

Pilot Evaluation Report on the Effectiveness of the ERACIS model

Arad, Romania

Project: ECSILI – Empowering Communities: A Local Action Plan for Social Inclusion and Labor Integration of Refugees
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The evaluation also acknowledges the contribution of the European Social Network, the external expert and the ECSILI consortium partners to the development of the evaluation framework and the mutual learning process.

Acronyms

AJOFM - Arad County Agency for Employment

DAS Arad - Social Care Directorate Arad

ECSILI - Empowering Communities: A Local Action Plan for Social Inclusion and Labor Integration of Refugees

ERACIS - Andalusian Regional Strategy for Social Inclusion

ESF+ - European Social Fund Plus

ESN - European Social Network

FGD - Focus Group Discussion

IAP - Individualized Action Plan

IIWG - Inter-Institutional Working Group

KPI - Key Performance Indicator

LAP - Local Action Plan

MEF - Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

NGO - Non-Governmental Organization

UUR - Union of Ukrainians in Romania



1. Executive Summary

The ECSILI pilot in Arad tested a coordinated, case-managed approach to the social and labour market inclusion of Ukrainian refugees. The model was implemented by the Social Care Directorate of Arad (DAS Arad) with the involvement of the following partner organisations: AJOFM - Arad County Agency for Employment, Centrul De Vis – Dream Centre for Refugees and UUR - Union of Ukrainians in Romania, Arad branch.

The pilot combined individualised case management, career counselling, skills profiling, employment-oriented activities, psychosocial support and community-based integration activities. The Local Action Plan provided the operational framework for cooperation between institutions, referral pathways and individual support through Individual Action Plans (IAPs).

By May 2026, 50 Individual Action Plans had been developed and at the end of the project Among those who found a job during the project, 32 people said the project helped (from partially to significantly). Three people left the project before completing it. In the open-ended question, citing their return to Ukraine was the main reason.

The implementation also generated a number of complementary activities aimed at strengthening participants' employability, confidence, language skills, psychosocial well-being and social connections. These included Romanian language classes, art and percussion therapy sessions, community celebrations and an information session with the employment office.

The available evidence indicates that the pilot succeeded in establishing an operational model of individualised and coordinated support. However, implementation highlighted areas for improvement such as the need for a better allocation of resources for improving the partners' contribution to the project and expanding the network of participants. Key obstacles for refugees include legal and status insecurity, lack of available qualified employment in the community.

2. Introduction

The ECSILI – Empowering Communities: A Local Action Plan for Social Inclusion and Labor Integration of Refugees project is funded under the ESF+ Social Innovation+ Initiative call "Innovative Approaches to Mitigate the Societal Consequences of Russia's War of Aggression Against Ukraine within EU countries". The project started on 1 May 2025 and has a duration of 18 months, ending on 1 November 2026.

The project brings together partners from Belgium, Romania, Spain, the Netherlands (until M14 of the project) and Poland and is coordinated by the European Social Network. In Arad,



the Social Care Directorate Arad is responsible for implementing the local pilot. The partner organizations are the following:

1. European Social Network (Coordinator) a European non-governmental and non-profit organisation coordinating the project (Belgium).
2. Andalusian Regional Ministry of Social Inclusion, Youth, Families and Equality (CISJUF) a regional public authority from Spain.
3. SkillLab B.V., a Dutch research and education institution and private company whose involvement lasted through M1 to M14 of the project (The Netherlands)
4. The City of Warsaw, a local public authority from Poland represented by Warsaw Family Support Center.
5. Social Care Directorate Arad (DAS Arad) a local public authority from Romania.

This project aimed to adapt and implement in Warsaw, and Arad the Andalusian [ERACIS model](#), which focuses on active and social inclusion through locally coordinated interventions, and which has been successfully implemented in Andalusia, Spain for the past six years. Based on this, this project aimed to create a new programme that promotes the integration of Ukrainian refugees in Warsaw, Poland and Arad, Romania.

The Andalusian strategy, known as ERACIS, was launched by the regional government of Andalusia in 2018 and has since been funded by the European Social Fund. The strategy focuses on designing and implementing local programs that promote the social and active inclusion of at-risk populations in disadvantaged areas, several of them with migration levels reaching 30 to 35%. The ECSILI project involved the transfer of the Andalusian model pillars to the target cities together with the implementation of a skills profiling app. Key activities included the development of a local action plan in Warsaw and Arad covering labour market integration, community support, and social inclusion of Ukrainian refugees. This was translated into the creation of a new programme consisting of a case manager role, an accessible directory of local services, and a multilingual online tool for skills profiling to help refugees find suitable jobs and navigate local services. The main objective was to foster the social and labour market integration of Ukrainian refugees by using key features of the ERACIS strategy to address refugees' employability and promote their inclusion in the community. these principles are translated into an approach.

The ECSILI project translated this overall ambition into specific objectives aimed at improving the way refugees and migrants are supported at the local level, with particular attention to individualised support, access to employment and services, and stronger cooperation between relevant institutions and organisations.



