B-WISE

Skills for the future : WISEs ready!

# Report on trends and challenges for work integration social enterprises (WISEs) in Europe. Current situation of skills gaps, especially in the digital area.

2022

b-wise.eu | info@b-wise.eu

Agreement: 621509-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-EPPKA2-SSA-B

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

Grant Agreement: 621509-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-EPPKA2-SSA-B



Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

B-WISE
Skills for the future : WISEs ready!

# KEY INFO PAGE

**Key information:**

Grant agreement n° 621509-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-EPPKA2-SSA-B
Deliverable D.1.1
Release version 1.0
Deliverable type: Report

Principal authors: G. Galera, C. Carini, B. Franchini, G. Tallarini (EURICSE); A. Signoretti (University of Trento); L. Bossuyt, L. Messely, (Lichtwerk); F. Belafatti, L. Bezzina, J. J. García Antequera (Policy Impact Lab); C. Moder (arbeit plus); D. Baturina (Zagreb University).

Internal reviewers: ENSIE team and the De Omslag team.

Graphic design: Studiorama

For more information, visit: https://www.bwiseproject.eu

**Acknowledgements:**

EURICSE would like to thank the members of the B-WISE Advisory Board for their insights; Carlo Borzaga (Euricse and University of Trento) for his precious guidance; Simona Di Marzo, Fabio Ferri (Alveare); Coline Pélissier (ACTA VISTA), and Giorgia Trasciani (Aix-Marseille University) for their contributions. A special thank goes to project coordinators and partners for their work.

**This report should be cited as follows:**

Galera, G. et al. (2022). *Report on trends and challenges for work integration social enterprises (WISEs) in Europe. Current situation of skills gaps, especially in the digital area*. B-WISE project, Brussels: https://www.bwiseproject.eu/en/results

**Project partners:**

EASPD - European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities (coordinator), ENSIE -European Network of Social Integration Enterprises, arbeit plus, Lichtwerk, Fundación ONCE, Réseau d'entreprises sociales, NASOR – National Association of the Socially Responsible Employers, ACT Group, La fédération des entreprises d'insertion, RISE Romania, Ev Zin, ŠENT - Slovensko združenje za duševno zdravje, Idee in Rete, Social Entrepreneurship Association of Latvia, De Omslag, Stowarzyszenie Współpracy Regionalnej, JKU-Johannes Kepler Universität Linz, CESUR - Superior Training Centre of Southern Europe, Excellia, Faculty of Law in Zagreb University, AFPA - Agence nationale pour la formation professionnelle des adultes, ADV - Fundatia Alaturi de Voi, Margarita, Cene Štupar, AIAS Bologna onlus, Samaritan Association of Latvia, ROC van Amsterdam, CERTES, SCF - Scuola Centrale Formazione, EURICSE – European Research Institute on Cooperatives and Social Enterprises.





Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

# PREFACE /PRESENTATION OF THE PROJECT

The B-WISE project targets the skills needs of workers with support needs, their supporters (such as their job coaches, trainers) and their managers. The project also promotes the attractiveness of the WISEs sector as a career choice and raises awareness on the importance of the use of digital technologies to support workers - who are more at risk to be excluded from the labour market - in work placement.

**To reach this goal and prepare WISEs to face future challenges, the project implements the following actions:**

1. Develop a report to provide an overview of the WISEs sector across Europe and identify the skills needs in the sector.
2. Design three training curricula to meet the skills gaps of workers in integration, their supporters and their managers.
3. Make those curricula a reality by testing them in 13 countries and validating them by certification authorities.
4. Develop a European Strategy to continue addressing the skills needs in the WISEs sector even after the end of the project.
5. Raise awareness to promote the WISEs sector as a career choice and on the importance of the use of digital technologies to support people who are more at risk to be excluded from the labour market in work placement.

B-WISE
Skills for the future : WISEs ready!

# TABLE OF CONTENTS




Grant Agreement: 621509-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-EPPKA2-SSA-B





Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

## List of acronyms

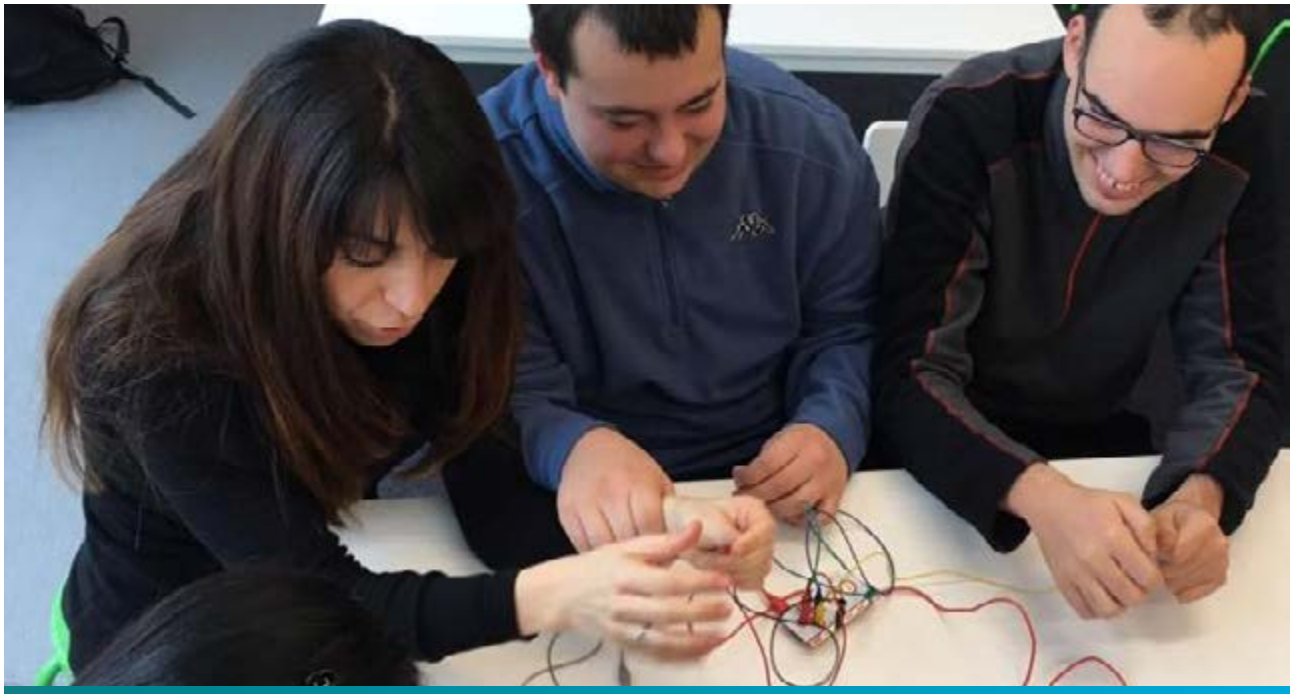
| | |
|---|---|
| **AI** | Artificial Intelligence |
| **ALMP** | Active Labour Market Policies |
| **AMS** | Public Employment Service, *Arbeitmarktervice* (Austria) |
| **ASBL** | Non-profit association, *Association Sans But Lucrative* (Belgium) |
| **B-WISE** | Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills in Work Integration Social Enterprises project |
| **CAE** | Cooperatives of activity and employment, *Coopérative d'Activité et d'Emploi* (France) |
| **CEE** | Central and Eastern Europe |
| **CEO** | Chief Executive Officer |
| **CFO** | Chief Financial Officer |
| **CHRO** | Chief Human Resources Officer |
| **CRM** | Customer Relationship Management |
| **CRPD** | Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities |
| **CSR** | Corporate Social Responsibility |
| **DG CONNECT** | Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology |
| **DG EAC** | Directorate-General for Education and Culture |
| **DG EMPL** | Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion |
| **DigComp** | Digital Competence Framework for citizens |
| **EaSI** | Employment and Social Innovation programme |
| **EASPD** | European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities |
| **EBE** | Enterprise for employment, *Entreprise à but d'emploi* (France) |
| **EC** | European Commission |
| **EDF** | European Disability Forum |
| **EI** | Integration company, *Entreprise d'Insertion* (Belgium) |
| **ENSIE** | European Network for Social Integration Enterprises |
| **ERDF** | European Regional Development Fund |
| **ERP** | Enterprise Resource Planning |

| | |
|---|---|
| **ESCO** | European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations framework |
| **ESF** | European Social Fund |
| **ETA** | Companies organising work customized to persons with disabilities, *Entreprises de travail adaptées* (Belgium) |
| **EU** | European Union |
| **EURICSE** | European Research Institute on Cooperative and Social Enterprises |
| **F2F** | Face-to-face |
| **GBP** | Common benefit employment projects, *Gemeinnützige Beschäftigungsprojekte* (Austria) |
| **ICT** | Information and Communication Technology |
| **IDESS** | Employment development initiatives in the proximity social services sector, *Initiatives de Développement de l'Emploi dans le secteur des Services de proximité à finalité Sociale* (Belgium) |
| **ILO** | International Labour Organization |
| **IoT** | Internet of Things |
| **IP** | Internet Protocol |
| **IPSS** | Private institution of social solidarity, *Instituição Particular de Solidariedade Social* (Portugal) |
| **IRAP** | Regional tax on productive activities, *Imposta Regionale sulle Attività Produttive* (Italy) |
| **Istat** | National Institute of Statistics, *Istituto Nazionale di Statistica* (Italy) |
| **IT** | Information Technology |
| **JRC** | Joint Research Centre |
| **KoiSPE** | Social cooperative of limited liability, *KoinonikoiSineterismoiPeriorismenisEfthinis* (Greece) |
| **KoiSEn** | Social cooperative of inclusion, *KoinonikosSineterismosEntaxis* (Greece) |
| **KoinSEpEntaxis** | Social cooperative enterprises of integration, *KoinonikesSineteristikesEpihirisisEntaxis* (Greece) |
| **KoinSEpEntaxisEidikonOmadon** | Social cooperative enterprises of integration of special groups (Greece) |
| **KoinSEpEntaxisEvalotonOmadon** | Social cooperative enterprises of integration of vulnerable groups (Greece) |

| | |
|---|---|
| **MS** | Member State |
| **N.A.** | Not Available |
| **NEET** | Not in Education, Employment or Training |
| **NGO** | Non-governmental organisation |
| **OECD** | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| **ONL** | Online |
| **PLMP** | Passive Labour Market Policies |
| **PTCE** | Territorial Pole of Economic Cooperation, *Pôle territoriaux de coopération économique* (France) |
| **PWD** | Person With Disabilities |
| **RFID** | Radio-frequency identification |
| **SCIC** | Collective interest cooperative company, *Société Coopérative d'Intérêt Collectif* (France) |
| **SE** | Social Enterprise |
| **SEE** | South-Eastern Europe |
| **SIAE** | Employers' organisation for work integration and training, *Structure d'insertion par l'activité économique* (France) |
| **SINE** | Social integration economy, *Sociale Inschakelingseconomie* (Belgium) |
| **SÖB** | Socio-economic enterprises, *Sozialökonomischer Betrieb* (Austria) |
| **SUEM** | Association for Supported Employment (Belgium) |
| **UN** | United Nations |
| **UNDP** | United Nations Development Programme |
| **UPA** | Sheltered workshop, *Unitati Protejate Autorizate* (Romania) |
| **VET** | Vocational Education and Training |
| **VZW** | Non-profit association, *Vereniging Zonder Winstoogmerk* (Belgium) |
| **WCAG** | Web Content Accessibility Guidelines |
| **WISE** | Work Integration Social Enterprise |
| **WP** | Work Package |
| **WSN** | Worker with Support Needs |
| **WSW** | Social Workforce Act, *Wet Sociale Werkvoorziening* (The Netherlands) |
| **ZPCh** | Supported employment enterprise, *Zakład Pracy Chronionej* (Poland) |

## List of tables

## List of boxes





# INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the main drivers, features and development trends of work integration social enterprises (WISEs) in the 27 European Union Member States and it examines skills needs and gaps of WISEs' workers, especially in the digital area. The aim of the report is to contribute to developing a new strategic approach (Blueprint) to sectoral cooperation on the skills needed so as to reinforce the empowering work of WISEs in strengthening the skills of WISEs' workers and to sustainably tackle the digitalisation challenges they face.

The report draws on 27 Country Fiches and on the findings of an empirical analysis consisting of both a face-to-face and an online survey carried out in the 13 B-WISE partner countries[1].

The report takes some steps further towards mapping the WISE sector in the European Union (EU) and it sheds some light on the main challenges faced by these organisations in their endeavour to integrate workers with support needs (WSNs).

The first chapter of the report – which focuses on the 27 EU Member States (MSs) – analyses both the main limitations of the labour market and the weaknesses of the labour policies that have been implemented to support the work integration of WSNs.

1 B-WISE partner countries are: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, and Slovenia.

Grant Agreement: 621509-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-EPPKA2-SSA-B
This publication has been co-funded by the European Commission. The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Agency and Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.
Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

Most of the policy measures implemented have indeed proved unable to ensure a balanced allocation of the available labour force and have thus paved the way to new alternative initiatives, which have in some instances emerged from below and in some other cases have been the outcome of an evolutionary process of existing organisations. They have been named work integration social enterprises (WISEs) because, regardless of their genesis, this trend has led to innovative integration pathways specifically designed to support WSNs.

Following an in-depth investigation of the key features of WISEs, including their added value, their drivers and their development patterns, Chapter 2 analyses the integration models WISEs have experimented with so as to integrate people that are distant to the labour market. Moreover, the chapter scrutinises the key fields of economic activity of WISEs, which are in most countries labour-intensive industries characterised by low added-value jobs with a progressive broadening of the domains of activity so as to include new fields with a higher added value, such as information and communication technologies (ICT), culture and the management of cultural heritage.

The following chapter (Chapter 3) maps the legal structures of WISEs in the 27 EU MSs. Attention is paid to both legally recognised WISEs – via e.g., specific statuses or the adjustment of cooperative legislation – and WISEs that are operating "outside the radar", as they are not defined as such either by the same organizations or by other stakeholders. Alongside countries that are not endowed with specific legal frameworks for WISEs, there are countries where despite the introduction of ad hoc legislation, newly established WISEs continue to use legal forms that have not been designed for them. This occurs precisely when new legal forms or statuses show severe shortcomings. Noteworthy are moreover those countries where changes in legislation have been either essential or key in fostering the development of WISEs on a wide scale. Finally, in a last group of countries WISEs use legal forms or statuses that were originally introduced to regulate sheltered workshops, but over the years their scope has broadened: they have started to include other forms of disadvantages and they have shifted towards a stronger entrepreneurial stance.

Chapter 4 explores the mix of public and private resources WISEs rely upon, including non-monetary; non-repayable resources (public and private); repayable resources (public and private); fiscal breaks and public and private resources from income generating activities thanks to the purchase of goods and services by public authorities and private clients. As highlighted by various Country Fiches, in more than a few countries WISEs emerged bottom-up with very little resources at their disposal, solely or mostly thanks to the commitment of volunteers. However, the recognition by public authorities of the role played by WISEs in favouring the work integration of persons otherwise excluded from the labour market has provided them with public support, including the introduction of measures targeting WISEs (e.g., subsidies and grants to cover investments in fixed assets, support for workplace adaptation, support

for training) and recipients (e.g., subsidies covering part of the wages of WSNs). Furthermore, fiscal measures benefiting WISEs are found in most of the countries analysed, being their rationale to reduce the higher costs incurred by WISEs, which are notably related to the training and supervision of WSNs.

The following chapter (Chapter 5) illustrates the context of emergence and the patterns of evolution of WISEs in three groups of countries: Central and Eastern European countries (i.e., Bulgaria, Croatia, Latvia, Poland, Romania and Slovenia), Southern Europe (i.e., Greece, Italy and Spain) and Western Europe (i.e., Austria, Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands). Attention is paid to the diverse connections of WISEs with labour policies and to the different degrees of integration of WISEs in the welfare systems.

Chapter 6 critically comments on the findings of the face-to-face survey that covered a selected sample of WISEs in the 13 B-WISE participating countries[2], given the aim of developing a comprehensive EU strategy to tackle the skills gaps in the WISEs sector, covering not only the skills needs of WSNs but also those of their supporters and of those who can enable an adequate working environment. Against this background, the survey focused on: enablers (e.g., chief executive officers (CEOs), chief human resources officers (CHROs), chief financial officers (CFOs), staff managers, area coordinators, project managers, and ICT specialists); supporters (e.g., job coaches, tutors, and mentors); and WSNs (e.g., people with physical and/or sensory disabilities; people with intellectual and/or learning disabilities; people with psycho-social disabilities and/or mental illnesses; people with substance use disorders; convicts and ex-convicts; people in long-term unemployment; homeless people; asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants; people aged 16-29 not in education, employment or training (NEET); women survivors of violence; members of ethnic minorities and people with low qualifications). The selection of technical and soft skills investigated reflects the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) framework[3] that is run by the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) of the European Commission (EC) and refers to the European multilingual classification of skills, competences, and occupations. This chapter also explores the existing training initiatives that are being promoted by WISEs to improve their workers' technical and soft skills.

Chapter 7 draws on the findings of the face-to-face survey and of an additional online survey specifically designed to assess the state of play of technology, digitisation and digital skills of WISEs in the 13 B-WISE participating countries. The chapter investigates the current and future relevance of technology and digitisation in WISEs in three specific domains, namely: standardised production processes, adaptation of individual workplaces and management processes. The current implementation of technologies such as e.g., cloud computer services, assistive-inclusive technology

2 Detailed information on the methodology is available in the Methodological Note (Annex A).
3 For more information on ESCO, see: https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1326&langId=en.

and communication technologies is also assessed. Moreover, the chapter investigates to what extent WISEs rely on internal and/or external ICT specialists and the main hindering factors for technologisation and digitisation in WISEs. Lastly, digital skills relevance and level of endowment of the three target groups are examined. Digital skills were conceptualised and measured according to the European Digital Competence Framework for citizens (DigComp 2.1)[4]. Attention is also devoted to training initiatives promoted by WISEs to address their workers' digital skills gaps.

The final chapter (Chapter 8) highlights some recent trends and challenges faced by WISEs in the studied countries.

The report includes four annexes. Annex A (Methodological Note) illustrates the methodology designed for the research activities carried out in the framework of the B-WISE work package "Research – State of Art". Annex B includes a Glossary, developed as a tool for the drafting of the Country Fiches and aimed at enhancing a common understanding of key terms that are often interpreted differently by different stakeholders in different countries. Annex C includes a set of Good Practices collected in the 13 B-WISE partner countries showing innovative solutions adopted by WISEs for developing digital skills that can be potentially transferred in other contexts, regions or countries so as to address skills shortages and mismatches. Finally, Annex D includes a set of 27 synthetic Country Fiches providing summarised information on the legal recognition of WSNs; on the labour policies designed to increase the employment opportunities of WSNs (i.e. regulatory, compensation, and substitutive policies); and an overview of the WISEs typologies and number mapped in each country; as well as information on e.g., the typologies and number of WSNs employed, the predominant integration model adopted, and main fields of activity in which WISEs are engaged in.

4 For more information on DigComp, see: https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/digcomp/digital-competence-framework_en.



# 1. THE LABOUR MARKET: TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

Drawing on the Country Fiches delivered by B-WISE partners and experts, as well as on relevant literature, this chapter analyses the limitations of the labour market and the weaknesses of the labour policies that have been implemented to support the work integration of WSNs. Attention is paid to the 27 EU Member States.

## 1.1 Workers with support needs

Work is crucial to both the welfare of every human being and to the stability of societies. However, unlike the standard assumptions of neoclassical theoretical models, the labour market is far from being perfect. Labour markets are characterized by information imperfections, asymmetries, and constraints that sharply reduce employment opportunities for some categories of workers (Borzaga and Defourny, 2001).

In addition to criticism from an ethical and civic point of view, failure to integrate all potentially productive workers in the labour market places relevant economic burdens on other people and on the entire society (Yeo and Moore, 2003). In essence, unemployment is a source of inefficiency that has broader effects than its strictly economic consequences (Yeo and Moore, 2003; Galera, 2010).

Grant Agreement: 621509-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-EPPKA2-SSA-B
This publication has been co-funded by the European Commission. The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Agency and Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.
Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

Exclusion from the labour market generates significant costs for public finances: it causes an increased expenditure of social transfers and health costs (Bramba and Eikemo, 2009; Perotìn, 2012) firstly due to the psychological damaging and stigma effects of exclusion upon the health conditions of the persons concerned. The severe social disadvantages generated by unemployment expose moreover individuals to impoverishment and poverty may in turn worsen the severity of the disadvantage faced (Fuchs, 2014; World Bank, 2014).

Difficulties in finding work do not affect everyone equally: they vary to a significant extent according to peoples' characteristics and contextual factors. In addition to personal characteristics – physical, social, or demographic – which influence employers' perceptions on the productivity of workers, there are also contextual conditions and cultural aspects impacting significantly upon the employability of WSNs.

Contextual factors affecting the extent to which individuals and groups are able to participate in the labour market include among others globalization and changes to the division of labour, which often result in job losses, insecurity and lower wages for the workers with most severe support needs to begin with (Spear and Bidet, 2005). International competition and economic restructuring are prompting dramatic changes upon the labour markets, which have been further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic: some traditional jobs are disappearing, and new ones are emerging. While making work more precarious, these trends have increased the conditions for social exclusion of WSNs in the labour market.

At the same time, social transformations and advancements, such as changing rates of female participation, social and health achievements and innovative approaches to some types of diseases and social concerns, have progressively pushed towards the work integration of people who were until recently condemned to exclusion from public life. Examples of trends that have positively influenced the perception of society towards given fragile groups are for instances changes in attitude and policy towards mentally ill patients, prompted by the deinstitutionalization of social care, and the evolution of standards in crime prevention and criminal justice so as to reintegrate prisoners in compliance with norms and socio-cultural advancements (Spear and Bidet, 2005). Noteworthy achievements that have positively affected the reintegration into society of given target groups are moreover the survival of infants affected by more or less severe disabilities (Borzaga and Galera, 2016).

Demographic and social changes coupled with the rapidly changing world of work have made it nevertheless increasingly more difficult to match the labour demand with supply, calling hence for dedicated policies aiming to tackle both labour market and social exclusion.

### 1.1.1 Conditions of disadvantage

Workers are in need of support – and hence disadvantaged with respect to the labour market – when they have some characteristics that let the employer assume that they are less productive than other workers. Enterprises tend indeed to recruit only those workers who – regardless of their actual productivity – bear positive signals and exclude workers who are characterised by negative signals, for example a physical or mental disability (Galera, 2010). In essence, selection processes tend to favour workers that provide for positive signals thanks to their qualifications, working experience and previous training, while they discriminate against workers bearing negative signals. As a result, the labour market assumes a dualistic character with on the one hand skilled workers with good career prospects, and on the other hand workers that are at risk of labour market exclusion (Borzaga, 2006).

The most recognized cause of exclusion from the labour market is "disability"[5]. In spite of the numerous conventions and laws that have been adopted with the goal of removing the barriers of exclusion and stimulating the work integration of persons with disabilities (PWDs), false beliefs about work and disability are still widespread (ONCE and ILO Global Business and Disability Network, 2021).

According to data from the European Disability Forum (EDF), only 50.8% of PWDs are employed (versus 74.8% of people without disabilities) and unemployment rates PWDs aged 20-64 are 7% higher than that of persons without disabilities. The main reasons are misconceptions and judgments on PWDs, which are nevertheless not supported by empirical data, but are rather based on prejudices and evaluations provided by an imperfect labour market (Social Economy Europe, 2020).

Differences concern also formal education and training. Available data indicates that PWDs are less likely to be in education than persons without disabilities. Education rates of PWDs aged 18-29 amount to 32.5% versus 38.3% for persons without disabilities. The educational gap of PWDs is particularly evident in MSs that joined the EU in the 2000s and concerns particularly NEETs. While they struggle to access formal education, PWDs are more engaged in non-formal education and training than persons without disabilities (Policy Impact Lab, 2019).

According to the European Parliament (2020), only slightly more than 50% of PWDs are employed at EU level compared to 74.8% of people without disabilities. PWDs have also a higher unemployment rate (17.1% vs. 10.2%) and a lower activity rate (61.0% vs. 82.3%). The gap is largest in Central Eastern European countries, smaller in some Western and Scandinavian EU MSs (e.g., Finland, France, Luxembourg, and Sweden) (Policy Impact Lab, 2019). Greater cross-country variations are moreover to be noticed between developing versus developed countries.

5 There is no universally accepted definition of "disability": the term refers to a variety of disabilities with different support needs. This heterogeneity leads to difficulties in the collection of comparable statistical data on the extent of employment of PWDs (Policy Impact Lab, 2019).

Nevertheless, when it comes to data analysis, it should be considered that many PWDs are not registered as unemployed and this inevitably leads to an underestimation of the number of unemployed PWDs. On top of this, PWDs are more likely to be engaged in the informal economy. And, amongst PWDs, women with disabilities end up being more disadvantaged than men (Policy Impact Lab, 2019).

Workers qualify as disadvantaged with respect to the labour market not only if they have a disability, but also due to other specific characteristics, including lack of skills or low educational level. However, these limitations – including disability – should not be considered in absolute terms, but rather in specific organizational contexts. Limitations are sometimes temporary, limited or surmountable thanks to individualized supported pathways. Taking for granted that all jobs should be adapted to the specific and diverse characteristics and inclinations of workers, some limitations can be overcome through specific training or the adaptation of the working place and working conditions.

Over the last three decades, the conditions blamed for generating severe disadvantages for certain people in the labour market have gone through an evolution. At the same time, the diversification of needs in society have led to a progressive broadening of the categories of persons that struggle to enter the labour market and that may be regarded as disadvantaged. The same conception of disability has been reinterpreted. Whereas for centuries PWDs were defined by their physical conditions, it is now well recognized that disabilities are relative and result from the interaction between individual's functional capacities and their surrounding environment, both social and physical. The reconceptualization of disability considers a social rather than an individual problem and presupposes a shift toward a view that considers PWDs actors who can make their own contribution and must be fully integrated into society (Savedoff, 2006).

A recent definition of disadvantaged workers, severely disadvantaged workers, and workers with disabilities is provided by the EU Commission Regulation 651/2014 (art. 2).

***Box 1. EU definitions of disadvantaged worker, severely disadvantaged worker and worker with disabilities***

**Disadvantaged worker** means any persons who:

a. has not been in regular paid employment for the previous 6 months; or
b. is between 15 and 24 years of age; or
c. has not attained an upper secondary educational or vocational qualification (International Standard Classification of Education 3) or is within two years after completing full-time education and who has not previously obtained his or her first regular paid employment; or
d. is over the age of 50 years; or
e. lives as a single adult with one or more dependents; or
f. works in a sector or profession in a Member State where the gender imbalance is at least 25% higher than the average gender imbalance across all economic sectors in that Member State, and belongs to that underrepresented gender group; or
g. is a member of an ethnic minority within a Member State and who requires development of his or her linguistic, vocational training or work experience profile to enhance prospects of gaining access to stable employment.

**Severely disadvantaged worker** means any persons who:

a. has not been in regular paid employment for at least 24 months; or
b. has not been in regular paid employment for at least 12 months and belongs to one of the categories (b) to (g) mentioned under the definition of "disadvantaged worker".

**Worker with disabilities** means any person who:

a. is recognised as worker with disabilities under national law; or
b. has long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment(s) which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in a work environment on an equal basis with other workers.

Table 1.1 compares the definition of disadvantaged workers provided by the EU Commission Regulation 651/2014 with national definitions. EU countries are classified into 5 groups: (i) countries in which there is no legal definition of disadvantaged workers; (ii) countries in which there is substantial correspondence between categories of workers regarded as disadvantaged by the EU and by national legislation; (iii) countries in which there is a misalignment between the national definition and the EU one, i.e., some categories included in the EU definition are not considered by the national definition, while additional categories are conversely regarded as disadvantaged; (iv) countries in which the national definition is broader, i.e., it includes additional categories of workers; (v) countries in which the national definition is narrower, i.e., it excludes categories that are taken into consideration by the EU definition.

### *Table 1.1. Comparison between EU definition of disadvantaged workers and country definitions*

| Comparison with EU definition of disadvantaged workers | Countries |
|---|---|
| No national definition | Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania |
| Alignment with EU definition | Estonia, Hungary, Slovenia |
| Misalignment with EU definition | Austria, Croatia, Denmark, France, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Slovakia, Spain |
| Broader than EU definition | Belgium (Wallonia), Bulgaria, Czechia, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania |
| Narrower than EU definition | Belgium (Flanders), Cyprus, Finland, Germany, Luxembourg, Sweden |

An example of the first group of countries are the Netherlands, where the term "disadvantaged persons" has not been legally defined. It should however be noted that the absence of a legal definition does not mean that disadvantaged persons are neglected by the Dutch government, where professionals working in social services are expected to design individualised support services on the basis of people's needs (Kemkes et al., 2021). Conversely, in Romania the lack of a legal definition of disadvantaged workers leads to a lack of focus of employment policies. Activation measures targeting WSN, including PWDs, are in place but they are not effective in providing tailor-made services (Vamesu, 2021).

Estonia, Hungary and Slovenia adopted the EU definition of disadvantaged workers provided by the EU Commission Regulation 651/2014. For instance, in Slovenia the Act on Social entrepreneurship (2011), the Act on Promotion of balanced regional development (2011) and the Act on Labour market regulation (2010) all incorporates the EU definition.

In the majority of EU countries, the current national definition of disadvantaged worker is to diverse extent misaligned with the EU definition. For instance, the legislation in force in Slovakia includes among the categories of disadvantaged workers also persons residing in a less developed district.

When comparing the EU definition of disadvantaged workers with national definition, Belgium (Wallonia), Bulgaria, Czechia, Greece, Ireland and Lithuania adopt a broader approach, which includes for instance in the case of Greece homeless people, persons living in poverty and persons with cultural peculiarities. Interestingly, Bulgaria has opted for an open-ended definition which may include any category of persons with support needs.

Finally, the approach in defining disadvantaged workers is narrower in Belgium (Flanders), Cyprus, Finland, Germany, Luxembourg and Sweden. Finland excludes from the category of disadvantaged workers for instance members of ethnic minorities and persons over 50 years old. However, these groups are entitled to access specific social benefits.

## 1.2 The impact of labour policies

Since their formation, modern welfare states have adopted labour policies to favour a more effective allocation of the labour force. The role of labour policies is to ensure that all workers can find suitable jobs that allow them to make adequate use of their capabilities and to acquire any missing abilities that may boost their competitiveness (Galera, 2010).

Indeed, the presence of given limitations do neither jeopardize necessarily productivity in all possible working tasks, nor prevent permanently the social and professional advancement of workers. Some limitations and barriers can for instance be overcome through an adaptation of workplaces or through ad hoc training (Borzaga, 2012).

Policies designed to sustain WSNs can be classified into four main groups:

- **Regulatory policies**, which consist of the adoption of quota systems that oblige all or some enterprises to hire a minimum percentage of WSNs.
- **Compensation policies**, which are designed to encourage enterprises to employ WSNs by compensating them for the lower productivity of the WSNs employed or for the hiring and training costs involved.
- **Substitutive policies**, which are aimed at creating a "substitutive labour market" that is an out-of-the market demand for WSNs specifically.
- **Supported employment**, which consists of a mix of policies that intervene directly with dedicated tutors to support the selection and training costs of enterprises integrating WSNs to work.

### 1.2.1 Regulatory policies

Regulatory policies are present in all EU MSs, but not in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden (Latvia introduced a system of quota in 1992, which has never been implemented and was then abolished in 1996). Key beneficiaries of regulatory policies are PWDs; exceptions are provided by Greece and the Netherlands, where regulatory policies target a broader range of WSNs, including but not limited to PWDs[6].

While in some countries (e.g., Belgium-Wallonia, Ireland) quota systems are foreseen only for public enterprises; in some others they address exclusively private enterprises (e.g., Croatia, France and Slovakia). Both public and private enterprises are conversely targeted by regulatory policies in the remaining countries (e.g., Austria, Bulgaria, Czechia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Spain). Generally, quotas are only valid above a certain workforce threshold, which ranges between 15 (Italy) and 50 employees (e.g., Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Spain). Conversely, the required quota ranges between 2% (e.g., Malta and Spain) and 8% (Greece) – only for private and public enterprises with 50 or more employees.

Almost all countries that rely on regulatory policies apply sanctions to employers who do not meet the required quota. Sanctions amounts vary across countries. In most cases, they are linked to the established minimum wage (e.g., in Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia). Fines are usually channeled into special funds that are meant to support measures specifically designed to support the work integration of PWDs[7].

In some countries, enterprises that employ more PWDs than the required quota are awarded a bonus. For instance, in Slovenia, employers exceeding the prescribed quota of PWDs employed are exempted from paying the pension and disability insurance contribution for each PWD employed above the quota[8].

Some quota systems provide for the possibility to meet, in some instances partially, quota requirements through alternative measures, mainly consisting in the purchase of goods and/or services produced by sheltered workshops, WISEs or self-employed PWDs (e.g., Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, France, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain). According to the Spanish Royal Decree 364/2005, enterprises that are expected to fulfil quota requirements (2% of PWDs in public and 5% in private enterprises with 50 or more employees) can choose among three alternative measures: i) establishing a contract with a Special Employment Centre or with a self-employed PWD, for the supply of raw materials, machinery, capital goods or any other type of goods and

6 Some countries (e.g., Austria, Belgium, Finland and Portugal) provide also for gender quotas.

7 E.g., *Fondo per l'inserimento lavorativo delle persone con disabilità in Italy, Państwowy Fundusz Rehabilitacji Osób Niepełnosprawnych in Poland, Ausgleichstaxfond* in Austria.

8 Decree on the quota for the employment of PWDs (21/14), art. 9.

services; ii) making donations and sponsorship actions, always of monetary nature, for the development of labour insertion activities and job creation PWDs; iii) establishing a work enclave, after signing a contract with a Special Employment Centre. In Spain, most enterprises choose to carry out alternative measures.

The evasion rate of quota requirements is quite high in most countries. For instance, in 2019 in Austria, 78.6% of the enterprises obliged to hire PWDs did not fulfill the quota requirements, resulting in an overall amount of approximately 160 million EUR of compensation fees being paid into the existing fund (Sozialministeriumservice, 2020).

Overall, the impact of quota systems has not been thoroughly analysed. However, available empirical data provided by the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research shows that quota systems only lead to small net employment gains (Fuchs, 2014). Failure to achieve the targets seems to be due to the embedded rationale of quota systems, which presupposes that WSNs are uncompetitive.

### *Table 1.2. National quota systems*

| Country | Target group(s) | Employer(s) obliged to meet the quota | Quota required by law | Sanctions in case of non-fulfilment | Alternative measures |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Austria | PWDs | Public and private employers with more than 25 employees | 1 PWD every 25 employees | Yes | No |
| Belgium | PWDs | Federal administrative public service | 3% of the full-time equivalent work capacity of each department | No | No |
| Wallonia | PWDs | Public employers | 2.5% of the full-time equivalent work capacity. If the quota is not reached, 5% of new recruitments are reserved for PWDs | No | No |
| Flanders | - | - | - | - | - |
| Bulgaria[9] | PWDs | Private employers with more than 50 employees | 1 PWD for employers with 50-99 employees; 2% of the staff if more than 100 employees | Yes | Buy goods and services produced by WISEs or self-employed PWDs |
| | PWDs | Public sector employers with at least 26 employees | 1 PWD for employers with 26-50 employees; 2% of the staff if more than 50 employees | Yes | Buy goods and services produced by WISEs or self-employed PWDs |
| Croatia | PWDs | Private employers with more than 20 employees | From 2% to 6% of the staff depending on the field of activity and the number of employees | Yes | Award contracts to sheltered/integrative workshops or other WISEs or self-employed PWDs; others. |

9 According to the Labour Code (last modified in 2022), both private and public employers with more than 50 employees are obliged to annually determine workplaces suitable for employment from 4 to 10% of the total number of employees depending on the economic activity (art. 315). Moreover, ministers, heads of other departments, municipal councils and private employers with more than 300 are obliged to establish specialized enterprises/workshops and other work units for persons with permanently reduced working capacity (art. 316).

| Country | Target group(s) | Employer(s) obliged to meet the quota | Quota required by law | Sanctions in case of non-fulfilment | Alternative measures |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cyprus | PWDs | Public sector employers, secondary education institutes | 10% of the staff | No | No |
| Czechia | PWDs | Public and private employers with more than 25 employees | 4% of the staff | Yes | Buy goods and services or award contracts to sheltered workshops or self-employed PWDs |
| Denmark | - | - | - | - | - |
| Estonia | - | - | - | - | - |
| Finland | - | - | - | - | - |
| France | PWDs | Private employers with more than 20 employees | 6% of the staff | Yes | Buy goods and services from sheltered workshops |
| Germany | PWDs | Public and private employers with more than 20 employees | 5% of the staff | Yes | No |
| Greece | Protected people[10] | Public and private employers with more than 50 employees | 8% of the staff | Yes | No |
| Hungary | PWDs | Public and private employers with more than 25 employees | 5% of the staff | Yes | Hire PWDs through secondments |
| Ireland | PWDs | Public sector employers | 3% of the staff | n.a. | No |

10 According to Law 2643/1998, last modified with Law 4765/2021: large families with four or more children, one of the children from a large family and the surviving or unmarried parent of three minor children; persons with a disability rate of at least 50% and those who have a child, a brother or a spouse with a disability rate of 67%; persons who took part in the National Resistance as per Law 1285/1982; PWDs and the wounded of war; other categories.

| Country | Target group(s) | Employer(s) obliged to meet the quota | Quota required by law | Sanctions in case of non-fulfilment | Alternative measures |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Italy | PWDs[11] | Public and private employers with more than 15 employees | 1 PWD for employers with 15-35 employees;<br>2 PWDs if 36-50 employees;<br>7% of the staff if more than 50 employees | Yes | Buy goods and services produced by WISEs |
| Latvia | - | - | - | - | - |
| Lithuania | - | - | - | - | - |
| Luxembourg[12] | Disadvantaged workers[13] | Public sector employers | 5% of the staff | Yes | No |
| | Disadvantaged workers[11] | Private employers with more than 25 employees | 1 PWD for employers with 25-49 employees; 2% of the staff if 50-299 employees;<br>4% of the staff if more than 300 employees | Yes | No |
| Malta | PWDs | Public and private employers with more than 20 employees | 2% of the staff | Yes | No |
| Netherlands | Disadvantaged workers[14] | Public and private employers with more than 25 employees | 2.35% of the staff | Yes[15] | Hire partnerships and long-term secondments |

11 Including occupational, war and service invalids.

12 According to the Labour Code (consolidated version 2011), art. 543-29: in the scenario of a worsening youth employment crisis, private sector employers with at least 100 employees must hire young jobseekers in a proportion of 1% of the number of employees they employ overall.

13 According to the Labour Code (consolidated version 2021): PWDs; workers eligible for internal vocational redeployment; job seekers who have recently been working under an employment initiation or employment re-integration contract; young job seekers.

14 There is no legal definition of disadvantaged workers in force in the Netherlands. Social services professionals are expected to assess people's support needs and design tailored-made support policies (Kemkes et al., 2021).

15 Sanctions are suspended until 2024.

| Country | Target group(s) | Employer(s) obliged to meet the quota | Quota required by law | Sanctions in case of non-fulfilment | Alternative measures |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Poland | PWDs | Public and private employers with more than 25 employees | 6% of the staff[16] | Yes | No |
| Portugal | PWDs | Private employers | 1% of the staff for employers with 75-250 employees; 2% of the staff if more than 250 employees. | Yes | No |
| | PWDs | Public sector employers | 5% of the staff for public tenders with 10 or more places available | Yes | No |
| Romania | PWDs | Public and private employers with more than 50 employees | 4% of the staff | Yes | Buy goods and services from sheltered workshops (only up to 50% of the gross min. basic income) |
| Slovakia | PWDs | Private employers with more than 20 employees | 3.2% of the staff | Yes | Buy goods and services produced by WISEs, sheltered workshops or self-employed PWDs |
| Slovenia | PWDs | Public and private employers with more than 20 employees | From 2% to 6% of the staff depending on the field of activity and the number of employees | Yes | Establish business cooperation agreements with two typologies of WISEs: companies for PWD or employment centres |
| Spain | PWDs | Public employers with more than 50 employees | 5% of the staff | n.a. | Award contracts to WISEs or self-employed PWDs; donations/sponsorships of work integration activities; establishment of a work enclave with a WISE |
| | PWDs | Private employers with more than 50 employees | 2% of the staff | n.a. | |
| Sweden | - | - | - | - | - |

16 The quota may be reduced if the degree of disability of PWDs hired is high.

### 1.2.2 Compensation policies

Compensation policies are designed to encourage enterprises to employ WSNs by compensating enterprises for their lower productivity or for the hiring and training costs involved.

There are many different forms of compensation measures and each one is subject to specific national laws and regulations. The most common forms of compensation are:

1. Incentives for the recruitment of WSNs persons (e.g., wage subsidies; reduced/ exemption from the payment of social security contributions; special bonuses/ grants/tax credit/insurances for incentivising the recruitment);
2. funding for training and guidance before recruitment (e.g., coaching, vocational training, consulting, scholarships);
3. funding for the adjustment of the workplace to better suit the needs of WSNs (e.g., adjustment of the workstations, tool and clothes; job assistance with job coaches, tutors, interpreters or other professional figures);
4. financial coverage for paid internships for WSNs;
5. other measures (e.g., incentives for self-employment such as loans, consultations, financial support).

When compared to regulatory policies, compensation policies target a broader spectrum of WSNs. Depending on the country, beneficiaries may include – in addition to PWDs – unemployed women, long term unemployed, severely disadvantaged persons, NEET, people older than 58, people under 26 living in priority neighbourhoods, convicts, etc.

The main difficulty with compensation policies seems to be calculating the required compensation. There are moreover two side-effects of compensation policies: they tend to exclude workers that bear severe disadvantages and have a stigma effect, which prevents the full empowerment of the beneficiaries (Galera, 2010).

### 1.2.3 Substitutive policies

Substitutive policies create a substitutive labour market, where WSNs are integrated. These protected markets can be promoted in the public sector, in public sheltered enterprises or in private enterprises that are created ad hoc.

According to the EC Regulation 651/2014 (art. 2), sheltered employment refers to employment in an undertaking where at least 30% of workers are workers with disabilities. Nevertheless, at the national level, sheltered workshops are defined in slightly different ways. According to EASPD, a sheltered workshop is a “simulated work environment and vocational training aimed to equip PWDs ideally with the skills for

open employment" (Policy Impact Lab, 2019: 18). In essence, the rationale embedded in a sheltered workshop is to adapt the work environment to the physical, mental or sensory disabilities of workers (Defourny, Gregoire and Davister, 2004).

Sheltered workshops have been traditionally created to integrate specifically PWDs. Exceptions are provided only by a few countries, like for instance Denmark, where sheltered workshops integrate a wider range of recipients, including people with problems such as homelessness and substance addictions.

While most sheltered workshops are focused on work activities, in some cases they also provide for vocational education and training (VET). This is precisely the case in the Flanders (Belgium), where some sheltered workshops train and prepare people who are not ready yet for employment, without paying them a wage. In practice, traditional sheltered workshops create places where PWDs can be supported in their endeavour to become more autonomous. It should however be acknowledged that if we exclude some specific cases – Belgium, Croatia, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain – where sheltered workshops have shifted towards a stronger entrepreneurial stance that has strengthened their capacity to fully integrate people at risk of labour market exclusion, technically speaking, sheltered workshops are not developed to integrate beneficiaries into work, as they do not pay them a regular salary. Furthermore, although no clear-cut methodologies for measuring financial sustainability exist, several studies indicate that sheltered workshops are not sustainable in strictly financial terms and they are not independent. In essence, the value created from sheltered workshop employment in terms of productive output is mostly outweighed by the (ongoing) costs of its operation (Policy Impact Lab, 2019).

Sheltered workshops have a longstanding tradition in several EU MSs, primarily in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, they were established by the 1969 Act on Social workforce (*Wet Sociale Werkvoorziening* – WSW), now replaced by the Participation Act of 2015, which introduced the *Beschut Werk scheme*. Under the WSW scheme, only public sheltered workshops subsidised by local governments existed, while nowadays under the *Beschut Werk scheme* also private enterprises can establish them (see Chapter 3). Sheltered workshops have existed in Belgium since 1958, when the Law on Training, retraining and social retraining of PWDs was introduced.

Conversely, sheltered workshops have a weak tradition in e.g., Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, and Romania. In Italy, sheltered workshop employment is a rather infrequent form of insertion: there are only a few experiences that target mainly people with severe forms of disadvantage such as intellectual disabilities or mental health problems. In Greece, the legal framework regulating sheltered workshops is still under development and for the time being, sheltered workshops are essentially informal forms of employment, which operate as departments of institutions/care units for PWDs supervised by the Ministry of Health, non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

and associations of parents and guardians of PWDs. In Romania, sheltered workshops (*unitati protejate autorizate* – UPA) were established more recently, by Law 448/2006 on the Protection of the rights of PWDs. They can be operated by both private and public institutions and they do not offer transition employment but permanent work contracts. Accordingly, they are not structured to provide support services to PWDs for their integration on the regular labour market. In Bulgaria, there is no tradition of sheltered employment whatsoever. Only two centres exist and sheltered employment was introduced as a term and practice only in 2017.

Negative side effects of traditional substitutive policies are thus firstly their low levels of productivity, high dependency upon public agencies, and incapacity to ensure the full integration of WSNs into the labour market, owing to a lack of employment contract and poor pay (O'Reilly, 2003).

On top of this, the high share of PWDs over the total workforce employed often results in the creation of ghettos and in segregation also of those workers that are potentially able to work. Segregation that sheltered workshops in many cases bring with them reveals the tension between protection and autonomy (May-Simera, 2018). Not surprisingly, since they do not adequately prepare PWDs for the labour market, sheltered workshops are in some instances regarded as the last option. This is how the Malta Federation of Organisations of PWDs sees sheltered workshops (Bezzina, 2019). In practical terms, although the stated policy of most sheltered workshops is to improve the transition to the regular labour market, transition rates are dramatically low: only 3% of people in Maltese sheltered workshops move on to the open labour market (European Parliament, 2015; Bezzina, 2019).

In light of the above-mentioned limitations and side-effects, the philosophy of sheltered workshops has been harshly debated and other employment measures that are more successful in empowering WSNs have come to the fore (Borzaga, 2012). The same United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, adopted in 2006), art. 27 calls for a shift in focus from sheltered employment schemes to alternative measures promoting equal access in the open labour market (Policy Impact Lab, 2019).

## 1.3 Supported employment

During the 1980s, given their ineffectiveness in coping with unemployment, passive labour market policies (PLMP), i.e., traditional policies designed to assist the unemployed, have been progressively complemented by new programmes (Borzaga and Loss, 2006). The system of unemployment benefits – via income transfers – have been gradually drawn into a new framework of active policies for employment, becoming a tool for structural adjustment (Garonna, 1990). The system of benefits was thus altered to provide incentives for occupational integration (Spear et al., 2001).

In some countries, the progressive shift from passive to active labour market policies (ALMP) was triggered by important policy changes, such as the deinstitutionalization of social care for PWDs and mental illnesses (Spear and Bidet, 2005). In Italy, in the 1980s the deinstitutionalization of care services paved the way for new initiatives aimed at fostering autonomy and social integration of people who were until then seen as recipients of custodial services. Similarly, in Sweden the closed institutions for people with mental disabilities were phased out in the wake of a psychiatric care reform of the 1990s, which led to a sudden need for daytime activities for these groups. Likewise, in Austria Law 155/1990 on Placement of patients with mental illnesses (i.e., *Unterbringungsgesetzt*), forbid placement of PWDs in closed psychiatric institutions or hospitals where PWDs were accommodated. The new law had thus an immense impact on the lives of PWDs (Flieger, Schönwiese and Wegscheider, 2013). The shift towards ALMP have encouraged the implementation of ad hoc measures aiming to discourage welfare dependency. In this framework, supported employment has become increasingly popular as a mix of policies supporting directly the selection and training costs of enterprises, and targeting in several cases a broad spectrum of fragile workers. It draws on a wide spectrum of measures, including individual placements, enclaves, mobile work crews, small business arrangements (Galera, 2010).

When it comes to the application of supported employment, country variations are significant. As a general trend, supported employment is nevertheless rather costly and complex and it is hence implemented mainly by public employment services and non-profit. In Austria, the initiatives of supported employment are promoted by the Austrian ALMP and provided through the Public Employment Service of Austria (*Arbeitmarktservice* – AMS): they target not only PWDs, but also long-term unemployed, people re-entering the labour market, PWDs and/or health issues, NEET and elderly workers (45+/50+). In Bulgaria, the implementation of supported employment is ensured mainly through the Employment Agency and the National Program for Employment and Training of People with Permanent Disabilities. Supported employment targets only unemployed people with permanent disabilities[17] and it is provided by both public enterprises and specialised enterprises and cooperatives for PWDs. The supported employment system in France targets mainly PWDs and it is managed by any legal person that has concluded a management agreement with a public employment service operator (*Pôle emploi*, *Cap emploi*, local mission, etc.).

In Belgium, initiatives of supported employment are coordinated by SUEM, the Belgian association for supported employment; they are addressed to all categories of WSNs. Italy and Spain provide for a few initiatives of supported employment, which are however regulated and managed at the regional level. In Italy they are promoted by the Public Employment Services, acting normally in cooperation with non-profit

17 Priority for people: 1. with and over 71% reduced working capacity; 2. military invalids; 3. people with sensory disabilities; 4. people with mental disabilities; 5. former addicts of working age.

organisations, and they are implemented via a voucher system addressed to job seekers specifically (not only PWDs).

Conversely, supported employment is not regulated by law in Greece, Croatia and Romania. In Greece some pilot supported employment initiatives are being promoted by non-profit centres created for the professional training of PWDs. These initiatives target only PWDs and are practised on a small scale. Likewise, in Slovenia, supported employment is foreseen exclusively for PWDs and it is provided mainly by companies for PWDs: it consists in a number of specialised services, including the supply of professional support through information, counselling and training, personal assistance, monitoring at work, development of personal work methods and evaluation of work performance.

Overall, supported employment is scarcely applied mostly due to financial constraints. It is moreover regarded as inefficient and ineffective in terms of activation of decent work integration opportunities especially for workers with most severe support needs.

To conclude, for different reasons mainstream labour policies – regulatory policies, compensation policies and supported employment – have proved unable to ensure a balanced allocation of the available labour force.



# 2. WISEs: DRIVERS, FEATURES AND MODELS OF INTEGRATION

This chapter sheds light on the key features of WISEs, including the distinctive models of integration they have developed. Attention is paid to the 27 EU MSs drawing on the Country Fiches delivered by B-WISE partners and experts, as well as on the relevant literature.

## 2.1 WISE specificities

### 2.1.1 Defining WISEs

Labour market failures have been compounded by several policy failures. Amongst them, the most evident has been recognising that many programmes – especially training programmes addressed to specific target groups – did not make the necessary connections between training and employment (Spear and Bidet, 2005). These failures have paved the way to new alternative initiatives (Aiken, 2007; Borzaga, 2012; Petrella and Richez-Battesti, 2016), which have in some instances emerged from below and in some other cases have been the outcome of an evolutionary process of existing organisations. They have been named Work Integration Social Enterprises

Grant Agreement: 621509-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-EPPKA2-SSA-B
This publication has been co-funded by the European Commission. The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Agency and Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.
Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

(WISEs) because regardless of their genesis, this trend has led to innovative integration pathways specifically designed to support WSNs.

Technically, a work integration social enterprise can be defined as an institutional mechanism of supported employment that favours workers discriminated against by conventional enterprises and provides them with appropriate on-the-job training (Borzaga and Loss, 2006).

In the past, PWDs were the only group regarded as in need of support, whereas in more recent times the concept of WSNs has been progressively enlarged and nowadays it includes diversified categories of vulnerable workers. Besides PWDs, many WISEs offer work integration pathways for long-term unemployed, older persons, migrants, NEETs, former convicts, and other groups who are at risk of exclusion from the labour market.

By directly involving people that, for diverse reasons, are perceived by employers of the open labour market as less productive than other workers, WISEs support their work integration, contribute to overcoming their disadvantages and have a role in advocating for the rights of these workers, by encouraging a change in mind-set of society (Aiken, 2007; Galera, 2010; Borzaga, 2012; Nyssens, et al., 2012).

### 2.1.2 WISEs as double output organisations

WISEs can be regarded as organisations simultaneously delivering two outputs. Firstly, WISEs – like any other business – are engaged in income-generating activities. They produce goods and/or services including, among others: manufacturing products, agriculture and maintenance of green areas and waste management activities that are sold on the market to both private and public clients[18]. In doing so, WISEs act according to market and contractual logic and can hence be regarded as full-fledged enterprises.

The second output of these organisations is the work (and social) integration of people with support needs otherwise excluded from the labour market. WISEs positive impact is evident not only at the individual level (e.g., improved labour market inclusion, work skills and networks of beneficiaries) but also at the broader community level, in terms of enhanced social cohesion and contribution to economic development (UNDP and EMES, 2008; Hiu-Kwan Chui, Shum and Lum, 2018).

Besides giving the opportunity to earn a wage and receive on-the-job and professional training, some WISEs adopt a holistic approach that gives emphasis to the social integration of the workers integrated thanks to a wide set of support services not limited to the work sphere, but covering other daily-life aspects that are crucial for actually enjoying the benefits of citizenship and participating in public life.

