

Incentives to business investment in skills in Italy

Recommendations for two public policy instruments



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1 Introduction

The Italian job market is characterised by a wide mismatch between the supply and demand of skills, which slows down productivity and the adoption of advanced technologies in Italian companies. Human capital contributes to generating new ideas, identifying and using existing knowledge and technologies, and implementing the organisational change that is often associated with the adoption of new technologies and the development of greater innovative capabilities.

The *Incentivare l'Investimento in Competenze delle Imprese Italiane* (Promoting Investments into Skills by Italian Enterprises) project, approved in 2019, fits into this framework. It uses targeted policies to respond to the need to support Italian micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) to develop or acquire the technical-scientific, digital, managerial and financial skills they need to face any new challenges posed by business transformation. The project is promoted by the Ministry of Economic Development (MiSE) and Invitalia and is part of the Support Programme for Structural Reforms (SRSP) of the European Commission's DG REFORM. This technical support is provided by the OECD, which has helped DG REFORM and the Italian government define a set of policies to support investment in skills for SMEs, and their implementation.

The project helps strengthen the ability to make use of the European Regional Development Fund for the 2021-27 programming period and, in particular, the resources for strategic objective 1.iv, i.e. to create "A more competitive and smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation" achieved by "developing skills for smart specialisation, business transformation, and entrepreneurship".¹ Investments in this context aim at developing the ability of enterprises (as well as other economic actors) to play a role in achieving the goals of smart specialisation strategies, through investments in research, innovation and human capital, among other things. The project also contributes to achieving the objectives outlined in the European Skills Agenda (2020), and seizing the investment opportunities offered by the Recovery and Resilient Fund and InvestEU.

The main expected outcome of the request for support is to design, develop and implement a new policy approach, aimed at encouraging business investment in skills associated to innovation and technology adoption. This will be achieved through the three stages of the project:

- An analysis of the obstacles to human capital investment in Italian SMEs and of good practices implemented in other European countries. Starting from this analysis and other sources, MiSE and Invitalia highlighted two areas of work on which to intervene with as a matter of urgency.
- The creation of two Working Groups, consisting of representatives of different public and private institutions² and moderated by the OECD, each to discuss the design of a new

¹ Article 5, section 1 of EU regulation 2021/1060.

² The list of participating institutions is attached as an Annex.

public policy aimed at strengthening investment in human capital as a prerequisite for promoting the implementation of new technologies in SMEs.

- The elaboration of the suggestions resulting from the Working Groups and their translation into concrete policies, and the development of analytical or operational tools to support the implementation of the policies.

This report concludes the second phase of the project and outlines recommendations related to the design of two public policy instruments identified as particularly urgent. The first tool aims at strengthening the investment in skills for collaborations of enterprises (or *networks* of enterprises), while the second one aims at reducing the costs incurred by SMEs in qualified consultancy and training activities, through a voucher system.

The recommendations, formulated by the OECD team, are developed from the discussions between Working Groups, retracing the different aspects dealt with during the meetings, and setting out the preferences for the design of any tools on which the respective Group found consensus. However, some design issues remain open where the Groups have not found consensus or where the OECD has no competence to comment.

Although the focus of this report is to present specific recommendations related to each tool, the activities of the Working Groups also identified a number of more general areas of intervention that could contribute to a more efficient implementation of these tools. The following issues were more prominent.

Expanding the use of skills analysis tools

The current mismatch of skills within Italian SMEs is at least partly due to the lack of a human resources department or specialised personnel who can help business owners and entrepreneurs identify the skills needed within the company and consequently choose the most relevant type of training for employees. Encouraging companies to carry out frequent and rigorous needs analyses should help raise awareness of their skills needs in the short and medium term, especially in the case of projects that involve a technological upgrade of production. It should also help firms provide more targeted training and make more efficient use of resources.

Promote training for management and business owners

One of the causes of the decrease in productivity for Italian SMEs is the low skill level of managers and business owners, who may lack adequate awareness of the benefits of retraining, including for themselves, and do not invest sufficiently in developing the skills of their employees as a consequence. Relevant actions include: expanding the supply of training courses in entrepreneurship and the development of 'soft' skills (such as communication, interpersonal skills, and adaptability), increasing the involvement of managers in these training courses, and promoting targeted actions aimed at strengthening entrepreneurs' capability to plan and invest.

Strengthening intercompany cooperation

The involvement of a wide range of stakeholders is considered essential for the success of initiatives aimed at strengthening investment in skills in SMEs, including those related to the *Industria 4.0* initiative. These include central or regional government bodies which share competence on adult learning policies, and all relevant socio-economic partners. Closer collaboration can strengthen the coordination of public policies on skills investment in companies and maximise their impact, for example by reducing the fragmentation of funding sources.

2 Investing in skills in business partnerships

The difficulties micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) face in adopting new technologies and investing in human capital which makes them applicable, are often intrinsically linked to the limited size of these companies. Company size influences both the cost of developing or accessing new skills and the ability to find information on public policy instruments that can be used for the same purpose. Where company growth cannot be easily achieved, smaller companies have the opportunity to join forces with others and thus share costs, develop new products or services, and transfer knowledge (OECD, 2021^[1]). The economic crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has particularly affected smaller companies, has highlighted the importance of networking for SMEs (ISTAT, 2020^[2]).

Networks of enterprises (also referred to in this report as networks, collaborations or partnerships) are an economic phenomenon in which several enterprises operate jointly and cooperatively, usually through a system of set operational relationships. These relationships can focus on different aspects of the production process: the exchange of information and knowledge, commercial relations, the pooling of services, traditional subcontracting agreements, etc. In the definition used for the purpose of this document, different forms of economic cooperation between enterprises (supply chain, clusters, industrial districts) and different legal forms (temporary association of enterprises, network contracts, consortiums, joint ventures) are therefore included in the concept of enterprise partnership.

Recent data from the National Observatory on Enterprise Networks (2020^[3]) show that being part of an enterprise network improves the performance and growth of the companies involved. However, the skills of managers can influence the performance of the partnership and its growth prospects. Only *networks* that are well organised, with a long-term vision and good cooperation achieve the best results (Retimpresa, 2020^[4]). In this sense, a successful experiment not only brings together companies with similar needs to invest in new or more human capital, but also makes sure that the joint project is supported by strong managerial skills in the participating companies.