The Arad pilot was not intended to reproduce the Andalusian model mechanically. Rather, it sought to adapt its core principles to the local institutional, social and labour market context and implement it under WP3 of the project – “Piloting, Monitoring and Evaluating the innovative refugee support model” –. This meant working through existing local services and partnerships and developing a Local Action Plan that reflected the needs identified among Ukrainian refugees in Arad.

The local intervention was based on the understanding that employment and social inclusion are interconnected. Participants could therefore receive different combinations of case management, employment counselling, language support, administrative assistance, psychological or motivational support, community activities and referrals, depending on their individual circumstances.

This integrated perspective is particularly relevant to the Arad context as the baseline survey showed that employment-related challenges were closely connected to language, information, and administrative issues, while social inclusion was affected by opportunities for interaction, support networks, and access to local services.

The [Local Action Plan](#) was consequently developed as a framework for coordinated action rather than as a list of isolated activities.

The implementation of the ECSILI Local Action Plan in Arad relied on the involvement of a network of local stakeholders whose complementary expertise and resources supported the social inclusion and labour market integration of Ukrainian refugees. The following section outlines the main partners involved in the local intervention and describes their respective roles and contributions to the implementation of the Local Action Plan.

Social Care Directorate of Arad (DAS Arad) acted as the main local coordinating institution, leading the development and implementation of the Local Action Plan. Its role included providing individualised support and case management to Ukrainian refugees, facilitating access to social and employment-related services, coordinating referrals, and ensuring cooperation among the local stakeholders involved in the integration process.

Arad County Agency for Employment (AJOFM Arad) contributed primarily to the labour market integration component of the Local Action Plan. Its role focused on providing refugees with information and guidance on the Romanian labour market, employment opportunities, workers’ rights and responsibilities, recruitment procedures, and available employment support measures, while also contributing to strengthening links with employers.

Centrul de Vis Association contributed as a community-based partner, supporting the outreach and engagement of Ukrainian refugees and facilitating their participation in activities

designed to promote social and professional integration. The organisation also contributed to strengthening access to information, community support and local resources, complementing the services provided by public institutions.

Union of Ukrainians in Romania – Arad Branch (UUR Arad) played an important role as a bridge between the project and the Ukrainian refugee community. Its contribution included facilitating communication with refugees, supporting the identification and understanding of their needs, promoting participation in ECSILI activities, and helping ensure that information and support were accessible and responsive to the linguistic and cultural context of the Ukrainian community.

3. Evaluation Purpose

The objective of the pilot evaluation report is to assess and present the results of the eight-month pilot phase, drawing on the monitoring data and other evidence collected during implementation.¹ The evaluation aimed to assess the achievements of the ECSILI project and its contribution to the **labour market integration, social integration, and well-being** of Ukrainian refugee beneficiaries in Arad. The evaluation included the perspectives and experiences of the project's target group, project staff, and local stakeholders. Questions used in the surveys, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and consultations were informed by the OECD-DAC criteria of **effectiveness** and **sustainability**. The evaluation combined qualitative and quantitative evidence, including Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), such as employment-related outcomes, as well as evidence concerning beneficiaries' social integration and well-being. Additionally, it included an assessment of the development of inter-institutional cooperation and the case management model.

The evaluation focuses on:

- the effectiveness of the coordinated case-management model;
- the individualisation of employment and integration pathways;
- cooperation between municipal services and external stakeholders;
- access to employment and employment-related support;
- participants' social inclusion and well-being;
- sustainability and potential replicability of the approach.

¹ ESF+ Social Innovation+ Initiative, Grant Agreement, pp. 41-42.

It assessed the extent to which the pilot achieved its intended objectives and outcomes, identifying its achievements, challenges, and areas for improvement. The key findings and recommendations will inform the updating of the ERACIS framework model developed under Work Package 2 (WP2) into an Updated Framework Model.²

4. Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation report was developed in August 2026 by the project staff, with support of the External Expert and the European Social Network (ESN). Monitoring and data collection were carried out both in person and remotely using a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to ensure a comprehensive assessment of the pilot's outcomes and processes.

Monitoring and Evaluation Matrix: monitoring data, indicators

The monitoring and evaluation framework for Arad is based on the MEF Matrix, which defines the specific objectives, outputs, indicators, targets, and corresponding sources of verification for the local pilot. The monitoring system is designed to capture both quantitative progress and qualitative feedback from beneficiaries, project staff, and relevant stakeholders.

The main monitoring indicators cover two overarching specific objectives: improved labour market integration (SO1) and improved social integration and well-being of beneficiaries (SO2). For labour market integration, monitoring focuses on the number of beneficiaries who obtain employment and confirm that the project support contributed to their employment. For social integration and well-being, the framework measures whether most beneficiaries perceive an improvement because of the support received.

At output level, monitoring covers the implementation of the coordinated case-management system, the use of the SkillLab's digital profiling tool, stakeholder cooperation, access to employment, language support and measures supporting social inclusion and emotional well-being.

Key quantitative indicators include:

- participation of at least 50 beneficiaries in the Joint Pilot Launch and Activation Event;
- delivery of diagnostic profiling and counselling to at least 50 beneficiaries;
- organization of six Inter-Institutional Working Group (IIWG) meetings;
- achievement of a 100% IIWG partners' attendance rate;

² Ibid.

