

Industrial RElations and Social Dialogue for an Economy and a Society "4.0" (IRESDES4.0)

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Insights from the Report on the state of the art regarding smart working and digital skills development in social dialogue practices and CLAs (Deliverable D2.1)

How can social dialogue embrace digital skills for SMEs? - 2nd Public Workshop organised by European DIGITAL SME Alliance

Bruxelles/Online 29 April 2022



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Sources

- studies and reports on **remote working and digital-skills development**, and the impact of these trends on the companies and labour market dynamics;
- existing **CLAs** and other documents already published on these topics by social partners;
- studies and researches on the policies impacting **skills development and remote working, namely with regard to their inclusion in CLAs**;
- analysis of the **strategies and approaches to address these topics within social dialogue practices**;
- **semi-structured interviews to Italian trade union members and employers' representatives**, selected by project partners Fim-CISL Veneto and Confimi Industria Digitale;
- Insights provided by **international experts** during the **First Expert Workshop** carried out on the 26th November 2021, in Bergamo.



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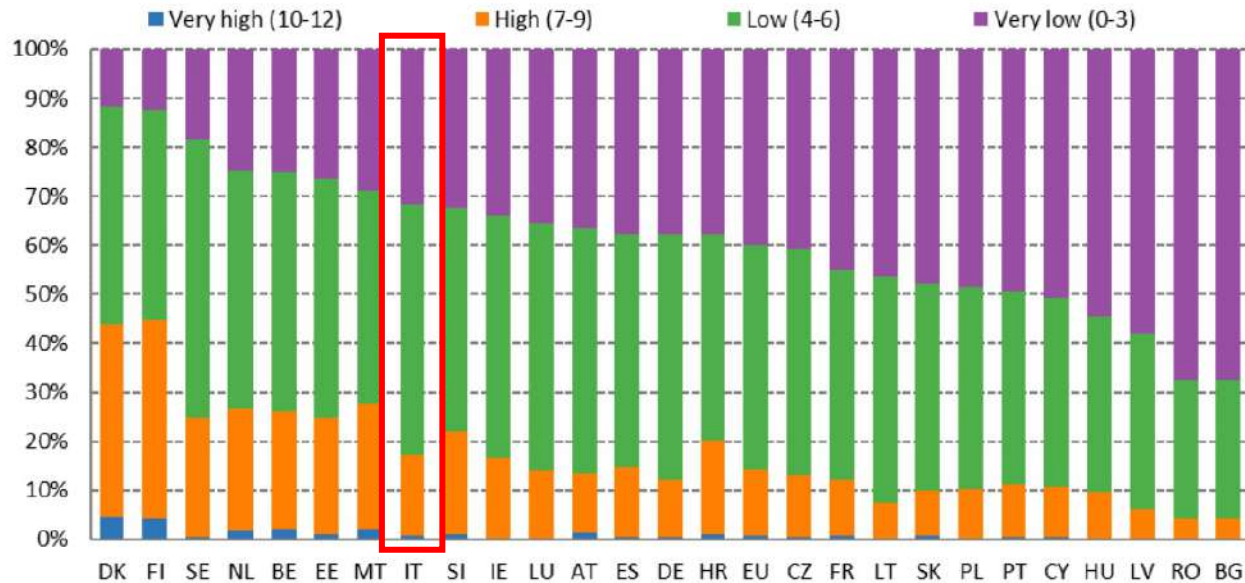


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The need for digital skills development

Figure 1: Digital Intensity Index by level (% of enterprises), 2020



Source: Eurostat, European Union survey on ICT usage and e-commerce in enterprises

- The uptake of digital technologies by businesses has the **potential to improve services and products as well as to increase competitiveness**;
- The crisis caused by COVID-19 has also shown that **digitalisation is a crucial tool to improving the economic resilience of businesses**;
- In 2020, only 1% of EU enterprises with at least 10 persons employed reached a very high level of digital intensity while 14% reached a high level. **The majority of the enterprises recorded low (46%) or very low (39%) levels.**



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Figure 2: Digital Intensity Index indicators tracking digitisation processes (% enterprises), 2020

