

On Thursday, October 14<sup>th</sup>, the 30 partners of the B-WISE project gathered in Brussels for the launching event of the project, organised by [EASPD](#) in conjunction with its [25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference](#) and in the framework of [ENSIE 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary](#). This event focused on the “Digital skills needs for WISEs of tomorrow” and set up the scene for the work that will be done during the project, underlining the current difficulties faced by WISEs and why the project is needed to support WISEs development and transitions.

Luk Zelderloo, from [EASPD](#), opened the event reminding the goal of the project: bridge the gap for people with support needs so they can take advantage of the new digital opportunities by developing a European strategy to address skills needs, in particular regarding digital skills, in the Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs) sector.

Hubert Gambis, Deputy Director-General DG GROW - Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs launched the event by situating the B-WISE project in the latest EU policy initiatives, indeed, the project results are crucial for the Pact for Skills and the Industrial Strategy for proximity and social economy. He reaffirmed that the WISEs sector will be supported by the European Commission in the next years through the Social Economy Action Plan and the Industrial Strategy so it can flourish and ensure that every member of its staff has the skills needed to face the digital and the green transition.

He was followed by two opening remarks, first from Maya Doneva, from EASPD, who underlined the challenges faced by WISEs especially in the area of digital skills. Second from Karel Vanderpoorten, from DG GROW, who explained that the task of the B-WISE project is to strengthen skills, with particular attention to digital skills for all the workers in WISEs from people in integration to enablers and support staff as those skills are and will be more and more crucial on the labour market.

Two panels then succeeded. The first one, moderated by Patrizia Bussi from ENSIE which focused on WISEs innovation and WISEs in Europe with the interventions of Martina Paterniti from [ENSIE](#) and Ilda Curti from [Idee in Rete](#). Martina Paterniti explained that innovation is at the core of WISEs, for example through its participation principle, she also underlined the barriers faced by WISEs to benefit fully from the digital transition, such as high costs or the lack of information. Ilda Curti presented the Italian WISE ecosystem, linked with the evolution of the legislative framework, the issues it faced, and the innovation developed from the 80s to today.

The third intervention in this panel was made by Giulia Galera from [EURICSE](#) who presented the first findings on the state of play for WISEs in the EU, made in the framework of the B-WISE project. After studying the WISEs ecosystems in 13 countries (14 others will follow soon), EURICSE started drawing common characteristics among WISEs in Europe as well as creating categories concerning the legal framework for WISEs, which depends on national legislation. You will soon be able to learn more about those findings!

The second panel was moderated by Timothy Ghilain from EASPD and focused on drivers and barriers to digitalisation. The four speakers shared their on-the-ground experiences on digitalisation and challenges faced by WISEs. Lieven Bossuyt from [Lichtwerk](#), Belgium, started by highlighting that WISEs will face difficulties with the digital transition as the future jobs will be more complex and need more and more digital skills. Therefore, actions must be taken now, and the B-WISE project is on point to ensure people with support needs are able to develop the right skills. Ancuta Vamesu from [Rise Romania](#) reminded that often, WISEs are early adopters in technology as it is a way to lower costs and WISEs need to be on the top of the latest technologies to compete with other companies. However, this could also be expensive, and she underlined that in Romania, social enterprises do not have access to government digital support for SMEs because of their legal forms. Angela Achitei from [Fundatia ADV Romania](#) reminded that hiring people with support needs is an investment in training and comes, for the enterprises, with higher costs and loss of competitiveness. This is why they need to be supported through national policies, which, as said by Ancuta Vamesu, is not the case in Romania. The last speaker of this panel, Panagiotis Anastassopoulos from [EfVET](#), underlined that to participate in the digital transition, the core issue is a change in mentality in order to create some changes in organisations and in the ecosystems.

To close the event, Konstantina Leventi, from EASPD presented B-WISE project and its goals and Patrizia Bussi from ENSIE wrapped up the event following a few questions over the issue of technology as an asset or as a risk for workers.

Learn more about the B-WISE project: <http://www.bwiseproject.eu/>