- delivery of capacity-building activities to at least 20 professionals;
- provision of vocational counselling and legal support to at least 50 beneficiaries;
- provision of flexible language modules to at least 15 beneficiaries;
- provision of psychosocial support and childcare referrals, with a target of at least 10 referrals.

In addition, the monitoring framework includes satisfaction and qualitative indicators. A target of 70% satisfaction is established for several categories, including staff satisfaction with the new case-managed system, staff satisfaction with the SkillLab tool, stakeholder satisfaction, participant satisfaction with capacity-building activities, and satisfaction related to employment-oriented interventions.

Qualitative Method

a) Review of Project Documentation

During the report writing process, the following project documentations were reviewed: Grant Agreement; Local Action Plans; Monitoring and Evaluation Matrix; Monitoring and Evaluation Framework Document; Project Records (attendance sheets, registration forms); and Evaluation Forms.

b) Semi-structured Interviews with Refugees

During the study visit to Arad between **7 and 9 April 2026**, four interviews were conducted with 4 refugee participants by the External Expert and the European Social Network (ESN). The semi-structured interview questions were developed by the External Expert and were reviewed by the Andalusian team and the European Social Network (ESN).

The semi-structured interviews provided valuable qualitative evidence on the implementation of the project from the perspectives of both refugee participants and case managers. The findings highlight the potential of the ECSILI approach to strengthen refugees' confidence, access to support and labour market orientation, while also identifying important implementation challenges related to follow-up, individualized case management, communication and the internal organization of the support process.

c) Semi-structured Interviews with Project Staff

During the study visit, four interviews were conducted with case managers from Arad Social Care Directorate by the External Expert and ESN. On July 8, 10, 14, and 22, 2026, additional interviews with DAS Arad Case Managers, Project Manager, the Director of DAS Arad, and members of the Social Work Team were conducted by the External Expert via the Zoom



platform. The semi-structured interview questions were developed by the External Expert and were reviewed by the Andalusian team and the European Social Network (ESN).

d) Focus Group Discussion with Refugees

The focus group, conducted on 9 July 2026 with 14 refugee participants (10 women and 4 men, aged 19–56), confirmed that participants initially faced significant barriers related to Romanian language skills, limited knowledge of local services, access to employment, and social isolation.

The focus group discussion was facilitated by Prof. Mihaela Gavrilă-Ardelean, PhD, who acted as moderator and guided the discussion throughout the session. Her role was to facilitate an open and inclusive dialogue, encourage participants to share their experiences and perspectives, and ensure that all relevant topics related to the implementation of the ECSILI project and the Local Action Plan were addressed.

The ECSILI intervention was perceived as relevant and beneficial, with participants particularly valuing:

- Romanian language courses, which improved communication skills and confidence in everyday situations;
- individualised case management, including personalized action plans, practical guidance and support in navigating institutions and administrative procedures;
- social, cultural and community activities, which reduced isolation, strengthened social connections and contributed to emotional well-being;
- labour market support, including information sessions, CV assistance, knowledge of employment rights and identification of job opportunities.

A key outcome was increased autonomy, self-confidence and knowledge of local services, with participants feeling better prepared to manage everyday situations and continue their integration journey independently.

"I manage better now because I've learnt a bit of Romanian"

- FGD with Refugees

"The project didn't change my life drastically, but it helped me take the necessary steps"

- FGD with Refugees

The employment component had a positive but partial achievement. While participants gained knowledge, confidence and better understanding of the labour market, actual employment



remained affected by language barriers, previous professional experience and limited direct access to employers. Participants therefore recommended stronger employer engagement, including employer visits, recruitment meetings and direct contact with companies.

Case management emerged as one of the strongest elements of the intervention, particularly due to continuity, personalised support and assistance in navigating unfamiliar systems. Participants also valued the emotional reassurance provided by having someone they could contact when facing difficulties.

Overall, the findings indicate that the ECSILI project contributed significantly to social inclusion, empowerment, community belonging and preparedness for continued integration. However, language learning and employment support remain important after the project, particularly for participants who have not yet entered the labour market.

Main areas for improvement include expanding Romanian language provision, strengthening practical employment support and employer engagement, maintaining individualised case management and community activities, and creating opportunities for peer learning and personal development.

e) Consultation with Local Stakeholders

A stakeholder focus group held in Arad on 16 July 2026, with 10 representatives from public institutions, NGOs, academia and community organizations, confirmed the relevance and added value of the ECSILI project for Ukrainian refugees and the local community.

Table 1.: Overview of stakeholders involved in the Focus Group Discussion

Partner / Stakeholder	Role in the Local Action Plan
Social Care Directorate of Arad (DAS Arad)	Local coordinator and lead implementation actor. Coordinated the development and implementation of the Local Action Plan, provided case management and individualised support, facilitated access to social services, coordinated referrals and maintained cooperation among local stakeholders.
Arad County Agency for Employment (AJOFM Arad)	Employment and labour market integration partner. Provided information and guidance on the Romanian labour market, employment opportunities, workers' rights and responsibilities, recruitment procedures and links with employers.

