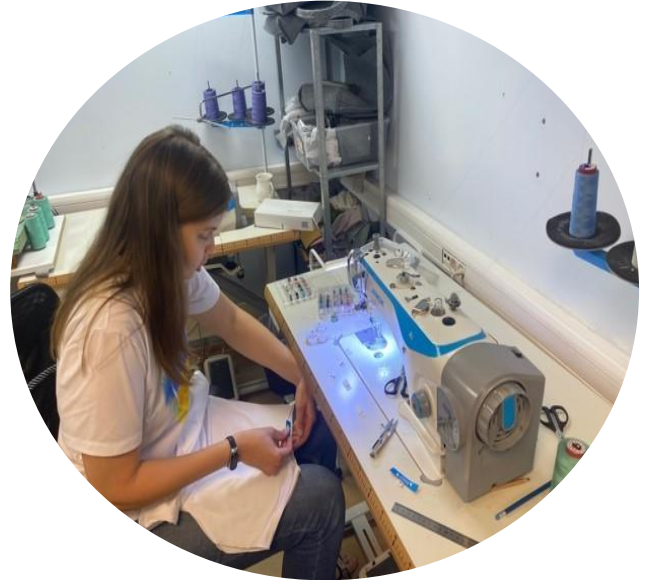




B-WISE
Skills for the future : WISEs ready!



Report understanding user (digital) skill needs in WISEs

Executive summary

2022





1.1 HOW THE REPORT FIT INTO THE WORKFLOW OF THE B-WISE PROJECT

The B-WISE project aims to strengthen the skills of Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISE), in particular, in relation to the technological and digital sphere; to this end, this project aims to develop a strategy to enhance competence of workers with support needs (WSNs), their supporters and those, such as enablers, who are responsible for creating a working environment capable of receiving and implementing influences related to the potential of digital and technology. This project is led by a partnership of 28 members from 13 European countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Greece, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain.

In order to pursue the above-mentioned objective, the B-WISE project consists of eight interconnected Work Packages, to which two transversal actions relating to project management and coordination (WP9) and quality and evaluation (WP10) are added; the project WPs are listed below:


- WP1 Research. State of Art
- **WP2 BUILDING SCENARIOS AND PERSONAS**
- WP3 Design of VET curricula meeting skills gaps
- WP4 Pilot Implementation of the curricula
- WP5 Skills recognition mechanisms
- WP6 Sectoral Skills Strategy (Blueprint) for WISEs sector
- WP7 Communication & Dissemination
- WP8 Long-term action plan and Sustainability
- WP9 Management & Coordination
- WP10 Quality assurance & Evaluation

This report collects and summarises the outcomes of WP2.

The WP:

- followed by WP1, in which the state of the art of WISEs in the partner countries was outlined through national analyses of secondary sources concerning the quantification of WISEs, national policies, etc. and through a questionnaire administered to workers, supporters and enablers. Regarding the digital and technological competence aspects, this questionnaire explored in detail the





existing competences in WISEs with reference to the three categories of actors mentioned above;

- precedes the WP3, in which, based on the weaknesses found and the margins for improvement detected, the characteristics of the curricula are to be outlined, so that to guarantee the strengthening of competences that is the central objective of the project.

What, then, is the missing piece that, starting from the general framework outlined in WP1, allows us to increase our knowledge to best contribute to the subsequent work on curricula to be carried out in WP3?

1.2 SCENARIOS AND PERSONAS

The answer contained in the B-WISE project framework, starts from an assumption that is as simple as it is fundamental: the objective of competence building cannot be adequately released unless we are able to understand that:

- European WISEs, although within certain unifying traits, are different from each other in their objectives, operational styles, organisation, size, entrepreneurial orientation, etc.
- The people working in WISEs in various dimensions capacities (WSNs, supporters and enablers) are diverse in terms of starting skill levels, life histories, investment in learning, etc.

Following from this, in order to be effective, the definition of competence-building pathways must be designed with reference to the different types of WISEs and the different types of persons working in them. In other words, as is well highlighted in the presented project, attention has to be paid to the creation of 'scenarios' (the different types of WISEs) and 'personas' (the different types of WSNs, supporters and enablers), so as to ensure that training and learning respond to the different competence needs.