18 For more precise information about WISEs economic sectors of activity, see Section 2.4.

### 2.1.3 WISE added value

The capacity of WISEs to simultaneously pursue these two outputs can be ascribed to the experience and expertise accumulated in working with WSNs, which enables to design organisational processes that suit employees' needs. Within this framework, the economic activity run is instrumental to the achievement of WISEs' primary aim, which is integrating people systematically excluded from the labour market. These organisations are characterised by a markedly different enterprise culture when compared with conventional enterprises. In fact, the main criterion for the choice of the economic activity to be carried out is not to make a profit (as occurs in conventional enterprises), but its functionality for users' interests (Vidal, 2001). WISEs entrepreneurial orientation reflects their social mission of providing an institutional response to unemployment and contributing to a better allocation of human resources in society. As pointed out by Aiken (2007: 7), the mission of integrating people with support needs "is not an 'add-on' or optional element to the motivation of these organisation but a core reason for their existence with any surplus ploughed back into the needs of those people and their communities".

In a WISE, work processes are purposely organised so as to take stock of the skills of WSNs. Differently from conventional enterprises and other public employment policies, WISEs have accumulated a specific know-how and expertise that enables to assign hard-to-employ workers the most appropriate job tasks according to their capabilities, previous work experience, expectations and needs. The competitive advantage of these enterprises can be moreover ascribed to their capacity to combine employment and training elements while performing productive activities. This enhances employees' well-being and opportunities to find gainful employment and (re)gain autonomy (Spear and Bidet, 2005; Galera, 2010; Hiu-Kwan Chui, Shum and Lum, 2018). WISEs capacity to match employees' skills with the difficulties of the job tasks and to further improve their skills set are possible, above all, thanks to the presence, among the enterprise staff, of experienced staff, such as job coaches, psychologists, ergo therapists, trainers (i.e., supporters), who contribute to the process of taking stock of workers' unexploited skills and further foster their autonomy.

In some WISEs people with support needs can even experiment with active involvement in decision-making processes not only for shaping their daily work tasks but also for managing the WISE itself. Although depending to a significant extent on the legal structure, like all other social enterprises, WISEs often adopt strategies and/or governance models aiming to actively engage the concerned stakeholders. When WISEs are set up as cooperatives and associations, beneficiaries – together with volunteers, ordinary workers, sometimes public authorities and other relevant stakeholders – are sometimes encouraged to sit in the general assembly or in the board of directors. When participation of recipients in governing bodies is not envisaged or possible, informal strategies – such as the involvement in internal

meetings – that give WSNs the chance to exert their decision-making role is sometimes furthered. By doing so, WISEs do not just work for people with support needs but also *with* them.

Being key actors in the fight against the exclusion of people from the labour market and important contributors to their empowerment, WISEs are often seen as trusting organisations by communities, public institutions, trade unions, and for-profit enterprises (Borzaga and Loss, 2006; Aiken, 2007). WISEs' inclination to enhance the social capital that is embedded in a community is corroborated by their ability to establish collaborative processes with service users, other (work integration) social enterprises, public sector agencies, and for-profit conventional enterprises. The embeddedness in the community in which they operate creates the conditions for WISEs to contribute to the development of deprived communities (O'Connor and Meinhard, 2014) and to tackling additional challenges plaguing the territories wherein they operate. The social impact produced – as highlighted by Defourny and Nyssens (2010) – is thus not only a consequence of the economic activities carried out by WISEs, but their motivation in itself. Moreover, communities represent for WISEs a source of additional resources, such as voluntary work, donations and community assets free of charge that would not otherwise be used for the common good (Galera, 2010).

### *Box 2. ACTA VISTA (France)*[19]

**www.actavista.fr**

ACTA VISTA is a major player in the field of inclusion through heritage, and develops integration and training projects in heritage trades, aimed at people who are most excluded from the labour market. By using the restoration of historic monuments in accordance with the highest standards of craftsmanship, the project seeks to recruit, provide social and professional support, as well as practical training and qualifications for jobseekers. This approach, specific to ACTA VISTA, enables them not only to get back on track towards employment, but also to regain a sense of self-esteem and pride.

ACTA VISTA is an association located in Marseille, France, and was founded in 2002. The association operates at a national level with other construction sites in different areas of France (e.g., recently Château de Chambord in Centre Val de Loire, Fort de Feyzin in Auvergne Rhône-Alpes, Abbaye de Montmajour and Port-Miou castle in South region). Moreover, ACTA VISTA has recently started to develop European and Mediterranean collaboration projects with various partners.

19 Authored by Coline Pélissier, ACTA VISTA.

ACTA VISTA works in close collaboration with two other associations that are fully part of this innovative model, namely BAO Formation[20] and La Citadelle[21]. ACTA VISTA employs and supports the trainees; BAO Formation (which is a training organization) allows the trainees to obtain a diploma; and La Citadelle is responsible for the opening of the Fort d'Entrecasteaux site in Marseille. The three associations are part of a larger association network, Groupe SOS[22], which brings together 650 organizations and is a key player of the social economy in Europe. ACTA VISTA, BAO Formation and la Citadelle have about 50 permanent employees, including technical profiles of trainers and site supervisors, socio-professional managers, a team dedicated to pedagogical engineering, a team dedicated to the cultural and mediation part and common support functions (e.g., communication, sponsorship, administration).

500 people are employed, trained and supported each year, i.e., 5,000 people since the creation of the association. They are employed for a six-month contract, renewable once. The model works in permanent entry and exit: if a person finds a stable job or training, they leave ACTA VISTA. At the end of their path at ACTA VISTA (10 months on average), two out of three participants find a job or further training, 50% in the building industry and 50% in other sectors; and 9 out of 10 obtain a diploma at the end of the path (equivalent Youth Training – National Vocational Qualification, Level 1.2). 200,000 hours of training are provided each year. 35 sites have been restored and enhanced since 2002.

This employment scheme is possible thanks to the French policy of "integration through economic activity" which subsidizes the incomes of workers in order to fight unemployment. ACTA VISTA works closely with local companies, and BAO Formation develops training programs in line with the needs of the labour market. ACTA VISTA thus works with a network of public partners (State and decentralized services) and private partners (sponsors and employment partners).

20 www.baoformation.fr.
21 www.villeylesec.fr/La-Citadelle-association.
22 www.groupe-sos.org.

## 2.2 WISE drivers and development patterns

### 2.2.1 WISEs emerging bottom-up

High unemployment among certain groups and severe social exclusion are the key driver, which stimulated – especially in coincidence with severe economic, social and financial crises – the search for alternative integration pathways bottom-up.

The emergence of WISEs from below is a relevant pattern especially in Italy, Greece, Spain and France.

In Italy, the longstanding civic culture that stimulated the widespread development of cooperatives in the 19th century was revitalized in the 1960s–1970s by new social movements, when the welfare regime started to show the first symptoms of crisis (Borzaga and Galera, 2016). This new mobilization was triggered by the dramatic increase in new needs in society, generated by the remarkable transformations in family structures, including the decline of the family's role in providing social support as a result of greater female participation in the labour market and the shift from large to nuclear families. From being service providers, families progressively generated new needs of care and assistance that could hardly be addressed by the existing supply of public services. Other factors that had a role in expanding the demand for social services were connected with demographic transformations generated by the progressive ageing of the population, the economic recession and the growth of youth unemployment. Moreover, additional needs quickly started to emerge in society because of new social and health achievements and innovative approaches to some types of diseases that led, for instance, to the deinstitutionalization of mentally ill patients and the increased likelihood of survival at birth of infants affected by severe psychological and physical disabilities (Borzaga and Galera, 2016). One of the key drivers of the emergence of new initiatives aiming to foster autonomy and social integration of people who until then were seen only as recipients of assisting services, was precisely the deinstitutionalization of care services. This is the story of some of the first Italian WISEs, which, from the beginning of the 1980s onwards, were places of work and integration for people discharged from psychiatric hospitals when these were gradually closed by Law 180/1978. A similar path can be referred to PWDs, when they were first admitted to the normal school cycle (abolition of the differential classes for pupils with disabilities by Law 517/1977) and then started employment opportunities both within WISEs, and thanks to the mechanisms of targeted employment described above (Marocchi, et al., 2021).

As for Greece, cooperative ideals and practices started to regain new meaning and forms of implementation when the country was hit by multidimensional crises. The first driver was the implementation of restrictive economic policies, which caused cuts in public expenditure and especially in the social and welfare services. This,

together with the continuous immigration flows to Greece from the Balkans and Eastern Europe, has triggered an increase in social exclusion since the 1990s. This situation was furthermore aggravated by the existing mechanisms of matching supply and demand in the labour market, namely the Public Employment Services of Greece, relying mainly on traditional measures and procedures which made their role insignificant (Ziomas, Ketsetzopoulou and Bouzas, 2001). Similar to Italy, the development of WISEs in Greece is nevertheless strongly connected with the movement of psychiatric reform, which started when the conditions of mental health service provision inside the psychiatric hospitals and the overall effectiveness of mental health asylums was put under question (Adam, 2014). The terrible conditions that existed were exposed by the international press and the European Economic Community started pushing for reforms and provided extra financial support (Council Regulation – EEC 815/84[23]) in order for the psychiatric reform program to begin. One of the goals of the psychiatric reform programs "Psychargos", "Leros I" and "Leros II" was the work integration of persons with mental health problems and ex–residents of mental health asylums (Liatira, Karagouni and Tourlidas, 2021).

In Spain, the industrial crisis of the 1970s and the subsequent financial crisis, which coincided with the political process of transition to democracy, led to two negative consequences: a "market failure" (i.e., an insufficient demand for labour) and a "state failure" (i.e., the insufficient capacity of the state to respond to the growing demand for personal services). In the same years, unemployed or employees in danger of losing their jobs initiated jointly owned enterprises under two different legal forms: the traditional form of workers' cooperative and the employee-owned company (Vidal, 2001). A key role in supporting the emergence of WISEs was nevertheless played by the self-organization and empowerment of the WSNs themselves and their representative organizations. In this sense, it is worth highlighting the role played for instance by the ONCE Social Group, one of their strategic axes being the creation of employment opportunities and the labour inclusion of PWDs. This said, the longstanding history and strength of the disability movement in Spain also explains the current disproportion in terms of support between PWDs and other WSNs, who have been only recently recognized and are distinguished by much weaker or not so extended networks (Juviño, 2021).

### 2.2.2 WISEs deriving from sheltered workshops

Alongside the emergence of work integration from below, it is useful to dwell also on the transformation undertaken by sheltered workshops in more than a few countries where the latter have started to behave more and more like work integration social enterprises. This shift has in many cases implied a substantial change in terms of specific goals pursued, functioning and typology of goods and services delivered.

23 Council Regulation (EEC) No 815/84 of 26 March 1984 on exceptional financial support in favour of Greece in the social field. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:31984R0815&from=DE.

Sheltered workshops have indeed shifted from being mainly socialising spaces tailored to PWDs into full-fledged enterprises, the rationale being to provide regular employment for PWDs and in some cases more broadly for people with other disadvantages. Against this background, sheltered workshops have started to be structured so as to trade on the open market. While in the past, many sheltered workshops were mainly focused on the production of gift items or commodities incorporating a rather low added value, those that have shifted towards a stronger entrepreneurial stance offer today high-quality items and, in some cases, highly professional services.

### *Box 3. ANOBIUM Special Employment Centre (Spain)*[24]

**www.anobium.es**

ANOBIUM is a Spanish special employment centre focused on the integration of people with all types of disabilities (physical, sensory and mental). It does this through activities linked to innovation and technology, with digitalisation of documents as the most important activity. It also manages social networks and websites of businesses and organisations, organic positioning of websites in online search engines (search engine optimisation), and pay per click in online advertisements and marketing (search engine marketing). It clearly shows two lines of activity in its business model – one focused on supplying information and communication technology services to the market and the other on the work integration of PWDs.

ANOBIUM was officially founded in 2007. It divides its economic activity into three main areas: physical services, digital services and services of research and consultancy. It develops its economic activity simultaneously with the service of work integration, which is its *raison d'être* as a WISE. This is explained in the main objective of ANOBIUM: to focus on the person as the heart of their activity, providing a means for their socio-employment integration through decent work, a good work environment and employment security and stability, and supporting the personal development of the people who form the company.

The professional team is one of the key elements in the services provided by ANOBIUM. One of its most important departments is the Department of Human Resources (in the organisational chart this is located at the level of the managerial staff), as it manages the process of integrating PWDs into

24 Source: European Commission (2020c: 31).

the workforce. The work integration service plans the work patterns and routines of workers in order to ensure the stability of their jobs. It allows employment time to be balanced with training time in order to facilitate the inclusion of PWDs in the regular employment market. Thus, both social and employment integration of workers becomes the essence of ANOBIUM, and the development of services in the ICT industry is seen as an opportunity to continue expanding this work of integration into new niches of employment.

This work integration process is developed following protocols that have been perfected over time. The objective of systematising and professionalising the process of fostering and supporting is the acquisition and development of personal and social skills and work skills that will enable the person better access to work and the maintenance of a job.

In the Netherlands, sheltered workshops are nowadays seen as a stepping-stone to the conventional workforce and transition to the regular labour market is highly incentivized. The role of sheltered workshops has started to change in 2015. Up until then, only public institutions were entitled to set up sheltered workshops and they were highly subsidised by local governments. Following a progressive decrease of public subsidies, some sheltered workshops were forced to close or will likely close in the near future (Cedris, 2021). Sheltered workshops can now be operated also by private enterprises and are developing new products and finding new commercial clients. These sheltered workshops can be regarded as full-fledged WISEs. However, political discussions are now in place as the current transition rate of beneficiaries of sheltered workshops has been contested and the evaluation of the Participation Act has shown that some extra measures are necessary to improve the job opportunities for PWDs integrated in sheltered workshops. In Germany, sheltered workshops – called "inclusive enterprises" – ought to be regarded as full-fledged WISEs. They offer work integration not only to PWDs who are unable to participate in the general labour market due to the nature or severity of their disability, but since 2016 also to long-term unemployed persons with severe disabilities and persons with cognitive and psychological impairments. Similarly, in Spain special employment centres, although legally considered sheltered workshops, are to all effects WISEs.

Likewise, private sheltered workshops (at least 51% of workers must be PWDs) and integrative workshops in Croatia, and sheltered workshops and sheltered workplaces[25] in Slovakia can be regarded as WISEs. However, due to the strict

25 A (i) sheltered workshop is a workplace where a legal entity or individual person establishes more than one workplace for a PWD and where at least 50% of the workforce are PWDs. A (ii) sheltered workplace is a workplace where a legal person or individual person establishes a workplace for a PWD and the workplace is not established in a sheltered workshop. A workplace where a PWD is self-employed shall also be regarded as a sheltered workplace. A sheltered workplace may also be established in the home of a PWD. There are 1,621 sheltered workshop and 4,722 sheltered workplaces.

regulation of sheltered workshops (the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family register and control them, and do not allow them to carry out their activities outside the approved premises), in Slovakia some organizations are quitting the sheltered workshops status to apply for the status of work integration social enterprise. Among ALMP for the employment of PWDs, sheltered workshops and sheltered workplaces are the ones that receive more support and this disproportion has been highly criticised.

Table 2.1 groups the studied countries in three main categories: countries that are distinguished by a strong sheltered workshops tradition; those that have a weak tradition and finally those where sheltered workshops have turned into full-fledged work integration social enterprises.

***Table 2.1. Sheltered workshops***

| | Countries |
|---|---|
| Strong tradition | Austria, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Sweden |
| Weak tradition | Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, Romania |
| Transformed into WISEs | Belgium, Croatia, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain |

## 2.3 WISE integration models

The main objective of WISEs is to give people distant to the labour market the opportunity to experiment with gainful employment and to accumulate work experience. However, WISEs can pursue different specific goals: they are either structured to create stable job positions for WSNs within the organisation itself, or to prepare them for jobs in the open labour market. As Table 2.2 shows, two distinct models of integration have been developed: a permanent and a transitional one. Some WISEs simultaneously adopt both integration pathways, acting as a springboard to the labour market for some of the workers integrated, while offering permanent jobs to others. This is the case for instance of Italy, where some WISEs are structured to facilitate the integration of WSNs in the open labour market and some others are specifically aimed at providing for permanent jobs. The choice in favour of one specific model is by large determined by the typology and severity of disadvantages dealt with.

### *Table 2.2. WISE predominant model of integration*

| | Countries |
|---|---|
| Permanent | Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia |
| Transitional | Austria, France, Spain |
| Mixed | Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Sweden |

The transitional model of integration enables WSNs to acquire the necessary work experience and training so as to show up to future employers in the open labour market with the set of skills needed to succeed in getting and maintaining the job. Conversely, the permanent model of integration tends to create stable jobs within the organisation (Defourny, Gregoire and Davister, 2004).

The choice of the model of integration depends on several factors, including but not limited to the typologies of disadvantages of WSNs integrated, the incentives and constraints of public policies, the connections with labour policies and the degree of interaction of WISEs with other potential employers. More specifically, as Table 2.3 shows, WISEs that predominantly adopt a transitional or mixed model of integration tend to integrate a wider range of typologies of WSNs compared with WISEs aiming to permanently employ WSNs in the organisation. The latter tend to include narrower categories of WSNs, sometimes with more severe disadvantages, such as psychiatric patients and people with permanent and serious disabilities. This is for instance the case of many Greek WISEs, which focus on specific target groups such as persons with mental health problems (social cooperatives of limited liability) and people with substance abuse problems (social cooperatives of inclusion). For those people furthest away from the labour market, offering permanent job positions seems to be the only viable alternative that can contribute to strengthening the degree of autonomy and social integration of recipients. This takes place in many WISEs integrating only PWDs, such as specialised enterprise and cooperative of PWDs in Bulgaria, sheltered workshop and integrative workshops in Croatia, supported employment enterprises and professional activity establishments in Poland, sheltered workshops in Romania, and companies for PWDs and employment centres in Slovenia.

Conversely, WISEs predominantly adopting transitional or mixed models of integration address categories of WSNs that, given the nature of their less severe physical or mental disabilities or less serious social problems, can be more easily integrated into the open labour market if adequately trained and/or by making the necessary adaptations of the workplace. Examples include young unemployed and immigrants. Employment integration enterprises in Spain, for instance, offer temporary employment to people with very diverse disadvantages, including – among others – long-term unemployed, members of ethnic minorities, people with substance

use disorders in the process of rehabilitation and youngsters who have dropped out of compulsory education and are unemployed. The same happens in Austria, where almost all WISEs adhere to the transitional model; they provide short-term or temporary occupations to people that are hard to place due to a wide spectrum of reasons such as the loss of social competence and qualifications as a consequence of long-term unemployment, homelessness, imprisonment, debts, substance abuse disorders, etc.

### *Table 2.3. Categories of WSNs integrated and predominant model of integration for each typology of WISE*

| Country | Typology of WISE | Categories of WSNs integrated | Model of integration |
|---|---|---|---|
| Austria | Socio-economic enterprises | Very broad | Transitional |
| | Charitable employment projects | Broad | Transitional |
| | Agencies for advisory and supervision | Very broad | Transitional |
| Belgium | Collective customised job | Narrow ** | Permanent |
| | Proximity services | Broad | Transitional |
| | Integration company | Very broad | Permanent |
| | Company organising work customized to PWDs | Narrow ** | Permanent |
| | Employment development initiatives in the proximity social services sector | Very broad | Permanent |
| Bulgaria | Social enterprise-class A | Very broad | Mixed |
| | Social enterprise-class A+ | Very broad | Permanent |
| | Specialised enterprise and Cooperative of PWDs | Narrow * | Permanent |
| | Shelter employment centre | Narrow * | Permanent |
| Croatia | Association | Broad | Permanent |
| | Social cooperative | Broad | Permanent |
| | Veterans social working cooperative | Narrow [26] | Permanent |
| | Conventional company | Broad | Permanent |
| | Sheltered workshop | Narrow * | Transitional |
| | Integrative workshop | Narrow * | Permanent |
| Cyprus | - | - | - |

26 Only veterans.

| Country | Typology of WISE | Categories of WSNs integrated | Model of integration |
|---|---|---|---|
| Czechia | Social cooperative | Broad | Permanent |
| | Association | Very broad | Permanent |
| | Public benefit company | Very broad | Permanent |
| | Institute | Very broad | Permanent |
| | Foundation | n.a. | Permanent |
| | Church legal person | Broad | Permanent |
| | Cooperative (other than social) | Very broad | Permanent |
| | Limited liability company | Very broad | Permanent |
| Denmark | Registered social enterprise | Broad | Mixed |
| | Association | n.a. | Mixed |
| | Foundation | n.a. | Mixed |
| | Limited liability company | n.a. | Mixed |
| | Cooperative | n.a. | Mixed |
| Estonia | Non-profit association | Broad | Mixed |
| | Limited liability company | Broad | Mixed |
| | Foundation | Broad | Mixed |
| Finland | Social enterprise | Broad | Transitional |
| | Social enterprise with Finnish Social Enterprise Mark | Broad | Mixed |
| | Association | Broad | Mixed |
| | Foundation | Broad | Mixed |
| | New cooperative not elsewhere classified | Broad | Mixed |
| | Start-up with a social mission | Broad | Mixed |
| France | Intermediate voluntary organisation[27] | Very broad | Transitional |
| | Centre for adaptation to working life[27] | Very broad | Transitional |
| | Self-employment integration company[27] | Very broad | Transitional |
| | Integration enterprise[27] | Very broad | Transitional |
| | Temporary work integration enterprise[27] | Very broad | Transitional |
| | Neighbourhood enterprise | Very broad | Mixed |
| | Adapted enterprise | Narrow * | Mixed |
| | Enterprise for employment[28] | Very broad | Mixed |
| | Cooperative of activity and employment | Very broad | Permanent |

27 Organisations for integration through economic activity (SIAE).

28 The enterprises for employment (*entreprises à but d'emploie*, EBE) have been created as part of the experimentation of the programme "Territoires zéro Chômeurs", which aims at fully implementing the "right to work" and thus fighting against long-term unemployment. This programme was started by ATD Fourth World in partnership with: Secours Catholique, Emmaüs France, Le Pacte Civic and the Federation of Solidarity Actors. EBE can be set up as a conventional company, production cooperative (*société coopérative de production*, SCOP), collective interest cooperative company (*société coopérative d'intérêt collectif*, SCIC) or association and do not seek for profit. Their aim is to create useful jobs, which respond to the needs of a population in a given territory. Law on Territories zero Chômeurs (February 2016) allowed for the creation of 10 "Territoires zéro Chômeurs". Since December 2020, a new law has extended the experimentation to at least 50 territories.

| Country | Typology of WISE | Categories of WSNs integrated | Model of integration |
|---|---|---|---|
| Germany | Entities operating as sheltered workshop | Narrow * | Permanent |
| | Neighbourhood and community enterprise | Very broad | Permanent |
| | Innovative to experimental WISE | Very broad | Permanent |
| | Inclusive enterprise | Very broad | Permanent |
| Greece | Social cooperative of limited liability | Narrow * | Permanent |
| | Social cooperative enterprise of integration of special groups | Very broad | Permanent |
| | Social cooperative enterprises of integration of vulnerable groups | Very broad | Permanent |
| | Social cooperative of inclusion | Narrow [29] | Permanent |
| | Women's agricultural cooperative | Narrow [30] | Permanent |
| Hungary | Association | Narrow ** | Mixed |
| | Foundation | Narrow ** | Mixed |
| | Non-profit limited liability company | Narrow ** | Mixed |
| | Non-profit joint-stock company | Narrow ** | Mixed |
| Ireland | Company limited by guarantee with a charitable status promoting sheltered employment | Narrow * | Transitional |
| | Organization under Community Employment scheme[31] | Broad | Transitional |
| | Organization under Community Services Programme scheme[31] | Very broad | Permanent |
| Italy | B-type social cooperative | Broad | Mixed |
| | Other enterprises with SE status | Very broad | n.a. |
| | Other enterprises without SE status | n.a. | n.a. |
| Latvia | Limited liability company with SE status | Very broad | Permanent |
| | Limited liability company | n.a. | Permanent |
| | NGOs (association and foundation) | n.a. | Transitional |
| Lithuania | Conventional company with SE status | Very broad | Permanent |
| | Public enterprise | Broad | Permanent |
| | Small partnership | Narrow * | Permanent |
| | Private limited liability company | Narrow [32] | Permanent |
| | Association | n.a. | Permanent |
| Luxembourg | Association | Very broad | Transitional |
| | Cooperative | n.a. | Transitional |
| | Societal impact company | n.a. | Transitional |

29 Only persons with substance abuse problems.
30 Only women from rural areas.
31 Mainly companies limited by guarantee with/without charitable status.
32 Only single mothers in rural areas.

| Country | Typology of WISE | Categories of WSNs integrated | Model of integration |
|---|---|---|---|
| Malta | - | - | - |
| Netherlands | Association | Broad | Mixed |
| | Foundation | Broad | Mixed |
| | Cooperative | Broad | Mixed |
| | Private company with limited liability | Broad | Mixed |
| | Public limited company | Broad | Mixed |
| | Other: combination of private company with limited liability and foundations | Broad | Mixed |
| Poland | Supported employment enterprise | Narrow * | Permanent |
| | Professional activity establishment | Narrow * | Permanent |
| | Social cooperative | Very broad | Permanent |
| Portugal | Social insertion enterprise | Very broad | Transitional |
| | Sheltered workshop | Narrow * | Mixed |
| | Social and solidarity cooperative | Very broad | Mixed |
| Romania | Social insertion enterprise | Very broad | Mixed |
| | Sheltered workshop | Narrow * | Permanent |
| Slovakia | Integration social enterprise | Very broad | Permanent |
| | Sheltered workshop | Narrow * | Permanent |
| | Not-for-profit initiative | n.a. | Transitional |
| Slovenia | Company for PWDs | Narrow * | Permanent |
| | Employment centre | Narrow * | Permanent |
| | Social enterprise | Very broad | Permanent |
| | Institute | n.a. | n.a. |
| Spain | Employment integration enterprise | Very broad | Transitional |
| | Special employment centre | Narrow * | Transitional |
| | Social initiative cooperative | Very broad | Permanent |
| Sweden | Economic association | Broad | Mixed |
| | Non-profit association | Broad | Mixed |
| | Conventional company (with a special dividend limitation) | Broad | Mixed |

** Only PWDs.*
*** Mainly PWDs.*

### 2.3.1 The permanent integration model

In a significant number of WISEs adopting a permanent model of integration, the objectives pursued are not limited to the mere work integration of WSNs, but specific attention is devoted to other-than-work life spheres, e.g., housing and social integration. A sheltered microsystem is often created around integrated workers, and support services are provided with a view to enhancing empowerment through which WSNs can progressively acquire (or regain) as much autonomy as possible.

The holistic approach adopted by these WISEs is particularly beneficial for some typologies of WSNs that are characterised by complex and/or multidimensional vulnerabilities. Not by chance, this is the *modus operandi* endorsed by many WISEs born in the mental health field and dealing with people with mental illnesses. In these WISEs, which are in some cases inspired by the model of the therapeutic community developed by Thomas Pains and Maxwell Jones and firstly implemented by Franco Basaglia in the psychiatric hospital of Gorizia (Italy) at the beginning of the 60s, freedom is regarded as the main therapeutic strategy and workers with mental health problems are employed in daily productive activities in an accommodative – still stimulating – work environment. Due to the severity of their conditions, for a significant part of individuals integrated within these WISEs adopting a holistic approach represents a necessity, the transition to the open labour market is not a feasible option and working within the WISE is their sole chance for work integration. Typical examples of this model are social cooperatives of limited liability in Greece, whose emergence and development have been strongly influenced and inspired by B-type social cooperatives in Italy (Adam, 2014). A number of Italian B-type social cooperatives – especially those integrating WSN with severe disadvantages – adopt a permanent model of integration.

The long-term nature of the integration pathways allows WISEs to both define individualised integration projects and focus also on social inclusion. Individualised services and tailored-made, flexible integration pathways can change over time on the basis of the progress (or eventual regressions, as frequent especially with certain typologies of WSNs) made by the workers integrated. Productive activities carried out by these WISEs reflect as much as possible the set of skills WSNs hold and are often initiated so as to foster the interaction of recipients with the community (e.g., tourist reception, catering). WSNs are moreover offered the possibility to establish meaningful social relations with other people (colleagues, volunteers, social operators, etc.), so as to increase their social confidence and favour the establishment of meaningful social relationships, both within and outside the organisation. Special attention is thus paid by this typology of WISEs to enhancing the social capital that is embedded in the communities wherein they operate. In fact, these WISEs can often be regarded as community organisations.

Even though great variability exists among WISEs on their degree of openness towards WSNs participation in the organisation's decision-making processes, being permanently integrated into the WISE may facilitate WSNs engagement in the organisation governing bodies. It should however be noted that WSNs active involvement in these processes is not always possible or it may be very challenging due to the particular disadvantages shown. Nonetheless, when participation is feasible, it further contributes to WSNs empowerment.

The model of integration influences the type of contractual arrangement entered into by WISEs with WSNs and permanent WISEs normally favour open-ended contracts, with no projected time limit. In WISEs offering permanent jobs, on-the-job professional training, i.e., the type of training provided to WSNs through field experience, tends to be more widespread. On-the jobs training paths are usually strongly individualised: they are designed starting from workers' capabilities and skills and aim at taking stock of hidden talents. Within this typology of WISEs, the content of the training is not limited to job-related tasks but it normally implies multidimensional support with a view to enhancing workers' autonomy.

WISEs adopting a permanent model of integration are more prone to expand their pool of services so as to satisfy the multifaceted needs of WSNs, therefore aspiring to scale their social impact deep (qualitative approach) rather than wide. Services provided may include support in finding suitable accommodation and assistance in gaining financial autonomy (OECD, 2016a).

Lastly, one of the peculiar characteristics of permanent WISEs is in many instances their tight connection with public social services. In fact, unlike WISEs distinguished by a transitional integration model, permanent WISEs are often regarded as tools of social policy. Usually, these WISEs have stable and frequent relationships with public agencies providing social and health services, which are key actors in taking charge of the different needs of integrated workers.

At times, the choice of the permanent integration model may be regarded as the second-best choice for some WISEs, which were established with the mission of integrating the highest number of WSNs into the open labour market. However, as testified by their very low transition rates, some WISEs were actually forced to switch to a permanent model given the difficulties they encountered in facilitating transition in the open labour market. This is the case of the companies organising customised work in Wallonia and of the collective customised jobs and proximity services in Flanders, which can be regarded as permanent models despite their declared objective is to empower WSNs so that they can migrate to a job in the open labour market (in 2019, only 2.5% of WSNs in collective customised jobs and 7.8% in proximity services entered into employment – Department of Work and Social Economy of the Flanders, 2020). A similar situation can be found in Slovenia, where the share of WSNs that succeeds in entering the open labour market is very low.

It is also worth mentioning that, especially among WISEs adopting the permanent model of integration, lock-in effects may represent a risk: given the "welcoming" work environment that tends to be created in this typology of WISEs, WSNs sometimes risk being "trapped" in the organisation, without considering with due attention other feasible trajectories outside the WISE.

### 2.3.2 The transitional integration model

As already mentioned before, WISEs drawing on a transitional integration model tend to integrate WSNs with less severe and, in some cases, "temporary" disadvantages. Their aim is to equip WSNs with the basic tools they need to re-enter (or enter for the first time) the open labour market through a combination of tailored training and work experience. Supporting WSNs in the preparation of their curriculum vitae, preparing them to face a job interview, putting them in contact with conventional enterprises looking for new workforce members and carrying out follow-up activities during the process of placement of workers conventional enterprises are typical activities carried out by WISEs promoting a transitional model.

By working in WISEs with a high turnover of WSNs, supporters have the possibility to acquire extensive knowledge so as to orient recipients to the most suited employment opportunities in the open labour market.

The transitional model is a more recent and dynamic evolution of the traditional (permanent) model of integration. In fact, as other research has shown (UNDP and EMES, 2008), getting workers back into the open labour market was not the priority of all the first initiatives of WISEs that emerged in Europe in the 1980s. Some were mainly focused on offering workers with support needs (mainly PWDs) the possibility to regain control over their lives and empower them through work on stable bases. However, over the years, the process of progressive institutionalization that WISEs have experienced, made them more closely connected with active labour market policies (ALMP). This has created pressure upon these organisations to integrate as much WSNs as possible into the open labour market and thus shift towards a transitional pattern of integration (UNDP and EMES, 2008).

Consistently with their goal, transitional WISEs are more prone to hire WSNs with fixed-term employment contracts (both on a full-time or part-time basis), which may eventually be switched to open-ended ones if deemed necessary. In some countries, laws regulating WISEs prescribe a maximum length for the work integration pathways within the organisation. This is for instance the case of Spanish employment integration enterprises: the law in force foresees a maximum of three years of employment before the transition into the open labour market. The maximum time of employment is even shorter in Austrian WISEs. In particular, socio-economic enterprises offer WSNs (mainly long-term unemployed, elderly and PWDs) employment contracts lasting a minimum of six months and a maximum of one year.

The same is valid for charitable employment projects, whose target groups are people furthest away from the labour market, in particular long-term unemployed. Lastly, agencies for advisory and supervision provide a low threshold contact point for WSNs as well as people with more severe problems and their integration model is transitory in nature.

The tradition of temporary employment has strong roots in France. In fact, since the very first private initiatives of work integration emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, the idea was not to create a parallel job market but to bring forth the first and preliminary step to entering the open labour market. In the majority of French WISEs – which include Intermediate voluntary organisations, centres for adaptation to working life, integration enterprises, temporary work integration enterprises and employers' organisations for work integration and training – the maximum time of employment within the organisation is set by law at 24 months (with the possibility of extending contracts duration only in some exceptional cases). For instance, temporary work integration enterprises core business is the provision of personnel to conventional enterprises, and this translates into particularly high return-to-work rates for their employees.

Differently from permanent WISEs, transitional WISEs aim at integrating a greater number of WSNs, thus aspiring to scale their social impact widely (quantitative approach). To pursue this objective, they are normally more inclined to specialize in production activities that are suited to strengthen those skills that have a significant employment potential (OECD, 2016a). Moreover, transitional WISEs mainly focus on structured and standardised professional training (alone or in combination with on-the-job training), often in collaboration with other training institutions and VET providers so as to improve WSNs employability in the open labour market (Defourny, Gregoire and Davister, 2004).

Among the risks, it is worth mentioning the possible crowding-out effect of the transitional model of integration. Under the pressure of market competitiveness, some WISEs have begun to integrate mostly WSNs with less severe disadvantages, thus having a cream skimming effect, which relegates those people that are most difficult to integrate more and more to the margins. On top of this, the limited duration of the work experience within the WISEs does not allow for the involvement of workers in decision-making processes, regardless of the legal structure and capacity of recipients to participate actively in the governing bodies.

In some countries, specific instruments designed to facilitate the transition of workers into the labour market have been introduced. This is for instance the case of the Spanish work enclaves (*enclaves laborales*), which have been introduced by the Royal Decree 290/2004 (art. 1.2). According to this law, a work enclave is understood as the contract between a company in the open labour market, called "collaborating company", and a special employment centre. In work enclaves, PWDs perform work tasks that are directly related to the normal activity of the collaborating company and

for which a group of workers with disabilities is temporarily seconded from a special employment centre to the workplaces of the collaborating company. Thanks to this instrument, special employment centre in Spain have a high impact on job creation and on the labour inclusion of PWDs, including those with greater difficulties in accessing the open labour market.

Like in Spain, French WISEs have been traditionally partnering with public authorities in order to co-set social public policies to fight unemployment, but they are now increasingly establishing partnerships also with private actors, including, among others, conventional enterprises. Collaboration with these enterprises is more and more regarded as a key strategy aiming to increase beneficiaries' chances to find stable employment. WISEs and conventional enterprises are increasingly finding ways to establish collaborations, and the creation of joint ventures among these two actors is becoming a more widespread strategy. The case of ÏNVA (see Box 4 below) is an example of how WISEs and enterprises of the open labour market can work together to create employment opportunities for WSNs.

### *Box 4. ÏNVA Joint Venture (France)*[33]

**www.lavarappe.fr/environnement/inva**

ÏNVA is a joint venture (co-enterprise) funded in 2020 between La Varappe[34], a French WISE that groups together more than 30 WISEs operating in the human resources, environmental, eco-construction and health sectors, and Vinci Autoroutes[35], a conventional company part of the Vinci Group, a concessions and construction company founded in 1899.

La Varappe decided to create the joint venture with a view to facilitate the integration of its WSNs into the open labour market. ÏNVA is based in the city of Salon, in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region (South of France), which is characterised by a higher unemployment rate compared to the national one. The joint venture is specialised in the provision of cleaning and maintenance services for areas related to passenger mobility and it also offers services such as reception, orientation and mediation to companies. Vinci Autoroutes has called on ÏNVA employees to participate in the maintenance of 73 of its sites. The two enterprises collaborate together, with Vinci Autoroutes sharing its know-how in the sector and La Varappe offering well-trained staff to perform the job.

33 Authored by Giorgia Trasciani, Aix-Marseille University.
34 www.lavarappe.fr.
35 www.vinci-autoroutes.com.

In 2021, ÏNVA employed nearly 30 WSNs, in addition to some 50 seasonal workers during the summer. ÏNVA does not target a particular category of the population: anyone can be admitted to the programme if they are long-term unemployed. However, there is a certain preference for young people, due to the high unemployment rate of this category. Moreover, WSNs integrated are often from rural areas, because this is where they will be working for ÏNVA, but this is not a necessary requirement. The recruitment is done in partnership with *Pole Emploi*, i.e., the French unemployment office. Another way to recruit workers is through door-to-door activity: professionals in the social fields, in close collaboration with local actors, reach out people in fragile territories who have fallen off the public policy radar. Thanks to this activity, therefore, even people who cannot be reached directly by public social services still have a chance of being included in the labour market.

Within ÏNVA, thanks to the key figure of the "*gestionnaire de parcours*", i.e., a supporter who helps and sustains WSNs during their working experience, WSNs develop the skills set needed and accumulate work experience. The *gestionnaire de parcours* combines relational approaches with technical approaches, directing and sustaining people to overcome difficulties. It also transmits soft skills e.g., capacity to networking, improve autonomy and self-confidence, decision-making ability. Moreover, having their name associated with a big enterprise not only makes WSNs proud of being part of an international group, increasing their self-esteem, but it also allows them to add a valuable job experience to their CV.

## 2.4 WISE fields of activity

WISEs are very diversified both in terms of sectors of activities and typologies of services and products delivered. Among the wide range of economic sectors in which WISEs are engaged, manufacturing, construction, cleaning, gardening and maintenance of green areas are the most widespread. The lion's share of the WISE sectors is in labour-intensive industries that are characterised by low added-value jobs. These sectors require low levels of specialization from the workers' side and are mainly based on routine rather than cognitive tasks, which fit well with the predominant low level of skills and poor qualifications of WSNs.

Table 2.4 illustrates the three main fields of activity of WISEs in the studied countries.

### *Table 2.4. WISE main fields of activities by country*

| Country | WISE main fields of activity |
|---|---|
| Austria | C – Manufacturing (e.g., of metal, electronic, wood and food products)<br>E – Water supply; sewerage; waste management and remediation activities (waste collection, treatment and disposal activities; materials recovery)<br>N – Administrative and support service activities (cleaning activities; landscape activities; packaging activities) |
| Belgium | C – Manufacturing (e.g., of metal, electronic, wood and food products)<br>E – Water supply; sewerage; waste management and remediation activities (materials recovery)<br>N – Administrative and support service activities (cleaning activities; landscape activities; packaging activities) |
| Bulgaria | I – Accommodation and food service activities<br>J – Information and communication<br>N – Administrative and support service activities |
| Croatia | C – Manufacturing (e.g., of metal, electronic, wood and food products)<br>G – Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles (wholesale and retail trade)<br>I – Accommodation and food service activities (food and beverage service activities) |
| Cyprus | - |
| Czechia | C – Manufacturing<br>I – Accommodation and food services<br>N – Administrative and support service activities |
| Denmark | K – Financial and insurance activities<br>O – Public administration and defence; compulsory social security<br>R – Arts, entertainment and recreation |
| Estonia | C – Manufacturing<br>I – Accommodation and food service activities<br>R – Arts, entertainment and recreation |
| Finland | C – Manufacturing<br>E – Water supply; sewerage; waste management and remediation activities (waste management; materials recovery)<br>R – Arts, entertainment and recreation |
| France | A – Agriculture, forestry and fishing<br>F – Construction<br>N – Administrative and support service activities (landscape service activities) |
| Germany | E – Water supply; sewerage; waste management and remediation activities (waste management)<br>G – Wholesale and retail trade<br>I – Accommodatio and food service activities |

| Country | WISE main fields of activity |
|---|---|
| Greece | I – Accommodation and food service activities<br>N – Administrative and support service activities<br>Q – Human health and social work activities |
| Hungary | C – Manufacturing<br>I – Accommodation and food service activities (food and beverage service activities)<br>N – Administrative and support service activities (cleaning activities; landscape service activities) |
| Ireland | A – Agriculture, forestry and fishing<br>C – Manufacturing<br>G – Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles (wholesale and retail trade) |
| Italy | E – Water supply; sewerage; waste management and remediation activities (waste collection, treatment and disposal activity, materials recovery)<br>N – Administrative and support service activities (cleaning; landscape service activities)<br>S – Other service activities (cemetery management; washing and (dry-)cleaning of textile and fur products) |
| Latvia | C – Manufacturing<br>I – Accommodation and food service activities<br>N – Administrative and support service activities |
| Lithuania | F – Construction<br>I – Accommodation and food service activities (event catering)<br>N – Administrative and support service activities (cleaning) |
| Luxembourg | G – Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles (wholesale of waste and scrap)<br>P – Education<br>Q – Human health and social work activities (social work activities; residential care activities) |
| Malta | - |
| Netherlands | C – Manufacturing<br>E – Water supply; sewerage; waste management and remediation activities (waste management and remediation activities)<br>I – Accommodation and food service activities |
| Poland | C – Manufacturing<br>I – Accommodation and food service activities (food and beverage service activities)<br>R – Arts, entertainment and recreation |
| Portugal | C – Manufacturing<br>I – Accommodation and food service activities<br>N – Administrative and support service activities (landcape service activities) |

| Country | WISE main fields of activity |
|---|---|
| Romania | C – Manufacturing<br>E – Water supply; sewerage; waste management and remediation activities (waste management)<br>I – Accommodation and food service activities |
| Slovakia | C – Manufacturing<br>F – Construction<br>N – Administrative and support service activities (landscape service activities) |
| Slovenia | C – Manufacturing<br>N – Administrative and support service activities (landscape service activities)<br>Q – Human health and social work activities |
| Spain | C – Manufacturing<br>E – Water supply; sewerage; waste management and remediation activities (waste management)<br>N – Administrative and support service activities (cleaning activities, landscape service activities) |
| Sweden | n.a. |

Large-sized WISEs, which draw on a relatively very high share of revenues from income-generating activities operate in sectors such as manufacturing, assembling, cleaning and other facility services, transports and construction and often act as suppliers for large conventional enterprises. Waste management is another highly developed sector of typically large-sized WISEs, which includes the collection of both hazardous and non-hazardous waste, its storage, treatment, disposal and recovery. These activities are mainly carried out by WISEs in the framework of contracts signed with public (mainly local) authorities and require significant investments e.g., for increasing the technological endowment so as to boost their competitiveness. This is the case of many large WISEs in countries such as Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands.

On the contrary, smaller WISEs engage in sectors distinguished by a stronger relational dimension, including for instance accommodation and food service activities (e.g., event catering, beverage serving activities, management of tourist facilities such as hotels and similar accommodations, restaurants and mobile food service activities), culture (e.g., community and recreational centres, theatres) and agriculture (e.g., social farming), in which human interactions of WSNs with other people are furthered so as to allow for the improvement of their social skills. This is for instance the case of Bulgaria, Denmark, Lithuania, Romania and Slovenia.

In the majority of EU MSs (e.g., Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, Latvia, Hungary, Poland, Portugal and Spain), WISEs are allowed to deliver also welfare services.

This circumstance is regarded as problematic on the ground of two main reasons; first, it jeopardises the specialization of the enterprise, which needs to combine the carrying out of two distinct activities, requiring different skills; second, delivering services with a high relational content to other vulnerable recipients may be challenging for WSNs (Galera, 2010). In Italy, when it was introduced, the law in force (Law 381/1991) provided for a clear-cut separation between health, social or educational services and work integration services. The separation between social cooperatives providing social services and social cooperatives aiming to facilitate the work integration of WSNs is one of the key factors explaining for the success of social cooperatives in Italy. Nevertheless, since 1996 the setting up of mixed social cooperatives is also possible, provided that the accounts of the two cooperative branches are kept separated.

Over the past decade, the domains of engagement of WISEs have progressively broadened; WISEs have increasingly entered new fields with a higher added value, such as those related to information and communication technologies (ICT), culture and the management of cultural heritage. Moreover, WISEs are increasingly willing to experiment themselves with private markets such as the food industry. This trend is especially relevant in countries like Italy, where customers' demand for these products and services is increasing. Entering these sectors can be however challenging for WISEs, as it requires higher professional qualifications for workers. Furthermore, these are highly competitive sectors where the commodities and services delivered by WISEs must compete with equivalent commodities and services produced by well-established conventional enterprises and traditional agricultural cooperatives which do not have to support the costs related to the integration of WSNs. Hence emerges the need for dedicated training activities aiming to fill the skills gaps of both WSNs and their supporters so as to foster WISE competitiveness.

By developing activities in new fields, WISEs not only aim to create new employment opportunities for hard to employ people; they also contribute to the design of new innovative models of services and commodities incorporating a social added value. This is for instance the case of WISEs managing touristic accommodation and food service activities.

Moreover, WISEs are increasingly taking the lead in tackling climate change by supporting the reconversion of the production system; the preservation of biodiversity; access to adequate, sustainable and healthy food and a radical change in individual consumption patterns and collective dynamics and practices.

Amongst WISE activities that are growing in relevance noteworthy are recycling, reuse and up-cycling. When compared to conventional enterprises, WISEs are better equipped to trigger the transformative processes needed to achieve the green transition because they are intrinsically concerned for the community and territory wherein they operate.

Another sector of activity in which WISEs are growingly engaged is the digital economy. Among the activities they carry out, more and more WISEs are introducing activities such as computer programming, data entry and processing, the creation of websites, video and television programmes, and other computer management activities. New digital jobs are therefore being created within the WISE universe and specific attention is devoted to services that promote digital education for citizens, so as to contribute to a fair and inclusive digital transition. Countries in which this trend is stronger are Austria, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

The contribution of WISEs is furthermore increasingly regarded as significant in remote areas with sparsely population/depopulation trends, where they could contribute to filling gaps in service delivery (e.g., provision of landscaping services, cultural services, retail consumption). This is the case for instance the case of Italy and Spain.

# 3. WISE RECOGNITION

The aim of this chapter is to scrutinize the legal structures of WISEs in the 27 EU MSs. Attention is paid to both legally recognised WISEs and WISEs that are operating "outside the radar", as they are not defined as WISEs either by the same organizations or by other stakeholders.

The chapter draws on both the Country Fiches and literature.

## 3.1 WISE legal structures

WISEs vary to a great extent across the EU in terms of legislation in which they operate.

While in some countries WISEs have a specific legal framework that applies exclusively to them and focuses on work integration, in some other countries WISEs operate under various legal arrangements that also apply to other organisations (Spear and Bidet, 2005).

The need for a specific legislation for WISEs depends on a number of country specific factors, reflecting distinctive features of the legal system. What is decisive in the decision of whether or not to recognise WISEs by law is if traditional legal frameworks regulating the creation and functioning of civil society organisations like associations,

Grant Agreement: 621509-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-EPPKA2-SSA-B

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

cooperatives, and foundations allow for the integration of WSNs to work through the carrying out of productive activities.

### 3.1.1 Countries with no ad hoc legislation for WISEs

Still today in several EU countries WISEs mainly use traditional legal forms that were neither specifically designed for them, nor for social enterprises whatsoever.

Examples are provided by Austria, Estonia, Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden, where WISEs use exclusively traditional legal forms. Depending on the countries, the legal forms used vary to a significant extent, ranging from conventional legal forms used to establish enterprises (e.g., Ireland and Sweden), adjusted so as to provide for dividend limitations, up to traditional associations, cooperatives foundations, institutes.

Different country specific factors may explain the decision not to regulate WISEs or more in general social enterprises by law. One factor, which contributes to explaining the absence of a dedicated law in Austria is the lack of a consensus on the need for a unified legal frame for social enterprises. In the Netherlands, the lack of a legal framework dedicated to social enterprises can be by contrast explained on the ground of the Dutch government decision to support social entrepreneurship as an approach, rather than social enterprises as a type of organisation (European Commission, 2019d). However, over the past two years, a number of stakeholders have increasingly emphasized the need for a dedicated legal form. Consistently with this request, in March 2021 the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate announced a new consultation process, which may be an important step towards a legislative proposal providing for an ad hoc social enterprise legal form.

Having said so, in addition to legal recognition there are also other strategies that may have a key role in acknowledging WISEs and enhancing their identity. One is by registering WISEs in special registers; this path has been followed for instance by Sweden, where a list of WISEs is administrated by the Swedish Agency of Economic Development and Growth (European Commission, 2019g). In Austria, WISEs are identifiable instead thanks to the specific funding schemes they have access to, which are named “socio-economic enterprises” (SÖB). Another trend that contributes to strengthening the visibility of WISEs, especially in countries where no specific legislation is in place, is the creation of private marks; this path has been embarked on by Austria (*Guetesiegel fuer Soziale Unternehmen*) and by the Netherlands (Social Enterprise Mark) (European Commission, 2018; 2019d).

### 3.1.2 Countries with underutilised legislation for WISEs

Alongside countries that are not endowed with specific legal frameworks for WISEs, there are countries, like for instance Czechia, Hungary and Latvia, where despite

the introduction of ad hoc legislation, the newly established WISEs continue to use legal forms that have not been designed for them. This occurs precisely when newly introduced legal forms or statuses show a number of limits, including legal constraints, lack of incentives for registration and/or cultural prejudices. As an example, the Law on Social enterprise that was adopted in Latvia in 2018 stipulates that only limited liability companies can qualify as social enterprises. Thus, WISEs set up as associations or foundations, which constitute an important part of the social enterprise spectrum in Latvia, cannot qualify as social enterprises. The low number of registered Latvian social enterprises confirms the weak impact of the legislation in force; based on the Welfare Ministry register, there are indeed only 33 registered WISEs which integrate 89 workers with support needs (Zeiļa and Švarce, 2021).

In Czechia, according to Act 90/2012 on Commercial corporations, a social co-operative is defined as a "co-operative that is pursuing beneficial activities to promote social cohesion through work and social integration of WSNs in society, prioritising the satisfaction of local needs and utilisation of local resources". The Commercial Corporations Act, which provides for the only dedicated legal form for social enterprises in Czechia, has not proved able to trigger the widespread growth of WISEs. Based on data provided by the Administrative Register of Economic Subject in 2021, there are only 40 social cooperatives (Kročil et al., 2021). Various reasons contribute to explaining the poor number of Czech social cooperatives. Among these, the still widespread perception of cooperatives as relict of the communist regime, the unwillingness of the cooperative sector to invest in the development of social cooperatives, as well as the lack of adequate fiscal benefits (OECDb, 2016).

Worth noticing is that also in countries where new legal forms have not been fully effective the trend of building private marks and labels is also rather widespread. A case in point is in this respect Finland (see Section 3.2.1).

### 3.1.3 Countries with widely used legal statuses and frameworks for WISEs

There is an additional group of countries, where changes in legislation have been either essential or key in fostering the development of WISEs on a wide scale.

The acknowledgement of B-type social cooperatives by Law 381/1991 was trigger factor for the development of WISEs on a wide scale in Italy. Indeed, associations were – at the time when the first pioneer initiatives emerged from below – not allowed to run economic activities; cooperatives were not entitled to promote the interests of non-members; and conventional enterprises were forced to be for – profit by law. In essence, the legal system did not allow for the development of entrepreneurial activities specifically aimed at providing work to people excluded from the labour market. Since most work integration initiatives started to use the cooperative form, an adaptation of the legislation on cooperatives became a necessity, which led to the introduction of a new cooperative form in 1991: the social cooperative. In the case

of Italy, this new legislation was developed bottom-up and it was widely supported by one component of the cooperative movement and by some local administrators (Borzaga and Galera, 2016). WISEs have gradually become effective labour policy tools. Although the Legislative Decree 155/2006 on social enterprises provides for the establishment of WISEs also as investor-owned enterprises, associations and foundations, social cooperatives are still today by large the most widespread WISE typology in Italy. Based on recent data, there are 5,300 social cooperatives in Italy, which integrate overall 25,000 workers with support needs (Istat, 2007; Borzaga and Musella, 2020; Marocchi et al., 2021).

In France, the introduction of a variety of statuses and legal forms specifically aiming to acknowledge WISEs or social enterprises more broadly was certainly key but not essential. In fact, WISEs can be set up also as neighbourhood enterprises/associations (Ausort, 2021). Based on recent data, there are 2,610 associations with at least one employee which can be classified as WISEs. WISEs were born in France in the 1970s and 1980s; a special role was played by specialized educators who accompanied young people from the suburbs to set up new organisations, as they were convinced that work was a key resource for the integration of excluded young people. For them, work provided several prerequisites for social integration: income but also life structuring. This initiation then made it possible to work on several additional social issues such as for instance housing. Integration through economic activity was then gradually recognized by the various legislations. Work integration social enterprises can nowadays choose among different options, including a broad set of WISE statuses and more than a few specific cooperative forms. Insertion enterprises were recognised in 1991 (Law 91/1991, revised in 2018), collective interest cooperative companies (SCIC) were acknowledged in 2001 (Law 624/2001) and cooperatives of activity and employment (CAE) were recognised under the Framework Law on Social and solidarity economy in 2014 (Petrella and Richez-Battesti, 2016).