Centrul de Vis Association	Community support and integration partner. Supported outreach and engagement of Ukrainian refugees, contributed to community-based activities and facilitated access to information, social support and opportunities for participation in the local community.
Union of Ukrainians in Romania – Arad Branch (UUR Arad)	Community and beneficiary engagement partner. Facilitated communication with the Ukrainian community, supported the identification of needs, promoted participation in ECSILI activities and contributed to culturally and linguistically accessible support.
Casa Seniorilor Association	Social inclusion and vulnerable groups partner. Contributed expertise related to support for vulnerable people and promoted an inclusive approach addressing the needs of refugees who may face additional social vulnerabilities.
CIPV Arad	Community support and social inclusion partner. Contributed to local community-based support, participation and networking activities, strengthening links between refugees and available local resources.
“Împreună Suntem Mai Buni” Association	Civil society and community participation partner. Supported social inclusion, volunteering and community-based activities and contributed to strengthening connections between refugees and the local community.
Romanian Red Cross – Arad Branch	Humanitarian and social support partner. Contributed expertise and support related to vulnerable people, humanitarian assistance and access to community resources and services.
“Aurel Vlaicu” University of Arad	Academic and knowledge partner. Contributed academic expertise, research and evaluation perspectives and supported the evidence-based development and assessment of local inclusion measures.
Knights of Archangel Gabriel Association	Community and volunteering partner. Contributed to community support, volunteering and social inclusion activities, helping to expand the local support network available to refugees.

The stakeholder focus group was facilitated by Prof. Mihaela Gavrilă-Ardelean, PhD, who acted as moderator. She guided the discussion, encouraged the active participation of all stakeholders, and ensured a structured and balanced exchange of views on the implementation of the ECSILI project, the relevance of the Local Action Plan, inter-institutional cooperation, and the sustainability of the mechanisms developed through the project.

Stakeholders particularly valued the project's contribution to a more coordinated and strategic local response, including the development of the Local Action Plan (LAP) as a shared framework for identifying priorities, coordinating interventions and planning future actions.

According to participants of the consultation, a major outcome was the strengthening of inter-institutional cooperation. The ECSILI project improved communication, information exchange and understanding of institutional roles, bringing together actors from social assistance, employment, education, community support and academia. This helped move local responses from mainly ad-hoc interventions towards a more coordinated approach.

The stakeholder focus group confirmed that the ECSILI project was highly responsive to the needs identified among Ukrainian refugees in Arad, particularly in relation to access to information, social services and opportunities for social and professional integration. Stakeholders valued the project's contribution to creating a more coordinated local response and considered the Local Action Plan a relevant instrument for structuring future interventions. As one participant from a public institution noted, *"The project's most significant achievement is that the institutions have begun to speak the same language and pursue the same objectives."*

- FGD with Local Stakeholders

At the same time, stakeholders emphasized that the needs of refugees evolve over time and therefore require an institutional response capable of adapting beyond the duration of individual projects. In particular, language development, psychosocial support and stronger labour market integration measures were identified as areas requiring continued attention. One NGO representative observed that *"Refugees' needs change as they remain in the community for longer periods, and the institutional response must evolve accordingly."*

- FGD with Local Stakeholders

Romanian language acquisition was identified as a particularly important factor underpinning both autonomy and employment. Stakeholders viewed language skills not simply as an educational objective, but as a practical prerequisite for accessing employment, adapting to

the workplace and participating more fully in community life. As one participant from an educational institution stated, *"Learning Romanian is the first step toward autonomy and professional integration."* - FGD with Local Stakeholders. Stakeholders also stressed that employment outcomes depend on complementary forms of support, including access to social services, education, counselling and psychological support.

Importantly, participants adopted a broader understanding of integration, extending beyond employment to include access to education and services and the development of a sense of belonging. As one participant put it, *"Integration is not just about finding a job; it also involves access to education and services, as well as a sense of belonging to the community."* - FGD with local stakeholders. This perspective was reinforced by the observation that labour market integration should also include the conditions necessary for refugees to retain employment and adapt to the local community.

The focus group therefore suggests that the main contribution of ECSILI was not only the delivery of individual activities, but the establishment of a more integrated way of working among local stakeholders. Participants highlighted the need to sustain this approach through regular coordination, updated information on available services, clearer referral mechanisms, continued language and social support, and stronger involvement of employers and community actors. In this regard, one participant emphasized that *"Integration is a long-term process that requires continuity, not just interventions limited to the duration of a project."* - FGD with Local Stakeholders.

The Local Action Plan was positively assessed, but stakeholders emphasised that it should remain a living and regularly updated working tool, rather than a project deliverable used only during the ECSILI project.

Participants considered the approach sustainable, but emphasised the need for continued stakeholder coordination, clear responsibilities, regular monitoring, information exchange and resources for implementation after project funding ends.

The main recommendations for sustainability are the following:

- Maintain regular inter-institutional coordination after the project ends.
- Strengthen referral mechanisms and information exchange between services.
- Increase employer and business-sector involvement.
- Continue Romanian language and professional development measures.

- Maintain the integrated approach linking employment with social, educational and community support.
- Regularly review and update the LAP.
- Continue involving public authorities, NGOs, academia, employers and community organizations.
- Develop new joint initiatives to sustain the partnership established through the ECSILI project.