Developing a tool for investing in skills in business networks

For these reasons, business networks that support investment in human capital can be particularly useful in helping SMEs on their path to industrial transformation, and particularly in designing and implementing investments in digital and 'green' technologies.

The Italian government already supports steps that facilitate investment in business partnerships, where it provides funding to carry out projects in partnership between enterprises to strengthen the innovative or organisational capacity of participating enterprises. Although normally combined with a project to invest in certain assets which are strategic to the competitiveness of the enterprises themselves, there are also programmes for the creation of the partnership

between enterprises, usually in the form of a network contract. One example of these is Development Contracts, an industrial policy tool for large-scale strategic and innovative investments in the industrial sector by individual enterprises or associations of several enterprises using a network contract. These can be supported by resources from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) through National or Regional Operational Programmes. In general, however, projects funded in the forms described above do not focus on on-the-job training or the hiring of qualified staff, although there may be elements of this.

Finally, public instruments supporting investment in skills in enterprises often include the chance to apply for or simply receive financial benefits as part of a business partnership. For example are the New Skills Fund and the calls for tender of some Interprofessional Funds, which allow the financing of projects presented by *networks* of enterprises. Only in some cases, however, do these instruments provide more favourable conditions for enterprise partnerships than for individual enterprises. In other cases, the limitation to the use of this type of incentives are interregional collaborations, where incentives for networks are only offered to companies based in one region. Finally, the low frequency of business-to-business partnerships in Italy is also a reflection of the limited managerial skills of business leaders and owners, who are not fully aware of the potential benefits of business-to-business collaboration, nor of the government tools that are available to support such partnerships (OECD, 2021^[5]).

It is therefore important for Italy to work on a new public policy tool that can contribute to investment in skills for SMEs and to leverage business-to-business partnerships. Creating common pathways for investing in skills and sharing the costs of training staff or hiring experienced staff are seen as key elements for the success of the policy. Although the existence or plan for a technological project is a prerequisite for the implementation of the policy, the most important and innovative aspect is the focus on skills development. At the same time, the tool is intended to facilitate the creation of new collaborations between enterprises but does not necessarily require them if these already exist for other business functions.

Defining a wide-range tool

Look beyond existing partnerships

The potential beneficiaries of a policy tool to support investment in skills through business networks are primarily existing business partnerships. However, these cover a limited proportion of Italian enterprises, and in particular SMEs. According to the Permanent Business Census, for example, in 2018 only 7.5% of all enterprises with 3 or more employees had formal agreements with other enterprises (consortium, network contract, joint venture, temporary association of enterprises, etc.). This percentage was lower for micro enterprises (5.8% of enterprises with 3-9 employees) and small enterprises (13% of enterprises with 10-49 employees) than for medium-sized enterprises (24% of enterprises with 50-249 employees).

As previously noted, there are several possible reasons for the low number of business collaborations in Italy. Members of the Working Group stressed, above all, the lack of awareness among entrepreneurs about the opportunities and benefits of creating a network, as well as the often greater economic advantage of applying for public funding as an individual enterprise vs. as part of a network, despite the current economic advantages in sharing employee training costs

between companies.³ There is therefore room for a substantial intervention by the public administration in raising awareness of the advantages of collaboration between companies, and to intervene at the start of the formalisation of the collaboration itself.

For this reason, it is recommended not to restrict the scope of public intervention to existing business partnerships. Depending on the type of support offered (see following sections), it is also important that the policy instrument can reach individual enterprises, with the aim of identifying skills needs, raising awareness among business leadership of the urgency of investing in human capital within a network, and connecting enterprises with similar skills needs. As mentioned above, the role of high management (business leadership or owners) in this context is crucial in understanding the benefits of collaboration, in selecting the most suitable training to be carried out in the network, or in involving and empowering their employees in this process.

An instrument suitable for firms in the same industry or region

Collaboration between enterprises can form as different business models, with the most widespread being the supply chain, clusters, and industrial districts. Some group types can consist of similar sized companies that share similar needs, in the same region or in distant areas. This gives their members access to productive, technological, or training experiences that are also very different. In other cases, companies may work together as suppliers and buyers, often within the same supply chain. Supply chain relationships in particular can be built around a large producer sharing its knowledge driving training plans within the supply chain. , This results in improved quality of production inputs and supplier productivity.

The Italian Public administration can choose whether only one or more of these forms of business partnerships should be the subject of the policy tool. This choice should be based on one or more of the following indicators: (i) the frequency with which the type of organisation provides for human capital investment in MSMEs, (ii) the features and design that would make a specific type of partnership particularly suitable for shared human capital investment across multiple firms, and (iii) whether networks should be formed on a geographical basis or based on industry when supporting skills investment in MSMEs.

At times there may not be adequate information on which of these forms of partnership are most widely used or are most appropriate for incentivising investment in skills in MSMEs. In these cases, it is suggested that the tool under discussion be flexible and applicable to different forms of economic partnerships as listed above, and that no preference be expressed for partnerships based on industry or production chain, or geographical proximity. Given the considerable concentration of 4.0 technologies and knowledge in certain Italian industries and regions, the policy should be adapted to support inter-industry and inter-regional realities, resulting in a greater and more uniform spread of said technologies throughout the country. This broad spectrum allows for the consideration of the advantages of each type of partnership, and of the fact that different businesses shall be able to choose the form of economic partnership that best suits their needs.

When it is necessary to formalise the partnership, favour network contracts

As mentioned, the Public Administration's intervention should reach out to both existing partnerships as well as individual companies, with the goal of creating a common skills

³ However, we cannot rule out the possibility that the low rate of applications for funding submitted by *networks* of enterprises simply reflects a reduced need for support, given the economic advantages of collaboration (sharing of costs and knowledge).

investment project. In the second case, however, some of the Public Administration's actions may require the partnership to be formalised in a well-defined legal form.

There are already numerous legal forms available to companies to formalise their cooperation. These include: the creation of a single company, a consortium, a joint venture, a temporary association of companies (ATI), or a network as specified by the network contract. The flexibility of the system therefore does not require the creation of new legal forms for business-to-business collaboration.

At the same time, choosing a specific legal form can have significant consequences, in terms of burdens and benefits, on the ability of MSMEs to invest in skills development. Each type of business partnership has its own regulations clarifying the governance and the role of its leader, as well as establishing the role of the person responsible for all interactions between the *network* and other businesses or public bodies. The Working Group agreed that network contracts and ATIs are the two legal forms best suited to meet the objectives of the policy tool in question, since they have lower costs and fewer ties compared to other types of partnership and are therefore better suited for MSMEs.