	Large	SMEs
Have a website	94%	76%
The maximum contracted download speed of the fastest fixed line internet connection is at least 30 Mb/s	92%	76%
Website has at least one of : description of goods or services, price lists; possibility for visitors to customise or design online goods or services; tracking or status of orders placed; personalised content in the website for regular/ recurrent visitors	78%	62%
Enterprises where more than 50% of the persons employed used computers with access to the internet for business purposes	56%	46%
Provide more than 20% of the employed persons with a portable device that allows internet connection via mobile telephone networks, for business purposes	47%	39%
einvoices sent, suitable for automated processing	53%	32%
Buy medium-high CC services	48%	25%
Employ ICT specialists	76%	18%
Enterprises with e-commerce sales of at least 1% turnover	39%	17%
Analyse big data internally from any data source or externally	34%	14%
Use industrial or service robots	28%	6%
Use 3D printing	17%	5%

Source: Eurostat, European Union survey on ICT usage and e-commerce in enterprises

- SMEs constitute “the backbone of the EU economy”, accounting for **more than half of its GDP, two thirds of total employment and 99% of Europe's businesses;**
- **Enhancing their level of productivity and boosting their innovation processes appears crucial to support the economic growth of the European Union in the next decades;**
- To reach the **Digital Compass 2030 target**, at least 90% of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the EU should have a basic level of digital intensity. **In 2020, only 60% of SMEs were at that level in the adoption of digital technologies.**



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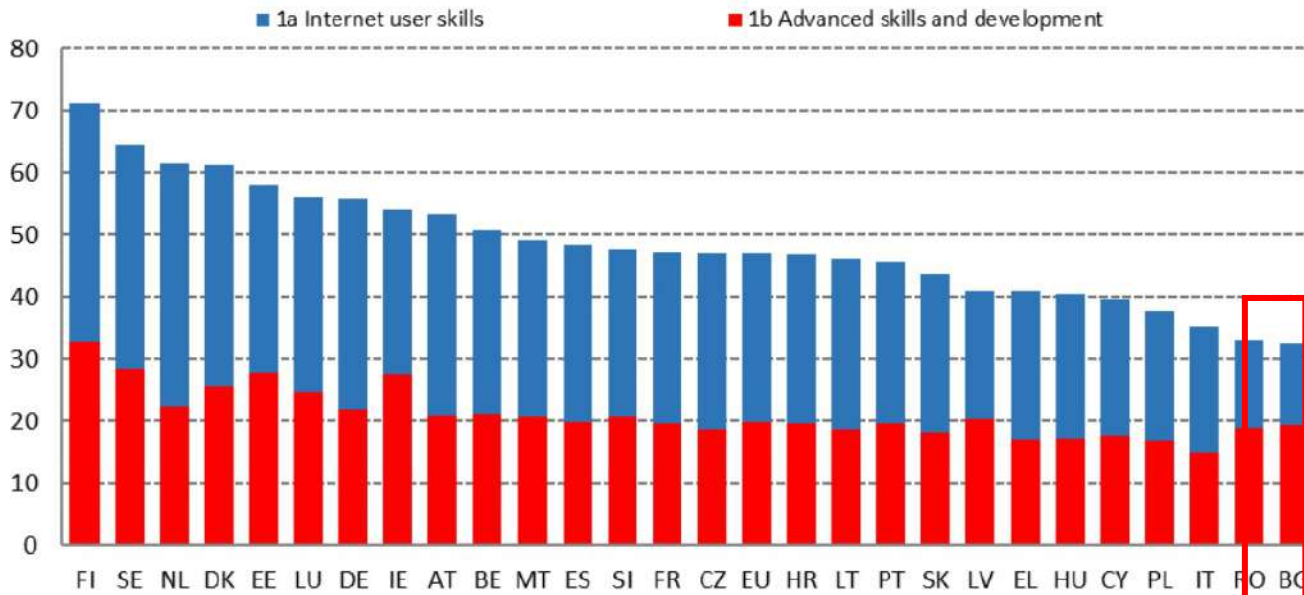
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Figure 3: Human capital dimension (Score 0-100), 2021.