Belgium presents a similar diversified picture when it comes to WISEs legal typologies: in addition to a rich variety of WISE statuses that are autonomously regulated by each region thanks to a process dating back to the 1980s (Flanders, Wallonia, Brussels), WISEs could until recently qualify as social purpose companies, based on the 1995 Act on Social purpose companies. This act was nevertheless repealed in 2019, when a special cooperative accreditation scheme – that is applicable also to WISEs – was introduced (European Commission, 2020b).

### 3.1.4 Countries with WISE statuses deriving from traditional social inclusion initiatives

There is moreover a fourth group of countries where WISEs use legal forms or statuses that were originally introduced to regulate sheltered workshops. This is the case in many Central Eastern European (CEE) countries, where many legal statuses for WISEs have been inherited from previous regimes. Many of these statuses were introduced

decades ago to further the inclusion especially of persons with physical disabilities, primarily people with visual and hearing impairments. Over the years the scope of these initiatives has broadened so as to include also other forms of disabilities and in some cases disadvantages and they have meanwhile shifted towards a stronger entrepreneurial stance, which has enabled them to operate on the open market. Examples are provided by companies for PWDs in Slovenia, and specialised enterprises in Bulgaria, as well as cooperatives of invalids and the blind in Poland.

An additional example is provided by special employment centres in Spain, which are legally considered sheltered employment, but can be regarded as fully-fledged WISEs. Special employment centres were born as an employment formula for PWDs with the Law of Social integration of PWDs (LISMI) of 1982. For this reason, at least 70% of their workforce must be made up of PWDs with a degree of disability equal to or over 33%. They are currently regulated by the Royal Legislative Decree 1/2013 of the consolidated text of the General Law of the Rights of PWDs and their social inclusion and, in more detail, in the Royal Decree 2273/1985, by which the Regulation of the special employment centres is approved.

Table 3.1 summarises the main development dynamics of WISEs in EU MSs.

***Table 3.1. Main dynamics concerning legal structures for WISEs***

| Main dynamic | Countries |
|---|---|
| No specific legislation designed for WISEs | Austria, Estonia, Ireland, Netherlands, Sweden |
| Specific legislation for WISEs exists, but most WISEs use traditional legal forms | Czechia, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania, Slovakia |
| Decisive role of WISE/Social enterprise statuses and/or legal forms | Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain |
| WISE statuses evolution from previous experience of sheltered workshops | Bulgaria, Croatia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Spain |

## 3.2 WISE patterns of legal recognition

Legal recognition of WISEs has allowed for a clearer definition of their aims, features and in some cases also the fields of activity.

WISEs have been legally recognised through various strategies: i) the introduction of ad hoc legal statuses for WISEs; ii) the introduction of legal statuses addressed more in general to social enterprises; iii) and the adaptation of cooperative legislation so as to allow for the integration of WSNs by the newly established cooperative forms (e.g., social cooperatives; solidarity cooperatives; general interest cooperatives).

In a few countries, WISEs can moreover qualify as public benefit organisations.

Ad hoc legislation has enabled to define the functioning rules of WISEs, including the modalities and the degree of engagement of members, as well as regulations on the distribution of profits and assets. Governance models vary to a significant extent across countries depending on the legal form covered by WISEs and may hence entail a diverse degree of participation of stakeholders, including WSNs, in the WISE governing bodies. Governance models range from participatory multi-stakeholder (e.g., social cooperatives in Italy) up to enterprises that do not foresee for the active participation of key stakeholders (e.g., insertion enterprises in Portugal, social enterprise in Finland).

### 3.2.1 WISE statuses

One possible strategy whereby to recognize WISEs is via special WISE statuses that can normally be obtained by a variety of legal forms, provided that they comply with given criteria stipulated by law in addition to the criteria already in place for the entitled organisations.

WISEs legal statuses are in place in Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Croatia, France, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia and Spain. From a comparative perspective, WISE statuses are by large the most widespread pattern whereby WISEs are legally acknowledged across Europe.

In some cases, WISE statuses have a longstanding history; in some other cases, WISE statuses have been introduced recently. This is for instance the case of Finland, where WISEs are the only type of social enterprise that is regulated by law. Based on the Act on Social enterprise (1351/2003, which entered into force in 2004), all enterprises, regardless of their legal form and ownership structure, may apply to become social enterprise, provided that they are registered as an enterprise with the Trade Register of the Ministry of Trade and Commerce. Interestingly, unlike many other EU member states, the Finnish Act on Social enterprise does not impose a non-profit distribution constraint. Moreover, it does not prescribe the adoption of participatory decision-making mechanisms so as to engage recipients actively (Pättiniemi, 2006). Also in this case, the share of registered social enterprises over the total number of organisations that operate as WISEs outside the radar is rather low: based on the 2018 data, there were only 37 registered WISEs employing 121 PWDs and long-term unemployed European Commission (2020a) (European Commission, 2020a).

Similarly to Finland, WISEs are the only typology that is eligible to obtain the social enterprise status in Lithuania according to Law IX-2251/2004. As for Finland, organisations acquiring the status of social enterprise do not have to comply with a non-profit distribution constraint in Lithuania[36].

36 According to Law IX-2251/2004, only WISEs are entitled to acquire the status of social enterprises.

In Romania, the social insertion status can be obtained by cooperatives, associations, foundations, mutual aid associations or conventional companies provided that they fulfil a number of criteria stipulated by the Law 219/2015 on Social economy (European Commission, 2019e). Social insertion enterprises are set up to integrate to work a broad spectrum of people facing difficulties in entering the labour market (e.g., long-term unemployed; persons with substance use disorders; former convicts; victims of domestic violence; NEETs).

WISE statuses are moreover widely used in France and Belgium. The most widespread statuses used in France are the following: SIAE (organisations for integration through economic activity) and adapted enterprise. WISE statuses used in Belgium include: collective customized job; proximity services; integration company; company organising work customized to PWDs; employment development initiative in the proximity social services sector (Bossuyt et al., 2021).

In all the above cases, WISE statuses limit the qualification only to those entities, which include work integration as a key aspect of their mode of functioning. In all the mentioned cases, at least 30% of the workers must be represented by WSNs or PWDs (European Commission, 2020a).

While WISE statuses have been in general key in supporting the widespread replication of WISE, it is worth underlying the misuse of the WISE status by opportunistic enterprises in some countries distinguished by a high degree of corruption (e.g., Bulgaria and Romania).

### 3.2.2 Social enterprise statuses

Social enterprise statuses are a rather recent dynamic, which has increased in relevance from the 2000s onwards. The rationale for introducing broader statuses is to support the growth of a wide set of entities that operate in a wide spectrum of fields of general interest, including but not limited to work integration. In all EU MSs, national legislations introducing legal statuses for social enterprises establish the primacy of social aims and provide for inclusive and participatory ownership and governance bodies also by introducing profit distribution constraints, especially on assets.

Depending on the country, social enterprise statuses can normally be adopted by a more or less broad variety of legal entities, provided that they comply with specific criteria, in addition to the fulfilment of the criteria already in force for the legal forms entitled to qualify (as it is in the case of WISE statuses). Countries that have recognized WISEs by entitling a broad set of organisational typologies to engage in general interest sectors include Italy (Law 155/2006 and Reform of the Third Sector 106/2016), Denmark (Law 711/2014), Bulgaria (Law 240/2018), Belgium (1995, Act on Social purpose companies repealed in 2019). Exceptions are provided by Latvia, where only conventional legal forms for establishing enterprises can qualify as social enterprises.

A more recent trend is that of acknowledging WISEs as a specific dynamic within a broader phenomenon – named, depending on the country: the social and solidarity economy (Bulgaria, France, Greece, Slovakia), the Third Sector (Italy) and the social economy (Romania) (European Commission, 2020a). The rationale for enlarging the scope by regulating a broader spectrum of entities, which may include also organisations engaged in non-commercial activities and organisations oriented towards promoting the interest of their members (e.g., traditional cooperatives), is to increase overall consistency and overcome fragmentation.

### 3.2.3 Adjustment of cooperative legislation

An additional pattern for recognition of WISEs is that of adjusting existing legal forms. The pioneering role was in this case played by Italy, which adjusted its cooperative law back in 1991. Italy was then followed by Spain, Poland, France, Bulgaria, Hungary, Greece, Portugal, Czechia and more recently Belgium with the special accreditation scheme for cooperatives.

When compared to other legal structures, in the case of cooperatives the participatory dimension is a key aspect. Accordingly, WSNs are often encouraged to participate in cooperatives. This conception implies assisting WSN, not only in developing an occupation, but also in acquiring specific values through their engagement, whenever possible, in decision-making processes (UNDP and EMES, 2008).

The enactment of Law 381/1991 on social cooperatives in Italy, which was the first legislation of this kind on the international scene, led to the extraordinary growth of WISEs, whose number is currently rather stable. Conversely, in Poland, the number of social cooperatives has increased several times from 187 in 2009. At the end of 2017, there were 1,449 social cooperatives; at the end of 2018, 1,547 were listed in the national register (Szarfenberg, Szarfenberg and Krenz, 2022).

Cooperative adjustment did not have by contrast the expected impact in Czechia, Greece and Hungary. Different reasons explain the apparently limited impact of these legal innovations, like the tight burdens, administrative constraints, irrelevant tax breaks as well as the poor engagement of practitioners on the ground, which was conversely a key element which boosted the growth in number of B-type social cooperatives in Italy.

### 3.2.4 Public interest statuses/organizations

In some countries, WISEs can be set up as public benefit organisations or can acquire the public benefit status. This status attaches to organisations that fulfil certain criteria, including the pursuit of a general interest aim, the non-distribution of profits and the fulfilment of additional requirements, depending on national legislation. Examples of countries where WISEs can obtain a public benefit status include Austria,

Czechia and Portugal. Conversely, in Slovakia public benefit organisations are a distinct organisation.

Organisations that obtain the public interest status are recognised as public benefit companies and granted preferential treatment by the competent tax authorities.

In addition, Portugal provides for a similar status: the Private institution of social solidarity (*Instituição Particular de Solidariedade Social*, IPSS) status, which is awarded by the social welfare administration for organisations which pursue general interest activities. The following legal forms are entitled to acquire the IPSS status: associations, mutual or mutual aid associations, foundations, mercy houses, social cooperatives, Catholic Church Parish Centres and Caritas.

### *Table 3.2. WISE legal forms*

| Country | Traditional legal forms | Legal adjustment of traditional legal forms | | Special statuses | Statuses/qualifications for social enterprises specifically | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Cooperative | Conventional company | Public/general benefit | WISE | Social enterprise |
| Austria | Association<br>Cooperative | - | - | Company with public benefit | - | - |
| Belgium | - | Cooperative accreditation scheme | - | - | Collective customized job<br>Proximity services<br>Integration company<br>Company organising work customized to PWDs<br>Employment development initiative in the proximity social services sector | - |
| Bulgaria | - | Cooperative of PWDs | - | - | Specialised Enterprise<br>Sheltered employment centre | Social Enterprise class A+<br>Social Enterprise class A |
| Croatia | Association<br>Conventional company<br>Social cooperative | Veterans social working cooperative | - | - | Sheltered/integrative workshop | - |
| Cyprus | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Czechia | Association<br>Institute<br>Foundation<br>Church legal person<br>Cooperative<br>Limited liability company | Social cooperative | - | Public benefit company | - | - |

| Country | Traditional legal forms | Legal adjustment of traditional legal forms | | Special statuses | Statuses/qualifications for social enterprises specifically | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Cooperative | Conventional company | Public/general benefit | WISE | Social enterprise |
| Denmark | Association<br>Foundation<br>Limited liability company<br>Cooperative | - | - | - | - | Registered social enterprise |
| Estonia | Non-profit association<br>Limited liability company<br>Foundation | - | - | - | - | - |
| Finland | Association<br>Foundation<br>Cooperative<br>Start-up with a social mission | - | - | - | Social enterprise | - |
| France | Association (neighbourhood enterprise) | Cooperative of activity and employment (CAE) | - | - | Organisation for integration through economic activity (SIAE)[37]<br>Enterprise for employment (EBE)<br>Adapted enterprise | - |

37 As a "qualification", SIAE is legally defined by the labour code (Code du travail, article L5132-1). There are five different types of agreements: intermediate voluntary organization (*association intermédiaire*, AI), centre for adaptation to working life (*atelier et chantier d'insertion*, ACI), integration enterprise (*enterprise d'insertion*, EI), self-employment integration company (enterprise d'insertion par le travail independent, EITI), and temporary work integration enterprise (*enterprise de travail temporaire d'insertion*, ETTI) that give ground to different typologies of SIAE. A SIAE can be set up as association, cooperative, societé cooperative d'interet collectif (SCIC) or conventional company.

| Country | Traditional legal forms | Legal adjustment of traditional legal forms | | Special statuses | Statuses/qualifications for social enterprises specifically | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Cooperative | Conventional company | Public/general benefit | WISE | Social enterprise |
| Germany | Association<br>Cooperative<br>Limited liability company<br>Civil law partnership | - | - | Public benefit status | Sheltered workshop<br>Inclusive enterprise | - |
| Greece | Women's Agricultural Cooperative | Social cooperative of limited liability<br>Social cooperative of integration of special groups<br>Social cooperative of integration of vulnerable groups<br>Social cooperative of inclusion | - | - | - | - |
| Hungary[38] | Foundation<br>Association<br>Non-profit limited liability/joint stock company | - | - | - | - | - |
| Ireland | Company limited by guarantee<br>Company limited by share<br>Designated activity company<br>Unincorporated association<br>Industrial and provident society (cooperative) | - | - | Charitable status | - | - |

38 Even though Act X (2006) was introduced to support the development of WISEs, social cooperatives have over the years turned into quasi-public organisations. Accordingly, social cooperatives are not regarded as fully-fledged WISEs by the B-WISE analysis.

| Country | Traditional legal forms | Legal adjustment of traditional legal forms | | Special statuses | Statuses/qualifications for social enterprises specifically | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Cooperative | Conventional company | Public/general benefit | WISE | Social enterprise |
| Italy | - | B-type Social cooperative | - | - | - | Social enterprise |
| Latvia | Limited liability company<br>Association<br>Foundation | - | - | - | - | Social enterprise |
| Lithuania | Public enterprise<br>Small partnership<br>Private limited liability company<br>Association | - | - | - | Social enterprise | - |
| Luxembourg | Association<br>Cooperative society | - | - | - | - | Societal impact company |
| Malta | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Netherlands | Association<br>Foundation<br>Cooperative<br>Private company with limited liability<br>Public limited company<br>Combination of private company with limited liability and foundation | - | - | - | - | - |
| Poland | - | Social cooperative | - | - | Professional activity establishment | - |
| Portugal | - | Social and solidarity cooperative | | Private institution of social solidarity | Social insertion enterprise<br>Sheltered workshop | - |

| Country | Traditional legal forms | Legal adjustment of traditional legal forms | | Special statuses | Statuses/qualifications for social enterprises specifically | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Cooperative | Conventional company | Public/general benefit | WISE | Social enterprise |
| Romania | - | - | - | - | Sheltered workshop<br>Social insertion enterprise | - |
| Slovakia | Association<br>Foundation<br>Cooperative | - | - | Public benefit organisation | Integration social enterprise<br>Sheltered workshop | - |
| Slovenia | Institute | - | - | - | Company for PWDs<br>Employment centre | Social enterprise |
| Spain | - | Social initiative cooperative | - | - | Employment integration enterprise<br>Special employment centre | - |
| Sweden | Economic association<br>Non-profit association | - | Conventional company (with a special dividend limitation) | - | - | - |




# 4. WISE RESOURCES

The scope of this chapter is to scrutinise the mix of resources WISEs rely upon, which include public and private resources resulting from the sale of goods and services, as well as monetary and non-monetary resources.

Attention is paid to the 13 B-WISE partner countries by relying on the Country Fiches and literature.

WISEs provide a number of positive externalities for the community, including improvements in the quality of life for persons with support needs and consequent reductions in the demand for health care and social services (Perotìn, 2012). The contribution of WISEs to improving wellbeing is furthermore strengthened by two trends. First, the recent increasing tendency to engage in fields, such as the regeneration of abandoned lands, recycling and up-cycling and social organic farming that contribute significantly to improving environmental health. Second, the intrinsic inclination of WISEs to use unexploited resources that would not otherwise be used for welfare and development goals so as to benefit WSNs or the community at large.

However, WISEs usually entail higher production costs than conventional enterprises, which are mainly related to the training and supervision of the WSNs they integrate to work. On top of this, most WISEs struggle to access repayable resources owing to their specific nature. For example, WISE start-ups cannot normally count on traditional

Grant Agreement: 621509-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-EPPKA2-SSA-B
This publication has been co-funded by the European Commission. The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Agency and Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.
Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

funding channels (e.g., venture capital) because they guarantee no or low returns on investments. At the same time, WISEs often encounter difficulties in accessing bank loans.

To counterbalance their higher costs, like any other social enterprise, WISEs have developed peculiar models of sustainability that draw on a variable resource mix. When compared to social enterprises delivering welfare services, WISEs are characterized by a turnover composed of a more balanced mix of private and public resources, which originate from various sources. These include public and private resources resulting from the sale of goods and services (e.g., to public agencies through public contracts; to individuals, and increasingly to conventional enterprises), as well as monetary and non-monetary resources, which are normally not accessible to for-profit enterprises (e.g., voluntary work and donations). Nevertheless, the latter are often unstable or insufficient. Hence, it emerges the importance of tailored policies in the form of public grants and subsidies and fiscal breaks to cover at least part of the costs linked to the work integration of WSNs (European Commission, 2020a).

Table 4.1 articulates the diverse typologies of resources WISEs rely upon.

***Table 4.1. WISE resource mix***

| Typology of resources | Sources | |
|---|---|---|
| | Public | Private |
| Non-monetary resources | Public community assets | Voluntary contributions, private community assets |
| Non-repayable resources | Public subsidies, EU grants | Private grants, indivisible reserves resulting from the constraint on the distribution of profits, donations also through crowdfunding |
| Repayable resources | Guarantee funds and matching funds at national and EU level (e.g., EaSI guarantee) | Loans, equity provided by special funds, traditional and socially-oriented banks, financial institutions and private social venture capital funds, equity capital brought by shareholders in the form of shares |
| Fiscal breaks | Decrease in taxes and social security contributions to reduce the cost of labour for WSNs | - |
| Resources from income-generating activities | Incomes from the sale of goods and services to public clients (public agencies) | Incomes from the sale of goods and services to private (individuals and conventional enterprises) |

## 4.1 Non-monetary contributions

Many WISEs emerged bottom-up with very little resources at their disposal, solely or mostly thanks to the commitment of volunteers. Volunteers had a fundamental role in the early stages of development of many national experiences, when the emerging WISEs were unable to attract enough monetary resources to support the work integration of persons with support needs. Volunteers have played a key role at various levels: they contributed in many instances by providing skills, such as guidance and support in the areas of expertise of WISEs, but they also contributed as supporters or as board members. Some WISEs were for instance voluntarily founded by psychiatrists, nurses and social workers (e.g., France, Greece and Italy).

Non-monetary resources such as voluntary contributions, donations received from members, other individuals or organisations, as well as assets made available by the community for free (e.g., buildings, pieces of land, and technical tools and equipment) have played a key role especially in those WISEs that emerged bottom-up. Conversely, non-monetary contributions drawn from the community have been less relevant in countries where WISEs have been developed mainly top-down thanks to public support measures (e.g., many CEE countries).

In countries where WISEs emerged from below, non-monetary resources continue to play a relevant role, particularly in those organisations that have safeguarded the local anchorage over time, despite their scale in size and consolidation. The observation of social enterprise development patterns, including WISEs, suggests that the capacity to attract non-commercial resources is stronger the more enterprises are inclusive and able to engage diverse stakeholders having a different relation with the enterprise (Borzaga, Fazzi and Galera, 2016).

Conversely, the share of non-commercial and non-monetary resources – primarily the number of volunteers – tends to drop significantly as WISEs weaken their roots in local communities and, as a result of their substantial growth in size, are pushed to adopt management tools and models suited for conventional enterprises, which are nevertheless doomed to jeopardise their added value in intercepting new needs and seizing new opportunities. Similarly, the capacity to mobilize community resources is rather low in those contexts where passive behaviours and dependence on the state tend to predominate (Vidović, 2013; Anđelić et al., 2021).

## 4.2 Non-repayable resources

The recognition by public authorities of the role played by WISEs in favouring the work integration of persons otherwise excluded by the labour market has provided them with public support (Defourny and Nyssens, 2008). Public support measures designed

by EU MSs target either WISEs (e.g., subsidies and grants to cover investments in fixed assets, support for workplace adaptation, support for training) or the recipients addressed (e.g., subsidies covering part of the wages of WSNs).

From a comparative perspective, access to targeted public support measures vary to a significant extent across countries, from the lack of public support measures dedicated to WISEs altogether in the Netherlands, in line with the Dutch approach favourable to creating an equal playing field for all enterprises, up to the availability of diverse public schemes tailored for WISEs in Belgium. Nevertheless, it should be underlined that in the case of the Netherlands WISEs have access – like any other enterprise – to a large variety of coherent policy measures, which ultimately render the support system for WISEs rather enabling when compared to that of other studied countries (European Commission 2019d; 2020a; Kemkes et al., 2021).

The rather favourable public support that is accessible to WISEs in Belgium, varies to a significant extent depending on the region. In the Flanders, WISEs can apply for different types of project grants, i.e., public grants to execute innovation projects or public grants for specific investments (Department of Work and Social Economy of the Flanders, 2021). Moreover, WISEs have access to public subsidies related to the number of WSNs employed: a wage subsidy, an individual support subsidy and an organizational support subsidy, or a lump-sum subsidy in case of proximity services (European Commission, 2020b). In Wallonia, integration companies (EI), employment development initiatives in the proximity social services sector (IDESS) and companies organising work customized to PWDs (ETA) have access to a subsidy called "social integration economy" (SINE) measure related to the employment of WSN, which is not accessible to conventional enterprises. For EIs, there is moreover a subsidy to finance the salary as well as the operating costs of the social workers supporting the WSNs.

Targeted subsidies for the recruitment of WSNs are moreover in place in Austria, Croatia, France, Latvia, Poland, Spain, and Slovenia, while public contributions aiming to reduce the cost of labour of workers that do not have support needs are awarded to WISEs in all the above-mentioned countries except for France and Latvia.

Having said so, the great majority of EU MSs are overall distinguished by an inconsistent and fragmented public support system, which fails to take the social responsibility taken on by WISEs adequately into account. The support funding structure is for various reasons described as not sustainable or lacking a strategic approach in Austria, Bulgaria, France, Greece, Italy, and Romania.

Differently from Belgium, in Italy no public support is provided to cover the wages of WSNs at national level, nor to finance the work carried out by without-support needs workers, neither to cover the support needed to facilitate the integration of fellow WSNs. Positive exceptions exist however in a few regions/provinces (e.g., the province of Trento), where adequate support has been provided to cover the costs of supporters. Likewise, the current French support system is unable to compensate for

the hiring of WSNs (Court of Auditors of France, 2019). Failure to support the costs of supporters, which is deemed crucial for the development of social and work inclusion pathways is extremely problematic, especially in times of economic crisis when the number of vulnerable people tends to increase dramatically.

Except for a few symbolic measures defined in the framework Law 219/2015, no national policy support framework exists for WISEs in Romania. WISE public support is similarly regarded as unsatisfactory in Austria and Bulgaria owing to a project-based approach of funding, shaped by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in Bulgaria and by Public Employment Services in Austria, which jeopardises stability. Having said so, like any other enterprise, Austrian WISEs profit from wage subsidies as well as other subsidies when hiring WSNs, who cannot enter the regular job market.

Within an overall support system that is described as unsatisfactory, Greece is distinguished by one measure targeting directly social cooperatives of limited liability (KoisPE), social cooperative enterprises of integration (KoinSEpEntaxis) and social cooperatives of inclusion (KoiSEn), which is described as particularly effective, because it encourages recipients to get involved in integration projects: WSNs employed by the above mentioned WISEs are allowed to keep their social protection benefits (i.e., rehabilitation benefit, disability pension) regardless of the level of salary (Adam, 2014; Douvitsa, 2020).

There are furthermore more than a few countries where there is disproportionate access to public support resources, which depends on the recipients (e.g., Slovenia and Spain) and/or the WISEs targeted (e.g., Bulgaria, Croatia and Poland).

Examples of countries where WISEs integrating PWDs have access to more generous support measures when compared to those facilitating the integration of other vulnerable target groups include Slovenia, Croatia and Spain. Despite the introduction of a law on social entrepreneurship in 2011 (reformed in 2018) in Slovenia, the pre-existing support system for WISEs integrating PWDs (in the form of companies for PWDs and employment centres) has continued to be more favourable than the one for social enterprises integrating other types of WSNs (OECD, 2022). Several more favourable support measures are accessible to companies for PWDs and employment centers, e.g., wage subsidies for the employment of PWDs, support for the costs for individualized assistance to PWDs and support for adapting the workplace to the needs of a PWD when compared to ex lege social enterprises. Noteworthy is that companies for PWDs are moreover exempted from paying social security contributions for the ordinary workers employed.

Likewise, in Croatia selected typologies of WISEs – namely, veteran cooperatives – benefit from a very favourable support system. The specific support measures they are entitled to contribute to explaining the impressive increase in number of veteran cooperatives up to the point that they nowadays make up almost half of the total number of cooperatives (Vidović and Baturina, 2021). However, as any other

enterprise employing PWDs, Croatian WISEs may receive subsidies in the amount of 10-70% of the wage base, depending on the decision of the Institute for Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of PWDs or the Croatian Employment Service.

In Spain, although specific measures to support both integration enterprises (which target a broad spectrum of WSNs) and special employment centres (facilitating work integration of PWDs) are in place, young people hosted by protection institutions, people with substance addictions and convicts do not enjoy the same levels of social, financial and institutional support of PWDs.

In Poland, by contrast, the opposite situation occurs: while support for supported employment enterprises (ZPChs) targeting specifically PWDs is being phased out, support for social cooperatives integrating a wide range of WSNs other than PWDs is rather effective, as confirmed by the significant growth in the number of social cooperatives registered since their legal recognition in 2006.

All in all, the public support system is rather inadequate and fragmented in most of the countries studied. A few improvements are however noticeable in selected countries. A positive example is provided for instance by Greece, where KoiSPEs (social cooperatives of limited liability) are now being supported for their function as mental health units, which is expected to contribute to further their economic stability and development.

Especially in countries where limited public measures addressed to WISEs are in place, a key role in boosting the development of WISEs has been played by the EU funds. Beneficiaries of EU funding schemes have been especially WISEs from CEE countries. For instance, in Latvia, there are several innovative grant support programmes, like the program “Support for Social Entrepreneurship”, financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) and run by the Ministry of Welfare. Also in Croatia, most of the public grants came from the ESF Operational Programme “Efficient Human Resources”, which provide for the possibility to use funds for the employment of WSNs. By contrast, access to public and EU grant programs remains extremely limited for Greek WISEs (European Commission, 2019c).

Worth underlying is that available funds, including EU and national schemes, are often not fully exploited due to the lack of capacity of small organisations, which are unable to cope with the complex administrative procedures (European Commission, 2019f; 2020a; Cotič, 2021).

*Table 4.2. Public policies*

| Public policies | Comprehensive support measures | | Weak support system (e.g., strong regional variations) | Strong support system for PWDs | Key role of EU funding |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Addressed to all enterprises | Addressed to WISEs | | | |
| Policies targeting enterprises (Subsidies & grants to cover investments, support for work place adaptation, etc.) | Austria, Netherlands | Belgium, France | Bulgaria, Latvia, Poland, Romania | Slovenia, Spain | Latvia |
| Policies targeting WSNs | Austria, Netherlands | Belgium, France | Bulgaria, Italy, Latvia, Poland | Croatia, Slovenia, Spain | Croatia, Latvia, Poland, Slovenia |

In addition to public non-repayable public resources, WISEs also rely on private resources. These include first the indivisible reserves resulting from the constraint on the distribution of profits. This accumulation of non-divisible resources over time increases the capitalisation of WISEs and facilitates access to the credit market.

WISEs have moreover increasingly access to private support measures made available by grant-making foundations operating at national and international level, as well as grants provided by second-level associations, other social economy organisations and conventional enterprises. In some countries, community resources are being mobilized also thanks to innovative crowd-funding platforms, which sometimes collect donations, some other times equity from private citizens and enterprises to fund the start-up of new WISEs (European Commission, 2020a).

## 4.3 Repayable resources

Access to repayable resources is extremely patchy across the studied countries and depends very much on the widespread difficulty of WISEs in accessing finance, which mainly results from insufficient knowledge of the existing supply of finance, a lack of investment skills and a poor ability amongst WISEs to develop proper project proposals (e.g., Latvia, Slovenia, Romania).

It should however be highlighted that except for those WISEs that are willing to invest in capital intensive sectors (e.g., waste management, urban renewal, cultural heritage management), the demand for repayable finance is in general not very high (European Commission, 2020a).

Noteworthy is that traditional financial intermediaries are moreover progressively financing WISEs, especially in those countries where they have been politically recognised and their functioning is regulated by law. Furthermore, socially-oriented and ethical banks are gradually emerging in various countries, hence increasing the supply of financial products and services tailored to the specific needs and challenges faced by WISEs when accessing repayable financial resources.

At national (e.g., Italy) and EU level specific programmes such as guarantee funds and matching funds are gradually gaining momentum. The EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) in particular provides for repayable financial instruments (loans and equity) in addition to grants and technical assistance to support the capacity of the finance providers as well as the investment readiness of social enterprises, WISEs included (European Commission, 2020a).

## 4.4 Fiscal advantages

Fiscal measures benefiting WISEs are found in all the analysed countries except for the Netherlands and Bulgaria; neither in the Netherland, nor in Bulgaria WISEs benefit from any specific favourable fiscal treatment (Kemkes et al., 2021; Hristova, Dobreva and Seyfetinova, 2021).

The rationale for awarding fiscal advantages to WISEs is that of reducing the higher costs incurred, which are related to the training and supervision of WSNs. Fiscal advantages are awarded either on the ground of the legal form covered (non-profit entity) or on the basis of the activity run (e.g., employment of WSN independently from the legal form etc.), which is deemed as worthy of a *favur legis*. The pattern of linking fiscal benefits to specific legal forms used by WISEs has contributed to a rather uneven landscape across countries and within the diverse typologies of WISEs in the same country. In some countries, WISEs set up as limited liability companies do not benefit from the fiscal advantages that are awarded to non-profit organisations; the same applies to non-profit organisation engaged in economic activities – the distinctive pattern of social enterprises – which are in some of the studied countries discriminated against.

Country variations are extremely marked and so are the differences within the WISE system in each country. In Romania, fiscal breaks are granted only to WISEs registered as non-profit organisations by virtue of their legal form. A similar situation takes place in Belgium where WISEs – mostly set up as associations – are eligible for all the benefits granted to non-profit entities (VZW, *vereniging zonder winstoogmerk* in Dutch and ASBL, *association sans but lucrative* in French). Fiscal breaks are recognised also when VZW/ASBL develop commercial activities, provided that all profits are reinvested into the organisation's social mission (asset lock scheme) (European Commission, 2020b). In Belgium, WISEs benefit however also from the reduction of social security

contributions, which are targeted to several types of organisations and enterprises (not only WISEs) that employ long-term unemployed people (European Commission, 2020b).

Likewise, in Austria fiscal breaks for WISEs are valid if the latter are recognized with the status of "public benefit enterprise". This status can be granted to a private limited liability company, as well as to an association by the competent tax authorities; to obtain the status, the pre-requisite is that the enterprise pursues a public benefit and uses its assets for such tax-privileged purposes only (European Commission, 2020a). Austrian WISEs profit also from corporate tax exemption and for their own economic activities reduced VAT rates.

Non-profit entities do not conversely benefit from fiscal advantages in Croatia if they are engaged in economic activities beyond a certain income. While non-profits are normally not subject to VAT, if they carry out economic activities, they are obliged to pay it like any other conventional company whenever their annual income gained from economic activities exceeds 40,000 EUR (Anđelić et al., 2021). Having said so, WISEs set up as sheltered and integrative workshops, veterans cooperatives and companies that employ PWDs, are conversely eligible for several incentives.

The same occurs in Slovenia, where fiscal breaks are extensive and generous for the three main typologies of WISEs: companies for PWDs, employment centres and social enterprises integrating WSNs.

Similarly, in Italy the social responsibility taken on by social cooperatives – by large the most widespread typology of WISE – is built into their fiscal framework. Profit allocated to reserves is not taxed and social cooperatives are exempted from the payment of pension and insurance contributions for the WSNs employed. Furthermore, some regions award total or partial reductions of the regional tax on productive activities (*Imposta Regionale sulle Attività Produttive*, IRAP) (where foreseen, WISEs benefit from this fiscal break by virtue of being a Third Sector organisation)[39]. By contrast, under the current fiscal system, WISEs other than social cooperatives are not entitled to the above-mentioned fiscal brakes.

Differently from Italy, there is no specific tax legislation for WISEs as such in Spain. However, the reduction of tax burden for WISEs is ensured by various exemptions, deductions and bonuses envisaged by the Spanish tax system, which are mainly related to the employment of WSNs. However, the most important reduction applies to hiring PWDs and the same deductions in corporate tax exemption and social insurance costs are notably higher for the recruitment of PWDs as compared to other WSNs.

39 According to the not yet implemented fiscal reform of the Third Sector, also WISEs in the form of social cooperatives shall benefit from the concessions resulting from the tax deductibility of the capital subscribed.

In Latvia, fiscal breaks granted to WISEs at the national level are still in development and it is therefore too early to assess their effectiveness, although current incentives do not seem overall to be adequate.

All in all, the fiscal framework is far from being satisfactory and the lack of a proper tax framework is seen as one of the factors limiting the future development of WISEs and precisely their capacity to invest in developing the skills and capabilities of those bearing most severe support needs (Aiken, 2007; Babić and Baturina, 2020).

Table 4.3 highlights the main fiscal benefits that are awarded to WISEs in the countries studied. They include the corporate tax exemption on the retained profits, which is mainly related to the non-profit nature of WISEs; the reduced or waived social insurance costs for the WSNs employed; the exemption from a reduced VAT rate; and tax reductions granted to private (both individuals and enterprises) and/or institutional donors of WISEs.

The most widespread fiscal advantage is the reduction in social insurance costs for WSNs employed. Other advantages – corporate tax exemption, VAT exemption or reduced rate and tax reductions granted to private and/or institutional donors – are less widespread. Among the less common fiscal breaks, tax reductions for donations to WISEs are regarded in more than a few countries as a desirable fiscal advantage that could help support the development of WISEs further (Juviño, 2021).

Based on the research conducted it is nonetheless essential to overcome the current fragmentation of the fiscal framework, which is the relevant pattern in most of the countries studied, by assigning equivalent fiscal advantages to all the WISEs operating within the same country. More specifically, preferential treatments linked exclusively to a particular legal form covered by WISEs or to the integration of sole PWDs shall be replaced by a more consistent fiscal support system.

### *Table 4.3. Fiscal benefits*

| Typology of fiscal benefits | Countries |
|---|---|
| Corporate tax exemption (on profits) | Austria, Italy (only social cooperatives), Latvia, Poland (only social cooperatives), Spain |
| VAT exemption or reduced rate | Austria, Croatia (only associations), Italy, Slovenia |
| Social insurance costs for the WSNs employed reduced or covered by subsidies | Austria, Croatia, Italy, Latvia, Slovenia, Spain |
| Tax reductions granted to private and/or institutional donors | Croatia (only associations), France, Italy (only social cooperatives) Poland |
| Other fiscal breaks | Greece[40] |

40 Exemption from an annual business tax, which is imposed on natural and legal persons with a commercial status and usually starts from 600 up to 1,000 EUR per year. Exempted from the taxation of profits distributed to employees (up to 35%).

## 4.5 Access to markets

### 4.5.1 Public markets

Over the last two decades, most EU MSs have been progressively moving away from grants and contracts signed directly with the public authorities towards competitive tenders, both to reduce the costs of services and to align with the EU public procurement rules. However, the impact of this evolution has been controversial. On the one hand, it has increased access to public markets to new, more innovative and more efficient providers and contributed to stabilising the relationships between WISEs and public agencies. On the other hand, the way public procurement regulations have been interpreted by certain national laws have sometimes hampered the exploitation of this opportunity (European Commission, 2020a). For instance, when public tenders are open to conventional enterprises and/or based exclusively or mainly on cost minimisation criteria, they have often negatively impacted on the quality of services and working conditions. This has happened for instance in Italy, where in recent years WISEs have registered a growing decrease of margins and have been pushed to the limits of sustainability by public contractors' procurement strategies. The latter have indeed prioritized the pursuit of budget cuts over the need to safeguard the quality of work and the integration of WSNs.

The new EU regulations on public procurement include provisions aimed at encouraging contracting authorities to shift from a price only approach towards the most economically advantageous offer (European Commission – EASME, 2020) and pave the way for facilitating WISEs' access to public markets. All EU MSs have transposed into national legislation the Directive 2014/24/EU on public procurement[41]. The Directive envisages the possibility for contracting authorities to reserve the right to participate in public procurement procedures to sheltered workshops and economic operators whose main aim is the social and professional integration of PWDs or other WSNs (art. 20)[42]; and to include qualitative, environmental and/or

41 Directive 2014/24/EU of the European Parliament and of The Council of 26 February 2014 on public procurement and repealing Directive 2004/18/EC. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32014L0024.

42 Directive 2014/24/EU establishes that "MSs may reserve the right to participate in public procurement procedures to sheltered workshops and economic operators whose main aim is the social and professional integration of disabled or disadvantaged persons or may provide for such contracts to be performed in the context of sheltered employment programmes, provided that at least 30% of the employees of those workshops, economic operators or programmes are disabled or disadvantaged workers" (art. 20). However, according to the legal analysis performed in the framework of the project "Buy for Social Impact", the transposition of this specific provision was optional, and this led to different provisions established by national legislators. For instance, in Croatia, Czechia, France, and Greece the established threshold is higher (50%), while in Romania there is no indication of a minimum threshold; in Czechia and Latvia, reserved contracts may be awarded only to only organizations integrating PWDs. Detailed information on the transposition of Directive 2014/24/EU at the national levels is available at: https://www.aeidl.eu/docs/bsi/index.php/bsi-buying-for-social-impact/bsi-library/bsi-deliverable.

social aspects in the awarding criteria (art. 67). However, the concrete exploitation of such opportunities is uneven across the countries studied.

In Belgium, both federal and regional public administrations are relevant clients for WISEs. The opportunities offered by the new procurement regulations have been well exploited and, in many cases, public contracts have gradually replaced public subsidies (European Commission, 2020b). Support measures in place to facilitate the application of the new regulations include the development of several tools aimed at providing technical assistance to contracting authorities on how to integrate social, environmental and ethical clauses, as well as to social enterprises on how to effectively apply to public tenders. In Wallonia, innovative tools include the creation of a network of "social clause facilitators" working as helpdesk to assist both public buyers and tenderers. Results of the application of these tools are overall positive and corroborate that there is room for improvement in this area: public procurements may foster professional training and build partnerships between conventional enterprises and WISEs (European Commission – EASME, 2020).

Social clause facilitators have been introduced also in France, where several provisions favouring WISEs participation in procurement processes have been incorporated in the Code of public procurement. These include the reservation of significant shares of public contracts (or lots) to enterprises employing WSNs and enterprises of the social and solidarity economy[43]. The exploitation of these opportunities has opened the access to WISEs in several markets. However, the share of public contracts awarded to WISEs is still quite low at the national level when compared to local public buyers (i.e., regional, departmental, and municipal institutions)[44]. This also applies to the use of social clauses. In 2017, the State achieved 6.7% of the amount of its purchases with a social clause, which is far from the targets established in 2012 (10%) and in 2020 (25%). Conversely, local authorities reached the share of 28.2% in 2017.

A similar trend is observed in the Netherlands, where contracting authorities making use of reserved contracts are mainly local institutions (e.g., municipalities, public schools and semi-public institution like regional water authorities), while the use of this provision at the national level has been quite limited so far (0.2% of the total number of public tenders launched in one year, according to TenderNed, 2021). Public buyers often hesitate to use reserved contracts because they prefer to receive a high number of applications, so as to be able to consider different offers and decide based on a cost-benefit analysis. However, the engagement of WISEs in a growing range of sectors as well as the growing number of enterprises awarded with the PSO 30+ certification (among them many WISEs) is likely to stimulate public buyers to make a

43 It is to be noted however, that contracts may be reserved to WISEs or equivalent organizations provided that they employ a minimum threshold of 50% of WSNs, while in most EU MSs, this threshold is set at 30% (Art. L2113-13) (Ausort, 2021).

44 In 2017, the State achieved 6.7% of the amount of its purchases with a social clause, which is far from the targets established in 2012 (10%) and in 2020 (25%). Conversely, local authorities in 2017 already reached 28.2% (Ausort, 2021).

wider use of reserved contracts in the future[45]. In many tendering procedures, local authorities demand 5% of social return, which implies that 5% of the contract value is to be spent on wages and/or other activities supporting employees with a large distance to the labour market. Subcontracting to WISEs is one of the ways to fulfil the 5% social return obligation. Another option applied by public buyers is to include social impact in the award criteria of the tendering procedure, where the social impact can be achieved by employing workers with a large distance to the labour market and/or by collaborating with WISEs and former sheltered workshops.

In other MSs, such as e.g., Spain, Slovenia and Italy, the situation is more fragmented.

In Spain, Law 9/2017 on Public sector contracts establishes that at least 7% of certain public contracts shall be reserved for social initiative special employment centres (which shall employ at least 70% of WSNs) or employment integration enterprises (which shall employ at least 50% of people at risk of social exclusion). Through specific agreements, regional authorities may set their own quota, and these vary from 2% (in the Canary Islands) to 10% (in Castilla la Mancha). However, the target is far from being reached at the national level, being the degree of compliance equal to 1.54%. The targets are not reached at regional level either, but significant variations in the degree of compliance are observed (e.g., 0% in the Canary Islands, above 30% in Galicia) (OIReScon, 2022).

In Slovenia, the opportunities offered by the new legislation in relation to socially responsible public procurement remain untapped. However, the Ministry of Public administration has published guidelines and provided training sessions to the officers in charge of managing public procurement procedures so as to ensure the correct application of the 2015 Act on Public procurement (OECD, 2022). Moreover, it is to be noted that specific typologies of WISEs (i.e., companies for PWDs) are better suited to compete with conventional enterprises and access public markets more easily also thanks to a dedicated support system.

As far as Austria is concerned, according to experts interviewed for the purpose of this study (Walchhofer and Moder, 2021), public contracting is considered a "sensitive topic", and there is limited information on the awarding of public contracts to WISEs. Their perception is that public authorities do not exploit the opportunity of reserving contracts to WISEs. Eventually, public authorities include social clauses (i.e., requirements for providing diversity) that allow for the awarding of higher punctuations to tenderers fulfilling them. However, it should be underlined that in Austria there is a "privileged market access" for both WISEs and sheltered workshops cooperating with the AMS, which supports public market access.

In countries such as e.g., Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Latvia, Poland and Romania – besides a few inspirational good practices that have been identified by recent

45 PSO-30+ certified enterprises are automatically eligible to apply for reserved contracts" although not every local purchasing authority is using the PSO 30+ as a compulsory certification (Kemkes et al., 2021).

research (see European Commission – EASME, 2020; European Commission, 2020c), the available social provisions under Directive 2014/24/EU appear to be overall underexploited.

In Croatia, despite public procurement is considered a key determinant for the future development of social enterprises in the country, WISEs are not usually engaged in public contracting and the opportunities offered by the EU regulations are far from being exploited (European Commission, 2019b). Similarly, in Greece socially responsible public procurement (SRPP) remains underdeveloped. Both the report "Promoting Social Considerations into Public Procurement Procedures for Social Economy" (European Commission, 2019a) and the "Report on the Social and Solidarity Economy 2019-2020" (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of Greece, 2020) pinpoint the need to undertake concrete actions aimed at informing and sensitising public authorities to reserve contracts to WISEs. Recently, both the number of contracting authorities (in particular at national level) and the pool of providers amongst WISEs (mainly Limited Liability Social Cooperatives, and a few Social Cooperative Enterprises of Inclusion) has grown; however, the use of reserved contracts for WISEs remains marginal and limited to contracts below the thresholds for the provision of cleaning and catering services.

The use of reserved contracts is reported as marginal also in Poland. In 2020, this contracting procedure was used only in the 0.31% of the contract notices published in the public procurement bulletin[46]. Similarly, contract notices including social clauses are a very small proportion of the overall number of contracts. In Bulgaria and Romania there is no evidence of the usage neither of reserved contracts, nor of social clauses in public procurement procedures. Likewise, in Latvia current practices show that contracting authorities do not use social clauses and do not announce privileged procurements. Some organisations with a longstanding experience in the provision of social care services (including conventional enterprises and NGOs) have proved to be successful in accessing public markets via public procurement procedures, but this has happened in the framework of ordinary processes, where the main awarding criterion was the lowest price.

Barriers preventing WISEs from applying to public procurement calls include the lack of technical and financial capacity (e.g., Bulgaria, Poland) and the fact that WISEs are not aware of the priorities of the public policies and therefore do not focus on the delivery of products/services that may be of interest to public administrations (e.g., Croatia, Latvia). In Greece, the limited adaptation of the new procurement regulations is also attributed to contracting authorities' longstanding operational problems (e.g., lack of staff or overloaded staff), and to the lack of systematic technical support (e.g., training, guidance, mentoring). In Croatia, Greece and Romania, hesitation to use reserved contracts and social clauses is also attributed to the fear of breaking the

46 In recent years, a constant but not significant increase is observed: 0.24% in 2017, 0.28 in 2018 and 0.29 in 2019 (Public Procurement Office of Poland, 2020).

competition rules, which implies the risk of disciplinary and penal consequences for the staff. The scarce dissemination of calls for tenders amongst potential bidders is also seen as an obstacle (e.g., Greece, Spain).

Besides the above-mentioned country variations, in all the countries studied procurement officers tend to award contracts according to the lowest price criterion. This also happens in France, where – despite the overall satisfactory exploitation of the EU regulations – the lowest price remains the most favoured criterion especially by national contracting authorities, who perceive the use of reserved contracts and social clauses as costly and complicated. A substantial culture change by means of a pedagogical work is therefore needed to make social procurement "business as usual".

### 4.5.2 Private markets

WISEs rely also on resources generated from private procurement i.e., market activities with other enterprises, including conventional enterprises.

In several EU MSs, WISEs entertain commercial relations or have established partnerships with conventional enterprises in the framework of existing national regulations on the employment of WSNs (i.e., quota systems, see Section 1.2.1). Moreover, many conventional enterprises cooperate with WISEs in the frame of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices (tecnopolis group, 2018).

Establishing collaboration with conventional enterprises contributes to improving the labour market functioning, as it favours WSNs smoother placement in the open labour market. At the same time, it enables to gain a clearer picture of labour shortages and hence encourages the co-design of training curricula in collaboration with conventional enterprises.

There is, however, little data on the volume of business generated through purely commercial transactions or more structured partnerships between WISEs and conventional enterprises. In some countries (e.g., Italy, Netherlands) available information show that the income generated from both private procurement and the sale of goods and services to individual customers has increased over the last years. However, this positive trend was temporarily interrupted been by the Covid-19 crisis.

Country fiche analyses show that, besides quota systems in place in some MSs, there are no national public measures specifically aimed at incentivise conventional enterprises to purchase from WISEs or to support the establishment of partnerships with WISEs.

Relevant private initiatives encouraging partnerships between WISEs and conventional enterprises have emerged in e.g., Belgium (i.e., the campaign promoted by the Flemish WISEs federation Groep Maatwerk in collaboration with more than 100

Belgian companies[47]) and the Netherlands (i.e., the "buy social" campaign launched by Social Enterprise NL[48]). In Spain, a common pattern of collaboration between WISEs (specifically special employment centres) and conventional enterprises often includes temporary consortia for joint public tenders.

47 See: https://www.groepmaatwerk.be/in-de-kijker/meer-dan-100-ondernemers-breken-een-lans-voor-samenwerken-met-een-maatwerkbedrijf.

48 See: www.buy-social.nl.

# 5. COUNTRY PATTERNS: FROM TRADITIONAL LABOUR POLICIES TO WISEs

This chapter illustrates the context of emergence and the patterns of evolution of WISEs in three groups of countries: Central and Eastern Europe (i.e., Bulgaria, Croatia, Latvia, Poland, Romania and Slovenia), Southern Europe (i.e., Greece, Italy and Spain) and Western Europe (i.e., Austria, Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands). Attention is paid to the 13 B-WISE partner countries plus Germany, in light of the peculiar development dynamic shown by WISEs in this country. The rationale for clustering countries in these three groups are the similar trends shared when it comes to the connections of WISEs with labour policies and the degree of integration of WISEs in the welfare systems.

The analysis draws on the Country Fiches drafted by national partners and relevant literature on welfare systems, social enterprises and WISEs.

Grant Agreement: 621509-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-EPPKA2-SSA-B
This publication has been co-funded by the European Commission. The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Agency and Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.
Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

## 5.1 WISEs in Central and South-Eastern Europe[49]

### 5.1.1 Context of development

This subsection provides a closer look into the development, forms and structures of WISEs in Bulgaria, Croatia, Latvia, Poland, Romania and Slovenia. These countries, which are geographically located in Central and South-Eastern Europe, have a common tradition of state socialism before democratic transition at the beginning of 1990s.

Some traditions that have shaped WISEs and more in general social enterprises in these countries are derived from historical developments, even before socialist times. As social enterprise drivers in CEE and South-Eastern European (SEE) countries, we can mention solidarity and collectivistic values present in the philanthropic, associative and cooperative tradition prior to the transition to a market economy, but they were suppressed under communist regimes. So social entrepreneurship emergence can be specifically tracked in post-socialist times (Ciepielewska-Kowalik et al., 2021; European Commission, 2020a), when post-socialist countries witnessed the renewal of civic life. However, following transition, the social entrepreneurship sector suffered from the absence of an institutional framework. The EU was an important factor in defining the social entrepreneurship field. Some demonstrative cases include Bulgaria, which elaborated the national policy on the social economy and social enterprise in compliance with the European priorities (Marinova and Yoneva, 2021), and Latvia, in which EU policy initiatives were a driving force for the creation of an ad hoc legal framework for social enterprises (Kalkis et al., 2021).

### 5.1.2 WISEs in the welfare systems transformation

Path dependency is often highlighted when trying to assess social policy in post-socialist countries. Wider welfare analysis showed that in these countries "governments implemented the welfare system already in place during the pre-Soviet period (Bismarck social insurance), tried to maintain most of the values in force during communism (universalism, corporatism and egalitarianism) and re-adjusted it to the new post-communist consensus (market-based schemes)" (Cerami, 2006: 143). Post-socialist countries are often characterized by a poor coverage of services of general interest and limited recourse to ALMP, which somewhat opens the space for the development of alternative integration pathways (Ciepielewska-Kowalik et al., 2021). In some countries of this region, social enterprises are conflated with WISEs and are seen as vehicles whereby to implement public policies, rather than autonomous market players. But in general, it needs to be mentioned that among the host of social enterprises, WISEs are the most widely recognized social enterprise typology in CEE.

49 Section authored by Danijel Baturina, University of Zagreb.

Given post-socialist countries relatively low recognition and development of social entrepreneurship in general, WISEs also struggle to find their space within the welfare state.

Looking into specific country developments, in Croatia policy makers mostly ignored a "productivist" function of the welfare state which resulted in low employment rates, underdeveloped ALMPs and social inclusion measures (Dobrotić, 2016)[50]. In Poland, social policy is dominated by expanding cash benefits, rather than developing social services and investments (Siemienska and Domaradzka, 2020). But we can generally state that most post-socialist countries had in recent time some (at least minor) shift in social policy from passive to more active one (for example noted in Latvia; Kalkis, 2021), and had "activational turn" in labour market policies. In addition, Europeanization of national social policies came into action, which contributed, to that shift[51]. Nevertheless, still public employment services and their outreach capacity remains limited (see e.g., Vamesu, 2021; Anđelić et al., 2021).

The degree of work integration of different WSNs groups is estimated to be low for most of the groups (Hristova, Dobreva and Seyfetinova, 2021; Szarfenberg, Szarfenberg and Krenz, 2021; Vamesu, 2021). Some groups have a certain higher degree of work integration; PWDs are in this respect better connected to an established policy framework for their integration[52]. This is conversely sporadically the case for some other specific vulnerable groups such as NEETs (which could be connected with recent EU recognition of NEET population; Eurofound, 2016) or women survivors of violence.

EU level mapping (European Commission, 2020a) also notes that although in CEE and SEE countries welfare systems have undergone drastic reforms, the provision of welfare services remains predominantly a state task. These trends have a role in limiting the "playing field" for WISEs in countries like Slovenia and Croatia where the state plays a dominant role in providing social services (more in Filipovič Hrast and Rakar, 2020; Anđelić et al., 2021). Noteworthy is moreover that in many post-transition countries structural reforms have not been fully completed yet, so there are still gaps in state provision of welfare programmes and unaddressed social needs. As a result, there is a space and need for all social enterprises to get involved (Ciepielewska-Kowalik et al., 2021), especially WISEs targeting the gaps in social and work integration of vulnerable groups. This is the case in the countries that have undergone a transition towards the free market and democracy, which contributed to the building

50 The welfare state relies more on passive benefits and money transfers instead of social investments in services, education and programs, which could foster social and work integration of vulnerable groups.