ATIs formalise a time-limited partnership, linked to a specific objective. This legal form therefore allows for extremely different types of partnerships. These are often limited to joining forces towards one shared goal. Network contracts, on the other hand, are used for wider-ranging collaborations, which can last longer, and already involve the investment in skills as one of their components, even if not fully developed. They usually create a stable cooperation consisting of a series of shared projects and requires a change in the organisation and mindset of all participating business. In this sense, the network contract is considered more appropriate within a context of business transformation that requires a joint investment in technology and skills.

Limits to the size of participating businesses

In some cases, business partnerships are organised around one company acting as a group leader, and which may also take responsibility for delivering a final product or service (think, for example, of vertical grouping in a network contract). In other cases, partnerships all have the same role in the collaboration and are jointly responsible for the delivery of the product or service. Depending on the type of partnership, the role of the leader can become decisive. It is therefore preferable to include partnerships that cover medium-sized or even large parent companies in the scope of the policy tool in question.

Conversely, the Public Administration may consider whether it is appropriate to impose constraints on the presence of micro or small businesses in the supported business partnership. On the one hand, including a minimum number of micro or small businesses in the partnership pursues the goal to offer specific support to companies that have the greatest difficulty in investing in skills and participating in business partnerships. On the other hand, such a constraint on the freedom of association between companies may reduce the willingness to use the tool. This is particularly true for companies aiming at horizontal collaboration, i.e., partnerships with similar business in terms of output and size. Similarly, the constraint has the potential to incentivise fictitious extensions of the *network* for the sole purpose of achieving the minimum necessary share of micro or small firms in the partnership, where the tool offers greater benefits from being in a network than operating as an individual firm. Group members have agreed that they would rather avoid imposing constraints on the presence of micro and small businesses.

Not a monetary support to firms, but a service

A business-to-business collaboration support tool can take two basic forms: the provision of funding, or a direct service. In the first case, the tool translates into funding for companies who want to establish a new business collaboration to invest in skills or want to use an existing partnership for the same purpose. In the second scenario, which is an alternative to the first due to resource availability, the tool takes the form of the creation or financing of a service to businesses. This can be provided by the Public Administration or by third parties.

The Group discussed these two alternatives and agreed to recommend support for a *service* to businesses. Direct support for companies - except in exceptional cases and designs - would not, in fact reach the vast number of people who are not aware of their own needs for investment in skills, or who do not have the capabilities or resources to invest in an effort of coordination and joint planning with other companies. Because these are primarily micro or small businesses, providing a service better meets the intended goal of increasing investment in skills for industrial transformation, especially in companies of these sizes. The Working Group also considers the policy tool under discussion as an excellent opportunity to fill the void of services aimed specifically at business partnerships, or to strengthen services that already exist in their early stages, with limited resources, or with significant room for improvement in terms of quality or regional presence.

The Group also expressed a clear preference for services to be offered *by a third party to the Public Administration* or other market actors. Public Administration would lack a sufficiently widespread presence in the area, and could struggle to attract businesses, i.e. potential beneficiaries of the service. At the opposite end of the spectrum, controlling and harmonising the quality of services offered in this area by very numerous and heterogeneous market players could imply excessive costs for the Public Administration. A third-party body, acting between the Public Administration and businesses, would have the right size in terms of granularity and presence on the territory.

Relying on third party bodies to provide services to support investment in skills for companies with similar training needs is the first innovative aspect of the policy tool being proposed. This level of partnership allows for significant economies of scale and can in turn be the start of more articulated forms of collaboration linked to the achievement of other objectives (e.g. in terms of innovation and/or internationalisation).

Throughout the rest of this report, Digital Innovation Hubs (DIH), Centres of Competence, Chambers of Commerce, and their Digital Enterprise Points (PID), and bodies created by Trade Associations are all identified as intermediary bodies. Choosing which third party may become the provider of these services remains a responsibility of the Public Administration.

An analysis of the main international and Italian examples identified the following as the most common support services for investment in skills as a network of companies:

- 1) An assessment of skill gaps and needs within the network as well as for single enterprises, in order to identify common needs and investment priorities;
- 2) Support in developing a common training plan for companies within the *network*, and support in defining the roles of each company within it;
- 3) The search for the most suitable training institutions for the needs of each *network*;
- 4) The direct provision of training or other support (e.g. search for qualified staff);
- 5) Identifying new partners in the area to become part of the *network*;

- 6) Aid in finding resources to support investment in skills;
- 7) Sharing information about public support initiatives aimed at investing in skills, and other outreach services.

Group members agreed on the gaps in existing service offerings, and identified services (1), (2), (7), and (5) as priorities, in descending order of importance. Among these four services, particular attention should be given to carrying out skill gaps assessments (1) at company level, with the aim of identifying suitable responses for the networks of which the companies are part, as well as identifying companies that could potentially coordinate shared training plans or search for qualified personnel. Based on this analysis of needs, the network should be supported in the creation of a joint project for investment in skills (2).

All four of the selected areas of intervention are types of consultancies provided by intermediary bodies to MSMEs, with the aim of strengthening the planning capabilities of company management and reinforcing the learning culture within the company.

More detailed recommendations are outlined below for each of these services to be prioritised.

Helping enterprises map out the skills they need

Because of how widespread this skills mismatch is in Italy, there seems to be an urgent need to help companies carry out an analysis of their skill requirements to identify the type of training best suited to their needs. In this context, an analysis of their skill requirements involves both a check-up phase of the current skills in the company, and a prospective reading of future skills needs, in particular in the perspective of investment objectives in 4.0 technology or innovation. Assessing skills gaps is useful to identify the real skills needs of companies, something that many companies already do, albeit in an informal and unstructured way. This is especially true for micro and small enterprises, which most often lack the tools to carry out an analysis of their skill needs. Other public policy instruments for training already require companies to carry out a skills assessment in order to evaluate the request for support to in-company training activities (calls for proposals from Interprofessional Funds; New Skills Fund).

Italy has several tools that highlight the skills gaps and needs of businesses at a regional or industry-based level (for example, the Unioncamere Excelsior survey or the Professioni e fabbisogni (Job Roles and Gaps) platform of INAPP and ANPAL). However, given the objectives of the policy tool and the desire to make public policy intervention as flexible as possible, an assessment of the skills needed at company level seems more appropriate. In recent years, self-assessment tools have become more and more popular, mainly because they are easy for businesses to access and often free of charge, although their focus is often on digital maturity within the company and not on skills. The Selfie4.0 self-assessment tool is an example of this; it was promoted by PIDs, and has received positive feedback from participating businesses.