Source: EU Commission, DESI Index 2021

- According to the DESI Index (EU Commission), **4 out of 10 adults and every third person who works in Europe lack basic digital skills;**
- According to the latest data, Finland is leading in Human capital, followed by Sweden, the Netherlands and Denmark. **Italy, Romania and Bulgaria rank the lowest.**



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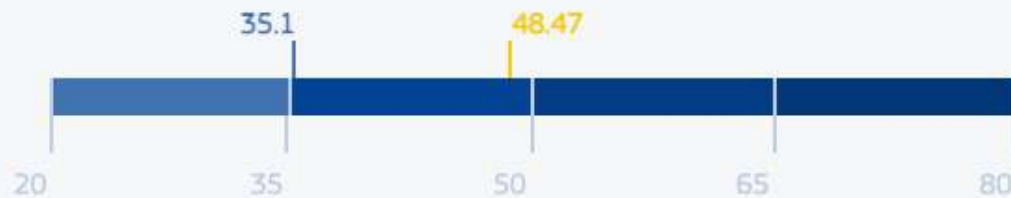
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 Italy

Score in DESI Report Human Capital

EU average score: **48.47**

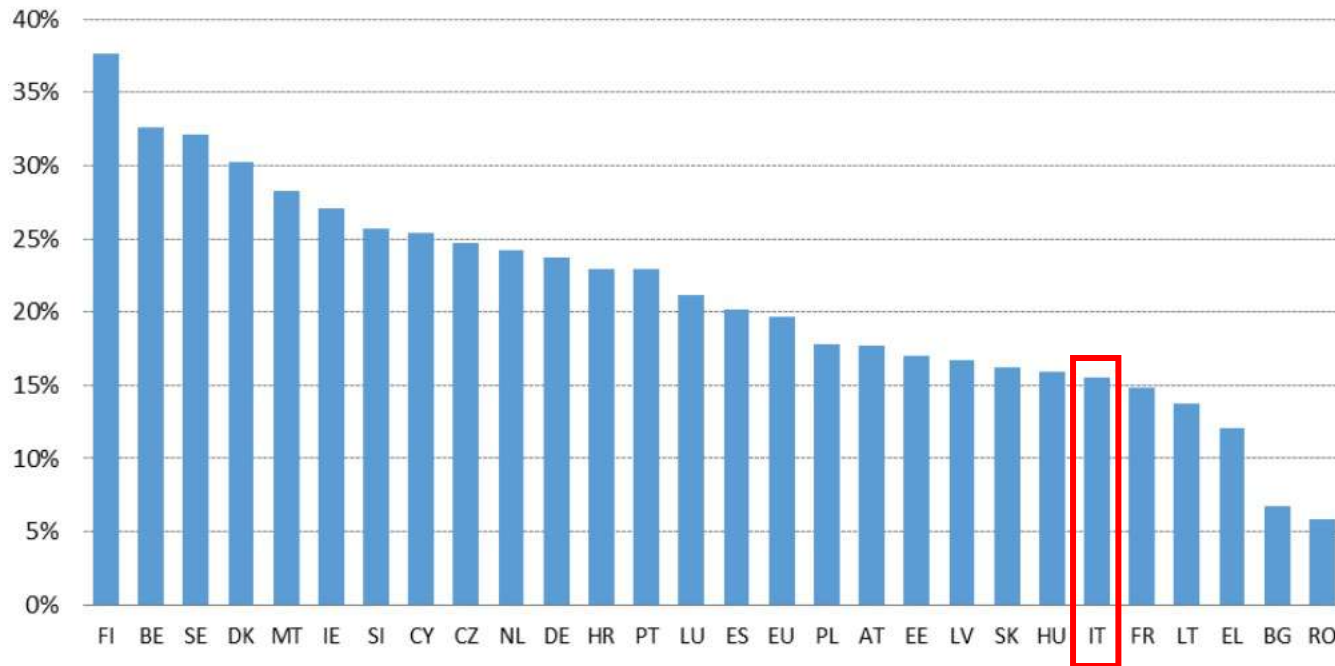
Italy score: **35.1**



- **41.5%** of people in Italy have at least basic digital skills.
- **3.6%** of employees in Italy are digital experts but **55% of companies that hired or tried to hire digital experts report difficulties in filling these vacancies.**
- Italy allocated **€7.003** million of the national Recovery and Resilience Plan to Human Capital, or around **15%** of its digital budget (just below the EU average of 17%). The European Commission estimates that **1,6%** of the total budget (around 3.005 million) will be dedicated to advanced digital skills, including digital R&D, placing Italy just above the EU average of 1.4% and at the **9th** position amongst EU Member States.



Figure 4: Enterprises providing ICT training (% enterprises), 2020



Source: Eurostat, European Union survey on ICT usage and e-commerce in enterprises.

- In 2020, 19% of EU enterprises employed ICT specialists. Among the EU Member States, Ireland and Belgium presented the highest proportion of enterprises employing ICT specialists, with 30% each. **Italy, with 13%, presented the lowest ratio of enterprises employing ICT specialists in 2020.**
