**Circular Innovation Expert (International)**

**Role Description**

The **Circular Innovation Expert** will play a key role in guiding micro, small, and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) in transitioning from single-use plastic packaging towards more sustainable, circular alternatives. The role combines technical expertise in plastic packaging with strong business development skills and an understanding of green finance, mainly focusing on circular investment strategies. The expert is expected to mentor and support innovators to design, validate, and scale up circular business models that align with EU regulations and global sustainability goals.

**Responsibilities**

The Expert will lead and oversee the following tasks:

* Provide technical guidance on the design, production, and use of alternative packaging materials that reduce plastic waste and improve recyclability or reusability.
* Support early-stage businesses in developing and refining circular packaging models through coaching, strategic advice, and hands-on support.
* Interpret and communicate relevant EU and global regulations related to plastic waste, namely the EU Directive (EU 2019/904) on the 10 SUP items ban, and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) to help Albanian companies align with compliance standards.
* Assist the participating applicants in building viable, scalable, and impact-oriented circular business strategies by integrating environmental and economic sustainability principles.
* Guide entrepreneurs in identifying and accessing funding mechanisms, green financing tools, and investment partners suitable for circular packaging initiatives.
* Inspire participating SMEs to adopt a systems-change mindset, explore innovative packaging designs, and envision long-term scaling potential.
* Offer specialized input on designing for reuse, recyclability, or material recovery when relevant to specific startup needs (preferably).

**Required qualifications, competencies, and experience**

* **At least 5 years of relevant experience** in the **plastic packaging industry**, including design, production, or supply chain processes.
* Demonstrated understanding of **EU and international regulations** on plastics, waste management, and **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)**.
* Proven experience working with **SMEs**, ideally in mentoring, acceleration programs, or business support environments.
* Practical experience with **circular economy business models** — reuse, refill, recyclable systems, or take-back schemes.
* Hands-on experience in **circular packaging design**, material recovery systems, or eco-design processes (preferred).
* Prior experience in the Western Balkan region would be considered an advantage but is not mandatory