At the same time, self-assessment tools may not be appropriate for businesses, especially small businesses, that do not have the skills or resources to fully understand the results of the assessment and translate them into action. Therefore, the intermediate or third-party body involved should have the task of helping companies read the results of their self-assessment, or even carry out a mapping of the company's needs. An example of this is the Zoom 4.0 tool, again promoted by the PIDs.

Different intermediaries, as well as different market players, have designed different models for mapping skill needs within a business. The Administration will therefore have to choose which instrument to use for this purpose, and to decide whether to:

- Choose only one eligible mapping tool for service delivery by each third-party body. In this case, a starting point could be the Selfie4.0 model, which could then be changed and adapted to the objectives of the policy tool in question. This option has the advantage of ensuring that the assessment of all companies involved is of equal scope and quality.
- Let each third-party intermediary use their own tool, which can be an existing one or one that is yet to be developed. This gives companies greater flexibility. They could take advantage of different tools depending on the third-party body with that they decide to work with. In this case, the Public Administration will need to ensure that the mapping of requirements meets consistent criteria.

The members of the Working Group agreed that, given the existence of multiple tools for the assessment of skill gaps needs, there is no need to create new one. Instead, there is a need to ensure that the tools used by the different third-party bodies collect all the necessary information in a consistent manner. The choice of intermediaries/third-party bodies and therefore of tools would still be limited to a set of clearly identified intermediate bodies.

In order to ensure that different skills gap mapping tools produce results that are appropriate and consistent, as well as in sync with any other digital maturity assessment tools, the skills gap analysis tool to be implemented within this framework shall be articulated in the following sections:

- I. Features of the company (industry, number of employees, years of activity, turnover, geographical area, target market).
- II. Assessment of the main business functions (objectives, inputs and outputs, resources, impact of technological investment).
- III. Technologies used (information systems; design, research and development; intellectual property; digital and enabling technologies).
- IV. The skills of its employees (soft, technical, digital, linked to a particular profession/company, measured through the level of education).
- V. Human resources management (organisation of human resources, training offer and existence of post-sales training/delivered by suppliers in the last 12 months, employees who have participated in training in the last 12 months).
- VI. Medium-term strategic goals.
- VII. Position of the business in relation to other businesses in the same supply chain or industry. This last point would provide insight into whether the company is on a different trajectory from the trend seen in similar businesses.
- VIII. For partnerships that have already been formalised, it is advisable to also ask about the role of the company within the partnership, while individual companies should probe their willingness to collaborate.

Designing a shared training plan for multiple enterprises

What the Working Group deemed as the most important point, in addition to the mapping of the needs of business, is a joint reading of the results of the mapping by several enterprises, and the support for creating a joint skills investment plan shared between multiple enterprises. With a mapping at individual company level, a key task for third parties would then be to encourage partnerships between business based on the identification of similar skills gaps and needs. This is particularly important for micro and small enterprises which, due to their more limited resources, are more often excluded from inter-company partnerships.

The development of a common training plan for all companies within a business partnership should, however, follow some essential guidelines on which the members of the Group agreed:

- The body that develops the training plan (intermediary or third-party body) may not be the same body providing the training. Outsourcing the delivery of training to other market players (e.g. training providers) is also allowed. Both these aspects would allow the intermediate body to concentrate on the less frequent activity on the market, i.e. project consultancy for different companies within the *network*.
- There is no need for constraints on the type of training offer eligible under the project for a *network* of companies in terms of content, the professional figures involved, the way in which the training is provided or the hiring process for new staff. Specifically, there seems to be no need to prioritize in-house training rather than using a training provider. These choices maximise the flexibility of the policy tool.
- It is possible to require that the training services provided as a result of a joint training project must meet minimum quality standards. One way forward is to limit the ability to provide training to a set of accredited third parties, although this idea may need to be elaborated further. Alternatively, intermediaries could be responsible for selecting providers, thereby taking at least partial responsibility for the effectiveness of the training services offered by the provider.
- It is essential to involve the business owners or business leader of the company. Their participation is key to ensuring the company's formal commitment to its partners.

Disseminating information and raising awareness of public tools to support investments in skills

Another priority identified was the need for measures to raise awareness and provide information about the existence of public policies to support investment in skills in business partnerships. These initiatives are particularly important for small businesses, which tend to be less aware of existing public initiatives, and to have fewer resources to apply for and benefit from public subsidies.

However, while there are a variety of information tools available, business owners rarely have the time or inclination to access them and review them. In addition, centralized information in the form of web pages, while potentially a valuable tool for spreading information about the different types of public support available to businesses, has not always been fruitful in the past. It is therefore essential to implement activities aimed at raising awareness, explaining what type of public support is available, and discuss it directly with company management or business owners.

Most members of the Working Group agreed that local initiatives and those that allow people to meet business leaders and/or management in person are the most effective means of broadening the catchment area of public support measures. This is because managers and business owners often look for a summary of information and the ability to quickly assess whether a certain type of public support is suitable for their company's needs. In many cases, they simply get their information from local channels, mainly based on a relationship of trust with the person or channel spreading the information.

However, it is not easy for Public Administration to intervene at local level when most of the tools available are of a national scope. For this reason, it seems appropriate to include in the scope of action of this policy tool a service aimed at spreading information and raising awareness, provided by third parties. In some cases, the Public Administration may even organise training events aimed at employees of the third-party bodies involved, in which the existing tools and their

suitability in different contexts will be explained. The MiSE-Unioncamere training for managers of Digital Innovation Hubs is an example of this. Alternatively, the Administration can leverage the third parties and their presence on the territory to organise other activities of direct interaction with companies, such as road tours.

Finally, finding information through trusted channels highlights the essential role of any professional in direct contact with the company (accountants, labour consultants, lawyers, etc.). These trusted professionals, however, do not necessarily have extensive knowledge of the available public tools to support on skills, which are rarely tax measures. The Administration interested in reinforcing investment in business skills through greater use of public support tools can therefore intervene with information and awareness-raising activities for accountants and other professionals.

Support the enlargement of the partnership and the search for qualified personnel

The expansion of the network through the inclusion of new partners can increase the opportunities for access to 4.0 skills (especially for smaller companies), thus increasing the human capital of the company. The same objective can be achieved by identifying new qualified professionals and including them in business partnerships.