Overall, the focus group confirms that the project generated value beyond the activities delivered to refugees. Its main achievements were the creation of stronger local partnerships, shared knowledge, coordination mechanisms and a common strategic framework for refugee integration. The key challenge for the post-project period is to institutionalize these mechanisms, secure the necessary resources and maintain the stakeholder network.

Quantitative Methods

a) Evaluation Forms and Feedback Forms

Pilot activities were systematically monitored through standardised feedback forms measuring content relevance, clarity, alignment with participant needs, and overall satisfaction. This quantitative dataset provided immediate insights for continuous improvement. Combined with attendance records and qualitative feedback, the results informed the comprehensive evaluation and optimization of the ECSILI support model.

b) Input and Output Surveys with Beneficiaries

To assess changes in refugees' needs, confidence, social inclusion and labour market situation, anonymous input and output surveys were administered at the beginning and at the end of the pilot. The input survey was conducted between 28 January and 5 May 2026, while the output survey was administered between 21 and 29 July 2026.

Both surveys covered three main dimensions: demographics, labour market inclusion and social inclusion. The output survey additionally assessed satisfaction with project support, perceived changes in employment, integration and well-being, and awareness of local services.

1. Baseline Profile and Initial Needs

The input survey collected 31 responses. The sample was predominantly female (83% women and 13% men), with an average age of 38 years; 63% were aged between 35 and 54. Approximately 52% held temporary protection status, while the remaining respondents reported recognized refugee status, a work permit or temporary residence permits. A



significant proportion had arrived in Romania relatively early after the full-scale invasion: 45% arrived in 2022, while 28% arrived in 2025.

At the beginning of the pilot, 28% of respondents were unemployed, while 38% were employed full-time, 14% part-time, 7% were self-employed and 7% had occasional or irregular work. Only 38% were actively looking for employment. Confidence in finding employment was relatively low: only 3% felt confident and none very confident, while 34% felt somewhat confident and 14% were not confident.

The principal barriers to employment identified at baseline were lack of Romanian language skills, difficulties with recognition of educational qualifications and limited information about the local labour market. In terms of skills development, Romanian and English language skills were rated as the most important priority, followed by CV and cover-letter development.

The baseline data also indicated that social inclusion were incomplete. 52% felt only somewhat included, 11% felt not included or not included at all, while 30% felt included and 7% fully included. Although 86% reported having some form of social support, only 31% had someone they could turn to for psychological support, compared with 90% for practical help and 93% for support in difficult situations.

The most frequently identified information needs were Romanian language learning, employment and healthcare information. Participants also expressed needs related to rights, legal status, psychological support, mentoring and community integration.

2. Individualised Support and Case Management

Based on responses from 34 participants, the output survey provides strong evidence of the implementation of individualised support. All respondents confirmed that they had been assigned a case manager, while 94% reported jointly developing an Individual Action Plan with their case manager.

The intensity of case management was substantial: 42% met their case manager six to ten times, 25% met 11 or more times, and 31% met between one and five times. The majority of participants were engaged in the project for three to six months (57%), while 30% participated for one to three months and 14% for more than six months.

The most frequent forms of individual support were:

- ✓ 78% – referrals to agencies and institutions;
- ✓ 75% – assistance with administrative and legalization procedures;
- ✓ 72% – language learning support;

- ✓ 69% – labour market counselling;
- ✓ 69% – motivational and stabilization support;
- ✓ 69% – psychological support.

Additional support included SkillLab-based skills/employer matching (36%), workshops and employment initiatives (17%), and mentoring/training referrals (11%).

The satisfaction level with personalized case management was particularly high: 94% of respondents were satisfied and 6% very satisfied, with no dissatisfied responses recorded. Qualitative responses also emphasized the value of emotional support, encouragement, trust and having a person available to discuss practical and personal difficulties. Respondents highlighted that the support received went beyond practical assistance, providing reassurance and a trusted person with whom they could discuss their situation and identify appropriate solutions. For example, participants mentioned: *“For work, emotional support, trust, and a lot of encouragement”*; *“Help with health issues, arranging doctor’s appointments”*; and *“I was often helped to find a job, but what pleased me most was having someone to talk to and work with to find the best solutions.”* These responses illustrate the value beneficiaries placed on the human and relational dimension of case management, alongside practical assistance with employment, housing, healthcare and administrative matters.

3. Employment Outcomes

The output survey shows a substantial improvement in the reported employment situation compared with the baseline. At the end of the pilot, no respondent reported being unemployed. The employment profile consisted of 46% full-time employment, 26% part-time employment, 14% temporary or irregular work, 6% self-employment/freelancing, while 9% were studying or attending a course.

At the same time, 58% were still looking for a job, indicating that employment integration remained an ongoing process for a considerable proportion of participants.

Importantly, all respondents perceived at least some improvement in their employment situation attributable to the project: 47% reported that their employment situation had improved and 53% reported that it had somewhat improved. No respondent selected “not improved” or “not improved at all.” Among participants who had found employment during the project, 47% stated that the ECSILI project helped them, 41% that it partially helped, and 3% that it helped significantly.