51 It is often discussed if East-Central European welfare state constitutes a specific model of the welfare state (McMenamin, 2003) in addition to the Social-democratic, Liberal and Conservative models identified by Esping-Andersen (1990).

52 The exception is Latvia, where the degree of integration of most groups is estimated as high (Zeiļa and Švarce, 2021). In Slovenia, no distinction is made between various types of disabilities in any of the available databases. Also, there are insufficient data on the integration of the various groups (Cotič, 2021).

of welfare state resembling liberal model distinguished by certain gaps in welfare programmes (examples could be Poland, see more in Siemienska and Domaradzka, 2020)[53].

There is also a discussion in place in post-socialist countries on whether social enterprises should be recognized for their social merit or as one of the possible ways to legitimize neoliberal policies and the further withdrawal of the welfare states from social service provision (Baturina et al., 2021). This is partly connected to a number of context-specific factures concerning the nature of the reforms that have been implemented following the democratic transitions, the level of development of post-socialist countries and the relatively "young" civil society (some of the aspects are also mentioned related to social enterprises development in the region by the European Commission, 2020a).

In the conception of the welfare state, WISEs can be seen as actors who are pro-actively looking for solutions for emerging societal problems in the context of underdevelopment of social services of (relatively) passive labour market policies. WISEs are not fully integrated in the welfare systems of targeted countries.

Commonalities across post-socialist countries also relate to exogenous factors, primarily linked to EU integration processes, which was one of the key stimuli that shaped social enterprises and WISEs development (Ciepielewska-Kowalik et al., 2021). Baturina et al. (2021) analysis shows that external financing or donors (among which EU was crucial) were a "fire starter" in setting a path of recognizing social entrepreneurship as a new trend that can be beneficial to addressing some of the social challenges. For WISEs this can be seen as enabling (in countries which are eligible and have dedicated for European funds) or limiting factor (an aspect that can narrow public support only to European funds and integration of only some groups of WSNs). EU policies nowadays can also influence the development of the sector in the aspects of agenda-setting, in which national policies adopt EU policy perspective on the development of the sector.

### 5.1.3 WISE scope and typologies

When looking at legal structures, some countries have established very narrow legal frameworks (e.g., Latvia)[54], and in some other cases legal frameworks are unclear (as in Croatia, where WISE can operate in several legal forms but there is no specific legal recognition of WISE; Anđelić et al., 2021). Thus, in some countries there are

53 Some similar development could be found in Romania also where market fundamentalism shaped the economic policies in the 1990s and of the country and promoted a dichotomous state/market model, in which the state played an increasingly small part in public-service provision.

54 There is only one way of operating as WISE de jure and it is to have acquired social enterprise status as a limited liability company and be registered as WISE with the main aim of integrating a certain group (Zeiļa and Švarce, 2021).

wider opportunities to establish WISEs, whereas in some other countries there is a very narrow space for the development of WISEs, mostly related to the integration of PWDs[55]. This is precisely the case of sheltered workshops for PWDs that have been in some countries inherited from socialist time and are still today well-established and in some instances supported by WISEs (Anđelić et al., 2021; Szarfenberg, Szarfenberg and Krenz, 2021). All countries of the region have enacted special legislation related to PWDs (rehabilitation and employment) and quota systems are in place in a significant number of cases[56].

However, WISEs in most post-socialist countries are overall low in number and have failed to expand and be fully integrated into the social and employment services framework and public support measures.

When it comes to the typologies of WSNs addressed there are different degrees of legal "operationalization" in the countries under consideration and in most cases national definitions are not aligned with the EU definition of disadvantaged workers. As a result, the definition of WISEs' target groups and their eligibility for social assistance and supported employment remain an issue, as in many countries they are only widely described or unspecific in the relevant legal framework.

Public procurement and access to public markets vary in the six countries analysed but it is generally to be noted that all of them have transposed Directive 2014/24/EU and thus provide for the definition of social criteria or reserved contracts (see Section 4.5.1). However, current practice shows that contracting authorities rarely use social clauses in procurement for various reasons, including the low recognition and visibility of WISEs (and social enterprises in general), lack of understanding of WISEs specificities, lack of political will, technical capacities and experience (see Hristova, Dobreva and Seyfetinova, 2021; Szarfenberg, Szarfenberg and Krenz, 2021; Vamesu, 2021; Zeiļa and Švarce, 2021).

Different programs for different target groups are in place in most countries. However, as public support is relatively scarce, some important funding for WISEs (and social entrepreneurship in general) is noted to come from various EU schemes (for example ESF funds that are related to ALMP). Access to the EU has partly been a change maker. That is aligned with the analysis of the role of external funding for the development of social entrepreneurship in CEE countries (Baturina et al., 2021). The field of development of social enterprises in these countries has been significantly shaped top-down, specifically by the ESF, with a focus on supporting several start-up programmes for WISEs (European Commission, 2020). The issue with WISEs

55 For example, often ministry related to social or labour policies are main vehicles to support social enterprises and WISEs (see more in Anđelić et al., 2021; Hristova, Dobreva and Seyfetinova, 2021), or spaces for WISEs are, as mentioned, prominently stated in legal and strategic provisions for PWDs.

56 Latvia had an opposite development. A quota system was included in the Law on the Medical and social protection of the PWDs (1992) but in 1996, the law was amended and the quota system abolished (Zeiļa and Švarce, 2021).

framework development could be connected with top-down approach, which often resulted in a serious gap between the criteria put forward to define social enterprise at the administrative (and political) level(s), on the one hand, and actual practices, on the other hand (Ciepielewska-Kowalik et al., 2021)[57]. In general, we may say that a lot of recognition of WISEs was triggered by EU policies and funding.

### *Box 5. Hedona Social Enterprise (Croatia)*[58]

**www.hedona.hr**

Hedona social enterprise is a Limited Liability Company founded in 2013 in Križevci, Croatia as part of the project "Chocolateria Chris – Krizevci chocolateria", by the Association of Persons with Disabilities Krizevci. Recognizing social entrepreneurship as a way to approach existing social problems innovatively, the company contributes to combating poverty and increasing the quality of life of PWDs. Hedona started their sweet story in 60 square meters and with 6 employees, four of whom were workers with disabilities. Today, Hedona Chocolateria has 18 employees, nine of whom are PWDs. The main activity of Hedona, a social enterprise and integrative workshop, is the production of chocolate and chocolate pralines. Hedona's handmade craft and artisan chocolate products can be bought at the Hedona's chocolate house in the center of Krizevci and throughout Croatia, as well as online.

Two aspects of their development and work that could be considered especially inspiring. One is their evolvement over time. From the modest start, they developed in the integrative workshop, the only one in Croatia in which PWDs participate in the complete production process[59]. The Ministry of Labour and Pension System awarded the integrative workshop status to Hedona in December 2018. Through a public grant, they obtained significant funds (around 430,000 EUR) for the construction and expansion of the space of the integrative workshop and installation of equipment and new technologies, to employ and maintain the employment of PWDs[60]. With its unique approach

57 Authors specifically note as visible in the cases of Poland and Croatia, where the requirements defined in policy documents have proven unrealistic, and their application impossible.

58 Authored by Danijel Baturina, University of Zagreb.

59 The Act on Vocational rehabilitation and employment of PWDs (OG NN 157/13, 152/14, 39/18, 32/20) defines sheltered workshops and integrative workshops. Integrative workshop is a specific status given to institutions, companies or cooperatives established by public bodies, local authorities or private persons or entities, which employ at least 40% of workers with disabilities. Compared to the sheltered workshop, the integrative workshop is aimed at integrating people with moderate disabilities and who therefore need limited support.

60 Public tender for the allocation of special funds for the development of new technologies and business processes aimed at hiring/maintaining employment in protective workshops. For more information, see www.zosi.hr.

to business models and the concept of company development with its employees, Hedona Llc. stands out on the market and is rightly called human and a social enterprise. That is also recognized recently by Council of Europe Development Bank warded them with Social Cohesion 2020 award[61].

The second notable aspect is their development of collaborations and partnerships with for-profit enterprises. Those collaborations are related to compliance with the quota system in place in Croatia, which prescribes that all private employers with at least 20 workers are required to hire a certain number of PWDs. This obligation could be met and/or replaced in different ways. One way is to establish a contract for business cooperation with sheltered/integrative workshops. On that basis, Hedona currently has more than 20 contracts with various companies, including Konzum (the largest Croatian retail chain). In many cases, the cooperation becomes systematic and goes much wider. For example, Hedona also cooperates with Erste Bank – Office for Responsible Banking. The cooperation took place at the initiative of Erste Bank, which recognized the potential of Hedona as its client. Initially, this cooperation was based on providing financial benefits for Hedona's activities, and all the while, it expanded through a business cooperation agreement to fulfil the replacement quota.

The business cooperation agreements for meeting the replacement quotas currently make up almost 90% of Hedona's revenues. The expansion of the network of market channels, in general, proves how WISEs can effectively cooperate with for-profit enterprises. That is especially important in the Croatian context in which WISEs, as well as their supporting infrastructure, are underdeveloped and different legal/cultural/institutional barriers represent obstacles to the cooperation between WISEs and conventional/traditional enterprises. Given their experiences, Hedona can be regarded as a resource centre for the transfer of valuable know-how to other WISEs, which could replicate and expand similar collaborations in the future.

## 5.2 WISEs in Southern Europe

### 5.2.1 Historical background and main drivers

Italy, Spain and Greece are distinguished by a number of common characteristics, which explain the peculiar development paths shown by WISEs.

61 For more information, see: https://coebank.org/en/news-and-publications/news/ceb-award-social-cohesion-2020-goes-to-hedona-doo.

One commonality shared by these southern European countries is that WISEs are strongly rooted in the longstanding tradition of cooperatives, which emerged in all the three countries studied back in the 19th century as a reaction from below of WSNs. Over the years, cooperatives gradually came to play a key role as social and economic institutions in diverse economic sectors, including more recently work integration of people at risk of labour market exclusion.

Still today, WISEs are set up mostly as cooperatives in Italy (B-type social cooperatives) and Greece (five distinct cooperative forms), while cooperatives represent around one third of the overall number of existing WISEs in Spain (in the form of social initiative cooperatives). The importance of cooperatives has however gone through distinct phases: periods in which cooperatives were relatively autonomous and contributed significantly to economic development, welfare and employment and periods in which they were controlled by the state and the political system (e.g., especially during the totalitarian regimes) and their capacity to pursue the interests of the community and of specific categories of stakeholders was thus strongly jeopardized (Defourny and Nyssens, 2010). This interplay continues even today in Greece and it is a crucial factor in the development or reduction of Greek cooperatives, including WISEs set up as cooperatives, whose potential is still far from being fully exploited (European Commission, 2019c; Liatira, Karagouni and Tourlidas, 2021).

There are moreover some similar characteristics of the welfare systems, mainly connected to the severe gaps in service delivery, high rates of unemployment and feeble shift from passive towards ALMP, which boosted the strong bottom-up emergence of private innovative initiatives aiming to tackle labour market and social exclusion in Italy, Greece and Spain. Noteworthy is that this spontaneous dynamic has however taken place in different time-frames, reflecting distinctive country peculiarities and registering a dissimilar occupational impact in terms of number of WSNs placed.

As for the peculiarities of the targeted welfare systems, when compared to Western European Countries, welfare spending is notably lower in Italy, Greece and Spain, and the provision of social services financed by the state, in particular, has been traditionally rather underdeveloped. In the three countries, families have moreover been until recently considered the key actor in welfare provision (Bettio and Plantenga, 2004) and the state has traditionally assumed a residual role, mainly aimed at filling the gaps left by the family (Ziomas, Ketsetzopoulou and Bouzas, 2001). On top of this, public provision of welfare services – especially in Greece and Italy – has been dominated by cash benefits and PLMP have made until recently the lion's share (KEPE, 1989; Kermalis, 1990; Karantinos et al., 1992; Kavounidis, 1996; Ziomas, Ketsetzopoulou, and Bouzas, 2001).

Several reforms have been adopted to tackle unemployment and social exclusion specifically in these three countries; they were somewhat prompted by the EC, which has attempted to tackle unemployment of WSNs through structural funds,

especially the ESF and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Amidst the most relevant measures, noteworthy are furthermore national policies, laws and instruments aiming to remove the barriers of exclusion and stimulating the work integration of PWDs. In Italy, regulatory policies targeting workers with physical, mental and sensory disabilities by requiring companies and public administrations with more than 50 and then with 15 employees to employ a quota of PWDs, were regulated by Law 482/68 and now by Law 68/1999. In Spain, the Royal Legislative Decree 1/2013, approving the consolidated text of the General Law on the Rights of PWDs and their social inclusion establishes, among other aspects, quotas obliging companies and public administrations to hire a minimum percentage of workers with disabilities. There are no regulatory policies targeting other WSNs. In Greece, policies and practices for supporting the work integration of PWDs are rather limited, but there are specific legal arrangements/provisions (Law 1648/1986, Law 2643/1998 and Law 4440/2017) providing private enterprises and public organisations fulfil a mandatory employment quota system for PWDs and other persons in vulnerable social groups.

Nevertheless, the reforms introduced have been largely unable to achieve satisfactory outcomes, as corroborated by the high evasion rate of regulatory policies registered in all three countries, which failed to effectively ensure that WSNs find a suitable job.

According to a study carried out by the consulting firm Leialta, around 81% of Spanish companies do not comply with the Law on Labour insertion of PWDs, which establishes that companies with 50 or more employees meet the minimum quota of 2% of employees with disabilities (Europa Press, 2016).

As for substitutive policies, differently from Spain where sheltered workshops are actually WISEs, sheltered employment is not a popular form of insertion neither in Italy, nor in Greece. In Italy there is no specific legislation providing for protected employment, whereas in Greece Law 2646/1998 on Sheltered productive workshops is not in force yet, as no presidential decree has been so far published (Logaras, 2013).

### 5.2.2 WISE institutionalization

When compared to other EU countries where only de facto WISEs exist, WISEs are legally recognized in Italy, Greece and Spain. All three countries are distinguished by an intense production of legal acts regulating WISEs specifically and more widely the Third Sector (Italy), the social economy (Spain), and the social and solidarity economy (Greece), wherein WISEs are positioned as a specific organisational dynamic. All this has contributed to strengthening the legitimization of WISEs as an institutional mechanism of supported employment favouring workers discriminated against by conventional enterprises.

Italy was the first country in Europe that institutionalized WISEs by adjusting cooperative legislation so as to enable cooperatives to integrate persons at risk of labour market exclusion. Although the first initiatives were initially organized as associations, since the 1980s the use of the cooperative form has rapidly become widespread; from the very beginning, the new cooperatives differed from traditional ones because of the goals pursued: they did not aim to promote the interests of their members. Rather, they aimed to provide solidarity to people in need who had been neglected by public policies. Unlike traditional cooperative forms, the new cooperatives included volunteers in their membership (Borzaga and Galera, 2016).

These new experiences developed as an alternative to the traditional frameworks supporting the integration of WSNs (experimented especially in Northern, Central and Eastern European countries), such as sheltered workshops. The new forms of enterprises were created indeed with the aim of providing the WSNs with a remunerated stable job and, as opposed to sheltered workshops (Borzaga and Loss, 2006).

After some years of free and unregulated development, these organisations were recognised by Law 381/1991, which clearly distinguishes between two types of social cooperatives: those delivering social, health and educational services, called A-type social cooperatives, and those providing work integration for disadvantaged workers, called B-type social cooperatives. For the latter, the law establishes precisely the typologies of disadvantaged people, which is rather broad and includes among other people with physical or mental disabilities; substance addicts and convicts on probation. While the criteria for recruiting beneficiaries have remained unchanged, the predominant tendency is for B-type social cooperatives to enlarge the typologies of WSNs to be integrated, including persons that are not legally recognised as disadvantaged. Based on current data, there are approximately 5,300 WISEs set up as social cooperatives (Borzaga and Musella, 2020). The total number of employees amounts to around 75,000 units and the number of WSNs is around 25,000 (Marocchi et al., 2021).

Differently from the Italian case, the landscape of WISEs is more diversified in Greece. There is not one type of WISE, but five distinct WISEs, all set up as cooperatives, which are specialised in supporting diverse categories of vulnerable workers. If one excludes women agricultural cooperatives – which can be regarded as the forerunner of WISEs in Greece[62] – WISEs were recognized a few years later than Italy, at the end of the nineties. The first type of WISE was acknowledged by Law 2716/1999 under the form of social cooperative of limited liability (KoiSPE as per the Greek acronym) and it was aimed to facilitate the work integration of psychiatric patients (Adam, 2014; Stephanakis, 2010). Then, while for almost ten years no new legislation affecting WISEs was introduced, the economic crisis of 2008 and the austerity measures

62 The Law 921/1979 was a pioneering initiative that introduced for the first time the term women's agricultural cooperatives giving women in rural areas new employment opportunities and the chance to gain their own income. Their legal status changed many times until the most recent Law 4384/2016, which aims to facilitate the economic, social and professional integration of women of rural areas introducing specific provisions.

imposed triggered a new reaction from below. The anti-austerity/solidarity movement that emerged all over Greece incited the creation of new formal and informal solidarity entities such as social pharmacies, social clinics, and social kitchens (Adam, 2014; European Commission, 2019c). Under these circumstances, in 2011, Law 4019 institutionalized social cooperative enterprises of integration (*KoinSEpEntaxis*), which were replaced a few years later by Law 4430/2016. This law introduced two different types of social cooperative enterprises of integration: social cooperative enterprises of integration of special groups (*KoinSEpEntaxisEidikonOmadon*) and social cooperative enterprises of integration of vulnerable groups (*KoinSEpEntaxisEvalotonOmadon*). The latest Law 4600/2019 prescribes also the establishment of social cooperatives of inclusion (*KoiSEn*) with a specific aim of integrating ex-addicts. In general, WISEs occupy a small part of the social and solidarity economy enterprises in Greece (Douvitsa, 2020). *KoiSPE* and *KoinSEpEntaxis* of vulnerable and special groups represent 4.3% of social enterprises[63] (NRSSE, 2020). *KoiSEn* are a very new legal form and until today no WISE of this type has been registered. *KoiSPE* are the oldest and seem to be by far the most developed form of the existing WISEs, as they are only 29 but they represent the 30% of employees and 21% of annual turnover of the more that 1,700 social and solidarity economy enterprises for 2018. According to data provided by the National Registry of Social and Solidarity Economy in 2020, the WSNs integrated are nevertheless not many: they amount to 348 annual work units (Liatira, Karagouni and Tourlidas, 2021).

While in Italy and Greece the cooperative form has ever since made the lion's share of WISEs, in Spain WISEs were initially set up as associations, because of the lowest formal establishment and running costs required. WISEs were more rarely established as foundations or as conventional enterprises (joint-stock company, limited company, employee-owned company) and only in a few cases as cooperatives. Over the years, the legal landscape has become richer; three distinct legal acts were introduced, which regulate the three typologies of WISEs that currently operate in Spain: employment integration enterprises (*empresas de inserciòn*), special employment centres (*centros especiales de empleo*) – by large the most widespread typology of WISE – and social initiative cooperatives (*cooperativa de iniciativa social*) (Díaz-Foncea and Marcuello, 2012).

Law 44/2007 on Employment integration enterprises, subsequently revised by Law 31/2015 on the Social economy, introduced a WISE status which can be adopted solely by conventional enterprises. According to Law 31/2015 only limited liability companies, whose social objective is the training and integration of people experiencing social exclusion as a way to access the ordinary labour market, can qualify as employment integration enterprises. They provide employment mainly

63 It is important to mention that Social Enterprises are different from entities of the Social and Solidarity Economy sector in Greece, which is much broader. Also, all enterprises are not obliged to be registered at the National Registry of Social and Solidarity Economy of the Ministry of Labour, so there is always a differentiation between the actual numbers and the ones presented from the Registry.

to persons at risk of social exclusion, who have been accredited by the public social services. Beneficiaries include a very broad spectrum of WSNs, including: beneficiaries of the minimum integration income; long-term unemployed; youngsters who have dropped out of compulsory education and are unemployed; former addicts in process of rehabilitation and social reintegration; penitentiary inmates and former inmates who are unemployed; other collectives, such as ethnic minorities, migrants or persons with unshared family burdens and in exclusion; PWDs. The law specifies that employment integration enterprises provide services of general economic interest. Employment integration enterprises are conceived as transition enterprise, which are expected to integrate beneficiaries between a minimum of 6 to 12 e months up to a maximum of three years. Employment integration enterprises amount currently to 185; based on available data, they integrate 4,228 unemployed people at risk of social exclusion (Ministry of Employment and Social Security, DG of Autonomous Work, Social Economy and CSR).

Special employment centres are regulated by Royal Decree 2273/1985 and Royal Decree 469/2006 primary focus on workers with disabilities to facilitate their access to the labour market. They represent by large the most widespread typology of WISE. Based on existing data, there are overall 2,202 special employment centres, which overall integrate 97,653 PWDs (BOCG, 2020).

Law 27/1999 on Cooperatives provides that 12 types of cooperatives – workers, consumers, agricultural, housing, common exploitation of the land, services, fishermen, transportation of workers, insurance, health, education and credit – can obtain the qualification of cooperative of social initiative. Practically, all the regions have developed their own regulations on cooperatives, with the exception of the Region of the Canary Islands. Currently there are 850 social initiative cooperatives, but there are no accessible data on the number of persons integrated (Autonomous and provincial registries of cooperatives).

### 5.2.3 WISE challenges

In all three countries over the years WISEs have been progressively adapting to new social realities, targeting different groups within them and operating in diverse fields of activity with a tendency to increasingly engage in sectors distinguished by a higher added value. Nevertheless, while in Italy work integration and social, educational and health sectors must be kept separated, in Greece and Spain WISEs are free to operate in any field, including the social and health domains (UNDP and EMES, 2008).

It should be noted that the models of integration experimented with have changed over time in all three countries. Nevertheless, while in Italy and Greece the predominant integration model of WISEs continues to be still today the permanent or mixed one, in Spain social initiative cooperatives are the sole type of WISE that integrates beneficiaries permanently in the enterprise. Employment integration enterprises s, as well as special

employment centres mainly provide for transitional occupations, being primarily aimed at favouring the integration in the open labour market.

Having said so, the potential of WISEs continues to be by large overlooked in all three countries, primarily in Greece where WISEs are still rather low in number when compared to Spain and Italy. This despite the dramatic challenges ahead, which call for innovative integration strategies that WISEs would be well equipped to deal with.

Key challenges include first and foremost achieving a sustainable and inclusive growth that reduces unemployment, poverty and social exclusion of a broad group of vulnerable groups, which includes among others NEETs, migrants and homeless people. All three countries are moreover confronted with depopulation problems in remote and mountain areas where there are dramatic gaps in service delivery, high out-migration rates and severe unemployment especially of youth.

Worth underlying is that all three countries have been hardly hit by the 2008 financial crisis without being able to start a consistent recovery. Despite the efforts made, in recent years the economic crisis has increased the poverty rate in all southern European countries, and the public policies implemented have not achieved the intended objectives of labour inclusion. Along these lines, the Council of the EU has recommended that Spain adopts and implements the necessary measures to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, reinforcing ALMP in order to increase employability of people with less access to the labour market (Juviño, 2021).

In Italy, the Covid-19 induced crisis has determined the destruction, according to the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat), of at least one million jobs despite the freeze on redundancies and despite the profusion of aid to citizens and businesses. The employment rate, which was 58.6% in July 2008, has risen just above these levels only in 2019, i.e., 11 years later (59.3 as of June 2019), and then fell sharply with the Covid crisis (at the time of writing it amounts to 56.5) (Marocchi et al., 2021). The number of employed has never returned to the 2008 level. GDP, even before the Covid-19 effect, had still not recovered to 2007 levels, while the number of failed firms continued to be much higher than during the pre-crisis (Liturri, 2021).

In Greece, since even before the outbreak of the crisis, the main factors that have kept in-work poverty rates high (double the respective EU average rate) include: the residual character of the social protection system; low employment rates (particularly of women); a relatively large share of self-employed persons; a large informal sector; high labour market segmentation; low unemployment insurance; and limited spending on active labour market measures (Ziomas et al., 2019). Most of these labour market features were aggravated during the crisis period 2009-2017, while new features, such as the extremely high rates of unemployment and the rise of non-standard forms of employment, emerged during the same period. All these had a negative impact on poverty and in-work poverty over the (prolonged) crisis period – along with the reduction of the tax-free income threshold, the increases in

indirect and housing taxation, and the relaxation of employment protection legislation (which included a reduction in the minimum wage and the suspension of national and sectoral collective agreements) (Liatira, Karagouni and Tourlidas, 2021).

Against the background of tackling the dramatic social and economic challenges plaguing Italy, Spain and Greece, WISEs are a key instrument whereby people at risk of exclusion could be progressively incorporated into the open labour market. In addition to European subsidies which have constituted an important factor in the emergence and development of WISEs, a key area where the influence of the EC has been central, is the regulation of public contracts through reserved contracts and social clauses (Defourny and Nyssens, 2010). Nevertheless, both are still underexploited for a number of reasons, including among others a political and cultural context less oriented than in the past to recognise the social function of WISEs in Italy, an overall ineffective support system for WISEs (e.g., Greece) and a partially inconsistent support system in Spain, which tends to favour PWDs.

To conclude, in spite of the legal and political recognition gained by WISEs in Italy, Greece and Spain, there is still significant room for improvement with respect to the full recognition of their role and potential in tackling social and work exclusion, as well as in supporting local development in both urban and remote areas.

### *Box 6. Alveare Social Cooperative (Italy)*[64]

**www.alveare.coop**

Alveare is a B-type social cooperative founded in 2001 thanks to the civic commitment of catholic faith-based organizations with the aim of enabling the work integration of the most vulnerable people in the community. The cooperative is based in Bollate (Milan, Italy) and it is strongly rooted in the territory within it operates, which covers the whole metropolitan city of Milan and the province of Monza-Brianza.

Alveare is made up of a plurality of 110 subjects acting together to achieve its mission. These include employees, worker-members, investor-members and volunteers. Currently, the cooperative employs 49 workers (of whom 18 are members) and almost 70% of them are PWDs. 50% of the workers are employed with a full-time contract (38 hours/week) and the remainder with a part-time contract (20 hours/week). The Board of Directors is comprised of 9 members who regularly meet to discuss the development strategies of the cooperative and to evaluate future economic/work/social prospects.

64 Authored by Simona Di Marzo and Fabio Ferri, Alveare Social Cooperative.

According to the national and regional regulations, public and private companies that have to employ a minimum quota of workers with disabilities, may comply with this obligation by outsourcing the performance of certain tasks to B-type social cooperatives, which hire workers with disabilities to perform them. Alveare exploited this opportunity in a very innovative way, and has worked so as to be able to offer companies tailor-made solutions, based on their real needs, so that their economic effort is as much beneficial as possible and meet their expectations. This approach required a propensity for innovation in the development of a range of services of interest of the companies and the design of a certified placement model.

Alveare objective is therefore to recruit PWDs, evaluate and take stock of their skills, capture their inner talents and ensure continuous training. Thanks to Alveare, PWDs can acquire new skills so as to be more attractive on the job market.

Alveare's ability to provide innovative business-to-business services through digital technology has attracted a multinational e-commerce company, which commissioned to Alveare the supply of a set of high-profile services, including: data analysis, information technology (IT) and development functions, product and supplier management, sales and advertising support.

## 5.3 WISEs in Western Europe[65]

Despite differences in traditions and social structure, the Western European Countries show some important similarities and patterns regarding the development of labour market policies and welfare states in recent decades. First, all the countries – except for the Netherlands – have mostly been classified as conservative or corporatist welfare states within the widely accepted classification of welfare state regimes proposed by Esping-Andersen (1990)[66] (Blank, 2020; Hassenteufel and Palier, 2020; Marx and Van Cant, 2020; Österle and Heitzmann, 2020). In conservative welfare states, social rights are strongly linked to labour market participation. The focus is to provide income security and enable status preservation, rather than foster redistribution (such as social-democratic welfare states) or solely prevent poverty (as in liberal welfare states). Limited possibilities for labour market participation or

65 Section authored by Clara Moder, arbeit plus.

66 Gosta Esping-Andersen was among the first to show that there is not merely "more" or "less" state intervention in market activities and income redistribution, but there are different variants. Based on degrees of decommodification (i.e., to what extent are social rights detached from labour market participation) and stratification (i.e., to what extent does social policy influence inequality and income redistribution), he established three types of welfare state regimes: liberal welfare states (low decommodification, low stratification), conservative welfare states (low to medium decommodification and stratification, welfare is focused on status preservation) and social democratic welfare states (high degrees of both decommodification and stratification).

outright exclusion of groups based on disabilities or other types of socio-demographic disadvantages, are thus particularly consequential in conservative welfare states. The Netherlands is a bit of an outlier in this regard. They have been labelled rather as a social-democratic, or even a hybrid welfare regime, characterized by a strong tradition of collective solidarity (van Gerven, 2020).

Second, all the Western European Countries have implemented an "activational turn" in labour market policies during the 1990s, in line with the broader EU trend. Outcomes include reduced social public spending and a shift from PLMP to ALMP, such as job subsidies and public employment programmes. The goal of labour market policies shifted away from income stability to labour market integration of individuals, leading to a higher employment rate on the one hand, and to more flexible labour markets with a higher share of fixed-term contracts and a larger low-wage sector on the other. Third, most of the countries have continued different types of reforms during the early 2000s or in the aftermath of the 2008-2009 economic and financial crisis. Many of these reforms continue the trends towards activation, individualization or even "flexicurity" (Hassenteufel and Palier, 2020; Ausort, 2021), but vary in the extent to which they do so. For instance, the "Participatory State" in the Netherlands has been analysed as a re-calibration of welfare state principles, with a stronger focus on individual citizens and local municipalities and their role in welfare provision (van Gerven, 2020). The "Hartz Reforms"[67] in Germany have shifted the focus of labour market policies towards individuals in an unprecedented way, making it difficult to sustain policies on the structural level (Göler von Ravensburg, Baga and Schmitt, 2021).

All this provides a changeable, sometimes challenging background for WISEs, who aim at supporting WSNs in their labour market participation and thus their (social) inclusion in the welfare state.

### 5.3.1 Context of development

An important component for WISEs operation within the framework of a Western European welfare state is the definition and acknowledgement of their target groups. In all countries under consideration, a definition of PWDs exists along the lines of the UN CRPD. People with physical disabilities were among the first disadvantaged groups to be recognized during the establishment of EU welfare states after World War II. The importance of a clear definition is visible in the development of sheltered workshops in all Western European Countries during the second half of the 20th century. Despite valid criticism of these workshops, the legal definition of the target group and the acknowledgement of their support needs enabled evolution of WISEs within the

67 The "laws for modern labour market services" that have become famous as the "Hartz Reforms" in Germany pose a set of fundamental changes in both active and passive labour market policies. The reforms included a flexibilization of the labour market, new types of marginal employment and – perhaps most importantly – the termination of insurance-based benefits for long-term unemployed and a shift to a social assistance system. See: https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/299220/hartz-iv-gesetz-grundsaetze-wirkung-reformvorschlaege.

welfare systems. In particular, the evolution of sheltered workshop contributed to an understanding that there are groups in need of assistance for labour market integration and thus societal participation.

However, when it comes to the definition of "disadvantaged workers" and thus their eligibility for support by WISEs, the picture is less clear. For instance, while in France and Wallonia (Belgium) such a definition exists, providing relatively clear regulations for WISEs (Ausort, 2021; Bossuyt et al., 2021), the German law only distinguishes between "employable" and "unemployable", whereas the latter include people with legally defined disabilities or in unstable living conditions. These definitions neither capture the fact that there are socioeconomic factors leading to disadvantages on the labour market, nor allow to distinguish adequately between the needs of different employable, but nevertheless disadvantaged groups (Göler von Ravensburg, Baga and Schmitt, 2021).

Nevertheless, typologies of WSNs with different degrees of legal implications exist in all countries under consideration. Many of those have evolved during the shift towards ALMP during the 1990s and have been adapted since. For instance, the Austrian Public Employment Agency defines several socio-demographic disadvantages such as age, long-term unemployment, and gender as eligibility criteria for supported employment in WISEs (Walchhofer and Moder, 2021).

ALMP have shaped work integration and policy making more generally in many ways since the early 1990s. A set of crises, including the oil shocks in the 1970s, demographic developments and new waves of migration led to profound changes of the work force in most Western European countries. All of this contributed to the end of full-employment and put systems focusing on PLMP in the form of wage compensation schemes under stress. Along with the zeitgeist of less state involvement shifted the focus from passive policies to ALMP, such as education, training, and supported employment. The goal of these policies was to actively promote employment (e.g., Weishaupt, 2019).

The acknowledgement of socioeconomic disadvantages for labour market integration alongside the emphasis on ALMP can thus be seen as an important factor for the development of WISEs in Western Europe. It is important to note that the shift towards ALMP also implied a shift towards individualization of unemployment, especially for socioeconomically disadvantaged groups. This narrative is still ongoing and has implications for WISEs regarding their activities as well as their relation to the state.

Sheltered workshops for PWDs are well-established and publicly funded in all countries. Conversely, the support system for WISEs integrating WSNs other than PWDs is not straight-forward and are not entitled to the same amount of support measures. Different programs for different target groups are in place in most countries. WISEs for different types of WSNs are to very different degrees publicly

funded. Thus, their proximity to the welfare system differs in the Western EU countries. In Austria, WISEs for WSNs are an integral part of ALMP. They are publicly funded by the Public Employment Agency and required to earn a certain threshold of their income via the sale of goods and services (Walchhofer and Moder, 2021). In Belgium, they follow regional legislation and are fully integrated in the welfare system (Bossuyt et al., 2021). In the Netherlands, on the other hand, there are no specific public support measures for WISEs, they are eligible to e.g., wage subsidies for the workers in the same way as traditional enterprises. This is to establish an "equal playing field for all enterprises", as well as to hold the private sector accountable for the labour market integration of WSNs (Kemkes et al., 2021).

Apart from funding, legal recognition and access to public markets are important factors for the relation between WISEs and the state. A distinct legal form for WISEs exists in France and in Belgium, where they are legally recognized as social enterprises in the social and solidarity economy. In the remaining countries, they operate under different legal forms as de facto WISEs. Since the 2008-2009 economic and financial crisis, social entrepreneurship and social business became popular in Western Europe, leading to the establishment of new types of social enterprises, often operating somewhat outside the traditional welfare framework. Given the lack of a comprehensive legal definition, this development makes mapping of the sector even more difficult.

Public procurement and access to public markets varies largely in the five countries. Legally, since the establishment of Directive 2014/24/EU, there are many possibilities for public authorities to include WISEs in public tenders (see Section 4.5.1). In practice, this is done to a larger extent in Belgium, the Netherlands and France; whereas the German-speaking countries are lagging behind. Austria was particularly late to adapt the EU Directive. Reserved contracts for WISEs or their inclusion in public tenders are still rare. Good practices, if any, can be found on regional levels. Generally, it is important to note that formal relations between WISEs and public authorities are easier and better established on municipal levels. Cooperation with regional authorities is crucial in all Western European Countries.

### 5.3.2 Fields of activity

WISEs in Western Europe engage in a wide field of activities. Broadly, they can be clustered in three types: first, "classical" social projects, often including sheltered workshops, but also organisations delivering welfare services to vulnerable groups. Second, many WISEs' activities can be attached to the circular economy, including reuse and recycling, waste management or second-hand shops. Given the strategies outlined by the EC regarding the Green New Deal, this type of activities will likely gain importance. Third, WISEs are drivers of social innovations, testing new practices and adapting established projects for new contexts. Especially in Belgium and the Netherlands, there are many innovative WISEs engaged in ICT services.

In most Western European countries, new WISEs or social enterprises have emerged in the aftermath of the 2008-2009 crisis in order to integrate mainly WSNs other than PWDs. The European Union has conducted various efforts to map social enterprises and their ecosystems and repeatedly pointed out the emergence of social start-ups, using a more "Anglo-Saxon" understanding of social entrepreneurship. This implies a stronger involvement in commercial activities and a more individual-based approach (European Commission – DG EMPL, 2016). In Austria, as well as in other countries, some of these organisations can be found within the Impact Hub Network[68]. Some of them explicitly focus on the integration of vulnerable groups, such as refugees or homeless people, into the labour market. The continuation of these new forms of organisations has taken different paths, depending on their embeddedness into the respective welfare system. Their further prevalence in the light of the Covid-19 crisis is yet to be seen.

### 5.3.3 Outlook: Joint topics and differences

From the analyses in the Country Fiches and the summary above, some joint topics and differences in the Western European countries emerge:

- The definition of WISEs target groups and thus their eligibility for social assistance and supported employment remains an issue.
- There is a discussion on "meaningful jobs" and a longer-term perspective for workers with disadvantages and disabilities in all countries. Sheltered workshops have been criticized for not offering a fair wage and good working conditions but being a mere "day structure" for people with physical and mental impairments. Thus, they might even hinder the possibility of labour market integration of their beneficiaries. Regarding supported employment and public employment programmes for WSNs, the prevalence of low-income jobs in WISEs remains a problem. These issues might be tackled by emphasizing the responsibility of the private sector for inclusion, as it is done in the Netherlands, or by proposing a stronger involvement of the public sector and the establishment of tailored support programmes. For instance, France started an experiment for eliminating long-term unemployment in 10 pilot regions. The focus was on the skills of formerly long-term unemployed people and their possible contributions to the regional economy. Jobs were locally developed in close cooperation with local businesses, citizens and WISEs. Importantly, all of the jobs created paid at least the minimum wage.
- Following this discussion, differences arise in the degree to which the business sector is involved in welfare provision on the one hand, and the perception of social enterprises as meaningful actors in the economy on the other hand. The Netherlands have been the vanguard regarding involvement of the private sector,

68 See www.impacthub.net.

putting forward the idea that everyone should contribute to society through labour market participation, businesses, and citizens alike. In most countries, WISEs struggle to be acknowledged as the important economic actors they are. Some form of legal recognition would contribute to enhance visibility and strengthen WISEs position.

The multiple crises of our times pose many challenges for EU welfare states and societies. Crucially, the question of "meaningful work" and its connection to social inclusion of vulnerable groups needs to be re-evaluated. In the past, Western European welfare states have established rather conservative approaches towards labour market policies, maintaining the status quo and shifting the problem on the individual level. WISEs, on the other hand, have often pro-actively sought solutions for emerging societal problems and were quick to adapt to new challenges. Digitalization and digital inclusion, for instance, has been on their agenda even before the pandemic hit and the topic became more widespread. Thus, WISEs experiences should be taken into account when designing future labour market policies and instruments for social inclusion.

### *Box 7. AQUA Mühle (Austria)*[69]

**www.aqua-soziales.com**

AQUA Mühle Vorarlberg (hereafter, AQUA Mühle) is a social cooperative association with limited liability. It is located in Franstranz, Vorarlberg (Austria) and operates at the local level.

Aqua Mühle was founded in1987 by Waltraud Moser and Iris Alge as a residential home for ten residents, PWDs and psychiatric disorders. Thomas Vogel joined the team in 2005 and with the association *Wohnheim Mühlegasse* and the *Frastanz Employment Initiative* new services at the interface of social psychiatry and qualification and employment were developed. Today, AQUA Mühle is engaged in a diverse set of activities: day-care centre, work integration, production of goods and services, employment initiatives – the offer change along service needs in the communities.

Main products and services include catering for kindergarten, preschool and school; restauration and waste kitchen; woodwork and landscaping; construction of playgrounds and raised beds; site preservation and forest maintenance; manufacturing; microfilming and digitalisation; archival storage.

69 Authored by Clara Moder, arbeit plus.

AQUA Mühle has 339 staff members and three volunteers, 113 workers are employed on permanent basis and 226 are temporarily integrated. AQUA Mühle is predominantly a productive WISE, but depending on the projects it has also elements of a social and training WISE.

The main sources of income are funding of the Austrian Employment Service, the regional government, the ESF and up to one third income is generated from the sale of goods and services. AQUA Mühle is governed by two managers and a governing body comprised of seven members.

Being specialized in the digitalization of historical documents to microfiche, AQUA Mühle has developed an interesting business model for the public sector. Former long-term unemployed people and people with psychiatric problems are employed to do microfilming and digitization of the cultural heritage.

"We are proud to be one of the most modern microfilming facilities in western Austria. We work with microprocessor-controlled stepping cameras, an electronic pass-through camera, and continuous quality control. We offer a comprehensive range of services in the field of long-term archiving of archive material and historical writings. With optimal storage, the data and writings are secured for up to 500 years. We are happy to contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage and at the same time to support the former long-term unemployed in acquiring digital skills that are relevant to the labour market." [Florian Kresser, managing director of AQUA Mühle Vorarlberg].

## 5.4 Synergies between labour policies and WISEs: country examples[70]

The previous sections of this chapter have shown that WISEs development is closely linked to development, adaption, and reform of social and labour market policies. For instance, fields of activity are often intertwined with WISEs roles in welfare provision; availability of public and private funding depends on both legal and political recognition, and possibilities for social integration of target groups build upon their recognition in the framework of social policy. The crises and developments of the past years have affected EU MSs differently and thus triggered different policy responses. Many of these responses have changed the framework in which WISEs operate, thus limiting or enhancing their scope and fields of activity. This section highlights some of these issues and provides examples of labour-market related policies discussed in the previous sections on country trends.

70 Section authored by Clara Moder, arbeit plus.

### 5.4.1 Dynamics of WISE emergence

The development of WISEs is strongly intertwined with welfare state regimes and patterns in social and labour market policies. As a result, there is a very diverse landscape of WISEs in Europe, which in part can be traced back to dynamics of WISEs' emergence. Generally, three main patterns can be pointed out.

In Southern Europe (Italy, Greece, Spain) as well as in France, WISEs are often the result of bottom-up civil society initiatives, which is to a certain extent connected with the longstanding tradition of cooperatives in these countries. In part, this is a result of limited welfare state presence and thus the need for civil society and citizens to step in. The focus of labour market policies remains on passive measures, i.e., relatively low income compensation. This has become especially prevalent during the financial crisis 2008-2009, which hit Southern European countries particularly hard. Their recovery from the effects of the crisis as well as austerity measures is still an ongoing process (see Section 5.2).

In Central Europe, the conservative welfare states resulted in a high degree of WISEs' integration into public policies and active labour market policy. WISEs were often integrated into policy programs and public administration (see Section 5.3), thus rather taking a top-down approach in their emergence and establishment. This is reflected in attempts to contract WISEs with social welfare provision, such as e.g., in Slovenia (see Section 5.1). In Austria, the link between active labour market policy and WISEs is particularly strong and institutionalized. The subset of WISEs comprised by socio-economic enterprises (SÖB) and common benefit employment projects (GBP) is an integral part of ALMP: they provide temporary employment for WSNs, in particular long-term unemployed people. These organisations are the result of a period of "experimental labour market policy" during the 1980s and have been further developed and institutionalized since. WSNs are employed for 6-12 months in the WISE and receive training on the job as well as counselling. SÖB and GBP are largely funded by the Austrian AMS: approximately 60-70% of their income stems from this source of funding, the remainder is generated by selling goods and services. Persons who are registered as unemployed with the AMS and fulfil the requirements for the target groups of SÖB and GBP are directly assigned by AMS counsellors. This high degree of integration into the framework of ALMP on the one hand implies a very strong link to disadvantaged groups and enhances possibilities for social integration; on the other hand, it fosters a higher degree of dependence on public funding and the AMS in particular (Walchhofer and Moder, 2021).

The Netherlands are taking a different approach. With the 2015 Participation Act, it aims at creating a participatory society that holds private enterprises and citizens accountable, moving away from a classical, comprehensive welfare state. The goal is to create 100,000 jobs for WSNs in the private sector and 25,000 in the public sector by 2024. Generally, WISEs in the Netherlands are more aligned with for-profit

businesses than in other countries, stressing the importance of an equal playing field for all types of enterprises (Kemkes et al., 2021). This type of entrepreneurial approach represents the third type of WISEs emergence in Europe and can also be partially found in other countries, such as in parts of Belgium and – to a lesser extent and under different signs – in Southern/Central Eastern European countries.

### 5.4.2 Patterns of WISE recognition

The extent to which WISEs are formally recognized and thus integrated into the welfare state as well as into the economy at large widely differ. The majority of WISEs in Europe, as represented in the B-WISE project, remain de facto WISEs, meaning these organisations operate as WISEs but lack legal recognition. Southern European countries with their strong tradition in cooperatives and bottom-up initiatives are an outlier in this regard. Explicit legal forms exist in Italy, Greece and Spain (see Section 5.2); as well as in Belgium and France (see Section 5.3.). Legal recognition often enhances WISEs' visibility and possibilities to act and engage with new fields of activity. Italy in particular stands out, as it was the first country to institutionalize WISEs in legislation: since the 1980s, new cooperatives aimed at providing services to people neglected by public policies were established. Other than in traditional cooperatives, they operated for public benefit and not exclusively for the benefit of their members. As early as 1991, these organisations were legally recognized. To date, two types of social cooperatives exist in Italy: A-type social cooperatives provide health and education services, whereas B-type social cooperatives provide work integration for WSNs and are thus legally recognized as WISEs. The law specifies a wide range of vulnerable groups that can be tackled by B-type cooperatives (see Section 5.2 and Marocchi et al., 2021).

Another important aspect of WISEs' recognition is their access to funding. In particular, the possibility to compete in calls for public contracts, as well as tenders for social public procurement vary to a large extent. In the Netherlands, WISEs regularly compete for public contracts at the regional and municipal levels. Elsewhere, the possibilities for WISEs in this regard are much more limited. In Western and South Eastern Europe, the possibility generally exists, but is not very often used in practice. Possible explanations include the aforementioned limited visibility of WISEs and social enterprises in general, as well as lack of technical capacities or experience (see Section 5.1). Lacking practice of socially responsible public procurement is however not limited to Eastern European countries. In Austria, for instance, Directive 2014/24/EU on public procurement was implemented with a delay of almost two years. Overall, there is still limited awareness among public authorities about the impact of socially responsible public procurement (arbeit plus, 2016).

### 5.4.3 Impact of EU funds on WISEs

The EU aims at playing an active role and fostering social and labour market policy development in its MSs, mostly through the means of structural funds. Especially in CEE, private philanthropy and networks have been active over the past decades to promote civil society development, supporting the emergence of business-like social enterprises. There is an ongoing discussion on whether they step in for lacking welfare state presence, or whether they are a mere tool to further legitimize neoliberal policies. In Southern Europe, as well as in Central/Southern Eastern Europe, the ESF has been an important tool that contributed to the development of WISEs. In some cases, it was the only funding tool available and thus rather fostering a top-down approach. In practice, this sometimes resulted in disparities between formal criteria for defining social enterprises on the one hand, and actual practices on the other (Section 5.1, European Commission, 2020a). Nevertheless, the impact of European structural funds on the development of social enterprises dedicated to social policy issues remains overall positive.

The ESF is an instrument for supporting jobs and job perspectives, including education opportunities, in all EU MSs. It funds employment-related jobs on different scales, ranging from small neighbourhood projects to large charities. Target groups include all types of disadvantaged, vulnerable groups – NEETs, PWDs and older adults alike – depending on the focus of the respective countries and communities[71].

To sum up, WISEs in different European countries face different framework conditions and degrees of integration into labour and social policy. This can partly be traced to patterns of emergence and result in varying degrees of recognition and financial stability. In the aftermath of recent and ongoing crises, new actors have emerged and WISEs adapted to new challenges. In order for them to remain sustainable, it will be crucial to ensure visibility and stability; for the benefit of WSNs and vulnerable groups to whose needs WISEs continue to cater.

71 For more information on the ESF, see: https://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=35&langId=en.

# 6. TECHNICAL AND SOFT SKILLS IN WISEs[72]

The B-WISE empirical analysis relied on two distinct surveys[73]:

- a quanti-qualitative face-to-face (F2F) survey targeting enablers, supporters and WSNs in the 13 B-WISE partner countries
- an online (ONL) survey specifically aimed at assessing the state of play of technology, digitisation and digital skills needs and gaps, targeting enablers in the 13 B-WISE partner countries (see Chapter 7).

This chapter presents the results of the face-to-face survey and it investigates both technical and soft skills deemed as the most relevant and additional skills gaps.

## 6.1 Introduction

The face-to-face survey aimed to map the skills needed to perform the jobs and fill the skills gaps in the WISE sector and anticipate the sector's future needs with a view to profiling the training needs of three target groups:

72 Chapter authored by Euricse with the collaboration of Andrea Signoretti, University of Trento.
73 Detailed information on the methodology is available in the Methodological Note (Annex A).

Grant Agreement: 621509-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-EPPKA2-SSA-B
This publication has been co-funded by the European Commission. The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Agency and Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.
Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

- enablers (e.g., CEOs, CHROs, CFOs, staff managers, area coordinators, project managers, and ICT specialists);
- supporters (e.g., job coaches, tutors, and mentors); and
- WSNs (e.g., people with physical and/or sensory disabilities; people with intellectual and/or learning disabilities; people with psycho-social disabilities and/or mental illnesses; people with substance use disorders; convicts and ex-convicts; people in long-term unemployment; homeless people; asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants; NEETs; women survivors of violence; members of ethnic minorities and people with low qualifications).

The selection of technical and soft skills reflects the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) framework[74]. ESCO is run by the DG EMPL of the EC and refers to the European multilingual classification of skills, competences, and occupations. Its first version (ESCO v1) was published in 2017. Since then, it has been updated several times, with the latest update dating back to 2020. One of the main aims of ESCO is to support the analysis of labour market data on skills and occupations to help policymakers, education providers, employers, and career counsellors make more effective decisions on employment policies, curricula designs, and business development.

Twenty-first-century skills – the twelve abilities regarded as important for success in the twenty-first century's rapidly changing digital society – were also investigated. Although primarily intended for students, twenty-first-century skills can also be useful for analysing the current skills gaps and future skills needs of the WISEs sector[75].

The reasons for skills gaps, their effects on an organization, and the strategies put in place to cope with them were also examined.

78% of the 515 originally planned interviews were carried out (403, of which 89 enablers, 145 supporters and 169 WSNs).

The WISEs selected for interviews were identified by trying to represent the variety of the WISEs landscape in each partner country, ideally in terms of size, typology of legal forms, typology of WSNs, model of integration[76], fields of economic activity, and geographic focus[77].

74 https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1326&langId=en.

75 http://www.battelleforkids.org/networks/p21/frameworks-resources.

76 Selected organisations reflect – if relevant – the different models of work integration that have been implemented by WISEs in each country, namely: 1) the creation of transitional occupations for WSNs with a view to facilitating their integration into the open labour market, 2) the creation of permanent occupations for WSNs within WISEs, and 3) a mix of the two models.

77 Different regions and territories (for example, urban settings and remote, rural, and mountainous areas).

The face-to-face interviews were carried out between October and December 2021. Table 6.1 shows the final data collected in each country.

***Table 6.1. Number of questionnaires collected by countries***

| | Number of interviews | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Country | Enablers | Supporters | WSNs | Total |
| Austria | 6 | 9 | 8 | 23 |
| Belgium | 10 | 18 | 18 | 46 |
| Bulgaria | 5 | 7 | 8 | 20 |
| Croatia | 6 | 6 | 14 | 26 |
| France | 6 | 12 | 12 | 30 |
| Greece | 7 | 9 | 14 | 30 |
| Italy | 6 | 13 | 11 | 30 |
| Latvia | 6 | 4 | 11 | 21 |
| Netherlands | 10 | 20 | 21 | 51 |
| Poland | 6 | 12 | 12 | 30 |
| Slovenia | 9 | 11 | 16 | 36 |
| Spain | 6 | 12 | 12 | 30 |
| Romania | 6 | 12 | 12 | 30 |
| **Total** | **89** | **145** | **169** | **403** |

## 6.2 Skills gaps

### 6.2.1 Enablers

The first impression that emerges from the answers provided by enablers is that none of the managerial or relational skills investigated are perceived as irrelevant (see Table 6.2). This confirms that organizations' leaders perform different tasks within WISEs (Riggio and Orr, 2004), and this requires a broad spectrum of skills that go beyond the mere technical skills required to lead an organization.

According to enablers, most of the skills that emerged as the most relevant are traced back to management skills. Within this group, enablers selected various skills related to the internal functioning and leadership of an organization, from designing

strategies for the development of WISEs (highly important for 71.9% of respondents and moderately important for 20.2%) and making decisions (highly important for 79.8% of respondents and moderately important for 18%) to engaging in direct relations with employees to coordinate their activities (highly important for 69.7% and moderately important for 27%) and motivating employees (highly important for 75.3% and moderately important for 21.3%).

Networking, especially outside the company, is also a key professional skill for managers, particularly in terms of managing personal and organizational trust relationships (Borzaga and Solari, 2001). WISEs, like other not-for-profit organisations, have relationships with a large variety of stakeholders, and managing these relationships has a vital role for legitimacy and accountability purposes. And in turn, it contributes significantly to achieving the organizational objectives (Huybrechts, Mertens and Rijpens, 2014).

Among communication, collaboration, and creativity, skills related to negotiating with clients, particularly private clients, were perceived as relevant (highly relevant for 71.9% and moderately relevant for 15.7%), compared to public authorities (highly relevant for 59.6% and moderately relevant for 28.1%). Differences between public and private customers also emerged in the evaluations relative to the skills of promoting, selling, and purchasing the products and/or services of WISEs – judged highly relevant by 61.8% and moderately relevant by 19.1% in the case of private clients and highly or moderately relevant by 38.2% and 37.1%, respectively, in the case of public authorities.