Basically, the questions running through this report are: what skills-building action do WISEs need based on their characteristics, the directions of their development, their corporate culture and their strengths and weaknesses? What are the characteristics of the workers (enablers, supporters, WSNs) to whom we would like to propose competence-building pathways? Because, just to give a few examples, it is different to





propose a digital skills enhancement process to a young and dynamic company that is planning to develop in the technological sphere and to a company that considers itself settled and with no prospect of particular future change in sectors where it operates without the use of technology; it is different to think of a training process for a young person with a high level of schooling who has emerged from a situation of drug addiction or for a person over 55 with a low level of schooling and with demanding family responsibilities. It is possible to reinforce digital competences in all the above-mentioned situations, but this must be done with different forms, methods, and timeframes; the knowledge gained in WP2 and reported in this report should help to define them in the subsequent phases of the project.

Thus, if the approach of WP1 was aimed at outlining general pictures, WP2 aims at the creation of typologies, thus trying to maximise 1) homogeneity within each type and 2) differences between the characteristics of different types. This applies as much to WISEs (scenarios) as to persons operating within them (personas); and these differences operate both between WISEs of different nations, also due to legal frameworks and cultural traditions, and within the same nation.

This is an ambitious objective, for which there are no established precedents, made even more difficult by some contextual elements: to give just one example, the same term "sheltered workshop" - may indicate different types of WISE (and, only in some cases it indicates WISEs, since in some countries this term refers to organisations that have not a productive connotation and do not pay workers a wage comparable to that of other worker) depending on national contexts, whereas WISEs named differently may in fact present very similar characteristics. The challenge is therefore to identify a working method that allows to compare WISEs (and their operators) that act in different contexts, that have different legal forms, that act in a wide variety of sectors of activity, that have different economic data and development perspectives, and to group them according to criteria that cut across all the above dimensions.

It is also necessary to properly balance the analytical accuracy of the model with a need for simplicity and linearity, thus capturing a limited number of essential data. It is therefore a matter of reducing, through a few dimensions of analysis, the infinite variability possible - the tens of thousands of European WISEs and the hundreds of thousands of people working in them - into a limited number of types from a few well-defined characteristics.





This elaboration, besides being central to the specific aims of the project, constitutes a more general added value for the knowledge and understanding of European WISEs.

This was the starting point for organising the work of WP2.

1.3 HOW THIS REPORT IS ORGANISED

The WP2 Report Understanding user (digital) skill needs in WISEs, in coherence with the B-WISE design framework, includes two deliverables centred respectively on Scenarios (and thus on the different types of WISEs - T2.1) and on Personas (and thus on who works in WISEs - T2.2).

These two deliverables are included in the report as follows:

- A foreword, which defines the general objectives and characteristics of the report;
- The chapter 'The working method', that describes and justifies the research strategy, the methodological choices, the articulation in phases of WP2, the tools used;
- The chapter "Scenarios, WISE types" (T2.1), offers a general description of the model adopted, based on three basic WISE types with a plurality of intermediate types. After a description of the main aspects of the model, the report is divided into two parts:
 - In the first one, the characteristics of the different types of WISE regard to 1) economic and entrepreneurial aspects 2) job placement aspects 3) enterprise objectives ("how they see themselves in 10 years' time") and 4) the place of WISEs in relation to policies;
- The chapter 'Personas' (T2.2) offers a summary of the classifications made at national level, divided into the three categories of workers, supporters and enablers;
- The following chapter, summaries of the national reports are given; link to complete form is available on text;
- The concluding chapter, in addition to summarising what emerged in the previous chapters, develops:
 - the general policy indications from WP2;



- the specific guidance offered to WP3 in terms of competence-building pathways.

1.4 THE WORKING METHOD

The work of WP2 ran from March to October 2022. It involved the active participation of the entire partnership, which actively contributed to the work presented here.

Before describing the work carried out in an analytical manner, some methodological premises must be made that inspired the subsequent steps.

The first is that the cognitive strategy was based on the progressive deepening of the contents, releasing step by step the information gathered, and the reflections elaborated and making them the subject of discussion with the partnership. This was done in the knowledge that the first documents shared with the partnership were necessarily imprecise and that during the WP flow, adjustment would be done to improve and deepen the initial hypotheses. The metaphor we used is that of loading images in the early days of the internet: first blurred and almost indistinguishable, then gradually sharper. This makes knowledge a true collective construction shared by the whole partnership. During this process, some elements produced in the initial stages were retained and became part of the final report, others were gradually modified thanks to subsequent in-depth efforts that led to better elaboration of the concepts by incorporating the criticisms and anomalies of previous formulations. The partnership actively contributed to this process, both by elaborating material on their own national situation and by offering feedback, including critical, to the work that was being presented, thus contributing to its reformulation.

