

Introducing the WISE Project

The **WISE project** is dedicated to **empowering refugee women from Ukraine** who have fled the war and are now living in Italy and Bulgaria, by supporting their socio-economic inclusion and overall well-being. Through four Holistic Support Centres (HSCs) in Sofia, Milan, Rome, and Turin, WISE combines mental health and psychosocial support with tailored employment services. A contextualised **AI tool helps participants identify their skills, explore career paths, and access opportunities, supporting a smoother integration into the workforce and society.**

Running **from April 2025 to October 2026**, WISE aims to reach 200 employable refugee women fleeing the war in Ukraine and their dependents, providing comprehensive support and guidance during this critical period.

Project Partners: Animus Association Foundation (AAF), Centro PENC Antropologia e Psicologia Geoclinica, EARLALL, Fondazione IRC Italia, Laboratorio di Gruppoanalisi (LdG), and Skillab.

In this issue:

- Project progress and updates
- Events participation
- Capacity-building activities

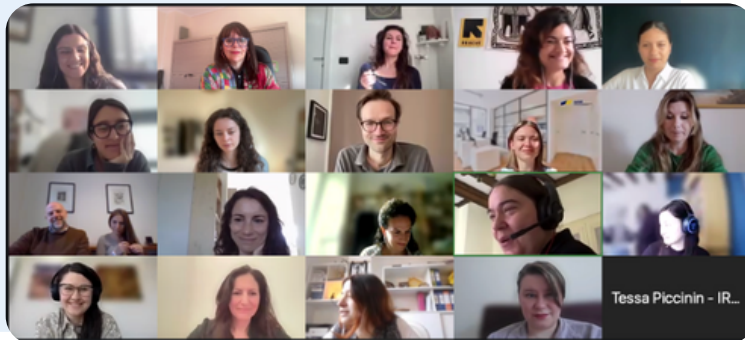
The Partners



Project Kick-Off meeting

On 28 April 2025, the international consortium of partners gathered online to launch the WISE project (Supporting Ukrainian (UA) Refugee Women's Socio-Economic Integration and Wellbeing), funded by the European Social Fund Agency. The meeting was hosted by the Fondazione International Rescue Committee Italia ETS (IRC).

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Start-Up meeting in Milan (Italy)

WISE held its inaugural programme launch meeting on 9–10 June 2025 in Milan, hosted by the International Rescue Committee (IRC). The project introduced an innovative social model that combines mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) with technology-driven employment services, creating a comprehensive support system tailored to the specific needs of refugee women displaced by the war in Ukraine.



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Project assessment phase

WISE partners launched the needs assessment phase in Sofia, Bulgaria, to ensure that the Holistic Support Centre (HSC) model and all WISE activities are grounded in the actual needs, experiences and challenges of women refugees from Ukraine affected by the war.

As part of this phase, partners conducted Key Informant Interviews (KII) with relevant stakeholders and service providers, together with direct consultations with refugee women. The insights gathered will support the development of the HSC model and guide the contextualisation of the AI-powered skills assessment tool.

In June 2025, the Animus Association Foundation organised the first focus group discussion with the target group in Sofia. Participants shared experiences regarding barriers to employment, including limited language proficiency, difficulties with recognition of qualifications, childcare responsibilities, informal or insecure work arrangements, and discrimination. Despite these obstacles, the women demonstrated strong motivation, resilience, and diverse professional backgrounds.

These findings confirmed the importance of providing integrated psychosocial, social, and employment support through the future HSCs, ensuring that women can access tailored guidance, build confidence, and pursue meaningful opportunities.





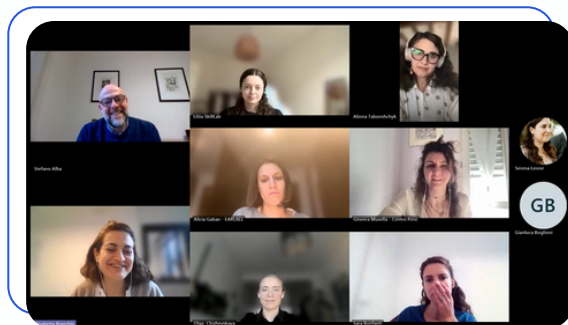
WISE project at the European Week of Regions and Cities 2025

WISE was showcased at the European Week of Regions and Cities 2025, which brought together over 6,500 participants from across Europe. Represented by EARLALL, the project was featured at the association's stand in Brussels on 14–15 October, offering an excellent opportunity to disseminate WISE's goals, present the idea of the Holistic Support Centre model, and raise awareness about the project's mission.

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Autumn Steering Committee Meeting

The Steering Committee of the WISE project met online on 18 November, bringing together all partners to review progress across work packages and plan the next stages of implementation. The meeting served as an important moment to align activities, share updates, and ensure coordinated delivery of upcoming tasks.



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Staff Training on the AI SkillLab Tool

In October, WISE partners organised two capacity-building trainings in Milan and Sofia, delivered by SkillLab for staff from the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the Animus Association Foundation (AAF). The sessions strengthened frontline staff's ability to use SkillLab's AI-powered tool to support refugee women from Ukraine in identifying their skills, exploring career pathways, and accessing suitable employment opportunities.

Participants learned how to work with the user application, counsellor and administrator portals, as well as how to develop learning content and understand labour-market needs.

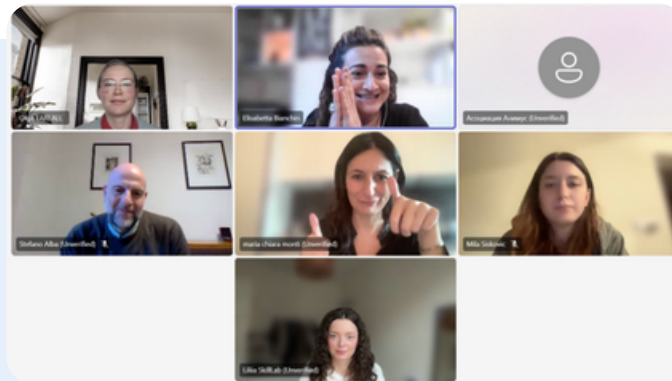


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WISE Partner Coordination Meeting

On 10 December 2025, an online coordination meeting of the WISE project took place focused on project implementation updates with particular emphasis on activities carried out in Italy and Bulgaria. The coordination meeting further discussed the use and integration of the SkillLab Tool, communication targets and upcoming exchange visits.

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Staff Training on Human Trafficking and Labour Exploitation

The WISE consortium took part in the Staff training on Human Trafficking and Labour Exploitation, coordinated by the Animus Association Foundation in Bulgaria. This training explained the definition of trafficking and how it affects refugee women. Concluding with challenges and methods of prevention by presenting empowering examples such as Safe Hut and other safe spaces for women.



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