Participation in employment-related support was high. 74% received career counselling, 60% used the SkillLab digital profiling tool, 20% received mentoring or career counselling and 14% received legal support. Employment-related services received a high satisfaction rating, with 86% satisfied and 6% very satisfied.

Among SkillLab users, the tool was particularly effective in supporting participants' understanding of their own skills. 93% agreed or strongly agreed that it helped them understand their skills, 97% understood how they had acquired those skills, 93% felt better able to describe their skills, and 97% better understood which skills were required for their target profession. The effect was somewhat lower regarding confidence in finding employment in the target profession, although still positive at 73% agreement.

4. Social Integration and Well-being

Participation in community and social integration activities was also high. Among respondents:

- ✓ 89% participated in Ukrainian Embroidered Shirt Day (Vyshyvanka Day);
- ✓ 69% participated in the "Rhythm Without Borders" percussion therapy event;
- ✓ 69% attended Romanian language courses;
- ✓ 64% participated in the Children's Day Celebration;
- ✓ 58% attended the World Refugee Day event;
- ✓ 28% participated in other activities.

Satisfaction with these community and group activities was exceptionally high: 66% were satisfied and 34% very satisfied, with no dissatisfaction reported.

The strongest overall outcome indicator concerns perceived integration and well-being. All 34 respondents who answered this question reported that their integration and well-being had improved since participating in the ECSILI project, with all rating the improvement at level 4 ("improved"). Furthermore, 100% reported having someone to turn to for emotional support, and all respondents also reported having someone to turn to for practical help and general support.

This represents a particularly important change when compared with the baseline, where only 31% reported having someone they could turn to for psychological support. The output findings therefore indicate a substantial strengthening of perceived access to emotional and practical support.

5. Awareness of Local Services

Awareness of local services increased to very high levels by the end of the pilot. Respondents rated themselves as informed or very well informed across all five assessed service categories, including social services, healthcare, education, employment support and cultural events.

The highest result concerned cultural events, for which 100% reported being informed or very well informed, while the other categories ranged between 97% and 100%. In addition, 71% had been referred to other social integration organizations, and respondents reported satisfaction with the organizations to which they had been referred.

This finding is particularly relevant given that lack of information and uncertainty about how to access institutions were among the concerns identified at the beginning of the project.

6. Overall Assessment of the ECSILI project

The overall assessment of the project was highly positive. The project staff survey was conducted between 10 and 24 July 2026. During this period, 100% of respondents stated that they were clearly informed about the objectives of the ECSILI project, and 100% said they would recommend it to others in a similar situation. The elements most appreciated were social events, personalized support and opportunities to meet other Ukrainians.

The main limitation identified by participants was the duration of the intervention, with respondents suggesting that the project could have been longer.

c) Survey with Project Staff

The staff survey provides an additional perspective on the implementation and effectiveness of the ECSILI project from the point of view of the professionals directly involved in delivering the intervention. The survey was completed by five DAS Arad project staff members: three case managers, one case coordinator and one project manager. Given the small sample, the results should be interpreted as a descriptive assessment of staff perceptions rather than a statistical analysis.

Triangulation of the data collected

The evaluation applied a triangulation approach to strengthen the validity and reliability of the findings by comparing evidence collected from different sources and perspectives. Quantitative and qualitative data were considered together, including beneficiary input and output surveys, feedback from project staff and case managers, stakeholder consultations, activity-level evaluation data, and project monitoring records.

Particular attention was given to areas where findings from different sources converged, as such convergence provides stronger evidence for assessing the effectiveness and sustainability of the intervention. Conversely, differences between perspectives were considered as part of



the analysis rather than treated as inconsistencies, as they may reflect the different roles and experiences of beneficiaries, professionals and local stakeholders.

Across the different sources, a consistent pattern emerged regarding the value of individualised and coordinated support. Beneficiaries reported high levels of satisfaction with the personalised assistance provided by case managers and highlighted the practical, administrative, employment-related and emotional support received. From the professional perspective, case managers considered the individualised approach effective in identifying needs at an early stage, tailoring interventions to individual circumstances and facilitating referrals and access to relevant services. Stakeholders, in turn, emphasized the added value of strengthened inter-institutional cooperation, coordinated responses and the common understanding of refugee needs developed through the ECSILI pilot.

The convergence of evidence across these sources supports the assessment that individualized case management, supported by local stakeholder cooperation and complemented by employment, language and social inclusion measures, constituted a key strength of the ECSILI pilot in Arad. At the same time, the triangulation indicates that the effectiveness of the model should be understood within the broader local context, including persistent barriers related to language proficiency, qualification recognition, administrative procedures, labor market access and available institutional capacity.

Table 2.: Overview of Quantitative and Qualitative Sources

Quantitative Sources	Qualitative Sources
Input Survey (N=31)	4 Semi-structured Interviews (4 refugees)
Output Survey (N=37)	7 Staff and Specialist Interviews
Activity Evaluation Forms	Beneficiary FGD (N=14 refugees)
Monitoring KPIs and IAPs	Stakeholder FGD (N=10 organisations)

d) **Ethical Issues**

Participation in surveys and qualitative evaluation activities was voluntary. Beneficiary surveys were anonymous and did not collect personal data. The use of anonymised participant quotations in this report is intended to illustrate recurring themes rather than identify individual participants. The evaluation also recognizes the importance of a human-centered approach. Digital tools can facilitate access to information, structure skills and improve efficiency, but they should complement rather than replace the professional relationship between participants and case managers.

e) **Limitations**

The findings of the evaluation should be interpreted in light of several methodological and contextual considerations.