- Enterprises are providing more and more training to their personnel to develop or upgrade their ICT skills. Overall 20% of the EU enterprises provided ICT training for their personnel. **When looking at company size, 68% of large enterprises actively provided the training, while only 18% of SMEs did so.**



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Digital skills training in Italian SMEs

- training is perceived as necessary to **remain competitive, increase client satisfaction and upgrade knowledge;**
- one of the main factors causing the lack of structured training activities in Italian SMEs could be identified in the **perceived uncertainty of the results, in terms of profit, of a conspicuous investment on human capital;**
- smaller companies often **do not have access to comparative studies, research and updated and reliable information on the matter,** which precludes them the possibility to perform an accurate cost-benefit analysis.



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The role of social dialogue in digital skills training

«Trade unions should have no role in workers' training: it is the employer who should choose the training path that is most consistent with its business»

(Employer)

«Trade unions should not only enforce collective agreements, but also identify company representatives who are willing to help develop digital skills.»

(Trade Unionist)

«Developing training courses within SMEs is complex, as small entrepreneurs are not usually inclined to innovate: it would take a lot of awareness-raising»

(Employers' representative)



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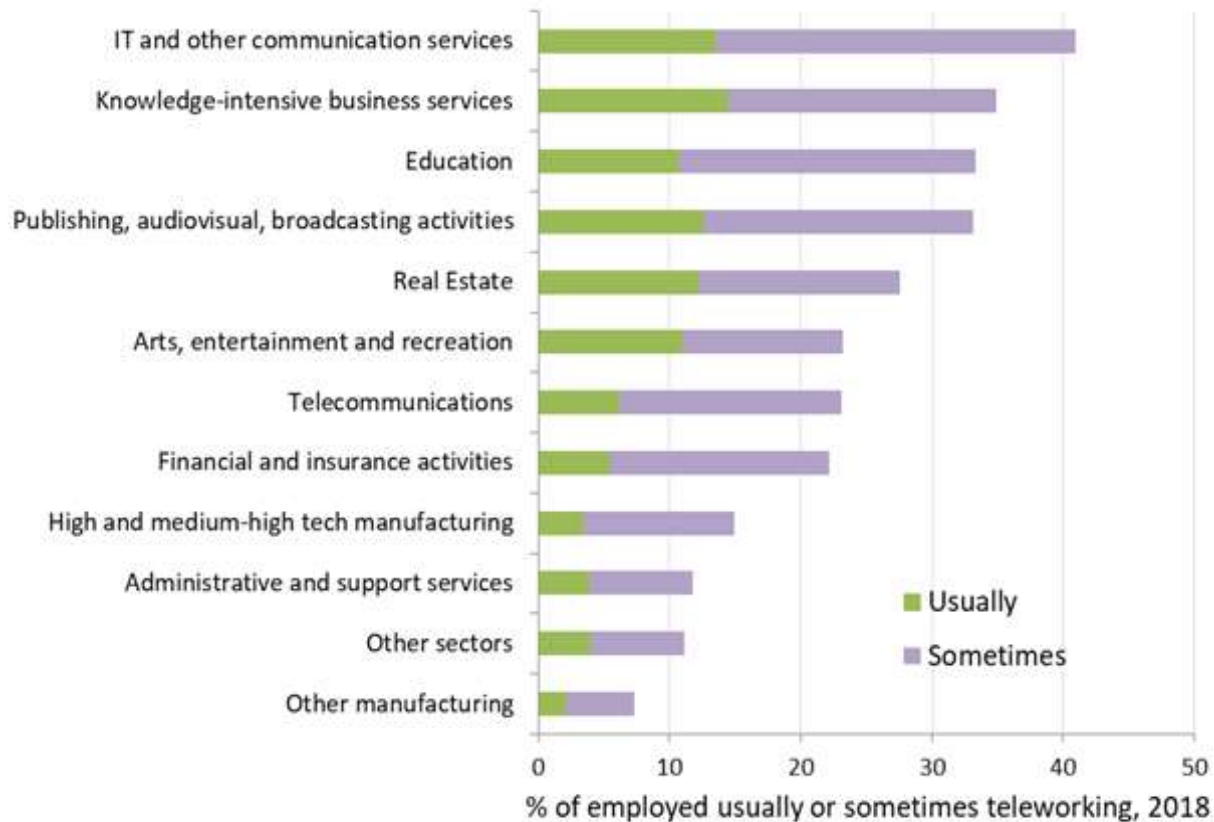