This can be explained by the fact that, in many of the countries analysed, collaborative relationships between WISEs and public authorities have been well established over time. Alternatively, it may signal awareness of the difficulties in obtaining fair prices and supply lead times from public authorities because of reduced public funding (Cunningham and James, 2017).

What is evident is that engaging and negotiating with private clients are relevant aspects for WISEs considering that, as pointed out by previous studies, WISEs and non-profit organizations have traditionally experienced difficulties in working with for-profit organizations, considering the social mission and characteristics of their organizations, such as the deployment of WSNs (AbouAssi and Jo, 2017; Signoretti and Sacchetti, 2020). However, a change in attitude on the part of both WISEs and for-profits is being observed in some of the mapped countries (technopolis group, 2018). And this change – still in progress – is paving the way to a growing number of collaborations between for-profits and WISEs. This may explain why skills related with private customers are considered important and why they are not yet fully developed within the interviewed WISEs.

### *Table 6.2. Relevance of communication, collaboration, creativity, and management skills for enablers to perform their job tasks (% values)*

| | Not relevant | Low | Medium | High | N.A. | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Negotiating with public authorities | 3.4 | 9.0 | 28.1 | 59.6 | - | 100.0 |
| Negotiating with private customers | 5.6 | 6.7 | 15.7 | 71.9 | - | 100.0 |
| Promoting. selling and purchasing to public authorities | 12.4 | 12.4 | 37.1 | 38.2 | - | 100.0 |
| Promoting. selling and purchasing to private customers | 10.1 | 9.0 | 19.1 | 61.8 | - | 100.0 |
| Working with other stakeholders | 6.7 | 4.5 | 40.4 | 48.3 | - | 100.0 |
| Developing WISE objectives and strategies | 3.4 | 4.5 | 20.2 | 71.9 | - | 100.0 |
| Organizing. planning and scheduling work activities | 2.2 | 1.1 | 27.0 | 69.7 | - | 100.0 |
| Allocating and controlling resources | 3.4 | 7.9 | 23.6 | 65.2 | - | 100.0 |
| Performing administrative activities | 3.4 | 12.4 | 43.8 | 40.4 | - | 100.0 |
| Leading and motivating WISE staff and stakeholders | 2.2 | 1.1 | 21.3 | 75.3 | - | 100.0 |
| Building and developing skills of the WISE staff | 2.2 | 9.0 | 25.8 | 62.9 | - | 100.0 |
| Recruiting and hiring supporters and workers with support needs | 7.9 | 6.7 | 24.7 | 60.7 | - | 100.0 |
| Supervising supporters' and ordinary workers' work | 3.4 | 11.2 | 29.2 | 55.1 | 1.1 | 100.0 |
| Making decisions | 2.2 | – | 18.0 | 79.8 | - | 100.0 |

*Source: B-WISE F2F survey 2021*

The enablers' evaluation of the level of endowment of each skill shows that there are no dramatic gaps between skills relevance and skills endowment (Table 6.3). In other words, the skills that are evaluated as relevant are also those for which the level of endowment is usually higher among enablers.

It is interesting to note that enablers are aware of the need to tackle these skills gaps, and one enabler in two of those surveyed believes that skills gaps in communication and management are destined to diminish; 22.5% think that these skills are destined to remain the same; 18% think that they are doomed to increase; and 9% is unable to assess how these skills gaps are expected to change in the near future.

In summary, there is room for improvement. As an example, let's consider the four managerial skills (developing WISEs objectives and strategies; organizing, planning, and scheduling work activities; leading and motivating WISEs staff and stakeholders;

and making decisions) agreed to be highly important by the greatest number of respondents, with percentages that are above or around 70%. For these skills, the proportion of enablers (those who declared the skill to be important) who believe they have a high level of endowment is between 44% and 55%, while 30–40% of those interviewed believe they have a moderate or low level of endowment with potential for improvement. The situation is the same for communication skills: the majority of those interviewed feel they have reached a high level of endowment in their ability to negotiate with public authorities (55.8%) and private clients (59.5%). In addition, one third of the respondents believe they have achieved a moderate level of endowment for these two skills and they are willing to make an effort to improve them, particularly negotiating with private clients.

***Table 6.3. Endowment of communication, collaboration, creativity, and management skills for enablers to perform their job tasks (% values) ****

| | Not present | Low | Medium | High | N.A. | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Negotiating with public authorities | - | 8.1 | 29.1 | 55.8 | 7.0 | 100.0 |
| Negotiating with private customers | - | 4.8 | 28.6 | 59.5 | 7.1 | 100.0 |
| Promoting. selling and purchasing to public authorities | 1.3 | 11.5 | 48.7 | 30.8 | 7.7 | 100.0 |
| Promoting. selling and purchasing to private customers | 1.3 | 8.8 | 38.8 | 40.0 | 11.3 | 100.0 |
| Working with other stakeholders | - | 6.0 | 32.5 | 49.4 | 12.0 | 100.0 |
| Developing WISE objectives and strategies | - | 10.5 | 31.4 | 47.7 | 10.5 | 100.0 |
| Organizing. planning and scheduling work activities | - | 5.7 | 39.1 | 41.4 | 13.8 | 100.0 |
| Allocating and controlling resources | - | 7.0 | 37.2 | 39.5 | 16.3 | 100.0 |
| Performing administrative activities | - | 7.0 | 41.9 | 40.7 | 10.5 | 100.0 |
| Leading and motivating WISE staff and stakeholders | - | 5.7 | 39.1 | 48.3 | 6.9 | 100.0 |
| Building and developing skills of the WISE staff | - | 12.6 | 40.2 | 36.8 | 10.3 | 100.0 |
| Recruiting and hiring supporters and workers with support needs | - | 7.3 | 40.2 | 43.9 | 8.5 | 100.0 |
| Supervising supporters' and ordinary workers' work | - | 7.0 | 45.3 | 39.5 | 8.1 | 100.0 |
| Making decisions | - | 1.1 | 28.7 | 55.2 | 14.9 | 100.0 |

*Source: B-WISE F2F survey 2021*

** The table reports the opinions of the enablers who believed that skills were relevant to some degree. Those who do not consider skills relevant are not counted.*

Although the number of interviews per country was limited, the WISEs interviewed attribute, in almost all countries, medium and high relevance to the skills related to negotiating with public authorities or private clients. Looking at individual countries, less than 50% of the enablers of WISEs based in Austria and Greece attributes high importance to the ability to negotiate with private clients. As regards negotiating with public authorities, the percentage remains below 50% for only the Dutch respondents.

There are no differences between individual countries in terms of the four most important management skills. With a few exceptions, almost all of those interviewed consider these skills to be of medium or high importance, with results for the high importance exceeding 50% of respondents for all countries and for all four skills. Greater differences can be seen in the levels of endowment, but in general, respondents agree that there is room for improvement in all the countries examined.

Looking at the age of the organizations, some differences emerge in the managerial skills considered highly relevant by enterprises in the start-up phase (in their first three years of life) and other WISEs. Enablers of the recently established WISEs consider the skills for building a team to be highly relevant. These skills include recruiting and hiring supporters and WSNs, building, and developing the skills of WISEs staff, supervising supporters' and ordinary workers' work, and leading and motivating WISEs staff and stakeholders. Except for the first skill, enablers feel that they have not yet fully developed these competencies. While more than 85% of enablers working in the WISEs with a lifespan of three years believe that building and developing the skills of WISEs staff is highly important, only 28.6% felt that they have reached high levels of endowment in those skills. Slightly different percentages can be observed for supervising supporters' and ordinary workers' work (71.4% felt it was highly important, 42.9% felt they had fully developed it) and for leading and motivating WISEs staff and stakeholders (85.7% felt it was highly important, 42.9% felt they had fully developed it). Conversely, the enablers of the more structured WISEs prioritized skills related to the development of organizational strategies and decision making. Even on this front, endowment levels showed potential for development with respect to perceived relevance.

### 6.2.2 Supporters

Supporters include professionals, like job coaches, tutors, and mentors, who help WSNs in carrying out their work tasks. The majority of the enablers interviewed consider all the supporters' competencies on which they were questioned to be highly important, except for developing strategies and objectives and building and developing teams (Table 6.4). For these competencies, a higher proportion of interviewees consider them to be of medium importance, perhaps because these competencies are normally managed by other key persons in organizations, particularly enablers themselves.

According to enablers, among all the supporters' competences, the skills that are most important are those related to training and supporting WSNs in their medium- and long-term work and in their day-to-day work activities. Of those interviewed, 75.3% consider teaching and training WSNs very important (another 16.9% consider it moderately important), 70.8% regard monitoring the development of WSNs as highly relevant (21.3% consider this moderately important), and 67.4% attribute a high level of importance to leading and motivating WSNs (20.2% consider this moderately important).

***Table 6.4. Relevance of supporters' skills to perform job tasks according to enablers (% values)***

| | Not relevant | Low | Medium | High | N.A. | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teaching and training workers with support needs | 5.6 | 1.1 | 16.9 | 75.3 | 1.1 | 100.0 |
| Documenting information on workers with support needs | 6.7 | - | 36.0 | 53.9 | 3.4 | 100.0 |
| Monitoring the development of workers with support needs | 6.7 | - | 21.3 | 70.8 | 1.1 | 100.0 |
| Counselling workers with support needs | 6.7 | 1.1 | 29.2 | 61.8 | 1.1 | 100.0 |
| Providing information and support to workers with support needs | 6.7 | - | 29.2 | 62.9 | 1.1 | 100.0 |
| Developing work integration objectives and strategies | 5.6 | 2.2 | 49.4 | 41.6 | 1.1 | 100.0 |
| Organizing. planning and scheduling work and activities of workers with support needs | 7.9 | 3.4 | 29.2 | 58.4 | 1.1 | 100.0 |
| Leading and motivating workers with support needs | 6.7 | 3.4 | 20.2 | 67.4 | 2.2 | 100.0 |
| Building and developing teams | 7.9 | 3.4 | 42.7 | 43.8 | 2.2 | 100.0 |
| Supervising workers with support needs | 7.9 | 1.1 | 24.7 | 64.0 | 2.2 | 100.0 |

*Source: B-WISE F2F survey 2021*

Regarding the level of endowment of supporters' skills, all the enablers interviewed (with small exceptions of the first two skills shown in Table 6.5) believe that supporters possess those skills that are considered important. However, they believed in most cases and for most of the proposed competencies, that the level of endowment of supporters is moderate. There is clearly room for action to ensure that supporters achieve a higher degree of competence in the skills that organizations consider essential to perform their roles.

Looking at the responses for individual countries, all the WISEs interviewed – with a few exceptions – consider the proposed skills to be of medium or high relevance. However, in some countries, the enablers interviewed perceive these supporters' skills to be of higher importance than in other countries. As far as teaching and training WSNs is concerned, all the respondents in France, Italy, Poland, Slovenia, and Spain consider these skills highly important, while lower percentages – below 50% – were achieved in Bulgaria, Croatia and Latvia. The same variability can be seen in the other skills investigated. The limited number of questionnaires makes it however difficult to analyse the reasons explaining variations. They may be due to specific characteristics of the organizations interviewed or to structural conditions in the environment in which these organizations operate.

What is evident when comparing the answers given by the enablers on the importance and degree of endowment of the skills of supporters is that in all countries, even in those where all the interviewees consider the proposed skills highly relevant, there is room for improvement in the level of skills possessed by supporters. Despite the limitations of the data coverage, opinions expressed by enablers are interesting and offer hints for future research and for the planning of training interventions, particularly when compared with the opinions expressed by supporters.

### *Table 6.5. Endowment of the supporters' skills to perform job tasks according to enablers (% values)**

| | Not present | Low | Medium | High | N.A. | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teaching and training workers with support needs | 1.2 | - | 48.8 | 46.4 | 3.6 | 100.0 |
| Documenting information on workers with support needs | 1.2 | 3.6 | 56.6 | 34.9 | 3.6 | 100.0 |
| Monitoring the development of workers with support needs | - | 2.4 | 49.4 | 44.6 | 3.6 | 100.0 |
| Counselling workers with support needs | - | 2.4 | 44.6 | 49.4 | 3.6 | 100.0 |
| Providing information and support to workers with support needs | - | 1.2 | 53.0 | 42.2 | 3.6 | 100.0 |
| Developing work integration objectives and strategies | - | 7.1 | 66.7 | 22.6 | 3.6 | 100.0 |
| Organizing, planning and scheduling work and activities of workers with support needs | - | 2.4 | 53.7 | 40.2 | 3.7 | 100.0 |
| Leading and motivating workers with support needs | - | 2.4 | 55.4 | 38.6 | 3.6 | 100.0 |
| Building and developing teams | - | - | 69.5 | 24.4 | 6.1 | 100.0 |
| Supervising workers with support needs | - | - | 46.3 | 48.8 | 4.9 | 100.0 |

*Source: B-WISE F2F survey 2021*

** The table reports the opinions of the enablers who believed that skills were relevant to some degree. Those who do not consider skills relevant are not counted.*

As far as the opinions of those directly involved are concerned, a key element that emerged from the interviews conducted – and that should be underlined to understand the evaluations made by the supporters in terms of necessary and developed skills – is the multifaceted nature of work. Supporters deal with a variety of activities, from planning work time and space and assisting and supporting WSNs in carrying out their tasks up to managing and reporting on activities to their supervisors and coordinators. A mix of hard and soft skills is required, the balance of which also varies according to the specific role assumed by a supporter within an organization.

It is not surprising that for the majority of those interviewed, the most important skills are managerial and assisting and caring for WSNs (Table 6.6). However, compared to the enablers, there is not an as clear opinion on the level of importance that these skills have for their work. As concerns supporters, 59.3% believe that management skills are highly important for their jobs, while 35.2% believe they are moderately important. Similarly, less than half of those surveyed (48.3%) considers skills in assisting and caring to be highly relevant to their work, while 31% considers them moderately important.

In addition to these skills, there are also language skills – considered moderately important by 40% and highly important by less than 10% of those interviewed – that are fundamental in the management of relationships with foreign workers and in the performance of specific activities carried out by some organizations (for example, the management of telephone and IT contact centres).

Finally, operational skills, such as constructing, handling, moving, and working with machinery and specialized equipment, are not considered relevant by 75.2%, 50.3%, and 42.1%, respectively. A minority of respondents believes however that it is important to master these skills to be able to effectively train and support WSNs in their daily activities and to optimally plan processes and work activities.

### *Table 6.6. Relevance of the skills needed for supporters to perform their job tasks (% values)*

| | Not relevant | Low | Medium | High | N.A. | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Assisting and caring** (providing information and support, counselling, preparing and serving food, providing general personal care) | 12.4 | 7.6 | 31.0 | 48.3 | 0.7 | 100.0 |
| **Management skills** (developing objectives and strategies, organising and planning and scheduling work, leading and motivating) | 1.4 | 3.4 | 35.2 | 59.3 | 0.7 | 100.0 |
| **Handling and moving** (sorting and packaging goods, cleaning, tending plants and crops, assembling products, moving and lifting) | 50.3 | 7.6 | 22.8 | 18.6 | 0.7 | 100.0 |
| **Constructing** (building and repairing structures, installing and finishing infrastructures) | 75.2 | 10.3 | 11.0 | 3.4 | - | 100.0 |
| **Working with machinery and specialised equipment** (installing, maintaining and operating equipment, driving vehicles) | 42.1 | 9.7 | 28.3 | 19.3 | 0.7 | 100.0 |
| **Language skills** (communicate in foreign languages) | 34.5 | 15.9 | 40.0 | 9.7 | - | 100.0 |

*Source: B-WISE F2F survey 2021*

As far as the level of endowment of these skills is concerned, the evaluations given by the supporters on assisting and caring skills and management skills are substantially in line with the evaluations expressed on the relevance side (Table 6.7). As for enablers, supporter believe that there is room for improvement for their skills, including both for management skills and technical skills related to the activities of engagement of WSNs.

From the interviews, it emerged that counselling and mentoring activities, in some cases, aim to stimulate workers in their own growth at work: they favour a positive atmosphere and even touch on some personal aspects that impact work. Some interviewees felt that they have received all the necessary tools to manage the support and counselling of WSNs. There are cases in which a lack of training on psychological aspects, as well as on the diverse typologies of workers' disabilities influences the effectiveness of supporters' activity. This can be explained also by the multifaceted nature of the work of supporters, who often struggle to manage the workload resulting from administrative and management activities and supporting and assisting workers with support needs.

*Table 6.7. Endowment of skills for supporters to perform their job tasks (% values)**

| | Not present | Low | Medium | High | N.A. | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Assisting and caring** (providing information and support, counselling, preparing and serving food, providing general personal care) | 0.8 | 2.4 | 44.1 | 49.6 | 4.8 | 100.0 |
| **Management skills** (developing objectives and strategies, organising and planning and scheduling work, leading and motivating) | - | 0.7 | 52.4 | 44.1 | 4.7 | 100.0 |
| **Handling and moving** (sorting and packaging goods, cleaning, tending plants and crops, assembling products, moving and lifting) | - | 5.6 | 45.8 | 38.9 | 8.4 | 100.0 |
| **Constructing** (building and repairing structures, installing and finishing infrastructures) | - | 25.0 | 41.7 | 19.4 | 7.8 | 100.0 |
| **Working with machinery and specialised equipment** (installing, maintaining and operating equipment, driving vehicles) | - | 10.7 | 52.4 | 33.3 | 4.2 | 100.0 |
| **Language skills** (communicate in foreign languages) | 3.2 | 13.7 | 54.7 | 26.3 | 3.1 | 100.0 |

*Source: B-WISE F2F survey 2021*

** The table reports the opinions of the supporters who believed that skills were relevant to some degree. Those who do not consider skills relevant are not counted.*

### 6.2.3 Workers with support needs

According to supporters, the key skills that WSNs must develop are operational skills, which are essential to carry out day-to-day work activities with accuracy, precision, and autonomy (Table 6.8). The importance of skills depends on the type of economic activity carried out, which in the sample interviewed ranges from manufacturing to administrative/office activities, catering, and waste management.

What emerged from the interviews with the supporters is that the degree of endowment is largely improvable for some of the operational skills examined (Table 6.9). While handling and moving was considered a highly relevant skill by 46.9% of the supporters interviewed, only 23.6% believed that WSNs have reached a high level of endowment in this skill. This also applied to working with machinery and specialized

equipment (a high level of importance for 27.6% of the supporters interviewed, with the same evaluation of the endowment in only 17.4% of cases).

Differences in the opinions of individual countries can be found on both the importance of skills and the level of development of these skills by WSNs are mainly affected by sector specializations of the organizations interviewed. Once again, the limited number of interviews carried out by sector within each country makes it impossible to delve into the reasons behind these differences.

### *Table 6.8. Relevance of skills for WSNs to perform their job tasks according to supporters (% values)*

| | Not relevant | Low | Medium | High | N.A. | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Assisting and caring** (providing information and support, counselling, preparing and serving food, providing general personal care) | 33.1 | 9.0 | 33.1 | 21.4 | 3.4 | 100.0 |
| **Management skills** (developing objectives and strategies, organising and planning and scheduling work, leading and motivating) | 33.1 | 18.6 | 35.9 | 9.0 | 3.4 | 100.0 |
| **Handling and moving** (sorting and packaging goods, cleaning, tending plants and crops, assembling products, moving and lifting) | 15.2 | 3.4 | 31.7 | 46.9 | 2.8 | 100.0 |
| **Constructing** (building and repairing structures, installing and finishing infrastructures) | 53.8 | 12.4 | 24.8 | 6.2 | 2.8 | 100.0 |
| **Working with machinery and specialised equipment** (installing, maintaining and operating equipment, driving vehicles) | 16.6 | 8.3 | 44.1 | 27.6 | 3.4 | 100.0 |
| **Language skills** (communicate in foreign languages) | 48.3 | 13.8 | 31.7 | 3.4 | 2.8 | 100.0 |

*Source: B-WISE F2F survey 2021*

### *Table 6.9. Endowment of skills for WSNs to perform their job tasks according to supporters (% values)**

| | Not present | Low | Medium | High | N.A. | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Assisting and caring** (providing information and support, counselling, preparing and serving food, providing general personal care) | 1.0 | 10.3 | 66.0 | 15.5 | 7.2 | 100.0 |
| **Management skills** (developing objectives and strategies, organising and planning and scheduling work, leading and motivating) | 1.0 | 32.0 | 49.5 | 9.3 | 8.2 | 100.0 |
| **Handling and moving** (sorting and packaging goods, cleaning, tending plants and crops, assembling products, moving and lifting) | - | 6.5 | 63.4 | 23.6 | 6.5 | 100.0 |
| **Constructing** (building and repairing structures, installing and finishing infrastructures) | 4.5 | 20.9 | 50.7 | 14.9 | 9.0 | 100.0 |
| **Working with machinery and specialised equipment** (installing, maintaining and operating equipment, driving vehicles) | 2.5 | 9.9 | 62.8 | 17.4 | 7.4 | 100.0 |
| **Language skills** (communicate in foreign languages) | 8.0 | 25.3 | 50.7 | 6.7 | 9.3 | 100.0 |

*Source: B-WISE F2F survey 2021*

** The table reports the opinions of the supporters who believed that skills were relevant to some degree. Those who do not consider skills relevant are not counted.*

Looking at data in Table 6.10, it is evident that workers' perceptions about the importance of skills are in line with the evaluations expressed by supporters. Most important to the WSNs are those skills that allow for the carrying out of their work autonomously and help them to meet the objectives and deadlines set by their organizations. The evaluations of the degree of endowment show good levels of development of the skills considered most important, with possible areas for improvement (Table 6.11).

### *Table 6.10. Relevance of skills for WSNs to perform their job tasks (% values)*

| | Not relevant | Low | Medium | High | N.A. | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Assisting and caring** (providing information and support, counselling, preparing and serving food, providing general personal care) | 42.6 | 7.1 | 27.8 | 22.5 | - | 100.0 |
| **Management skills** (developing objectives and strategies, organising and planning and scheduling work, leading and motivating) | 40.8 | 10.7 | 27.2 | 21.3 | - | 100.0 |
| **Handling and moving** (sorting and packaging goods, cleaning, tending plants and crops, assembling products, moving and lifting) | 24.9 | 6.5 | 26.0 | 42.0 | 0.6 | 100.0 |
| **Constructing** (building and repairing structures, installing and finishing infrastructures) | 78.7 | 4.1 | 11.8 | 5.3 | - | 100.0 |
| **Working with machinery and specialised equipment** (installing, maintaining and operating equipment, driving vehicles) | 34.9 | 7.7 | 28.4 | 27.8 | 1.2 | 100.0 |
| **Language skills** (communicate in foreign languages) | 56.8 | 8.9 | 24.3 | 10.1 | - | 100.0 |

*Source: B-WISE F2F survey 2021*

*Table 6.11. Endowment of skills for WSNs to perform their job tasks (% values)**

| | Very poor | Poor | Good | Very Good | Excellent | N.A. | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Assisting and caring** (providing information and support, counselling, preparing and serving food, providing general personal care) | - | 2.1 | 44.3 | 33.0 | 17.5 | 3.1 | 100.0 |
| **Management skills** (developing objectives and strategies, organising and planning and scheduling work, leading and motivating) | 1.0 | 11.0 | 48.0 | 23.0 | 12.0 | 6.0 | 100.0 |
| **Handling and moving** (sorting and packaging goods, cleaning, tending plants and crops, assembling products, moving and lifting) | - | 4.7 | 31.5 | 34.6 | 25.2 | 3.9 | 100.0 |
| **Constructing** (building and repairing structures, installing and finishing infrastructures) | 8.3 | 22.2 | 25.0 | 25.0 | 8.3 | 11.1 | 100.0 |
| **Working with machinery and specialised equipment** (installing, maintaining and operating equipment, driving vehicles) | - | 6.4 | 34.5 | 34.5 | 19.1 | 5.5 | 100.0 |
| **Language skills** (communicate in foreign languages) | 6.8 | 21.9 | 43.8 | 11.0 | 15.1 | 1.4 | 100.0 |

*Source: B-WISE F2F survey 2021*

** The table reports the opinions of the supporters who believed that skills were relevant to some degree. Those who do not consider skills relevant are not counted.*

## 6.3 Skills gaps reasons

This section provides an in-depth analysis of the factors the three target groups – enablers, supporters, and WSNs – identify as the main reasons explaining the presence of skill gaps in WISEs workforce. These results can help formulate the actions needed to improve personnel's skills within WISEs.

Starting with enablers, on the one hand, lack of economic resources and labour shortages of workers with the needed job profile represent the two main reasons explaining enablers' own skills gaps (Table 6.12). The lack of economic resources is a well-known issue in WISEs, which hinders the capacity to address skills gaps, from training/education to new hiring (Ridder and McCandless, 2010; Ridder, Piening and

Baluch, 2012). Labour shortages highlight the difficulty to find adequate profiles in the labour market[78]. This might also be ascribed to the lack of tailored university educational programmes for this type of workers in the countries surveyed.

Having said so, the introduction of new technology and new working practices without proper training do not seem to be relevant so as to account for skill gaps. This result suggests that WISEs are attentive to avoid the carrying out of new innovative activities without adequate training. Moreover, only 9% of the enablers indicate the lack of motivation as a reason for skill gaps: upgrading their own skills is perceived as important, and this aspect should be put in relation with the usual high motivation of workers in the non-profit sector (Borzaga and Tortia, 2006; Mosca, Musella and Pastore, 2007). Finally, within the option "other", eight enablers (9% of respondents) pointed out the lack of time as an explanatory factor. Lack of time is typically a barrier for instance in relation to training activities in small organizations (Signoretti, 2020), which are relevant in the non-profit sector (Townsend, McDonald and Cathcart, 2017).

### *Table 6.12. Reasons explaining enablers' skills gaps according to enablers themselves (% values)*

| | % of enablers |
|---|---|
| Lack of economic resources preventing them to upgrade their skills | 32.6 |
| Labour shortages of workers with the needed job profile | 27.0 |
| Introduction of new working practices without proper training | 14.6 |
| Degree of education not consistent with their job tasks | 14.6 |
| Lack of education opportunities enabling them to upgrade their skills | 14.6 |
| Introduction of new technology without proper training | 11.2 |
| Staff lacking motivation | 9.0 |
| Other | 36.0 |

*Source: B-WISE F2F survey 2021*

As highlighted in Table 6.13, supporters express views similar to those of enablers. In fact, while percentages differ, the lack of economic resources is regarded as a very important factor for skills gaps (15.1%) by supporters, while lack of motivation is confirmed to be the least relevant reason (1.4%). However, the scarcity of suitable training activities is the most important reason explaining skills gaps according to supporters (16%). At the same time, supporters do not consider the introduction of

78 We consider of relevance options selected by at least 20% of respondent enablers. This threshold derives from the fact that the three most important options usually selected by enablers in the other questions of the questionnaire are beyond 20%.

new technology or new working practices without proper training. Within the option "other" seven respondents (around 5%) ascribe the reason for skills gaps to the lack of time (for training).

### *Table 6.13. Reasons explaining supporters' skills gaps according to supporters themselves (% values)*

| | % of enablers |
|---|---|
| Although my organisation would support my participation, there are no suitable training opportunities to upgrade my skills | 15.9 |
| The organisation lacks economic resources for training | 15.1 |
| I am expected to adopt new working practices without having been trained | 6.2 |
| My educational background is not consistent with my current work activities | 6.2 |
| I am expected to make use of new technologies without having been trained | 4.1 |
| If I am not forced, I do not participate in training because I am not motivated | 1.4 |
| Other | 59.3 |

*Source: B-WISE F2F survey 2021*

Finally, time is the main issue (21.3%), which was conversely highlighted by WSNs (Table 6.14). The lack of time to learn new things is certainly an issue that is worth to consider since it was highlighted also by enablers and supporters, albeit through the option "other". Another 14.8% of respondents trace skill gaps back to personal considerations, which jeopardise the use of new working practices or technology despite the received training. Personal considerations may interact with the issue lack of motivation (10.6%), because if people perceive training as useless, their motivation to attend training activities is likely to decrease. Then, within the option "other", two elements are noteworthy. First, 13 workers (7.7%) claimed to attend or to have attended training activities thus confirming WISEs' commitment to address skills gaps. Second, twelve people underlined the inadequacy of training on the ground of physical, intellectual, or social issues. These two answers show that workers are, on the one hand, willing to fill their skills gaps but, on the other hand, some of them find it difficulties to attend training courses with success. Finally, there are workers who do not report any reason (16%). This answer is likely to derive from the difficulty in identifying precise reasons on the part of some WSNs and/or to their indecision in identifying and expressing possible reasons.

### *Table 6.14. Reasons explaining skills gaps of workers with support needs according to workers with support needs themselves (% values)*

| | % of WSNs |
|---|---|
| There are training opportunities, but I do not have enough time to learn new things | 21.3 |
| Do not know | 16.0 |
| Despite the training I have attended, I do not feel confident in using new work practices and/or new technological tools | 14.8 |
| There are training opportunities, but I do not feel motivated to learn new things | 10.6 |
| There are no training opportunities | 8.9 |
| Other | 40.2 |

*Source: B-WISE F2F survey 2021*

By comparing the reasons for the supporters' and WSNs skills gaps, as highlighted by enablers and supporters respectively, some commonalities emerge (Table 6.15). First, the lack of economic resources and labour shortages are important factors explaining skills gap for both supporters and WSNs. Second, the introduction of innovative changes concerning technology or working practices without adequate training and staff lacking motivation are not considered relevant factors. However, this latter observation should be interpreted carefully by considering that a significant percentage of supporters selected educational issues (i.e., lack of education opportunities and inconsistent degree of education) as relevant factors explaining workers' skills gaps.

Moreover, in the option "other", 16 supporters (12%) express the difficulty in identifying proper training for WSNs because of their specific vulnerabilities. These responses can be interpreted in different ways and ascribed to a number of diverse conditions, including medical complaints, lack of soft skills, and stress yielded by training activities. As highlighted before, this point was raised by some WSNs when explaining their own skills gaps. Therefore, WSNs may be not motivated to address their own skills gaps because educational/training activities are not considered adequate. Training can indeed be stressful for WSNs. It is thus important to invest time and energy in adapting training and education to the specific needs of recipients (Villotti et al., 2017; Villotti et al., 2018; Signoretti and Sacchetti, 2020).

### *Table 6.15. Skills gaps reasons of supporters and workers with support needs according to the higher hierarchical level (% values)*

| | Supporters* | WSNs** |
|---|---|---|
| Lack of economic resources preventing them to upgrade their skills | 30.3 | 26.9 |
| Lack of education opportunities enabling them to upgrade their skills | 22.5 | 28.3 |
| Labour shortages of workers with the needed job profile | 21.3 | 23.4 |
| Degree of education not consistent with their job tasks | 14.6 | 22.8 |
| Introduction of new technology without proper training | 13.5 | 11.0 |
| Introduction of new working practices without proper training | 12.4 | 12.4 |
| Staff lacking motivation | 10.1 | 20.0 |
| Other | 37.1 | 34.5 |

*Source: B-WISE F2F survey 2021*

** According to enablers*

*** According to supporters*

## 6.4 Skill gap effects

As highlighted in Table 6.16, the evaluations of enablers and supporters on the effects of their own skill gaps show that the main effect is represented by both the limited capacity to assist current or additional workers and the increased workload for staff. In other words, skill gaps hinder the process of work integration. This result is further corroborated by enablers' strong motivations to properly assist WSNs so as to facilitate their process of work integration, as highlighted by their concerns about their capacity to assist WSNs given their own skills gaps.

### *Table 6.16. Interviewees' evaluations of the effects of their own skills gaps (% values)*

| | Enablers | Supporters |
|---|---|---|
| Limited capacity to assist current or additional workers with support needs in their work integration processes | 32.6 | 20.0 |
| Increase workload for other staff | 31.5 | 13.8 |
| Limited capacity to pursue goals other than work integration | 21.3 | 12.4 |
| Higher operating costs challenging economic sustainability | 16.8 | 78.6 |
| Delays in delivering products and/or services | 11.2 | 6.9 |
| Other effects | 33.7 | 51.7 |

*Source: B-WISE F2F survey 2021*

It is important to notice that the option “delays in delivering products and/or services” registered the lowest percentage, whereas the issue “higher operating costs challenging economic sustainability” was selected by the majority of supporters (78.6%) and only by a relatively low share of enablers (16.8%). It seems that both the need to avoid delays in supply and the concern of higher operating costs weakness the importance of achieving financial sustainability. The balance between social and economic goals is crucial and never stable for WISEs, and economic sustainability is necessary to pursue the social mission (Guo et al., 2011; Battilana et al., 2015). However, from these answers, it seems that due to their precarious economic situation, several WISEs are, to a certain extent, sacrificing the social dimension to the advantage of the economic one (Baluch and Ridder, 2020).

As regards enablers, the option “other” is not taken into consideration by the analysis since it includes very differentiated answers. Instead, in the case of supporters, some recurring answers emerge. 17 people (around 12%) pointed out that skills gaps do not yield any effect or relevant effect, while other ten (around 5%) respondents stated that there are not relevant skill gaps. These two answers are similar. Therefore, skill gaps do not seem to be very relevant according to some supporters whereon they would not yield significant consequences.

As concerns skill gaps effects of WSNs, the main concern refers to the inability to work with proper quality and/or speed, which may provoke delays or hamper the quality of the products/services supplied to customers (26 people have reported this aspect, namely 15% of respondents).

Finally, Table 6.17 reports the effects of supporters’ and WSNs’ skill gaps according to their higher hierarchical level, namely from the perspective of enablers and supporters respectively. Results mostly corroborate what was highlighted before. There are two additional points that deserve specification. First, it was remarked that according to some supporters the effects of WSNs’ skill gaps yield delays in delivering products and/or services. This may be due to the fact that WSNs often carry out operational jobs. Second, a high percentage (39%) of supporters pointed out an increase in the workload. It is likely that supporters end up in many instances working directly to address the delays deriving from the skills gaps of WSNs, thus experiencing high workloads.

### *Table 6.17. Effects of supporters' and workers with support needs' skills gaps according to their higher hierarchical level (% values)*

| | Supporters* | WSNs** |
|---|---|---|
| Limited capacity to assist current or additional workers with support needs in their work integration processes | 30.3 | 23.4 |
| Increase workload for other staff | 39.3 | 42.1 |
| Limited capacity to pursue goals other than work integration | 30.3 | 23.4 |
| Higher operating costs challenging economic sustainability | 18.0 | 15.2 |
| Delay in delivering products and/or services | 9.0 | 22.8 |
| Other effects | 28.1 | 30.3 |

*Source: B-WISE F2F survey 2021*

** According to enablers*

*** According to supporters*

## 6.5 Measures to address skills gaps

As highlighted in Table 6.18, training is the most important measure to address skill gaps, while the recruitment of new staff or processes of internal re-organization of staff are less preferred actions. Nevertheless, as highlighted before, the adoption of these strategies can be hindered by the lack of economic resources.

### *Table 6.18. Measures in the pipeline to address skill gaps for enablers, supporters and workers with support needs (% values)*

| | Enablers* | Supporters* | WSNs** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Training courses | 51.7 | 65.2 | 54.5 |
| Recruitment of new staff | 27.0 | 27.0 | 20.7 |
| Internal re-organisation of staff | 27.0 | 23.6 | 24.1 |
| No measures | 19.1 | 11.2 | 19.3 |
| Other measures | 12.4 | 15.7 | 22.1 |

*Source: B-WISE F2F survey 2021*

** According to enablers themselves*

*** According to their higher hierarchical level*

These activities constitute the main measures to address skill gaps for WSNs evaluating their own situation, too. One peculiar element is that WSNs normally prefer face-to-face training and teamwork to address their own skill gaps (Table 6.19). This may be explained on the ground of the personal issues – highlighted above – that have a role in rendering online training particularly challenging.

### *Table 6.19. Measures to bridge their own skills gaps according to workers with support needs (% values)*

| | |
|---|---|
| Adequate face-to-face training | 51.5 |
| Learning from other colleagues | 47.3 |
| Adequate online/digital training | 22.5 |
| Studying on my own | 14.2 |
| Other measures | 16.6 |
| Do not know | 11.2 |

*Source: B-WISE F2F survey 2021*

The relevance of training activities leads the great majority of enablers and thus of WISEs to support training (either organized internally or by external organizations) to increase the skills of the workforce. Specifically, 84.3% of enablers claim to support these training activities while the remaining 15.7% do not.

It is important to turn to the level of satisfaction with the WISE training offer expressed by the different actors, which is reported in the table below.

### *Table 6.20. Level of satisfaction with the WISE training offer (% values)*

| | Enablers | Supporters | WSNs |
|---|---|---|---|
| Very good | 20.0 | 32.0 | 29.7 |
| Good | 50.7 | 34.0 | 56.2 |
| Acceptable | 21.3 | 24.8 | 7.8 |
| Poor | 8.0 | 5.0 | 0.8 |
| Very poor | 0.0 | 4.2 | 5.5 |
| **Total** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** |

*Source: B-WISE F2F survey 2021*

Overall, respondents expressed high levels of satisfaction. Supporters appeared to be slightly less satisfied than other groups. This can be partly related to the difficulty

expressed by them in the previous answers in finding appropriate training activities both for themselves and for WSNs. On the contrary, a higher percentage of WSNs expressed satisfaction with training. Anyway, all respondent groups expressed an overall satisfaction towards training.

In the following table, the funding schemes used by WISEs for training were inquired.

### *Table 6.21. WISEs training activities funding schemes (% values)*

| | |
|---|---|
| Self-funded | 67.1 |
| Co-funded by public funds | 55.2 |
| Funded by public funds | 35.5 |
| Funded by private funding schemes | 9.2 |
| Paid by employees | 2.6 |
| Other | 2.6 |

*Source: B-WISE F2F survey 2021*

The majority of enablers indicated reliance mainly on WISEs' own funds. This result partly explains why enablers and supporters indicate the lack of economic resources as the main factor hindering interventions to reduce skill gaps (among which training initiatives result the most important one). However, public funds are available for the majority of WISEs. Instead, private funding schemes are used by few WISEs. Nevertheless, access to private funding schemes is likely to increase in relevance following the observed tendency of WISEs to strengthen collaboration through mutual support mechanisms.

The following table reports the barriers preventing WISEs from organizing or supporting training according to enablers:

### *Table 6.22. Barriers preventing WISEs from promoting or supporting training activities according to enablers (% values)*

| | |
|---|---|
| Lack of time to organize/involve staff in training | 49.4 |
| Lack of funds | 39.3 |
| Lack of tailored training opportunities fully matching the WISE skills gaps | 28.1 |
| Lack of knowledge about training opportunities | 10.1 |
| Not applicable (i.e., no barriers detected) | 16.0 |
| Other | 3.4 |

*Source: B-WISE F2F survey 2021*

Results show that lack of time represents the most relevant barrier. As highlighted before, this factor is directly indicated within the option “other” by some supporters and enablers when evaluating the reasons explaining their own skills gaps. The option “lack of funds” corroborates the pivotal role exerted by the limited economic resources allocated to training by most WISEs. The challenge of being able to select tailored training matching WISEs’ skills gaps emerges as another relevant element. This corroborates what was already highlighted in relation to both supporters and WSNs and represents thus a challenge cutting across all respondent groups.

## 6.6 21st century skills

The so-called 21st century skills encompass a variety of skills which result to be particularly relevant for people working nowadays in the WISE sector. In fact, creativity skills enable to pursue innovative social and economic strategies, leadership and social skills favour teamwork, and flexibility allow for the adaptation to market and organizational demands. In essence, they are all essential skills that can have a role in improving the effectiveness of WISEs. Specialised knowledge related to technology, media, and information are becoming more relevant in light of massive technological and social media changes.

Overall, all 21st century skills appear to be important for enablers. By considering both the options “medium” and “high”, critical thinking allowing to find solutions to problems, communicative, collaborative and flexibility skills are highly relevant according to enablers for their own job. Creativity and the ability to motivate a team (i.e., leadership) are equally important, too. The ability to take the initiative, maintaining efficiency and social skills emerge as somehow relevant, while information literacy and creativity register high but lower percentages. Comparatively speaking, specialized technical knowledge related to technology and media usage and manipulation cover a secondary role. This data confirms the importance assigned to social relations by WISEs. The low marks received by specialized technical knowledge can be related to the manual activities still characterizing the majority of WISEs where practice-oriented skills assume a predominant role. However, the pandemic has recently given a push to the development of digital technologies, which need hence to be monitored and assessed in the future.

### *Table 6.23. Relevance of 21st century skills for enablers to perform their job tasks (% values)*

| | Not relevant | Low | Medium | High | N.A. | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Critical thinking: finding solutions to problems | 1.1 | 2.2 | 16.9 | 79.8 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Creativity: thinking outside the box | 1.1 | 9.0 | 30.3 | 59.6 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Collaboration: working with others | 1.1 | 1.1 | 15.8 | 82.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Communication: talking to others | 1.1 | 2.3 | 19.1 | 77.5 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Information literacy: understanding facts, figures, statistics and data | 1.1 | 12.4 | 28.1 | 58.4 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Media literacy: accessing, understanding, manipulating and evaluating media | 4.5 | 24.7 | 43.8 | 27.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Technology literacy: using, managing, understanding and assessing technology | 2.3 | 15.7 | 37.1 | 44.9 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Flexibility: deviating from plans as needed | 1.1 | 3.4 | 34.8 | 60.7 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Leadership: motivating a team to accomplish a goal | 1.1 | 2.2 | 13.5 | 83.2 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Initiative: starting projects, strategies and plans on one's own | 3.3 | 7.9 | 27.0 | 61.8 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Productivity: maintaining efficiency in an age of distractions | 2.3 | 3.4 | 35.9 | 57.3 | 1.1 | 100.0 |
| Social skills: meeting and networking with others for mutual benefit | 1.1 | 5.6 | 21.3 | 70.9 | 1.1 | 100.0 |

*Source: B-WISE F2F survey 2021*

The following table reports the level of endowment of the most relevant 21st century skills for enablers according to enablers themselves. Attention is paid to the skills that were evaluated as the most relevant ones by enablers thus omitting specialised technical knowledge, including information, media and technology literacy, and creativity skills.

### *Table 6.24. Level of endowment of the most relevant 21st century skills for enablers for their own job (% values)*

| | Not present | Low | Medium | High | N.A. | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Critical thinking: finding solutions to problems | 0.0 | 9.0 | 42.7 | 44.9 | 3.4 | 100.0 |
| Collaboration: working with others | 0.0 | 9.0 | 39.4 | 49.4 | 2.2 | 100.0 |
| Communication: talking to others | 0.0 | 10.1 | 47.3 | 40.4 | 2.2 | 100.0 |
| Flexibility: deviating from plans as needed | 0.0 | 13.5 | 37.1 | 47.2 | 2.2 | 100.0 |
| Leadership: motivating a team to accomplish a goal | 0.0 | 11.2 | 42.7 | 42.7 | 3.4 | 100.0 |
| Initiative: starting projects, strategies and plans on one's own | 1.1 | 16.9 | 40.4 | 39.4 | 2.2 | 100.0 |
| Productivity: maintaining efficiency in an age of distractions | 0.0 | 20.2 | 40.4 | 34.9 | 4.5 | 100.0 |
| Social skills: meeting and networking with others for mutual benefit | 0.0 | 13.5 | 42.7 | 39.3 | 4.5 | 100.0 |

*Source: B-WISE F2F survey 2021*

There is a good correspondence between the two tables related to 21st century skills relevance and endowment since the most relevant skills registered – according to enablers – good levels of endowment too. Maintaining efficiency and the ability to start projects, strategies and plans emerge as the two highly relevant 21st century skills that show grater space for improvements.

Overall, 21st century skills appear to be important for supporters' jobs, too. Highly relevant is supporters' capacity to collaborate and communicate with others being flexible, productive and finding solutions to problems at the same time (as highlighted by enablers, too). Instead, low relevance (more than 25% of respondent supporters selecting skills as not relevant or of low relevance) was assigned to "media, technology, and information literacy", as occurring with enablers. Unlike enablers, initiative skills come out as not particularly relevant for supporters in comparison to the other inquired skills.

### *Table 6.25. Relevance of 21st century skills for supporters to perform their job tasks (% values)*

| | Not relevant | Low | Medium | High | N.A. | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Critical thinking: finding solutions to problems | 0.7 | 5.5 | 24.8 | 68.3 | 0.7 | 100.0 |
| Creativity: thinking outside the box | 2.1 | 13.8 | 31.7 | 51.7 | 0.7 | 100.0 |
| Collaboration: working with others | 0.0 | 0.7 | 11.7 | 86.9 | 0.7 | 100.0 |
| Communication: talking to others | 0.0 | 4.1 | 10.4 | 84.8 | 0.7 | 100.0 |
| Information literacy: understanding facts, figures, statistics and data | 0.7 | 21.4 | 32.4 | 42.8 | 2.7 | 100.0 |
| Media literacy: accessing, understanding, manipulating and evaluating media | 13.1 | 39.3 | 29.0 | 17.9 | 0.7 | 100.0 |
| Technology literacy: using, managing, understanding and assessing technology | 4.8 | 30.3 | 36.6 | 27.6 | 0.7 | 100.0 |
| Flexibility: deviating from plans as needed | 0.0 | 6.2 | 35.2 | 57.9 | 0.7 | 100.0 |
| Leadership: motivating a team to accomplish a goal | 2.8 | 10.3 | 33.8 | 52.4 | 0.7 | 100.0 |
| Initiative: starting projects, strategies and plans on one's own | 3.4 | 25.5 | 22.8 | 46.9 | 1.4 | 100.0 |
| Productivity: maintaining efficiency in an age of distractions | 0.0 | 9.6 | 34.5 | 55.2 | 0.7 | 100.0 |
| Social skills: meeting and networking with others for mutual benefit | 2.8 | 13.8 | 20.7 | 62.0 | 0.7 | 100.0 |

*Source: B-WISE F2F survey 2021*

Attention is thus paid to the level of endowment of 21st century skills focusing on those skills that were regarded as the most relevant by supporters.

### *Table 6.26. Level of endowment of the most relevant 21st century skills for supporters for their own job (% values)*

| | Not present | Low | Medium | High | N.A. | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Critical thinking: finding solutions to problems | 0.0 | 5.5 | 42.1 | 49.7 | 2.7 | 100.0 |
| Creativity: thinking outside the box | 0.7 | 13.8 | 46.9 | 35.2 | 3.4 | 100.0 |
| Collaboration: working with others | 0.0 | 4.1 | 29.0 | 62.8 | 4.1 | 100.0 |
| Communication: talking to others | 0.0 | 6.9 | 31.8 | 57.9 | 3.4 | 100.0 |
| Flexibility: deviating from plans as needed | 0.0 | 8.3 | 36.5 | 49.7 | 5.5 | 100.0 |
| Leadership: motivating a team to accomplish a goal | 2.8 | 16.5 | 40.7 | 35.9 | 4.1 | 100.0 |
| Productivity: maintaining efficiency in an age of distractions | 0.0 | 9.0 | 40.0 | 47.6 | 3.4 | 100.0 |
| Social skills: meeting and networking with others for mutual benefit | 0.7 | 11.0 | 31.0 | 52.5 | 4.8 | 100.0 |

*Source: B-WISE F2F survey 2021*

The table above shows a good correspondence between relevance and endowment of 21st century skills for supporters. The table below illustrated the relevance of 21st century skills for WSNs according to the workers themselves.

### *Table 6.27. Relevance of 21st century skills for workers with support needs to perform their job tasks (% values)*

| | Not relevant | Low | Medium | High | N.A. | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Critical thinking: finding solutions to problems | 8.3 | 25.4 | 32.0 | 33.7 | 0.6 | 100.0 |
| Creativity: thinking outside the box | 11.8 | 31.9 | 32.0 | 23.7 | 0.6 | 100.0 |
| Collaboration: working with others | 0.0 | 11.8 | 24.9 | 62.1 | 1.2 | 100.0 |
| Communication: talking to others | 1.2 | 12.4 | 28.4 | 57.4 | 0.6 | 100.0 |
| Information literacy: understanding facts, figures, statistics and data | 21.3 | 31.9 | 24.3 | 21.9 | 0.6 | 100.0 |
| Media literacy: accessing, understanding, manipulating and evaluating media | 42.0 | 28.4 | 14.8 | 14.2 | 0.6 | 100.0 |
| Technology literacy: using, managing, understanding and assessing technology | 29.0 | 27.2 | 23.1 | 19.5 | 1.2 | 100.0 |
| Flexibility: deviating from plans as needed | 8.9 | 25.4 | 31.4 | 33.1 | 1.2 | 100.0 |
| Leadership: motivating a team to accomplish a goal | 31.4 | 24.3 | 25.4 | 18.3 | 0.6 | 100.0 |
| Initiative: starting projects, strategies, and plans on one's own | 29.5 | 24.3 | 24.3 | 20.7 | 1.2 | 100.0 |
| Productivity: maintaining efficiency in an age of distractions | 8.3 | 16.5 | 31.4 | 42.6 | 1.2 | 100.0 |
| Social skills: meeting and networking with others for mutual benefit | 19.5 | 18.9 | 29.0 | 32.0 | 0.6 | 100.0 |

*Source: B-WISE F2F survey 2021*

There is a lower number of relevant 21st century skills for WSNs but some of them emerge as very important. In fact, skills related to communication and collaboration, social skills and productivity are considered relevant by the majority of WSNs.

The table below underlines the good correspondence between skills relevance and endowment for the most relevant skills. However, social skills can be improved.

Grant Agreement: 621509-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-EPPKA2-SSA-B
This publication has been co-funded by the European Commission. The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Agency and Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.
Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

### *Table 6.28. Level of endowment of the most relevant 21st century skills for workers with support needs to perform their job tasks (% values)*

| | Low | Medium | High | N.A. | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Critical thinking: finding solutions to problems | 12.4 | 35.6 | 46.1 | 5.9 | 100.0 |
| Collaboration: working with others | 5.9 | 27.8 | 65.1 | 1.2 | 100.0 |
| Communication: talking to others | 4.7 | 32.5 | 60.4 | 2.4 | 100.0 |
| Productivity: maintaining efficiency in an age of distractions | 10.0 | 30.2 | 49.8 | 10.0 | 100.0 |
| Social skills: meeting and networking with others for mutual benefit | 17.1 | 24.3 | 41.5 | 17.1 | 100.0 |

*Source: B-WISE F2F survey 2021*

© Mariasteen by Lichtwerk

# 7. TECHNOLOGY AND DIGITAL SKILLS GAPS IN WISEs[79]

This chapter presents the results of both the face-to-face and the online surveys and focuses on technology, digitisation and digital skills of WISEs in the 13 B-WISE participating countries.

## 7.1 Introduction

The surveys carried out between October and December 2021 not only included 403 face-to-face interviews with three target groups (enablers, supporters, WSNs), they also consisted of an online questionnaire with a subset of questions of the face-to-face interviews, completed by 175 enablers (e.g., CEOs, CHROs, CFOs, staff managers, area coordinators, project managers, and ICT specialists).

79 Chapter authored by Lieven Bossuyt and Lisa Messely (Lichtwerk); Fabio Belafatti, Lara Bezzina and Juan José García Antequera (Policy Impact Lab).

Grant Agreement: 621509-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-EPPKA2-SSA-B
This publication has been co-funded by the European Commission. The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Agency and Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.
Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

### *Table 7.1. Number of interviews (face-to-face survey) and respondents (online survey) at country level*

| FACE-TO-FACE SURVEY | | | | | ONLINE SURVEY |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of interviews | | | | | Number of respondents |
| Country | Enablers | Supporters | WSNs | Total | Enablers |
| Austria | 6 | 9 | 8 | 23 | 4 |
| Belgium | 10 | 18 | 18 | 46 | 30 |
| Bulgaria | 5 | 7 | 8 | 20 | 14 |
| Croatia | 6 | 6 | 14 | 26 | 7 |
| France | 6 | 12 | 12 | 30 | 0 |
| Greece | 7 | 9 | 14 | 30 | 6 |
| Italy | 6 | 13 | 11 | s0 | 20 |
| Latvia | 6 | 4 | 11 | 21 | 6 |
| Netherlands | 10 | 20 | 21 | 51 | 7 |
| Poland | 6 | 12 | 12 | 30 | 28 |
| Romania | 6 | 12 | 12 | 30 | 19 |
| Slovenia | 9 | 11 | 16 | 36 | 12 |
| Spain | 6 | 12 | 12 | 30 | 22 |
| **Total** | **89** | **145** | **169** | **403** | **175** |

Both surveys aimed to provide a state of play of skills, technology and digitisation of WISEs in the 13 B-WISE participating countries. A specific section of the face-to-face survey designed for enablers – which was specifically aimed at investigating the use of technology and the presence/absence of digital skills within WISEs – was used to carry out the online survey. The online survey was disseminated by B-WISE partners via e-mail and social networks in the same 13 countries as the face-to-face questionnaire.

Both surveys targeting enablers collected information on the relevance of technology and digitisation for the organisation of their WISE. The surveys paid specific attention to the integration of WSNs. Furthermore, the current use of digital tools was explored.

This chapter departs from the results of the face-to-face survey. The results of the online survey are used to confirm the findings from the interviews, when discrepancies have been observed, they are indicated below. The results have been analysed on a European level and when data allowed it, a cross-country analysis has

been performed. Furthermore, the size of the WISEs based on staff headcount has been taken into account in the analysis[80].