First, the evaluation took place within a pilot timeframe and therefore captures mainly short- and medium-term changes. Longer-term employment stability and social integration cannot yet be fully assessed. Second, some evidence is self-reported and therefore reflects participants' perceptions and experiences. Third, some employment outcomes are affected by factors outside the control of the ECSILI project, including language proficiency, recognition of qualifications, administrative procedures, labour market conditions and employer decisions. Finally, the digital component of the intervention was affected by the unavailability of the SkillLab app during the last month of the pilot. This highlights the importance of continuity, data portability and alternative procedures when digital tools form part of an integration pathway.

5. Effectiveness

The main evaluation question regarding effectiveness is whether the pilot is achieving its specific objectives.³

Specific Objectives:

- SO1: Labor Market Integration of Beneficiaries
- SO2: Social Integration and Well-being of Beneficiaries

The evaluation examined how well the ECSILI project achieved SO1 and SO2 through the implementation of five outputs (O1 – O5).

Outputs:

- O1. Coordinated, case-managed system for social and labour market inclusion of refugees
- O2. Personalised career and integration pathways through use of the SkillLab digital skills profiling tool

³ „Is the intervention achieving its objectives? The extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups.“ In: Better Criteria for Better Evaluation Revised Evaluation Criteria Definitions and Principles for Use OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation, 2019, p.9.
https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2019/12/better-criteria-for-better-evaluation_f7a307eb/15a9c26b-en.pdf

- O3. Strengthen collaboration among municipal services, NGOs, employers and education providers
- O4. Increase access to qualified employment through job-matching, skills recognition, and mentorship
- O5. Foster social inclusion and emotional well-being of participants in the program

Assessment of Pilot Results

The following section provides a detailed assessment of each output, including its planned results, indicators/targets, achievements, qualitative evidence and overall assessment.

O1. Establish and implement a coordinated case-management system

Planned result

The ECSILI pilot aimed to establish and test a coordinated case-management approach capable of providing Ukrainian refugees with individualised, needs-based support throughout their integration pathway. The model was intended to strengthen the connection between social assistance, employment support and other relevant local services, while ensuring that each participant had a clearly identified professional contact and an individualised pathway reflecting their circumstances, needs and objectives.

The approach was designed not as a parallel service structure, but as a mechanism for connecting existing local resources and services around the individual participant.

Achievement

The planned case-management mechanism was established and implemented during the pilot. Individualised support was provided to participants through regular contact with case managers and through Individualised Action Plans. 50 Participants were recruited and supported and 50 IAPs were developed.

The range of support provided demonstrates that case management operated as a genuinely multidimensional mechanism. Participants reported receiving referrals to agencies and institutions (78%), assistance with administrative and legalisation procedures (75%), language learning support (72%), labour market counselling (69%), motivational and stabilisation support (69%) and psychological support (69%).

Satisfaction with personalised case-management support was particularly high: 94% of respondents were satisfied and 6% very satisfied, with no dissatisfaction reported.

Qualitative explanation

The qualitative evidence strongly reinforces the quantitative findings.



Participants consistently valued not only the practical assistance provided, but also the continuity of contact, trust and emotional support associated with having a designated case manager. Their feedback referred to assistance with employment, housing, medical services, social services, citizenship and administrative procedures. Several participants emphasised that having someone to discuss problems with and identify solutions together was particularly important.

Based on the findings from the survey with project staff all staff respondents considered the model effective for promoting the social and labour market inclusion of refugees. They highlighted the integrated approach, cooperation with public institutions, regular meetings and the ability to identify participants' needs more rapidly and tailor support accordingly.

At the same time, staff identified several implementation challenges, including administrative complexity, the need for stronger information exchange between institutions, differences in procedures, the need for clearer common working arrangements and the importance of adequate resources for longer-term monitoring.

The convergence between beneficiary and staff evidence is particularly significant. It suggests that the added value of the model was not limited to referral or information provision. Rather, case management provided continuity, coordination and a trusted professional relationship through which participants could access different forms of support according to their individual circumstances.

Assessment

The Arad pilot successfully established and tested the case-management approach at the planned scale. The evidence indicates that the model was relevant to the complex and interconnected needs of participants and that individualised support was one of the strongest elements of the intervention.

The principal areas requiring further development concern staff capacity, administrative efficiency, common procedures, information exchange and the sustainability of case-management functions beyond the project period.

O2. Personalise career and integration pathways through skills profiling

Planned result

The pilot aimed to integrate diagnostic profiling, counselling and digital skills profiling into the individual support process in order to help participants identify and articulate their skills, understand the requirements of their target occupations and develop more realistic employment and integration pathways.



SkillLab was intended to complement, rather than replace, professional assessment and counselling.