Even in the case of the search for partners to expand business cooperation, it is desirable to foster opportunities for exchange between enterprises at local level or within clusters or supply chains. This suggests the importance of meetings between business leaders in the same region, peer learning, and mentoring. Trade associations and chambers of commerce are already organising similar activities, albeit with schedules and methods that are not always well defined, and regional differences in terms of quality of the service. The Group did not express any suggestions on planning elements for these tools which would maximise their impact, other than (i) the fact that they should ideally take place on a regional level; and (ii) the need for these activities not to be limited to spreading information, but to result, as much as possible, in a pooling of business interests.

Matching platforms (matching supply to demand) are useful tools that have already been implemented in several Italian and European initiatives in order to help find partner companies for potential cooperation. 'Italy Frontiers', a platform for start-ups, the blockchain platform 'Registry' conceived by Confindustria, and the i4.0 Atlas created by MiSE and Unioncamere are some examples of platforms managed by the government or by an intermediate body. However, there is no impact assessment available to date for any of these initiatives, so it is not possible to define which features are essential for a platform to be efficient. Certainly, however, the success of a platform requires efforts to (i) continuously update the information contained in the platforms, and to (ii) promote the platform among entrepreneurs and business leaders.

In relation to the professional figures to be brought into the company, the Working Group suggested that sharing apprentices between companies of the same *network* is not entirely consistent with the objective of introducing advanced skills into the company. The Group also suggested either placing a temporary manager in the businesses, or a cooperation between the company and the research world. In this way, the company can benefit from the knowledge acquired by a research centre or university, without having to hire someone new on a permanent basis. The latter option would have the advantage of integrating advanced knowledge into the business or business partnership, but only temporarily, for the relevant period. In these cases, third-party intermediaries can act as brokers in this relation, and help identify the figures to be placed within the company on a temporary basis.

The Administration's action plan

The topic of how services will be provided has come up in multiple areas during the project. The decision rests the Public Administration. To date, each third party provides the above-mentioned services in a discretionary manner that responds not only to the needs of the local production context but also to its own organizational requirements. This results in differences throughout the same region, as well as poor monitoring and evaluation analysis, in line with the feedback provided by the Working Group on several occasions.

This creates a strong need for direction and coordination to ensure a minimum level of quality is delivered, which should be equal nationwide and across all providers.

The suggestion is that these guidance and coordination functions should remain with the Government and its technical support structures. These functions should be formalised in a *work activity plan* (hereinafter: Working plan) created by the Government's Ministry and focused on the areas of action indicated below, to be developed in the 2021-2027 planning period for European Structural Funds. As elaborated on below, these activities should also include a first phase of listening and involvement of key stakeholders in the delivery of the services mentioned above, or any additional services to be provided.

The Working Plan should be implemented through the following actions.

a) Identify services that need to be prioritised

The tool designed aims to contribute to the strengthening of investment in skills in business partnerships by enhancing certain services, provided by intermediary bodies to the MSMEs involved. As discussed in the previous sections, the services identified include:

- I. mapping of requirements;
- II. a joint assessment of needs, and the creation of a common training plan for all companies within a *network*;
- III. spreading information on existing public policy, with a particular focus on the first two services. These services must meet the minimum standards established by the Administration;
- IV. widening cooperation and looking for new professional figures.

In relation to these services, there is a need for a consolidated way forward, as well as compliance with minimum service standards by third-party bodies. An opportunity was also highlighted for guideline measures to include support for all initiatives (i) falling within the Ministry's sphere of competence and (ii) focusing on the investment in skills for industrial transformation, not only on the investment in skills for business partnerships.

b) Define minimum standards

Among the necessary elements identified within the project, guidance on the minimum quality of services to be delivered was a particular focus. This would be implemented through:

- The creation of guidelines and minimum criteria for the services to be provided to businesses by third party intermediaries. Some essential elements of this are presented above.
- A joint reflection on relevant experiences and *best practices*, obstacles, or criticalities in the provision of services. In some instances, this may also include sharing reports and analyses.

- Re-prioritising services or identifying new relevant services.

c) Assess the work of third parties

This component of the Working Plan is intended to ensure that the guidelines identified in (b) are implemented by all intermediaries.

Firstly, services providers should be required to prepare an annual report monitoring their work. This report would allow them to observe and assess the work of the various participants in their ecosystem, ensure coordination, and identify any overlaps or gaps. Another option is the creation of an ad hoc Group formed by MISE, Invitalia, and other institutions, which would be solely dedicated to monitoring the third parties' compliance with the service guidelines.

Secondly, the Public Administration should consider ways to achieve effective compliance of third parties and their operations in specified services with the proposed guidelines. Compliance with these guidelines could, for example, be incentivised if the Public Administration was allocating resources to third-party bodies/intermediaries following the monitoring or assessment work mentioned above.

In all instances, it is important to consider whether any resources should be granted to the third party in its entirety. The alternative being granting them to individual local offices that have presented an application and proven they have adapted their services to respect the guidelines set by the coordinating body.

d) Stakeholder listening activity

As mentioned, all activities carried out over the course of the project have highlighted the importance of coordination between all stakeholders involved in the policy. These are:

- 1) institutions (e.g. Ministries with a mandate on key aspects linked to the development of competencies or their instrumental bodies, or the Conference of the Regions as the national referent of the strategy of intelligent specialization)
- 2) intermediaries providing services for the development of skills in SMEs (e.g. Chambers of Commerce, Competence Centres, Digital Innovation Hubs, Trade Associations and Trade Unions).

The Administration's Working Plan should therefore include regular meetings and communications between the Public Administration itself and the different stakeholders in the measure, particularly service providers.

3

Contributing to business costs to encourage investment in skills

Fostering a learning culture in the workplace can help improve a company's ability to innovate and reduce staff turnover. Although there is no overriding definition of learning culture, some of its general features can be identified, namely:

- I. promoting learning activities among employees;
- II. the willingness to learn at different levels of company hierarchy;
- III. the ability to influence internal change thanks to newly acquired skills.

Within this framework, business owners and managers play a key role in planning and implementing change, thanks to a better understanding of the company's needs and the role of employees within it. However, in micro or small-sized firms, managerial skills are often limited, compared to larger firms. Investing in the "hard" and "soft" skills of managers and business owners, and in their ability to understand human capital as a productive investment, is therefore crucial for the growth and survival of MSMEs.