## 7.2 Diffusion of technology within WISEs

### 7.2.1 Relevance of technology and digitisation for WISEs

Before diving into the state of play of specific technologies and digitisation processes in WISEs, the face-to-face and online surveys questioned the relevance and the level of reliance on technology for WISEs today and in the near future. The surveys investigated the relevance of the following domains of technologies and digitisation processes and the extent to which WISEs rely on them:

- Digitisation of standardised production processes to improve productivity/ reduce risks/improve quality e.g., Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP); digital transformation in manufacturing (assistive manufacturing and Industry 4.0 solutions such as operator guidance solutions, digital work instructions, collaborative robots, etc.); e-commerce.
- Technological adaptation of individual workplaces to address employees with disabilities needs and/or digital monitoring/evaluation of the outcomes of integration (e.g., software monitoring integration processes, screen magnifiers, Braille displays, voice recognition software).
- Digitisation of management processes to stay competitive/improve the working environment (e.g., digital organisation of work schedule, sending e-invoices, cloud computing services).

Furthermore, the level of reliance on internal and external Information and Communication (ICT) specialists has been taken into consideration.

80 Small enterprise: staff headcount <50. Medium-sized enterprise: staff headcount between 50 and 250. Large enterprise: staff headcount >250 (see: https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/sme-definition_en).

## Technology and digitisation today

### *Table 7.2. Relevance and level of reliance on the digitisation of standardised production processes (% values)*

| | Digitisation of standardised production processes | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Country | Not relevant | 1 (low) | 2 | 3 | 4 (high) | N. A. | Total |
| Austria | 16.7 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 66.7 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Belgium | 0.0 | 30.0 | 0.0 | 40.0 | 30.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Bulgaria | 20.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 40.0 | 40.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Croatia | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 33.3 | 0.0 | 16.7 | 100.0 |
| France | 0.0 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 16.7 | 66.7 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Greece | 28.6 | 57.1 | 0.0 | 14.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Italy | 33.3 | 33.3 | 33.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Latvia | 33.3 | 0.0 | 16.7 | 33.3 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Netherlands | 30.0 | 0.0 | 20.0 | 0.0 | 40.0 | 10.0 | 100.0 |
| Poland | 33.3 | 0.0 | 16.7 | 50.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Romania | 16.7 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 33.3 | 33.3 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Slovenia | 66.7 | 22.2 | 11.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Spain | 16.7 | 0.0 | 33.3 | 50.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| **Total** | **24.7** | **16.9** | **11.2** | **27.0** | **18.0** | **2.2** | **100.0** |

*Source: B-WISE F2F Survey 2021*

The relevance of the first domain analysed, namely the digitisation of standardised production processes, varies within and over countries in Europe, from not relevant (24.7% of WISEs) to highly relevant (18.0% of WISEs). On a country level, the results from the online survey differ from those of the face-to-face survey, consequently it is not possible to draw conclusions for individual countries. Nevertheless, data indicate that mainly large WISEs see the relevance of these technologies and they rely on them moderately or highly (62.5%). For medium-sized and small WISEs, these technologies are less relevant, as a consequence they rely less on them.

### *Table 7.3. Relevance and level of reliance on technological adaptations to individual workplaces (% values)*

| | Digitisation of standardised production processes | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Country | Not relevant | 1 (low) | 2 | 3 | 4 (high) | N. A. | Total |
| Austria | 100.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Belgium | 20.0 | 20.0 | 20.0 | 30.0 | 10.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Bulgaria | 20.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 40.0 | 20.0 | 20.0 | 100.0 |
| Croatia | 16.7 | 33.3 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 16.7 | 100.0 |
| France | 0.0 | 66.7 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Greece | 14.3 | 85.7 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Italy | 50.0 | 33.3 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Latvia | 66.7 | 0.0 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Netherlands | 50.0 | 0.0 | 10.0 | 20.0 | 10.0 | 10.0 | 100.0 |
| Poland | 16.7 | 33.3 | 33.3 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Romania | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 33.3 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Slovenia | 66.7 | 22.2 | 11.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Spain | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 33.3 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| **Total** | **36.0** | **24.7** | **13.5** | **14.6** | **7.9** | **3.4** | **100.0** |

*Source: B-WISE F2F Survey 2021*

The second domain of technology and digitisation processes analysed shows similar trends. The relevance and the level of reliance on the technological adaptation of individual workplaces is diverse across the EU (36.0% of enablers indicate that this domain is irrelevant and 7.9% of WISEs state that they reached a high level of reliance on these technologies). Nevertheless, over all, the relevance and the level of reliance on technological adaptations of individual workplaces is lower compared to the digitisation of standardised production processes, as only a small percentage of WISEs reach a high level of reliance on these technologies. Furthermore, it can be noticed that all Austrian WISEs interviewed deemed this category of technology/digitisation irrelevant, 66.7% of Latvian and Slovenian WISEs think it is irrelevant and half of Italian and Dutch WISEs do not see the relevance of the technological adaptation of individual workplaces for their businesses today.

Considering the size of the WISEs, the same tendency can be observed as the results for the first domain showed. Mainly large WISEs indicate that the technological adaptation of individual workplaces is relevant and there is a higher level of reliance on these technologies in large WISEs compared with small and medium-sized WISEs.

### *Table 7.4. Relevance and level of reliance on the digitisation of management processes (% values)*

| Country | Digitisation of management processes | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Not relevant | 1 (low) | 2 | 3 | 4 (high) | N. A. | Total |
| Austria | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 50.0 | 50.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Belgium | 0.0 | 10.0 | 20.0 | 50.0 | 20.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Bulgaria | 20.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 40.0 | 20.0 | 20.0 | 100.0 |
| Croatia | 16.7 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 33.3 | 33.3 | 16.7 | 100.0 |
| France | 0.0 | 0.0 | 16.7 | 33.3 | 50.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Greece | 0.0 | 0.0 | 57.1 | 28.6 | 14.3 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Italy | 0.0 | 33.3 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 33.3 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Latvia | 16.7 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 66.7 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Netherlands | 0.0 | 0.0 | 30.0 | 20.0 | 40.0 | 10.0 | 100.0 |
| Poland | 0.0 | 50.0 | 0.0 | 16.7 | 33.3 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Romania | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 33.3 | 66.7 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Slovenia | 0.0 | 11.1 | 33.3 | 33.3 | 22.2 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Spain | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 50.0 | 50.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| **Total** | **3.4** | **7.9** | **15.7** | **36.0** | **33.7** | **3.4** | **100.0** |

*Source: B-WISE F2F Survey 2021*

Considering the third domain investigated in the surveys, i.e., the digitisation of management processes, almost all WISEs believe these technologies or digitisation processes are relevant. Consequently, the level of reliance on them is rather high. Taking into account the digitisation of management processes, the differences between large, medium-sized and small WISEs are, especially in the face-to-face survey, less outspoken.

## Technology and digitisation tomorrow

Enablers were asked the same questions about the same three domains of technologies and digitisation, but referring to the future (To what extent and at which of the following levels is your WISE planning to digitise new work processes in the next five years?).

### *Table 7.5. Relevance and level of reliance on the digitisation of standardised production processes in the next 5 years (% values)*

| Country | Digitisation of standardised production processes | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Not relevant | 1 (low) | 2 | 3 | 4 (high) | N. A. | Total |
| Austria | 0.0 | 33.3 | 50.0 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Belgium | 0.0 | 10.0 | 20.0 | 30.0 | 40.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Bulgaria | 20.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 40.0 | 20.0 | 20.0 | 100.0 |
| Croatia | 16.7 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 16.7 | 50.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| France | 33.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 50.0 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Greece | 28.6 | 28.6 | 0.0 | 28.6 | 14.3 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Italy | 50.0 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Latvia | 0.0 | 50.0 | 50.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Netherlands | 40.0 | 10.0 | 0.0 | 20.0 | 20.0 | 10.0 | 100.0 |
| Poland | 16.7 | 0.0 | 16.7 | 33.3 | 33.3 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Romania | 33.3 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Slovenia | 55.6 | 22.2 | 11.1 | 0.0 | 11.1 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Spain | 33.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 50.0 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| **Total** | **25.8** | **15.7** | **12.4** | **23.6** | **20.2** | **2.2** | **100.0** |

*Source: B-WISE F2F Survey 2021*

As regards the first domain analysed, i.e., the digitisation of standardised production processes, the results of the face-to-face survey show that 71.9% of WISEs plan to digitise standardised production processes to a certain level. 28.1% of WISEs think there will be a rather low level of reliance on digital production processes (score 1 or 2) and 43.8% of WISEs think the level of reliance will be rather high (score 3 or 4). However, 25.8% of the enablers indicate that for their WISE the digitisation of standardised production processes will not be relevant within five years. Up to half of the Italian WISEs, 55.6% of the Slovenian WISEs and 40% of the Dutch WISEs do not think it will be relevant.

The results of the online survey are in line with what the enablers stated in the face-to-face interviews. Only on a country level there are small differences.

The face-to-face survey showed no relationship between the desire to digitise standardised production processes and the size of the WISE. Nonetheless, the results of the online survey indicate that mainly large WISEs plan to digitise standardised production processes in the near future.

### *Table 7.6. Relevance and level of reliance on technological adaptations to individual workplaces in the next 5 years (% values)*

| Country | Technological adaptation of individual workplaces | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Not relevant | 1 (low) | 2 | 3 | 4 (high) | N. A. | Total |
| Austria | 100.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Belgium | 30.0 | 10.0 | 20.0 | 30.0 | 10.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Bulgaria | 20.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 60.0 | 0.0 | 20.0 | 100.0 |
| Croatia | 16.7 | 33.3 | 16.7 | 33.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| France | 50.0 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 33.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Greece | 14.3 | 28.6 | 42.9 | 0.0 | 14.3 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Italy | 66.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Latvia | 66.7 | 0.0 | 33.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Netherlands | 50.0 | 10.0 | 0.0 | 10.0 | 20.0 | 10.0 | 100.0 |
| Poland | 0.0 | 16.7 | 33.3 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 100.0 |
| Romania | 0.0 | 33.3 | 16.7 | 33.3 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Slovenia | 33.3 | 22.2 | 11.1 | 22.2 | 11.1 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Spain | 33.3 | 0.0 | 16.7 | 33.3 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| **Total** | **37.1** | **14.6** | **15.7** | **20.2** | **9.0** | **3.4** | **100.0** |

*Source: B-WISE F2F Survey 2021*

The second domain included in the surveys was the technological adaptation of individual workplaces. A high percentage (37.1%) of WISEs do not think these kinds of technologies and digitisation processes will be relevant in the five years to come. Only 29.2% of WISEs believe that there will be a high level of reliance on them in the near future (score of 3 or 4) and 30.3% of enablers state that their WISE will reach a rather low level of reliance on the technological adaptation of individual workplaces (score of 1 or 2).

The results of the online survey show a slightly higher reliance on this domain than the face-to-face survey. Only 16% of enablers does not believe the technological adaptation of individual workplaces will be relevant. 42.3% of enablers indicated that the level of reliance will be rather high in the near future and 41.7% of enablers indicated that the level of reliance will be rather low in the near future.

The face-to-face survey showed no relationship between the desire to implement technological adaptations to individual workplaces and the size of the WISE; this

contrasts with the results of the online survey, which indicate that mainly large WISEs plan to implement technological adaptations to individual workplaces.

***Table 7.7. Relevance and level of reliance on the digitisation of management processes in the next 5 years (% values)***

| | Digitisation of management processes | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Country | Not relevant | 1 (low) | 2 | 3 | 4 (high) | N. A. | Total |
| Austria | 0.0 | 0.0 | 50.0 | 33.3 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Belgium | 0.0 | 10.0 | 10.0 | 30.0 | 50.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Bulgaria | 20.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 40.0 | 20.0 | 20.0 | 100.0 |
| Croatia | 16.7 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 50.0 | 33.3 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| France | 33.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 50.0 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Greece | 14.3 | 0.0 | 14.3 | 28.6 | 42.9 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Italy | 16.7 | 33.3 | 0.0 | 16.7 | 33.3 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Latvia | 0.0 | 50.0 | 16.7 | 33.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Netherlands | 0.0 | 10.0 | 10.0 | 30.0 | 40.0 | 10.0 | 100.0 |
| Poland | 0.0 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 16.7 | 66.7 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Romania | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 50.0 | 50.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Slovenia | 0.0 | 0.0 | 22.2 | 33.3 | 44.4 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Spain | 0.0 | 0.0 | 16.7 | 33.3 | 50.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| **Total** | **6.7** | **9.0** | **11.2** | **33.7** | **37.1** | **2.2** | **100.0** |

*Source: B-WISE F2F Survey 2021*

Concerning the third domain, i.e., the digitisation of management processes, the results of the face-to-face survey clearly show a high relevance of these technologies in the next five years. Only 6.7% of WISEs think they will not be relevant and 70.8% of the enablers declare that the level of reliance on digital management processes will be rather high (score 3 or 4) in the years to come. 20.2% of enablers believe they will reach a low level of reliance on digital management processes (score 1 or 2). Almost all large WISEs attribute great relevance to the digitisation of management processes in the next five years, nevertheless small and medium-sized WISEs also plan to digitise management processes to a certain level. Over 60% of them consider that the level of reliance on digital management processes will be high (score 3-4).

## ICT specialists

Next to the three domains of technologies and digitisation processes mentioned above, the surveys zoomed in on the relevance of ICT specialists. Enablers were asked if their WISE has its own ICT specialists or if it recurs to external specialists.

***Table 7.8. Reliance on own employees and external suppliers for the maintenance of the ICT infrastructure, the support of software etc. (% values)***

| Country | Own employees | External suppliers | A mix of own employees and external suppliers | N.A. | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Austria | 16.7 | 33.3 | 50.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Belgium | 20.0 | 50.0 | 30.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Bulgaria | 0.0 | 40.0 | 20.0 | 40.0 | 100.0 |
| Croatia | 0.0 | 66.7 | 33.3 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| France | 0.0 | 33.3 | 66.7 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Greece | 14.3 | 14.3 | 71.4 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Italy | 16.7 | 83.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Latvia | 33.3 | 66.7 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Netherlands | 20.0 | 50.0 | 20.0 | 10.0 | 100.0 |
| Poland | 33.3 | 66.7 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Romania | 33.3 | 50.0 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Slovenia | 0.0 | 33.3 | 66.7 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Spain | 16.7 | 50.0 | 33.3 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| **Total** | **15.7** | **48.3** | **32.6** | **3.4** | **100.0** |

*Source: B-WISE F2F Survey 2021*

The majority of WISEs count solely or partly on external suppliers for the maintenance of their ICT infrastructure, for the support of software etc. Only in Belgium, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland and Romania more than 20% of the WISEs interviewed indicate that their own employees perform ICT functions. Small WISEs count slightly more solely on external suppliers than medium-sized and large WISEs. Medium-sized and large WISEs count in general on a combination of their own employees and external suppliers. The online survey shows a somewhat higher dependence on own employees, also for small WISEs.

### Covid-19

Given the time in which the research was conducted and the clear relationship between Covid-19 and digitisation and technology, the impact of Covid-19 on the WISEs' digitisation processes was also investigated.

***Table 7.9. The impact of covid-19 on digitisation in WISEs (% values)***

| Answer | % |
|---|---|
| Covid-19 had a very important impact upon digitalization | 15.7 |
| Covid-19 had a fairly important impact upon digitalization | 16.9 |
| Covid-19 had an important impact upon digitalization | 27.0 |
| Covid-19 had a slightly important impact upon digitalization | 16.9 |
| Covid-19 did not have any impact upon digitalization | 22.5 |
| N.A. | 1.1 |
| **Total** | **100.0** |

*Source: B-WISE F2F Survey 2021*

Only 22.5% of the enablers interviewed state that Covid-19 did not affect the digitisation processes in their WISE. 32.6% of enablers state that Covid-19 had a very or fairly important impact upon digitisation and 43.9% of enablers state that Covid-19 had an important or slightly important impact. The results of the online survey are similar.

## 7.2.2 State of play of technology and digitisation in WISEs

This section gives an elaborate state of play of technology and digitisation in WISEs. Both the online and the face-to-face survey focused on different types of technology and digitisation processes applied to digitise standardised production processes, to digitise management processes or for the technological adaptation of individual workplaces:

- Communication technologies (website/social media)
- E-commerce
- E-invoicing
- Use of cloud computer services
- Artificial Intelligence (including big data analysis and the IoT)
- Rapid prototyping (use of 3D printing or laser cutting)
- Use of assistive/inclusive technology
- Automatic exchange of information
- Remote working teleworking and online collaboration tooling

Besides the types of technology and digitisation processes listed above, the surveys paid attention to the access to and the use of the Internet, which is a crucial condition for the implementation of technology and digitisation processes.

## Access and use of the Internet

First of all, WISEs were asked to rate the quality of the broadband connection in the area where they operate. According to data collected, almost all WISEs think that the quality of the connection is good, very good or excellent. Only in Poland, half of the WISEs that participated in the survey state that the broadband connection in their region is poor. Overall, the enablers interviewed consider that the quality of IT maintenance services available in the geographic area in which their WISE operates is good to excellent. Only Polish enablers indicate that the quality of IT maintenance services is poor.

In addition, the survey looked into the quality of hardware. Nearly all WISEs express that they have access to updated hardware and that the quality of this hardware is good to excellent. Nevertheless, not all employees have or need access to the Internet for business purposes. The variation between and within countries is high. 41.6% of WISEs affirm that 70-100% of their employees have access to the Internet for business purposes and 5.6% of WISEs state that between 50-70% of their employees have access to the Internet for business purposes. 14.6% of WISEs declare that between 30-50% of their employees have access to the Internet for business purposes and 23.6% of WISEs say that between 10-30% of their employees have access to the Internet for business purposes. In 13.4% of WISEs, less than 10% of the employees have access to the Internet for business purposes.

According to the face-to-face survey, 84.3% of WISEs have a fixed line connection to the Internet and in 76.4% of those WISEs the speed of the connection meets the actual needs of the WISE. The online survey indicates that 93.1% of WISEs have a fixed line connection to the Internet.

85.4% of the WISEs interviewed have a wireless connection to the Internet and in 83.1% of those WISEs the speed of the connection meets the actual needs of the WISE. Once more, this number is higher according to the online survey, 92.6% of enablers affirm that their WISE has a wireless connection to the Internet.

It can be concluded that in most WISEs there is a connection to the Internet (fixed line or wireless) that meets the needs of the WISEs. Furthermore, the majority of the WISEs provide mobile devices (e.g., tablets and smartphones) to their employees. This means that a large part of the WISEs interviewed meet the conditions for the further implementation of technologies and digitisation processes. The sections below elaborate on the current use of those technologies by WISEs across the 13 EU MSs covered by the surveys.

## Communication

**Website**: Taking into account the use of communication technologies, almost all WISEs interviewed have their own website. Only in Croatia and Greece approximately a third of the WISEs do not have a website (respectively 33.3% and 28.6%). In Italy, Latvia, Poland and Spain 16.7% of WISEs do not have a website. WISEs have a website mainly to pursue promotional objectives (in 77.5% of the cases) and informational objectives (in 65.2% of the cases). 64% of the WISEs are satisfied with their website and merely 7.8% of the WISEs are very dissatisfied with their website. Only 16.9% of the WISEs state that their website meets Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) standards. Conversely, a large part (46.1%) of the WISEs do not know what WCAG standards are and if their WISEs website meets them.

**Social media**: Looking into the results of the surveys, it can be deduced that most WISEs (88.8%) use social networks like Facebook and LinkedIn for other purposes than paid advertising. Other social media, like a company blog or knowledge bases like SharePoint and Wiki are less common: less than 20% of WISEs use them. Almost half of the WISEs (47.2%) use multi-media content sharing websites like Instagram or YouTube.

## E-commerce

Considering e-commerce, it can be noted that most WISEs do not sell goods or services online (only the year 2020 has been taken into account). If WISEs do sell goods/services online, they do this mostly via their website or via an application. In general, e-commerce forms a relatively small part of the total turnover of the WISE. Only 6.6% of the WISEs indicate that e-commerce generates more than 20% of their total turnover.

Looking into the future, 12.4% of WISEs intend to start selling goods or services online in the next 12 months. Not only large ones, but also small and medium-sized WISEs plan to implement e-commerce activities in the near future. The online survey shows an even greater prevalence of small WISEs planning to sell goods and services online in the next 12 months.

## E-invoicing

Another aspect taken into account in the survey was the digitisation of the invoicing process. 62.9% of WISEs already use e-invoices, i.e., invoices in an electronic format and in a standard structure suitable for automated processing. Nevertheless, not all invoices issued by WISEs are already suitable for automated processing.

### *Table 7.10. Number of e-invoices sent, suitable for automated processing (% values)*

| Answer | % |
|---|---|
| Less than 10% | 6.7 |
| At least 10% but less than 25% | 0.0 |
| At least 25% but less than 50% | 4.5 |
| At least 50% but less than 75% | 2.2 |
| At least 75% | 36.0 |
| Do not know | 14.6 |
| N.A. | 36.0 |
| **Total** | **100.0** |

*Source: B-WISE F2F Survey 2021*

60.7% of WISEs still use invoices in PDF and JPEG formats, and send them via e-mail, while 38.2% of WISEs still send paper invoices. Small WISEs are lagging behind: only 53.8% of small WISEs use e-invoices suitable for automated processing.

## Cloud computing services

Another important aspect of digitisation is the use of cloud computing services (e.g., business or productivity software, e-mail, storage of files). Enablers were asked if their WISE buys any cloud computing services over the Internet. In 56.2% of WISEs, this is the case. However, there are major differences between countries. In countries like Belgium, Croatia, France, Latvia, the Netherlands and Spain more than 60% of the WISEs make use of them. Mainly large and medium-sized WISEs buy these services, respectively 68.8% and 71.4%. Conversely, only 46.2% of small WISEs buy cloud computing services.

WISEs buy a large variety of cloud computing services. Only Customer Relationship Management (CRM) applications and computing power to run software are less implemented at present.

### *Table 7.11. Cloud computing services bought by WISEs (% values)*

| Cloud service | % |
|---|---|
| E-mail | 46.1 |
| Office software (e.g., word processors, spreadsheets) | 44.9 |
| Hosting the WISE's database(s) | 40.4 |
| Storage of files | 50.6 |
| Finance or accounting software applications | 40.4 |
| CRM software application for managing information about customers | 23.6 |
| Computing power to run software used by the WISE | 16.9 |

*Source: B-WISE F2F Survey 2021*

## Artificial Intelligence

Next, the survey questioned the implementation of Artificial Intelligence (AI). It can be noted that almost none of the WISEs interviewed have already implemented AI applications. If WISEs apply AI, it concerns technologies analysing written language (5.6% of WISEs) and technologies converting spoken language into a machine-readable format (5.6% of WISEs). Most of these WISEs are large enterprises. Furthermore, the willingness to use AI (in the future) is relatively low. Over 80% of WISEs do not consider using it today or in the future.

**Big data**: Another important element investigated is big data. Nevertheless, only 12.4% of WISEs performed a big data analysis (themselves or by engaging another organisation). Once more, the results show that mostly large WISEs use big data analyses. WISEs using big data perform analyses on different kinds of data sources: data from smart devices or sensors, geolocation data, data generated from social media, etc.

**Internet of Things (IoT)**: it is the use of interconnected devices/systems that can be monitored or controlled remotely via the Internet. Today, almost 20% of the WISEs interviewed use these kinds of devices. 43.8% of large WISEs apply the principle of the IoT in their organisation. For small and medium-sized WISEs, this is less than 15%. WISEs use technologies such as smart measuring devices, smart lamps, smart thermostats, movement or maintenance sensors, Radio-frequency identification (RFID)[81] or Internet Protocol (IP)[82] tags, Internet-controlled cameras, etc. The applications are very diverse.

81 Radio-frequency identification (RFID) uses electromagnetic fields to automatically identify and track tags attached to objects. An RFID system consists of a tiny radio transponder, a radio receiver and transmitter. (see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radio-frequency_identification).

82 The Internet Protocol (IP) is the network layer communications protocol in the Internet protocol suite for relaying datagrams across network boundaries. Its routing function enables internetworking, and essentially establishes the Internet. (see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_Protocol).

## Rapid prototyping

In the last decade, different technologies emerged that can be used for rapid prototyping, e.g., 3D-printing and laser cutting. These technologies help WISEs to create tools to adapt the individual workplace of WSNs or to create objects that can be applied in a production line.

In 2020, 5.6% of the WISEs interviewed used their own 3D-printer and 4.5% of WISEs counted on 3D-printing services offered by external providers. Mainly large WISEs (12.5%) have a 3D-printer or used this technology in 2020. The same trend can be observed when taking into account the use of a laser cutter; 4.5% of WISEs used their own laser cutter and 3.4% of WISEs counted on laser cutting services offered by external providers. Mostly large WISEs draw upon laser cutting machines (their own or from an external provider) (6.3% of large WISEs vs. 3.8% of small ones).

From these data, it can be deduced that rapid prototyping technologies such as 3D-printing and laser cutting did not find their entrance in WISEs yet. However, there are some good practices that show the potential of these technologies, for example the Belgian case, "technology gives a helping hand". In this Flemish project, different pilots have been set up in different WISEs. The WISE Mariasteen focused on rapid prototyping. Through 3D-printing and laser cutting engineers designed and realised tools and objects to adapt individual workplaces or to make production possible. The goal of the engineers of Mariasteen was to go from design to realisation in four hours. This way, the WISE can adapt workplaces really fast to respond to the production demands and the quality needs of their clients[83].

## Assistive technology

Assistive technology is another key strategy to adapt the individual workplace of WSNs and bridge the gap between their skills and the tasks they need to perform. Assistive technologies help people that have difficulties, e.g. in writing, speaking, typing, remembering and learning. Different disabilities demand different kinds of technologies, from hardware (e.g., prosthesis, eye gaze) to software (e.g., personalised interfaces and screen readers) and other low-tech or high-tech solutions. In the surveys targeting enablers, three different categories of assistive technology were taken into account:

- Assistive technology for physical support
- Assistive technology for social support
- Assistive technology for cognitive support

Taking into consideration assistive technology in the domain of physical support, the results of the face-to-face survey show that 91% of the WISEs do not use them yet.

83 For more information and examples, see Mariasteen (2022).

Only 2.2% of WISEs use exoskeletons[84], 4.5% of WISEs use industrial robots[85] and cobots[86], and 4.5% of WISEs use service robots for activities such as surveillance and cleaning. Almost all WISEs indicating that they use assistive technology for physical support are large WISEs.

Looking into the use of assistive technology in the domain of cognitive support, 94.4% of enablers state that their WISE does not use assistive technology for cognitive support. Merely 1.1% of WISEs use Augmented or Virtual Reality applications via portable devices, only 3.4% of WISEs implemented industrial augmented reality via projection technology in their WISE and there are even less WISEs (1.1%) making use of personalised interfaces. The larger the WISE, the more assistive technology for cognitive support implemented.

The last category investigated is assistive technology in the domain of social support. 96.6% of interviewed WISEs do not use assistive technology for social support. None use Augmented or Virtual Reality via smartphones, tablets or smart glasses with the purpose of offering social support. Only 2.2% of WISEs apply smart e-coaching or e-health apps in their workplace. Finally, none of the WISEs involved in the research use social robots[87]. It would be reasonable to think that, as happens for other technologies, large WISEs adopt more assistive technologies for social support compared with small WISEs. However, due to the small number of WISEs in the sample declaring to use assistive technologies, no significant trends in their use can be detected.

Today, assistive technology is a rare phenomenon in WISEs. However, it is an important strategy to tackle the challenges of the labour market of tomorrow. Different studies show the efficacy and relevance of assistive technology (e.g., Huang 2018; Bosch and van Rhijn, 2017). Therefore, it is important to collect and spread good practices in order to make assistive technologies more mainstream.

## Automatic exchange of information

There are different software packages that support the automatic exchange of information between different departments of a WISE and between WISEs and their (potential) customers. E.g., an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software package helps sharing information between different departments; a Customer Relationship

84 An exoskeleton is a wearable device that works in tandem with the user. Exoskeletons are placed on the user's body and act as amplifiers that augment, reinforce or restore human performance (see: https://exoskeletonreport.com/what-is-an-exoskeleton).

85 An industrial robot is a robot system used for manufacturing. Industrial robots are automated, programmable and capable of movement on three or more axes (see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_robot).

86 A cobot, or collaborative robot, is a robot intended for direct human robot interaction with a shared space, or where humans and robots are in close proximity (see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cobot).

87 A social robot is an autonomous robot that interacts and communicates with humans or other autonomous physical agents by following social behaviours and rules attached to its role (see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_robot).

Management (CRM) software package helps maintaining the relation with (potential) customers. In general, it can be stated that CRM will be mainly used by younger and small to medium-sized enterprises, whereas fast-growing, mature and large enterprises will prefer ERP. In many cases, the CRM module will then be part of the ERP.

**ERP**: 33.7% of the WISEs interviewed have already implemented an ERP software package. Nevertheless, there are large differences between countries. None of the WISEs in Greece, Italy and Latvia use an ERP software package. Conversely, more than half of the WISEs in Austria, Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Spain use this software. Furthermore, the size of the enterprise plays an important role: 81,3% of large WISEs use an ERP software package, while the large majority of small WISEs (80.8%) does not. This makes sense considering the fact that small enterprises mainly use CRM software.

**CRM**: Less WISEs implement a standalone CRM software package compared to an ERP software package (25.8%). Especially Austrian, French and Romanian WISEs use CRM software (66.7% or more). None of the Belgian, Greek, Italian, Polish or Slovenian WISEs implemented a CRM software package. Moreover, there are less outspoken differences between small, medium-sized or large WISEs. 19.2% of small WISEs, 33.3% of medium-sized WISEs and 37.5% of large WISEs use CRM software. If WISEs do implement CRM software, they use it mainly to collect, keep and make information on customers accessible to different departments within the WISE. The analysis of information about WISEs' customers for marketing purposes is less common today.

#### Teleworking

Especially since the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis, teleworking has gained a lot of importance all over the world. This is also the case for the WISEs interviewed, where 74.2% of enablers use tools that facilitate teleworking or online collaboration. Enablers were also enquired about the use of the same tools by supporters and WSNs within the WISEs. According to them, 66.3% of supporters and (only) 25,8% of WSNs use teleworking tools. In 18% of WISEs, none of the target groups use tools for teleworking. Especially small WISEs do not use tools for teleworking.

### 7.2.3 The main hindering factors for technologization and digitisation in WISEs

There are different factors hindering WISEs from implementing technologies or digitisation processes. Enablers were asked in both surveys to indicate what influenced most their WISEs' decision not to implement a certain technology or digitisation process. Results from both the online and face-to-face surveys confirm that WISEs do not implement a certain technology or digitisation process because it

is not relevant or it is not a priority. Lack of budget, lack of skills or capacities of the organisation play a minor role. This is the case for e-commerce, e-invoices, cloud computing services, CRM and ERP software packages, the IoT, 3D-printing and laser cutting technologies.

Taking into consideration AI and big data analysis, it can be noted that, next to the fact that it is no priority for most WISEs, 19.7% of the enablers recognize that their WISE does not have sufficient skills or knowledge to use AI or perform big data analyses.

Relevance and priorities are also the most important factors in the implementation of assistive technology (for physical, cognitive or psychosocial support). 46.8% of enablers state that assistive technology is not relevant for their WISE and 26.9% of enablers indicate that it is not a priority. Nevertheless, 9.3% of enablers point out that their WISE needs more or new skills for the successful implementation of assistive technology. In addition, a lack of budget hinders 17.6% of enablers in the implementation of assistive technology.

Next to a lack of relevance and urgency, enablers declare that their WISE does not use teleworking tools because WSNs cannot use them. 12.4% of enablers confirmed this statement in the face-to-face survey, 51.4% in the online survey.

## 7.3 Digital skills for workers in WISEs

In line with the scope of the B-WISE project, both surveys not only paid attention to technical, soft and 21st century skills (these skills have been elaborately discussed in the previous chapter), but also paid particular attention to digital skills. The digital skills assessment was conducted in two ways: (i) a general digital skills assessment for each of the three target groups (enablers, supporters, WSNs) and (ii) an individual digital skills self-assessment, carried out by supporters and WSNs.

The general digital skills assessment was conceptualised and measured according to the Digital Competence Framework for citizens, DigComp 2.1. For the individual digital skills self-assessment (in the supporters' and WSNs' questionnaires), the Digital Skills Indicator (European Commission, 2021) is referred to. More detailed information on the digital skills assessment is provided in Annex A (Methodological Note)[88].

88 For more detailed information on the Digital Competence Framework, see the dedicated page in the EC website (https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/digcomp/digital-competence-framework_en) and Carretero Gomez, Vuorikari and Punie (2018). In March 2022 (after the administration period of the two surveys), an updated version of the framework (DigComp 2.2) was released (see: https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC128415). As regards the Digital Skill Indicator, for more information see: https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/new-comprehensive-digital-skills-indicator.

### 7.3.1 Enablers: relevance of digital skills, needs and gaps

In the face-to-face survey targeting enablers, the relevance and the level of endowment of digital skills of the enablers in their WISE (their own digital skills and those of colleagues with a similar role) was questioned. Five competence areas were investigated in this survey: (i) management of digital content and data literacy; (ii) communication and collaboration through digital technologies; (iii) creation and editing of digital content; (iv) addressing safety issues in digital environments; and (v) solving digital problems.

*Table 7.12. Relevance of digital skills for enablers (% values)*

| Skill | Management of digital content & data literacy | Commu-nication & collabora-tion through digital technologies | Creation & editing of digital content | Addressing safety issues in digital environments | Solving digital problems |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Not relevant | 2.2 | 2.2 | 5.6 | 7.9 | 9.0 |
| Low | 4.5 | 7.9 | 12.4 | 16.9 | 12.4 |
| Medium | 46.1 | 33.7 | 48.3 | 39.3 | 50.6 |
| High | 46.1 | 55.1 | 33.7 | 36.0 | 28.1 |
| N.A. | 1.1 | 1.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| **Total** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** |

*Source: B-WISE F2F Survey 2021*

*Table 7.13. Level of endowment of digital skills of enablers (% values)*

| Skill | Management of digital content & data literacy | Commu-nication & collabora-tion through digital technologies | Creation & editing of digital content | Addressing safety issues in digital environments | Solving digital problems |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| None | 0.0 | 0.0 | 3.4 | 5.6 | 3.4 |
| Low | 10.1 | 9.0 | 9.0 | 10.1 | 16.9 |
| Basic | 43.8 | 44.9 | 62.9 | 55.1 | 49.4 |
| Above basic | 42.7 | 40.4 | 20.2 | 21.3 | 22.5 |
| Not applicable | 2.2 | 4.5 | 3.4 | 6.7 | 6.7 |
| N.A. | 1.1 | 1.1 | 1.1 | 1.1 | 1.1 |
| **Total** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** |

*Source: B-WISE F2F Survey 2021*

The tables above show that all competence areas are relevant for enablers. This goes together with the level of endowment. Only 2.5% of enablers have no digital skills at all, 11% of enablers have a low level of digital skills, 51.2% of enablers reach a basic level of endowment and 29.4% of enablers have an above basic level of skills. The online survey shows the same results, only the relevance and the level of endowment of addressing safety issues in digital environments and of solving digital problems lie a bit lower.

### 7.3.2 Supporters: relevance of digital skills, needs and gaps

#### Self-assessment

The survey addressed to supporters included a self-assessment, collecting information on the use of digital skills at work and at home. Supporters were asked if they performed a certain action (at work or at home) during the last three months. The self-assessment covered six categories: information skills, communication skills, problem-solving skills (A and B), and software skills for content manipulation (A and B).

According to the collected data, 81.9% of supporters used information skills at work and 84.3% at home. Information skills include: copy or move files or folders; save files on Internet storage space; obtain information from public authorities/services' website; find information about goods or services; seek health-related information.

73.3% of supporters used communication skills at work and 78.8% used them at home. Communication skills include: send/receive e-mails; participate in social networks; have telephone/video calls over the internet; upload self-created content to any website to be shared.

The results of the survey show that 63.2% of supporters used basic problem solving skills (e.g., transfer files between computers/devices; install software/applications; change settings of any software, including operational systems/security programs) at work and 70.3% of supporters used them at home.

40.4% of supporters used more advanced problem solving skills at work, 67.5% used these skills at home. Advanced problem solving skills include online purchases, selling online, the use of online learning resources and the use of internet banking.

77% of supporters used word processing software, spreadsheet software or software to edit photos, videos or audio files at work. 73% of supporters used these basic software skills for content manipulation at home.

At work, 46.2% of supporters used more advanced software skills for content manipulation, 28% of supporters used these skills at home. These include the creation of a presentation or document integrating texts, pictures, tables or charts; the use

of advanced functions in spreadsheets to organise and analyse data (i.e. sorting, filtering, using formulas, creating charts); and writing a code in a programming language. Supporters use and need digital skills both at work and at home. Over 75% of them need information skills, communication skills and software skills for content manipulation (A) at work. 63.2% of supporters indicate that they use problem solving skills (A) at work. Less than half of the supporters use problem solving skills (B) or software skills for content manipulation (B) at work.

Considering the use of technology and applications at home, the results are very similar. Over 75% of supporters use information and communication skills at home. Over 70% of supporters use software skills for content manipulation (A) and problem-solving skills (A) at home. 67.5% of supporters use problem solving skills (B) at home and only 28% use software skills for content manipulation (B) at home.

Looking closer into the results it can be noted that, although the use and importance of digital skills at work is high, supporters use more digital skills at home. Only software skills for content manipulation are more frequently applied at work.

## Enablers' opinion

To get a clear impression of the digital skills of supporters, the survey for enablers included a judgement on the relevance and the level of endowment of the digital skills of the supporters in their WISE. The survey shows following results:

***Table 7.14. Relevance of digital skills for supporters (% values)***

| Skill | Management of digital content & data literacy | Commu-nication & collabora-tion through digital technologies | Creation & editing of digital content | Addressing safety issues in digital environments | Solving digital problems |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Not relevant | 11.2 | 9.0 | 15.7 | 24.7 | 22.5 |
| Low | 12.4 | 11.2 | 21.3 | 24.7 | 23.6 |
| Medium | 75.3 | 77.5 | 61.8 | 47.2 | 51.7 |
| High | 0.0 | 1.1 | 0.0 | 2.2 | 1.1 |
| N.A. | 1.1 | 1.1 | 1.1 | 1.1 | 1.1 |
| **Total** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** |

*Source: B-WISE F2F Survey 2021*

According to at least 75% of enablers, the management of digital content and data literacy and the communication and collaboration through digital technologies are relevant (medium or high) for supporters. Conversely, the creation and editing of digital content, and especially addressing safety issues in digital environments and solving digital problems, are less relevant skills.

### *Table 7.15. Level of endowment of digital skills of supporters (% values)*

| Skill | Management of digital content & data literacy | Commu-nication & collabora-tion through digital technologies | Creation & editing of digital content | Addressing safety issues in digital environments | Solving digital problems |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| None | 3.4 | 4.5 | 13.5 | 15.7 | 11.2 |
| Low | 23.6 | 20.2 | 21.3 | 25.8 | 32.6 |
| Basic | 39.3 | 36.0 | 36.0 | 23.6 | 16.9 |
| Above basic | 24.7 | 30.3 | 18.0 | 15.7 | 21.3 |
| Not applicable | 6.7 | 6.7 | 9.0 | 16.9 | 14.6 |
| N.A. | 2.2 | 2.2 | 2.2 | 2.2 | 2.2 |
| **Total** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** |

*Source: B-WISE F2F Survey 2021*

Examining the level of endowment of the digital skills, according to enablers 9.7% of supporters have no digital skills, 24.7% have a low level of digital skills, 30.4% reach a basic level of digital skills endowment and 22% have an above basic level of digital skills. Taking into account the competence areas considered as most relevant for supporters (i.e., management of digital content and data literacy; communication and collaboration through digital technologies), it can be noted that over 60% of supporters have a level of endowment that is basic or above basic. Overall, there are no discrepancies between the relevance of these skills and their level of endowment.

## Digital skills qualifications

Supporters were asked if they obtained specific certifications or qualifications attesting their digital skills proficiency level. Data analyses show that most supporters do not have such qualifications or certifications. Only in France (41.7%) and in Greece (66.7%) a larger part of the supporters interviewed have a specific qualification/ certification.

### 7.3.3 Workers with support needs: relevance of digital skills, needs and gaps

#### Self-assessment

The survey addressed to WSNs included the same self-assessment as the self-assessment inserted in the survey targeting supporters, covering the same six categories of digital skills. WSNs were asked if they performed a certain action (at work or at home) during the last three months.

According to the collected data, 26.4% of WSNs used information skills at work and 65.6% used those skills at home. 27.8% of WSNs used communication skills at work and 65.9% at home. The results of the survey show that 19.9% of WSNs used basic problem solving skills at work and 43.8% used them at home. 9.6% of WSNs used more advanced problem solving skills at work and 41.3% at home. 26.6% of WSNs used word processing software, spreadsheet software or software to edit photos, videos or audio files at work and 39.8% of WSNs used these basic software skills for content manipulation at home. At work, 11.8% of WSNs used more advanced software skills for content manipulation, 10% of WSNs used these skills at home.

Overall, WSNs use fewer digital skills at work than at home. At work, information skills, communication skills and software skills for content manipulation (A) are the most applied skills. At home, all skills have been used during the last three months, especially information and communication skills. Software skills for content manipulation (B) are less applied at home.

#### Supporters' opinion

To get a clearer view on WSNs' digital skills, their supporters judged the relevance and the level of endowment of the digital skills of the WSNs they assist. The survey shows following results:

### *Table 7.16. The relevance of digital skills for workers with support needs (% values)*

| Skill | Management of digital content & data literacy | Commu-nication & collabora-tion through digital technologies | Creation & editing of digital content | Addressing safety issues in digital environments | Solving digital problems |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Not relevant | 35.9 | 26.9 | 56.6 | 51.0 | 55.9 |
| Low | 26.2 | 22.8 | 20.7 | 25.5 | 22.8 |
| Medium | 24.1 | 31.7 | 15.9 | 13.8 | 11.0 |
| High | 13.8 | 18.6 | 6.2 | 9.0 | 10.3 |
| N.A. | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.7 | 0.7 | 0.0 |
| **Total** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** |

*Source: B-WISE F2F Survey 2021*

According to supporters, management of digital content and data literacy and communication and collaboration through digital technologies are the most important skills for WSNs. More than half of the supporters regard the other three competence areas as not relevant for WSNs. Overall, according to supporters, digital skills are not very relevant for WSNs at work.

### *Table 7.17. The level of endowment of digital skills of workers with support needs (% values)*

| Skill | Management of digital content & data literacy | Commu-nication & collabora-tion through digital technologies | Creation & editing of digital content | Addressing safety issues in digital environments | Solving digital problems |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| None | 8.3 | 4.1 | 15.9 | 18.6 | 22.1 |
| Low | 32.4 | 26.2 | 24.8 | 33.8 | 22.8 |
| Basic | 29.0 | 41.4 | 20.0 | 12.4 | 20.0 |
| Above basic | 10.3 | 11.0 | 6.9 | 5.5 | 4.8 |
| Not applicable | 19.3 | 16.6 | 31.7 | 29.0 | 29.7 |
| N.A. | 0.7 | 0.7 | 0.7 | 0.7 | 0.7 |
| **Total** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** |

*Source: B-WISE F2F Survey 2021*

Looking into the level of endowment of digital skills of WSNs, data shows that 13.8% of WSNs have no digital skills, 28% reach a low level of digital skills endowment, 24.6% of WSNs have a basic level of digital skills and 7.7% have an above basic level of digital skills. 61.4% of supporters indicate that WSNs have a low or basic level of endowment of management of digital content and data literacy; 10.3% think that the level of endowment is above basic. 67.6% of supporters indicate that WSNs have a low or a basic level of endowment of communication and collaboration through digital technologies; 11% indicate that the level of endowment is above basic. A majority of supporters consider that level of endowment of WSNs in the other three skills is rather low or not applicable.

According to supporters, there are no significant digital skills gaps among WSNs: relevance and level of endowment go hand in hand.

### Digital skills qualifications

WSNs, as supporters, were asked if they have specific certifications or qualifications attesting their digital skills proficiency level. Most WSNs do not have such a certification/qualification. Only in France and in the Netherlands, over 40% of WSNs interviewed have a certification or qualification. This shows that WSNs acquire digital skills mostly through self-study, probably at home, where digital skills are more relevant and used more frequently than at work.

## 7.3.4 Digital skills training

WISEs' training initiatives have been discussed in depth in Chapter 6, above. This section specifically focuses on the training initiatives related to digital skills. The face-to-face and online surveys addressing enablers investigated both internal and external training initiatives promoted by WISEs for their employees.

### *Table 7.18. Training initiatives on digital skills offered by WISEs (% values)*

| Country | Yes | No | N.A. | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Austria | 100.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Belgium | 40.0 | 60.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Bulgaria | 20.0 | 60.0 | 20.0 | 100.0 |
| Croatia | 0.0 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| France | 83.3 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Greece | 14.3 | 85.7 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Italy | 0.0 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Latvia | 33.3 | 66.7 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Netherlands | 50.0 | 50.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Poland | 33.3 | 66.7 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Romania | 16.7 | 83.3 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Slovenia | 11.1 | 88.9 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Spain | 66.7 | 33.3 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| **Total** | **36.0** | **62.9** | **1.1** | **100.0** |

*Source: B-WISE F2F Survey 2021*

Most WISEs interviewed do not provide training on digital skills themselves. Nevertheless, there are some exceptions: all WISEs in Austria that have been interviewed provide training on digital skills, 83.3% in France, 66.7% in Spain and half of the Dutch WISEs provide training on digital skills. In the remaining countries, only 40% or less of the WISEs do it. The larger the WISEs, the more likely they will provide training on digital skills. The online survey confirms these results.

Among the three target groups, the main beneficiaries of training initiatives on digital skills are enablers, while WSNs' participation in training activities aimed at improving their proficiency on digital skills is lower. This makes sense, since digital skills are considered more relevant for enablers to carry out their tasks. The fact that the level of endowment of digital skills is high for enablers shows that the current training initiatives meet their needs.

Overall, a limited share of the WISEs interviewed (16.9%) have established partnerships with other local/regional organizations to promote external training initiatives for WSNs. Exception to this are French and Belgian WISEs (respectively 50% and 40%). Especially medium-sized WISEs rely on external partners to provide training initiatives, probably because large WISEs provide more training initiatives themselves. However, the online survey provides different results: according to the data, the share of WISEs that established partnerships to provide training on digital skills is higher, and it also includes large WISEs.

# 8. DEVELOPMENT TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

This chapter briefly illustrates some of the key development trends and challenges faced by WISEs.

The analysis carried out confirms that mainstream labour policies are unable to ensure a balanced allocation of the available labour force. As highlighted in particular by some country analyses, WISEs are not a completely new trend. While in some countries they have emerged spontaneously bottom-up, in some other countries WISEs have evolved from traditional sheltered workshops as an innovative solution of supported employment favouring workers that are discriminated against by conventional enterprises.

In all the countries where they operate, WISEs have however demonstrated their ability to tackle key problems of labour exclusion affecting contemporary economies that traditional labour market policies – regulatory, compensation and substitutive policies – had proved unable to tackle. Among the disadvantages resulting into barriers to employment that WISEs manage to cope with there are the lack of formal education, low skills and cognitive abilities, disabilities and mental illnesses, substance use disorders and unstable housing arrangements. The competitive advantage of WISEs over traditional labour policies can be ascribed to the full integration of workers that is promoted through the running of autonomous economic activities, which

Grant Agreement: 621509-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-EPPKA2-SSA-B
This publication has been co-funded by the European Commission. The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Agency and Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.
Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

provide for both marketable services and commodities and work integration support services aiming to empower specifically WSNs.

In spite of the success of WISEs in implementing active labour market policies, their potential is still far from being fully harnessed, as confirmed by the number of WSNs integrated, which is by large inadequate when compared to the growing demand for work inclusion. This also in light of the consideration that further current global challenges, including for instance migrations due to war and climate change, are likely to increase the conditions for social exclusion and hence dramatically increase the number of WSNs.

When it comes to the acknowledgment of WISEs, some improvements are worth noting. Both their recognition and visibility have increased significantly over the past decades. Many new laws have been adopted in a growing number of EU MSs. The most diffused legal trend is that of acknowledging WISEs via legal statuses, tailored for facilitating work integration or addressed more broadly to enterprises engaged in a broad spectrum of fields of general interest. Noteworthy is also the trend of recognising WISEs via cooperative legislation adjustment, which is diffused in countries distinguished by a longstanding cooperative tradition.

The scarce development of ex lege WISEs in some countries can be traced back to two main factors. First, the insufficient degree of engagement of WISEs in law-making processes. The poor engagement of practitioners on the ground has often led to the design of legislations that are not fully aligned with the rich practice of WISEs at the local level. Second, ineffective laws often reflect a scarce understanding of the context wherein WISEs operate. The incapacity to identify all types of organizations that may be considered WISEs, explains the ineffectiveness of several legal frameworks.

All in all, there is a trend towards the broadening of the recipients of WISEs so as to include new typologies of vulnerable workers in need for tailored support. This is especially the case of more recent statuses when compared to older ones, which continue to integrate exclusively PWDs. More than a few WISEs are also increasingly prone to integrate vulnerable workers that are not formally recognized as in need of support, including for instance NEETs and asylum seekers.

Based on the transversal reading of the Country Fiches, WISEs have developed peculiar models of sustainability that draw on a variable resource mix, which allows for the counterbalancing of their higher costs. These include public and private resources resulting from the sale of goods and services (e.g., to public agencies through public contracts; to individuals, and increasingly to conventional enterprises), as well as monetary and non-monetary resources, which are normally not accessible to for-profit enterprises (e.g., voluntary work and donations). Nevertheless, the latter are often unstable or insufficient. Hence, it emerges the importance of tailored policies in the form of public grants and subsidies and fiscal breaks to cover at least part of the costs linked to the work integration of WSNs (European Commission, 2020a).

As concerns repayable resources, the demand is in general not very high and access to repayable finance is rather patchy and mainly limited to WISEs operating in capital intensive sectors such as waste management, urban renewal, and cultural heritage management. Finally, as concerns access to market, WISEs face several challenges. The move away from grants and contracts signed directly with public authorities towards competitive tenders, which has taken place over the past decade, is described as controversial. Indeed, while increasing access to public markets to new providers and contributing to stabilising the relationships between WISEs and public agencies, the way public procurement regulations have been interpreted by national laws have sometimes discouraged the use of public procurement. As regards WISEs' access to private markets, a growing share of WISEs is starting to collaborate with conventional enterprises. Partnerships between WISEs and conventional enterprises may result from a variety of institutional arrangements and show different degrees of formalisation. Some particular legal and/or policies schemes, such as quota systems, have a key role in paving the way for such agreements.

The comparative analysis of the Country Fiches confirms however that to fully exploit the added value of WISEs, a more enabling environment is needed. There is in particular a need for more enabling public schemes and policies, including public support measures designed by EU MSs to target WISEs (e.g., subsidies and grants to cover investments in fixed assets, support for workplace adaptation, support for training, etc.) and measures targeting recipients (e.g., subsidies covering part of the wages of WSNs). Although from a comparative perspective public support measures vary to a significant extent across countries, in most EU MSs the public support system is overall inconsistent and fragmented. The same can be said for the fiscal framework, which is far from being satisfactory. The lack of a proper public support system and fiscal framework that acknowledges the social responsibility taken on by WISEs adequately is seen as one of the key factors limiting the future development of WISEs and precisely their capacity to invest in developing the skills and capabilities of those bearing the most severe support needs.

New market access opportunities for WISEs are nevertheless emerging from the 2014 EU Directives on public procurement, which include provisions aimed at encouraging contracting authorities to shift from a price-only approach towards the most economically advantageous offer (European Commission – EASME, 2020). Although the concrete exploitation of such opportunities is uneven across EU MSs, a more strategic use of public procurement is overall needed in all the countries studied, which calls for adequate tools to both enable local authorities to better integrate WISEs in their procurement and help WISEs seize the existing opportunities.

At the same time, while access to repayable finance is rather patchy and its demand is not very high, the latter may increase significantly for those WISEs investing in capital-intensive sectors such as for instance waste management.

Innovative strategies are being moreover experimented by some WISEs with a view to improve their integration capacity. Among the most innovative there are collaborations between WISEs and conventional enterprises that are becoming a widespread strategy in some countries also as part of particular legal and/or policy schemes, such as quota systems. New opportunities for collaboration between WISEs and conventional enterprises are likely to emerge also in the frame of the just green transition thanks to the capacity of WISEs to facilitate the inclusion of both marginalised people and citizens in green projects.

It is also worth mentioning the tendency to build networks that group together WISEs. Where present and well developed, relationships between WISEs represent important sources of economic sustainability. Thanks to these networks, WISEs can establish commercial relationships with new clients, propose themselves strongly and more visibly on the market and develop in new sectors of activity, thus increasing their competitiveness in the market. In Italy, the first social cooperatives that emerged in the 1980s organised themselves in second-level cooperatives or consortia, which soon became the main form of collaboration among cooperatives (Pavolini, 2003). Consortia have notably played a key role in furthering the widespread development of social cooperatives thanks to the ability to generate economies of scale and strengthen the entrepreneurial profile of the same social cooperatives (Borzaga and Ianes, 2011). Over the recent decade, also more flexible forms of networking have gained momentum in Italy thanks to the introduction of a new legal instrument i.e., the network agreement (*contratto di rete*)[89], which is particularly suited to increase the number of WSNs integrated thanks to workforce sharing. Other recent examples of innovative forms of networking are the Territorial Poles of Economic Cooperation (*Pôles territoriaux de coopération économique, PTCEs*) in France. PTCEs group together the main actors of the territory (WISEs, local authorities, conventional enterprises, universities, and other social and solidarity economy organisations), with a view to promoting local territorial development. In these networks, the work inclusion of WSNs is – among others – an objective pursued by member organisations.

