pre-defined indicators—for example, the number of SMEs engaged, training sessions delivered, startups supported, or tools used. WP1 tracks the number of SMEs mapped, case studies collected, and training materials created. WP2 measures how many SMEs participate in training, use the advisory services, or begin working on decarbonisation plans. WP3 focuses on supporting startups, tracking the uptake of venture support, and the progress of early-stage innovations toward market-readiness.

Work package leaders are responsible for collecting data and reporting progress, while the Lead Partner (SIEA) consolidates the information, ensures consistency, and prepares formal reports to the controllers. Each partner is responsible for preparing their own content-related contributions and reporting on their assigned activities. SIEA, as the lead partner and project coordinator, checks and verifies all partner inputs before submission. All reporting is carried out through the Joint Electronic Monitoring System (JEMS), which serves as the central platform for project monitoring and communication with the programme authority. Partners use standardised reporting templates and submit their updates according to the defined project milestones and deadlines.

Regular Progress Reporting Mechanisms are in place to ensure transparency and accountability across the consortium. These include monthly internal coordination calls, quarterly partner updates, and formal reporting before major project milestones. Key documents and deliverables are reviewed internally before submission: peer partners provide comments, WP leaders perform content checks, and the Lead Partner ensures that outputs meet expected quality standards. The Steering Committee meets twice per year to review progress against objectives and recommend adjustments if needed.

A key part of this approach is the integration of **Feedback Loops and Continuous Improvement**. After each major activity—such as trainings, workshops, or testing rounds—partners collect structured feedback from participants. This includes SMEs, startups, and researchers, depending on the activity. The feedback is reviewed and directly used to improve tools (e.g. the Carbon Calculator), refine training content, and adjust formats or delivery methods. In WP2, the SME pilot activities are being adapted based on what participants find most useful or difficult. In WP3, the venture programme is being iterated with support from green-tech founders, mentors, and investors. Across the consortium, lessons learned are documented and shared, with good practices scaled up or transferred between regions.

10.5. Sustainability Measures

CREDIT4CE is designed with long-term impact in mind. From the start, the project has aimed to create tools, methods, and support structures that remain relevant and accessible beyond the project lifetime. Sustainability is not only about maintaining deliverables—it is about ensuring that what we create continues to serve SMEs, stakeholders, and policy goals even after funding ends. This section outlines how we plan to secure the long-term use of project outputs, how activities will be transferred to relevant stakeholders, and what impact we aim to leave behind.



10.5.1. Plans for Ensuring the Sustainability of Project Outputs

All key outputs—such as the Carbon Calculator, the Decarbonisation Hub, the Catalogue of Solution Providers, and the training materials—are developed with long-term usability in mind. They are designed to be simple, user-friendly, and adaptable to new contexts. Partners have agreed that the Carbon Calculator and Hub will remain accessible after the project ends, with hosting and basic updates ensured through in-kind contributions or integrated into the partners' existing services.

Training content, case studies, and good practices will remain available online through the project website or national platforms. These materials will continue to support SMEs and innovation actors, and can be used in future EU-funded or national programmes. In addition, several partners have committed to incorporating project tools and services into their long-term advisory or incubation work. This will keep the project alive at regional level even after the formal close.

10.6. Strategies for Handover of Activities to Stakeholders

As the project nears its final phase, we are preparing for a gradual handover of selected activities to relevant stakeholder groups. These include public energy agencies, chambers of commerce, business support organisations, and innovation clusters who can embed CREDIT4CE outputs into their daily operations. For example:

- National energy or innovation agencies can adopt the Carbon Calculator as part of SME consulting.
- Business associations can continue using the training modules in their annual capacity-building plans.
- Startup incubators and venture funds can integrate the WP3 innovation framework into their existing services.

To support this, partners will organise targeted meetings and info sessions in Months 25-30. These sessions will explain how outputs can be used, adapted, or incorporated into ongoing activities. User guides, communication templates, and technical documentation will be shared to make the handover easier.

11. Conclusion

The CREDIT4CE Joint Strategy and Action Plan sets the direction for coordinated, practical, and results-driven efforts to accelerate the decarbonisation of manufacturing SMEs in Central Europe. It brings together the shared vision of ten committed partners, backed by a structured work plan, clearly defined responsibilities, and evidence-based activities tailored to regional realities.

The strategy is grounded in real-world needs, as identified through comprehensive SME readiness mapping and stakeholder engagement. It outlines concrete tools—such as the Carbon Calculator, the Decarbonisation Hub, and a set of support services—that will help SMEs start or deepen their decarbonisation journey. It also supports green-tech innovation by strengthening the link between early-stage research and the needs of SMEs, building a supply pipeline of sustainable solutions.

Throughout the document, we have detailed not only what will be delivered, but also how we will ensure quality, consistency, and long-term value. The integrated approach to communication, risk management, stakeholder engagement, and monitoring ensures that the project is agile, collaborative, and accountable.



This strategy is not static—it will be continuously informed by feedback, adapted to stakeholder input, and improved through ongoing learning. The structure we have set in place allows for flexibility while keeping us focused on the bigger goal: enabling real climate action at SME level, supporting innovation ecosystems, and contributing to national and EU-level decarbonisation targets.

In doing so, CREDIT4CE goes beyond awareness and policy talk. It provides tools, services, and connections that SMEs and innovators can actually use. And through close cooperation across borders, sectors, and levels of governance, it lays the foundation for a lasting impact that extends far beyond the project's duration.