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Remote work in the metallurgy sector

Figure 4: Prevalence of telework by sector, EU-27, 2018



- The distribution of occasional and regular teleworkers in the Member States varies considerably among different economic sectors, which therefore have **different levels of “teleworkability”**.
- While in **high and medium-high tech manufacturing**, the general percentage of teleworkers in 2018 was around **15%**, more than **40% of workers in IT and other communication services** carried out remotely at least part of their work.

Source: Eurofound, Teleworkability and the COVID-19 crisis: a new digital divide? 2020, p. 10



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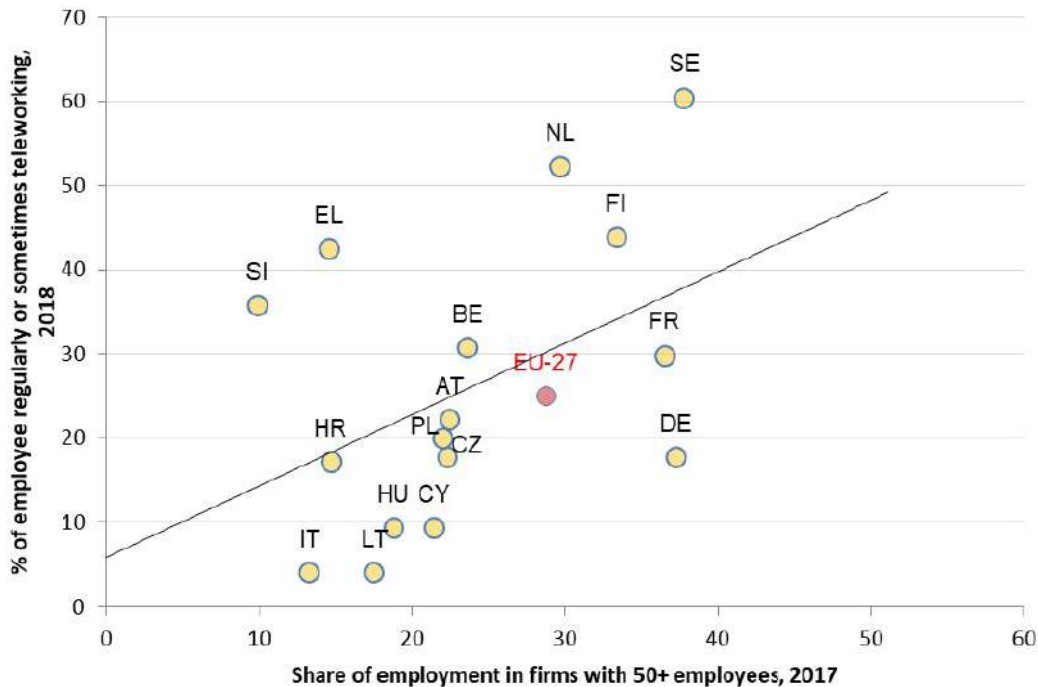


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Remote work in SMEs

Figure 5: Telework and employment by firm size, knowledge-intensive business services, 2017.