Alongside their legal institutionalisation, over the years WISEs have strengthened their know-how and their competitive advantages, which stem from their expertise accumulated by working with specific types of WSNs. While acquiring specialized knowledge on the impact of the diverse support needs upon different types of work activities, WISEs have experimented with appropriate organizational processes designed to facilitate work integration. They are thus capable of identifying the most suitable job according to the type of support a worker needs.

Having said so, when it comes to skills development, WISEs face specific challenges when compared to conventional enterprises. While the level of skills endowment of all three respondent groups seems to be rather good, they seem to be well aware

89 Legislative Decree 5/2009, converted into Law 33/2009.

of the broad set of skills that are needed to work in WISEs, particularly by enablers and supporters. With some exceptions, the analysis of data does not highlight any significant difference across countries, but it confirms that there is substantial room for improvement. Three points are in this regard noteworthy. First, the various groups of respondents consider specific skills as particularly relevant; enablers rate managerial skills as important (such as the importance accorded to the skill of negotiating with private customers), whereas supporters shed light on the relevance of assisting WSNs for their job (shared with enablers); collaborative, communicative and operational skills are conversely regarded as crucial when looking at WSNs. Second, from a comparative viewpoint, all three respondent groups consider specialized technical knowledge related to media and technology as not relevant; this can be traced back to the still key role played by soft skills and other technical knowledge necessary to assist workers in carrying out their job tasks in WISEs. Third, when looking at enablers' skills, what makes the difference is the age of the organization. Start-up WISEs need to build new skills to recruit the most suitable staff and develop effective working teams, while in more structured WISEs the development of organizational and decision-making strategies come to the front.

All in all, there are skills gaps that ought to be significantly improved and failure to fill these gaps is regarded as particularly risky. In fact, it could jeopardize WISEs' capacity to assist current and/or new WSNs. Respondents' awareness of the risks caused by skills gaps confirm the full alignment of WISEs' personnel with the organizational social mission, including the need to preserve financial viability (without which the social mission is hampered) (Battilana et al., 2015). Against the background of addressing skills gaps, respondents consider training activities particularly important. Based on the respondents' answers, training is mostly financed by WISEs' own resources: the great majority of WISEs provides for training internally or supports employees' participation in external training. Needless to say that the lack of resources to be allocated to training by most WISEs hinders training attendance. To tackle this challenge, one strategy is to support WISEs' access to private funding schemes by encouraging their inclination to collaborate via mutually supportive mechanisms further.

An additional obstacle preventing access to training is the lack of time. WISEs, especially when they are small in size, struggle to detach personnel from their working activities. In these situations, training carried out within the organizations and combining both theoretical and practical activities can help WISEs overcome this problem (Signoretti, 2020). Finally, what is especially difficult is also being able to identify the most adequate training activities that can enable to address supporters' and WSNs' skills gaps or improve their abilities. As regards specifically WSNs, training activities turn out to be sometimes ineffective because of their weak learning abilities due to the particular vulnerabilities shown (Signoretti and Sacchetti, 2020). Hence, it emerges the need for individualised and targeted training, to be designed and planned on the basis of real people's needs and capabilities. In this respect, the

findings of the survey underline the importance of further research on both the content and modalities of training.

Considering digital skills, there are no significant discrepancies between their relevance and the level of endowment for the three target groups. Enablers are those who most need digital skills, while supporters need digital skills to a certain extent, and their level of endowment is considered basic or above basic for the skills they need most. Finally, according to the data collected, WSNs require little digital skills to carry out their work activities, and this also matches with their level of endowment. Moreover, there are little training initiatives specifically addressed to WSNs. Digital skills seem to acquire a higher relevance in private life activities and this raises the question if WISEs should pay more attention to the need for digital skills in other contexts, outside of the working environment.

Next to an overview of the relevance and the level of endowment of digital skills, both surveys provide a comprehensive picture of current and future use of technology and digitisation. Especially in large WISEs, technologies and digitisation processes are applied to a large extent in management processes and for the standardisation of production processes. Indeed, the digitisation of management processes is deemed as crucial by enablers and the majority of WISEs already implement technologies and digitisation processes (i.e., cloud computing services and e-invoices) in this domain. As regards the digitisation of standardised production processes, technologies like ERP software packages have found their entrance into the surveyed WISEs.

Conversely, AI, rapid prototyping and assistive technology are considered as less relevant by enablers and therefore are rarely used within WISEs. Nevertheless, those are important technologies, mainly for the adaptation of WSNs' individual workplaces. This is an interesting finding, given the fact that the employment of WSNs is the core business of WISEs and use of these technologies may contribute to reach this goal.

Another important tendency emerged is that the level of digitisation is higher in larger WISEs. As a consequence, scaling up will be an important factor for WISEs if they want to take further steps towards digitisation and towards the implementation of technologie.

## REFERENCE LIST


- AbouAssi, K. & Jo, S. (2017). Partnerships among Lebanese Nonprofit Organizations: Assessing the Impact on Human Resource Capacity, *American Review of Public Administration*, 47(6): 687–698. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074015613850
- Adam, S. (2014). Social Exclusion and Work Integration: Social Cooperatives for People with Mental Health Problems in Greece, *CIRIEC Working Papers,* n. 08. Belgium: University of Liège.
- Aiken, M. (2007). What is the role of social enterprise in finding, creating and maintaining employment for disadvantaged groups? UK Cabinet Office: Office of the Third Sector. Available at: https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/+/http:/www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/third_sector/assets/social_enterprise_employment.pdf [Accessed 20 April 2022].
- arbeit plus (2016). Themenpapier Öffentliche Vergabe und Soziale Dienstleistungen (Thematic Paper: Public Procurement and Social Services). Vienna: arbeit plus. Available at: https://arbeitplus.at/themenpapiere/oeffentliche-vergabe-soziale-dienstleistungen/ [Accessed 5 May 20200].
- Babić, Z. & Baturina, D. (2020). Current Challenges and Future Potentials of Social Economy in Croatia, *Calitatea Vietii*, 23 (1): 5-23. DOI: https://doi.org/10.46841/RCV.2020.01.02
- Baluch A. M. & Ridder, H.-G. (2020). Mapping the Research Landscape of Strategic Human Resource Management in Nonprofit Organizations: A Systematic Review and Avenues for Future Research, *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 50 (3): 598-625. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764020939653
- Battilana, J., Sengul, M., Pache, A. C. & Model, J. (2015). Harnessing Productive Tensions in Hybrid Organizations: The Case of Work Integration Social Enterprises, *Academy of Management Review*, 58(6): 1658–1685. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2013.0903
- Baturina, D., Mihály, M. Haska, E., Ciepielewska-Kowalik, A., Kiss, J., Agolli, A., Bashevska, M., Korunovska Srbijanko, J., Rakin, D. & Radojičić V. (2021). The Role of External Financing in the Development of Social Entrepreneurship in CEE Countries. In: J. Defourny & M. Nyssens (Eds.), *Social Enterprise in Central and Eastern Europe Theory, Models and Practice*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 218-234. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429324529-16
- Bettio, F. & Plantenga, J. (2004). Comparing Care Regimes in Europe, *Feminist Economics*, 10(1): 85-113. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/1354570042000198245

- Bezzina, L. (2019*).* Systematic review. Legislation, Policies, Strategies and Guidelines Relating to Disability in Malta. Malta: Department of Disability Studies, Faculty for Social Wellbeing at the University of Malta and the Commission for the Rights of People with disabilities. Available at: https://www.crpd.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/DisabilityPolicyReview2019-Lara-Bezzina.pdf [Accessed 10 April 2022].
- Blank, F. (2020). The German Welfare System. The Calm after the Storm. In: S. Blum, J. Kuhlmann & K. Schubert (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of European Welfare Systems*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 110–128. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429290510-7
- BOCG (2020). Written reply to question addressed to the Spanish Parliament by Mr. Genís Boadella Esteve (GPlu) on the amount of the State Budget allocated in 2019 to support the maintenance of employment of persons with disabilities, *Boletín Oficial de las Cortes Generales* (Gazette of the Spanish Parliament). Available at: https://www.congreso.es/public_oficiales/L14/CONG/BOCG/D/BOCG-14-D-191.PDF [Accessed 10 March 2022].
- Borzaga, C. & Defourny, J. (Eds.) (2001). *The Emergence of Social Enterprise.* London and New York: Routledge. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203164679
- Borzaga, C. & Solari, L. (2001). La Gestione delle Imprese Sociali: Problemi e Prospettive (The Management of Social Enterprises: Problems and Perspectives). In: C. Borzaga & J. Defourny (a cura di), *L'impresa sociale in prospettiva europea*. Trento: Edizioni 31, pp. 295-318.
- Borzaga, C. (2006). Cooperazione Sociale e Inserimento Lavorativo: Il Contributo dell'Analisi Economica (Social Cooperation and Labour Insertion: The Contribution of Economic Analysis), *Giornale di Diritto del Lavoro e di Relazioni Industriali*, 109/2006. Bologna: Franco Angeli Editore. Available at: https://www.francoangeli.it/riviste/Scheda_rivista.aspx?IDArticolo=27206 [Accessed 5 April 2022].
- Borzaga, C. & Loss, M. (2006). Profiles and Trajectories of Participants in European Work Integration Social Enterprises. In: M. Nyssens, *Social Enterprise. At the Crossroads of Market, Public Policies and Civil Society.* London and New York: Routledge, pp. 185-210. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203946909-21
- Borzaga, C. & Tortia, E. C. (2006). Worker Motivations, Job Satisfaction, and Loyalty in Public and Nonprofit Social Services, *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 35(2): 225–248. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764006287207
- Borzaga, C. & Ianes, A. (2011). Il Sistema di Imprese della Cooperazione Sociale: Origini e Sviluppo dei Consorzi di Cooperative Sociali (Networking Among Social Cooperatives: Origins and Development of Consortia), Euricse Working Paper Series, 14/11. Trento: Euricse. Available at: https://euricse.eu/it/publications/wp-01411-il-sistema-di-imprese-della-cooperazione-sociale-origini-e-sviluppo-dei-consorzi-di-cooperative-sociali/ [Accessed 5 April 2022].

- Borzaga, C. (2012). Lo svantaggio sul mercato del lavoro: i fallimenti di Stato e mercato e la proposta del non profit. In: S. Depedri (Ed.), *L'inclusione efficiente. L'esperienza delle cooperative sociali di inserimento lavorativo.* Bologna: Franco Angeli Editore, pp. 28-31.
- Borzaga, C. & Galera, G. (2016), Innovating the Provision of Welfare Services Through Collective Action: The Case of Italian Social Cooperatives, *International Review of Sociology*, 26(1): 31-47. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2016.1148336
- Borzaga, C., Fazzi, L. & Galera, G. (2016). Social Enterprise as a Bottom-Up Dynamic: Part 1. The Reaction of Civil Society to Unmet Social Needs in Italy, Sweden and Japan, *International Review of Sociology*, *26*(1): 1-18. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2016.1148332
- Borzaga C. & Musella M. (Eds.) (2020). L'impresa sociale in Italia. Identità, ruoli e resilienza. IV Rapporto Iris Network (Social enterprise in Italy. Identities, roles and resilience. IV Iris Network Report). Trento: Iris Network. Available at: https://irisnetwork.it/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/IV-Rapporto-IS.pdf [Accessed 10 April 2022].
- Bosch, T. & van Rhijn, G. (2017). Snelle, flexibele en foutloze assemblage met geprojecteerde werkinstructie (Fast, flexible and error-free assembly with projected work instructions). Leiden: TNO Innovation for Life. Available at: https://repository.tno.nl//islandora/object/uuid:e10517fc-22ba-40ae-a7e5-efe2970822a1 [Accessed 24 May 2022].
- Bramba, C. & Eikemo T. A. (2009). Welfare State Regimes, Unemployment and Health: A Comparative Study of the Relationship between Unemployment and Self-Reported Health in 23 European Countries, *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health,* 63(2): 92–98. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/jech.2008.077354
- Carretero Gomez, S., Vuorikari, R. & Punie, Y. (2018). DigComp 2.1: The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens with eight proficiency levels and examples of use. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. DOI: https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/38842
- Cedris (2021). Steun voor initiatiefnota Sociale ontwikkelbedrijven (Note on the initiative to support social development companies). Available at: https://cedris.nl/nieuws/steun-voor-initiatiefnota-sociale-ontwikkelbedrijven/ [Accessed 6 May 2021].
- Cerami, A. (2006). *Social Policy in Central and Eastern Europe. The Emergence of a New European Welfare Regime*. Munster, Hamburg, Berlin, Vienna & London: LIT Verlag.
- Ciepielewska-Kowalik, A., Vidović, D., Kiss, J., Hubai, L., Legnerová, K. & Dohnalová, M. (2021). The Influence of Historical and Institutional Legacies on Present-Day Social Enterprises in CEE Countries: Lessons from Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Croatia. In: J. Defourny & M. Nyssens (Eds.), *Social Enterprise in Central and Eastern Europe Theory, Models and Practice*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 201-2017. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429324529-15

- Court of Auditors of France (2019). Rapport public thématique: L'insertion des chômeurs par l'activité économique. Une politique à conforter. (Thematic public report: Integration of the unemployed through economic activity. A policy to be strengthened). Available at: https://www.ccomptes.fr/fr/publications/linsertion-des-chomeurs-par-lactivite-economique [Accessed 6 May 2022].
- Cunningham, I. & James, P. (2017). Analysing Public Service Outsourcing: The Value of a Regulatory Perspective, *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 35(6): 958–974. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0263774X16671138
- Defourny, J., Gregoire, O. & Davister, C. (2004). Work Integration Social Enterprises in the European Union: An Overview of Existing Models, *EMES Working Papers,* n. 04/04. Available at: https://emes.net/publications/working-papers/work-integration-social-enterprises-in-the-european-union-an-overview-of-existing-models/ [Accessed 10 May 2022].
- Defourny, J. & Nyssens, M. (2008). Social Enterprise in Europe: Recent Trends and Developments, *Social Enterprise Journal*, 4(3): 202-228. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1108/17508610810922703
- Defourny, J. & Nyssens, M. (2010). Conceptions of Social Enterprise and Social Entrepreneurship in Europe and the United States: Convergences and Divergences, *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship*, 1(1): 32-53. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/19420670903442053
- Department of Work and Social Economy of the Flanders (2020). Jaarrapport sociale economie 2019 (Annual report on social economy 2019). Brussels: Departement Werk en Sociale Economie. Available at: https://www.socialeeconomie.be/nieuws/jaarrapport-sociale-economie-2019 [Accessed 10 May 2021].
- Department of Work and Social Economy of the Flanders (2021). Alle oproepen (All calls). Departement Werk en Sociale Economie Available at: https://www.social-eeconomie.be/alle-oproepen [Accessed 10 May 2021].
- Díaz-Foncea, M. & Marcuello, C. (2012). Las Empresas Sociales en España: Concepto y Características (Social Enterprises in Spain: Concept and Characteristics), *GIZAEKOA - Revista Vasca de Economía Social//GEZKI*, 8: 143-164. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1387/reves.12721
- Dobrotić, I. (2016). Crisis and Croatian Welfare State: A New Opportunity for Welfare State Retrenchment? In: S. Schubert, P. de Villota & J. Kuhlmann (Eds.), *Challenges to European Welfare Systems*. Switzerland: Springer International, pp. 301-324. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-07680-5_14
- Douvitsa, I. (2020). The Work Integration Social Enterprises in Greece, *Revista Jurídica de Economía Social y Cooperativa*, 36: 195-219 DOI: https://doi.org/10.7203/CIRIEC-JUR.36.17289

- Esping-Andersen, G. (1990). *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/095892879100100108
- Eurofound (2016). Exploring the diversity of NEETs. Authors: M. Mascherini & S. Ledermaier. Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2016/exploring-the-diversity-of-neets [Accessed 11 May 2022].
- Europa Press (2016). El 81% de empresas españolas no cumple aún con la LISMI, según un studio (81% of Spanish companies do not yet comply with the LISMI, according to a study). Madrid, 22/01/2016. Available at: https://www.europapress.es/epsocial/rsc/noticia-81-empresas-espanolas-no-cumple-aun-lismi-estudio-20160122103132.html [Accessed 9 March 2021].
- European Commission - DG EMPL (2016). Social Enterprises and their eco-systems: developments in Europe. Authors: C. Borzaga & G. Galera. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=16376&langId=en
- European Commission (2018). Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Updated country report: Austria. Authors: M. Anastasiadis, W. Gspurning & R. Lang. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://europa.eu/!dK34uG [Accessed 11 May 2022].
- European Commission (2019a). Promoting Social Considerations into Public Procurement Procedures for Social Economy Enterprises: Mapping the ecosystem in which social economy enterprises operate, including access to public procurement contracts, in Greece. Author: F. Marini. Available at: https://aeidl.eu/docs/bsi/index.php/home/bsi-documents/bsi-deliverable/4-mapping-se-ecosystem-el/file [Accessed 3 April 2022].
- European Commission (2019b). Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Updated country report: Croatia. Author: D. Vidović. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://europa.eu/!dK34uG [Accessed 11 April 2022].
- European Commission (2019c). Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Updated country report: Greece. Authors: A. Varvarousis & G. Tsitsirigkos. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://europa.eu/!dK34uG [Accessed 11 April 2022].
- European Commission (2019d). Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Updated country report: The Netherlands. Author: N. Bosma. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://europa.eu/!dK34uG [Accessed 11 May 2022].

- European Commission (2019e). Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Updated country report: Romania. Authors: M. Lambru & C. Petrescu. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://europa.eu/!dK34uG [Accessed 11 May 2022].
- European Commission (2019f). Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Updated country report: Slovenia. Authors: T. Rakar & Z. Kolarič. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://europa.eu/!dK34uG [Accessed 11 April 2022].
- European Commission (2019g). Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Updated country report: Sweden. Author: M. Gawell. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://europa.eu/!dK34uG [Accessed 11 May 2022].
- European Commission (2020a). Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Comparative synthesis report. Authors: C. Borzaga, G. Galera, B. Franchini, S. Chiomento, R. Nogales & C. Carini. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://europa.eu/!Qq64ny [Accessed 11 April 2022].
- European Commission (2020b). Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Updated country report: Belgium. Authors: M. Nyssens & B. Huybrechts. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://europa.eu/!dK34uG [Accessed 11 April 2022].
- European Commission (2020c). Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Updated country report: Spain. Authors: M. Díaz, C. Marcuello & R. Nogales. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://europa.eu/!Qq64ny [Accessed 11 April 2022].
- European Commission (2020d). Making Socially Responsible Public Procurement Work: 71 Good Practice Cases. Authors: P. Tepper, A. McLennan, R. Hirt, P. Defranceschi (ICLEI), V. Caimi, & A. Elu (AEIDL). Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2826/844552
- European Commission - EASME (2020). Buying for social impact. Good practice from around the EU. Publications Office of the European Union. Authors: V. Caimi (AEIDL), D. Daniele (DIESIS), L. Martignetti (REVES). Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. DOI: https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2826/8319
- Huang, Y. (2018). Effectivity of Augmented Reality for Cognitive Work Support: A statistical Analysis. Leuven: KU Leuven.
- Mariasteen (2021). *Rapid Prototyping*. Available at: https://www.mariasteen.be/rapid [Accessed 24 May 2022].

- European Parliament (2015). Reasonable Accommodation and Sheltered Workshops for People with Disabilities: Costs and Returns of Investments. European Parliament, DG for internal policies. Policy department A: Economic and scientific policy. Brussels: European Union. Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/536295/IPOL_STU%282015%29536295_EN.pdf [Accessed 11 April 2022].
- European Parliament (2020). Briefing: Employment and disability in the European Union. Author: M. Lecerf. Brussels: European Parliamentary Research Service. Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/651932/EPRS_BRI(2020)651932_EN.pdf [Accessed 11 May 2022].
- Filipovič Hrast, M. & Rakar, T. (2020). Restructuring the Slovenian welfare system: Between economic pressures and future challenges. In: S. Blum, J. Kuhlmann & K. Schubert (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of European Welfare Systems. London and* New York: Routledge, Chapter 27. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429290510-27
- Flieger, P., Schönwiese, V. & Wegscheider, A. (2013). Behindertenpädagogik und Behindertenhilfe im Spannungsfeld zwischen alten Mustern und neuen Wegen (Disability education and disability aid, tension between old patterns and new paths). In: H. Halbrainer & U. Vennemann (Eds.), *Es war nicht immer so.: Leben mit Behinderung in der Steiermark zwischen Vernichtung und Selbstbestimmung 1938 bis heute*. CLIO Verein f. Geschichts- & Bildungsarbeit, p. 189-211.
- Fuchs, M. (2014). Policy Brief: Quota Systems for Disabled Persons: Parameters, Aspects, Effectivity. Vienna: European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research. Available at: https://www.euro.centre.org/downloads/detail/1459 [Accessed 11 March 2022].
- Galera, G. (2010). Social enterprises and the integration of disadvantaged workers. In: L. Becchetti & C. Borzaga (Eds.), *The Economics of Social Responsibility.* London and New York: Routledge, pp. 117-134.
- Garonna, P. (1990). Indemnisation du chômage et politiques de l'emploi (Unemployment benefits and employment policies), *Revue francaise des affaires sociales*, no. 8.
- Guo, C., Brown, W. A., Ashcraft, R. F., Yoshioka, C. F. & Dong, H. K. D. (2011). Strategic human resources management in non-profit organizations, *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 31(3): 248–269. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X11402878
- Hassenteufel, P. & Palier, B. (2020). The recalibration of the French welfare system. In: S. Blum, J. Kuhlmann & K. Schubert (Eds.). *Routledge Handbook of European Welfare Systems*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 202–219. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429290510-12

- Hiu-Kwan Chui, C., Shum M. H. Y. & Lum, T. Y. S. (2018). Work Integration Social Enterprises as Vessels of Empowerment? Perspectives from Employees, *Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work and Development*, 29(2): 133-148. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/02185385.2018.1538899
- Huybrechts, B., Mertens, S. & Rijpens, J. (2014). Explaining Stakeholder Involvement in Social Enterprise Governance through Resources and Legitimacy. In: J. Defourny (Ed.), *Social Enterprise and the Third Sector: Changing European Landscapes in a Comparative Perspective*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 157-175.
- Istat (2007). Le cooperative sociali in Italia - Anno 2005 (Social cooperatives in Italy – Year 2005). Roma: Istat (Italian National Institute of Statistics). Available at: https://www.forumterzosettore.it/multimedia/allegati/ISTAT%20rapporto%202007%20Coop%20sociali.pdf [Accessed 11 May 2022].
- Kalkis, H., Vilka, L. Līcīte-Ķurbe, L., Trapenciere, I. & Urbāne, M. (2021). Challenges for Social Enterprises in Latvia. In: J. Defourny & M. Nyssens (Eds.), *Social Enterprise in Central and Eastern Europe Theory, Models and Practice*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 102-121. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429324529-8
- Karantinos, D., Cavounides, J., Ioannou, C., Koniordos, M. & Tinios, P. (1992). EC Observatory on National Policies to Combat Social Exclusion - Consolidated Report Greece. Available at: https://www.scribd.com/doc/138213925/D-Karantinos-J-Cavounides-Chr-Ioannou-M-Koniordos-Pl-Tinios-1992-EC-Observatory-on-National-Policies-to-Combat-Social-Exclusion-Consolida [Accessed 11 April 2022].
- Kavounidis, J. (1996). Social Exclusion: Concept, Community Initiatives, the Greeck Experience and Policy Dilemmas, Diastassis tou Kinonikou Apoklismou stin Ellada, National Centre for Social Research, A: 47-79.
- KEPE (1989). Ekthessi gia tin Kinoniki Politiki, Pentaetes Programma 1988-1992. Athens: Centre of Planning and Economic Research).
- Kermalis, K. (1990). *Kinoniki Pronia*, Athens.
- Liturri, G. (2021). Tutti i numeri sui fallimenti delle imprese in Italia. Report Bankitalia. *Start Economia Magazine*, 1 Feb 2021. Available at: https://www.startmag.it/economia/tutti-i-numeri-sui-fallimenti-delle-imprese-in-italia-report-bankitalia/ [Accessed 11 April 2022].
- Logaras, D. (2013). Ergasia, ApasxolisikaiAnapiria. Athens: ESAmeA. Available at: https://www.esamea.gr/help/39-publications/books-studies%CE%91/490-ekpaideytiko-egxeiridio-ergasia-apasxolisi-kai-anapiria-toy-dimitri-logara [Accessed 11 April 2022].
- Marinova, T. & Yoneva, E. (2021). Social Enterprises in Bulgaria: Historical and Institutional Perspective. In: J. Defourny & M. Nyssens (Eds.), *Social Enterprise in Central and Eastern Europe Theory, Models and Practice*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 23-39. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429324529-3

- Marx, I. & Van Cant, L. (2020). Belgium's Welfare System Still Lagging After All These Years. In: S. Blum, J. Kuhlmann, & K. Schubert (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of European Welfare Systems*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 38–55. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429290510-3
- May-Simera, C. (2018), Reconsidering Sheltered Workshops in Light of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), *Laws, 7*(1): 6. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3390/laws7010006
- McMenamin, I. (2003). Is there an East-Central European Variety of Democratic Capitalism? A Twenty-Two Country Cluster Analysis, *Working Paper in International Studies Series*, n. 2003-5. Centre for International Studies. Ireland: Dublin City University. Available at: https://doras.dcu.ie/2119/1/2003-5.pdf [Accessed 11 April 2022].
- Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of Greece (2020). Έκθεση για την κοινωνική και αλληλέγγυα οικονομία 2019-2020 (Report on the Social and Solidarity Economy 2019-2020). Athens: Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, General Secretariat of Labour, Directorate of Social and Solidarity Economy. Available at: https://urly.it/3p29g [Accessed 22 April 2022].
- Mosca, M., Musella, M. & Pastore, F. (2007). Relational Goods, Monitoring and Non-Pecuniary Compensations in the Non-Profit Sector: The Case of Italian Social Services, *Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics*, 78(1):57-86. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8292.2007.00327.x
- Nyssens, M., Defourny, J., Gardin, L. & Laville, J.-L. (2012). *Work integration social enterprises and public policy: an analysis of the European situation.*
- O'Connor, P. & Meinhard, A. (2014). Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs): Their Potential Contribution to Labour Market (Re-)Integration of At-Risk Populations. Toronto: Ted Rogers School of Management, Ryerson University: Centre for Voluntary Sector Studies. DOI: https://doi.org/10.32920/ryerson.14641602.v1
- O'Reilly, A. (2003). The Right to Decent Work of Persons with Disabilities, *IFP/Skills Working Paper* no. 14.Geneva: International Labour Organization. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_bk_pb_93_en.pdf [Accessed 11 April 2022].
- OECD (2016a*).* Policy Brief on Scaling the Impact of Social Enterprises. Policies for social entrepreneurship. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/Policy-brief-Scaling-up-social-enterprises-EN.pdf [Accessed 15 May 2022].
- OECD (2016b). Boosting social entrepreneurship and social enterprise creation. Unlocking the potential of social enterprises in the Czech Republic. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/Czech%20Republic%20Report%20%2006.03.17-FINAL.pdf [Accessed 15 May 2022].

- OECD (2022). Boosting social entrepreneurship and social enterprise development in Slovenia. In-depth policy review. *OECD Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Papers*, No. 2022/02. Paris: OECD Publishing. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1787/8ea2b761-en.
- OIReScon (2022). Informe especial de supervisión relativo a la contratación estratégica en el 2020. Contratos reservados y criterios medioambientales, sociales y de innovación (Special monitoring report on strategic procurement in 2020. Reserved contracts and environmental, social and innovation criteria). Madrid: Oficina Independiente de Regulación y Supervisión de la Contratación, Ministerio de Hacienda. Available at: https://www.hacienda.gob.es/RSC/OIReScon/informes-especiales-supervision/ies-contratacion-estrategica.pdf [Accessed 11 June 2022].
- ONCE & ILO Global Business and Disability Network (2021). An inclusive digital economy for people with disabilities. Fundación ONCE and International Labour Organization. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/disability-and-work/WCMS_769852/lang--en/index.htm [Accessed 22 April 2021].
- Österle, A. & Heitzmann, K. (2020). Austrification in Welfare System Change? An Analysis of Welfare State Developments in Austria between 1998 and 2018. In: S. Blum, J. Kuhlmann & K. Schubert (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of European Welfare Systems*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 21-37. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429290510-2
- Pättiniemi, P. (2006). Case Finland: development of legal framework for social enterprises in Finland, paper presented at the seminar "*Emerging models of social entrepreneurship: possible paths for social enterprise development in Central East and South East Europe*", Zagreb, 28–29 September 2006.
- Pavolini, E. (2003). *Le nuove politiche sociali. I sistemi di welfare fra istituzioni e società civile* (The new social policies. Welfare systems between institutions and civil society). Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Perotìn, V. (2012). Worker Cooperatives: Good, Sustainable Jobs in the Community, *Journal of Entrepreneurial and Organizational Diversity,* 2(2): 34-47. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5947/jeod.2013.009
- Petrella, F. & Richez-Battesti, N. (2016). Patterns of Evolutions of Social Enterprises in France: A Focus on Work Integration Social Enterprises, *International Review of Sociology*, 26(2): 234-246. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2016.1181390
- Public Procurement Office of Poland (2020). Prawozdanie Prezesa Urzędu Zamówień Publicznych z funkcjonowania systemu zamówień publicznych w 2020 (Report on the functioning of the public procurement system 2020). Warsaw, Poland. Available at: https://www.uzp.gov.pl/baza-wiedzy/analizy-systemowe/sprawozdania-o-funkcjonowaniu-systemu-zamowien-publicznych [Accessed 11 April 2022].

- Policy Impact Lab (2019). Study on employment models within the social economy and their role in including persons with disabilities into the labour market and society. Brussels: European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD) & European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR). Available at: https://www.epr.eu/publications/employment-models-within-social-economy-and-role-in-including-pwd-into-labour-market-and-society/ [Accessed 6 May 2022].
- Ridder, H. G. & McCandless, A. M. (2010). Influences on the Architecture of Human Resource Management in Nonprofit Organizations: An Analytical Framework, *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 39(1): 124–141. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764008328182
- Ridder, H. G., Piening, E. P. & Baluch, A. M. (2012). The third way reconfigured: How and Why Nonprofit Organizations Are Shifting Their Human Resource Management, *VOLUNTAS,* 23: 605–635. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-011-9219-z
- Riggio, R. E. & Orr, S. S. (2004). *Improving Leadership in Nonprofit Organizations*. New York: John Wiley.
- Savedoff, W.D. (2006). Public Policy for People with Disabilities in Chile: learning from international experiences, report submitted to the Inter-American Development Bank, Portland, ME: Social Insight.
- Siemienska, R. & Domaradzka, A. (2020). Politics of Welfare: The Polish Welfare System in the First Decades of the 21st Century. In: S. Blum, J. Kuhlmann & K. Schubert (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of European Welfare Systems.* London and New York: Routledge, Chapter 23. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429290510-23
- Signoretti, A. (2020). Overcoming the Barriers to the Implementation of More Efficient Productive Strategies in Small Enterprises, *Employee Relations*, 42(1): 149-165. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1108/ER-11-2018-0298
- Signoretti A. & Sacchetti S. (2020). Lean HRM Practices in Work Integration Social Enterprises: Moving Towards Social Lean Production. Evidence from Italian Case Studies, *Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics*, 91(4): 545-563. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/apce.12283
- Social Economy Europe (2020). Social Economy for the full inclusion of people with disabilities. Best practice guide. Available at: https://www.socialeconomy.eu.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/SEE_SocialEconomy-4-the-inclusion-of-People-with-Disabilities.pdf [Accessed 11 March 2022].
- Sozialministeriumservice (2020). Geschäftsbericht 2019 (Annual Report 2019). Vienna: Verlags- und Herstellungsort: Available at: https://www.sozialministeriumservice.at/Ueber_uns/News_und_Veranstaltungen/News/Geschaeftsbericht_2019.de.html [Accessed 11 March 2022].

- Spear, R., Defourny, J., Favreau, L. & Laville, J-L. (2001). *Tackling Social Exclusion in Europe. The contribution of the social economy*. Aldershot, Burlington USA, Singapore, Sydney: Ashgate. Available at: https://base.socioeco.org/docs/ang2.pdf [Accessed 11 March 2022].
- Spear, R. & Bidet, E. (2005). Social Enterprise for Work Integration in 12 European Countries: A Descriptive Analysis, *Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics,* 76(2): 195-231. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1370-4788.2005.00276.x
- Stephanakis, G. (2010). Κοινωνικοί συνεταιρισμοί περιορισμένης ευθύνης, ένα συνεταιρεστικό πείραμα σε εξέλιξη. Το παράδειγμα του ΚΟΙΣΠΕ Δυτικής Θεσσαλονίκης (Social cooperatives of limited liability, a cooperative experiment in progress. The example of the SCLL of West Thessaloniki). Post graduate theses. Thessaloniki: Aristotle University. DOI: https://doi.org/10.26262/heal.auth.ir.124650
- technopolis group (2018). Social Business Initiative (SBI) follow up: Co-operation between social economy enterprises and traditional enterprises. Final Report. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/growth/publications/social-business-initiative-sbi-follow-cooperation-between-social-economy-enterprises-and-traditional_it [Accessed 11 March 2022].
- TenderNed (2021) Opdrachten voor sociale ondernemingen beter vindbaar maken (Making reserved contracts for social enterprises easier to find). Available at: https://www.tenderned.nl/cms/nieuws/opdrachten-voor-sociale-ondernemingen-beter-vindbaar-maken [Accessed 6 May 2021].
- Townsend, K. McDonald, P. & Cathcart, A. (2017). Managing Flexible Work Arrangements in Small Not-For-Profit Firms: The Influence of Organisational Size, Financial Constraints and Workforce Characteristics, *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 28(14): 2085-2107. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2015.1136671
- UNDP & EMES (2008). Social enterprise: a new model for poverty reduction and employment generation. An Examination of the Concept and Practice in Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. Bratislava: UNDP Regional Bureau. Edited by: C. Borzaga, G. Galera, & R. Nogales. Available at: https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/Social%20Enterprise-%20A%20New%20Model%20for%20Poverty%20Reduction%20and%20Employment%20Generation.pdf [Accessed 11 March 2022].
- van Gerven, M. (2020). The Dutch Participatory State. Shift from a Welfare System of Collective Solidarity Towards Individual Responsibility in a Participatory Society. In: S. Blum, J. Kuhlmann & K. Schubert (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of European Welfare Systems*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 387–403. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429290510-22

- Vidal, I. (2001). Spain. Social Enterprises as a Response to Employment Policy Failure. In: C. Borzaga & J. Defourny (Eds.), *The Emergence of Social Enterprise.* London and New York: Routledge, pp. 203-219.
- Vidović, D. (2013). Social entrepreneurship in Croatia: a framework for development, *Euricse Working Paper Series*, 61|13. Trento: Euricse. Available at: https://euricse.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/1387198307_n2451.pdf [Accessed 5 April 2022].
- Vidović, D. & Baturina, D. (2021). Social Enterprise in Croatia: Charting New Territories. In: J. Defouny J. (Ed.), *Social Enterprise in Central and Eastern Europe.* London and New York: Routledge, pp. 40-55. DOI*:* https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429324529-4
- Villotti P., Corbìere M., Fraccaroli F., Fossey E., Lecomte T. & Harvey, C. (2017). Work Accommodations and Natural Supports for Employees with Severe Mental Illness in Social Businesses: An International Comparison, *Community Mental Health Journal*, 53(7): 864-870. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-016-0068-5
- Villotti P., Zaniboni S., Corbière M., Guay S. & Fraccaroli, F. (2018). Reducing Perceived Stigma: Work Integration of People with Severe Mental Disorders in Italian Social Enterprise, *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 41(2): 125-134. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1037/prj0000299
- Weishaupt, J. T. (2019). Arbeitsmarktpolitik (Labour Market Policy). In: H. Obinger & M. G. Schmidt (Eds.), *Handbuch Sozialpolitik* (Social Policy Handbook)*.* Wiesbaden: Springer VS, pp. 669–696. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-22803-3_33
- *World Bank (2014). Portraits of Labor Market Exclusion*. Authors: R. Sundaram, U. Hoerning, N. De Andrade Falcao, N. Millan, C. Tokman, M. Zini. Washington, DC: The World Bank Europe and Central Asia Region Human Development Unit. Available at: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/20490 [Accessed 5 April 2022].
- Yeo, R. & Moore, K. (2003). Including Disabled People in Poverty Reduction Work: "Nothing About Us, Without Us", *World Development*, *31*(3): 571-590. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X(02)00218-8
- Ziomas D., Bouzas N., Capella A. & Konstantinidou D. (2019). ESPN Thematic Report on In-work poverty – Greece, European Social Policy Network (ESPN), Brussels: European Commission. https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?pager.offset=10&advSearchKey=ESPN_iwp2019&mode=advancedSubmit&catId=22&policyArea=0&policyAreaSub=0&country=0&year=0 [Accessed 5 April 2022].
- Ziomas, D., Ketsetzopoulou, M. & Bouzas, N. (2001). Greece. Social Enterprises Responding to Welfare Needs. In: C. Borzaga & J. Defourny (Eds.), *The Emergence of Social Enterprise.* London and New York: Routledge, pp. 136-148.

## B- WISE Country Fiches (unpublished)


- Anđelić, J., Baturina, D., Bežovan, G., Ciglar, D. & Matančević, J. (2021). B-WISE country fiche: Croatia.
- Ausort, M. (2021). B-WISE country fiche: France.
- Bossuyt, L., Messely, L., Dewandeler, E., Franck, G., Sferrazza, J. & Dupont, S. (2021). B-WISE country fiche: Belgium.
- Caruana, V. (2021). B-WISE country fiche: Malta.
- Cerniauskaite, A. (2021). B-WISE country fiche: Lithuania.
- Cotič, G. (2021). B-WISE country fiche: Slovenia.
- Gordon, C. M. M (2022). B-WISE country fiche: Ireland.
- Göler von Ravensburg, N., Baga, E. & Schmitt, S. (2021). B-WISE country fiche: Germany.
- Hansen, A. F. & Kjeldsen, U. B. (2021). B-WISE synthetic country fiche: Denmark.
- Hristova, N., Dobreva, N. & Seyfetinova, S. (2021). B-WISE country fiche: Bulgaria.
- Juviño, A. (2021). B-WISE country fiche: Spain.
- Kemkes, J. van der Naaten, E., van de Burgt, C. & Lara Deckers, L. (2021). B-WISE country fiche: The Netherlands.
- Kročil, O., Kosina, D., Müller, M., Rychtář, K., Francová, P. & Vinkelhoferová, M. (2021). B-WISE country fiche: Czechia.
- Lepik, K.-L. (2021). B-WISE country fiche: Estonia.
- Liatira, M., Karagouni, S. & Tourlidas, D. (2021). B-WISE country fiche: Greece.
- Marocchi, G., Baldini, C., Curti, I. & Balzini, V. (2021). B-WISE country fiche: Italy.
- Martinho, A.L., Azevedo, E. & Rocha, F. (2021). B-WISE country fiche: Portugal.
- Nelhubel-Olah, H. & Szantai, M. (2022). B-WISE country fiche: Hungary.
- Nilsson, P. & Björk, M. (2022). B-WISE country fiche: Sweden.
- Oksanen, J. (2021). B-WISE country fiche: Finland.
- Pafite, M. (2022). B-WISE synthetic country fiche: Cyprus.
- Polačková, Z. (2021). B-WISE country fiche: Slovakia.
- Schumann, A. & Alfredsson, E. (2022). B-WISE country fiche: Luxembourg.
- Szarfenberg, R., Szarfenberg, A. & Krenz, R. (2022). B-WISE country fiche: Poland.
- Vamesu, A. (2021). B-WISE country fiche: Romania.
- Walchhofer, O. & Moder, C. (2021). B-WISE country fiche: Austria.
- Zeiļa, R. & Švarce, L. (2021). B-WISE country fiche: Latvia.

B-WISE
Skills for the future : WISEs ready!

# Annex A: Methodological note*

* Drafted by Euricse in collaboration with Lichtwerk and EASPD.



Grant Agreement: 621509-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-EPPKA2-SSA-B

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

This methodological note explains the methodology that was designed by Euricse in collaboration with B-WISE partners to accomplish the tasks of Work Package (WP) 1, namely:

1. Developing a common methodology for mapping the activities and characteristics of work integration social enterprises (WISEs) and for assessing the current situation of skill needs in WISEs;
2. Mapping and characterizing of subsectors of WISEs across Europe (EU);
3. Mapping of skill needs and gaps (especially but not exclusively in the digital area) in WISEs (including field research in the 13 B-WISE participating countries);
4. Collecting good practices on developing digital skills in WISEs in the 13 B-WISE participating countries.

The 13 B-WISE participating countries are:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Austria | Greece | Romania |
| Belgium | Italy | Slovenia |
| Bulgaria | Latvia | Spain |
| Croatia | The Netherlands | |
| France | Poland | |

WP1 was articulated along four phases:

- Phase 1: Preliminary mapping of WISEs and analysis of the institutional context within they operate
- Phase 2: Empirical analysis
- Phase 3: Identification and analysis of good practices
- Phase 4: Drafting the final report

Grant Agreement: 621509-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-EPPKA2-SSA-B

This publication has been co-funded by the European Commission. The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Agency and Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

## Phase 1: Preliminary mapping of WISEs and analysis of the institutional context within they operate

The first research action consisted of 13 in-depth country analyses mainly drawing on desk research (and in a few cases on short interviews to key informants) focused on the analysis and classification of WISEs typologies and typologies of WSNs employed; analysis of policies designed to increase the employment opportunities of WSNs; analysis of policies specifically designed to support WISEs.

B-WISE partners analysed existing national statistical data, official reports and grey literature on labour market policies and, more in general, on work integration pathways for people that are hard to employ, being the aim to understand the context wherein WISEs operate in each country, including their drivers, development patterns, challenges and support policies benefiting WISEs in the studied countries.

The template that was designed for conducting country analyses (i.e., Country Fiches) was based on a set of common tools (e.g., elaborated in the frame of previous studies or referring to EU frameworks), including:

- A shared definition of WISE drawing on the EC Social Business Initiative definition of social enterprise
- EU definition of disadvantaged and severely disadvantaged worker; worker with disabilities; sheltered employment (EC Regulation 651/2014)
- Classification of the resources WISEs normally rely on (ref. Study on Social Enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe, European Commission, 2020a)
- Classification of public policies (i.e., regulatory policies, compensation policies, substitutive policies and supported employment)

Country analyses led to the elaboration of 13 Country Fiches.

This preliminary analysis was extended so as to include 14 additional EU Member States (MSs).

## Phase 2: Empirical analysis

The second research action consisted of an empirical research, including both a quanti-qualitative face-to-face (F2F) and an online (ONL) survey[1].

### Face-to-face (F2F) survey

The F2F survey was aimed at both mapping skills needs and skills gaps – including but not limited to the digital area – and anticipating future needs in WISEs, with a view to profiling the training needs of three target groups, i.e.:

- Enablers (e.g., chief executive officers (CEOs), chief human resources officers (CHROs), chief financial officers (CFOs), staff managers, area coordinators, project managers, ICT specialists)
- Supporters (e.g., job coaches, tutors, mentors)
- Workers with support needs (WSNs, e.g., people with physical and/or sensory disabilities, people with intellectual and/or learning disabilities, people with psycho-social disabilities and/or mental illness, people with substance use disorders, convicts and ex-convicts, people in long-term unemployment, homeless people, asylum seekers/refugees/migrants, NEETs, women survivor of violence, member of ethnic minorities, people with low qualifications)

The survey covered the 13 participating countries of the B-WISE project and it was based on three different questionnaires (one for each target group), including both open (semi-structured) and closed questions. Euricse designed the methodology in collaboration with relevant partners of the B-WISE consortium, including project coordinators, and then validated by the Advisory Board. In collaboration with Idee in Rete, Euricse tested the three questionnaires with a view to check their degree of understanding and duration. In addition, both Euricse and Idee in Rete carried out technical pre-tests on the online reporting tool the consortium used to gather data collected to guarantee its correct functioning.

Questionnaires allowed for the collection of data on:

- the sector of activity, number of employees, and legal forms of the selected WISEs; the typology of WSNs integrated; the strategy and actions carried out to facilitate WSNs labour and social integration; the sustainability, ownership and governance models adopted
- the three target groups' characteristics and skills needed to perform their job tasks
- the relevance of technology and the technological endowment of the selected WISEs (e.g., how they use technology to assist WSNs and to facilitate their labour and social integration, pro and cons of its usage)

1 The two surveys were conducted separately from each other to avoid dependencies and delays. WISEs invited to participate in the two surveys were therefore different.

- the existing training initiatives promoted/supported and the training needs of the three target groups, with a view to providing insights for the development of the “Blueprint for sectoral cooperation on skills needs”
- the occupational profiles that are likely to be needed in the next future, as well as the most promising fields of engagement for WISEs

The WISEs identified by partners for the F2F survey are not a representative sample of WISEs, being the aim to conduct an in-depth analysis of 5-10 organisations per country through the administration of questionnaires to one enabler, two supporters and two WSNs per organisation. The rationale for selecting WISEs was agreed with ENSIE, EASPD, Idee in Rete, Lichtwerk, Johannes Kepler University of Linz, and the B-WISE Advisory Board so as to take the variety of the WISE models (in terms of size, legal forms, target groups, model of integration, fields of economic activity and geographic focus) existing in each country into account.

The three questionnaires were developed in English and then translated into national languages by partners. Interviewers were trained and provided with ad hoc resources aiming to support their work:

- a table to help interviewers to frame selected WISEs in legal terms
- for each proficiency level, a description and examples of digital competence areas as per the Digital Competence Framework (see below)
- a glossary, with explanations of technical terms present in the questionnaire – mainly related to the digital domain
- a showcard aimed at helping WSNs in completing the questionnaire

Interviews were conducted face-to-face and when not possible – due to pandemic restrictions – via video conference or phone calls.

Out of the 515 questionnaires expected to be collected, 403 questionnaires (i.e., 78.2%) were collected in 13 EU MSs through the F2F survey (89 enablers; 145 supporters; 169 WSNs).

### Online (ONL) survey

*Aim:*

Differently from the face-to-face survey, which targets a limited number of respondents, the aim of the online survey is to reach a larger audience of WISEs.

Furthermore, its goal is much more specific, being to assess the digital skills gaps in WISEs.

*Questionnaire:*

- 1 online questionnaire in the language of the respondent with a set of closed questions
- Focus on digital skills, technology, existing training and training needs
- The closed questions are extracted from the face-to-face questionnaire designed for enablers
- Responses were provided by respondents directly on SoSci Survey2
- Respondents were not asked to fill out the name of their organization, meaning that specific results cannot be linked to a specific WISE (done for privacy reasons)

175 questionnaires were collected in 13 EU MSs through the ONL survey.

## Skills measurement

*Digital skills*

In line with the scope of the B-WISE project, the questionnaires paid particular attention to digital skills, which were conceptualized and measured according to the Digital Competence Framework for citizens (DigComp 2.1). This framework was developed by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) on behalf of the European Commission (EC), Directorate-General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) and, more recently, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL)3. According to the latest version of the DigComp, digital skills are divided into five areas:

- Information and data literacy
- Communication and collaboration
- Digital content creation
- Safety
- Problem solving

2 SoSci Survey is a professional tool used by many researchers at universities. Johannes Kepler University Linz is well experienced on SoSci and has recommended to use it as a reporting tool since it includes more than 30 question types, is fully compliant with GDPR (privacy and data protection), and supports multilingual surveys.

3 More information on the Digital Competence Framework can be found in the dedicated page in the EC website (https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/digcomp/digital-competence-framework_en) and in Carretero Gomez, Vuorikari and Punie (2018). In March 2022 (after the administration period of the two surveys), an updated version of the framework (DigComp 2.2) was released (see: https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC128415).

In the questionnaire for enablers, respondents were asked to provide a general assessment of their digital skills (respondents and colleagues with a similar role) and that of supporters. In the questionnaire for supporters, respondents were asked to provide a general assessment of the digital skills of WSNs. WSNs only provide an assessment of their digital skills.

The general digital skills assessment was made up by two variables: (i) the relevance and (ii) the skills endowment of the target group for each of the five digital competence areas included in the DigComp Framework. Respondents had four response options to assess the relevance (Not relevant; Low; Medium; High) and the skills' endowment (None; Low; Basic; Above basic).

Considering the level of endowment, the collected data on digital skills has been analysed in the following way: for each competence area, four level of skills have been computed (*None; Low, Basic*, *Above basic*). Then, an overall composite indicator has been computed following a similar approach. This way we were able to distinguish between individuals with *Above basic* level of skills, individuals with a *Basic* level of skills, individuals with *Low* level of skills (missing some type of basic skills) and individuals who can be considered having *No digital skills at all*.

For the individual digital skills assessment (in the supporters' and WSNs' questionnaires), the Digital Skills Indicator was referred to. The Digital Skills Indicator is an instrument developed by the EC Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology (DG CONNECT) and the Eurostat Information Society Working Group4. It is based on the Digital Competence Framework: it derives from Eurostat survey on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) usage by Individuals, which collects information about the activities carried out by the respondent during the previous three months (unless otherwise specified) and covers four out of the five competence areas5. In the questionnaires, there is a distinction between digital skills used at work and those used by the respondents in their personal life.

### *Technical and soft of skills*

For the selection of skills other than digital ones (technical and soft skills), questionnaires relied on the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) framework6. ESCO is run by the DG EMPL of the EC and refers to the European multilingual classification of Skills, Competences and Occupations. Its first version (ESCO v1) was published in 2017. Since then, it has been updated several times, the latest update dating back to 2020.

One of the main aims of ESCO is to support the analysis of labour market data on skills and occupations, helping policymakers, education providers, employers and career

4 More information on the Digital Skills Indicator is available at: https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/new-comprehensive-digital-skills-indicator

5 The "safety" domain is not covered, as adequate indicators are not available.

6 For additional information, see: https://esco.ec.europa.eu/select-language?destination=/node/1

counsellors make more effective decisions concerning employment policies, curricula design and business development.

Specifically concerning the skills pillar, ESCO identifies and categorises 13,485 concepts hierarchically structured, with four sub-classifications:

- Knowledge
- Skills/competences
- Attitudes and values
- Language skills and knowledge

At the highest level, skills/competences are classified into eight areas:

- Communication, collaboration and creativity
- Information skills
- Assisting and caring
- Management skills
- Working with computers
- Handling and moving
- Constructing
- Working with machinery and specialised equipment

To design the three questionnaires, a selection of the skills for each of the eight ESCO areas has been made.

In addition, 21st century skills, i.e., the twelve abilities regarded as important for success in the 21st century rapidly changing digital society, are measured in the questionnaires. Although primarily intended for students, 21st century skills can also be useful to analyse current skills gaps and future skills needs in the WISE sector.

As illustrated below, the twelve 21st century skills are divided into three categories: learning skills, literacy skills and life skills.

| Learning Skills | Literacy Skills | Life Skills |
|---|---|---|
| Critical Thinking | Information literacy | Flexibility |
| Creativity | Media literacy | Leadership |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Collaboration | Technology literacy | Initiative |
| Communication | | Productivity |
| | | Social skills |

## Phase 3: Identification and analysis of good practices

EASPD developed the methodology for the collection of good practices with the contribution of ENSIE and Euricse. The survey aimed at identifying good practices for developing skills with the focus on digital skills, across the 13 B-WISE partner countries, which address the skill gaps, mainly related to digital skill gaps, in the WISEs sector.

As per the methodology designed, “good practice” is intended as an approach/integration pathway for developing digital skills.

This approach could be (non-exaustive list):

- a training course
- a training element, either a training content, a training manual, a feature that increases accessibility, such as visual aids or a specific learning approach
- an on-the-job training methodology or other methodology
- a strategy, a work process, or a tool that aims to support people in developing skills
- or that enables to identify and build on unexploited skills (this is not an exhaustive list; other approaches may also be considered).

Partners submitted their own experiences and disseminated the survey amongst their networks.

Under EASPD coordination, an ad hoc selection committee (comprised of arbeit plus, De Omslag, ENSIE, Scuola Centrale Formazione and ŠENT) was established for the evaluation and selection of the good practices according to essential and preferable criteria outlined as follows:

**Essential criteria:**

- A practice that targets WISE workers (enablers, supporters, WSNs)
- A practice that relies on/supports the development of skills, mainly digital skills

- A practice that can be considered innovative. Some examples of innovations may include (non-exhaustive list):
    - following a variety of learning approaches
    - using a blended pedagogical format, online and on-site
    - developing innovative training materials, innovative content of training
    - an approach offering certification
    - an approach targeted on the needs of learners
    - an approach with a direct impact on the employability of the learners, or on the use of these skills in the open labour market
    - an approach that has been progressively evolved since it was first started, etc

**Preferable criteria:**

- A practice that can be transferred in another context, or in another region/ country
- A practice that has been highly evaluated by the learners
- A practice that has tangible impact on the lives of the learners

A total number of 34 good practices were collected in the 13 B-WISE participating countries, out of which 10 (based on the selection committee's ratings) are included as an annex to this research report.

## Phase 4: Drafting the final report

The final report incorporates the findings of the activities conducted during the previous phases of WP1.

The B-WISE findings were enriched and critically compared against the findings of selected research projects that were scrutinised through desk research. The latter focused on the main theoretical and empirical literature on: the functioning and failures of the labour markets; the limitations of labour policies; the emergence of social enterprises in Europe; the ecosystem of social enterprises in Europe; the role and potential of WISEs; the use of technology and digital skills; the role of technology for the employability of WSNs; skills shortages and mismatch in the EU, etc.