Indicator / target

The MEF Matrix establishes diagnostic profiling and counselling for at least 50 beneficiaries as the principal quantitative target for O2.1, with beneficiary satisfaction as an additional indicator.

Achievement

Achieved at output level; positive contribution at outcome level. A practical challenge identified during the pilot concerned the time required to complete the SkillLab profile. The profiling process could be relatively lengthy, particularly when detailed information on previous experience, skills and qualifications had to be entered. This created an additional time requirement for both beneficiaries and staff and could make the tool more demanding to use within a counselling session. The interviews therefore suggest that, while SkillLab was useful for structuring skills information and supporting career discussions, the profiling process would benefit from being more streamlined and adapted to the time available in routine counselling.

The monitoring records document the implementation of diagnostic profiling and individualised counselling within the case-management process.

O3. Strengthen collaboration among local stakeholders

Achievement: Achieved.

The core coordination mechanism was successfully established, with the target of six IIWG meetings achieved. The stakeholder consultation conducted on 16 July 2026, involving 10 local representatives, confirmed strengthened cooperation and a shared understanding of refugee needs.

Stakeholders considered the Local Action Plan a useful common framework for cooperation and emphasised the importance of maintaining it as a living document beyond the project period. Staff also assessed cooperation positively, with an average score of 4/5.

Assessment: The objective was achieved, with ECSILI contributing to stronger local coordination and referral pathways. The main sustainability challenge is to maintain these cooperation mechanisms beyond project funding.



Sustainability remains dependent on institutional ownership, staff capacity and available resources.

04. Increase access to employment and employment-related support

Achievement: Partially achieved – positive contribution.

ECSILI provided substantial access to employment-related support: 74% of respondents received career counselling, 60% used SkillLab, and 86% reported being satisfied or very satisfied with employment-related services. The labour-market information session was particularly well evaluated, with 100% of respondents rating the overall experience 4/5 or 5/5.

Participants also reported positive changes in their employment situation: 47% stated that it had improved and 53% that it had somewhat improved. However, 58% were still looking for employment at the time of the output survey.

Assessment: The project clearly improved access to counselling, labour-market information and employment support, but employment outcomes cannot be attributed exclusively to ECSILI. Future implementation should place greater emphasis on employer engagement, job matching, qualification recognition and follow-up after employment.

05. Foster social inclusion and emotional well-being

Achievement: Strong positive contribution.

Participation in social inclusion activities was high, particularly in Ukrainian Embroidered Shirt Day (89%), *Rhythm Without Borders* (69%), Romanian language courses (69%) and Children's Day (64%).

Participants valued these activities as opportunities for social interaction, peer connection and community belonging. The *Rhythm Without Borders* activity received particularly strong feedback, with 73.3% rating it 5/5 and a further 11.1% rating it 4/5. Romanian language courses were also positively evaluated, while participants identified additional speaking practice as a future need.

Assessment: The objective was strongly supported by the pilot. The evidence indicates that social and language activities contributed not only to participation and well-being but also to the broader integration pathway. Future provision should retain this integrated approach while increasing opportunities for practical language use and sustained community participation.



6. Sustainability

The evaluation indicates that the sustainability potential of the ECSILI project in Arad is strongest at the level of the working methods and partnerships developed through the pilot. In particular, the individualised case-management approach and the strengthened cooperation between local institutions and organizations can be integrated into existing services and continued beyond the project period.

The sustainability of these benefits will, however, depend on the availability of staff capacity, institutional commitment, resources and mechanisms for maintaining referral and information-sharing arrangements. The continued use of the Local Action Plan as a living coordination framework would further support this process.

Replicability

The ECSILI approach is replicable within the local context and potentially transferable to other municipalities, particularly its combination of case management, employment support, language learning, social inclusion activities and cross-institutional cooperation.

Replication should, however, allow sufficient flexibility to adapt the model to local institutional structures, available services, labour market conditions and the specific needs of refugee populations.

7. Key Findings

Individualised case management was one of the strongest and most consistently valued elements of the pilot.

While Cross-institutional collaboration improved coordination and created a stronger basis for integrated support, systemic, legal or bureaucratic obstacles to the effective integration of services persist, with limited access to certain public services and the need to better structure resources distributions among participating organisations in the project cited as main obstacles. Nonetheless, the cross-institutional work carried out within the project fostered a holistic understanding of the challenges faced by Ukrainian refugees in Romania. The following quote is particularly telling: *"it is very good that we had here in the project Labor Market Agency because, they are not so used to work directly with the people. And when they saw that we are... we bring the refugees, we speak with them, they saw that there is needs, and they made them to be more closer to them"* - Interviews with project staff

The Local Action Plan (LAP) and Inter-Institutional Working Group (IIWG) provide mechanisms that can support continuity beyond the project.



8. Recommendations

- Maintain the case-management approach within existing local social and employment services.
- Continue the Inter-Institutional Working Group (IIWG) and cross-institutional cooperation.
- Keep the Local Action Plan (LAP) updated as a practical, living framework for local integration measures.
- Strengthen employer engagement and employment follow-up, including qualification recognition and job matching.
- Ensure that future digital components have sustainable alternatives and data-portability arrangements.
- Secure sufficient institutional capacity and resources to maintain the integrated support model after the pilot.