Among the activities that are particularly useful for the development of skills in companies where the culture of continuous learning is still limited are coaching, mentoring, and direct consulting. Consultants can assist business leaders and owners in developing a project, which could be a training, innovation or tech adoption project. Examples of good support practices suggest that consultants should follow the project for at least part of its duration, since initial support project planning does not preclude serious implementation challenges from arising further down the line. In order to make sure that consulting creates long-term results, the person helping the firm on a temporary basis must be able to pass on their knowledge to company employees or management, so that they can continue the work they have started and complete the innovation project.

The new *Voucher Consulenza Formazione*

A public policy tool that is effective and easy to use even for smaller companies is vouchers. This can include a other ways to allocate financial resources to reimburse expenses incurred by companies for training or consulting services. These tools generally have lower administrative costs and can be designed to accommodate various types of expenses and services. In creating the different components of the voucher, we have tried to design an effective but streamlined tool that avoids complicated bureaucracy for businesses and for the Public Administration. Because of this flexibility and limited costs, the voucher is particularly well suited to support small or very small businesses.

National and international examples of training vouchers show that in order to use the same tool in micro, small and medium-sized enterprises which can hugely differ from one another, and to maximise returns on the public resources invested, training should be flexible in its:

- 1) content (e.g., adapted to each company's needs and covering both technical and transferrable skills),
- 2) delivery (e.g. modular training, distance learning, training outside working hours) and
- 3) recipients (e.g. involving employees at all levels of the business hierarchy).

Consultants, coaches and mentors can support the enterprise in adopting new technologies and, above all, in modernising the organisation of production to accommodate these technologies. Successful approaches aim to create solutions that are highly customised to the needs of the company. This goal more easily achieved through a particular form of incentive: vouchers.

Eligible expenses: support for those without a predefined project

As mentioned, training aimed at facilitating technological or industrial transformation, together with the introduction of an external consultant within SMEs, contributes to developing a strategic and long-term vision of the company's needs in terms of technology, business planning, organisation or investment in human resources. The training and consulting voucher is therefore designed to cover expenses for training purposes (related to an existing investment or in preparation for an investment in innovation) and for consulting services prior to the implementation of any training for innovation purposes.

Regarding consulting services, the scope should remain broad and include both support activities for different people within the business, and an assessment of the company's needs. The latter would act as a consulting service for businesses that feel the need to carry out a more in-depth study of their skills needs, assisted by the service provider. However, this translates into a voucher to cover an in-depth assessment of the company's needs, with the risk that the assessment may not translate into concrete action of investment in human capital by the company. Of course, a voucher geared towards this service should have a more limited maximum amount than a voucher supporting more highly qualified services.

Regarding training, measures should be targeted at managers or business owners, people who have a role of responsibility and who contribute to the development and implementation of the company's objectives, as well as at other employees who are directly involved in intelligent transformation, innovation and company reshuffling projects. However, the members of the Working Group agreed that it is not necessary to stick rigidly to the professional profile (business owner, director, management) of the people receiving training, but rather to look at the role they play within the business. For smaller companies, these people should be identified based on each training or tech transformation project. This decision stems from the fact that, especially in micro firms, certain functions may be managed by people who are not formally classified as managers.

In order to respond effectively to the challenges brought about by the combined effect of the spread of 4.0 technologies and the pandemic, the Group has concluded that the training services covered by the voucher shall include technical, managerial and "soft" skills. The latter, although transferrable by nature, play a key role in the development and implementation of technological or organisational innovation projects, as well as in strengthening the managerial and entrepreneurial skills of management and business owners. This aspect, too, seems consistent with Strategic Objective 1.4 of the ERDF, as presented in the introduction to this report.

Maintaining a broad definition of the type of innovation

In order to broaden the voucher's target population and facilitate access to it for different types of companies, the concept of innovation requiring the investment in training is deliberately broad. It would also be difficult to identify the whole range of possible cases, with the risk of excluding many forms of organisational and process transformation that are not strictly linked to an investment in 4.0 technologies. Therefore, it is not necessary to add an exhaustive list of the types of organisational or technological innovation considered eligible to the call for proposals, nor to request proof of the actual start of the transformation project. This ensures that companies with less planning capacity are not excluded. However, the following guidelines are an outline of the types of innovation considered the most relevant for the purpose of the project:

- Expanding the range of products and/or services or their technological and functional redefinition in an innovative sense;
- Introducing digital content and processes and service innovation which can change the relationship with customers and stakeholders;
- Changes in products and services towards environmental sustainability;
- Modernising organisational and management structures within the company.

Different voucher amounts

It is good practice to expect companies to pay for at least some of the expenses covered by the voucher (OECD, 2021^[5]). The maximum amount of the voucher or the rate of co-participation in the costs incurred are aspects the Administration can use to direct the companies (or select the number of beneficiaries) towards certain key public policy objectives. As mentioned, it is important to encourage small and very small businesses who have innovation potential but do not necessarily have the organisational capacity or resources to plan a transformation project or seek public support. In view of this objective, the voucher amounts could be differentiated based on two key criteria:

1. Company size. If the voucher is aimed at micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, it should be adjusted based on the size of the enterprise, and/or the participation of enterprises in partnerships or networks. The voucher should favour small and micro enterprises.
2. Type of eligible expenses. The Public Administration can decide whether consultancy and training costs should be subsidised for the same maximum amount (given, for example, the average cost of providing each service), or for the same percentage of the costs incurred. For example, businesses who choose to receive joint training and consulting services, i.e. a more complex and ambitious intervention, could benefit from a higher voucher amount.
3. The choice between planning and more complex interventions. As mentioned earlier, some companies are unable to carry out an in-depth analysis of the skills gaps within the company and translate them into organisational changes or new training. In this regard, a possibility would be to offer further support in the review of the skills gaps assessment and in the elaboration of a training plan, if companies do not have the resources to do so autonomously. This choice would therefore lead to the creation of two separate vouchers: i) a voucher for a higher amount, which would cover expenses for companies with a well-defined training or organisational consulting project; ii) a voucher for a lower amount, which would be used to cover costs for services such as support in understanding the

mapping of skills needs, and subsequent drafting of a training or organisational consulting project. Businesses accessing the smaller voucher may have the opportunity to apply for a further voucher to support project implementation. To avoid companies applying exclusively for this second type of voucher, the sum of the two vouchers (planning and implementation) should not exceed the maximum amount that can be allocated with the first voucher.