The second choice of method, linked to the previous one, was to maintain (with the minimum flexibility necessary in such a large partnership and in a complex project) the timeline, even at the cost of sacrificing the completeness of the content in the first phases. The B-WISE project has a very demanding layout, in which each phase is functional to the next. A very accurate product, that did not arrive in time to support the WP3 efforts, would be of little use. This meant accepting compromises: for example, taking note that for some partners it was impossible to realise the number of case studies initially planned by the agreed date; it was decided then to reduce the number






of case studies (paying more attention to their correct identification), rather than to extend the time for the realisation of the fieldwork, which would have led to a delay in the delivery of this report and which would have obliged the WP3 leaders to start their work on the competence-building pathways without having the data resulting from WP2. Instead, it was decided to start working together with the WP3 leaders as early as June, and to involve them in the work of WP2 as it was developed. The smaller amount of data may have partially reduced the heterogeneity of the WISEs studied; however, it must be considered that in any case a study involving 5-10 WISEs out of several hundred (or thousands, in some countries) can only be exploratory in nature. The effects of the reduction of heterogeneity may however have been mitigated by the expertise of the partnership, which, thanks to the set of tools used (focus, outcomes of WP1) also made available to the WPP leader additional information regarding its own country.

The third major methodological choice was the adoption of a qualitative strategy, based on understanding and interpretation. This choice stems from the fact that WP1 produced and is still producing a considerable amount of quantitative data, based on a complex questionnaire administered in the fall of 2021, which gathered detailed information on a plurality of organisational aspects of European WISEs (including those related to technology and digitalisation). The knowledge gained from WP1 was abundantly utilised in WP2 and provides useful insights also for the design of WP3, but it would have been repetitive and unnecessary to repeat similar tools in WP2. We therefore chose to work intensively with qualitative interviews, focus groups, participant observation, asking the interviewers to first of all grasp the "climate" within the WISEs, to understand the nature and rules of the interactions. WP1 and WP2 express different and complementary methodological choices and produce outcomes that have to be read together by those who will lead WP3 and the subsequent phases.

Besides the methodological aspects outlined above, the complementarity between WP1 and WP2 also concerns the substance of the work performed. Examining the WP1 materials available at the time (first weeks of 2022) when WP2 was set up from WP1 Country fiches, it emerged that:

- with respect to the categorisation of WISEs (scenarios), there was sufficient evidence in WP1 to elaborate a first hypothesis, which would have required:
 1. subsequent validation by the partnership;



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2. some insights, particularly with regard to the development plans of WISEs: not what they are today, but what they want to become in 10 years' time;
- With respect to the categorisation of people (workers, supporters, enablers) operating in the WISE, it was found that the available elements of WP1 were not sufficient and that it was therefore necessary to organise a specific cognitive effort, dedicating a significant part of the resources of WP2 to this. This does not exclude the possibility that subsequent elaborations resulting from WP1 (the outcomes of the aforementioned questionnaires), made available in the summer of 2022 and thus with a timeline contemporaneous to the drafting of this report, may be included, together with the outcomes of this work, in the premises for the realisation of the subsequent WP3.

On the basis of the above, it was therefore decided to:

- 1) elaborating an initial version of the typification of WISEs (scenarios) on the basis of the outcomes of WP1, integrating, developing and improving this product during WP2 both through discussion with partners and by integrating existing information;
- 2) devote the prevalence of WP2 resources to the collection of information useful for the categorisation of those working in WISEs (personas);
- 3) allocate the prevalence of WP2 resources to the implementation of case studies, based on open interviews and participant observation, with the aim of integrating existing information on scenarios and gathering information on personas.

Finally, taking up and sharing an invitation from the partnership, it was decided to structure a strongly participative research model. Resulting in a report in which both the collective effort and the skills of all partners are reflected. The partners were not mere "labour force" for the realisation of operational phases (e.g., interviews), but contributed to each of the work phases thanks to their own knowledge and sensitivity; several times during the course, the initial proposals of the WP2 leader were discussed and redefined thanks to the work of the partnership.