- The difficulties in the use of digital technologies in SMEs also reflects on the diffusion of remote work, both in Italy and in EU countries, **which appears significantly lower than that in larger companies;**
- Scientific literature deemed it to be mainly connected to the **costs of remote work, the low level of trust confided in employees working remotely, and the need for a better change management.**

Source: European Commission, Telework in the EU before and after the COVID-19: where we were, where we head to, p. 7

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The role of social dialogue in the implementation of remote work

«The regulation of agile work cannot be totally entrusted to individual autonomy, given the different contractual position of the parties: a framework of common collective rules is necessary»

(Labour law expert –
Trade Unions' side)

«The collective agreement must provide guidelines, but then it is up to company-level collective agreements to deal with specific cases, in line with their production needs»

(Employers' representative)

«Remote working collective projects are sometimes resisted within SMEs, as the latter do not have trade union delegates. It would therefore be appropriate to implement local-level forms of collective bargaining»

(Trade Unionist)



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Best practices in Italian SMEs: remote work

Team work of the company's human resources department with trade union representatives, aimed at identifying which areas of the company would be most interested by the implementation of remote work.

Execution of a "test" before the structural implementation of a remote work agreement on a limited number of workers over a fixed period of time, in order to better monitor their adjustment to the new organizational model.

Institution of a joint committee composed of workers' and firm representatives, invested with the task of discussing the implementation of smart working practices and to come up with shared proposals.



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Best practices in Italian SMEs: digital skills development

Periodical skill mapping of the companies' workforce, carried out with the participation of the trade union representatives, aimed at monitoring the company's digital skills needs and tailoring training to its shortcomings.

Development of training paths structured in short and agile modules and carried out through mixed methods (e-learning instruments, digital platforms, frontal lectures etc.), in order to facilitate their fruitful completion among workers with different training necessities.

Pre-emption of the introduction of new technological equipment in the company with a sufficient number of hours of vocational training, funded through the resources of the so-called "Interprofessional training funds".



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The point of view of international experts on remote work

- **OSHA issues connected to remote work** (musculoskeletal disorders; psychosocial issues) are one of the main topics that needs specific regulation through collective agreements and social dialogue;
- The use of instruments for the monitoring of the performances of remote workers could potentially pose a **threat to their privacy and the protection of their personal data**, and therefore it should be thoroughly evaluated before its implementation;
- During lockdown periods, the work experience of remote workers often translated on a one-on-one relationship with their superiors, and the **collective dimension of work would often be set aside**: consequently, if remote work involved more people in the future, trade unions would have to change their means of communication, their organization methods, together, perhaps, with the nature of their claims.



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The point of view of international experts on digital skill training

- **European data showing a low level of digitalization in SMEs might not be accurate**, given that SMEs mostly outsource their IT services, rather than having an internal worker invested with that specific task;
- A possible way to increase the level of digitalization in SMEs is the **"education" of small and medium entrepreneurs on the importance of new technologies**, together with the implementation of international standards;
- **Training should be tailored to the necessities of the single worker**, in order to maximise its efficiency and guarantee the employability of different kinds of workers (es. older workers).
- **Social dialogue and collective bargaining are the most suitable instruments for the introduction and management of digital skills training**, both in SMEs and larger companies.



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Next steps

- Identification of **initial recommendations on how smart working and on-the-job digital skills development could be addressed in national social dialogue practices and CLAs**, in the context of the Second Expert Workshop (Task 3.2);
- Final validation, among the social partners, of the **recommendations on CLAs and social dialogue practices addressing the trends of digitalization** in the context of the Third Expert Workshop (Task 3.3);



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