Identifying the right skills and needs that businesses require

The reasons for the importance of skills needs mapping in MSMEs were discussed in the previous section. Within the scope of the Training and consulting voucher, skills mapping is essential in order to be able to provide the appropriate training and training consultancy services. Therefore, assessing the company's skills needs should be made mandatory in order to submit eligible applications for funding. This should be done before the application is submitted, with the aim of ensuring a better match between skills needed and services provided, thus ensuring a more effective use of the voucher. The results of this assessment should also be requested from businesses applying for consulting vouchers not strictly related to a training activity, or businesses who have already carried out the assessment independently. However, the assessment will have to have been carried out within the previous 6 or 12 months, and it will have to include all parameters considered key to the mapping.

As previously noted, in order to broaden the number of beneficiaries and include smaller companies, a smaller voucher could be used to cover costs for somebody to support the reading and interpretation of the skills needs assessment and subsequent planning in companies who do not have the tools to finance this independently.

The analysis of skill requirements shall include a check-up phase to assess the skills already present in the company, and a prospective reading of future skills needs, in particular in view of future investments in 4.0 technology or innovation.

The service provider will have the task of helping the company understand the results of the self-assessment, and use them to design the reskilling or consulting project for which the voucher money will be used.

Features of skills needs assessment tool

The contents of the policy tool should include the areas identified in the previous section, prioritising 4 areas of main interest: i) company characteristics; ii) employee skills; iii) technologies used or digital maturity; iv) human resource management. The result of this assessment should be the identification of any skill gaps within each company.

Regarding the choice of tool to be used to assess skills gaps in the company, the options available to the Public Administration are slightly broader than in the case of business partnerships (see previous section), and include:

- I. Choice of only one self-assessment tool eligible to receive the voucher. Selfie4.0 could be used as a starting model, and then some changes could be made in order to adapt it to the objectives of the voucher, following an agreement Unioncamere/MiSE. This option would have the advantage of ensuring that all companies undergo a self-assessment of equal scope and quality. It would facilitate the leader's task of assessing whether the results of the skills gap analysis are adequately reflected in the project submission for which the voucher is requested. If this option was considered

to be the most suitable, there may be a need to limit the number of projects under each supplier, to avoid a large percentage of companies choosing PIDs as their service provider after using the self-assessment kit provided by these same institutions.

- II. Identification of a set of tools among existing tools that are considered eligible under the voucher. In this way, companies would have more flexibility in the choice of the tool.
- III. The business may choose a tool or company to carry out the needs assessment. In this case, the project coordinator should check that the skills needs assessment has been completed and that it meets consistent criteria. This can take the form of a semi-automated review, based on a pre-formatted form containing some questions on the self-assessment, which companies will have to fill in when applying for the voucher. A more onerous option for the leader as well as the company, but one that would at the same time ensure greater relevance of the needs assessment within the context of the voucher, is for the results of the assessment to be included within the KPIs proposed by the company at the start of the project.

In order to maximise the effectiveness and usefulness of the business needs assessment tool, its format must be able to count on the involvement of multiple stakeholders. The choice of the form of partnership and inter-company coordination will be decided by the Administration once the most suitable self-assessment tool for the voucher has been selected. However, should the decision be made to choose one or more existing tools to be amended, the institutions at the origin of those tools could be involved in promoting and making businesses adopt them. Starting from this, the MiSE will be able to reflect on which other ministries, bodies and institutions (PIDs, other Chambers of Commerce sub-bodies, trade associations) should be involved, and how to ensure effective coordination between them.

Selecting adequate suppliers

In this context, the aim is to prevent voucher applications from being presented only by companies with high planning capacity or with sufficient resources to make an innovative investment which could be financed through the voucher. This goal requires careful consideration of the ways in which businesses receiving the service interact with the service providers themselves.

The selection of service providers considered eligible within the context of the voucher, and the way in which the quality of their services is assessed are key aspects for ensuring the quality of the projects financed. This suggests the need for a careful discussion of the 'inbound' selection criteria for service providers who may participate in voucher-covered activities. Eligible service providers should then be placed on a list of qualified providers that is open to businesses seeking these services. This list will form the basis for the development and implementation of the call for applications.

The list of providers should include existing entities that have prior experience in advising MSMEs. This involves both institutional or semi-institutional bodies and private companies operating in the training or consulting market.

Given the diverse nature of these entities, different procedures for their selection have been identified. Firstly, regarding institutional or semi-institutional entities, Group members agreed that Competence Centres, European Digital Innovation Hubs, Certified Incubators, and Industry 4.0 Technology Transfer Centres will be eligible for automatic accreditation. Other similar bodies may

be considered in this group and automatically enter the list, but this calls for a discriminating criterion. The Working Group has suggested that this criterion be the existence of public funding, and therefore a preliminary screening by the Public Administration.

On the other hand, regarding universities, PIDs and ITSs, one option put forward by the Working Group is that the voucher may be provided only if the consulting or training activity is carried out in collaboration with one of the institutional or semi-institutional entities mentioned above.

The selection of market entities, on the other hand, is based on two fundamental criteria: accreditation and operational experience in the areas of application of the voucher. The relevant accreditation conditions are: enrolment in a professional register, regional accreditation, a certificate in accordance with Law 4/2013 for coaching or training professionals, or an ISO or UNI quality certificate.

Instead, the alternative options for minimum experience criteria would be:

1. At least 3 years of experience in projects similar to those eligible for funding through the voucher and:
 - a) Have been active for at least 5 years or
 - b) Present at least 3 projects consistent with voucher-covered activities, performed within the last 3 years;
2. A minimum turnover in the specific task.

The Working Group agreed that accreditation is not a sufficient condition for the selection of market entities. Therefore, it was decided that these bodies must also meet an experience criterion (1a, 1b or 2). For bodies that do not have any accreditation, it will still be possible to be selected, provided they meet at least two minimum criteria, i.e. 1a and 2, or 1b and 2.

Although the Working Group did not create a detailed definition of these experience criteria, it was decided that technical skills on "industry 4.0" technologies should not be part of the entry selection criteria, given the speed of technological change and the obsolescence of skills. However, it was suggested that considering experience criteria would require a pre-formatted template sheet or form that suppliers should use to report their relevant experience. This sheet should include a request for a description of the goals, outcomes, and type of participating provider.