## Main challenges/limitations

Challenges encountered during the unfolding of WP1 include but are not limited to the following:

- Poor recognition of WISEs in some countries complicated the identification of organisations that fulfil the shared definition of WISE
- Lack of reliable data on WISEs in specific countries hampered the comparative analysis
- Covid restrictions: more time than expected was needed to perform interviews and some interviews were carried out by phone/call.

Low number of collected questionnaires via the online survey in some countries (e.g., Austria and France).

B-WISE
Skills for the future : WISEs ready!

# Annex B: Glossary*

* Drafted by Euricse.



Grant Agreement: 621509-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-EPPKA2-SSA-B

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

| | |
|---|---|
| Asset lock | A mandatory and irreversible legal or constitutional mechanism, which ensures that surplus income, capital, profits or other property is not distributed to any organisation's members, shareholders or persons. It prevents the assets of an organisation from being used for private gain rather than for the social mission of the organisation, both during the life of the organisation and in case of its dissolution or sale. |
| Association | A legal form that is broadly characterised by the following features: a group of individuals/organisations organised on the basis of a written agreement to further a shared purpose; it can be established to further a range of social purposes; profits are used for purposes stated in governing document and are not distributed. The possibility that associations carry out entrepreneurial activities is not acknowledged in all countries. |
| Contract | An agreement to deliver a specific quantity and quality of products/services as specified by the buyer, often based on a competitive tendering process. |
| Conventional enterprise | Any entity that strives for profit, although not being necessarily aimed at maximizing it. It can be engaged in any economic activity and may be structured in different ways as per corporate law: sole proprietorship, partnership, and corporation. Liability in some types of conventional enterprises (the smaller ones) is assumed by the owners; it can either be limited or unlimited depending on the type. In advanced economies, the specific rules regulating conventional enterprises are rather similar and vary only to a limited extent.<br><br>Also referred to as "mainstream enterprise" or "traditional enterprise". |
| Cooperative | An "autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise" (ref. International Co-operative Alliance). |

Grant Agreement: 621509-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-EPPKA2-SSA-B

This publication has been co-funded by the European Commission. The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Agency and Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

| | |
|---|---|
| | According to the ILO Recommendation 193/2002, a cooperative is a legal form that is broadly characterised by the following features:<br>▪ jointly owned and democratically controlled by the people who work in it, trade through it or use its products or services ("members");<br>▪ can pursue almost any purpose, traditionally subject to the requirement that there should be a common economic, social or cultural need or interest shared by members of the cooperative;<br>▪ can in principle distribute profits to members. However, there can be limitations to the distribution of profits, i.e., notably in those legal systems that have strengthened cooperatives' social function. |
| Disadvantaged worker<br><br>Severely disadvantaged worker | As for the EU Commission Regulation 651/2014, art. 2(4), any person who:<br>(a) has not been in regular paid employment for the previous 6 months; or<br>(b) is between 15 and 24 years of age; or<br>(c) has not attained an upper secondary educational or vocational qualification (International Standard Classification of Education 3) or is within 2 years after completing fulltime education and who has not previously obtained his or her first regular paid employment; or<br>(d) is over the age of 50 years; or<br>(e) lives as a single adult with one or more dependents; or<br>(f) works in a sector or profession in a Member State where the gender imbalance is at least 25% higher than the average gender imbalance across all economic sectors in that Member State, and belongs to that underrepresented gender group; or<br>(g) is a member of an ethnic minority within a Member State and who requires development of his or her linguistic, vocational training or work experience profile to enhance prospects of gaining access to stable employment.<br><br>As for the EU Commission Regulation 651/2014, art. 2(99), any person who: |

| | |
|---|---|
| Worker with disabilities | (a) has not been in regular paid employment for at least 24 months; or<br>(b) has not been in regular paid employment for at least 12 months and belongs to one of the categories (b) to (g) mentioned under the definition of "disadvantaged worker".<br><br>As for the EU Commission Regulation 651/2014, art. 2(3), any person who:<br><br>(a) is recognised as worker with disabilities under national law; or<br>(b) has long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment(s) which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in a work environment on an equal basis with other workers. |
| Ecosystem | Is used to refer to the environment wherein social enterprises, including WISEs, operate. It builds on two main pillars: the public policies that recognise, regulate and support social enterprises, with a view to enhancing their multiplication and citizens' ability to self-organise. These two underlying pillars shape a number of evolving factors that compose the ecosystem of WISEs: 1) the capacity to self-organize; 2) visibility and recognition; 3) access to resources; 4) research, education and skills development.<br><br>The term ecosystem reflects on the one hand the importance of valorising fruitful linkages among the various elements that compose it; on the other hand, it reflects the multiplicity of relationships that WISEs evolve and develop with a broad spectrum of actors, including their beneficiaries, lead producers, suppliers, stakeholders, governments and even competitors. |
| Foundation | A philanthropic organisation, organised and operated primarily as a permanent collection of endowed funds, the earning of which are used for the benefit of a specific group of people or of the community at large. The main classification is between grant-making foundations and operating foundations. The latter provide social, health, and educational services. A foundations is broadly characterised by the following features: established |

| | |
|---|---|
| | by one or more “founders”; allocating assets to further a social purpose; it can be established to further a range of social purposes (e.g., philanthropic, artistic, cultural and religious purposes); assets and surpluses can only be used for social purposes stated in the governing document and are not distributed; it is not democratically governed; it is managed by trustees appointed by the founder or by the board. |
| General interest services | The benefit of the public in general or of an unspecified group of beneficiaries. Counterpart is self-interest. General-interest services cover a wide range of activities that have a strong impact on the well-being and quality of life of a society at large. They range from basic infrastructure (e.g., energy and water supply, transportation, postal services, waste management) to key sectors such as health, education and social services. |
| Grant | A sum of money, awarded una tantum that is provided by a governmental agency or private organisation. Most grants are provided with a view to funding a specific project and require some level of compliance and reporting (for a comparison between the terms “grant” and “subsidy”, see footnote1). |
| Legal form | The form under which an organisation is incorporated. The legal form determines how aspects like property rights, liability, governance and control, reporting, profit distribution and funding will affect the organisation. |
| Legal framework | The complex set of rules established by one or more legislations that are applicable to a certain legal entity. |

1 Grants and subsidies are both cash-based substantive financial policy tools. Substantive financial tools are used to influence directly some aspects of the production, distribution or delivery of goods and services in society. Through grants and subsidies the government pays companies, organisations or individuals to do (or not to do) some (un)desired form of activity. In general, grants cover also some organisational development costs. Other forms of subsidies cover only parts of the cost per unit/beneficiary. Each country has specific legislation for those financial policy tools and the use, combination of those tools in policy design is country specific (considering the level of policy capacity, the availability of resources or other contextual elements). Together with tax or royalty-based financial tools (substantive policy tools through indirect transfers) they represent one of the most extensively used policy design and implementation instruments.

| | |
|---|---|
| Legal status | Qualification provided by law to certain entities meeting given legal requirements. A legal status is regulated by a national or regional legislation or by a public policy strategy.<br><br>WISE statuses have been introduced in a number of EU Member States to limit the social enterprise qualification only to those enterprises which include work integration as a permanent and significant aspect of their scope and mode of functioning. Depending on the legislation, organisations (with specific or any legal form) can acquire the WISE status, provided that they meet relevant legal requirements, including at least 30% of the workforce that must be represented by workers with support needs. |
| Lifelong learning | The "ongoing access to the renewing of skills and the acquisition of knowledge" throughout people's lives (ref. European Commission White Paper on Education and Training, 1995)2. It consists of all learning activities undertaken by an individual throughout their life, which contribute to improving their personal knowledge, know-how, skills or qualifications. |
| Market | Any exchange that results from a contractual agreement. A market is created whenever potential sellers of goods/services enter into contact with potential buyers and there is a possibility of exchange through a contractual agreement. WISEs operate on both public and private markets. Resources obtained through market exchanges can either derive from contracts established - in more or less competitive forms - with public authorities (e.g., for the maintenance of public green areas and for cleaning public offices), or from business-to-business exchanges. |
| NEET | Acronym that stands for "Not in Employment, Education or training" and it is used to refer to a person - typically aged between 15 and 24 - who is |

2 COM(1995) 590 final. White paper on education and training "Teaching and Learning - Towards the Learning Society". Available at: https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d0a8aa7a-5311-4eee-904c-98fa541108d8/language-en

| | |
|---|---|
| | unemployed or inactive, as per the ILO definition, and not attending any education or vocational training. |
| Non-governmental organisation (NGO) | An organisation that is independent of governments. This expression came into use with the establishment of the United Nations in 1945 with provisions in Art. 71 of Chapter 10 of the United Nations Charter for a consultative role for organisations that neither are governments nor Member States. It is a very general term, used to refer to both transnational and local organisations. In some countries, it is used as a synonym of association, often to refer to organisations that specifically operate in the field of international cooperation. |
| Non-profit &<br><br>Not-for-profit sector | As for the Johns Hopkins University, it includes organisations that are: voluntary; formal; private; self-governing; and do not distribute profits. The term “non-profit” refers to organisations that have to comply with a non-distribution constraint. The term “not-for-profit” is more general and refers to the goal pursued (which is other than profit). |
| Non-profit distribution constraint | Can be introduced by law or voluntarily by an organization to both avoid profit-maximising behaviours and ensure that profit is not freely used and distributed at any stage of the organisation life for purposes other than the social ones. The non-profit distribution constraint can be operationalized in different ways: it can be applied to the profits generated or to the remunerations gained by the workers employed so as to avoid an indirect distribution of profits; it can be total - in which any distribution of profits is admitted - or partial - in which dividends on risk capital provided by members are capped at a specified rate. In some instances, the non-profit distribution constraint is also accompanied by the asset-lock constraint. |
| Non-repayable resources | Are needed to cover production and operational costs. Include public grants and subsidies; non-economic resources (deriving from voluntary work and donations); and market incomes (see Glossary term: “Market”). Public grants can be addressed to all enterprises or to social enterprises specifically. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | In addition to targeting enterprises, subsidies can target the same workers with support needs. WISEs are often created bottom-up thanks to the commitment of volunteers, sometimes with very little financial resources at their disposal. Voluntary work and donations continue in many instances to play a key role also when WISEs scale-up. |
| Private mark | A symbol attached to certain organisations or products for giving information about the values, features and/or code of governance shared. Private marks are regulated by private entities normally for self-identification purposes with a view to presenting clear signals to stakeholders. The use of private marks is normally authorized after a more or less in-depth screening and is subject to periodic checks. |
| Profit | The residual return to the entrepreneur, i.e., the difference between total sales revenue and total costs incurred by the enterprise. |
| Public procurement | The process of purchasing supplies/services by public authorities, typically via tendering or auctioning. Public procurement is a key element, which has and will most probably stimulate the growth in number and size of social enterprises. The EU regulations on public procurement which came into force in 2014 (in particular Directive 2014/24/EU) are in this respect of paramount importance, as they create new opportunities for social enterprises, including WISEs (see e.g., art. 18(2) on mandatory social clauses and art. 20 on reserved contracts). EU Directive 24/2014 also introduces a number of modalities whereby public administrations can develop a more strategic approach and enter into dialogue and cooperation with potential service-providers, including social enterprises. These include competitive procedures with negotiation (art. 29), competitive dialogue (art. 30) and innovation partnerships (art. 31). |
| Repayable resources | Include equity and debt. Equity involves raising money by selling interests in the company; debt involves borrowing money to be repaid, plus interest. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | WISEs need repayable finance to undertake investments. Depending on the country, their demand can be covered by members through equities or other financial tools, public financial institutions or special funds specifically dedicated to financing investments in public or private organization managing activities of public interest, including the integration of workers with support needs; traditional financial intermediaries, mainly banks; socially-oriented banks; national or local networks of social enterprises; private social venture capital funds, established by foundations, ethical banks or individual entrepreneurs. |
| Reserved contracts | The possibility of restricting tendering procedures and therefore reserve contract opportunities to economic operators that pursue the aim of the social and professional integration of workers with support needs.<br><br>According to the EU Directive 24/2014, art. 20, Member States may reserve the right to participate in public procurement procedures to sheltered workshops and economic operators whose main aim is the social and professional integration of disabled or disadvantaged persons or may provide for such contracts to be performed in the context of sheltered employment programmes, provided that at least 30% of the employees of those workshops, economic operators or programmes are disabled or disadvantaged workers.<br><br>Moreover, according to art. 77 of the abovementioned Directive, Member States may provide that contracting authorities may reserve the right for organisations to participate in procedures for the award of public contracts exclusively for health, social and cultural services, as far as they fulfil all of the following conditions: (a) its objective is the pursuit of a public service mission linked to the delivery of health, social and cultural services; (b) profits are reinvested with a view to achieving the organisation's objective. Where profits are distributed or redistributed, this should be based on participatory considerations; (c) the structures of management or ownership of the organisation performing the contract are based on employee |

| | |
|---|---|
| | ownership or participatory principles, or require the active participation of employees, users or stakeholders; and (d) the organisation has not been awarded a contract for the services concerned by the contracting authority concerned within the past three years. In fact, the maximum duration of the contract shall not be longer than three years. |
| Shareholder | A person or a company who owns shares in a company and therefore receives part of its profits and has the right to vote on how the company is managed. |
| Sheltered employment | According to the EU Commission Regulation 651/2014, art. 2(100), means employment in an undertaking where at least 30% of workers are workers with support needs.<br><br>Sheltered workshops emerged in many EU countries after World War II. Differently from WISEs, sheltered employment workshops normally do not pay attention to market dynamics and do not pay disadvantaged workers an income equal, or at least comparable with that of other workers. They offer starting job initiatives and/or vocational rehabilitation to people with severe disadvantages; the type of work performed by beneficiaries is very basic and conducted under special supervision. |
| Skills | “The ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems” (ref. European Qualification Framework). Skills can be defined as the relevant knowledge and experience needed to complete a task/job and can be the product of education, training, or real-life experience. Examples of skills are digital skills (such as the use of the Internet or specific software), transversal skills (such as self-discipline, enthusiasm and perseverance), soft and relational skills (communicational skills, empathy, team working), managerial skills etc. |
| Social clause | In public procurement procedures, is used to refer to social and labour standards and obligations in force at the place where the service is provided or the work carried out that contractors must fulfil to tender for public contracts. Social clauses are used as instruments for promoting decent work and a |

| | |
|---|---|
| | more social and inclusive Europe, acting as disincentives for downward pressure on wages and/or working conditions and favouring equal opportunities. |
| Social economy | Comprehends a wide set of organizations that share a number of characteristics: rather than seeing profit, they serve the members of the community and rely on democratic decision-making processes, which represent a structural procedure to control the actual pursuit of the organisation's goals. Among the organisations belonging to the social economy one can find associations, cooperatives and mutual organisations and, more recently, also foundations and social enterprises. The Charter of Principles of the Social Economy promoted by the European Standing Conference on Co-operatives, Mutual Societies, Associations and Foundations (CEP-CMAF), the EU-level representative institution for these four forms of social economy organisations, underlines the following defining features of social economy organisations:<br>▪ primacy of the individual and the social objective over capital;<br>▪ voluntary and open membership;<br>▪ democratic control by membership (does not concern foundations as they have no members);<br>▪ combination of the interests of members/users and/or the general interest;<br>▪ defence and application of the principle of solidarity and responsibility;<br>▪ autonomous management and independence from public authorities;<br>▪ most of the surpluses are used in pursuit of sustainable development objectives, services of interest to members or the general interest. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Social enterprise | According to the European Commission's Communication on the Social Business Initiative3, is an undertaking:<br>▪ whose primary objective is to achieve social impact rather than generating profit for owners and shareholders;<br>▪ which uses its surpluses mainly to achieve these social goals;<br>▪ which is managed in an accountable, transparent and innovative way, in particular by involving workers, customers and stakeholders affected by its business activity.<br>Social enterprise key features are arranged along three dimensions:<br>▪ an entrepreneurial dimension;<br>▪ a social dimension;<br>▪ a dimension relative to governance structure.<br>Provided that the pursuit of explicit social aims is prioritised through economic activities, these three dimensions can combine in different ways; it is their balanced combination that matters most when identifying the boundaries of social enterprise. |
| Social entrepreneurship | It covers a broad range of activities and initiatives, including social initiatives occurring in profit-seeking businesses, institutionalised entities explicitly pursuing a social goal, relations and practices that yield social benefits, entrepreneurial trends in non-profit organisations, and ventures developed within the public sector. Such initiatives can be undertaken by individuals, non-profit organisations, public agencies or non-profit organisations in partnership with for-profit enterprises in an attempt to balance corporate profit with a commitment to social responsibility. They are neither necessarily finalised to production, nor expected to remain stable through time. In general, social entrepreneurship is interpreted as an activity undertaken by specific individuals or groups, |

3 COM(2011) 682 final. Social Business Initiative. Creating a favourable climate for social enterprises, key stakeholders in the social economy and innovation. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52011DC0682

| | |
|---|---|
| | without referring to the organisational features and constraints (governance models, non-distribution of profits, etc.) backing the pursuit of social goals. |
| Social investment | All the targeted actions aiming to develop an economic environment that enables social enterprises to access finance. Social investment includes financial instruments (i.e., grants, loans, equity and hybrid instruments) that together with other types of support aim to maximize social impact. Traditionally, it involves several actors including supply-side (investors), demand-side (social enterprises), intermediaries and business development support organisations. The term is sometimes used more narrowly in reference to the provision of repayable finance with the aim of generating social impact, alongside an expectation of some financial return (or preservation of capital). More recently, social investment is sometimes used interchangeably with "impact investment" or "impact finance". The latter terms usually involve investors who seek a blended return based on several criteria (financial, social and environmental) and who tend to focus on financing scaling-up and replication of social enterprises. As for the use within the European Commission, it usually refers to policies designed to strengthen people's skills and capacities and support them to participate fully in employment and social life4. In more recent years, the European Commission has also been using this term to refer to the provision of repayable finance to social enterprises. |
| Social market economy | Owes its origin to the post-World War II period, when the shape of the "New Germany" was being discussed. The social market economy is based on two clearly distinct but complementary pillars: on the one hand, the enforcement of competition, and on the other, social policy measures to guarantee social justice by correcting negative outcomes and bolster social protection. |

4 This is the target of the EC Communication "Towards Social Investment for Growth and Cohesion – including implementing the European Social Fund 2014-2020" (http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=9761&langId=en) which relates to policy areas such as education, quality childcare, healthcare, training, job-search assistance and rehabilitation.

| | |
|---|---|
| Stakeholder | Introduced by Edward Freeman in the 1960s. According to its original meaning, “stakeholders” refers to “those groups without whose support the organisation would cease to exist”. Recently, the significance of stakeholders has become wider and more commonly used to mean a person or an organisation who is somehow involved in the company’s business and has an interest in its success (e.g., employees, customers, shareholders, suppliers, local communities). The term “multi-stakeholder” refers to the involvement of different stakeholders, representing different interests. A “multi-stakeholder social enterprise” refers to a social enterprise that engages different stakeholders in its governing bodies, e.g., workers, users, volunteers, donors, representatives of the local community. |
| Subsidy | A transfer of money from the government to an entity to help keep the price of a commodity or service low. The objective of subsidy is to bolster the welfare of society. In the case of WISEs, subsidies are often introduced by law and conceived as an incentive for hiring workers with support needs (for a comparison between the terms “grant” and “subsidy”, see footnote 1). |
| Surplus | Synonym of profit (i.e., the difference between total sales revenue and total costs incurred by the enterprise) but more commonly used by non-profit organisations uncomfortable using language related to the commercial sector. |
| Third Sector | Refers to organisations other than the public owned (the “State”) and the private for-profit ones (the “market”). This term emphasises the intermediary nature of the belonging organisations and includes exclusively non-profit organisations. This means that cooperatives are in most countries not included in the Third Sector. |
| Work integration social enterprise (WISE) | An institutional mechanism of supported employment that favours workers discriminated against by conventional enterprises. WISEs integrate workers with support needs into work and society through productive activity and pay them a |

| | |
|---|---|
| | pay that is equal or at least comparable to that of other workers.<br><br>To empower and take stock of the skills of workers with support needs, WISEs have developed a number of alternative strategies:<br><br>▪ creation of transitional occupations that provide work experience and on-the-job training with a view to supporting the integration of the target group in the open labour market. Training periods before recruitment by the same WISE or by other employers - only partially paid by the same WISE or by public entities - are in this case possible.<br>▪ creation of permanent jobs that are sustainable alternatives for workers disadvantaged in the open labour market.<br>▪ WISEs include two main typologies of organizations that at least comply with the above-mentioned definition: i) enterprises with a longstanding tradition in employing people with disabilities that have existed for 50+ years especially in some EU Member States (e.g., companies for people with disabilities, etc.); ii) enterprises that have emerged (often bottom-up) to facilitate the work integration of people excluded from the labour market. |
| Worker with support needs (WSN) | Can be long-term unemployed, persons with disabilities, older persons, migrants, NEETS and other groups who are more at risk to be excluded from the labour market. |
| Statistical definitions | |
| Employed person | http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Persons_employed_-_SBS |
| Employees | http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Employee_-_SBS |
| Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) | https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/sme-definition_en |

| | |
|---|---|
| Statistical unit | http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Statistical_unit |
| Self-employed person | http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Self-employed |
| Turnover | http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Turnover_STS |
| Statistical definitions | |
| Employed person | http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Persons_employed_-_SBS |
| Employees | http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Employee_-_SBS |
| Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) | https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/sme-definition_en |
| Statistical unit | http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Statistical_unit |
| Self-employed person | http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Self-employed |
| Turnover | http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Turnover_STS |

B-WISE
Skills for the future : WISEs ready!

# Annex C:
# Collection of good practices for developing digital skills in the WISEs sector*

* Drafted by Konstantina Leventi and Fabiana Scarano, EASPD.



Grant Agreement: 621509-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-EPPKA2-SSA-B

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

# 1. Smart assistive Augmented Reality work and training stations

**About the practice**
**Where**: Belgium
**Start date:** 2017
**Status**: active
**Beneficiaries**: 1. vulnerable groups (i.e., people with a (work) disability, people with a temporary or structural (work) limitation, etc.);
2. associations, companies, governments and third parties who employ,guide, train and support these groups
**Funded by**: Lichtwerk's own funding; governmental subsidy


**Contacts**

Lieven Bossuyt
Lieven.Bossuyt@lichtwerk.io

http://www.lichtwerk.io

## OVERVIEW OF THE PRACTICE

Lichtwerk's goal is to create an inclusive labour market so that people with disabilities and other individuals with a certain distance to the labour market have access to paid employment. To achieve this, Lichtwerk provides smart assistive Augmented Reality work and training stations, powered by LightGuide AR software. The solution offers “cognitive support” through the projection of digital work instructions on any work surface, providing operators with visual guidance, feedback and confirmation. This helps them to better learn new complex processes. The solution replaces written and oral work instructions with an intuitive and intelligent guidance programme that complies with the highest quality standards and makes the workspace safer and more inclusive. The assistive technologies provided by Lichtwerk can be used as permanent support, but also for (re) training and educational purposes.

Grant Agreement: 621509-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-EPPKA2-SSA-B

This publication has been co-funded by the European Commission. The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Agency and Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

This solution has so far been installed in social enterprises, conventional manufacturing companies, schools and training centres.

## THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Lichtwerk develops and implements custom-made LightGuide AR solutions in co-creation with the operators (workers with support needs) and the supporters (job coaches, tutors, occupational therapists, etc.).

The practice is delivered by following a "Think & Design – Build & Implement – Maintain & Improve" approach, developed around the three following phases:

1. **"Think & Design"**

In this preliminary phase, behavioural analysis (tasks to be performed/skills and needs of people doing the jobs), scope refinement, final scope definition and impact calculation are the key activities. The aim is to provide the organisation benefitting from the practice with transparent insight into the specific added value of smart assistive LightGuide AR work and training stations, both on people (e.g., positive impact on their well-being, autonomy, proficiency level and skills development) and on business level (e.g., positive impact on product quality and overall work floor efficiency and productivity). In this phase, all expertise of all partners and the different groups of people involved (workers with support needs or job seekers and their supporters) is brought together in order to define, refine and document the needs, approach and estimated outcomes.

2. **"Build & Implement"**

During this implementation phase, the smart assistive LightGuide AR work and training stations are configured, tested and installed at the customer's premises. The supporters get extensive training on how to create and improve existing and new digital work instructions.

3. **"Maintain & Improve"**

Once the smart assistive AR work and training stations have been installed, a lot of data is collected and analysed. This information is continuously used to improve and support workers, their supporters and enablers, the processes and the products.

## TYPE OF SKILLS DEVELOPED

The technology is used for training, retraining (e.g., after a long period of absence, illness) or for permanent support to people who are in need of support. The training stations are especially suited for industrial tasks (assembly) or logistical tasks.

## THE INNOVATIVE ASPECT

The innovation of the practice lies in its "Go Digital, Stay Human" approach, which aims at making work feasible and manageable for every employee or job seeker. Moreover, the software used collects different data to monitor the progress of the operator and capture his/her needs, thus making the implemented technology adaptable to each individual and each task.

The practice has also received many awards as recognition of its innovative aspect.

## IMPACT & SUSTAINABILITY

The assistive technology has a positive impact on the operator's well-being, minimising the stress experienced when learning or executing complex tasks. It also encourages workers to be more autonomous in their work. This technology contributes to a more inclusive labour market, as more people with disabilities can find employment in social economy or conventional enterprises. . The implementation of LightGuide in educational settings contributes to this inclusiveness since it makes the transition to the labour market easier.

In order to guarantee the sustainability of the solution, Lichtwerk makes sure that the digital work instructions and training stations offered to organisations can always be adapted to new tasks and new employees. Moreover, by remaining updated about new technologies and market changes, Lichtwerk is able to anticipate future needs and adapt its services accordingly. Lichtwerk is also looking to expand its activities by working with international partners to reach more customers and push for more diversity across the economy.

## 2. ABZ*Digi-Cafés

**About the practice**


**Where**: Vienna, Lower Austria, Burgenland, Vorarlberg
**Start date**: August 2020
**Status**: Digi cafès have been implemented and finalised, however the practice can be replicated everytime new training needs emerge
**Beneficiaries**: All ABZ*AUSTRIA employees + course participants and women in ABZ* counselling service
**Funded by**: ABZ*AUSTRIA's own funds (obtained through project assignments)

**Contacts**

Daniela Schallert
abz-austria@abz-austria.at
www.abzaustria.at

### OVERVIEW OF THE PRACTICE

ABZ*AUSTRIA is a non-profit women's organisation that has been devoted to promote the equality of men and women on the Austrian labour market ever since it was founded in 1992. The practice of ABZ*Digi-Cafés was developed in order to respond to the changed framework conditions due to the Covid-19 situation and the resulting strong focus on digitization at work. The organisation decided to launch an internal digitization training initiative in 2020 to make sure all employees were able to use the new digital tools for distance learning and distance counselling that were made available. The most important part of the training consisted in the ABZ*Digi-Cafés, during which employees could have access to specific, uncomplicated and free training and peer-to-peer exchange about digital tools. The idea was to ensure that no employee who did not yet know the tool had to learn it all by herself.

Over 80 ABZ* employees were actively involved in the Digi-Cafés and all 170 employees have access to the recordings.

## THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The desire to discuss and learn about a digital tool is drawn from everyday practice in courses or in consulting.

The frequency of use of all digital tools is surveyed within the framework of the individual projects and then communicated to the Digi-Team members.

For every training, the ABZ*Digitalisation Officer is responsible for coordinating the topics, hosts and dates as well as sending out the invitation and documentation to the ABZ*Digi-Café. Employees can then decide whether the digital tool presented is of their interest and if they want to take part in the training. During the Digi-Café, which usually lasts 30-60 minutes, digital tools are explained and first steps are tried out. All information and links to the tool presented, as well as the video recording of the input part of the ABZ*Digi-Café, are made available to all employees so that they can have access to them at any time. Moreover, via a Digi-Café-Padlet, ABZ* employees can always exchange information and ask colleagues new questions, which are answered by experienced users of the respective digital tool. After the training, the ABZ* employees use the new digital tools in the ABZ* courses and in counselling, they train the participants in the use of these tools and expand the possible uses through their applications. If further possibilities for using a digital tool are found, the employees can in turn communicate this to their colleagues via ABZ*Padlet for the Digi-Café.

All staff members give regular feedback on their use of the digital tools. If more in-depth training on a specific tool is needed in a project, the Digi Team members can provide this training.

Since 2021, the ABZ*Digi-Cafés have been held every two months.

## TYPE OF SKILLS DEVELOPED

ABZ*Digi-Café employees are trained on how to use specific digital tools. Selected examples of tools discussed so far include Trello, Edupad, Cryptpad, Scrumblr, Flinga, Mindmeister, Oncoo, Padlet, Easyfeedback and Loom.

## THE INNOVATIVE ASPECT

The innovative aspect of the ABZ*Digi-Café lies in the exchange of all employees via Zoom, which allows all colleagues in all federal states to participate. The relaxed atmosphere in the Digi-Café, which does not have to adhere to the guidelines of a course schedule, also contributes to the fact that many employees use the Digi-Cafés for further training. By making the recording available to all colleagues, those who are prevented by appointments at the time of the Digi-Café can also learn about the contents of the training. Their comments and suggestions can in turn be read later via our Digi-Café-Padlet.

In addition, as a non-profit organization, ABZ*AUSTRIA has little to no budget for large-scale training and the chosen form of peer-to-peer training is cost-effective.

## IMPACT & SUSTAINABILITY

The ability to use digital tools and to pass on how to use them has increased. Inhibition thresholds in the use of digital tools are reduced. Moreover, digital tools continue to be used in face-to-face training to bring digitalisation closer to the course participants in the projects. Also, constant care is taken to ensure that the newly acquired knowledge is maintained by all ABZ* staff.

The sustainability of the Digi-Cafés is maintained through regular use of the digital tools. The Digi-Team members always look into further possible uses of the tools, continue to gather feedback on this from colleagues and surveys the needs for further digital tools in the projects.

Securing the data and, thus, retaining the knowledge of the experts also plays an important role in sustainability. Knowledge should be quickly accessible and easy to understand in order to be used easily by each colleague.

Furthermore, since no travel is required to participate in a Digi-Café, the practice results to be sustainable also from an ecological perspective.

Lastly, due to the low cost of implementing the training program and the high added value for the employees, Digi-Cafés are also economically sustainable.

# 3. Online shadowing practise in Latvia

**About the practice**

**Where**: Riga, Latvia
**Start date**: September 2021
**Status**: active
**Beneficiaries**: New workers - both from disadvantaged and not disadvantaged groups
**Funded by**: Sonido's clients internal resources


**Contacts**
inga@sonido.lv
https://www.sonido.lv/en/

## OVERVIEW OF THE PRACTICE

Online Shadowing is a practice offered by Sonido, a call centre whose employees are knowledgeable in a wide range of subjects and industries. The aim of this solution is to practically show the specifics of the call center work practice to new workers. The latter are first offered a full understanding of the telework practice; afterwards, they are put together with more skilled workers so that they can follow their work practices through the Zoom platform. Since most of the training is based on the e-platform, it is easier for new workers to understand the practice and gain skills through observing and "shadowing" other workers. Online Shadowing is meant as the middle step to evaluating if the worker fits the position. Mostly it is one hour-long session which is also recorded to be watched afterward.

Five people have been supported through this practice until now.

## THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

When a new worker starts the job, his/her qualifications are checked and needs are identified. Based on this, Sonido develops the learning path of the person that needs to

be trained. After an initial theoretical explanation, the new worker is paired up with a more advanced one, who is chosen based on the skills level of the trainee. The two workers then connect through Zoom and the new worker starts following the other one in performing the job.

The progress of each participant is checked once the new worker starts performing tasks on his/her own.

## TYPE OF SKILLS DEVELOPED

Online shadowing allows workers to gain all the practical skills they need to perform their job.

## THE INNOVATIVE ASPECT

The innovation of this solution consists in the practice of shadowing the actions of other workers through the Zoom platform.

## IMPACT & SUSTAINABILITY

Workers are more equipped with practical learning through observation and the following of the actions of other workers.

The practice is sustainable as it does not require much extra costs for the companies that benefit from it.

# 4. Pilot MBO Praktijkleren – Roetz Bikes

**About the practice**

**Where**: Amsterdam, The Netherlands
**Start date**: 2018
**Status**: active
**Beneficiaries:** People with a distance to the labour market (e.g., persons with intellectual and/or learning disabilities; NEETs; people who have been unemployed for a long time; refugees/asylum seekers)
**Funded by**: Perspectief op Werk (Job Perspectives)


**Contacts**

info@roetz-bikes.com
www.roetz-bikes.com/nl_NL/ourstory

## OVERVIEW OF THE PRACTICE

The pilot MBO Praktijkleren (practical learning) is a collaboration between vocational institutions (MBO), conventional companies, the Municipality of Amsterdam, sheltered workshops and the Dutch Employee Insurance Agency (UWV). The aim is to offer workers with support needs the opportunity to learn professional skills at the workplace. People are provided with a very accessible way to obtain a basic qualification in growing sectors of technology, hospitality, gardening/landscaping and healthcare. The skills are recognized by MBO and rewarded with a practical skills certificate.

One of the companies offering these types of apprenticeships is Roetz Bikes, a social enterprise that focuses on participation and circular economy. In order to achieve this, the company reuses and recycles old bikes by employing and training workers with support needs. At the bike factory, people learn and work in a safe environment. The objective of the practical learning pilot is to create perspective and wage value for workers with support needs with the aim of offering them a paid position in bicycle service or beyond.

In 2020, 79 people followed a learning trajectory at Roetz Bikes.

## THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The practice is delivered as an educational trajectory. The needs of each employee are evaluated within the framework of a personal development plan on the basis of which the training at the workplace is tailored. The progress is monitored by the job coaches and the daily supervision is done by the workshop manager. Usually, a learning trajectory at Roetz Fair Factory has a duration of six months, when working 32 hours per week. This can be adjusted depending on the needs of each participant. After the trajectory, the person trained can start working at a potential employer (usually a bicycle company), where he/she has a probationary period of 2 months. During that period, an assessment of whether such work can lead to long-term employment is carried out.

## TYPE OF SKILLS DEVELOPED

Participants are trained to become experienced bicycle mechanics. Both soft and technical skills are developed.

## THE INNOVATIVE ASPECT

The pilot can be considered innovative because of the efforts put in it by all the stakeholders. The practice has been improving the employability (with assistance) of people with a greater distance to the labour market offering them the opportunity to get a practical skills certificate. Pilot MBO fixes a gap in the Dutch educational system and is able to reach a target group that otherwise would have been left out of the educational system. Because of the focus on individual needs, it offers an approachable learning method for a large and diverse group of people.

## IMPACT & SUSTAINABILITY

People with a distance to the labour market and in vulnerable positions that are taking part in the training are able to gain the confidence and the experience to actively participate in the workforce. According to a yearly impact research conducted by Roetz,

employees are very satisfied with the training and feel to be more confident and increasingly able to work independently. Thanks to the practice, their technical knowledge and productivity have increased as well.

To guarantee its sustainability in the following years, the pilot can count on funding from the initiative Perspectief op Werk (Job Perspectives). For this initiative, the Dutch ministry of Social Affairs and Employment has made 2 million EUR available per designated region. The funding contains three elements: funding for the educational aspect, funding for the support at the workplace and funding for the project management of the practice. The municipality and the Dutch Employee Insurance Agency are key partners in ensuring the funding of the project management and the educational aspect. Moreover, all the stakeholders agree on the fact that the costs of the support at the workplace should not become the sole responsibility of the employers, since this could endanger the willingness of employers to participate. Therefore, on a national level, they are working on subsidization to link these practical statement schemes to existing vocational educational funding.

# 5. Digi+

**About the practice**

**Where**: St. Pölten, Austria
**Start date**: June 2020
**Status**: active
**Beneficiaries**: workers with support needs and their supporters
**Funded by**: Arbeiterkammer (project Arbeit 4.0)


**Contacts**

Juergen Binder
digiplus@arbeitplus.at
https://werkzeugkiste.arbeitplus.at

## OVERVIEW OF THE PRACTICE

Digi+ consists of direct trainings in the field of digitalization targeting workers with support needs and their supporters. Started by Arbeit plus niederösterreich and the Ilse Arlt institute of the St. Pölten University of Applied Sciences to speed up the process of digitalization in social and integrative enterprises, the main objective of this practice is to ensure a better inclusion of people in the process of digital transformation.

Beneficiaries are trained on two main topics:

- basics of computers and smartphones (what they are, how to operate them and what can be achieved by using them);
- the Internet and how to use it safely to gain personal advantage.

So far, 54 supporters and 95 workers with support needs have benefitted from this practice.

## THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Digi+ is implemented by using the following approach:

1. The needs of each participant are evaluated by the St. Pölten University of Applied Sciences.
2. Based on the evaluation carried out, a process of adaptation is applied, either through the trainer on the training itself, or through a website which determines the level of digital qualification.
3. Trainings are delivered at the workplace. On one hand, content is delivered directly to the workers with support needs; on the other hand, their supporters are instructed on how to do that (train the trainer). A website is also being developed to support the learning process.
4. Progress of each participant is evaluated via personal tests in the trainings and quizzes on the website.

## TYPE OF SKILLS DEVELOPED

Digital skills. In particular, at the end of the training, the trainees are able to use devices and the Internet to:

1. stay in touch;
2. find jobs;
3. getting administrative things done from their home;
4. have fun in a safe way.

## THE INNOVATIVE ASPECT

The innovation of the Digi+ practice lies in the personal contact between the trainer and the worker combined with the use of the supporting digital website.

## IMPACT & SUSTAINABILITY

Thanks to this practice, beneficiaries can be more easily integrated into the labour market. Workers with support needs learn how to manage and use their e-mail addresses and how to find and use tools that can support them in finding suitable jobs.

The sustainability of the practice is guaranteed by the training of the trainers, who can support and educate new workers with support needs in the future. Furthermore, the website developed is barrier-free and can be therefore accessed and used by everyone. This will also allow replicating the practice in other contexts.

# 6. Zero-Coercion educational package


**About the practice**

**Where**: Ljubljana, Slovenia
**Start date**: 2021
**Status**: active
**Beneficiaries**: Service users, family members, mental health professionals
**Funded by**: ŠENT own funds

**Contacts**

Gregor Cotic
gregor.cotic@sent.si
www.sent.si

## OVERVIEW OF THE PRACTICE

The Zero-Coercion educational package is a complex tool aimed at supporting service users, their families and mental health professionals in overcoming mental crises in a domestic environment. The practice has a strong digital aspect, as it relies on various apps, websites, video-calling software as well as a dedicated platform to be implemented.

30 people have been supported through this practice.

## THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The practice is delivered both face-to-face and online and has been carefully designed to be as accessible as possible to all levels. It has specific exercises, skills, theory papers, presentations and other documentation tailored to various levels of comprehension. Progress of each participant is evaluated individually, through group discussions and a questionnaire.

## TYPE OF SKILLS DEVELOPED

IT skills, coping skills.

## THE INNOVATIVE ASPECT

Zero-Coercion is adaptable and can be administered face-to-face as well as online. The practice has a strong digital aspect allowing for remote learning. Having been developed with pedagogical workers, it results to be more accessible and valuable as a teaching tool. Moreover, it was conceived jointly by seven countries, making it widely applicable.

## IMPACT & SUSTAINABILITY

Zero-Coercion teaches coping skills and IT skills, thus enhancing the personal health of the target groups. It is a long-term program, designed to be immediately usable without adaptation.

The sustainability of the practice is guaranteed through cultivating peer groups that use the practice as a model, thus perpetuating the skill set without the need for further funding.

# 7. UTILDECO

**About the practice**


**Where**: Uricani village, Iasi county, Miroslava commune1, Romania
**Start date**: 2008
**Status**: active
**Beneficiaries**: 1. Persons with disabilities 2. companies with more than 50 employees that, according to ongoing legislation, have to employ people with disabilities in a percentage of at least 4% of the total number of employees
**Funded by**: agreements signed with companies from all over Romania

**Contacts**

comenzi@utildeco.ro
www.utildeco.ro

## OVERVIEW OF THE PRACTICE

UTILDECO is an authorized shelter unit and work integration social enterprise founded by the Alaturi de Voi (ADV) Romania Foundation in 2002. The practice was developed as a way to create and maintain workplaces for people with disabilities and from other groups at risk, especially young people who had left the system of child protection.

UTILDECO has been recognized by the European Commission as a best practice and has also won the award EY Social Entrepreneur of the Year in 2016.

So far, more than 1,000 persons from groups at risk, including people with disabilities, benefitted from professional orientation and capacity building.

[1] A commune (comună in Romanian) is the lowest level of administrative subdivision in Romania. The country does have 2,686 communes. The commune is the rural subdivision of a county, while urban areas, such as towns and cities within a county, are given the status of city or municipality.

## THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

UTILDECO offers different types of services depending on the target group that benefits from the practice.

### 1. Services addressing people with disabilities

UTILDECO supports persons with disabilities from Iasi county through a free integrated package of social and employment services, all in one place, according to the principle of “one-stop-shop”. The package includes:

- Internship within the UTILDECO Work Integration Social Enterprise, owned by ADV Romania, during which people can acquire basic skills in fields such as: manual book-binding, archiving, tailoring, printing;
- Professional capacity building acknowledged on the labour market in the field of manual book-binding and archiving.

The offer is personalized in accordance to the needs and profile of the customers, which are evaluated through: a system of professional counselling and orientation; a job coaching service; the use of the CASPER testing battery (a complex instrument for the assessment of people with disabilities allowing the creation of an “occupational profile” and identifying the best suitable job); and the testing with the CAS++ battery (a software for psychological testing).

Progress of participants is assessed by looking at: the satisfaction degree of the client with respect to the products/services they procured; the adaptability to the needs of the final beneficiary; the number of workplaces available for the employment of persons with disabilities; and the period for maintaining the employers within the company, mainly of persons with disabilities.

### 2. Services for companies

UTILDECO offers companies from Iasi county a specialized package of services and the possibility to procure goods and services based on Law 193/2020, which modifies and completes Law 448/2006 on the protection and promotion of the rights of people with disabilities. Some of the services offered are:

- Work protection equipment;
- Document archiving and storage;
- Bio-degradable packing;

- Digital printing services;
- Interior/exterior polystyrene decorations;
- Event organizing;
- Recruitment of persons with disabilities;
- Health and safety matters.

The managers of UTILDECO maintain permanent contact with the clients in order to make sure the final beneficiary is satisfied with the goods/services received.

### 3. Online services accessible at national level

Through the www.utildeco.ro site, UTILDECO offers at national level the possibility to order and procure different products/services from the available list of goods.

## TYPE OF SKILLS DEVELOPED

Participants who benefit from the practice are able to discover and develop their native as well as professional skills that can support them in finding a job in the labour market. In particular, people receive training and develop skills in the field of archiving (including digitization of archived documents) or manual binder, tailoring and digital printing.

## THE INNOVATIVE ASPECT

UTILDECO is the only service of this type in Romania offering an integrated package of services adapted to the needs of people with disabilities.

The intervention package uses two innovative tools:

a) a job matching service;
b) a job coaching service - helping people to maintain the job and avoid the failure in employment.

## IMPACT & SUSTAINABILITY

Thanks to the job matching and job coaching services, UTILDECO has been supporting people - especially people who have not completed their studies, have no qualifications and have never worked - in developing valuable skills and finding and maintaining employment in social enterprises or the open labour market.

The sustainability of UTILDECO is guaranteed by its capacity to reinvent, adapt and adjust the practice itself to customers' demands.

# 8. The Kennisalliantie inclusie en Technologie (Knowledge Alliance Inclusion and Technology: KIT)

**About the practice**

**Where**: Amsterdam, The Netherlands
**Start date**: 2017
**Status**: active
**Beneficiaries**: People with mental, physical or psychological disabilities
**Funded by**: pilots are funded by different stakeholders depending on where the pilots take place


**Contact**

https://inclusievetechnologie.nl/

## OVERVIEW OF THE PRACTICE

The KIT is a platform in the field of inclusive technology that was founded in 2017. It is a partnership between TNO (The Dutch organization for applied scientific Research), Cedris (the national association for an inclusive labour market and sheltered workshops) and SBCM (the center of knowledge and funds for social employment). The objective of KIT is to help as many people with mental, physical or psychological disabilities as possible to find and keep suitable and sustainable job by using technology in the broadest sense of the word.

To test inclusive technology in the workplace, multiple pilots have been developed so far with approximately 20 participants in each of them. However, the group of people potentially benefitting from the innovation tested in the pilot can be bigger.

## THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The KIT connects stakeholders and serves as a catalyst to initiate, supervise and evaluate research and experiments and share this knowledge with other sectors. The following ones are examples of some of the pilots that have been carried out so far:

- Cobots at UW Utrecht: In this pilot, the KIT investigated whether the production of solar panels at the sheltered workshop UW Utrecht could be made less labour intensive with the use of technology. In this case, it was examined whether a collaborative robot (cobot) could take over repetitive tasks since this often places a great deal of physical strain on workers.
- Smart beamer at Amfors: In the pilot at Amfors, the Operator Support System (OSS) was tested to assist step by step through the assembly system employees with cognitive disabilities. The system projects the work instructions onto the workplace via a smart beamer. As a result, workers know exactly what to do and in which order.
- Operator Support System at Senzer: workers with support needs In the pilot the OSS, a technology supporting employees in performing assembly tasks was tested. Work instructions were projected onto the workplace in the right order and time. Tailored to the work and the needs of the worker, the OSS can provide feedback in case of incorrect actions and is equipped with a pick-to-light module (a system assisting working to pick items accurately).
- Smart beamer at Inclusief Groep: In this pilot, a Smart beamer is tested. Employees are actively supported by a smart projection system through all production steps. The beamer indicates with arrows and/or images which action the workers has to take and which tools or material are needed. With the use of the beamer one worker can successively carry out multiple steps at once. The beamer is also programmed to check the quality and quantity of the products.

In the individual pilots, the needs of each worker are evaluated so that the technology can be tailored on the basis of this assessment.

## TYPE OF SKILLS DEVELOPED

Workers benefitting from this practice are able to develop skills in the technological field which help them to find more and more suitable job opportunities.

## THE INNOVATIVE ASPECT

The pilots from KIT can be considered particularly innovative because they support the development of skills by means of digitalization and technology.

## IMPACT & SUSTAINABILITY

The practice has a direct impact on the employability of workers with support needs, who increase their confidence and independence at work. The different pilots presented different results regarding the development of the skills. For instance, the Amfors pilot showed that employees using OSS can handle more and more complex tasks with less personal guidance than employees not using OSS.  At UW Utrecht, the pilot revealed that the participants became more involved at the workplace and started to think about how their workplace could be improved.

To guarantee the sustainability of the practice, the current government and the UWV are conducting a trail in which companies can apply for subsidies for innovative improvements.

# 9. Digital Workplace

**About the practice**

**Where**: Spain
**Start date**: November 2019
**Status**: active
**Beneficiaries**: ILUNION Social Business Group and Fundación ONCE's employees
**Funded by**: ILUNION Social Business Group's own funds


**Contacts**

Oscar da Pena
odapena@ilunion.com
https://www.ilunion.com/en

## OVERVIEW OF THE PRACTICE

Digital WorkPlace is a digital and cultural transformation project stemming from the organization's commitment to technological evolution, digitalization and transformation with a person-centred approach. The initiative is based on three main pillars - individual and collective productivity and agile methodology – and has four main objectives: increasing personal efficiency and productivity; promoting teamwork through collaborative platforms; flexibilizing the access to information; digitalizing and automatizing data, while ensuring accessibility.

Employees are provided with an intuitive web portal that offers all the reference audio-visual materials, as well as the recordings of online training sessions. In order to foster the implementation of the initiative, Digital WorkPlace has introduced the figure of the "Champions", digital ambassadors with the mission to guide workers in the digital transformation process. The project has also fostered the development of digital skills with Microsoft 365 tools through online training.

So far, over 15 webinars have been delivered, with 10.000 participants/views.

## THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The practice takes the form of events, webinars and workshops delivered to workers through Microsoft Teams, a web portal on SharePoint and a user Community on Yammer.

Contents are shaped taking into account the needs of all the participants, as well as the information gathered through the Champions, surveys and forms. Accessibility and usability of contents and tools are key aspects that are taken into account in the design of the trainings.

Progress of participants are evaluated through a follow-up on the evolution of the project implementation through monthly analysis of KPIs and comparison with the initial assessment.

## TYPE OF SKILLS DEVELOPED

Participants acquire digital skills and knowledge on new digitalisation processes that can help improving workers' productivity.

## THE INNOVATIVE ASPECT

Digital Workplace is an innovative practice as it is based on an online training model, complemented by a web portal, which encourages and allows all workers to participate in a flexible way (synchronous or asynchronous learning). A collaborative space was created on YAMMER for participants to share results and news, as well as asking questions, etc. The project has allowed the full implementation of Microsoft technology and, consequently, the digitalization of many processes.

## IMPACT & SUSTAINABILITY

Although the project was launched in November 2019, the initial assessment and gathering of requirements was being carried out when the Covid-19 pandemic broke out. The lockdown boosted digitalization and made this project even more relevant and necessary, especially for all those workers in non-essential activities who were working from home. Training sessions started in April 2020 and since then indicators have been improving: all the webinars got over 10,000 participants/views on the web portal; over 12 million documents were transferred to OneDrive from network drives; nearly 6,000 sites were created on SharePoint; the use of Microsoft Teams as a collaboration and communication tool was consolidated.

The sustainability of the practice is guaranteed by the figure of the Champions. As members of the staff, they are a closer reference for workers. They are also in charge of the promotion and follow-up of the project and its results in their companies, as well as for the identification of needs, issues and concerns.

# 10. ENTELIS+ Digital Accessibility


**About the practice**

**Where**: Greece
**Start date**: July 2021
**Status**: active
**Beneficiaries**: Persons with intellectual disabilities, people of third age as well as professionals and service providers
**Funded by**: ERASMUS +

**Contacts**

research.development@eeamargarita.gr
https://entelisplus.entelis.net/

## OVERVIEW OF THE PRACTICE

ENTELIS+ is a project co-founded by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ Key Action 3 “Support for policy development and cooperation” and its consortium is made up of 10 experienced European partners with complementary skills and knowledge. Thanks to this project, people with intellectual disability are trained in accessibility and digital accessibility through an easy-to-read adaptation of a training manual developed by ENTELIS+ partners. The participants learn about accessibility and why it is useful for all people - regardless of age, disability, gender or other reasons - to receive accessible services. Additionally, the beneficiaries are trained into altering existing resources into an accessible form. This practice enhances their digital skills and trains them into being more inclusive, in order to promote accessibility and assist more people. Lastly, the beneficiaries are trained into using a roadmap that will help them reach the ultimate goal, meaning having access to information and places and thus, participating equally in the society.

## THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Prior to the training, a focus group about accessibility is organized in order to evaluate the needs of the participants and adapt the training accordingly (e.g., easy-to-read version of PowerPoint presentations, voice over in Greek, alt-texts in images, digital games, simulation games). After the training, a questionnaire and an interview are organised with the participants and the lead trainer in order to evaluate their knowledge and skills relevant to digital accessibility.

This plan is based on ENTELIS+ manual, which provides the necessary theoretical knowledge and tips for its practical implementation. In collaboration with the learners, the trainer co-produces the training tools that will make the information accessible to them.

The evaluation of beneficiaries' progress is carried out through practice, exercises and the creation of accessible resources. The trainers also fill a trainer's logbook in order to track the progress, difficulties and strong points of the learners they support and, consequently, improve the accessibility of the resources and focus on the educational goals that need more practice.

## TYPE OF SKILLS DEVELOPED

ENTELIS+ training activities focused on the development of the digital skills of persons with disabilities and older people in order to make them able to participate in the digital society. At the same time, ENTELIS+ trained important key actors that are in charge of designing and implementing facilitating frameworks (public authorities and service providers).

## THE INNOVATIVE ASPECT

Partners in this ENTELIS+ consortium have rich experience in digital accessibility and digital skills and have been innovating in the sector of disability and technology for many years. This expertise is materialized in the innovative methods and practices that promote inclusive education as well as in the capacity to foster digital skills and competences of digitally excluded groups.

In particular, ENTELIS+ was able to:

› Raise awareness about the importance of accessibility as an enabler for inclusive learning and teaching through multiple training and events in Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Italy and Sweden.

› Develop the digital skills of persons with disabilities and older people to participate in the digital society in the above mentioned countries. More than 90 total people participated in ENTELIS+ training events.

› Build the capacity of key actors in charge of designing and implementing facilitating frameworks (public authorities and service providers).

## IMPACT & SUSTAINABILITY

ENTELIS+ generated impact by raising awareness about the importance of accessibility as an enabler for inclusive learning and teaching through multiple training and events in 7 countries (Greece, Austria, Ireland, Italy, Cyprus, Sweden and Belgium). During the trainings offered by the project, participants strengthened their skills regarding accessibility, learned more about their rights - specifically about their right on accessibility and how this is protected by EU policies and national laws - and discovered existing resources in order to make different digital services and environments more accessible.

The sustainability of the project is ensured through the links and cooperations established with other organizations and professionals that support the idea of empowering people with disabilities and older adults through accessibility digital skills as a way to overcome the digital divide and open a wide range of social, career development and job market opportunities for these user groups at risk of exclusion. ENTELIS+ materials will be also made available to those interested in order to guarantee continuous training of service users and their families on digital accessibility.

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



B-WISE
Skills for the future : WISEs ready!

*Report on trends and challenges for work integration social enterprises (WISEs) in Europe. Current situation of skills gaps, especially in the digital area.*

https://www.bwiseproject.eu