It is important to emphasise that any non-automatic selection criteria, particularly the assessment of a provider's past experience, requires resources, time and expertise on the part of the institution conducting this preliminary phase. The effort required in evaluating providers is likely to be excessive unless the voucher is implemented over multiple years. The definition, therefore, of the duration of the call for tenders, its resources and the institution in charge of the preliminary phase will have an impact on the possibility to include experience criteria among the requirements for selecting suppliers on the list of qualified entities.

Carrying out a double assessment of eligible projects

In addition to the strict selection of providers, the quality of the services covered by the voucher will be ensured through an ex-ante and ex-post evaluation of eligible instances (or projects). TA preliminary phase (ex-ante evaluation or selection) not only helps to ensure a better quality of the financed projects, but also avoids excessive risk-taking if the project is only assessed at the end (ex-post evaluation). This "two-step" assessment also allows for minimal control to be to the

size and regional background of beneficiaries, and to meet certain European Programming requirements.

However, the Working Group also considered that, given the relatively limited size of the voucher paid to each business, it is not advisable to invest substantial resources, and therefore impose very stringent criteria, simultaneously on both assessments. The coordinator is therefore required to decide whether it is preferable to invest resources in raising quality through an in-depth preliminary phase or an ex-post evaluation, and to see the two as potentially alternatives. Below, the ex-ante evaluation is necessary and more relevant than an ex-post evaluation, since the disbursement of resources only after the ex-post evaluation would entail considerable risk on the part of the company, which would know if a project can be funded until the very last minute.

Finally, in order to avoid conflicts of interest, the body evaluating eligible instances cannot also be a service provider.

Ex-ante assessment or preliminary phase

In order to widen the number of potential beneficiaries and involve smaller companies with less experience in accessing public funds, a first-in, first financed approach (rather than a click-day) is preferred, to allow companies to apply during a pre-established and not short period of time, possibly dividing the public resources available for the policy tool in several successive periods of time.

In order to minimise the cost and time of the preliminary phase, it is necessary to identify some semi-automatic criteria for the selection of eligible projects. Based on the examples mentioned during the Working Group meetings, for companies that have already carried out or plan to carry out an investment in 4.0 technology or innovation the following aspects can be considered:

- A reference to such a project, past or future;
- An indication of the proportion of company employees who will be involved in the training or company reshuffling activity. It should be noted, however, that using only this parameter is not enough, since projects with the same impact on business activity can involve a very different proportion of employees, depending on the size of the business;
- An estimate of the expected cost per person for the training or reshuffling activity.

The preliminary phase should then be completed by considering one or two discriminating criteria, such as the synergies of the investment in technology 4.0 in relation to projects supported by the voucher, or the definition of *key performance indicators* (KPIs) where the company expects to see results thanks to the activities supported by the voucher. It will be up to the management teams to assess the KPIs, their consistency with the policy tool's objectives, as well as their "ambition" With greater care. The preliminary phase may also be faster for some accredited service providers such as Competence Centres, DIHs, or PIDs.

The Group ruled out the idea that an ex-ante project evaluation should reward projects that come from categories of companies considered particularly relevant to the project objectives, such as start-ups. It would be appropriate to express similar preferences of the Administration, if any, clearly in the call for submissions if they are going to become a discriminating condition for access to the voucher, thus avoiding other companies from incurring the expenses of planning a project that would have a low chance of success.

It is important to note that any project description or KPI must have a set maximum length and be based on a pre-formatted template developed and made available by the project leader. For smaller vouchers, the Public Administration may provide a simplified application template, which should also be based on a pre-formatted template.

Further aspects of the preliminary phase that must be defined by the Administration are: (i) identifying a subject/authority who will take charge of the preliminary phase; (ii) defining some essential KPIs on which the ex-ante evaluation should be based; (iii) identifying resources to finance the voucher.

Ex-post evaluations

At the end of the eligible project, the leader will have to first acquire documentation demonstrating supplier and contractor compliance. Concretely, this would imply certifying that the service was actually provided, and that the company paid the provider. Should the Public Administration decide to split the voucher into two payments, one of which would be at the end of the project, the second payment would only be issued after this review.

Given the relatively small size of individual vouchers, it was not considered necessary to impose an ex-post evaluation for each project (i.e. company by company), which would estimate the impact of the measure on company performance. However, the Group suggested quantifying the impact of the measure through a series of possible measures the Administration may choose to:

- monitor funded projects, in which a minimum number of key features of grantees and funded projects would be recorded and catalogued to allow for subsequent analyses of how resources have been used and what the characteristics of grantees are. These characteristics include, for example: project amount, industry and company size, identity of the service provider associated with the project, number of people involved.
- evaluate of the overall impact of the measure on all beneficiary companies as a whole (and not company by company). This assessment should be carried out by a third party.
- survey beneficiaries (or a sample of them), with the aim of gathering information about their satisfaction with the measure, and what aspects could be improved. One aspect of particular interest when collecting this information is the quality of the interaction between the company and its service provider.
- Set up a reward mechanism for those businesses (and possibly their suppliers) that have funded particularly worthy, successful, or innovative activities using the voucher. Given the limited size of the voucher, a monetary reward (calculated, for example, as a percentage of the total voucher amount) would likely be too small to attract the attention of businesses. Instead, the Working Group suggested that the award consist of the opportunity to be mentioned as a *best practice* example in the policy outreach activities that the Administration will implement. The companies would receive the reward based on an ex-post assessment of only some of the projects financed, specifically those that the companies themselves have voluntarily submitted to the Public Administration, with the aim of obtaining this "*visibility reward*".

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Annex : Institutions participating to the Working Groups

Agenzia per la Coesione Territoriale (ACT)
Associazione Fabbrica Intelligente Lombardia (AFIL)
Agenzia Nazionale Politiche Attive del Lavoro (ANPAL)
Associazione Piccole e Medie Industrie (API)
Associazione Italiana per la Formazione Manageriale (ASFOR)
Assolombarda
Competence Centre MEDITECH (Università Federico II)
Confartigianato
Confindustria
Digital Innovation Hub Confartigianato Marche
Direzione Economia della conoscenza, del lavoro e dell'impresa - Regione Emilia-Romagna
Distretto Tecnologico GATE 4.0
Istituto Nazionale per l'Analisi delle Politiche Pubbliche
Invitalia
MiSE
OCSE
Ente di formazione e consulenza Pipeline Srl
Tecnostruttura
Unioncamere